ABSTRACT

LYLES, KARLA MARIE. Telling Stories of Basic Writers: Analysis of Narrative Conventions in the Literacy Narratives of “Basic Writers” Enrolled in a Summer Pilot Program. (Under the direction of Susan Miller-Cochran.)

Among the most significant shifts in recent basic writing scholarship has been the transition away from trying to define “the” basic writer, instead recognizing the unique contexts in which basic writers and basic writing courses are situated. Despite this change, some popular and academic discourse continues to portray basic writers as a uniform group, particularly one that is reading and writing deficient. Such a portrayal is bound with notions of what constitutes literacy and what forms of literacy are privileged in the academy, and in the research presented here I examine how a group of nine students who were enrolled in a “basic writing” course as part of a summer pilot program for pre-freshmen understood their own literacies within the context of their first experience in higher education. Specifically, in this dissertation I analyze the students’ literacy narratives to identify 1) the ways in which the students defined literacy (including their integration of master and/or little cultural narratives of literacy as outlined by Alexander (2011)) and 2) how their narratives can be read rhetorically using Rabinowitz’s (1987) rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence to better understand the students’ representations of themselves and their literacy experiences. Findings showed that students tended to define literacy according to the traditional definition as the ability to read and write and to reinforce the master cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success. This is perhaps attributable to the prevalence of the traditional definition and master cultural narrative of literacy in addition to the placement of the literacy narrative first in the course’s assignment sequence. Findings also showed that all four of Rabinowitz’s rules could be applied when reading the students’ writing, though
rules of signification seemed less applicable in the analysis, perhaps due to genre expectations. Implications for both the use of narratological frameworks for rhetorical readings of literacy narratives as well as changes to approaches for teaching the literacy narrative are discussed.
Telling Stories of Basic Writers: Analysis of Narrative Conventions in the Literacy Narratives of “Basic Writers” Enrolled in a Summer Pilot Program

by

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DEDICATION

To Chloe. Although you weren’t here when I started this process, I’m so thankful that you were when I finished it. I love you more than words could ever express.
BIOGRAPHY

Karla Marie Lyles is a scholar whose research interests include literacy theory and studies, basic writing, and narrative analysis. Prior to pursuing her Ph.D. in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University, Karla earned her M.A. from Texas A & M University and her B.A. from Clemson University, both degrees in English. She has taught first-year composition at Georgia Southern University as well as advanced composition and professional writing at The University of Mississippi in Oxford, where she currently resides with her husband, Brian, and daughter, Chloe. She has presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Computers and Writing (C&W), the biennial Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) conference, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) conference, as well as other local and regional conferences, including the Transitioning to College Writing Symposium.
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I would also like to thank the teacher who welcomed me into her classroom for data collection and who allowed me to gather her thoughts on her teaching and her beliefs about basic writers. Particularly through speaking with her I was reminded of how great our responsibility as teachers is, and that such responsibility extends beyond the limited amount of time spent in the classroom with our students a few times a week. I was also reminded of how important the ways we speak about our students are, not just in the scholarship that we publish, but also in our everyday lives. Those conversations we have in the hallways or in our offices matter, sometimes more than we may think.

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. . . someday—perhaps some day soon—no one will even be labeled “basic writer,” as no one really is. (Carter, 2008, p. 151)

At issue for the basic writer is whether education is a means of empowerment or erasure, critical analysis or obedient conformity. (Mutnick, 1996, p. 34)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The quotes from Carter (2008) and Mutnick (1996) appearing in the epigraph highlight the two core beliefs that inform this research: 1) the language we use to describe students identified as under-prepared for academic reading and writing, whom we most often refer to as “basic writers,” is problematic, and 2) our approach to teaching these students should help to strengthen their sense of agency and self, accounting for the ways in which the academy can threaten both. For those students identified as basic writers, the label often constrains them according to lowered expectations for their reading and writing abilities and assigns them a holistic status on the basis of a single piece of writing, writing that due to its failure to demonstrate Standard English and/or the correct form of academic discourse (Bizzell, 2000) becomes equated with deficiencies and otherness. Though the coining of the phrase “basic writer” seemed to offer a turning point for discouraging the stigma other labels, like “remedial writers,” attached to under-prepared students, the phrase’s fundamental role in separating those considered “basic” from those who are not (Minot & Gamble, 1991)—those who are able to become members of academic discourse communities soon after entering college and those who are held back from such membership—maintains its link to its predecessors.

Nonetheless, we retain the term, often losing sight of the actual student and his/her educational needs to the detriment of teaching to the label assigned to the student instead (Rose, 1989). Further, despite some writing programs’ shifts toward portfolio assessment and
Directed Self-Placement (DSP) to determine enrollment in basic writing courses, the former
drawing on a more balanced representation of students’ writing and the latter on the students’
personal assessments of their preparedness for academic reading and writing, students are
still subject to others’ processes of defining their “basic-ness” or “non-basic-ness” according
to prescribed departmental standards. In the case of portfolio assessment, students are placed
into the basic writing course according to judgments of their writing, most often that done in
high school, in relation to departmental expectations that perhaps do not align with the
students’ prior educational backgrounds. In the case of DSP, students are asked to self-
identify according to their understanding of departmental expectations—which might not be
well informed—and/or their prior educational backgrounds, a process that still entails their
acceptance of “basic-ness” or “non-basic-ness” regardless of whether they otherwise would
consider such language accurate to describe them.

Also complicating the process of how students enroll in basic writing is that
departmental criteria used for placement can ignore the logic behind students’ errors as well
as the competent uses of language the students demonstrate in spaces outside of the
institution. Home literacies and academic literacies are treated as so distinct that there are no
points of shared contact between them, reminiscent of the segregation of orality and literacy
Ong (1982) championed. Indeed, as Adler-Kassner and Harrington (2002) asserted, when we
neglect to account for “students’ literacy experiences outside of the classroom, their
approaches to classroom-based writing tasks seem autonomous, tied only to their own ideas”
(p. 47). Once students enroll into basic writing courses, establishing their identities as under-
prepared writers at best and illiterate/non-literate at worst due to the emphasis on academic
reading and writing alone, as though these practices exist in a vacuum, their opportunities for
self-definition can remain limited or non-existent. This is especially likely to occur if the curriculum follows a skills-and-drills model and/or students’ familiar reading and writing practices are excluded to focus on their academic reading comprehension and writing performance alone, areas in which many of these students tend to struggle. For students considered basic writers then, approaches to their identification can exclude them altogether, negating the worth of those literacies most important to shaping them as readers, writers, and speakers as well as the students’ own beliefs about their “basic-ness” or lack thereof.

**Defining the “Basic Writer”**

The result of this exclusion is the formation of a model of the basic writer to which we can refer for all basic writers. Such a model, in the process of neglecting the differences students identified as basic writers demonstrate, also tends to be based on proposed deficiencies, whether in terms of cognition, belonging, and/or understanding of academic discourse. When basic writers across course sections and programs are painted with such broad strokes, it becomes simple to relegate them all to the borderlands of academia en masse. The students are branded as underperforming—unable to read and write the texts asked of them—thus making their presence in academia seem a mistake that should be corrected, according to some in higher education as well as the general public. When the students are deemed as warranting a place in academia, though, they may still find that their success is not necessarily a priority, as their needs may be made secondary compared to those of the general student population. Basic writing has been and remains a subject of much debate among scholars in the field, administrators, and the public, with the most common recurring arguments focusing on whether basic writing courses should be offered; if so, what
the standards should be to place students into those courses; and, if not, then whether the students should still be admitted, but simply mainstreamed.

The contention surrounding basic writers is reflected in the changing language used to describe them, with even the most recent iteration of “basic writer” still posing its own challenges. On the one hand, the phrase “basic writer” can be understood to suggest the need to enroll these students who in general would not be admitted because it indicates potential; the language suggests the students will become literate in academic discourse through training (Minot & Gamble, 1991), progressing beyond their under-prepared, “basic” starting point. On the other hand, and as noted earlier, though, the phrase promotes a general model of student, obliterating the distinctions that make each “basic writer” unique. Such obliteration can then be used to underscore the common argument that remedial instruction leads to a decline in academic standards and quality of education for all students. Basic writers thus become depicted as threats to both the institution and to the learning that students who actually belong should experience.

Although research has shown that students identified as basic writers represent a range of backgrounds and educational needs (Fitzgerald, 1999; Greenberg, 1997; Huse, Wright, Clark, & Hacker, 2005; Jensen, 1986; Troyka, 1987), the criteria used to define them are generally quite limited. Basic writers tend to be described as such on the basis of their demographics (e.g. race and socioeconomic status), roles in their institutions (e.g. deficient students, outsiders, and/or beginners), and processes of adjusting to the reading and writing demands of those institutions (e.g. popular metaphors of growth, initiation, and conflict/struggle, as Harris, 1995, outlined). Though basic writer populations across course sections and writing programs sometimes do demonstrate shared characteristics in the
aforementioned categories, some similarities should not be used to assign a generic representation to all. Indeed, scholarship has highlighted the problems that occur when just a few common approaches are used to determine who a basic writer is, but that has not stopped the flawed process from occurring again and again, nor will it until we acknowledge that the term “basic writer” has lost its strategic function (Bartholomae, 1993). We must acknowledge then, as Carter (2008) has argued, that no one is a basic writer. Otherwise, we may continue to teach to the label “basic writer,” designing our pedagogies based on expectations attached to that label, and to ignore the student in our writing class whom the label obscures.

To clarify, I am not arguing here that we should abandon discussions about basic writing students and theories about best practices for teaching them. Instead, I am proposing that we question the language we use to refer to these students as well as our practices of defining them through institutional assessments of measures like departmental placement and SAT critical reading scores, minimal samples of their academic writing, etc. Acknowledging student differences is a start, but we must go further. We must engage our students in the kinds of reading and writing practices that draw on the complexities and worth of multiple literacies (not just academic ones alone), and that facilitate a more holistic understanding of the positions that basic writers hold within a range of discourse communities. We must grant them a space to share their perceptions of their roles as readers/writers/communicators, and we must listen. Basic writers are more than their demographics and errors, and until we stop “[reproducing] the conditions and inequalities [our scholarship] claims to disrupt . . . [that reproduces] those social and educational relationships that subordinate Basic Writing
students in the first place” (Marrott, 2008, p. 8), those students who enter remedial writing courses will remain cast aside to the margins.

**Defining “Literacy” and the Implications of Our Approach for Basic Writers**

But engaging students in self-reflection about their literacies is not a simple process, in large part because of the challenge of defining what literacy means. The traditional definition of literacy as the ability to read and write no longer seems sufficient to describe the range of interpreting and composing processes that are now often required for successful participation in academic, professional, social, and other discourse communities. Further, with the increase in multimodal communication, and in particular the creation and distribution of multimedia digital texts, our understanding of what comprises reading and writing has changed; reading can follow a nonlinear path rather than pre-established coordinates, writing can be both author- and reader-directed, and neither process is dependent on an alphabetic text alone. Thus, although literacy in the digital age still retains the suggestion of power and access to communities and opportunities otherwise out of reach, it does not indicate what kind of literacies a person demonstrates, what we mean in terms of the reading, writing, speaking, and/or other practices that define means of communication.

Marrott (2008), citing Graff (1986), noted the juxtaposition between the seeming ease and the actual challenge of defining literacy, claiming the definition is both 1) natural due to general public consensus that it refers to reading and writing aptitude and 2) contested due to the inclusion of a broader spectrum of interactions, from writing fan fiction to taking a food order to understanding lowrider culture (Mahiri, 2004). Mainstream access to digital technologies has pressed the issue of what we choose to designate as literacy/literacies, but debates surrounding what it means to be literate are not the product of the digital age. Rather,
we can look at the pre-digital argument surrounding whether oral and literate cultures are
distinct or share some commonalities in terms of their practices and progress to see the
consequences of our decisions regarding how to define what “counts” as literate (and thus
what it means to be “illiterate” or “non-literate”). This pitting of orality and literacy against
each other brought to the forefront the contention surrounding how groups are defined
according to their language practices as well as established a foundation for the concept of
multiliteracies. Furthermore, it is pertinent to the discussion of basic writers because these
students are often described as rooted in oral traditions, so much so that their writing
becomes a reflection of their speech rather than its own form.

Ong (1982), addressing the transformation in thought that accompanied the shift from
oral culture to literate culture, argued that oral and literate cultures exist at opposite ends of a
spectrum, with the former oriented toward groups, dependent upon thought embedded in
concrete experiences, and demonstrating “original” thought in adaptation of prior ideas to
new situations. Literate cultures, in contrast, isolate people from each other and are more
capable of complex, abstract, and new uses of language. Such a distinct separation and
description of the two groups thus suggest that oral cultures are less sophisticated because of
their reliance on spoken rather than written language, and, although literate cultures arise
from oral cultures, it is the former that are associated with intellectual and social progress.

Critiquing Ong (1982) for basing his conclusions on Western beliefs about education
as well as modern “oral” cultures, Street (1984) addressed the residual effect of isolating the
two cultures from each other and ignoring their interrelationships. He proposed that rather
than focusing on the differences between oral and literate cultures, we need to acknowledge
the social situatedness of literacies; such acknowledgment would then help us to understand
the points of connectedness between orality and literacy. His “ideological model,” in contrast to the “autonomous model” Ong (1982) supported, thus established a foundation for claiming that no one is illiterate or non-literate because such labels depend on a false dichotomous relationship that ignores the similarities between different language groups. The ideological model, in the process of establishing relationships between oral and literate cultures and highlighting the need to acknowledge the social contexts within which communication is embedded, also opens up a space then for shifting attention from reading and writing alone as the defining features of literacy to the potential of multiple literacies.

Though there remains to some extent the belief that reading and writing are the sole practices that comprise literacy, as Marrott (2008) noted, both academic and non-academic discourses are dismantling this perception through their treatment of multiliteracies. It has become commonplace to refer to multiple literacies such as “computer,” “critical,” “digital,” “functional,” and so on within scholarship (Fleckenstein, 2003; Kress, 2003; Selber, 2004; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004; Warnick, 2002) and popular media, underscoring the increasing acknowledgment and interest in exploring the range of communication practices in which we engage that are now considered literacies. The language itself does not clarify in all cases what we mean, though, as sometimes phrases such as “computer” and “digital” literacies are interchanged and at other times defined differently depending on who is using the terminology. In addition, as Selber (2004) indicated through his outline of the distinctions among functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies, sometimes the emphasis is on skill or competence whereas other times it is instead on, or in conjunction with, critical awareness or consciousness. The concept of multiliteracies thus presents its own challenges to the

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1 As discussed later in this chapter, though, Street (1995) expressed concerns about the concept of multiliteracies due to it being too all encompassing.
discussion of how we define what it means to be literate, including significant anxieties for scholars such as Street (1995) and Kress (1997, 2003) about the diluting of the term “literacy” through broadening it to include any and all forms of information exchange.

To expand on this concern, Street (1995) argued that describing all communication interactions as literacies omits the influence of social context because the emphasis shifts toward particular skill sets and away from considerations of knowledge and critical awareness. Within the context of reading and writing, if what it means to be literate is to be able to read and write in a functional sense, then the particular situation surrounding an act of reading and/or writing does not matter; someone who can read and write in one set of circumstances should be able to do so in another through skill transference. Although to an extent this is true in that our understanding of the principles of how to read and write can and often do translate across contexts, we cannot transfer knowledge of a particular group’s discourse features or critical understanding of issues surrounding those features and their meaning from one context to another in order to enable us to function equally effectively across settings.

For example, students in first-year writing classes must assimilate to using the language of academia, a language that is unfamiliar to them but which must become “natural” (Bartholomae, 1985). Although students entering these classes know how to combine words to articulate sentences, (somewhat) understand the rules of Standard English, etc., their successful reading and writing outside of the institution does not guarantee successful reading and writing within it because the two are unique spaces with unique language demands. The struggles that students, basic writers and non-basic writers alike, can and often do experience adjusting to writing in higher education demonstrate the faultiness of
thinking of literacy in terms of mere transference of skills from one interaction to another. For Street (1995), claiming all acts of communication are literacy threatens to encourage the belief that such transference and subsequent successful communication should be expected as we shift from one discourse interaction to another, bringing our skills along with us.

Like Street (1995), Kress (1997, 2003) also argued against labeling all forms of interacting with texts as literacy, but he claimed as well that if we understand communication as occurring through a range of media and modes, then it is immaterial to refer to multiple literacies at all. Framing literacy as “language in its written form” (Kress, 1997, p. 1) and language as “a system of signs” (p. 6), Kress (1997) both restricted and opened up the range of practices that could be considered literacies. Although the connection with writing is maintained, there are other modes of expression that can dominate an interaction and warrant our attention. Furthermore, Kress (2003) proposed that text is “the central category in literacy” (p. 86), and texts are “the result of social action, . . . so the centrality of text means that literacy is always seen as a matter of social action and social forces, and all aspects of literacy are seen as deriving from these actions and forces” (p. 86). As he indicates then, literacy and social context are inherently bound together, in which case literacy cannot be reduced to mere skills or competencies that simply translate from one context to another.

At stake with the perception of literacy as isolated from social context is not just the representation of literacy as skill, but also content fetishes (Gee, 2004), which further restrict who is and who is not considered literate. When we create dichotomies between meaningful and meaning-less information and practices, such as through privileging reading a canonical piece of literature to reading text messages, we promote the idea that the possession of certain knowledge makes one literate whereas the lack of said knowledge means one is not
(and, in turn, that a particular content and its application are more important than other kinds
and their applications). Gee (2004) argued that “content, in the sense of facts and principles”
is not at the core of disciplines or other “semiotic [domains],” but that instead “social
practices” that are in constant flux are (p. 21). Unless we recognize that knowledge is
embedded in social situations, as it is created, questioned, modified, and so on in interactions
whose contexts change across time and space, we create the false sense that possessing
information within one set of circumstances will enable us to engage with others in discourse
communities in other circumstances.

Regardless of how we define what literacy means, it is clear that the label functions to
distinguish between those with access to certain discourse communities and those without.
Sharing the common language of the groups to which one seeks belonging is integral to
acquiring membership, and with that membership access to certain roles and degrees of
success that are otherwise withheld. Hierarchical relationships are maintained on the basis of
who is considered literate and who is not (Stuckey, 1991), intertwining access to power with
access to the required language of particular groups. Thus, literacy, power, and opportunity
cannot be extricated from each other, which is why how we define literacy is crucial both in
theory and in practice.

Further complicating the issue of exclusion from discourse communities and
subsequent opportunities are the often false assumptions about what distinguishes the literate
from the illiterate/non-literate. Beliefs that those classified as belonging to the latter group
are so because of a failure 1) to understand the benefits of being able to read and write, 2) to
use prescribed technologies for communication, and/or 3) to demonstrate willingness to learn
help to perpetuate the forces that further disenfranchise those who cannot compose and/or
interpret the texts that are expected of them. Such beliefs, which tend to assign fault to those identified as illiterate/non-literate, are thus fundamental to how we determine inclusion and exclusion from particular social, academic, professional, and other communities and the identities that those groups represent. For basic writers, the assumptions about them, particularly about their reading and writing abilities, are integral to how the label is assigned to them and the meaning it carries in their own minds as well as the minds of their peers and others within and outside of academia.

Becoming literate is not a neutral process, but one fraught with changes in identification, grounded in the adoption of an unfamiliar language that can distance us from our home cultures. For basic writers, whose labeling as such is rooted in assessments of their academic reading and writing, this process brings to the forefront their identities and agencies (or lack thereof) within their institutions and the separation between their academic and non-academic literacies. Though their awareness of this separation is important and can be a useful pedagogical tool, at the same time the students should be encouraged to see the points of shared contact between the two forms of literacies, and it is this encouragement that is missing when we depend upon classifications of students as basic writers that do not account for more than a limited set of measurements based on scores and/or academic texts (and then design our pedagogies in relation to such classifications).

Further, although Street (1995) and Kress’ (1997; 2003) concerns about “literacy” losing its meaning if the term is used too freely are legitimate, at the same time and as noted earlier, it is becoming increasingly common to use “literacy” to refer to a wider range of communication practices/information exchange than solely reading and writing, and for basic writers especially, a broader application of the term would be beneficial. Specifically,
transitioning to such a broader application would allow us to acknowledge the range of complex forms of communication that otherwise can be neglected when making our decisions about who is literate and who is not, who has access to certain communities and opportunities and who is excluded. Limiting our understanding to just reading and writing, and sometimes just reading and writing printed, alphabetic texts, reinforces stigmas associated with those considered illiterate or non-literate because of their inability to read and write or read and write prescribed documents, maintaining rigid power hierarchies. For groups that are often the subject of this exclusion, the concept of multiliteracies legitimates their practices of sharing and interpreting messages through different approaches because it assigns worth to a greater range of forms of articulation and comprehension, not just those that follow rules of Standard English, for example. Within the field of composition, acknowledging, embracing, and incorporating the multiple literacies, academic and non-academic, that our students bring with them to the composition classroom can produce profound effects on their learning and self-confidence.

For those students identified as basic writers, who are so often located at the margins of academia from the time of their placement into basic writing until at least their completion of the course, the promise of bringing multiliteracies into the classroom is that much greater. Shifting toward a model of instruction that recognizes the multiliteracies basic writers demonstrate can both help to discourage the stigma associated with their status as basic writers as well as facilitate the students’ awareness of the points of contact and difference between their academic and home literacies (Soliday, 2002). Both outcomes open up a space for basic writers to participate in the construction of their identities in relation to their literacies within the writing classroom, assuming positions of power within academia that are
often otherwise denied them. We can begin to dismantle then the well-established approach to defining basic writers in relation to their academic literacies alone that has led to three patterns in their classification, including their identification as 1) “deficient,” attributing the fault for their reading and writing challenges to them, specifically their impaired cognition; 2) “outsiders,” positioning them as residing in the borderlands of academia; and 3) “under-prepared,” shifting the focus of “blame” to other, external factors, but maintaining their shortcomings nonetheless.

The first pattern, that of claiming basic writers are deficient, results from a narrow focus on the errors these students demonstrate in their writing, and such a focus ignores the fact that in looking for errors that is all we tend to see, regardless of the strengths of the writing that otherwise appear. The second pattern, that of labeling “basic writers” in relation to their outsider status, helps to create and/or reinforce the placeless-ness of these students within their institutions and the barrier that exists between them and those who are considered as belonging. The third and final pattern, which shifts the burden of the students’ reading and writing struggles to other factors beyond their control, such as inadequate prior schooling, nonetheless relegates basic writers to a disempowered status; these students are not responsible for their positioning as basic writers, but must still accept the label and the consequences it entails. Although we cannot blame the language “basic writer” alone for casting students in the aforementioned disenfranchising roles, it is connected to the critical beliefs surrounding those students just as its predecessors were.

Decades ago what is now known as basic writing was referred to as “bonehead English,” underscoring the attitude toward the students in such courses as dumb and in need of the most simplistic instruction to understand Standard English, instruction that tended to
focus on skills-and-drills exercises. The similar descriptor “handicapped English” reinforced the perception that basic writers were lacking, though it implied this lack was due to reading and writing disabilities that necessitated some kind of treatment or cure teachers and administrators alone could offer. The later phrase “remedial English” also connoted medical treatment, suggesting the correction or curing of student writers with reading and writing defects, although it could perhaps be considered less belittling than the earlier terminology. Finally, the language “basic writing,” which has remained with us for more than three decades, represented a transition from speaking of under-prepared students in medical terms to instead suggesting they were writers who had not progressed beyond the fundamental stage of acquiring a command of Standard English, and who, as a result, lack the complex skills required to perform at college standards. Although basic writers do need additional training for their reading and writing to meet higher education standards, at the same time, it should be clear that the language used to describe basic writers is bound with our assumptions about their literacies. Those assumptions thus contribute not only to how we define the students, but also to how we can constrain their identities within our classrooms and perhaps influence their identities outside of them as well on the basis of (narrow) perceptions of their reading and writing capabilities.

But it is insufficient to just acknowledge that the language “basic writer” is problematic and that basic writers are not the same within a particular course section, program, or institution. We need also to learn about the students from the students, offering them opportunities to reflect on their own attitudes toward their identities in relation to their literacies and how those identities are shaped from within and without. Such promotion of students’ expressions of their personal perceptions of their roles as readers, writers, and/or
speakers would also open up a space for teachers to compare how their beliefs about the students do or do not align with the students’ own beliefs, as well as to learn how differences between those beliefs can function as sources of disempowerment for the students.

Foundation for the Current Research

Indeed, it was the significant gap in the basic writing literature in terms of the absence of the students we often talk around rather than with that prompted this dissertation. Without dismissing the research that has helped to 1) define the basic writing field, 2) establish a place for basic writing programs within institutions otherwise hesitant or opposed to offering them, and 3) facilitate the sharing of ideas to design better writing instruction for students considered under-prepared, I feel that there remains an integral missing piece to our discussions about the reasons for fighting to keep basic writing programs in place. Furthermore, I question the extent to which basic writing students sometimes understand their placement into their writing courses and how their attitudes toward that placement can affect their perceptions about their reading and writing abilities. This research is an effort to build on the limited number of studies that include basic writing students in the discussions that are occurring around them, and I see it as a steppingstone for further examination of students’ own beliefs regarding their education in the composition classroom.

The essential goal of this dissertation then is to share the stories about the self-described literacies of “basic writing” students who were enrolled in a summer pilot program. The research presented here does not attempt to end debates surrounding whether basic writing courses should be offered or what the standards should be for determining placement in such courses, which would be an ambitious and impossible effort for any single study. Rather, responding to calls for more student-centered research (Adler-Kassner & Harrington,
I seek to create through this project a richer understanding of the students’ self-perceptions of their identities and agencies within a context that highlights their supposed academic shortcomings at best and illiteracies at worst. Specifically, I focus on answering the question, “How do students categorized as ‘basic writers’ understand their own literacies within the context of their first encounter with higher education?”

In order to answer this question, I chose to analyze the literacy narratives written by a small group of students participating in a summer pilot program for pre-freshmen, focusing my analysis on the following:

RQ1: How do the basic writers who participated in this study define literacy when narrating their stories of literacy acquisition, including aligning those stories with the “master” cultural narrative of literacy as success and/or “little” cultural narratives (Alexander, 2011)?

RQ2: When writing about their literacy experiences, what techniques do the students use to shape audience response to those experiences and their identities in relation to their literacies?

Because the students’ approaches to defining literacy perhaps influenced their choices about which literacies to describe and how, I thought it was necessary to account for those approaches and included the first research question as a result. As the wording of the question reflects, I was specifically interested not just in whether students relied on the traditional definition of literacy and/or proposed alternate definitions, but also whether the students reinforced the dominant cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success and/or integrated other cultural narratives in which to situate their stories. Through examining this aspect of their writing, I could attempt to offer further insight into their beliefs about literacy.
and the ways it can affect opportunities, their attitudes toward learning/reading/writing/etc., and so on.

The main focus of this project is the students’ self-promoted identities related to their literacy acquisition experiences, though, which the second question addresses. As noted earlier, one of the significant gaps in basic writing scholarship is the students’ own perceptions of who they are, particularly in connection to their literacy practices, and it was addressing this gap that was of greatest importance to me. In addition, rather than focusing on what the students “can’t” do (i.e., their errors/struggles with writing), I wanted to emphasize what they can and did do, calling attention to how their writing reflects common narratological practices. I deliberately set out then to go beyond what was problematic in the students’ writing to try to find the strengths of it instead, though in my analysis I did address breakdowns, or “ruptures,” in content where I found them to present potential barriers to reading that the audience would need to ignore or, more likely, attempt to reconcile.

Aims of the Current Research

On that note, before I conclude this introduction with summaries of the major points of the upcoming chapters, I would like to take some time to add further clarification to what the goals were and were not for this project. The title of my dissertation underscores the fact that the basic writers who participated in the research are not models of basic writers at all institutions and therefore should not be interpreted as such. Although the two cohorts of Summer START\textsuperscript{2} students who participated in data collection were enrolled in their English 100 course due to low SAT critical reading scores and high school grades, making them

\textsuperscript{2} The Summer START program is based on the model of the Summer Start program at Syracuse University. Despite the change in the formatting of its name, START is not an acronym but rather a minimal change to the prior program’s name to distinguish the two.
similar to students placed into basic writing programs at other institutions, the circumstances
surrounding their enrollment were otherwise unique. Specifically, most of the students were
incoming first-year athletes, some of whom were top national recruits for their sports.
Another student was considered “at-risk” due to his initial rejection from the institution and
later admission into a preparation program that aims to place students into majors within two
semesters. The last student, who did not “belong” to either of these groups but who enrolled
in the English 100 section I studied to get ahead in his college career, managed to “slip into”
the course despite efforts to discourage this from happening. Thus, these students do not
match a particular profile of basic writing students recorded in the literature, nor do the
students allow for a simple, single profile to be created for them.

No effort was made to impose such a profile on these students either, as the goal of
the research was the opposite: to learn the students’ stories about their identities as readers,
writers, speakers, and so on that represented their unique literacy experiences and personal
interpretations of those experiences. The question, “Who is a basic writer?”, then, was not
one I attempted to answer because it is a fundamentally flawed question that ignores the rich
differences and complexities of the students assigned that status. Instead, I found it more
beneficial to focus attention elsewhere, and the approach I used not only enabled me to
highlight the students’ beliefs about their literacy acquisition and who they are in relation to
that acquisition, but also to create a space in which the students’ non-academic literacies
could be interjected into a discourse that so often attempts to shape them according to
academic reading and writing alone. Without studies examining how basic writers understand
their multiple identities in relation to their literacies, we are missing a component integral to
the successful design of writing courses that allow basic writers to merge their familiar
literacies with academic literacies, maintain their identities rooted in their home cultures while seeking new identities as well, and offer them opportunities for empowerment through their writing. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to call attention to that integral component.

Chapter Descriptions

In the chapter that immediately follows, I synthesize two areas of scholarship: 1) basic writing, focusing specifically on patterns in the descriptions of basic writers’ identities and treatment of their literacies, and 2) literacy narratives and their potential to empower basic writers. The first strand of scholarship is included to primarily establish the three traditional approaches taken to represent students considered basic writers that focus on their cognitive deficiencies as well as foreignness and newness to the academy. These patterns are not ones the students themselves highlighted throughout their writing, reinforcing the need for greater inclusion of students’ perceptions in the literature written about them. The second strand of scholarship is included to call attention to the intertwining of storytelling and identity construction that establishes a foundation for using literacy narratives as a means of gaining insight into basic writers’ beliefs about their roles as readers, writers, speakers, etc.

The third chapter describes the research methods of this project, including the selection of research site, participants, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis. Regarding the methods of data analysis, I explain the use of Rabinowitz’s (1987) four rules of reading (notice, signification, configuration, and coherence) as well as Alexander’s (2011) cultural narrative analysis, which is itself based on other scholars’ work in identifying cultural narratives surrounding literacy. The chapter minimally highlights as
well some of the limitations of the approaches I used for data collection and analysis, with a more thorough discussion of limitations appearing in the conclusion.

In the fourth chapter I focus on analysis of the students’ first writing assignment, addressing how the students constructed their own identities as readers, writers, speakers, etc. through their selections of which literacies to describe, their roles in acquiring those literacies, and the narrative strategies used to relay this information. This chapter speaks as well to how the students’ writing reproduced the “master” cultural narrative of literacy as success story and/or “little” cultural narratives. To offer context for the analysis, I open the chapter with a short overview of the English 100 course in which the students were enrolled, specifically with regard to the first assignment unit and the teacher’s beliefs about the students that she communicated in interviews I conducted with her. I also provide brief introductions to the students whose literacy narratives I analyzed.

In the fifth and final chapter I outline my theoretical and pedagogical contributions, discuss the limitations of my research, and provide suggestions for future research.
When students are . . . labeled “basic writers” or “remedial” students, writing instructors are forced to wonder just what “basic” means, in whose eyes do they need remediation and for what purpose? (Marinara, 1997, pp. 4-5)

How to define basic writers has been a central issue in basic writing research. But the desire to define writers’ characteristics (whether descriptively or prescriptively) and isolate elements of their writing processes often begins by perpetuating some elements of the autonomous model of literacy. (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002, p. 15)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there has been an increasing shift away from the traditional definition of literacy as the ability to read and write, recognizing the wide range of communication practices—both old and new—in which we engage, within the context of higher education we still often see the effects of a narrow approach to defining the term. Specifically, the tendency to prioritize Standard English and to treat orality and literacy, as well as academic and non-academic literacies, as discrete, has helped to enable the continued practice of labeling some students as “basic writers” and others not. For those whose literacies are considered inadequate or too “basic” for higher education, there are serious implications both for their presence in academia in general and their experiences in the writing classroom in particular. Exploring how scholarship has defined basic writers can help us understand what the tradition has been that we need to (continue to) transition away from if we are to ensure greater access to opportunities and respect that being acknowledged as literate in the academy affords. We can then turn our focus to how to redefine these students, and, ideally, how to empower them to lead the charge.

Patterning Basic Writers

The basic writing field has dedicated substantial attention to describing who basic writers are in terms of their reading and writing abilities, demographics, and educational
backgrounds, as well as to proposing strategies for responding to their under-preparation (e.g. Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002; Bizzell, 1986; Fox, 1990; Gray-Rosendale, 1999; Harris, 1995). This attention, “often [to] . . . the exclusion of other, more pressing concerns” (Gray-Rosendale, 2000, p. 6), helped enable the emergence of trends in the representations of basic writers, trends that reflected not just shifting attitudes toward the students’ mental, reading, and writing capabilities across time, but also later critiques of the academic and social frameworks that perpetuate beliefs about them (Adler-Kassner, 2000). Gray-Rosendale (1999), for example, based on her examination of articles published in the *Journal of Basic Writing* between the 1970s-1990s, identified three patterns in how basic writers were described. Specifically, the patterns consisted of depicting the students as 1) incapable of intellectual growth without the assistance of a teacher/scholar; 2) “helpless . . . [to form] generalizations and abstractions ‘naturally’ like other students”; and 3) disposed to errors that despite their logic (Shaughnessy, 1977) “[needed] to be purged” (Gray-Rosendale, 1999, p. 110). These patterns, unfortunately, were not isolated to just her corpus, but could be found in research published elsewhere as well.

As the aforementioned patterns suggest, basic writing scholarship has historically called attention to students’ struggles with academic reading and writing, particularly as reflected in their errors, difficulties with the writing process, and conflation of written and spoken forms. The research has tended to focus more on “what students cannot or did not do” (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002, p. 15), and in the process contributed to constructing identities for basic writers that led to problematic results (Gray-Rosendale, 2000). Further, although no longer as dominant a theme in the scholarship as it once was, explaining just who basic writers are remains a common thread in more recent basic writing
research. Scholars continue both to reference the depictions of basic writers in the extant literature and to offer descriptions of the basic writers who are at the center of their own studies. Neither of these is surprising or “wrong” considering the need to situate new research in the broader scholarly discussion and to describe research participants, but the lingering attention to defining basic writers has resulted in newer, different patterns in the students’ representations that are worthwhile to note, particularly because of their shift away from accounting for the supposed deficiencies the students demonstrate. In contrast to the prior emphases on determining the defining characteristics of basic writers that could then be used to create a model for the basic writer, as well as to publishing scholarship that was “student-vacant” (Bishop, 1993) because it so often focused on students’ work with “little about the student[s] in the research” (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002, p. 16) themselves, research started to change course in the late 1990s-early 2000s.

In particular, Gray-Rosendale (2006) identified three new patterns emerging in articles published in the Journal of Basic Writing during this timeframe that emphasized 1) situating basic writers within particular contexts (“in situ”), 2) linking their identities to changes in the field, and 3) examining the students’ actions and their perceptions of those actions. Regarding the first pattern, no longer was the push toward forming generalizations about basic writers, but rather toward “exposing the local conditions of various basic writers and basic writing programs” (Gray-Rosendal, 2006, p. 8) so that appropriate theories and pedagogical strategies could be developed to address differing students’ needs and institutional contexts. In addition, the second pattern highlights the need to understand the critical role basic writers can play in helping the field to reform in terms of “theory, academic discourse, and/or history” (p. 12). Through examining and reflecting on how scholarship has
constructed basic writers’ identities, as well as developing “context-dependent theorizations” of those identities (p. 16), we may find opportunities to make needed changes. Finally, the last pattern calls attention to the need to study “what basic writing students do and what they say about what they do” (p. 16) so that scholarship, much like what we claim our teaching is or should be, will be student-centered.

Despite these changes to the scholarly discussion surrounding basic writers, especially the greater emphasis on “watching [the students’] actions as a set of practices to be studied” (Gray-Rosendale, 2006, p. 16), there continues to be a lack of examination of students’ own attitudes toward their literacies and roles as readers, writers, and speakers (Stenberg, 2002) inside and outside of the writing classroom. Scholarship published within the last two decades has attempted to address this imbalance (Adler-Kassner, 1999; Fox, 1999; Gray-Rosendale, 1996; Harrington & Adler-Kassner, 1998; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Mlynarczyk, 1995; Severino, 1995; Young, 1996), but there remains a profound gap nonetheless. Furthermore, since “[e]mphasizing the ways that basic writers’ processes or texts are marked by difference or deficit implicitly promotes a definition of literacy that is, to some degree, autonomous” (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002, p. 15), it is arguably through examining the patterns of defining basic writers that were linked to “difference” and “deficit” that we may gain the greatest insight into why more student-centered research is still needed. Specifically, analyzing those patterns may enable us to better understand how scholarship has reinforced beliefs about literacy that helped compromise the role of basic writers in higher education and to neglect the contributions they could make, especially to the writing classroom.
Pattern I: Basic Writers’ Deficiencies

Perhaps the most well-known approach to describing basic writers has been in terms of their errors, which during the 1970s-1980s in particular were often attributed to deficiencies in cognition. Scholars drew on psychological frameworks, such as the Piagetian model and William G. Perry’s scheme (based on Piaget’s work), to demonstrate basic writers’ “thinking [needed] remediation as much as their writing” (Bizzell, 1982, p. 213). Positioning basic writing as “a rudimentary stage in which [students’] expressive strategies [are] retarded or indeed arrested before they [can] be developed and refined to tap the special resources of written prose, such as the opportunity to reconsider and revise one’s choices” (Beaugrande & Olsen, 1991, pp. 9-10), the application of cognitive development theories led to the representation of basic writers as intellectually impaired/immature. Scholars reasoned that if teachers could just come to understand the mental barriers holding back their students, then their pedagogies could be adjusted in response so that the students’ reading and writing abilities could progress to meet higher education standards. For example, Spear (1983), who later outlined the characteristics of the formal operational thought stage in the Piagetian model and linked these characteristics to basic writers’ struggles, proposed enhancing basic writers’ mental processing skills using Bloom’s taxonomy.

Although not focused on conceptualizing writing ability, the Piagetian model of cognition was used to describe basic writers because of the idea that the degree of writing skill students demonstrate is “bound” to intellectual growth (Winchell, 1990); thus, those whose writing includes a significant number of errors, indicates a lack of audience awareness, and/or relies on oral traditions must be “behind” in their reasoning capacities compared to students whose writing does not feature these “problems.” Lunsford (1978,
1979) wrote two of the foundational articles supporting the argument that basic writers’ challenges with writing Standard English and reading academic texts could be attributed to their intellectual inadequacies, claiming on the basis of her interactions with her students that basic writers lack the formal operational stage of thought outlined in the Piagetian model. The formal operational stage is that which occurs around the age of 12 and lasts into adulthood, and is when we acquire the skills to think in abstract terms. Because basic writers’ thinking is grounded in concrete situations and experiences then, according to Lunsford’s (1978, 1979) assessment, they are unable to see past their own experiences to draw on knowledge used in one context to operate within others as well as to “adopt a persona” or distance in their writing (Lunsford, 1978, p. 3).

Such handicaps as those Lunsford (1978) described were cited as the reasons for the struggles basic writers experience when transitioning from their home discourse communities into those of academia; their “often confused and incomplete” knowledge (Taylor, 1979) was cited as the reason keeping them from grasping the application of concepts across different situations as well as mastering audience awareness to compose strong, reasoned arguments. This line of reasoning hearkens to the autonomous model of literacy, faulting students for not possessing the ability to transfer knowledge/skills from one discourse situation to another, despite the changing contexts. Framed “as children in a world of adult discourse” (Harris, 1995, p. 29), basic writers were beginning to be depicted in the scholarship as so rooted in their own experiences that their thinking could not accommodate others’ experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs, limiting their ability to successfully write the kinds of assignments expected of them in the composition classroom.
Further building on the literature that proposed cognition played a role in basic writers’ struggles with academic writing, Hays (1983) shifted from the Piagetian model to Perry’s scheme, which although based on the Piagetian model, focuses on college students specifically. Hays argued that basic writers operate within a dualistic framework, and this framework is characteristic of the first two of the nine stages of Perry’s scheme students journey through, the first being basic duality and the second full dualism. The two stages are ones through which non-basic writing students have already passed, but which basic writers have not because they are unable to acknowledge and examine others’ differing beliefs, processes that are integral to successful academic writing. As Hays argued, basic writers “still [perceive] a multiplicity of perspectives as alien intruders into a dualistic universe” (p. 133), leading them to ardently argue their own positions without considering alternate opinions. Although Kogen (1986) later refuted Hays’ (1983) claims, arguing it was not their intellectual maturity holding back basic writers but rather the need to learn the conventions of academic discourse, and Martinez and Martinez (1987) also disagreed with Hays’ (1983) position, connections between basic writers’ cognition and reading and writing abilities continued to be made throughout the 1980s and beyond.

Indeed, Hays (1987) herself responded to Kogen’s (1986) critique, defending the use of cognitive developmental models to try to understand who basic writers are and the causes of their challenges with acclimating to academic reading and writing. The same year she published her response, Jolly (1987), echoing Lunsford (1978, 1979) and Spear (1983), drew on the Piagetian model to describe the challenges that basic writers encounter when attempting to write, claiming those challenges are rooted in the students’ lack of formal operational thought. Finally, although Zeller (1987) acknowledged basic writers “are already
good at drawing inferences” (p. 346) upon entrance into the college writing classroom, he claimed their problems with reading and writing arose because of their lack of self-awareness of their inference processes. The role of the basic writing classroom was thus to help students acquire “the sort of thinking skills that will make their stay in college more meaningful” (Zeller, 1987, p. 346), underscoring the extent to which basic writers were in need of further mental maturation.

Pattern II: Basic Writers’ Foreign-ness

In addition to the representation of basic writers as cognitively deficient, another common pattern in the literature was to depict them as foreigners in higher education. Their “outsider” status was attributed to their struggles with the “insider” language of academic discourse as well as their differences in educational and familial backgrounds compared to their non-basic writing peers (Lu & Horner, 2000). Basic writers were, and still are, relegated to the margins of higher education (Mutnick, 1996), their label signifying them as “a subgroup of the writing population . . . [that requires] some special treatment” (Minot & Gamble, 1991, p. 117) and that is “outside the mainstream, outside the norm” (Ritter, 2009, p. 42). After all, it is their proposed “salient characteristic . . . [of] outlandishness” (Bizzell, 1986, p. 294) that goes hand-in-hand with their tenuous positions within the academy, reflected in the common phrase, “I can’t believe the person who wrote this is in college!” (Newman, 1996, p. 35). Basic writers just do not belong then, an assessment demonstrated through both the language used to describe them as well as the practices used to reinforce their distinction from their non-basic writing peers.

Regarding the language used to describe basic writers, it is not just an issue of semantics, but rather carries significant power implications. Goto (2002) claimed that
because insider status is linked with higher/preferred “status or knowledge,” outsider status must denote the opposite, “someone who occupies a less prestigious position” (p. 11). For basic writers, who occupy “a gate below the gate” (Shor, 1997, p. 94) and who are “outside the mainstream” (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986, p. 4), boundaries of access and power based on membership status or lack thereof can be difficult, if not impossible, to cross. Further, the isolation of basic writers from their peers on the basis of their language use can lead to their positioning as illiterates or non-literate (Stygall, 1994), with claims like they are disproportionately members in “discourse communities other than the mainstream literate one” (Collins, 1995, p. 4) supporting their being cast aside. Although Shaughnessy (1977) attempted to change the language used to describe basic writers so that it was focused more so on the students’ acclimation to a new discourse community, a process that all would-be members must go through, basic writers nonetheless continued to be represented as on the outside looking in. Assigned to the borderlands at the time they are admitted into their institutions and staying there until at least their successful completion of the basic writing course, for basic writers the process of joining the “insiders” of the academy has been and remains a significant hurdle.

A fundamental difference that scholars alleged to exist between basic writing students and their non-basic writing peers that positioned the former as outsiders and the latter as insiders was the extent of the clash between the students’ home language and that of academe. Basic writers were depicted as struggling in the academic setting because the language of that setting is unknown to them and must come to replace their own, introducing them to new literacies and new methods of making meaning (Newman, 1996). Though students who are judged competent to enter into the “regular,” non-basic writing
course/sequence must also adopt the language of academic discourse (Bartholomae, 1985),
which requires putting aside their familiar writing and speaking to some extent, their process
for doing so is not as fraught with challenges and frustrations. In contrast to basic writers,
these students are considered to enter higher education with a stronger grasp of Standard
English and the intellectual capabilities to think outside of their own experiences as well as to
formulate well-reasoned arguments.

Indeed, Bizzell (1986) described basic writers as “those students who experience the
greatest distance between their home dialects and Standard English, the preferred dialect in
school” (p. 294). Brammer (2002) echoed this point in his claim that basic writers’
dispositions to “speak and write a language that is different from ours” (p. 17) is the sole
marker of what defines them as basic writers; otherwise, there are no characteristics that all
students who fall under the classification “basic writers” demonstrate. It is, therefore, basic
writers’ “sometimes wild guessing at the nature and the forms of academic discourse [that] is
a reflection of the students’ cultural and intellectual distance from the world of academe”
(Newman, 1996, p. 35), and although this perception admittedly credits them with attempting
to join that world, their efforts to do so tend to be ignored to focus instead on their struggles
as part of that process. Indeed, the approach to defining basic writers according to the
separation between their home and academic literacies speaks to the narrow way in which
literacy has been, and often still is, defined in higher education, leaving basic writers to
assume the position of non-literate/illiterate “Other.”

In addition to attributing basic writers’ struggles (and thus their status as outsiders) to
the clash in dialects, though, research has often noted the students’ abilities to distinguish
between oral and written modes of communication as another contributing factor to their
placement in the academic borderlands. Their lack of linguistic cultural capital (Brammer, 2002) has been connected to their embeddedness in oral traditions that do not translate into competency in the writing expected of them in the higher education setting, marking them as different from their non-basic writing peers. Although as I discussed earlier in the introduction, Street (1984) proposed that oral and literate practices exist along a continuum and we should acknowledge the interrelationships between them, the basic writing literature has traditionally maintained their distinctness to explain the challenges that students considered basic writers encounter upon entrance into college. For example, as Farrell (1978) argued, basic writers must learn to shift “toward more literate modes of thinking” and away from their oral dependence in order to gain control of their writing (p. 37) and access to the academic discourse community to which they seek membership. Despite his acknowledgment that the characteristics of oral and literate cultures “are not direct opposites” (p. 31), nonetheless the basic writer was portrayed as essentially held back due to rootedness in orality.

For basic writers then, the demarcation between literacy and orality prompts academic writing to become a “trap”; specifically, spoken language, in its “looping back and forth between speakers[,] . . . [offers] chances for groping and backing up and even hiding,” but writing is “a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn’t know” (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 7). Thus, basic writers are depicted as confronting the dilemma of either maintaining refuge in their ways of speaking, which prohibits them from becoming full members of academia because they must write and so often conflate their speaking and writing when they do so, or exposing their struggles with Standard English when they attempt to write in a way that is distinct from their speech. In the
latter case, the presence of errors throughout their writing may then be linked back to supposed intellectual deficiencies, further reinforcing the students’ position on the margins.

Although Bizzell (1986) argued that attributing basic writers’ struggles with writing to their conflation of oral and written modes ignored the range of their “cultural backgrounds . . . and the differences in world views” that arise from that range (p. 297), basic writing scholarship continued on its trajectory of focusing on this conflation and the alleged problems resulting from it. Parisi (1994), for example, claimed basic writers interpret their writing as “cleaned up speech” (p. 34) and, as a result, focus on sentence-level, rather than more global-level, concerns. This practice distinguishes them from their non-basic writing peers, calling further attention to their difference. In addition, Dykstra (1994), who credited basic writers with being aware of their struggles with writing Standard English—“[knowing] they don’t know,” but also not “[knowing] a way out”—claimed that for these students their challenges with writing become intertwined with inabilities to communicate (p. 41). This leads them to then cling to their speaking abilities, “further [entrenching them] in their reluctance to write” (p. 41). Finally, Brammer (2002), drawing on excerpts from his basic writing students’ compositions and analyzing them within the context of the students’ spoken dialects, noted the awkwardness of language that can result when basic writing students infuse their writing with their common speech patterns.

Discussion of basic writers’ identities as outsiders in their institutions is inextricable from the argument surrounding the interrelationship, or lack thereof, between oral and literate modes of communication then. As a result, scholars’ goal of delineating what qualities define a basic writer became intertwined with beliefs about literacy, specifically those that isolated orality and literacy, as well as academic and home literacies (as noted earlier), from each
other. For basic writers who are assigned to the borderlands of academia, therefore, their choices for retaining access to higher education are limited, dependent upon 1) their willingness to embrace Standard English and academic literacies, often at the expense of rejecting their own familiar reading, writing, and speaking practices; or 2) their ability to merge the academic and familiar together, but to do so without relying on their oral traditions. The latter, of course, assumes that opportunities exist for such merging, which is not the case at all institutions and in all writing programs. Further, resistance to total assimilation is a risk that can result in basic writers reinforcing their own outsider status, participating in their own relegation to the margins through self-positioning as the defiant Other. Brammer (2002) argued that for at least some basic writing students, “accepting or adopting the White middle class codes [of Standard English] means selling out or losing identification with their family and community” (p. 23), a loss that perhaps is not worth the gain. For these students, then, although resistance can result in their further push to the academic borderlands, it can be their sole option for retaining their sense of self and relationships.

Reinforcing Brammer’s (2002) findings, Heaney (2006), based on her experiences teaching basic writers in the Synergy Program at the University of Wyoming, claimed the students’ difficulties with Standard English were the result of their deliberate resistance to academia, which the students had learned before had no place for their familiar means of communicating. As she argued, to some extent “these students understand that learning the new discourse—academic writing, for example—changes the way they think and therefore who they are in a fundamental way” (Heaney, 2006, p. 33); some students then choose to reject these changes despite the (potential) consequence of remaining an outsider in the
academy. As a result, basic writers can contribute to their characterization as foreigners through their rejection of the institutional disciplining procedures that attempt to force them into identities as readers and writers belonging to the dominant others, not “their own.”

Basic writing students are thus faced with the problem that resistance to acculturation reinforces the binaries of the institution: “the prepared to the underprepared, the normal to the remedial” (Mutnick, 1996, p. xxi). Although they can refuse to adopt the language of academia that encourages the loss of their familiar identities and therefore abandonment of their home communities (at least according to their proposed perceptions of the consequences of assimilation), in doing so oppositions are upheld that reinforce their disenfranchisement. Furthermore, those students identified as basic writers cannot afford complete rejection of the discourse communities and identities associated with membership in those dominant communities because institutional legitimation depends upon their adoption of accepted language practices. Basic writers as we frame them then are in a perpetual state of disempowerment, assigned their status on the basis of placement measures that operate against them and then subject to others’ constant redefinations/re-identifications of them on the basis of their willingness to assimilate (and their success at doing so).

Indeed, the extent to which basic writers are pushed to the margins is perhaps no more apparent than when complaints about the allocation of resources to educate such students who “should not be here” arise, as we can see from both non-academic and academic discourses surrounding liberal admission programs and their role in the supposed deterioration of standards (Traub, 1994). In addition, though, the credit hours (or lack thereof) sometimes assigned to basic writing classes are another indicator of how basic writing students’ presence and contribution to the institution are diminished (Rodby & Fox,
2000), with basic writing classes sometimes characterized as extensions of high school curricula that failed. Further, the practice of basic writing classes sometimes meeting in different buildings or campuses from the non-basic writing classes is a spatial reinforcement of the conceptual distance between the two, suggesting the “normal” learning spaces are unsuitable for basic writers’ specific needs. Basic writers are thus reminded in many different ways of how “alien” they are, particularly because their literacies are considered wanting.

Pattern III: Basic Writers’ Newness

In contrast to the aforementioned common representations of basic writers as both deficient and outsiders, which assigned fault to the students for their struggles with reading and writing academic texts, the pattern of describing them as beginners helped to legitimate their presence in their institutions through attributing their difficulties to under-preparation. Scholars were describing basic writers as beginners/initiates to academic discourse during the late 1970s-early 1980s, the same time the other two patterns emerged as well, though this characterization did not seem to catch on as efficiently. Forging the change in thinking about the defining characteristic(s) of basic writers was Shaughnessy (1977), who claimed these students’ writing errors are “not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes” (p. 5). As she argued, we should expect these students to struggle with academic discourse due to their lack of prior training in the requisite skills that would enable them to succeed. Such an expectation would then allow the students “to find a physical and intellectual place of their own inside the often-foreboding institutional gates” (Ritter, 2009, p. 34), a place that is so commonly withheld from them.
The shift toward redefining basic writers in relation to their beginner status resulted from three main changes in attitudes toward the students, their writing, and their instruction (Gray-Rosendale, 1999). The first was that basic writers were no longer understood to be mentally stalled, incapable of thinking outside of concrete situations and experiences in order to apply their knowledge in broad terms. Instead, as initiates to “academic discourse and the codes of academic life” (Gray-Rosendale, 1999, p. 115), the students just needed to become familiar with this new language, to learn how to understand and use it. Struggles and failures that occurred during the acclimation process were no longer attributable to intellectual deficiency on the part of basic writers, thus, but were understood to be normal signs of learning. The second change was the recognition that errors are logical, not just random, and also “meaningful rhetorical attempts” to create a language “[approximating] academic discourse” (Gray-Rosendale, 1999, p. 115). In contrast to prior explanations of errors as reflections of cognitive deficiencies, carelessness, and/or unwillingness to learn, errors came to be seen then as reflections of attempts to adopt the institutional language. The third and final change was that the goal of basic writing courses shifted from “remediating” students through Standard English skills-and-drills exercises to “initiating” them “into the mainstream of academic discourse” (Gray-Rosendale, 1999, p. 115). Basic writers were no longer students in need of a cure or repair, but instead those who needed to learn the foundations of academic discourse in preparation for the additional knowledge that the required/non-basic writing course/sequence would offer.

Fundamental to the shift toward framing basic writers as beginners then was the understanding that for some reason their prior educational experiences did not prepare them to meet the reading and writing demands of college, and that rather than searching for that
reason, we should turn our attention toward designing writing instruction that responded to their under-preparation. Garnes (1984), in her treatment of the three major characteristics of the ideal basic writing teacher, claimed that in contrast to their non-basic writing peers, basic writers had not “‘caught’ composition” in their earlier schooling, and, as a result, “desperately need instruction” (p. 4). Instead of attributing blame to basic writers for their struggles with academic reading and writing, thus, she proposed that the problem was one of education just not aligning with the students at the time of their enrollment. Furthermore, the lack of preparation basic writers demonstrated could explain not just their errors with Standard English usage, but also their difficulties understanding writing as a process (Eves-Bowden, 2001). Rather than these students’ challenges with starting their compositions, articulating their ideas, and rewriting being attributed to problems with abstraction and audience awareness, which was the first pattern in the scholarship described earlier, or conflation of their writing and speaking, the second pattern, the source could be identified as their inexperience with writing academic prose.

Supporting this claim, Yelin (1978) argued that basic writers are both unfamiliar with the forms of academic discourse and with “academic practices” (p. 20); the basic writing course should function not just to prepare students for the reading and writing expected in higher education then, but also to orient them to the attitudes and actions that those within the institution should demonstrate. Urging a dialectical approach to basic writing instruction, Yelin claimed that basic writing teachers should be responsible for acquainting students with the principles and the “practices of academic life[. . .] [offering] them . . . a way of understanding that inscribed within each act of signification, within each social process and practice, is a whole structure of social relations” (p. 29). According to her approach to
defining basic writers as beginners, thus, the students’ newness to their institutions includes more than just their under-preparedness with academic literacies. Instead, basic writers need an introduction to the guiding beliefs that influence the entire higher learning structure and that then shape the language use and practices of the academic discourse communities to which the students seek membership (a point Bartholomae, 1986, later articulated as well).

Although to some extent the shift toward describing basic writers as newcomers disrupted the stigmas attached to the other two patterns, it was not without its own set of challenges. Specifically, if we understand basic writers as like their non-basic writing peers in terms of being unfamiliar with academic forms and practices and in the process of assimilating, then what are the differences between the two groups, differences that can be used to reject/grant admission, shape curriculum, etc.? Harrington (1999) argued that the shared experience of acclimating to academic discourse (or “inventing the university,” as Bartholomae, 1986, described the process) between basic writers and non-basic writers makes it “difficult to distinguish them” (p. 100), and if that is the case, are we left to fall back on either or both of the patterns described earlier? Do basic writers remain in the margins due to their representations as deficient and/or as outsiders, or perhaps lose their access to education or the additional preparation needed for them to succeed that the suggestion of “basic” becoming “non-basic” affords?

The reframing of basic writers as beginners, then, despite shifting the blame for their struggles with academic reading and writing away from them to acknowledge the role of their prior education to their under-preparation, does not negate the problems surrounding the language used to describe these students. Rather, it helps to reinforce the argument that our processes for labeling basic writers as such needs to be examined and questioned, and that “it
is toward ‘basic writers’ own language . . . [used] to describe their identities and writing processes that we should turn as we think about ways to strengthen our Basic Writing theories and pedagogies” (Gray-Rosendale & Leonard, 2001, Implications section, para. 5). Because no pattern is complete and adequate in itself to describe the range of students labeled “basic writers,” as long as we continue to search for such common approaches to defining them we will promote inaccurate representations of their abilities and role(s) in higher education. We will continue to seek out their flaws and miss their strengths, to push them to the borders rather than include them, and to see them as beginners without recognizing the expertise/familiarity they demonstrate with other discourse forms they bring to the classroom. Examining not just how we define who these students are then, but also the ways in which we subscribe to certain beliefs about literacy that inform that process, is a crucial step to no longer diminishing the value of the basic writer in the academy.

The Potential Value of the Literacy Narrative for Basic Writers

One means of empowering basic writers, both through encouraging them to integrate their non-academic literacies into the classroom and to explore the dominant discourses surrounding literacy/learning, is the literacy narrative assignment. Although a common criticism of the literacy narrative is its lack of rigor compared to other forms of academic writing, as Sharma (2015) has claimed, “[W]riting ‘about’ the experience of learning to read and write can greatly promote students’ development of critical sensibilities, capacity for intellectual judgment, independence as writers and makers of knowledge, self-confidence and self-respect, and, in short, their epistemological agency” (pp. 108-109). Further, because the literacy narrative “present[s] . . . proof that the struggle to attain a desired but foreign form of literacy is manageable. . . [and demonstrates how the] personal voice breaks through and
makes a claim (Corkery, 2005, p. 49), reading literacy narratives in addition to writing them can increase basic writers’ confidence in their ability to succeed in the academy and to maintain their own sense of self in the process.

Indeed, the literacy narrative can offer students the opportunity to participate in discourse that otherwise seems both frequently out of their reach and critical of them. According to Ivanič (1994), participation in discourse “is not a matter of free choice among a freely available set of alternative identity-creating discourses” (p. 5); rather, it is determined by what discourses the writer has access to as well as the preferences for certain discourses more than others in different contexts. Within the academic context, explicitly welcoming basic writers to join the scholarly discussion about their identities and offering them opportunities to do so can enable us to (continue to) shift the emphasis away from others defining who basic writers are through “student-vacant” discourse. We can grant them a space to interject their interpretations of their experiences into the classroom and to demonstrate the importance of those interpretations to how we see them. As Corkery (2005) asserted, “Assigning students to examine the ways in which their pasts have influenced the communicators they have become uncovers and points up the complex issues that accompany their move into higher education. But the portrait is, of course, in their hands” (p. 50).

Further, the opportunity to create this “portrait” can help basic writers to explore the fluidity of identity through language use, i.e., to learn the ways in which we use language to persuade others to see us how we want to be seen. This understanding is particularly important for basic writers, whose labeling as “basic writers” and the ensuing representations of them as a result may or may not reflect their own perceptions of who they are. Soliday (1994) highlighted the potential of literacy narratives to enable students to shape their
identities in desirable ways, and Rymes’ (2001) research shows this to be the case. Her study of high school dropouts who later returned to school demonstrated the ways students “[re-scripted] themselves through narratives that eliminate their past identities” (Corkery, 2005, p. 51). Alexander (2011) similarly found that literacy narratives encourage students “to negotiate and grasp various identities. They claim one identity and then move on to another” (p. 625). The literacy narrative then, like other forms of autobiographical writing especially, offers the author unique opportunities to select those characteristics of himself/herself that are most desirable to highlight or hide, those experiences most notable to share or obscure, and so on, until the next time he/she writes and can adopt a new identity of his/her choosing.

Finally, the literacy narrative can help basic writers realize that learning and the literacy that accompanies that learning are politically charged. As Soliday (1994) argued, Literacy stories let us look at reading, writing, or speaking as unusual when, like an ethnographer, the narrator assumes that something as seemingly natural as learning to write in school is not a neutral event but is itself a meaningful social drama. (p. 514) Through not only sharing their stories of literacy acquisition then, but also making choices about the form those stories should take, basic writers can start to see the meaning behind their experiences, including perhaps who and/or what determines which literacies and learning “count” and why. Further, Marinara (1997) noted that bringing together non-academic and academic literacies “means the shape of academic knowledge changes” and instead of “indoctrinating students into academic ways of knowing and defining those ways of knowing as having the highest value, the academy must then work within a larger nexus of literacy and knowledge” (p. 5). The literacy narrative can therefore enable not just students to better understand the forces at work that shape their learning and the worth attached to that
learning, but also to ultimately shape at least some of those forces themselves to recognize often otherwise undervalued forms of literacy.

Despite these potential benefits of assigning the literacy narrative in the basic writing classroom, it should be noted there are challenges to doing so, too (Corkery, 2005; Sharma, 2015). For example, if an instructor assigns sample literacy narratives for students to read to help them with planning for their own writing, some students may struggle to identify with the authors of those texts and feel alienated from them. As Corkery (2005) claimed, those “students who have the most trouble imagining themselves participating in schooled literacy” may be the most likely to feel distanced from the narrators, and those “who already feel ‘outside’ of that new literacy . . . are more likely to see the successful narrators as foreign, given the ‘inside’ position from which the authors write” (p. 49). Further, “[l]iteracy narratives do not confirm the value of oral expression that does not convert into writing” (Corkery, 2005, p. 62), and, as noted earlier, basic writers are often identified as grounded in oral traditions more so than their non-basic writing peers. Finally, Sharma (2015), citing other scholars, claimed that “[l]iteracy narrative assignments basically force students to buy into prevailing hegemony, essentially perpetuating the power structure of discourse and epistemology in the society” (p. 106). The literacy narrative is thus not able in itself to fully address all of the issues the academic discourse surrounding basic writers raises.

At the same time, we should not expect a single assignment to make sweeping changes across higher education. Rather, we should acknowledge the promise it can hold for better understanding our students on their own terms, and certainly any opportunity to accomplish that goal should be considered. In addition, the literacy narrative assignment in itself does not necessitate making basic writers feel (even more so) like they are outsiders to
the institution, or that they must perpetuate certain beliefs that can and often do
disenfranchise them. Instead, the ways in which we teach the assignment can and often do
lead to these results, which is why it is critical to examine and self-reflect on our pedagogy.
Although not the primary goal of this dissertation, my analysis of the literacy narratives
written by some of the basic writers participating in the Summer START program does offer
implications for instructing students on how to write this genre, which I address in more
detail in the conclusion.
Identity must be understood as processed, socially embedded, and readable through the self-stories in which it discursively manifests itself. In order to understand this construction, we need to analyze the processes (the telling) as well as the relationships (between teller and listener) and the form and content of such self-stories. (Kraus, 2006, p. 106)

CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN

In response to both the extant literature interlinking representations of basic writers with often narrow beliefs about literacy and the call for more student-centered research, I chose to explore how students considered “basic writers” represented their own literacies within the context of their first encounter with higher education. Specifically, I focused on the following questions: 1) “How do the basic writers who participated in this study define literacy when narrating their stories of literacy acquisition, including aligning those stories with the ‘master’ cultural narrative of literacy as success and/or ‘little’ cultural narratives (Alexander, 2011)?”; and, 2) “When writing about their literacy experiences, what techniques do the students use to shape audience response to those experiences and their identities in relation to their literacies?” These questions enabled me to examine the choices the students made in their writing regarding how to portray literacy in general and also specifically with regard to their personal literacies. Furthermore, I was able to consider how their representations of their literacy experiences and themselves as literate did or did not align with common ways of describing basic writers.

In order to pursue my research, I required the following: 1) access to an institution within reasonable distance that offered at least one section of a basic writing course during either a summer session and/or fall semester; 2) the assignment sequence for the basic writing course/section had to include a literacy narrative; and 3) the appropriate administrators and/or instructor(s) of the course/section had to grant me permission to collect
data as well as preferably allow me to help design the assignment and attend classes during the assignment unit. Regarding the ability to collaborate on the assignment, I wanted students to be able to choose whether to focus on academic or non-academic literacies in their writing, and because the wording of the assignment description could/likely would affect their writing, I preferred the option to be able to contribute to the assignment description if not also the broader assignment unit. In addition, although I intended to focus primarily on the students’ essays for my analysis, because of the likelihood that instruction as well as teacher and student interaction would affect their writing, I needed to be able to attend all class meetings.

Selection and Profile of the Research Site

I first learned in March 2010 that a pilot program called Summer START would be held at Research University³ (RU) and would offer a “basic writing” course for two of its four student cohorts. The program was scheduled to take place during the Summer II session (July 1st through August 4th), and it was in its final planning stages at the time I was preparing a short list of potential research sites. RU initially had been included on the list because of its proximity to me. After learning about the goals of Summer START as well as the student cohorts who would be participating in it, I decided to solicit participation from those affiliated with the program. Because I was able to gain the consent of a Summer START English 100 (“Introduction to Academic Writing,” or the equivalent “basic writing” course at the institution) instructor, 9 of her students, 6 program coordinators whose expertise pertained to the planning, implementation, and operations of the program as well as the student cohorts of interest, and 5 of the 8 tutors who interacted with the aforementioned

³ Research University is a pseudonym. A detailed profile of the school is offered later in this chapter.
student cohorts to participate in the research, I did not attempt to recruit participants at another location.

Modeled after the six-week SummerStart program for pre-freshmen at Syracuse University, Summer START was intended to help new first-year students make a successful transition from high school to college through what the coordinators referred to as “academic and social programming.” The pilot was described and marketed as a unique experience for students, one that would prepare them for the upcoming fall semester, but do so under more low-stakes conditions than those characteristic of a regular 15-week term. Three goals thus guided the program: 1) assisting enrolled students with acclimating to the campus and local area, 2) enabling them to gain credit for two core courses that would introduce them to the rigor and expectations of higher education, and 3) promoting bonds among the students that would offer integral support during the often difficult adjustment period to college life. The students’ needs, and others’ assumptions about those needs as suggested by the program’s aims and resources, were therefore at the core of Summer START, making it an ideal choice for this research. Further, in light of the more recent shift in basic writing scholarship toward acknowledging the particular contexts in which basic writers are found, choosing SummerSTART, one of just a few programs of its kind throughout the country, for data collection offered a unique opportunity to contribute to the literature.

In contrast to some of the other options I considered for recruiting participants, Summer START was not just an academic program, but also a residential program; students interacted with each other outside of their classes on a regular basis, attending a baseball game together, for example, as well as painting a local high school. In addition, the students were required to attend regular weekend meetings that offered them opportunities to meet
and befriend students from different backgrounds who were not in their classes and to learn about issues considered fundamental to student success, such as exercise, nutrition, and time management. The emphasis on combining academic and social success was grounded in the program coordinators’ research into how certain factors, such as acclimation to college life and retention, correlated in order to design a successful pilot. According to the SummerSTART coordinators and other staff I later spoke with, it was this inclusion of both components that attracted students and their families to the pilot. With that said, despite the emphasis on the additional benefits other than the course credit students could gain, most students I spoke with during and after the summer session cited the course credit as the reason for participating in the program. This is perhaps expected since, for example, the summer credits could be used to help offset a later semester when other obligations could limit the number of hours feasible for the students’ schedules, particularly the athletes.

Program coordinators set a goal of enrolling 90 students in the pilot, but due to the costs for students (estimated at $3,000, excluding additional costs such as food and entertainment) and lack of institutional funding to offset those costs, Summer START 2010 enrolled just 49 students total. The 49 students were distributed across four cohorts, including a cohort of international students; a cohort of calculus-based curriculum students (the latter also referred to as “domestics”); a cohort of 20 student athletes who represented football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, and swimming; and a cohort of 9 students who were also participants in the Transition Program (TP), an undergraduate academic enrichment program unaffiliated with Summer START. Each student cohort enrolled in two paired courses that were pre-selected for the particular students within it, and decisions about which courses to offer were based on assessments of the cohorts’ needs according to the
students’ scores on a language placement and/or SAT exam, their high school GPAs, and the coordinators’ knowledge of prior similar students’ experiences with certain course subjects. Students were not able to choose their own courses then, although some students from the calculus-based curriculum cohort later did transfer into other, higher-numbered mathematics courses upon their request and demonstration of competence to exempt the lower-numbered course.

Because I did not focus on the first two cohorts, the international students and calculus-based curriculum students/“domestics,” for this research, I will focus further discussion on only the other two cohorts who comprised the majority of the study participants. For the cohorts consisting of student athletes and TP students, an English 100 course was paired with a Sociology 202 course, “Principles of Sociology.” The former was chosen because the students’ SAT critical reading scores in general were low and athletic coordinators had found in the past that student athletes tended to struggle with the required English 101 course when enrolling in it without first completing English 100. Because the Summer START coordinators wanted to link as much as possible content in the English 100 course with content in another course to lessen the workload for the two cohorts within the intense 5-week session, the Sociology 202 course was chosen because its intended outcomes and some of the course concepts aligned with those of English 100. In addition, some of the Summer START coordinators had prior experience collaborating with members of the sociology department and the head of that department indicated an interest and willingness to participate in the pilot when approached during the program planning stages. The decision was made, therefore, to pair the two aforementioned courses since such a pairing seemed ideal in terms of curricula and departmental collaboration.
It should be noted that prior to the Summer START pilot, English 100 had not been offered during summer sessions due to the failure to meet the enrollment cutoff, and when English 100 sections were proposed for earlier summer sessions, the classes were scheduled to last 10 weeks in contrast to the 5 weeks of the program. The English 100 course is a somewhat recent addition to the first-year writing curriculum at the institution, though, as it was proposed in 2002 in conjunction with English 101 to replace the former required English 111 and 112 writing course sequence. I was unable to locate information regarding when English 111 and 112 were first offered, but I did find that the courses existed since at least the 1960s; a course action form was completed in 1962 proposing dropping English 111 and 112 from the curriculum.

In addition to the paired courses each cohort was enrolled in, tutoring was offered at no additional cost to all of the students in the four cohorts. For the student athletes and Transition Program students, considered at-risk and thus the weakest two cohorts of the Summer START program (the former identified as the weakest students at the entire institution according to some of the program coordinators), tutoring was required and held for three hours each afternoon Monday through Friday in group sessions at the dorm where students resided throughout the pilot. For those students among the two aforementioned groups who were unable to complete their assignments within the required three-hour tutoring sessions, supplemental tutoring was also offered and was scheduled on Wednesdays and Sundays.

During the required tutoring sessions, students were assigned to groups of 3-4 students each, and in general the groups consisted of both student athletes and TP students. Each group was under the direction of a single tutor who was either an undergraduate student
or graduate student with or without prior teaching and/or tutoring experience. Though during the planning stages of the program some requests were made to allow each student athlete his/her own tutor, due to budget limitations this was not feasible and the small group tutoring format was selected as the best option to meet student needs while working within financial constraints. Furthermore, because an academic support program specifically for student athletes and external to the pilot was already in place at RU, the student athletes participating in Summer START were able to access additional assistance through that program as needed.

Summer START tutors were trained through the Undergraduate Tutorial Center (UTC) prior to the start of the pilot program, but as I later learned, there was no general agreement about how to lead tutoring sessions and, as a result, there were inconsistencies across tutoring groups in terms of management and protocol for meetings. All tutoring groups did share in common, though, that students were required to complete a brief form at the beginning of tutoring sessions indicating their specific goals to accomplish during those sessions. The form helped to ensure students were held accountable for their work and that there was a standard method for communication about students’ progress between tutors and program coordinators. Because the students’ forms were not stored throughout the duration of the summer session, unfortunately I was unable to consult them or obtain them for data collection purposes.

In its efforts to increase students’ likelihood for academic and personal success, the Summer START pilot thus depended upon a rigid structure of class scheduling, tutoring, workshops, and outings that offered students significant personal attention and support, but that in the process could be (and on occasion was) interpreted as stifling. Coordinators and staff indicated that the program was meant in part to help students become independent and
to assume personal responsibilities for their learning, time management, etc., but there seemed to be tension between accomplishing these goals while offering students as much assistance as possible to encourage their progress and retention. Furthermore, as a unique educational and social experience occurring during a summer session, the pilot could not mirror all of the conditions of being a student at the institution during regular fall and spring semesters, which presented the question of the extent to which Summer START could offer students an accurate representation of general student life at Research University. These distinctions, among others, between the conditions of Summer START and those of general semesters at the school made the former a unique research site within the larger institutional context, and are, therefore, important to consider when assessing the design and goals of the pilot and their potential influence on the data that I collected.

Profile of the Institutional Setting for Summer START – Research University

Research University is a four-year public institution located in the southeast that was founded in the late 1880s to offer residents of the state access to education, research, and extension services. With its roots in agriculture and mechanics, the school expanded the scope of its curricula in the 1920s to include programs in engineering, science, business, textiles, education, and graduate studies, later adding schools in the humanities and social sciences, among others. Though RU now boasts more than 100 undergraduate majors, it is perhaps best known for its programs in agriculture, engineering, mathematics, and textiles, as well as its substantial emphasis on research across campus and through collaborations with outside partners/agencies. Since its original class of fewer than a hundred students, the school has grown to become the largest four-year institution in its state, enrolling more than 33,000 students (undergraduate and graduate combined).
As a public land-grant institution, Research University is committed to offering educational access to groups that would otherwise remain underrepresented, though it has not offered open admissions since its founding and has continued to maintain rigorous admission standards for all of its programs. All of the schools within the institution, despite their different supplemental admissions criteria and application requirements, expect applicants to demonstrate strong prior commitment to learning and potential for future academic success in order to gain admission. For two of the schools (as well as one subprogram within a third school), a successful applicant in general is in at least the top 25-30% of his/her high school graduating class in demanding college prep courses, has a B+ or higher GPA, and has strong SAT or ACT scores. For all of the remaining schools, a successful applicant in general is in at least the top 10-15% of his/her high school graduating class in the “most rigorous” college prep courses, has a B+ to A GPA, and also has strong SAT or ACT scores. These admissions criteria thus enable RU both to compete with neighboring institutions of outstanding national and international reputation and also to retain a strong student profile.

Regarding the student profile, of the more than 19,000 applicants hoping to enter the Fall 2010 class, only approximately 10,000 were admitted with an expected class of 4,550. Of the entering students, 43% (1,685) ranked in the highest 10% of their graduating classes, 31% in the highest 10-20%, and 16% in the highest 20-30%. In addition, of the entering class 95 of the students were valedictorians and 66 were salutatorians, and most students applied with strong SAT scores: 76% earned an 1100 or higher, and just 1%, 45 students, earned below 900. The majority of the students who indicated their intent to enroll, 63%, also submitted Advanced Placement (AP) exam scores averaging 4.08 exams per student, and of the submitted scores almost 2,000 were perfect 5’s. A large number of the entering Fall 2010

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4 Admissions criteria reported here were those used in 2010.
class submitted college credit hours as well, with 404 submitting 1-9 hours; 139 submitting 10-19 hours; 56 submitting 20-29 hours; 15 submitting 30-39 hours; and 66 submitting 44+ hours.

These numbers suggest the reputation that Research University has built as a commonly ranked leading public university in the nation, a reputation that has not been nor is now associated with “remedial instruction.” Multiple two-year colleges are located in the immediate and surrounding areas, and students who are considered too under-prepared to enroll at RU upon high school graduation often complete coursework at these other institutions and then attempt to transfer. For Karen⁵, one of the Summer START coordinators responsible for what she referred to as the “hands-on issues” pertaining to the program, this is how it should be, echoing the common attitude toward remedial instruction as noted in Soliday (2002). Local two-year colleges, not Research University or its four-year counterparts in the surrounding areas, are considered responsible for meeting the educational needs of those students identified as underperforming and in need of further instruction to “catch up.” This stated explicit distinction between two-year colleges and four-year institutions like RU is important within the context of the Summer START program and the research I conducted in that for at least one of the two student cohorts I studied, the student athletes, there was a clear need to respond to the students’ under-preparation to try to ensure their success and retention, which some would likely consider “remedial” instruction.

As I will discuss in further detail in a later chapter, some of the students were described as admitted to the institution on the basis of factors other than (and in spite of) their prior academic performance. The program was intended in part then to help ensure their

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⁵ Karen is a pseudonym assigned to one of the Summer START coordinators who is also an administrator at RU. In addition to keeping her name anonymous, she requested her specific position title be omitted as well.
continued presence at Research University through enabling them to gain the knowledge and
skills that were lacking in their educational backgrounds. Furthermore, and as noted earlier,
tutoring was required for the student athletes and their fellow cohort of Transition Program
students, and supplemental tutoring was offered (and needed) for those students within the
two groups who were unable to complete their assignments within the allotted time of the
required tutoring sessions. While not a remedial program at a remedial institution, then, one
could argue that Summer START filled a remedial purpose for some of its participants in
terms of offering significant support and personal attention uncharacteristic of that for
students enrolled during regular fall and spring semesters.

In addition to the differences in their instruction and the institutional resources the
student athletes and TP students who participated in Summer START were offered that
distinguished the two groups from the general student population at RU, racial composition
of the cohorts is another important factor to consider within the context of this research.
Although the institution is located in an urban area and its students come from regions
throughout the United States as well as other countries, the student population’s ethnic
profile is not as diverse as one would perhaps expect. The majority of the students who
indicated intent to enroll for the Fall 2010 class, for example, were Caucasian, with this
group representing 75.6% of the total. African Americans comprised the second largest racial
group with 8.5% representation, and the next two largest groups were Asians at 4.7% and
Hispanics at 3.5%.

This ethnic breakdown of the Fall 2010 entering class of students at Research
University is notable with regard to Summer START in that one of the program’s goals was
to facilitate students’ “knowledge and appreciation of other cultures,” encouraging social
integration among students from different demographic backgrounds in addition to academic preparedness. The four cohorts of students who participated in the Summer START pilot were integral to the program’s efforts to accomplish such integration, as the international student cohort consisted of all Chinese students, the calculus-based curriculum student cohort Caucasian students, and the student athletes and Transition Program students almost all African-American students (as self-identified). In contrast to their peers who would enter in the fall then, most of the students who participated in Summer START and those who were enrolled in English 100 in particular were not Caucasian but minorities, an important issue in terms of the design of the program, its curriculum, and staff (which consisted of all Caucasians except for one African-American coordinator). Furthermore, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the ethnicities of the student athletes and TP students in light of extant basic writing research and common assumptions about which racial groups tend to comprise most basic writers.

Thus, due to differences in the degree of support and curricular choices offered to the Summer START participants as well as their educational backgrounds and demographics compared to the general student population, the students in the pilot program represented a distinct population within the school itself. In addition, due to their acceptance into the institution following special consideration, which I discuss in more detail below, the student athletes and TP students represented a special population within not just the institution, but also the pilot. I chose to research them in particular rather than all of the student cohorts in part due to this fact as well as their enrollment in the English 100, “basic writing,” course.
Profile of Student Research Participants – Athletes and Transition Program Students

Because two sections of English 100 were offered during the Summer START pilot and each enrolled 15 students, there was a total of 30 potential students to recruit. Of those 30 students, 29 were pooled from the student athletes and Transition Program student cohorts, with each section including students from both groups to better integrate them in response to the social component of the program. The remaining student was not a participant in the pilot program but had self-enrolled in an English 100 section because he wanted to gain course credit for English during the summer; all of the English 101 summer sections had started in Summer I, prior to his high school graduation, so English 100 was his only option. Although the student was not a participant in the Summer START program then, his presence in the “basic writing” course and the potential that his experiences would significantly differ in comparison to his under-prepared peers made him an appealing candidate for recruitment.

All of the students enrolled in the English 100 classes were recent high school graduates, with most having graduated within a month of the beginning of the pilot, though one had completed his high school degree at the beginning of the year. The 29 who were participants in Summer START were selected for the pilot program on the basis of their low GPAs and SAT scores compared to both the general student population and other incoming student athletes and students participating in TP. In addition, some of the student athletes had not been admitted to RU until after a special committee had reconsidered their applications, and all of the Transition Program students had been denied admission based on their initial applications to two degree programs of their choice and were then later accepted through the

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6 At Research University, students submit applications for up to two degree programs the institution offers, not the institution as a whole.
undergraduate academic enrichment program. The students in the two cohorts were thus considered at-risk in relation to their potential for academic success on the basis of these multiple factors, though I was later told that some of them came from difficult home situations and lower socioeconomic statuses as well that would place them at-risk and that further differentiated them from the general student population at the institution.

Despite the similarities between the two cohorts, there were differences as well that affected their enrollment in the pilot and that should be addressed. As stated in the first chapter, there was an imbalance in the number of student athletes and TP students who participated in the research, which is due to the fact that there were more of the former than the latter enrolled in Summer START. The conditions surrounding financial aid to facilitate their enrollment in the pilot differed for the student athletes and the Transition Program students, with the former being offered funding as part of their recruitment to Research University that could be applied to Summer START whereas most TP students were not. According to the coordinators responsible for the Transition Program students’ inclusion in the pilot program, it was this lack of funding that led to fewer students from that group enrolling. The costs were just too high for students and their families to afford, and, in some cases, students who opted not to participate had been offered summer jobs that were necessary to fund their college coursework for the fall semester.

For those Transition Program students who were able to participate despite the general lack of funding from the institution, the pilot offered opportunities both to accomplish the Summer START outcomes and also to better prepare for the requirements of the undergraduate academic enrichment program that had admitted them. The Transition Program, which runs throughout the academic year, relies on parent/guardian support and
requires students to sign a contract attesting to their commitment to their education. As stipulated in the contract, students must: 1) attempt to earn at least a 3.0 GPA during their first year, 2) manage their time to ensure academic success, 3) coordinate scheduling with their advisors to select appropriate courses for their majors, 4) enroll in 15 credit hours each semester, 5) attend at least 8 hours of supplemental academic support meetings each week, 6) participate in “life coach” group sessions the school counseling center offers, and 7) attend all classes. Considering the strenuous demands of the 5-week summer session as well as the strong academic and personal support for the students, Summer START both helped to prepare the students for the upcoming fall semester and acted as a foundation for the rigor of the Transition Program, mirroring the latter to some extent, just in a more condensed timeframe.

In addition to the contrast in funding for the student athletes compared to TP students to enroll in Summer START, the two groups had different understandings of their need to participate in the pilot as well. The student athletes and Transition Program students were both contacted about the program earlier in the summer and the students were not enrolled without their consent. Whereas the TP students understood their enrollment was optional, though, since they had applied for the program, most of the student athletes were under the impression their enrollment was mandatory. The student athletes’ admission to the institution and their financial support were not contingent upon their participation in Summer START, but coordinators and coaches omitted the fact Summer START was optional from their program descriptions; instead, the benefits of the pilot for preparing the athletes for college life were emphasized. According to tutors I later spoke with, some of the student athletes in their groups indicated their presence in the program signaled their academic failings, a claim
that poses serious implications for how we understand the students’ perceptions of their abilities in relation to their assumptions about how others, in particular the program coordinators, thought of them.

Although their participation in Summer START offered the student athletes and TP students significant resources for preparing for their first full semester at Research University then, and, for the latter group, preparing for the Transition Program itself, it should be noted that it also prohibited them from choosing to enroll in English 100 like their peers who would enter in the fall semester. Starting in 2009, the First-Year Writing Program (FYWP) implemented Directed Self-Placement to determine students’ enrollment into either English 100 or 101 rather than depending on students’ SAT scores, which had been the protocol in the past. The DSP process entails students completing a questionnaire inquiring into their reading, writing, note-taking, and comprehension skills as well as high school experiences and test scores to determine whether English 100 or 101 would better suit their needs.

After completing the questionnaire, students are then recommended to enroll in one course or the other, but the students can choose to ignore the recommendation and enroll in their preferred course. Once the students enroll and classes start, English 100 and 101 instructors can then recommend that students remain in their current course or transfer into a section of the other course, but students can once again ignore those recommendations. The process is student-directed at all stages, therefore, although as noted earlier, all students must complete English 101 to fulfill the general education writing requirement because the credit hours earned for English 100 do not count toward that requirement. Rather, the credit hours can be used to meet the total hours required for graduation, depending upon the students’ majors and the number of extra hours allowed within those majors.
Thus, considering all of these factors surrounding their enrollment in the Summer START program, the students represented a combination of what LeCompte and Schensul (1999) described as “unique” and “ideal” case selections. The population was unique because of the goals and design of the Summer START program and its status as a pilot, as well as the fact that Research University had not offered English 100 before during a summer session. It was “ideal” because of the program’s bringing together of students who did not choose to enroll in the “basic writing” course, who were considered “at-risk” and admitted to the institution through special consideration, and who because of their participation in a pilot would be susceptible to many assumptions and talk about their literacies and academic preparedness as coordinators kept a careful watch on the program (and so did the instructors and tutors who communicated with each other and the coordinators). I knew that working with the students enrolled in at least one of the English 100 sections as part of Summer START would enable me not just to answer the research questions I had then, but also to reinforce the flawed usage of the label “basic writer” (Carter, 2008).

Indeed, although I initially recruited 22 of the total 30 students enrolled in the two English 100 sections combined (68.75%), ultimately I narrowed my sample to just 9 students enrolled in one of the sections that was taught by Erin⁷. To start the analysis of the students’ writing, I began with Erin’s section because hers consisted of not just student athletes (7 of whom I recruited) and Transition Program students (1 of whom I recruited), but also the 1 student who belonged to neither cohort and who self-selected to enroll. As I continued the analysis, I found patterns emerging that seemed likely to appear across the other students’ writing to some extent as well, and I felt confident the smaller sample size was still sufficient to draw insightful conclusions about the students’ approaches to defining literacy and

⁷ Erin is a pseudonym.
techniques for writing about their personal literacy acquisition experiences. In addition, I wanted to continue offering in-depth explorations of the essays rather than more minimal treatment that would be necessary in order to accommodate all 22 students’ narratives and to avoid likely repetition.

Further, because Erin, in contrast to Kate, the instructor of the other English 100 section, had prior experience working with basic writers that likely affected her pedagogy, I thought it would be useful to turn greater attention toward her course and her beliefs about the students (the full list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix A). Specifically, I was interested to see whether her opinions of the students would or would not align with the three representations of basic writers according to their supposed deficits, foreignness, and newness to academia, and to consider the implications as a result for how the students’ narratives could be read.

Profile of Summer START Coordinators, English 100 Instructors, and Tutors

In addition to recruiting some of the students participating in the summer pilot, I also recruited those responsible for nominating the students for Summer START, the instructors of the two English 100 sections (though as aforementioned, I narrowed my sample to just one course section and thus one instructor after beginning the analysis), and the tutors the students were required to meet with in the afternoons following classes. Although I focused only on the students’ literacy narratives for analysis, through conducting interviews with the coordinators, instructors, and tutors I was able to gain further insights into the Summer START program, instructional goals, and, perhaps most importantly, the attitudes the aforementioned groups had toward the students. Since their attitudes likely affected their interactions with the students, perhaps also helping to shape the students’ personal beliefs
about their (extra-)curricular literacies, their writing about those literacies, and their expectations for program and course outcomes, their participation in the research helped establish necessary context. Furthermore, for the instructors, it seemed probable their attitudes toward the students influenced their reading of the students’ writing and were, therefore, important to consider since they were the intended audience of that writing.

Though I knew the student athletes and TP students were selected for Summer START due to their low GPAs and SAT scores, I wanted to learn more detailed information about the nomination and selection process for these students, such as the reasons for enrollment decisions as well as approaches to informing the students of their selection. In addition, in order to understand the design of the pilot (e.g., choices regarding curriculum, teachers, tutors, etc.) and the assessments of the students that shaped that design, recruiting the program coordinators was essential as no other group possessed that knowledge. Thus, I recruited those Summer START coordinators who had direct knowledge not just of the program in general, but also of the student athletes and Transition Program student cohorts in particular.

The program coordinators I recruited included: 1) the Interim Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs, who could tell me about the background of Summer START and its logistics as well as both cohorts of interest; 2) the Director of Academic Undergraduate Programs, who could also tell me about the background and logistics of the program as well as the TP students in particular since she coordinated with them throughout the process of their application, selection, and participation in the program; 3) another administrator, Karen, who I mentioned earlier and whose responsibilities pertained to the logistics of the program in all essential areas; 4) the Associate Athletics Director for Academics and Student Services,
who could inform me about the role of the academic support program available to the student athletes in the pilot as well as the student athletes cohort; and 5) the Director of Undergraduate Tutorial Services, who could explain to me the application, selection, and training processes for the tutors who interacted with the students on a regular basis.

In addition to the aforementioned program coordinators, I also recruited the English 100 instructors since I presumed their pedagogies and feedback on the students’ writing would be tailored to meet the students’ needs based on their beliefs about basic writers, rooted perhaps in suggestions from the Summer START program coordinators and/or their knowledge of basic writing scholarship. Due to the time constraints of the summer pilot program as well as the placement of the literacy narrative first in the major assignment sequence, it seemed reasonable to expect the instructors’ attitudes toward the students would still be grounded in part on reported characteristics of basic writers in general. As noted earlier, though, for Erin, who had experience teaching basic writers at a two-year institution before she began teaching at Research University, her pedagogy was also presumably connected to her history working with similar students so that it was arguably more informed. Thus, when I decided to narrow my sample, I selected her for my instructor research participant.

The last group I recruited was the Summer START tutors who interacted with the student athletes and Transition Program students on a regular basis. I presumed their one-on-one experiences helping the students with their English 100 (and Sociology 202) coursework would enable them to offer me unique insights into the students’ attitudes toward their “basic writing” course, their experiences with writing and reading, etc. Furthermore, I presumed that the constant personal interaction with the students would enable the tutors to bond with them
to an extent impossible for program coordinators and instructors, and that as a result this

group would provide a different framework for understanding the students. Eight tutors were

assigned to help the student athletes and Transition Program students throughout the summer

session, with all but two of them undergraduate students who had prior tutoring experience

(either at RU or with programs such as Upward Bound). The two graduate student tutors had

prior experience teaching first-year writing for the English Department at the institution and

one also had experience teaching students who could be considered basic writers through an

outreach program. Both of these tutors were assigned as lead tutors, so in addition to their

regular tutoring duties they also attended all English 100 and Sociology 202 class meetings,

coordinated with instructors regarding points to focus on during tutoring sessions, and

reported back to the remaining 6 tutors about the instructors’ suggestions for tutoring

sessions.

Design of the Literacy Narrative Assignment Unit

The first meeting with the English 100 instructors, Erin and Kate, and the First-Year

Writing Program Director occurred in March 2010, and during this time the instructors

consented to collaborate with me on the literacy narrative assignment unit materials as well

as to allow me to attend their classes. Following the meeting I prepared drafts of a diagnostic

essay that would also facilitate the students’ initial brainstorming about literacy, the literacy

narrative assignment description, and class planning exercises designed to introduce students

to the concept of multiliteracies and the implications of our approaches to defining literacy

(see Appendix B). The emphasis on multiliteracies instead of “traditional” literacies was due
to a combination of factors, including: 1) the increasing push in scholarship toward

recognizing different forms of literacy outside of reading, writing, and speaking as
historically defined; 2) the characteristics of the students as recent high school graduates who were considered academically under-prepared and, as a result, possibly had other experiences more significant to them that they would want to address beyond those considered "traditional" literacies; 3) the desire to see how the students would potentially connect their academic and non-academic learning in a formal writing assignment and the insight(s) that connection could offer; and 4) the goal of expanding basic writing scholarship beyond the common focus on students’ academic literacies, or lack thereof. After I shared the materials with the instructors, no changes were proposed to the assignment description, and Erin did not alter the supplemental documents.

IRB and Research Site and Participant Pseudonyms

Because I was dependent on instructor participation to be able to pursue the project, I chose not to complete the IRB application until after the initial meeting with them and the FYWP Director. Approximately two months after that meeting, I then completed the IRB application and submitted it to the appropriate office during the first week of June 2010. I was notified in mid-June that the project was cleared after minor changes to the original application were made, and I began formal recruitment thereafter.

In the IRB application I indicated that I would maintain the anonymity of the institution and the participants, assigning pseudonyms unless any participants specified a desire for their actual names to be used. One of the instructors, Kate, whom I initially recruited, consented to the use of her name, whereas the other instructor preferred I assign a pseudonym to her. Regarding the Summer START coordinators, I only report information from one of them specifically in this document, and she requested that her position title be omitted and a pseudonym assigned to her. For the other administrators, their position titles
are included with their permission, but any references to names are omitted, and thus no pseudonyms were assigned. Initially I assigned full-name pseudonyms to the student participants, but I later decided to use initials instead. The process of naming the student participants was one I admittedly struggled with, in large part because of the richness of their birth names and the fact that for the student athletes, their names were at times integrated in their stories as they recounted nicknames connected to their sports. After discussion with my committee chair, I opted for the neutrality, so to speak, of using initials rather than full-name pseudonyms. Because some students’ names started with the same letter, in those cases I assigned a letter other than the one that began the student’s name so that there was no repetition and subsequent confusion.

Data Collection

I started data collection during the first English 100 class meeting of the summer session, not only through the field notes I recorded while attending the class (which I continued to maintain throughout the entirety of the literacy narrative assignment unit), but also a SurveyMonkey questionnaire I asked students to complete that inquired into such information as their demographics, parents’/guardians’ education levels, and reading and writing preferences (Appendix C). Erin asked the students who agreed to participate in my research to complete the questionnaire outside of class, and most of the 9 students I recruited had done so by the third class meeting. For those who did not complete the questionnaire by that time, I provided a printout of the questionnaire to try to increase completion rate. Ultimately, I collected questionnaires from all of the student participants so that there was a 100% response rate for this first tool of student data collection.
Although the questionnaire offered useful insight into the students’ backgrounds and additional factors that could influence their attitudes toward reading and writing, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the students as well (see Appendix D for the scripted interview questions). The interviews were designed to gain further information about their learning experiences in addition to their goals and the strategies they used to write their literacy narratives. Because I presumed students would be more likely to consent to interviews if I solicited participation one-on-one and when they were not with their peers, I approached students either as they entered or left their English 100 class meetings. This recruitment method was successful in that all student participants agreed to interviews, but because most of the students were athletes and the majority of those were football players, when football camp began during the fourth week of the summer session the students began to miss our scheduled meetings. As a result, I met with just four out of the nine students who agreed to interviews during the summer session and into the beginning of the fall semester.

It was not until after I completed most of the four student participant interviews that I scheduled interviews with Erin, the Summer START program coordinators, and the tutors, a decision based on the likelihood it would become increasingly difficult to schedule interviews with the athletes and TP students once the fall semester started; thus, prioritizing the student interviews would likely ensure more successful data collection from my target group. In addition, I thought the instructor’s, tutors’, and coordinators’ responses to questions about the students and curriculum might change after the summer session was underway and they had an opportunity to observe the students’ performance. As a result, I postponed scheduling appointments to speak with these three groups until later in the summer session.
Shortly after the literacy narrative assignment unit was completed, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Erin in her office. Questions focused on such areas as her knowledge of basic writers and experience working with them, her understanding of the goals of the Summer START program and opinions of it, her opinions of the students, etc. As noted earlier, see Appendix A for the full list of scripted interview questions. Following my interview with Erin, I then contacted the Interim Dean, Director of Undergraduate Academic Programs, and the Associate Athletics Director in August to obtain their consent to participate in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E for the full list of scripted questions). I conducted interviews with these participants from August through the start of September.

It was during my meetings with both the Interim Dean and the Director of Undergraduate Academic Programs that the Director of the Undergraduate Tutorial Center and Karen, the remaining two coordinators I interviewed, were recommended to me as potential contacts for further information pertaining to Summer START. The Interim Dean, following our meeting in his office in August, walked me to the office of the Director of the UTC to arrange our introduction, and at that time I obtained her consent to participate. We scheduled a date to meet later in the month so that I could ask her about her role in Summer START as well as other pertinent knowledge (see Appendix F for the full list of scripted questions). Regarding my interview with Karen, due to a conflict that arose in her schedule, our first meeting in August was spent further discussing the project rather than Summer START, so it was not until a second meeting in her office that I was able to interview her regarding the pilot (see Appendix E).
The last group of participants I conducted semi-structured interviews with was the tutors. I solicited the participation of the two lead tutors face-to-face, and the remaining three tutors I recruited through email after their names and email addresses were provided to me by the First-Year Writing Program Director. I conducted interviews with the tutors in late August through early September, and the full list of scripted interview questions is available in Appendix G.

Compensation for Participation

None of the students, the English 100 instructor, program administrators, or tutors I recruited was offered compensation for their participation in the research. I did offer to send a draft of the dissertation upon its completion to all participants, though none of the students and just a few of the participants in the other groups requested copies.

Data Analysis – Narratology and Cultural Narratives Analysis

Although rhetorical criticism and narratology are both well-established research methods and can be applied to many of the same texts, including autobiographical writing, scholarship has not explored in-depth the benefits of blending the two methods together to supplement their unique strengths. In his well-known book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth (1983) proposed understanding how fiction comes to persuade its reader within the context of a formal narratological grammar, and despite its limitations, the text was foundational to demonstrating the promise of a merger between rhetorical criticism and narratology. Indeed, Phelan (2010) called attention to its merits and went so far as to provide an “imagining” of a sequel. But there hasn’t been a significant push in the literature since the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* with regard to outlining approaches for bringing the two methods
together, as well as the importance of doing so, resulting in the continuation of the long-standing tradition of isolating the two methods from each other.

The lack of articles and books featuring both “rhetoric” and “narratology” in their titles suggests the dearth of extant, comprehensive literature using a rhetorical narratological approach, with notable exceptions including Phelan’s (1996) *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* as well as Kearns’ (1999) *Rhetorical Narratology*. To some extent it is perhaps unsurprising the number of publications linking narratology and rhetorical criticism is limited since narratology is a fairly new field, gaining most of its ground since the late 1960s-early 1970s. And, as Kearns noted, narratology was founded in a tradition focusing on the role of the structural components of a text alone in the process of creating meaning, which enabled scholars to identify a grammar (or formal features) typical of narratives to analyze, but which also suggested that texts are autonomous and interpretation is not context-based. Drawing on speech act theory, he proposed rhetorical narratology as a theory that would effectively bring rhetoric and narratology together, claiming he “intend[ed] to give narratology’s rhetorical turn a strong push by keeping at the center of the inquiry the question, ‘How do the elements of narrative actually work on readers?’” (p. 9). With that said, although Kearns builds on the prior work of notable scholars within narratology to enhance our understanding of how the merger of rhetorical criticism and narratology can form a more comprehensive method of analysis, I am not persuaded that scholarship published since Booth’s (1983) *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and before Kearns’ *Rhetorical Narratology* has offered us insufficient models for how to combine the two approaches.
Rather, I think we can look to Rabinowitz’s (1987) *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*, which Kearns (1999) references and commends, for guidance in how to read narratives rhetorically. Rabinowitz claimed that “one can study narrative structure not only in terms of concrete textual features but also in terms of the shared interpretive strategies by which readers make sense of them” (p. 1), linking formalist and rhetorical approaches. Although he did not use the term “rhetoric” specifically, Rabinowitz seems to be responding to the question Kearns (1999) claimed needed to be answered of how the formal grammar, or structural characteristics, of narrative can affect the reader. Furthermore, within the context of this specific project, Rabinowitz’s (1987) method is especially useful because of its emphasis on examining how the knowledge a reader brings to a text affects his/her interpretation of it. “[L]ooking at readers’ starting points can help us understand how interpretation comes about and what its implications are” (p. 3), according to Rabinowitz, and for basic writers, whose learning is so often steeped in the pre-formed impressions of them that circulate in scholarship and popular discourse, this approach to analyzing their writing seems particularly appropriate.

I should mention that Rabinowitz (1987), like many narratology scholars, focuses his sample analyses on fictional literature, but he does not state that his approach should be limited to fiction, nor do I think it must be. In addition, he deliberately examines noncanonical writing, because otherwise our ways of reading canonical texts “are implicitly universalized—treated as the way to read—a process that in the end serves to justify the initial canonical choice rather than to examine it” (p. 12). Thus, I think Rabinowitz allows for the application of his approach to texts other than those often chosen for analysis, including autobiographical writing such as literacy narratives.
In order to answer my second research question then, “When writing about their literacy experiences, what techniques do the students use to shape audience response to those experiences and their identities in relation to their literacies?”, I used Rabinowitz’s (1987) four sets of rules: notice, signification, configuration, and coherence. Rules of notice are the features and content of the text that direct the reader’s attention, including titles, beginning and ending sentences, typographical changes, and repetition. Rules of signification build on this first set of rules, directing the reader how to “recast or symbolize or draw the significance” from the features that have commanded his/her attention (p. 44). The third set of rules, configuration, shift the focus from discrete textual features to the grouping together of features, and due to the reader’s established knowledge and/or experience with such groupings, his/her ability “to assemble disparate elements in order to make patterns emerge” (p. 44). Finally, the rules of coherence emphasize “[reading] a text in such a way that it becomes the best text possible” (p. 45), meaning the reader will make sense of or legitimize textual breakdowns, for example, in his/her reading.

Appendix H presents the rules in more detail, breaking them down further into their subcomponents. Although the rules are outlined as discrete, there can be features that would fall under two or more of them, and the reader may attend to the rules in a different order at different times. For example, the reader may realize there is a pattern in the text, which then may lead him/her to notice a feature he/she otherwise missed on initial reading. Thus, there is not a linear path for how the rules apply across a text or that the reader must follow, with the exception of the tendency to recognize certain features of rules of notice first due to their privileged positions (i.e., titles, beginnings, etc.).
The analysis of the students’ literacy narratives entailed three steps: 1) determining the narratological features of each text using Rabinowitz’s (1987) four rules; 2) tracing patterns across all of the texts with regard to those features; and 3) analyzing the features to determine how they could be used to influence the reader’s interpretation of the experiences the students were sharing and the identities they were constructing. Despite the likelihood that the students incorporated some fictional components into their writing, in particular due to their dependence on memories that were perhaps incomplete or “inaccurate” as well as their potential embellishment of their experiences to build interest for the reader (as is common storytelling practice), I did not distinguish between the real authors of the texts—the students—and the implied authors—the narrators—in the analysis of their writing. This decision was in keeping with the custom not to make such a distinction when examining factual writing, and since the students were instructed to write about actual, personal experiences with the literacies of their choosing, I considered their writing to be factual. Furthermore, I did not isolate all of the narratological features of the writing, but those that were most dominant in my reading and thus for that reading assumed the most important roles in the students’ constructions of their personal stories. Of course, I acknowledge the possibility that the features I determined to be most crucial for analysis would not necessarily be the same for another reader, and/or that there may be other features another reader would consider integral that I excluded.

**Application of Rabinowitz’s Rules**

Regarding how I marked the students’ writing for analysis, although the rules do not need to be applied in a strict linear order (and sometimes such an order is impossible to follow), I began with the rules of notice as I marked the students’ writing for analysis.
Specifically, I first noted the titles of the essays (when no title was included I made a note of this also), typography, as well as first sentences/introductions and last sentences/conclusions. From there, I then proceeded to mark the texts for inclusion of any direct instruction to the reader, figurative language, and/or repetition. I began with all of the aforementioned features because of their role in shaping an audience’s first and final impressions, as well as the likelihood that aside from error, these features would most likely grab attention, particularly on initial reading. I attempted to approach analyzing the writing as a “typical” reader then while also remaining mindful of the personal biases and agenda I brought to the reading as described at the end of this chapter.

Once I had marked the features of rules of notice that I found in the students’ writing, I then began to scan the essays for features of rules of signification and rules of coherence. Regarding the rules of signification, I did not anticipate that source would be a prominent feature of the students’ writing since typically literacy narratives are told from only one perspective. Similarly, because the literacy narrative is an autobiographical form of writing, I did not anticipate that the truth and realism component of the rules of signification would apply to a substantial extent in the students’ essays. With that said, I did not discount the possibility that source and truth and realism would be areas for analysis, but rather just presumed morality and causation would be more likely to apply. In terms of morality, I expected that particularly because so many of the students were athletes, they would include physical descriptions of themselves and use those descriptions to suggest their inner qualities. Finally, regarding causation, I expected that many of the students would integrate maxims into their writing because of the likelihood of hearing them while growing up and/or while playing sports. While reading I paid close attention then to moments when the students
described themselves and/or other individuals included in their narratives, as well as when they integrated maxims or other kinds of statements making general observations on the state of things.

Following marking the essays for features of rules of signification, I then marked them for features of rules of coherence. I transitioned to coherence instead of focusing on configuration in large part because of the errors present in the writing. Specifically, I thought that in the process of noticing grammar and mechanics mistakes, a typical reader would perhaps become hyperaware of seeming content errors in the form of providing too little or too much information. Similarly, I thought it was likely a typical reader would draw on rules of coherence when coming across what appeared to be ruptures in the writing, particularly given the context surrounding the essays as the first major assignment in a writing class. When reading a piece of student writing, I think there is a tendency to want to read it as “the best text possible” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 45) because of understanding that the writing reflects the learning process, and, as a result, to draw on rules of coherence to account for what appear to be any content/storyline errors. Thus, as I read the students’ narratives and increasingly noticed surface-level errors, I also became increasingly aware of content that seemed insufficient or excessive and that would, in my opinion, prompt a reader to rely on license to fill or surplus under the rules of coherence. I also accounted for naming, bundling, and thematizing, which fall under the final category of rules of coherence, privileging in particular parallelisms and the conclusions of the essays.

Finally, I marked the students’ writing for features of rules of configuration, particularly the “basic rules” and undermining categories. Regarding the basic rules, I revisited the essays’ titles I had previously marked and considered how they could be
interpreted as “prophetic.” In addition, I marked the essays for any passages in which “straightforward descriptions of what [was] to come” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 114) appeared as well as any additional features that could suggest the outcomes of the narratives. In terms of undermining, I searched for any features that established expectations for what would occur and marked where expectations were not met. Finally, I also read the essays for features of balance, particularly warnings/notice, and revisited any repetition and maxims I had previously marked. For the rules of configuration especially, I found I attended more to this set of rules on second and later readings of the students’ essays because of the overlaps with other rules I had accounted for on my first reading of the texts.

Although it could be argued that because the students were not trained in rhetorical criticism or narratology, analysis of their autobiographies using the approach I did attributes more intention to them than is accurate, such a claim ignores the emphasis Rabinowitz (1987) places on reader response versus authorial intention as well as the knowledge of how to tell stories and the skills to do so that we acquire outside of formal instruction. Regarding the latter, we tell stories as part of our routine oral and written interactions with others, and we often change how we tell our stories on the basis of our conscious and/or subconscious assumptions about our audience. Furthermore, Erin discussed with the students strategies for crafting successful autobiographies, offering them some exposure to formal storytelling techniques that would enable the students to make more informed decisions about their writing. Finally, through my analysis I am not claiming how I interpreted the students’ writing was specifically how they intended for it to be interpreted, or that it should be the only interpretation. Rather, I am offering a possible reading grounded in Rabinowitz’s (1987) approach, and as applicable I also consulted the interviews I conducted with the students for
further insight. Through occasionally integrating the interview data where possible and appropriate, I attempted to further infuse the students’ voices into the analysis and to remain “truer” to the students’ beliefs about their experiences.

After completing my analysis in response to the second research question, I then used this information to help inform my analysis in response to the first research question, specifically in terms of the presence of cultural narratives surrounding literacy in the students’ writing in connection to how they defined literacy. Applying the cultural narrative scheme Alexander (2011) outlined, which focuses on what she referred to as “master” and “little” cultural narratives (most of which other scholars had earlier identified), I was able to trace which popular beliefs about literacy students appeared to subscribe to. Whereas the master cultural narrative “[tries] to reify experience or stereotype large groups of people” (Alexander, 2011, p. 611), little narratives “offer valuable insights about various specific literate practices and while they may theorize on the (sic) these practices, they seldom make theoretical statements that claim to be valid for literate persons in general or literate cultures in general” (Daniell, 1999, p. 403).

On the basis of her analysis of the presence of these cultural narratives (the categories of which include success, hero, child prodigy, literacy winner, victim, outsider, rebel, and other) in 60 students’ literacy narratives, Alexander (2011) found that the students primarily integrated the dominant cultural narrative of success, which connects literacy to economic, social, and other progress, and that they often did so in their conclusions. With that said, the little narratives, such as the victim and hero cultural narratives, the next most common to appear, did frequently show in the students’ writing, so that “collectively, the little narratives were utilized 70% of the time, more than doubling how often the success master narrative
was incorporated” (p. 625). Thus, I was curious to see which cultural narratives would appear in the students’ writing as they defined literacy and described their personal literacy acquisition, particularly whether students would lean more toward the master narrative or integrate a stronger balance of little narratives. I did not perform as detailed of an analysis as Alexander (2011) did using paragraph units, but instead considered how the students’ definitions of literacy, when provided, and the general experiences they shared suggested a particular cultural narrative. I looked for broad patterns, therefore, rather than conducting a minute examination of the writing for which cultural narratives appeared and how frequently they did so.

**Researcher Bias**

Three significant factors influenced how I read and interpreted the students’ writing and, therefore, could be considered limitations of the research the reader should be aware of before continuing to the results chapter that follows. First, I approached the students’ work purposefully looking for the narrative techniques Rabinowitz (1987) identified as features of the rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence. As a result, features of the writing that fell outside of the scope of those categories were omitted, for the better or worse, in my analysis. My interpretation of the students’ writing cannot be generalized then as applicable for other audiences who, due to their own guiding principles for reading, would perhaps reach different conclusions. Second, I approached the analysis with the goal of focusing on the strengths of the writing rather than what could be interpreted as deficiencies, a decision prompted by what I consider to be a need to further the scholarship on the successes of basic writers’ work. Subsequently, it could be argued that the agenda behind my analysis led to a more optimistic, so to speak, reading of the students’ writing than would
occur otherwise for readers who lack such an agenda. With that said, the reader will notice in my analysis that I integrate qualifiers when making claims about how features of the writing could be interpreted, and that at times I identify multiple possible interpretations as well. I also acknowledge ruptures in the students’ writing and the potential those ruptures were not intentional.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, my expectations surrounding what a literacy narrative is could differentiate how I read the writing in comparison to how others operating from a different perspective would. Specifically, I think the literacy narrative can focus on a broad range of communication/information exchange practices rather than being limited to academic reading and writing alone, and I recognize its purpose as including not only a tracing of literacy acquisition to demonstrate some degree of intellectual, emotional, social, and/or other form of growth, but also to tell an engaging story. Further, I acknowledge that in the process of telling such a story, one that is reliant on memory to provide support for the author’s claims about his/her growth, it is likely that truth and fiction will merge. I expect then that a literacy narrative will include some embellishment, fabrication, etc. for this reason in addition to the fact that within the context of preparing the literacy narrative as a classroom assignment, it is likely that most students want to make a positive impression on their teacher who will read the essay as well as their peers who may do so for peer review and/or some other learning exercise.

Thus, as a result of the agenda and biases I brought to my reading of the students’ essays, my analysis of their writing may represent a (significantly) different interpretation than other audiences would reach. Although I attempted to read the narratives as I thought a typical reader would and to be comprehensive in my analysis of the texts with regard to the
rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence, it is probable that other interpretations could be reached and should be accounted for perhaps in a future study.
Every act of self-presentation involves the withholding of information that might undermine the idealized impression the performer wants to convey. (Newkirk, 1997, p. 3)

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As the analysis below will show, all of the students’ essays offered substantial opportunities for analysis applying Rabinowitz’s (1987) four rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence, and, as a result, I preferred to offer a more in-depth examination of each essay rather than to present only brief excerpts from the students’ writing to reflect patterns in how the rules were applied. The reader will see then that this chapter is arranged according to the analysis of each essay, rather than according to the four rules. Such arrangement also allowed me to account for the following two factors: 1) I wanted to incorporate significant excerpts of the students’ writing to create more of a balance between my interpretation and their actual words, and 2) as explained in the prior chapter, rules can sometimes be called on for the same textual features as well as work in conjunction with each other in order to inform reader response.

Regarding the first factor, I thought presenting summaries of the students’ writing punctuated with just occasional quotes would distract from the ultimate goal of highlighting the students’ ways of portraying their experiences and their identities in relation to those experiences. In doing so, I would be speaking for them, their writing largely detached from the interpretation of that writing.\(^8\) Regarding the second factor, attempting to structure the analysis according to how the rules were used across all of the students’ essays could ignore the complexity of how the rules sometimes function as well as become distractingly

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\(^8\) I acknowledge that because I am interpreting the students’ writing, a perfect balance between my words and theirs is impossible. Nonetheless, I think a closer equilibrium is created through the approach I used so that this chapter is more student-centered than otherwise would be the case.
repetitious. It would be difficult to establish a clear, logical progression in the analysis if there were frequent bouncing back-and-forth between calling attention to the same features, but under different rules.

The reader will notice that although I commonly started analysis with each essay’s title, first sentence, or introduction due to the privileged positions of these features under rules of notice and their role in establishing the audience’s first impressions, I otherwise did not follow a strict chronological order of the content. Instead, I structured the analysis according to what appeared to be the most important features of the texts for shaping audience response based on the approach I took to marking the essays that I described in the prior chapter. With that said, since for some of the essays ruptures seemed to occur in relation to how the students did or did not define literacy, I chose to explore the ways students were defining literacy (the first research question) within the analysis of how the writing demonstrated features of Rabinowitz’s (1987) rules (the second research question) rather than to separate that information. For those students who defined literacy in their essays, there was often a tendency to do so in the introduction, and as a result I usually address the first research question early in the analysis when discussing the rules of notice pertaining to the feature of beginnings.

I did not purposefully place the essays in any particular order, though I did make some connections across them in terms of similarities and contrasts as I transitioned from analysis of one to another. In addition, other than necessary changes to excerpted material to adhere to my sentence structures, I did not alter the students’ writing, maintaining any errors that were present in their drafts and signaling those errors when they occurred. I preferred not to correct the errors in large part to demonstrate the need when reading basic writers’ writing
to look beyond error to pay attention to the ideas that appear instead (or at least as well). The reader can consult the full drafts of the students’ literacy narratives exactly as they were written (including all errors) and formatted in Appendices J-Q.

Before presenting my analysis, I include two necessary sections below that offer context for the students’ writing and my interpretation of that writing. First, immediately below I have provided a description of the instructional approaches used during the assignment unit that possibly influenced how the students chose to define literacy, which of their personal literacies they chose to discuss, and how they chose to do so. Such description includes referencing materials the instructor and/or I created that were designed to help the students understand the concept of multiliteracies, for example, as well as how to integrate details into their writing to make it more appealing to the reader. In addition, I have included excerpts from my interview with Erin that offer insight into her attitude toward the students and the rationale behind her pedagogy. Second, I include brief biographical information about each student writer as well as his goals for Summer START and/or English 100, when possible. For at least some of the essays, the students’ demographic information, such as that pertaining to their families, appears and plays different roles in the stories that the students tell. In addition, it is possible that the students’ aspirations for the pilot and/or writing course reflect their attitudes toward learning and, therefore, are connected to the choices they made when writing their literacy narratives. Thus, I thought it was important to include this kind of information, which I gathered through questionnaires and/or interviews.

**Overview of Erin’s Literacy Narrative Unit, Pedagogy, and Perception of the Students**

During the first class meeting on July 1st, Erin distributed the course syllabus and calendar, both brief documents that outlined the basic information the students needed to
understand course policies and what to expect in the upcoming weeks of the summer session.
The syllabus itself referred to literacy under the course description section, explaining that
the class would include “[e]xploration of writing processes and academic literacy skills.” A
definition of literacy was then suggested, as “academic literacy skills” were clarified to
include “interpreting assignments; comprehending, analyzing, evaluating college-level texts;
inventing, drafting, and revising; seeking, providing, and responding to constructive
feedback; [and] collaborating effectively under varied learning models.” As this description
suggested then, literacy extended beyond “just” reading and writing within the context of the
class to include collaboration as well, and reading and writing were broken down into the
specific processes that each would entail, at least some of which were likely unfamiliar to the
students.

According to the calendar, the literacy narrative assignment unit was scheduled to last
not quite two weeks, with the students’ rough drafts due on July 9th and the final drafts due
on the 13th. This timeline included a class cancellation on July 5th since the July 4th holiday
fell on a Sunday. Although the unit extended until the 13th, it should be noted that it was not
until July 6th that the students were actually introduced to the literacy narrative assignment.
Originally Erin had scheduled the overview of the assignment on July 2nd, but she revised the
calendar so that on that date the students instead were instructed on the rhetorical situation
and process writing. The revised calendar for the first assignment unit was as follows:

July 1st: Introductions of the class (syllabus and calendar), teacher, and students

July 2nd: Discussion of the rhetorical situation and process writing

July 5th: No class
July 6th: Introduction of the literacy narrative assignment; Discussion of definitions of literacy; Orientation to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives

July 7th: Overview of how to analyze features of literacy narratives and practice doing so; Discussion of style and writing introductions

July 8th: Discussion of the textbook reading, Kennedy and Smith’s (2010) *Reading and Writing in the Academic Community* (4th ed.); Discussion of peer review and revision; Sign-up for peer review groups; In-class drafting workshop

July 9th: Peer review of the literacy narrative rough drafts

July 12th: In-class revision and editing workshop

July 13th: Final drafts of the literacy narrative due

As the calendar indicates, the course was not built around skills-and-drills exercises, but rather teaching the students core concepts that would be addressed in a typical first-year writing class. Although Erin did integrate grammar and mechanics exercises into the class meetings, including some that focused on writing complete sentences, understanding the parts of a sentence, etc., she did not place a substantial emphasis on them.

When delivering content, Erin often relied on PowerPoint presentations, which she first introduced in the second class meeting. Although the presentations outlined the basic principles connected to the topics that she was reviewing, Erin was careful to avoid just static delivery of content. Instead, she embedded exercises into the presentations as well, such as during her “The Rhetorical Situation” presentation when she had the students 1) look for a plot synopsis online of the films *Silence of the Lambs* and *Mary Poppins*, 2) determine which genre the films belonged to and why on the basic of the synopses, 3) watch recuts of the trailers to the films on YouTube, and 4) discuss with each other how the trailers affected their impressions of the films and what they would expect to see on the basis of those trailers.
Similarly, her “Process Writing” presentation that same day added an unexpected, hands-on element as she distributed small blocks of clay to each student and instructed the class to mold the clay into mugs. After the students did so, they then answered a series of questions pertaining to their creative process, and Erin used this activity as a way to mimic the writing processes of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Thus, Erin’s pedagogy was a combination of lecture and interactive exercises that both helped to maintain the students’ engagement during the lengthy class meetings of the 5-week session as well as to enable them to practice the skills they were learning about through their readings and lecture.

As part of her instruction on how to write a literacy narrative, Erin used the class exercises I designed as well as provided two sample literacy narratives that she reviewed with the students in class. The first sample paper, titled, “The Power of Writing,” traced the author’s experiences with writing from childhood through entering college, beginning with creating a Mother’s Day card in third grade, followed by keeping diaries in middle through high school, then writing poetry as a young adult, then writing letters after she married young and to keep in contact with friends who had moved away, and finally ending with writing a warm-up assignment in her college English class. The second sample essay, titled, “A Flash in the Pan of My Writing Life,” focused on the author’s use of writing as an outlet to express her emotions. The narrative begins with her describing an activity she and her family did together on Sunday afternoons that was called Family Dialogue. Each family member wrote a question and read it aloud to the others, which then prompted open discussion about each person’s feelings. The author then goes on to describe writing (often) angry letters to her parents, friends, and boyfriend, concluding that she is grateful for being able to use writing to express her thoughts.
Although the specific subject matter of the two sample literacy narratives was different then, both focused on literacy in terms of writing and doing so in a traditional sense. As a result, the essays themselves did not represent a broader understanding of literacy that the class exercises and exposure to the DALN targeted. Further, the “A Flash in the Pan of My Writing Life” essay included an excerpt in which the author noted how easy it had always been for her to express her positive feelings toward her family orally during Family Dialogue, but how writing had forced her to take her time to think through the negative feelings she had. The juxtaposition of the ease of speaking versus the challenge of writing is interesting to note considering the common perception of basic writers as being rooted in oral traditions and often conflating their speaking with their writing. I did not specifically ask Erin about her selection of sample essays during our interview, nor did she introduce that subject into any of our discussions. With that said, particularly since she had prior experience teaching basic writers, I question whether Erin deliberately selected the second sample in part because of its treatment of orality in comparison to writing and the fact that the attitude the essay’s author shared toward speaking and writing perhaps mirrored that of the students. Such a sample essay could help to discourage the feeling of alienation that Corkery (2005) described as occurring sometimes when students read literacy narratives whose authors they cannot identify with.

Indeed, during our first interview in August it became clear that Erin was attuned to the students and felt a strong sense of commitment to them. Early in our interview she noted the students, specifically the athletes, demonstrated “a general lack of self-esteem when it comes to academics” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010), and she expressed her willingness to reconsider her usual policies as needed to help the students as much as
possible. For example, she mentioned that although her “unofficial policy is your final paper is your final paper,” if a student was struggling and “[had] extraordinary circumstances” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010) she would work with him. At the same time, she also stated her confidence in the students’ abilities to succeed, indicating that although there was one student who was really struggling, she felt like “the majority of them . . . [were] going to pass” and that “they [could] pass English 101” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010). The fact that the students were strong enough to pass the class seemed to be a relief in that Erin mentioned she “[didn’t] think [she] would pass them on if [she] felt like they still need[ed] another go around with this kind of material,” so she was “really happy with that” (personal communication, August 5, 2010).

Although Erin felt the students could pass English 101 after exiting her course, she implied the challenges that were involved in adjusting her usual curriculum to teach the students in the summer session as well as addressed the challenges the students would encounter once they entered 101. As she explained, “The things that [she] had to change for [the] course[,] what [she] was expecting to come in to do and what [she] ended up having to do were like [there was] a chasm between the two” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010). Erin noted the students’ struggle with reading comprehension especially and identified as her “number one goal” helping them improve in this area, stating her belief that you “[c]an’t be successful in college if you can’t read and understand academic texts” (personal communication, August 5, 2010). In addition, she did mention the difficulties the students had with Standard English, stating that she “really had to scale back the kind of grammar and mechanics lessons that [she] was planning on doing” after she realized that her “plan . . . to
talk about commas and semi-colons and colons” needed to give way to “instead . . . talking about sentence fragments [and] run-ons” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010).

Responding to my question regarding what the students’ reaction was when she discussed what Writing 101 would be like, Erin commented that the students were “nervous,” thinking that Writing 100 “was as bad as it gets because of the 5-week program and having two classes at the same time” (personal communication, August 5, 2010). She indicated that she was “trying to get [the students] to see that . . . exposure to things many[,] many times is the only way to ensure success and it’s not about being stupid,” so although they would need to be able to “find their own sources and determine what [was] . . . relevant to the kind of paper that [they would be] writing and all those kinds of things” in Writing 101, they were capable of succeeding. Although Erin recognized the struggles the students had in her course and would experience once they transitioned into Writing 101 then, she maintained her confidence in their ability to do well and acknowledged her role in enabling them to excel.

On a final note, another subject we discussed during the interview was perceptions of the students, particularly the student athletes who, according to Erin and others affiliated with the program, were considered weaker academically compared to the Transition Program students. Erin mentioned that during a conference with one of the student athletes he commented on the belief that he would not be at RU if it were not for his athletic ability, and her response was that it was “going to be [his] responsibility to prove them [those who thought he shouldn’t be at the school because of his academic struggles] wrong” (personal communication, August 5, 2010). Later in the interview, though, she admitted that she herself had a misguided impression of the students, stating:

And so I think I was really into the notion that a lot of these kids thought that they
were going to the pros and that this was just a steppingstone to get there and that the academics was just something that they had to put up with. And I was so wrong. So, so, so wrong. (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010)

Acknowledging that she “definitely had those preconceived notions of what they [the student athletes] would be like” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010), her opinion of the TP students was significantly different. Describing those students as “solid,” Erin stated that “you don’t see nearly as many sentence structure issues or sentence fragments[, a] lot of those kinds of lessons” (personal communication, August 5, 2010). Although she thought the Transition Program students would “need a little bit more work” compared to students enrolled in a typical English 100 course, “had the athletes not been in the class [she] would not have had to have changed [her] lesson plans as drastically as [she] did” (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010). Thus, based on our interview it was clear Erin held certain beliefs about the students going into the course that likely affected how she read and responded to their literacy narratives, but at the same time her experiences teaching them led her to re-examine those beliefs as the summer session continued. Working with the students during the pilot perhaps also led her to respond to my question about the terminology used to refer to under-prepared students with the following, which speaks to one of concerns at the core of this research:

They hear this is the class for stupid people. So I think that there needs to be a way of referring to the class for students who need extra help. I don’t know that there’s a good way to do that that doesn’t give the impression these are basic and these are advanced . . . Yeah I don’t like using it [the label “basic writers”] because I don’t want to give that impression. (Erin, personal communication, August 5, 2010)
Student Introductions

R. was a 19 year old Black/African-American male from North Carolina. He indicated in his questionnaire that his mother had completed two-year college and his father had completed high school. When asked why he thought he was enrolled in the Summer START program, he responded that he thought his participation was required as well as that the program would help him: “I believe that I was selected to participate . . . because (sic) for one I am a football player and it is pretty much mandatory for incoming freshman (sic), but also it gives me the chance to get ahead and also to get help with classes that I mind (sic) difficult. His stated goal for English 100 was “to learn how to improve my writing to the best of my ability. Also, inhaence (sic) my reading.”

B., claiming Ohio as his home state, was also a 19 year old Black/African-American male. Although he stated his mother had completed four-year college, he chose not to respond to the question regarding his father’s education. When asked why he thought he was selected for the Summer START program, B. responded, “To get a good start on my G.P.A. and credits.” He hoped to learn from English 100 “a better understanding of english (sic) and . . . more skills to help [him] excell (sic) in the class and other classes [he would] be in during [his] college years.” No additional information about his background and plans for the pilot program and/or writing class was offered.

Identifying South Carolina as his home state, T. was an 18 year old Black/African-American male. He indicated in his questionnaire that he thought he was enrolled in Summer START to help him “develop a basic (sic) on early college life,” and when I asked him for clarification of his response in our interview, he indicated the program could help him “get his feet under [him],” understand “what he had to do in the classroom,” and understand
“being a student athlete.” T. noted that the program would help prevent him from “falling by the wayside” when he started school.

C. was also an 18 year old Black/African American male who, like R., was from North Carolina. He indicated in his questionnaire that his mother had completed four-year college and his father had completed graduate school, one of only two of the student participants who had a parent who had earned an advanced degree. When asked why he thought he was enrolled in Summer START, his response was, “Because I think im (sic) a [indecipherable handwritten text that may be “group”] kinda (sic) guy.” No elaboration was offered to clarify what he meant. His goal for English 100 was “to improve [his] english (sic) and [his] grammer (sic).” C. was the student described earlier who opted into the English 100 course because he wanted to complete a writing class during the summer.

M., like T. and C., was an 18 year old Black/African-American male. In contrast to most of the other students who were from southern states, he indicated he was from New York. Although M. stated that his mother had completed graduate school, he preferred not to disclose his father’s highest education. His response regarding why he thought he was enrolled in Summer START was “to get a head start,” though he did not specify what that meant. His goal for English 100 was “to improve [his] writing,” and again, no further specificity was offered.

One of the oldest of the student participants, L. was a 19 year old Black/African-American male from Illinois. His mother had completed high school, but he chose not to disclose his father’s educational background. His opinion of why he was enrolled in Summer START was “[t]o get an earlier start,” and when asked what he hoped to learn in English 100 he responded, “Whatever Mrs. [Erin] has to teach us.” In contrast to the other students who
answered from the perspective of what they wanted/intended to learn, L. was the only student to emphasize in the questionnaire that his learning would be based on Erin’s decisions about what to teach.

G. was an 18 year old White/Non-Hispanic male from North Carolina, like R. and C., whose parents had both completed two-year college. His opinion of why he was enrolled in the Summer START program was that he “was put in by coach [name omitted to protect anonymity],” suggesting his belief that participation was mandatory, echoing R.’s belief, while offering no insight into his own impression of his academic reading and writing skills. His goals for English 100 were to learn both “[t]o be a better writer, and . . . to be a college student,” making him the only student to acknowledge that the course could help him in a broader sense to succeed at college beyond just improving his reading and writing skills.

S. was the other 19 year old student participant, and in his questionnaire he indicated he was of Hispanic/Latino descent. Identifying as his home state California, S.’s parents both had completed high school. When asked why he thought he was selected for the Summer START program, his response indicated uncertainty as well as his opinion that others thought he needed further preparation in order to be successful: “I really can’t say. I guess they believed i (sic) was one of that (sic) seemed may need some help to get ready to for (sic) the college life.” S. did not elaborate on this response, so it is unclear whether he thought the program teachers, administrators, both groups, and/or others had this perception of him. One of his stated goals for English 100 was “to put [his] AP English experience to the test,” suggesting he was anticipating and perhaps looking forward to the challenge of the writing course. S. was the sole Transition Program student represented in my sample.
Finally, D. was an 18 year old Black/African-American male from Georgia whose mother had completed high school and whose father had completed two-year college. He thought the purpose of his enrollment in Summer START was “to take advantage of the opportunity to get a head start,” but he did not elaborate on what that meant. Unlike the other students who identified at least one goal for English 100 in their questionnaires, D. responded he had “no clue” what he hoped to learn from the course.

Analysis of R.’s Narrative

Although the title of a text commonly acts as the first feature of rules of notice, no title appears in R.’s essay (Appendix I), necessitating that the audience continue reading for some clue regarding what will be the focus of the writing. The first sentence thus acts as the first feature of rules of notice, and although it clarifies that the essay will address literacy, it otherwise offers no insight into what specifically will be the subject of the upcoming content. The second sentence adds clarification, articulating R.’s perception that he is “football literate,” but it also presents a possible rupture. R. defines literacy as “the ability of reading and writing” in the first sentence, and then claims in the second sentence that he is “football literate because [he is] able to comprehend its well developed language.” A reader likely will not associate football with reading and writing, at least on initial reading, instead questioning how the two processes factor into playing the sport.

It is not until the second body paragraph (appearing on the second page of the essay) that R. explicitly makes the connection, explaining his ability to read a playbook, but arguably this rupture hints toward the general omission of discussing football in terms of reading and writing that is characteristic of R.’s essay. His writing instead appears more centered on establishing his characteristics that led to his success as well as describing his
background (including challenges he faced) and accomplishments. Noticing the rupture can help to prepare the audience then for what will be the main points of the writing, though it also puts readers in the position of seeking coherence across the text in order to make it “the best text possible” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 45).

The reader may primarily draw on rules of notice and rules of signification to understand how R. is communicating about what he sees as his defining qualities. Specifically, regarding rules of notice, one of the fundamental ways in which R. calls the audience’s attention is through references to his physique, explaining “you have to be a massive individual” in order to play his position of offensive lineman, for example, as well as that he is 6’8 and weighs 315 pounds. These details help the audience to imagine his physical strength as well as to offer a transition into his background that he dedicates so much attention to describing. R. ends his introduction by explaining that he “always felt assured . . . [he] would have a future in football or basketball because [he has] been bigger all [his] life and [he has] always worked just as hard if not harder than everyone else.” Through describing his body, R. clearly indicates he possesses the necessary physical build to play his sport as well as that he recognizes the value of that body to his future (since he “felt assured” of his place in the sport). He is also careful, though, not to attribute his sense of security for the future solely to his physicality; rather, it is his body in conjunction with his work ethic that prompted his confidence in future success.

Indeed, R. draws on repetition, a basic indicator of rules of notice, throughout the essay both to emphasize his size and his work ethic, suggesting these two characteristics are central to his identity and inextricably linked. Regarding his size, in addition to the aforementioned descriptions of himself, he also explains he started playing football because
he “was so big” he “couldn’t play many other sports because of [his] size.” For example, he “was too big to play soccer,” and although hockey was not offered in his hometown, prohibiting him from playing it, he thinks he “was probably to (sic) big for [it] anyway.” His teammates referred to him with “big” before his name, and when he was in the eighth grade he “was two times bigger than everyone.”

It is only descriptions of his work ethic that parallel the quantity of references to his size, prompting drawing on rules of signification as R.’s strong build becomes reflective of his strong work ethic. For example, in addition to the way he ends his introduction as explained earlier, R. refers to his “hard work” three more times in the essay, including in the final sentence of the conclusion: “After playing football since I was nine years old all of my hard work had finally paid off on the field.” He also describes his “work ethic in the classroom” as pairing with his “footing skills and body size” to enable him to “get a college education and also to play football at the collegiate level.” “[Working] hard in the classroom” was integral to his ability to play football in high school, which then enabled him to be recruited to play football at RU. Thus, throughout the essay R. continues to refer to both his size and hard work as foundational to his success, signifying to the reader to pay attention to these qualities as well as intertwining them together so that one seems symbolic of the other.

In addition to these characteristics, though, R. also calls on his audience to note the role his home life played in his later success in sports. Specifically, he tells the audience about his legal guardians, whom he moved in with at the age of fourteen “to escape the surrounding environment in which [he] lived with [his] mom.” R. provides no other details regarding what the “surrounding environment” was that prompted his move, leaving the audience with a gap to fill through rules of coherence as discussed further below. His use of
the word “escape,” though, both calls the audience’s attention and suggests the importance of this event to his story. Also, R. later mentions “[remembering] driving through the fog that was on the street” when he was a child on his way to football practice, with “fog” perhaps acting symbolically to represent the negative environmental influences that could obscure his future had he remained in the neighborhood.

The only other time R. mentions his mother is in a seemingly nostalgic way that contrasts with the image of escaping, describing how his “mom would wake [him] up with a warm breakfast every Saturday morning and turn the television on as [he] sat at the living room coffee table eating [his] eggs and bacon as [he] watched cartoons.” Such a heartfelt description of his mother and life inside of the home he shared with her clearly contrasts with the image of a “surrounding environment” from which he needed to “escape,” suggesting R. may be attempting to clarify that it was the forces outside of the home that necessitated his moving in with legal guardians rather than those within it. This interpretation, along with the lack of details regarding the neighborhood as well as the timeline between the memory of Saturday mornings when he was “growing up as a child” and his age when he changed homes, prompts the use of license to fill the gap in information about why exactly he moved. It seems reasonable the audience may draw on scenarios in other stories of escaping a childhood home/neighborhood—scenarios often linked to crime, violence, etc.—as well as its understanding of cause and effect (something bad occurred to prompt his relocation) as part of that license to fill.

R.’s claim that “moving in with the . . . family would give [him] the opportunity to make something out of [himself] and become successful in life”—opportunity presumably otherwise impossible if he had stayed with his mother in their neighborhood—further links
the story to others similarly focused on finding success after relocating to a new neighborhood/home situation. The appearance of the word “opportunity” twice more in the essay helps to build this connection, with R. describing the “opportunity to get a college education and also to play football at the collegiate level” as well as how football “[gave him] that opportunity to keep [his] grades up at a reasonable level.” If he had not moved in with his legal guardians and played football while growing up under their care, it is likely these other opportunities he mentions would not be possible. Thus, R.’s story mirrors that of characters in well-known fiction in terms of saying goodbye to their pasts/origins in order to pursue significant life experiences that lead to happiness, fame, etc.

R.’s past may account for why so little of the essay discusses family and other people who influenced him, instead focusing more so on his own characteristics and accomplishments. He explains how long he knew his legal guardians before moving in with them; attributes his learning about “integrity, determination, and pride” to his male legal guardian who “gave [him] the key concepts that every athlete needs in order to become successful in today’s sports worlds and sports industry”; and indicates the importance his guardians placed on grades since “every body’s (sic) parents are not fortunate to have enough money to pay for four years of college.” He otherwise does not discuss his legal guardians, though, and only makes fleeting references to a coach and teammates. His story thus is truly focused on him, with minimal “distractions” to that focus as he rarely characterizes others and explains the roles they had in his life.

Although R. acknowledges his male legal guardian instilling in him the aforementioned qualities that are integral to his success, he largely takes personal ownership of his accomplishments. Aside from his treatment of his size and work ethic as described
earlier that can call the audience’s attention, he also refers to the decisions he made that have had significant effects on who he has become. R. claims “joining in with [his legal guardians] was the best decision [he has] ever made in his life,” and that deciding to play football when he was younger “was one of the best decisions [he] ever made besides deciding to turn [his] life around while leaving (sic) with [his legal guardians].” In both of these examples R. frames the decisions as his own, repeating the phrasing that they were the “best decision[s]” he made. Presumably, though, the choice for him to relocate to his legal guardians’ home (and to have legal guardians at all) was not solely his, nor is it likely the choice to stop playing basketball and instead play football was his alone as well. Further, R. distinguishes himself from some of his peers growing up in his decision to play football, writing, “Football was something that all the parents made their family do in [city omitted to maintain anonymity]. . . I on the other hand, there was no question that I was going to play.” He suggests here that whereas some of his teammates played because of being forced into it, he chose to play, pursuing the sport on his own accord. Thus, R. claims agency for these decisions that significantly impacted his life and future success, suggesting he wants the reader to recognize his independence and authority.

Such authority is further signaled when he demonstrates his knowledge of “football word[s],” which he discusses in two body paragraphs (specifically the second and third body paragraphs) that are the only sections of the essay to directly address how he is “football literate.” R. responds to critique (possibly that he expects from the reader) that football and literacy are not linked, writing, “One may think that football does not take much literacy to perform, but in reality, being literate is one of the keys (sic) things in order to play football.” The use of “in reality” calls the audience’s attention to this sentence, in part because it
indicates the reader who thinks football and literacy are not linked is wrong (the opinion they are separate being outside of “reality”), and also in part because of, ironically, the persistent uncertainty when reading autobiographical writing regarding whether the author’s claims are true or fabricated/embellished.

R. then poses a question to the reader to reinforce the importance of this idea that football and literacy work in tandem, writing, “Without knowing how to apprehend the plays and learn the terminology of football how can one play the game of football?” This is a legitimate question to ask, and one that the skeptical reader would need to answer if he/she is to argue football and literacy are not connected. Further, in case after considering R.’s question the reader still rejects the idea that literacy pertains to football, he offers examples of the role language awareness has in the ability to play football, defining terms such as “kick step” and later “ladder.” Defining these terms enables R. not only to establish that football has a language of its own that players must be “literate” in, but also to demonstrate his knowledge of that language that many readers likely do not possess. He has the authority then to write on the subject of football literacy because he is a member of the discourse community that uses the specialized language, as demonstrated through his command of the terminology. Further, he is an authority on the subject of football literacy because he is able to teach the audience some of the phrases key to playing the sport, enabling readers to start to become literate in football as well through their burgeoning acquisition of the language.

As noted earlier, though, the challenge the audience may encounter while reading R.’s essay is that it does not read like a typical literacy narrative. Rather than tracing his acquisition of football literacy—his increasing knowledge of the language of football and ability to read a playbook—throughout the text, R. instead dedicates the majority of his essay
to other topics. For example, we learn of his ranking compared to other linemen in the nation, as well as how many schools made offers to try to recruit him for their teams. If the reader reacts to this seeming failure to fulfill genre expectations as exemplary of the struggles basic writers experience with academic writing, then he/she will likely not follow rules of coherence to try to read the text as a unified whole, linking the explicit discussion of literacy to the other material. If he/she applies the rules of coherence, though, then it is possible to read R.’s essay as a demonstration of the literacy as pathway to success dominant cultural narrative (Alexander, 2011).

The audience can interpret R.’s essay as such a narrative due largely to its reliance on the theme of hard work—and literacy that accompanies that hard work—leading to success, a narrative that is punctuated with descriptions of his characteristics (size and work ethic), background, knowledge of football language/practices, etc. to communicate the theme. Rather than dedicating his essay to one single experience in his life or a series of experiences that led to his ability to understand “football [words]” then, he instead communicates his knowledge of the language early in the writing and takes the majority of the remainder of the content to address his accomplishments that are possible in part because of his knowledge of that language and ability to apply it. Literacy does lead to success then, an idea R. expressly states: “In order to make something out myself (sic) I had to realize how valuable literacy was and playing football was the key for me finding the reason it was so important.”

Analysis of B.’s Narrative

The first sentence of B.’s essay (Appendix J) brings together both rules of notice (because it is the first sentence) and rules of signification (because it suggests the course of the story that will be told), reading: “When I was younger I never would have thought I’d be
the person I am today.” Based on this sentence, the reader can anticipate the essay will be one focused on growth, elaborating not only on who B. has become (his transition “from the shy child in the neighborhood who had few friends to a well known name in the entire city”), but also what experiences he has had to lead him to become the person he is now. The essay does follow through on exploring who B. is as an athlete—his accomplishments and the challenges he has faced along the way—but in the process of doing so it omits explicitly tracing his literacy acquisition. Indeed, the word “literacy” does not appear at all in the writing, creating a likely rupture due to the mismatch between the audience anticipating literacy will be explicitly addressed and the content that appears instead. The title of the essay, “Sports Have Changed My Life,” perhaps foreshadows this rupture as it articulates no clear connection to literacy.

As B. recounts his experiences participating in sports, it becomes apparent he prioritizes others’ opinions of him and uses those opinions as an indicator of his success. He frequently repeats the words “everybody” and “everyone” when describing how others reacted to his athletic abilities, such as when he writes that at the first day of football camp his freshman year, “everybody was wondering who the fast freshman that was on the team was.” Here he establishes he had built a reputation for his athletic prowess that preceded him, with “everybody” curious to find out who the reputation belonged to. B. later repeats that “[e]verybody [was] always wondering who [he] was” throughout his freshman year as well as tells the reader “[e]veryone knew who [he] was and wanted to see [him] play and wanted to play against [him] to see if they could compete against [him].” Such widespread recognition he describes was not only in football, though. After the state finals track meet, he
claims that “[e]verybody who was cheering for the school came up to [him] and congratulated [him],” and “[e]veryone [was] so proud of [him] and for the team.”

Although the multiple references to “everybody” and “everyone” thinking he was an incredible athlete suggest B. is using the repetition to persuade the reader he is skilled, surprisingly he dedicates little attention to explaining what exactly makes him talented. The only apparent explanation he offers is his “unbelievable jumping abilities” (the word “unbelievable” acting as a basic indicator of rules of notice to call the reader’s attention) and speed, the latter being the attribute he largely focuses on and repeats. B. mentions teachers encouraging him to play basketball because of his “speed and jumping skills,” and how in his 8th grade year he “excelled only because [he] was faster than the other kids.” As noted earlier, at football camp his freshman year he stated “everybody was wondering who the fast freshman” was, and “everybody” was “always wondering who [he] was” due to “how fast [he] was.” His success as an athlete seems to primarily be based on his speed then, which makes up for his small size that he similarly repeats throughout to call the reader’s attention to this potential obstacle to his success.

According to B., he was “really good” at wrestling, track, and football, and he “did fairly well to be [his] size” in football in 8th grade. Then, as a freshman football player, no one expected him to be so fast since he “was about 115 lbs with the smallest legs you can ever imagine a guy having.” Indeed, after the players had to introduce themselves, “everyone’s (sic) . . . assumed [he] was the worst player on the team regardless if [he] was fast or not” due to his size. Although his coaches looked beyond his size to recognize his talent, asking him to consider joining varsity football in his freshman year, B. states he “couldn’t imagine playing at that level, well at least not yet considering [his] size.” Thus, this
repeated attention to size seems to set up B. as an underdog of sorts (after all, he claims that he “was driven off of being underestimated”), but such a status seems contradictory to the confidence in his abilities he otherwise expresses throughout the essay, confidence he is careful to situate within the praise that “everybody” or “everyone” bestowed on him. Drawing on rules of coherence, though, it is possible to read this content as following the common narratological strategy of establishing problems that could hold back the “hero” of the story, but that are ultimately surpassed to accomplish success. The essay would not be as engrossing, nor would readers presumably be able to relate as closely to B., if it were just a running list of his successes, so introducing challenges he has faced enables him to maintain the audience’s attention and interest in his story.

In addition to his size, other potential obstacles to his success that he describes include the “horrible teachers and hardly any books for the classes.” These characteristics of the schools he attended are what prompted his family’s relocating “from one county to another for a better education system,” and B. notes as well that the neighborhood he grew up in “wasn’t good either” because there were “a lot [of] fights and robberies.” Like R.’s essay thus, B. presents his story as one of rising from less than desirable beginnings to succeed, though it is more specific in outlining what about his past was problematic. Also like R.’s essay, B.’s writing describes his mother, though instead of a fond memory about breakfast and Saturday cartoons, it is a memory of his mother seeming not to support his participation in basketball when he was younger.

He explains that when he was “7 or 8 years old [he] went out and tried to play for a summer team, but . . . it only lasted 2 days because [he] wasn’t able to get rides to the gym and actually try out for the team.” He directly links his inability to try out to his mother,
claiming she “sometimes didn’t want to take [him] or just was out doing things with the church.” Although B. attributes his inability to try out for basketball to his mother, he does not elaborate on her unwillingness to take him to the gym or her prioritizing of attending church-related functions. This lack of further discussion of his mother’s role in keeping him from tryouts, coupled with his inclusion of “just” before explaining she was sometimes preoccupied with other engagements, suggest a possible attempt to minimize criticism of her.

It is also possible to read this limited treatment of his mother, though, as a reflection of B.’s general lack of discussion of his family. He does not mention his mother again except once toward the middle of the essay when he writes that he “had 21 scholarships [to play football] and they were from everywhere,” and he had “never seen [his] mom so happy and proud of what [he] did.” In addition, other than his brothers, who he briefly describes playing basketball with, no other family member appears in the essay. Perhaps the omission of his father is the most noticeable gap in B.’s discussion of his family because he describes his position coach as “another father to [him] more than a coach.” The reference to “another father” can heighten the reader’s awareness that his “primary”/biological father is not discussed at all, and B.’s elaboration on his coach being a second father because he helped him with football and other issues in his life, such as “[deciding] what college to go to [and] how to be more relaxed,” further calls attention to the gap. Thus, the lack of detail regarding his family members’ and their roles in helping him become successful can prompt the reader to draw on license to fill, possibly relating B.’s story to other similar texts in which family members are absent or are otherwise barriers to the narrator’s pursuit of goals.

Although B.’s essay is mostly centered around describing his talent and success, particularly in the face of challenges he encountered, it does not, in general, highlight his
efforts toward becoming successful. Instead, his accomplishments are described in such a way that they seem to have happened to him rather than because of him. For example, the second, and last, sentence of his introduction reads:

As my life progressed, there were things that fell out and was (sic) replaced by new things that came and lead me to where I am today and brought me to be who I am, and it’s all because of letting sports come in my life and take put (sic) me a path that brought me success, friends, motivation, ambition to always believe in myself and much more.

In this example, B.’s attribution of agency to the “new things that came” into his life, claiming they “lead,” “brought,” and “put” him on the path to success, position him more so as a recipient than facilitator of that success. Although “letting sports come in [his] life” does mean he made the decision to participate in sports, a decision essential to him becoming an accomplished athlete, he nonetheless assigns more action words to the “things” than himself, syntax that calls the reader’s attention. Perhaps his empowering of “things” functions to balance with the confidence in himself he demonstrates throughout the majority of the writing, making him appear more grounded and aware that his success is also attributable to factors outside of himself.

Trying to decipher who B. is, or is trying to represent himself as, becomes increasingly complex as the essay continues, though. Through his frequent statements about his success and others’ recognition of that success, it seems he is trying to persuade the reader to see him as a model athlete, one who has prospered despite obstacles and underestimation along the way. But as the audience continues reading, the essay starts to include examples of B. not being a dedicated athlete, content that can undermine the
perception of himself he has otherwise promoted. For example, B. writes, “Finally came track season, I haven’t ran since my 8th grade year, let alone being serious about going to practice and doing what the track coach tells me to do.” He continues on to state that his middle school coach “didn’t care what we did we just came to practice and just hung out, if you were good you didn’t have to do anything you didn’t want to do.” Here B. appears to acknowledge himself as a skilled athlete (the reader can easily make the connection that he is indicating he was “good” and thus ignored what the coach asked him to do), but also one who does not work toward strengthening his ability as we generally expect top performing, role model athletes to do. The seeming lack of dedication could be attributed to age since B. is writing about experiences in middle school, or it may be read more critically when coupled with a later description he offers of his participation in the state track preliminaries in high school.

When recounting his experience at the preliminaries, B. changes his writing style, specifically using present tense whereas before he primarily used past tense (the exception being one sentence that appeared earlier in his discussion of football: “Then, its (sic) freshman year, it’s the first day of camp for football . . .”). The change in style can call the reader’s notice as he writes, “It’s my first year running high school track and I’m in the state meet,” and then switches back to past tense to tell how his “heart was pounding every second waiting to run and the anxiety was too high to stay calm.” The present tense places the reader in the moment, and although B. switches back to the past tense, the words “pounding” and “anxiety” may continue to maintain the audience’s attention, signaling the importance of the experience he is sharing.
B. explains that once the official shot the gun to start the race, “the nervousness turned into energy cheering for [his] other relay members as they tried their hardest to put [him], the anchor of the relay, in a good lead.” Although B. refers to being “so amazed at how hard they ran for [him] and for [their] school” as well as turning a “decent lead” into a bigger lead after he was handed the baton, he then writes that “towards the end, since it was only the preliminaries and not the finals [he] slowed down and [they] took second.” Rather than depicting himself as an athlete to admire then because he continued the momentum his teammates established to win the race, he instead represents himself as someone who disappointed his teammates (and presumably others) because he chose not to push himself as his teammates had. This information can cause readers uncertainty regarding how to reconcile the image of a confident, successful athlete B. has dedicated so much effort to portraying with the image of an athlete who essentially quits at the end of the race because he decided it was not important enough.

Applying the rules of coherence, though, the reader could interpret the juxtaposition as B. using the state track preliminaries experience to set up a turning point for himself as an athlete and person. He writes, “After the meet everyone talked to me about how I shouldn’t just take it easy because I can[,] not only track[,] but in life always shoot for the best and not settle for less, (sic) it’s something that has stuck on me ever since.” This sentiment connects the experience of “quitting” in the race to the title of the essay (“Sports Have Changed My Life”) since it is a moment of awakening for him, and it also enables B. to establish the groundwork for retelling how he emerged a hero at the state track finals after learning from his mistake.
At the state finals he was tapped to run in place of another athlete who was injured, and although he doubted himself (“I felt bad running the whole race, I wanted to stop, I knew I couldn’t catch up to the other teams[.] I wasn’t ready for it.”), he persisted. As he explains, [He] didn’t continue for [himself. He] did it for the seniors it (sic) was their last shot to win a title. So [he picked] up [his] pace and [began] to push harder until [he] didn’t have anything left, [he] (sic) was coming down the last 100 meters exhausted, horrible face, using every muscle [he] had to move faster until [he] gave the baton off to the next teammate.

The language here can call the reader’s attention because of the sensory details regarding B.’s appearance as he pushed himself to continue the race, and it also contrasts with the language he used earlier to straightforwardly describe his participation in the preliminaries. Rather than just tell the audience he was fully committed to running the race then, he uses “exhausted,” “horrible face,” and “every muscle” to show the reader he was. The reader is thus offered proof of B.’s change in character as he writes a gritty description of himself and then goes a step further to show his self-doubt, claiming he “felt so slow” and that he “ran the worst time.” No longer the self-assured athlete who put himself before his teammates, B. presents himself here as more down-to-earth and relatable, aware of his role as a member of a team and anxious about whether his running made him a disappointment to that team. He becomes a character the reader likely wants to see win, which the audience does when it is told the team “won [its] 1st state title.”

B.’s emphasis on team soon seems to fade, though, as he claims credit for the win. He mentions that his coach told him the title “was because of [him] because if [he] didn’t run they didn’t have anyone else to run the race.” He then continues on to explain it was an
important day for his school and he “was a part of it and was the cause of it.” Although he
initially refers to being just a “part” of the win, he then changes course to identify himself as
“the cause,” neglecting the role his teammates played in obtaining the state title. Of course,
B. alone did not accomplish the win, but his emphasis on being the “cause” helps maintain
coherence with the rest of the essay in which he has frequently referred to his personal
success. The pattern of highlighting B.’s status as a skilled, well-known athlete that started
with the first sentence is thus carried through until the end, culminating in the last sentence
that reads, “I met a lot of people, travelled out of state to a few places for once, and witnessed
lifelong dreams that everyone will remember because of my year of success.”

As noted earlier then, B.’s essay seems to largely function as a way to impress the
reader with his athletic abilities and success rather than to trace his literacy acquisition.
Although the audience gains insight into the experiences he considers important to shaping
him into the person he is now, it remains unclear how B. defines literacy or whether any of
the content he has written is intended to be read as demonstrating his literacy. It may be that
the omission of direct references to literacy signals B.’s misunderstanding of the assignment,
but perhaps it is instead attributable to his connecting literacy and success in such a way that
he thought demonstrating how he has been successful in sports was demonstrating his
literacy. Further, although B. does not demonstrate how he has changed in relation to his
literacy acquisition, an expected component of a literacy narrative, he does address moments
that mark milestones in his life. Thus, the audience can come away from reading the essay
with a better understanding of how B. sees himself and interprets his accomplishments.

Within the context of the literacy narrative being the first assignment of the Summer
START session, it is also perhaps unsurprising that he would focus on his talents and how
well-recognized they are in order to model for his intended audience (the instructor, though arguably an additional audience could be his classmates since peer review was part of the assignment unit) how he wants to be seen (and has been seen by peers/authority figures in the past). Arguably more surprising is that B. chose to discuss his experiences with track to a greater extent than football since he was recruited to RU for the latter. Incorporating both track and football into his essay enables him to uphold the title of the piece (plural “Sports”) and further impress the reader with how well rounded he is as an athlete, but the decision to emphasize track may also be because that sport presented him with the most significant challenges and/or led to the most important changes in himself as an athlete and person. When discussing football, B. does not indicate he underwent any major self-reflection or character shifts. The most important takeaway for him seems to be after he injured his meniscus at football camp his sophomore year, which enabled him to learn “who really cared for [him] and was looking for [his] best interest.” In contrast, his experiences with track appear more closely connected to a stronger understanding of himself and his relationship to others, and it is his retelling of those experiences that most fully support the title and opening sentence of his essay.

Analysis of T.’s Narrative

The title of T.’s essay (Appendix K), “Literacy and its (sic) Understanding,” calls the reader’s attention not only due to its position, but also its appearance; it is bolded and enlarged, as well as written in a different font compared to the rest of the text. Due to its clear reference to literacy, the title signals to the reader that the essay will focus on the intended subject of the assignment, though the awkwardness of the phrasing prompts the reader to question whose understanding T. is referring to. It is not until the conclusion that the answer
seems clear when he writes, “Out of all the things I shared with you hopefully you have a grip on the understanding and nature of literacy and the ways it’s locked around the world we live in and the English we used (sic).” As he directly addresses the reader, calling his/her attention, it appears that the title is suggesting T. will share his understanding of what literacy is throughout the essay in order to elucidate the audience’s understanding. At no point in the writing does he actually explain what he thinks literacy is, though. Instead, he focuses his essay on his perceptions of the importance of literacy and its uses, as well as his experiences with note taking, a form of literacy he describes personally acquiring.

Among the uses/applications of literacy he claims are that “it shapes and makes the English language, speeches, and laws of the land”; “different jobs require literacy to help people understand and learn”; “just by talking we use literacy in some type of way”; when the President of the United States “gives speeches everyday he has to use literacy in his writing”; and “you had to use literacy to understand” football. These descriptions of literacy’s uses highlight the importance T. attaches to it, but do not explicitly indicate what he considers literacy to be. It is clear he links literacy to language, communication (oral and written), comprehension, and learning, but what exactly is it in his opinion?

Because T. does not offer a firmly stated definition of literacy, the reader is unable to determine with certainty whether he has a clear understanding (ironically, in light of the essay’s title) of what he means by “literacy” and simply does not share it, is uncertain how to describe it but knows actions that are examples of it, or has some other reason for refraining from defining the term. As a result of this ambiguity, the reader is left with a gap in the writing he/she must attempt to fill in order to create coherence between the title and body content. If we read the gap in T.’s essay as intentional, rather than an error, then it is possible
to interpret it in a number of ways, such as: 1) he intends to allow the reader to use his/her own approach to defining literacy based on the information he has provided; 2) he recognizes the complexity of defining literacy and the consequences that can result from the multiple ways in which it is defined; and/or 3) he privileges understanding of the ways literacy can be used and the effects of those uses to a specific definition of what it is.

T.’s acknowledgement of the danger of being non-literate/illiterate suggests a well-informed understanding of literacy regardless of the omission of his own definition for what literacy is. He writes that if the POTUS does not use literacy, “people may take what he said and make it a tool against him in the future.” Going beyond the typical connection of literacy to opportunity and success thus (which T. does make later in the essay), he acknowledges that literacy can be used as a means of threatening others who are considered to be lacking it. T. does not elaborate on this ability of literacy to be used as a way to hurt others, but especially in light of his own position as a basic writer, such understanding may pose personal significance, particularly if he has experienced the use of his writing (and errors in it) against him. T. may not explicitly define what literacy is then, but he is able to establish authority to discuss the subject through his informed linking of literacy to power.

In addition, T. recognizes the ability of literacy to transform people and their relationships/interactions with others. He explains that after his seventh grade history teacher, [name omitted], “showed [him] the methods, tips and tools required to mastering the ability” to take notes and strengthen his “reading and the understanding of the structure within [his] writing,” he became more committed to his education. He “started to become the same student that [his] friends and [he] used to give hard times (sic) because they did what was right and they turn (sic) in work when it was due.” T. realized that the change in his attitude
toward learning had changed him, so he “made a choice to change the people [he] was friends with.” This description of losing friends demonstrates Corkery’s (2005) claim that literacy narratives often feature the characters “[sacrificing] family and community relationships to succeed in school” (p. 62), and T.’s diction that he “made a choice” rather than just that he changed his social circle can call the audience’s attention to the importance of this experience in his life. For the first time—since he writes that he “began to notice things about [himself] and the way [he] started to view [his] classes, [himself], and [his] over all (sic) work in life”—he was taking command of his learning as well as relationships that could impact that learning and, likely, his future success.

As he grew older and continued his studies, “[channeling his] literacy into note taking and the things [he] loved to do,” he was “[transformed] . . . as a person and as a student athlete.” The use of “transform” may call the reader’s attention, but it is later in the paragraph when T. ascribes a religious connotation to the transformation, explaining that by his “sophomore year . . . [he] had become this total (sic) different person that had a new soul,” that the reader can start to see the significance of the changes he was undergoing. For T., literacy is life changing, so much so it can seemingly affect you to the core of your being. The reference to “soul” is the second in the essay connected to religion, the first appearing in the introduction when T. identifies “churches” as being one of the places in which literacy is found. The third and final religious reference is when T. describes the “great new (sic) [he] was blessed with” in high school when he was offered a scholarship to play football. Thus, through these references he has integrated at different points in the essay, T. is able to situate literacy within the spiritual sphere, rather than just education/schools and athletics (the main focuses of his writing), as well as to suggest that faith is a part of his life.
Although he does not refer to it as the starting point of his transformation, it seems T.’s joining a little league football team was the first step in the process. He explains that the idea to play football started with his “best friend’s dad who was also a coach,” claiming he “gave [him] this crazy idea.” The use of “crazy” can call the reader’s attention, though T. does not explain why the idea seemed irrational unless we interpret his decision to “[blow] the idea off, (sic) because [he] had no real sense of direction or mean (sic)” as the justification. Despite the initial rebuff, the coach persisted in his efforts to recruit T. to play, and “[t]hen one day [his] mother comes home and tells [him] that she signs [him] to play little league football.” The change in writing style, specifically the transition to present tense “comes” and “tells,” again could call the reader’s attention, suggesting the importance of this part of the story and the need for the reader to take notice of its significance.

Indeed, in the next sentence T. writes, “All at once my life began to change.” This “change” appears to be due to participating in the sport, but later it becomes linked to literacy: “As I got older football became more than just a game that we play, you had to use literacy to understand it . . .” His note taking, the form of literacy he focuses on in his essay, enabled him “to take [his] level of skill to a place that at times [he] could not believe it [himself] sometimes it was even scary for [him] because [he] began taking the game as a job and so did the coaches.” Similar to the earlier use of “crazy,” the inclusion of “scary” and simile “as a job” also calls attention, signaling to the audience to notice this part of the story that highlights the start of T.’s full commitment to football and ultimately a deeper understanding of literacy.

For T., the literacy of note taking goes beyond “just writing the word (sic) and things you hear” to focus on comprehension: “writing them [words] in a way that helps you to
understand and remember them.” Further, there are different forms of note taking, accounting
for the different contexts in which someone needs to keep track of words and remember
them. For example, T. states that “[n]ote taking on the field is very different, you have to be
able to see the motions required in a set of plays, how your body is suppose (sic) to move,
and how you are demanding it to react to make you the very best player on the field.” He
describes [taking] visual note (sic) in your mind,” and how he has used note taking to help
“make [himself] the very best.” Although T. may not realize it, and he does not use the
terminology to suggest he does, his recognition of the fact that literacy is situated within
specific contexts aligns his interpretation of literacy with the ideological model. He
reinforces here then the impression he has a complex understanding of literacy that his earlier
acknowledgement of the relationship between literacy and power suggested.

As the essay continues, T. again frames note taking in terms of memory, explaining
that after he made his choice regarding which football scholarship to accept, he “had made a
lot of people proud, but at the same time people were upset because [he] didn’t pick the
college that they wanted [him] to attend and as you can tell this is another form of note
taking.” His direct address to the reader through “you” commands notice, and his claim the
reader “can tell” what he is discussing is a form of note taking positions the reader as
agreeing with him. Of course, the audience may not agree with him or, for that matter,
understand what he means at this point, in which case the reader can either remain outside of
the scope of T.’s authorial audience or read “you can tell” as instruction for how to respond.
T. continues on to explain “[t]his kind of note taking tells you who is there for you and who
just wanted something from you because they knew you were in control of what was going to
happen in your life.” Arguably, although the aforementioned sentence offers clarification
regarding what he means by note taking and is thus useful to filling a (potential) gap for the reader, it is T.’s reference to being “in control of what was going to happen in your life” that is more important to notice.

To make his decision about which school to attend, T. used his literacy of note taking, writing “notes on what school is best on student athletics, which schools gave [him] the best chance for a great future, and what school was close enough for [his] over protective (sic) mother.” He “made [his] decision,” which he describes as “one of the toughest decision (sic) of [his] life so far,” and through claiming responsibility for his choice, he asserts his agency. He “had to make the best decision for [himself] and for [his] life,” and it was his decision, a decision made possible by “all the hard work [he] had put in and earned for [himself] and for [his] family.” Even his “over protective mother,” phrasing that calls the reader’s attention because of its negative connotation, is not credited as responsible for his choice, a choice he identifies as posing significant implications for himself, his future, and his family. Literacy is a source of empowerment then as T.’s case shows; it enables you not only to make major life decisions, but also to protect yourself from bad influences (his former friends he dropped, as described earlier) and manipulation (people who “just [want] something from you”).

Finally, as T. concludes the essay, he again directly addresses the reader, writing, “By me telling and explain (sic) the way literacy impacted my life and opened the door to a bigger and brighter future you should come to a conclusion on literacy and see the way it help (sic) create and develop the world we live in.” The audience is reminded here of the connection between literacy and success, but also prompted to extrapolate from T.’s experiences in order to understand how literacy has broader effects. T. comes full circle back to the title of the essay then, demonstrating the rule of configuration in terms of a prophetic
title. His conclusion reinforces that the writing is meant to instruct the reader about what he/she “should” do as a result of reading T.’s words, specifically, that he/she should now possess an understanding of literacy that presumably he/she lacked before reading the essay. His story is not just a tracing of his own literacy acquisition, therefore, but is much more if the audience pays attention to the cues and identifies the coherence across the text.

Analysis of C.’s Narrative

C.’s essay (Appendix L) begins with a title, “Sweet Shoes, but no money (sic),” that captures the reader’s attention both due to its privileged position and the use of bold and underlining. The title foreshadows the content that is to follow as it suggests two of the major themes of the writing: 1) excess and 2) false appearances. The sequencing of the wording—the item that is owned appearing before the circumstances that follow its purchase—as well as the formatting of the title—its use of capitalization for “Sweet Shoes” in contrast to lowercase for “no money”—both underscore the two themes and C.’s privileging of material possessions to financial security that prompted the experiences he recounts in the essay. As the introduction begins, the first theme is further reinforced, with C. writing, “Shooting up Nikes, smoking Polo, popping Brooks Brothers, were all drugs that consumed my head as a child.” The brand names coupled with the drug metaphors he includes highlight a dependence on shopping, and, in the case of the metaphors, also call the reader’s attention, both because of their presence in the first sentence and the context surrounding the writing. Since the essay was written to fulfill an assignment for a first-year writing class, the drug references can seem to violate extratextual norms, thus increasing their likelihood to be noticed. The second sentence then resumes building the theme of excess as C. explains that “[c]lothes and unnecessary spending took over [his] life in a way that drugs and alcohol
would, [he] was infatuated.” Spending is thus framed as an addiction for him, one rooted in the highly impressionable stage of childhood.

Although C. compares his spending habits to using drugs, claiming his purchases “consumed [his] head” and “took over [his] life,” he seems to then undermine the seriousness of the extent of his problem when he states he “was infatuated.” The reader’s attention is thus likely called again because of the disconnect in the diction that, on the one hand, links C.’s spending to addiction, which poses significant long-term implications (effects on physical and emotional health, relationships, ability to function day-to-day, etc.), and, on the other hand, reduces it to a temporary passion. The breakdown in language is perhaps not intentional, but we could read it as C.’s attempt to emphasize just how foolish his spending was and/or the feelings his spending inspired in him that led to it becoming a habit. Spending became something he felt compelled to do to the point of disrupting his life, but it was also something he loved to do.

The seeming rupture that appears in his second paragraph lends some support to the possibility that what may appear to be a breakdown in C.’s diction at times, including the aforementioned addiction/infatuation example, may instead just be the result of problematic or otherwise unclear phrasings. C. defines literacy as “being able to read and write,” but then immediately after claims, “To [me] being literate is being able to understand a topic and explaining it competently to someone else.” He continues on to state that “[m]oney is a topic that everyone should be literate in,” which then prompts the question, “If literacy is the ability to read and write as he states—the traditional definition of literacy—then what does it mean to be literate in money?” Rules of notice help us to reconcile this potential rupture, as the inclusion of “[t]o me” signals that the definition of literacy he provides as the ability to
read and write is not his own; rather, he is acknowledging how literacy is commonly defined, but then offers his own definition to reflect his personal interpretation. Using his definition, thus, it is possible to be literate in money, learning its worth and how to spend it responsibly as well as communicating that information to another person. Indeed, C. addresses/demonstrates this as he traces his acquisition of financial literacy grounded in his parents’ missteps and later efforts to educate him.

Before his parents taught him otherwise, C. “thought money was a thing that did not have much meaning, it was just there when it was convenient for you.” Such a misunderstanding of money is perhaps unsurprising as the reader learns about the luxuries C. enjoyed throughout his childhood/youth, including “attending a small Lutheran private school,” “[moving] into a new house with a new car,” and trips every year “to France and the islands.” According to C., his family was financially secure as he was growing up and thus there seemed to be no immediate need for him to understand money or the consequences of spending to excess. Further, his age likely would not lead the reader to expect him to be that knowledgeable of money or his parents’ spending; he was just ten at the time his parents purchased the new house, for example, and since the family trips were made “every year,” he presumably was younger the first time he went on such a trip. Indeed, C.’s age/year in school becomes intertwined with his telling of his parents’ financial decline, and the language he uses to describe his response to that decline suggests how uninformed he was.

C. portrays himself as bewildered by the signs of what was occurring as his parents started to struggle with money, writing, “I will always remember when I came into our new condo [purchased after his parents sold their house] and my sister was over giving my parents money and buying my school clothes . . . I was just sitting there . . . wondering why
would my sister give my parents money.” The word “wondering” suggests how unaware of money and his parents’ financial situation in particular C. was, and its repetition later in the same paragraph reinforces this impression: “One day after school I came home wondering where the family car was, and why were some clothes packed up and at the door.” Although C. presents himself as aware something was happening (he could not “wonder” otherwise), his seeming inability to make sense of what was occurring emphasizes how out-of-touch with their circumstances he was. He also chose to remain this way, since after seeing his sister offering their parents money he “never asked [his] parents about it, [he] just went on like nothing happened.” He does not use the word “denial,” but his pretending “like nothing happened” could be interpreted that way, and it is a response that appears multiple times in the essay as C. continues to spend with the idea his parents will help him out (discussed further below). It is also a response that hearkens back to his drug-related metaphors and reference to “addiction” earlier in the essay, maintaining coherence across the text.

The financial fall of C.’s family coincided with his “transition into middle school,” which he describes as “a strange transition from a small Lutheran private school with a population of 300, (sic) to a large school with a couple thousand.” The use of “strange” can call the reader’s attention, and it is notable that although C. describes the change in schools this way, he does not use similar language to describe the change in household when his parents downsized from a house to a condo. Similarly, he does not mark the change in residence as a “transition” or use language that otherwise signals a major life experience, which is surprising. Rather, when describing the house he refers to it as “new” or “white,” and when describing the condo he refers to it as “new” or “small.” The audience could read his diction as suggesting which characteristics of both residences C. identifies as their
defining features. It is also possible, though, to read his choice to focus on the size of the condo as underscoring the parallelism between his transition in school and his transition in home life, since size is the feature he emphasizes regarding the schools. Thus, although the change in home is not described as a “transition,” much less a “strange” one, it was a significant experience for him similar to changing schools.

C. notes that he was starting at a young age to “[see] the power and importance of money” once it became “tight,” learning that he attributes to his parents. They “really showed [him] the importance of money at that time, (sic) by showing [him] how to budget [his] money correctly and the necessities of life.” C.’s diction of “showed” and “showing” calls the reader’s attention due to repetition, and it also portrays him as a recipient rather than agent in starting to acquire his financial literacy. Nonetheless, he does try to establish how knowledgeable of money he was, claiming he “always had a good understanding of money just never had the concept of how, where, and the struggle of getting it.” C. does not elaborate on what he means by “a good understanding of money,” creating a gap for the reader to fill in order to see this as a legitimate claim.

Filling the gap is difficult, though, particularly since C. indicates in the same sentence that he lacked “the concept of how, where, and the struggle of getting it [money].” The phrasing is awkward, but it appears C. is stating he did not know “how” to get money, “where” to get it, or the challenge/effort required to get it. If this is the case, then what about money did he know that would qualify as a “good understanding”? In addition, claiming he “always” had such an understanding is problematic, especially since the content earlier in the essay indicates he did not. Perhaps the discrepancy in the wording, and the gap itself, are actually indicators that C. still is learning how to understand money and the unstable
relationship he has had with it. It may also be that for C., “understanding” money may be as basic as just the exchange principle that underlies it, and in that sense, he did possess such understanding since he frequently invoked it.

As C. continues his story, it becomes further apparent that he did not grasp the complexities surrounding spending, so much so that when he was a junior in high school, his “parents had to have an intervention with [him] because of his spending habits.” C.’s use of “intervention” here circles back to his inclusion of drug-related metaphors in the introduction, arguably suggesting his introduction was meant to foreshadow his continued struggles with money he would explore later in the essay. Also, “intervention” here may signal his upcoming discussion of attending a class on finances, which his sister required him to complete in order for her to fund a small business venture of his. It is apparent from reading C.’s essay that as it continues it becomes a tracing of his steps to become more financially informed and responsible. Coupled with his inclusion of drug-related references, it thus reads like a rehabilitation story. Although initially the inclusion of drug metaphors seemed out-of-place and jarring then, particularly because of their presence in the introduction, they later appear to be a part of how coherence is maintained across the text.

C.’s tracing of his steps to become financially literate also portray him as increasingly more of an agent in the process, though his family members continue to be the ones he depicts as responsible for initiating the steps. For example, as he describes his parents’ intervention, C. states that they “wanted [him] to learn the worth of work and money,” which he didn’t fully understand, presumably in part because he “never had a real job before, just volunteer work.” In an effort to “[teach him] the worth of a dollar [his] parents went all around the city looking for jobs and internships [he] could take part of (sic),
but instead of finding a well paying job. (sic) [He] was placed working 24 hours a week for free at the museum of natural science (sic).” Rather than C. searching for a job or internship for himself then in order to further build his financial literacy, his parents are described as the ones who looked, and he “was placed” (language that calls the reader’s attention due to the passive voice) in an unpaid volunteer position. He continues on to write, “They sat me down and showed me the importance of money once again as a child.” The use of “showed” here, like earlier in the essay, reinforces the responsibility his parents assumed for promoting C.’s understanding of “the importance of money,” phrasing that also may call the audience’s attention due to its earlier use as well. Finally, later when C. begins a small “business of making t-shirts and other designs,” his sister offers to invest only “if [he] went to money handling classes.” The classes were not something he pursued himself then, despite the fact his parents’ efforts to help him reform his money spending habits were unsuccessful.

Indeed, C. mentions that “[a]fter the volunteer work [he] still didn’t understand the concept of money, (sic) because [he] never acquired any during [his] time.” Although he acknowledges responsibility for losing his money within “the first couple of days” because he “didn’t listen to them [his parents] and didn’t budget [his] money,” he seems to pass off the responsibility for his financial mismanagement here, suggesting he is drawing on the victim “little” cultural narrative of literacy. C. has established earlier in the essay that he had a habit of overspending, going through his allowance and requesting more money from his parents when that happened. Thus, the experiences he has recounted indicate he did not know how to spend responsibly when he had money, yet here he attributes the lack of money for his continuing to be uninformed about financial responsibility. Based on his prior actions then, it seems likely that if the position at the museum had been paid, C.’s pattern of
spending beyond his means would have continued. The audience may start to question his ability to accurately assess and reflect on his struggles with spending, therefore, but it is possible to also read this section as C.’s legitimate belief that until a person earns his/her own money and must deal with the consequences of choices about spending that money, he/she is unable to become fully financially literate. Rather than there appearing to be a discontinuity in the writing then, if we are seeking coherence in how C. portrays himself and his beliefs about spending, it is possible to read the text in such a way that his claim is a reasonable one instead of just attributing blame to someone/something other than himself.

Complicating such a reading to attain coherence, though, is how C. describes homelessness in his essay, writing, “You see adults all the time who are homeless now because they did not handle their money wisely and businesses that go under.” He later reinforces this impression that homelessness is linked to irresponsibility, explaining in the conclusion, “Homeless people start off with money, but they loose (sic) it through other circumstances mostly the misusing of funds like gambling, drugs, and other things.” For C. it seems to be important to identify who/what is responsible and/or at fault regarding spending habits, so much so that a complex issue, such as homelessness, can be reduced to a fairly black and white interpretation: homelessness generally signals engaging in bad, possibly illegal, habits that result in someone’s financial downfall. Further, within the context of C. having described his own spending habits like being addicted to drugs or alcohol (his “spending took over his life” similar to how these substances would), it is interesting that he so readily attributes fault for homelessness to most of those who are homeless, rather than to forces beyond or stronger than their self-control.
Seemingly without his family’s support and the ability to enroll in the financial management class he completed, he likely would have continued misspending to the point of having no money at all. This may explain why C. describes homelessness as typically rooted in misspending; he is generalizing from his own experiences and possible future if he had not become financially literate. Further, the essay upholds the typical notion that literacy is a pathway to success, ending with the claim “money makes the world go around and being literate helps you go around also,” and, thus, presumably if you are unsuccessful you are lacking in literacy in some form or another. In light of C.’s choice to focus on financial literacy, it is not necessarily surprising that he would connect homelessness, arguably considered the opposite of success and often the consequence of being unable to afford housing, to a lack of financial literacy.

C. finally does experience an epiphany about his spending habits, though, claiming that his “life was rough[, he] didn’t have gas, lunch, and chill money to hang out with [his] friends,” and this “is when it really hit [him] that to become a successful adult [he] must learn how to control [his] spending habits.” Although the losses he describes of “gas, lunch, and chill money” may not seem that serious, but more so a reflection of his age at the time, the use of “rough” still calls our attention to the importance of this experience for him. Further, his description of being “hit” also prompts the reader to notice this retelling of a moment in his life, the violence of it standing out and signifying how dramatic of an impact his being “stranded for two weeks without money until [he got] his allowance again” was. C.’s language emphasizes that he finally reached a turning point in his life, and, indeed, the remainder of the essay upholds this representation of him as a changed spender.
Realizing that in order “[t]o run a successful business [he] had to change [his] habits and become literate in money,” C. enrolled in a three-week class “that taught how to live well but still have control over your spending.” Although he acknowledges the class helped him to finally become more responsible in his spending after the first assignment made it clear his “priorities were in all the wrong places,” his reaction to taking it was less than enthusiastic. In the most strongly worded sentence of the essay, which suggests the significant impact of taking the class on C.’s life, he writes: “I loathed this class from the bottom of my heart; it was a hot small classroom with adults that stunk of coffee and a sense of tension and stress.” The word “loathed” calls the reader’s attention both because of the strong emotion/disgust it expresses and also because other than his reference to being infatuated with spending/purchasing clothing, C. does not describe emotional responses to the experiences he shares throughout the essay. The coupling of “hot” with “small” to describe the classroom starts to suggest why C. disdained the class; further, “small” parallels the earlier descriptions of the private school he attended before moving on to a larger public high school as well as of the condo he and his parents lived in after selling their house. Coherence across the text is reinforced here then as the repetition suggests similarities with two other major experiences in C.’s life, underscoring the importance of the class as a milestone in his growth/literacy acquisition.

Finally, his application of “stunk” not only to coffee, but also to “a sense of tension and stress,” grabs the reader’s attention because of the seeming misuse of the language. We do not readily associate tension and stress with smell, so the reader must put aside his/her initial response to the language if he/she is to interpret it as intentional and a means of emphasizing the dismal conditions of the classroom. C.’s diction enables the audience to
imagine how uncomfortable the room was as it reeked of coffee, tension, and stress that, within the context of the essay as a whole, can also link back to the earlier drug-related references/suggestion of rehabilitation he established; specifically, the financial management class is described in such a way that it mirrors physical conditions the reader may associate with addiction rehabilitation classes (i.e., the drinking of endless cups of coffee among people experiencing tension and stress as side effects of their habits and efforts to kick those habits).

Despite his response to the class, C.’s change in diction suggests the change he underwent in his maturity and sense of financial responsibility as a result of completing it. He realized that his spending included “frivolous things with [his] friends,” and that he wasn’t putting “enough money out of [his] profits . . . back into [his] business to keep it up and going.” After completing the class, he “[n]ow . . . understand[s] how to be a good stewardess (sic) of [his] money.” Instead of a reckless spender who ignored his parents’ recommendations and warnings, C. is now portraying himself as a forward thinking entrepreneur, using words such as “frivolous,” “profits,” and “stewardess,” though presumably he means “steward,” to mark this change in his thinking. He was no longer the irresponsible young adult relying on his parents for money (although he acknowledges he continues to receive money from them), but instead transitioned into more of an adult, noticing changes in his “income,” for example, and taking measures such as “packing [his] lunch” to save money.

Indeed, C. appears to attribute his successful financial literacy solely to the class, writing that his business has been prospering “and it was all to the budgeting that the money handling class taught [him].” He continues on to write that “[w]ithout that class [he] would
not be able to control money and be as literate as [he is] today in money.” Although
admittedly he continued to misspend despite his family’s efforts, and it was not until taking
the class that C. realized his misspending was jeopardizing his business, it is surprising that
he does not attribute at least some of his financial literacy to his family. After all, he indicates
multiple times throughout the essay that his parents attempted to educate him about money,
starting at a young age, and his sister is the one who pushed him to attend the class because
doing so was the only way she would contribute to his business.

Later C. does seem to acknowledge his parents’ role in his financial literacy toward
the end of the conclusion when he writes, “It has been a long road to becoming literate, but it
was worth every time I was grounded and had no money.” Presumably his parents were the
ones who grounded him, and it is possible his mention of not having money is connected to
their unwillingness to give him money when he spent all of his allowance. If this is the case,
though, then the audience is faced with a rupture in the writing because of the discontinuity
between his acknowledgment of the class as responsible for his newfound financial
responsibility and his claim it was “worth” all of the grounding and “no money.” In order to
be “worth” it, his parents’ actions had to play a role in his literacy acquisition, at least in
establishing the groundwork to lead him to ultimately enroll in the class. If the reader seeks
coherence, though, then it is possible to reconcile the discrepancy as the result of C.
suggesting that without the class, he still would not be financially literate because all prior
efforts to help him reform his spending had failed. Perhaps for C. it is the factor that led him
to assess his spending and come to terms with the need to change, as well as to build the
skills to do so, that he feels is responsible for that literacy, rather than the factors that merely
contributed to the “long road to becoming literate.” It is the class that got results, rather than
the efforts and failures earlier in the process of working toward literacy, and thus it warrants the credit regardless of how those prior efforts and failures affected him.

Analysis of M.’s Narrative

In contrast to the other students’ essays that either lack a title or include one that is a short, generally straightforward phrase, the title of M.’s essay (Appendix M) poses a question: “Texting better than talking?” The position of the title as well as its bolding call the audience’s attention, but arguably the phrasing of the title as a question is what most draws notice. The phrasing of the title could be interpreted as suggesting M. has not yet decided for himself whether texting is better than talking, but it can also be interpreted as indicating he wants the audience to consider the question before continuing on to the rest of the essay. Without understanding what is meant by “better”—the criteria that would be used to compare and contrast texting and talking—it is, of course, impossible for the reader to answer the question M. has posed. Perhaps, though, the point is that no absolute answer can be reached; either understanding of the title suggests it is not readily apparent whether texting is better than talking and that preference for one or the other is based solely on personal opinion.

With that said, M. may be attempting to suggest an answer as he writes at the beginning of the introduction, “Literacy is the ability to read and write. Literacy is important because in our society you need to know or learn how to read and write.” Through these sentences he both reproduces the traditional definition of literacy as well as suggests the dominant cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success. Regarding the latter, he goes on to describe the role of literacy in getting a job, progressing through school, and just generally “[getting] . . . somewhere in life” if you are able “to read, write and comprehend what people
say and do.” Ultimately, he claims “you have to be literate in order to be successful in life.” If literacy is the ability to read and write then, and it is necessary in order to be successful, arguably texting is better than talking because it is a mode of communication based on reading and writing. Although M. may not intend to suggest the literacy versus orality debate, through pitting texting against talking here he alludes to that debate.

Of course, texting is a form of written communication that is often closely connected to our speech, not necessarily adhering to Standard English as much of our writing is expected to do. As a result, it can be problematic to surmise M. finds texting better than talking on the basis of the literacy-success connection because it is frequently a mashup of reading, writing, and speaking. Ironically, it may be then that the reason we can ask whether texting is better than talking in the first place is because the two are closely related, and, thus, there is no clear answer. Further, M. appears to acknowledge the distinctions between texting as a form of reading and writing and other forms of communication that draw on those abilities, writing, “Texting is away (sic) to show literacy, if you know how to text your (sic) showing your (sic) somewhat literate.” The reference to “somewhat,” which may call the reader’s attention due to its articulation of uncertainty, indicates that M. does not think texting in itself is able to demonstrate someone’s ability to read and write. Instead, the ability to read and write using other forms of communication would be necessary in order to fully demonstrate literacy. Thus, his language can be read as though he is suggesting texting is a lesser form of literacy, in which case its status as a form of literacy in itself does not necessarily make it better than talking.

Like the introduction, the remaining content of M.’s essay also does not clarify whether texting or talking is better, in part because talking is rarely discussed. He cites the
ease of texting “when you do not feel like speaking in person or on the phone,” and mentions that texting “takes away those drawn out lectures” talking can lead to. His choice of “lectures” draws attention and suggests a critical perception of talking, framing it as tedious and/or boring (reinforced by the addition of “drawn out”), as well as perhaps a source of reprimand. Other than these comments, though, he makes only two other references to talking. The first is when he claims he texts his family frequently “because [they] barely get the chance to call each other,” suggesting again the increased amount of time talking requires in comparison to texting, and the second is his mention of his mom encouraging him to stop texting and call someone. The reader thus must largely draw on his discussion of the benefits and possible consequences of texting in order to try to determine M.’s opinion about whether texting or talking is superior.

The majority of the essay focuses on why texting is important and useful, with M. declaring it as “one of the best skills you could have under your belt.” Its importance is associated with it being “one easy way to communicate” as well as being “easy to teach and learn how to text as long as you have ideas of typing on a computer.” The repetition of “easy” can grab the audience’s attention and suggests that this is a defining feature of texting for M., though later in the essay he describes challenges learning how to text that suggest it is not as easy to learn as he claims, creating discontinuity (described further below). As the essay continues, the benefits of texting that are listed go beyond easiness to include emotional/mental well-being and family connectedness. M. states that “texting eases [his] mind when [he’s] stressed,” enabling him to “just express how [he feels] through words.” Although he seems to be suggesting here that texting helps decrease stress because of written expression, in the next sentence he emphasizes the act of reading instead: “When you are
reading a text for some reason it takes you somewhere else, it is like you’re zoned out until
you are finished reading the message.” The sudden transition from writing to reading calls
the reader’s notice, with the reference to being “zoned out” further capturing attention
because it likens reading a text to entering a trance-like, perhaps euphoric, state.

M.’s use of “[f]or example” to begin the next sentence prepares the reader for elaboration on why he associates reading a text with “[zoning] out,” but instead another discontinuity in the writing seems to occur as his example does not offer clarify. Rather, he returns to discussing the ability of texting to decrease stress/change mood, describing how his sister is “like [his] personal physiatrists (sic)” when he texts her about anything he is going through. The simile comparing his sister to a psychiatrist again grabs the audience’s attention due to the sudden interjection of a reference to the medical field, but also because it reflects back to M.’s claim earlier in the same paragraph that “[t]exting is a habit for [him]” and “[p]eople say [he texts] every second [he gets].” M. describes texting like an addiction for him since he engages in it so frequently that unidentified, multiple “people” comment on his doing so. Indeed, later in the essay he refers to his grandmother thinking he “stayed on [his] phone a little too much,” and after mastering the “T9 word way” following some initial difficulty, he considered himself “a text fanatic.” Ironically then, his description of his experiences with texting present it as both a remedy and a problem, further complicating the reader’s ability to determine whether texting is better than talking and the extent to which the pros of it do or do not outweigh the cons.

Although for the most part the essay addresses the benefits of texting, M. does dedicate some attention to its possible harms (other than just becoming addicted), and he prepares the audience for this information when he writes “texting can also be a wrong turn if
you don’t do it at an appropriate time and place” and that he “will elaborate more on this later.” Just as texting is described as bringing his family closer together, enabling them to maintain more frequent contact and, presumably, in the case of his sister for them to build a closer bond, it also can be a source of frustration and conflict. He explains how when he was younger and still in the fairly early stages of texting, his brother and sister sometimes would not return his texts “because [he] would be annoying them so they say.” The addition of “so they say” calls the reader’s attention because it suggests M. doubts his siblings’ claims that they were annoyed and/or that he thought such annoyance was uncalled for, but also because it seems surprising he would have such a response since he describes himself as getting “tired of texting [his] grandma, mother, aunties and uncles” and wanting to branch out to communicate with new people. Presumably if he was “tired” of texting the same people, it seems reasonable his siblings would also become bothered by his frequent texting with them.

Further, once he progressed to texting outside of his family, specifically texting girls after “[asking his] brother for a few pointers,” his mom then “got tired of [him] being on the phone texting all the time.” Her exasperation at his frequent texting led to her “[being] on [his] back” and “even [yelling] a couple of times to [him] to call someone on the phone because [his] eyes would be glued to the screen of [his] cell phone.” His description of his mother’s reaction commands notice in part because other than the yelling, it seems a stereotypical reaction of a parent to a child engaging with technology for too long. In addition, though, it also calls attention because of M.’s disbelief that his mother would get so upset about his texting. He claims he “never thought” she would “be on [his] back so much,” with the use of “never” prompting the reader to question why he felt so assured she would not get frustrated, especially if he was texting to the extent he claims.
M.’s description of his eyes being “glued to the screen” hearkens back to his earlier description of texting as a “habit” for him, and his explanation that he would text “when they went grocery shopping, movies and even the dinner table when she [his mom] wasn’t looking” reinforces the perception of texting as an addiction. Both the frequency with which he texted and the secrecy surrounding his doing so (trying not to get caught at the table) suggest the seriousness of his “habit” to the point of it interfering with his life. In addition, texting is represented as a potential risk to his health, specifically his eyesight, as M. mentions his grandmother thinking he would “need glasses from the way [he] was looking at the text in [his] phone . . . and that [he] was straining [his] eyes to see them [the words].” He dismissed her concern, though, thinking “what she was saying was funny” and telling “her that she needed to get [him] a bigger and better phone when she said anything about [him] texting.”

In his request that she purchase another phone for him, M. appears to be missing the point that it is the frequency with which he texts that is the problem. He seems to be in denial then about the extent to which his texting is all consuming and problematic, including in terms of how it affects his relationships with others, much like people addicted to substances often are. His reaction to his grandmother’s warning as “funny” and his claim that he “would just laugh” call the reader’s attention because it seems his grandmother’s concern may be warranted based on how preoccupied with texting he describes himself as being. Thus, his reaction could be the result of feeling uncomfortable with being called out for his habit or just a dismissal of what he legitimately thinks is unnecessary worry. Indeed, after writing that he would laugh at his grandmother and tell her she needed to get him a new phone, M. writes, “As time passes I’m still getting better at texting,” a seemingly awkward transition in
thought that creates discontinuity in the writing. There is no clear bridge between his response to his grandmother and his claim that his texting skills are increasing, so perhaps this awkward transition suggests M.’s discomfort with the notion that his texting is extreme.

In contrast, he does not appear to be uncomfortable sharing an embarrassing personal experience surrounding his texting that arguably is more information than an academic reader like his instructor would expect. M. explains that as he became older “the quality of the phone and how big or how small” it was mattered, particularly because of his hand size (he needed enough space between buttons so he did not press the wrong characters) and also because he would text multiple people at once. Trying to maintain so many discussions simultaneously resulted in him “[texting] the wrong thing to the wrong person before and [getting] into a lot of trouble,” or feeling humiliated. As an example, he describes texting a girl he was seeing at the time about sex, writing, “[H]ow you want me to give it to you baby.” Although it is not necessarily surprising that his texting at times would pertain to sex, his decision to include sample dialogue from such a discussion likely catches the reader off guard. Further, the audience cannot know with certainty whether this is the actual language of the text he sent, so it is possible that the sentence he includes functions to shock more so than a sentence from the actual dialogue would. Regardless, the sample text both captures notice and can act under rules of coherence with regard to overabundance, appearing to provide more information than is clearly necessary, at least on initial reading.

As M. explains, his stepfather’s name is similar to the girl’s name, and it was his stepfather to whom he sent the text. In response, his stepfather “said what the hell are you talking about son,” the inclusion of “hell” calling the audience’s attention due to it being coarser language than that M. has otherwise used throughout the majority of the essay. In
addition, in contrast to the sentence he indicates he sent to his stepfather that was intended for the girl, he does not include quotation marks around his stepfather’s supposed response. This can lead the reader to question whether the words M. includes were his stepfather’s or rather a recreation that may not be accurate (and may be embellished for effect). It is possible the omission of quotation marks is an error, but it is also equally as likely that it signals to the reader M. is paraphrasing.

M. claims the experience left him “so embarrassed [he] didn’t know what to say LOL.” Similar to wondering about the language ascribed to his stepfather, the audience may also ask whether the experience was that embarrassing for him since he chooses to recount it here to a mostly unfamiliar reader (the intended reader being his instructor whom he had known for less than two weeks at the time of submitting the assignment). It is possible, though, that perhaps he includes the episode to introduce humor into the writing, and/or that at the time of writing the essay he had enough distance from the experience so that retelling it did not register humiliation like going through the experience in the moment did. With that said, the integration of “LOL” into the writing, which calls attention since it is the only use of texting language in the entire essay, may suggest the moment still registers some awkwardness for M. As he writes about the experience to the reader, he resorts to using the quick acronym for “laughing out loud” just like in real-time someone may laugh when a discussion becomes awkward. Thus, whether M. actually did write the language he places in quotations when texting his stepfather does not matter so much as does his ability to make the reader feel like the moment was real, as well as to demonstrate successfully the “wrong turn” he earlier mentioned texting can take. The latter upholds the rules of configuration with regard to establishing an expectation for the content through what is essentially a warning
and then ultimately fulfilling that expectation through sharing an experience that
demonstrates how that warning can come true.

With that said, although it may seem like the embarrassing exchange with his
stepfather would be the ultimate example to demonstrate how texting can go awry, M.
continues on to highlight an experience he had at school that represents “other predicaments”
he found himself in. He describes how at school friends would “[text] back and forth about
nothing, but you’re so easily to be (sic) trapped to texting back.” His use of “trapped” grabs
attention because of the suggestion his texting was sometimes due to forces beyond his
control, as though he were unable to decide not to text. One time at school a fight broke out,
and his friends were texting him the details. M. was in class reading the messages, which “is
where [he] took the wrong turn [his] (sic) teacher caught [him] looking at [his] phone and
requested [he] . . . give it to her.” His repetition of “wrong turn,” acting as a rule of notice,
links back to the second page of the essay when he assured the reader he would elaborate on
how texting “can also be a wrong turn,” and it suggests as well the importance of the moment
to the story. We see again also the enactment of rules of configuration as the warning about a
wrong turn is taken up with an additional example of how texting can lead to unintended
consequences.

While describing this experience at school it is the only time M. expresses regret
about his texting, claiming he “was wishing [he] had never known how to text or even had a
phone at the time to text.” His reaction appears to be prompted more so by his mother finding
out about his getting caught texting and the repercussions at home as a result than any
penalty at school, with M. writing he “still got [his] mom called” despite relinquishing his
phone to the teacher, and that “nobody wants their mom called,” this latter phrase reading
like a would-be maxim. Despite this suggestion of being anxious about his mother’s response, though, building on his earlier portrayal of her as strict/critical of his texting practices, as well as coming “home to an empty room and no remote in the living room” since he was “on restrictions,” M. ultimately turns the experience into an opportunity to interject humor into his writing.

He dismisses his feeling of regret almost as soon as he states he had it, writing, “I quickly got over that only because I got off punishment pretty quick. I used my silent treatment on my mother, she (sic) always falls for that.” Initially, mentioning his use of “silent treatment” could read as extra and/or irrelevant information that breaks up the continuity of the writing, seeming like an overabundance under the rules of coherence. If the last sentence were omitted the reader likely would still understand the main point that M. was not seriously punished for what occurred at school and that was why he “quickly got over” feeling remorseful.

Aside from reading the sentence as functioning to add comic relief to the moment, though, it is also possible to interpret it as contributing to a pattern of presenting stressful situations with his parents (the accidental texting of a sexual message to his stepfather coupled with being disciplined by his mother for texting at school) as less serious than they may otherwise seem. M. presents himself as practically unaffected by experiences that arguably most readers would consider face-threatening moments (embarrassment at sending the text to his stepfather as well as getting caught at school, being forced to hand over his phone, and then being punished at home). He also depicts himself as rebellious, particularly with female authority figures, as he “started to not” relinquish his phone to his teacher until she threatened him with the school officer taking it forcefully and he retaliated against his
mother for punishing him. This portion of his essay hearkens to the rebel “little” cultural narrative of literacy as he resists authority and transgresses what is “typical and conventional” behavior in school (Alexander, 2011, p. 615). Thus, if reading for coherence, the reader can see such content as one way of managing the reader’s impression of M., not just punctuating the essay with comedic effect.

The way M. describes the reason for his being punished because of what happened at school also seems to be a potential form of impression management as he writes that he “was on restrictions” for using [his] strength in literacy which was texting.” His language here tries to downplay why he was punished so that instead of being “on restrictions” because he did not adhere to school policy, and perhaps because he also disobeyed his mother’s instructions to follow policy and listen to his teachers, his being disciplined was because of demonstrating his literacy in texting. To some extent it is surprising that M. attempts to misrepresent the situation this way, particularly since he acknowledged earlier in the essay that texting can lead to consequences “if you don’t do it at an appropriate time and place” and made it clear he had experience with such consequences since he would “elaborate more on this later.” On the other hand, it may be that he blames his punishment on demonstrating his literacy rather than flouting school (and possibly his mother’s) rules because he describes the experience at school toward the end of the essay—in the last body paragraph before the conclusion—and is thus trying to promote or maintain a favorable impression of himself before closing.

Indeed, the representation of himself he concludes the essay with is one based on pride in his ability to text and his skills in doing so. He explains that he has “been texting for at least ten years now,” establishing his knowledge of the practice and authority to write on
it, as well as claims his “literacy in texting is off the charts.” M. goes so far as to quantify the amount of time he spends texting to underscore his dedication to it, claiming he “[spends] 50% of [his] day texting and it’s what [he’s] excellent at.” Of course, the estimate of 50% is presumably exaggerated, but arguably the number is not important; it is merely another way to demonstrate the substantial amount of time he spends texting just like his earlier reference to “people” commenting on how much he texts did.

Further, linking back to the discussion of strategies for managing the reader’s impression of him, it is possible he interprets including such a high percentage as a way to shape the audience’s response to who he is. After all, he writes in the next sentence that he “[hopes] this paper shows everyone that [he] would choose texting over talking on a phone” followed by the last sentence in which he claims he is “proud to say texting is [his] literacy.” M. is direct in stating what he wants the reader to take away from the essay, and it is an assessment that he established the groundwork for in the beginning with his claims “one main thing I’m literate in is texting” (the topic sentence of the first body paragraph) and “I am proud to say I started texting at a young age” (the topic sentence of the second body paragraph). If texting is such a substantial part of M.’s life as his essay indicates it is, then it is unsurprising it would be one of the factors on which he bases his identity and one to which he attaches a sense of pride that he wants the reader to recognize.

Analysis of L.’s Narrative

L. begins with a straightforward title, “Basketball Literacy,” that suggests the unadorned style characteristic of the majority of the essay (Appendix N). Through the title the audience is prepared for the writing to intertwine basketball and literacy together, but because the title is so brief, it is unclear what specifically L. will focus on to demonstrate his
literacy acquisition. The first sentence of the introduction starts to offer clarification as L. describes watching NBA basketball players, whom he “always looked up to,” playing on television, “but . . . never really [knowing] what was going on in the games because [he] was so young.” This sentence, in addition to invoking the image of a small child (“so young”) watching his sports heroes, also starts to suggest the relationship between “basketball literacy” and understanding how to play the game that will be explored further in the writing. Indeed, L. continues on to explain he “watched basketball every single day just so [he] could be literate at it because [he] knew that [he] wanted to play when [he] got older.” Thus, he appears to indicate here that in order to be literate in basketball you do not need to be able to play it, but rather to just understand the mechanics of the game; literacy is grounded in knowledge instead of practice.

This separation between knowledge and practice, privileging the former, is one L. repeats again in the introduction as well as at other points in the essay. In the introduction he writes that he “began to learn everything about basketball [and] that’s when [he] knew [he] was ready to start playing,” and “[o]nce [he] began to learn everything about basketball [he] started playing.” According to L., it is possible to “learn everything” about the sport without any experience actually playing it, the repetitious phrasing demonstrating rules of notice as the audience’s attention is called to this idea. Such knowledge also leads to being a stronger competitor despite a possible physical weakness, as he mentions his uncle’s claim “the smarter you are the better you’ll be,” words he took “to [be] the only advantage that [he] had” because of his small size. Further, it can also be what separates a good player from a great player, as he describes being “one of the nation’s best players” by the age of 14 and “[figuring] that it wasn’t [his] skill it (sic) was because [he] knew the game better than any
other kid that played the game.” In contrast to others who “just wanted to play,” L. “actually studied the game” and it was this dedication and his subsequent knowledge that he thinks led him to be highly ranked nationally. Basketball literacy arguably is possible for anyone willing to persist in learning about the game, regardless of their athletic ability.

A critical reader may question the idea it is possible to “learn everything” about basketball without having played the sport, though, much less through just watching televised games as L. suggests. Indeed, a rupture seems to occur between the introduction where L. states he watched basketball, presumably on television, “every single day” so he “could be literate at it,” and his later discussion of the role his uncle played in teaching him about the sport. His uncle was a college basketball player L. “always looked up to,” the phrasing acting as a rule of notice because of its repetition from the introduction when he referred to watching professional players, and when he would come home he would “teach [him] everything that he learned from college,” including “dribbling moves, shooting drills, and other things.” They would then “go out in the back and [L. would] try every move that he showed [him].” L. states he learned “new things” from his uncle, and although the techniques his uncle showed him were just “basic,” he still found them “very challenging” and “[g]etting the moves down took a while.”

Thus, although L. “studied” basketball, learning about the rules and techniques from watching and listening, when he attempted to apply that information he struggled to do so. This suggests that it is not possible to “learn everything” about basketball without some experience playing since presumably participating in a sport requires understanding how to adapt one’s physical characteristics to perform, and this is only possible through getting on the court. Further, the fact his uncle showed him “new things” must mean that what he saw
on television did not demonstrate *all* there was to learn about playing basketball, and, if this is the case, again it becomes unclear how watching basketball games can teach “everything.” Finally, L. acknowledges in the conclusion that he “had to learn from [his] uncle the first few steps of the game of basketball but from then on out [he] was by [himself].” If he learned “the first few steps” from his uncle, then the question arises as to the role all of his television viewing played in his becoming literate as he indicates it did in the introduction.

If the reader seeks coherence across the text, it is possible to interpret this seeming rupture as due to L.’s belief that without understanding of the sport, athletic talent can only lead so far, and, therefore, knowledge *is* “everything.” For example, he writes that he “just [needed] the concentration and literacy of the game of basketball to make it that far [becoming one of the nation’s highest ranked players].” Because literacy was earlier described in terms of understanding, L. appears to be stating here that such understanding has been integral to his success. Further, in addition to this initial reference to “concentration,” he repeats this diction when he writes, “Basketball takes a lot of concentration.” The repetition grabs the reader’s attention and underscores the extent to which L. thinks there is an intellectual aspect to the sport that influences how a player performs. Although the language is problematic then to suggest one can know “everything” about basketball without experience playing it, it is possible to look past this to understand L.’s likely intent: encouraging the reader to recognize how important knowledge is to the sport and to form the impression he possesses said knowledge.

Similarly, L. goes beyond highlighting the mental component of basketball to also address the emotional factor that is fundamental to performance as well, at times linking the two together. He claims that “[m]aturing in this sport would have to be the biggest
accomplishment for any young player who has ever played basketball,” and “when your (sic) young in the mind you always seem to do crazy things.” Initially it is unclear what “[m]aturing in this sport” means, but it is apparent he associates basketball with growth, seemingly the ultimate goal of playing since it is “the biggest accomplishment.” His reference to “young player” that is followed in the next sentence with the reference to “young in the mind” calls the reader’s attention due to repetition of “young,” reinforcing the idea of maturation. In addition, connecting “in the mind” to youth recalls the references throughout to the mental aspect of playing, and when L. refers to “crazy” it calls notice because of the suggestion that not being emotionally mature can lead to irresponsible decisions. He continues the emphasis on youth when he writes, “People don’t like a player who always throws tantrums in games just because they got fouled by another player and the ref didn’t call it.” “Tantrums” hearkens to a childish fit of rage or frustration, suggesting emotional immaturity.

Arguably what is most interesting about this section of L.’s essay is that when mentioning a player throwing tantrums, he uses the example of a foul being committed and the referee missing the call. He claims that when this happens, “[y]ou are supposed to keep your cool and just keep on playing.” Thus, it does not matter if you experience unfair treatment (such as a foul not being called, a common occurrence in the sport), you are expected to continue on without becoming emotional. To L., this is “what separates the good players from the bad ones.” Here he acknowledges then that participating in basketball means accepting the fact it will be unfair at times, an acknowledgment that depicts him as more mature in his thinking than expected of a “young player” who is “young in the mind,” and who may naively expect all wrongs to be addressed.
The reader is again reminded thus of how L. is different from other players who just commit to the physical aspect of the game. Further, because emotional maturity is associated with being a “good” player and emotional immaturity with being a “bad” player, he suggests that it does not matter how athletically talented you are if you are unable to control yourself on the court. As he completes this paragraph of the essay, he reinforces both his point as well as his representation of himself as mature and knowledgeable, claiming certain gestures/actions can get a player kicked out of a game, “and if your (sic) any type of basketball player who loves to play you know (sic) would know as much as I do not to/get (sic) any of those things.” He understands, therefore, that it is not only the ability to play the game that matters, but also the intellectual understanding of it and emotional control. His direct address to the reader, “if your (sic),” helps him to call the audience’s attention, and the inclusion of “who loves to play” suggests that those who respond childishly to an offense are not truly committed to the game.

He further strengthens the impression of himself as mature, and more so than some other players he has encountered, in the next paragraph, claiming he’s “been told that [he shows] no emotions when [he plays].” In addition, although he “[wants] to get mad” when other players resort to tactics such as “punching [him], grabbing [his] shorts, or even pulling [him] down to the ground,” he “always [thinks] of the consequences . . . if [he did] so and . . . [doesn’t] think any of them would be good.” Thus, he offers two examples of proof of his emotional maturity here, the first being others’ recognition he keeps his emotions out of the game and the second being the difference between him and other players who use questionable strategies to try to win. Like earlier in the essay when he compared himself to players who “just wanted to play” in order to demonstrate his intellectual dedication, L. is
able to define himself as emotionally mature in part by contrasting his actions with those of
others. Further, he shares his insight that “[a]ttitude shows everything about you, people can
tell if you’re a good a (sic) bad person on the court by the way you express yourself.” The
implication is that those players who resort to the tactics he described are “bad,” whereas he
is “good” since he does not do so. Actions on the court demonstrate character then just as
actions off of it do, and, in addition, his references to “good” and “bad” recall his earlier
description of the role of emotional maturity in distinguishing “the good players from the bad
ones.”

The espousing of life principles, such as his aforementioned “[a]ttitude shows
everything about you . . .” statement, is an additional way in which L. is able to represent
himself as mature and, in the process, to also instruct the reader. The first time he introduces
such a principle is when discussing his mother as the source of his ambition. He claims that
he “[does] the extra mile for her because [he knows] she has sacrificed a lot for doing (sic)
her days of raising [him] as a child,” and he later credits his family as being “the ones who
really give [him] the strength [he needs] to play basketball.” Presumably based on this
connection he has with his family, he tells the reader he “[believes] that your family is
always going to know what’s best and following along with what they are telling you will get
you where you want to be.” Through taking the stance of guiding his reader about the
importance of family to success, L. represents himself as possessing the knowledge and
experience to credibly speak on the subject. He is thus able to build authority not only in
relation to his basketball literacy, which is the primary focus of his essay, but also in terms of
his wisdom about life.
Of course, a critical reader may interpret his statement about family “always . . . [knowing] what’s best” and encouragement to listen to them to “get you where you want to be” to instead signal less mature thinking grounded in generalizations from his limited personal experience. Particularly for the primary intended audience, his instructor, who also read his classmates’ essays that included representations of absent or otherwise unsupportive/uninvolved family members, L.’s claim—and its inclusion of “always” to signal absolute certainty—can be problematic. In addition, because he does not elaborate on why “a big part of something [he] had to learn as [he] was growing up” was to trust family to lead him in the right direction, he is unable to demonstrate that he perhaps has experienced situations that called into question the principle he is promoting, but that ultimately did not deter him from his belief, granting him more ethos to make his claim. Thus, the audience does not know whether he “had to learn” this lesson because of the natural process of learning as you age, and/or because his family caused him to doubt their guidance at some point. At the same time, his acknowledgment he “had to learn,” despite its ambiguity, can increase his credibility with the reader because it indicates he critically engaged with the principle rather than blindly accepting it.

L. includes three additional life principles in his conclusion, allowing him to end the essay reinforcing the impression he has established of himself as a knowledgeable, mature athlete and person. The first appears when he states that “everyone makes mistakes you (sic) can’t always beat yourself over the head and get made (sic) all the time because you made a small mistakes (sic) that won’t get anybody where they want to be with any dream that they have.” His inclusion of “you” and “yourself” capture notice because of the direct address to the reader, signaling he is offering explicit instruction to the audience. Further, the inclusion
of the colloquialism “beat yourself over the head” calls attention as well since it is an anomaly compared to most of the rest of the essay; its appearance highlights the importance of the point being made. In addition, the phrasing “all the time” suggests L. recognizes there are appropriate times to “get [mad]” and that doing so presumably has some utility, making him appear more practical and well informed than someone who would encourage the reader to refrain from getting mad at all times. He is emotionally mature enough to see the benefit in occasional frustration and reflection on mistakes to lead to progress then, whereas someone who is angry all the time or who thinks it is better to try to completely suppress anger is not.

The second principle appears shortly after the first when he writes, “Looking up to older friends and family members really can help a person with anything because they are much wiser than a student of the game.” This statement recalls his earlier claim of the importance of family to steering one in the right direction, although here he attaches age to the reason why he thinks it is beneficial to trust family; being “older” appears to be connected to being “wiser” because at that point a person is no longer “a student of the game,” or still in the process of learning. His linking of age and wisdom is notable since he has depicted himself as intellectually and emotionally mature throughout the essay, and at the time he wrote it he was just eighteen. It could seem as though there is a discontinuity in the writing then due to L.’s calling attention to the benefit of older age here, but if reading for coherence, the audience can interpret this connection of age and wisdom as a means to underscore the impression that he is “wise beyond his years.”

Further, L.’s reference to “student of the game” calls notice because of the double entendre. He could be referring to himself specifically since he has indicated earlier in the essay he was a “student of the game,” dedicating himself to learning “everything” he could
about basketball before he even started to play it. According to this interpretation, L. may be subtly signaling to the reader to realize the limitations of the insights he has provided and reasonably can provide in the essay due to his brief life experience. In addition, though, “game” could refer to life in general so that the “student of the game” is anyone who is still figuring out his/her place in life and how to get through it. Thus, he may be articulating a broad statement about the benefit of letting older generations guide since their wealth of experience makes them better informed to do so.

The final life principle he promotes is found in the next-to-last sentence of the conclusion where he writes, “It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to know what you want to do for the rest of your life.” Throughout the essay he has demonstrated his “hard work and dedication” to becoming a knowledgeable, skilled athlete, supporting the legitimacy of his comment here, but the reader may recall that in the introduction he also stated that when he was a child he watched professional basketball players on television and “knew that [he] wanted to play when [he] got older.” It may seem like there is a rupture then between the introduction and the conclusion, but if seeking coherence across the text it is possible to interpret the former as indicating that when he was a child he realized he wanted to play basketball, but it was not until he was older and had already demonstrated “a lot of hard work and dedication” that he realized he wanted to play for the remainder of his life/as a career.

Despite his apparent confidence in the life principles he articulates as well as in himself, based on his dedication to learning about basketball and ranking as one of the nation’s best players when he was just a teenager, L. concludes the essay with uncertainty about the future. Such doubt may seem out of place as he writes, “I don’t if (sic) basketball
will ever lead me to the NBA but I figure if I just follow the rules that I was brought up by I’ll be just fine,” but it actually enables him to intertwine some of the major ideas of the writing and to thus maintain coherence. First, the excerpt demonstrates his maturity in terms of his recognition there is no guarantee he will be drafted to play professionally regardless of the “hard work and dedication” he has shown throughout his life; he does not cling then to the wide-eyed belief that “hard work and dedication” must result in the desired outcome. With that said, the ambiguous reference to “be just fine,” which could be interpreted to mean he thinks he will be drafted or that if he is not drafted he thinks he will still be successful in life, indicates optimism in the presence of doubt; he does not come across as jaded, which would seem out of character for him. Second, it is likely his mention of “the rules that I was brought up by” is a reference to his family, whom he has discussed in the essay as teaching him how to play basketball (his uncle) as well as encouraging him (his mother), and, thus, as he ends the essay he is reinforcing the perception he has already established that family is important to him and listening to them will lead you to success of some sort or another.

Analysis of G.’s Narrative

G. opens his essay (Appendix O) with the title, “Football and Its Effect,” which calls the reader’s attention because of both its position and use of underlining. It also clearly indicates the focus of the upcoming content will be on football. The inclusion of “Its Effect” is more ambiguous in communicating what the writing will be about, though, the phrasing perhaps referring to the effect on the player (specifically G.), those who watch the sport, and/or others. Further, it is unclear what kind of effect(s) he is referring to, thus creating a gap that requires the audience to continue reading in order to fill. The first sentence does not clarify what the “effect” refers to, though, instead reading, “Third game of the year, five
years old and in an ambulance.” This sentence functions more so to grab the audience’s attention because of its position as well as its unexpected combination of “five years old” and “ambulance,” heightening the audience’s curiosity to learn more. Nonetheless, the style of the sentence does prepare the reader for what to anticipate later in the essay as G. frequently integrates sensory details and dialogue to immerse the reader in his storytelling.

As he continues explaining what happened, G. suggests his own disbelief at the medical emergency to mirror the likely reaction of the reader, indicating he had run the play, the “‘T-bone special,’” for almost “three weeks prepping for the season” and it was “designed especially for [him].” The injury was seemingly a complete surprise to him and others because the play had been well rehearsed and created with his physical characteristics and talent in mind. Nonetheless, the injury, which he attributes to “[a] player from the other team [sniffing] out the play,” did occur and entailed G.’s face hitting the other player’s forehead. The inclusion of “sniffed” calls the audience’s attention because of its use to mean “detected,” reading like an allusion to mysteries in which a clue is unearthed. Further, the choice of “collide” to describe G.’s face meeting the other player’s forehead also acts as a rule of notice, the phrasing highlighting the violence of the moment of impact. He then builds on this depiction of the hit, explaining his mom described the “collision” sounding “like a bowling ball being dropped on the floor.” The simile enables the reader to better grasp the impact of the hit through an auditory reference as though he/she were there at the field at the time of the injury.

Aside from the aforementioned language that calls notice, suggesting G. wants the reader to pay close attention to this experience he has privileged by including it in the introduction, his alternation back-and-forth between present and past tense when describing
what happened also signals the significance of the injury to him. Although in the first sentence he recreates the scene of being in the ambulance as though it is currently happening, he later changes to past tense when he writes that he “pitched the ball back to the running back.” He then switches back to present tense soon after when he states, “I turn around mid-stride and the ball hits my hand.” The changing verb tense can be disorienting for the reader as he/she is situated in the moment only to be taken out of it and then placed back again, but simultaneously it does allow G. to discourage the reader from missing any details that could otherwise occur if the writing was consistently in the same tense. Further, it enables him to lead the reader along with building intensity to what appears to be the life-changing moment for him of considering quitting football: “It was only flag football and at that point I never wanted to play again!” The use of the exclamation point emphasizes how strongly he felt at the time about quitting, with the word “only” both minimizing the sport (it was just flag football) as well as highlighting again how surprising it was to sustain such a serious injury.

Despite his desire to quit playing after getting hurt, he ultimately continued to play, a decision that appeared to be his father’s more so than his own. In contrast to many of the other students’ essays that indicate the students’ participation in athletics was their choice and that choice was sometimes made in spite of a lack of support and/or other barriers, G. depicts his participation in football as pressed upon him. After describing his injury in the flag football game, for example, he writes that his father “insisted . . . [he] just finish the season, considering (sic) the fact that [he] was his quarterback and didn’t want to be the laughing stock of the league [he] felt obligated because horrible teams were common occurrences for [his] father and [himself]!” The use of “insisted” can call the reader’s attention because it suggests G. did not choose to continue playing, but rather did so because
his father demanded he play. Considering G. was only five years old at the time of his injury, this interpretation of “insisted” seems further supported since he was at such an impressionable age. In addition, his later reference to feeling “obligated” seems to reinforce this understanding of his lack of choice to continue playing.

With that said, the run-on error leads to some uncertainty regarding G.’s meaning, whether he meant to write, “He insisted that I just finish the season considering the fact that I was his quarterback and didn’t want to be the laughing stock of the league. I felt obligated . . . ,” for example, or, “He insisted that I just finish the season. Considering the fact that I was his quarterback and didn’t want to be the laughing stock of the league, I felt obligated . . . .” How the audience reads this section of the essay with its missing punctuation affects the extent to which G.’s father is considered responsible for his continuing to play football or whether the decision was also G.’s. In the first example, his father would appear to be responsible for the decision to resume playing, with the reasons for his father’s insistence identified. In the second example, though, the audience can interpret the choice to resume play to be due to both G.’s father’s insistence, with no reason identified, as well as G.’s belief both that he was responsible to his father since he was “his quarterback” and that if he did not continue playing he would be humiliated. One interpretation thus positions G. as essentially powerless, whereas the other makes him more of an equal to his father and agent in decision making that affected his future.

It may be that G.’s description of his father’s reaction when he was hurt offers a clue as to which interpretation is more accurate. In contrast to G.’s mother, whom he “could hear . . . in the stands yelling at [his] dad to call an ambulance” and who ran “to his side,” his father “was just sitting by the fence waiting for the ambulance to arrive.” He describes his mother
“[making] him feel better by telling [him] that everything was going to be okay,” whereas there were no comforting words from his father who was seemingly emotionally distanced just as he was spatially from his son. G. does not explicitly question his father’s response, though, but instead appears to implicitly treat it as expected for a father since he describes his mother’s actions as being “what Mom’s (sic) are for”; a clear distinction between mothers as nurturers and fathers as not is suggested here then, and it is one that arises again later in the essay. In addition, he explains his “father has never been easy on [him],” but he does claim his father “wanted the best for [him] although at the time he didn’t know that [G.] would be a foot taller than him and playing collegiate football eleven years down the road.” Thus, G.’s father can appear out-of-touch and demanding, yet also concerned about his son’s future, which is in keeping with the idea of him pushing G. to continue playing, presumably in hopes that his son would enjoy the sport and excel at it.

Further, G. makes it clear that when he was younger he was not particularly interested in playing football. He describes finishing the season when he was injured as “[getting] through that season alive,” and afterward he “started liking the game.” If he did not like the game prior to his injury, then it seems less probable he wanted to continue playing and expressed a desire to do so when his father “insisted.” In addition, G. goes on to claim he “wasn’t completely in love with football,” the use of “completely” suggesting he had some desire to play, but was not fully dedicated to doing so. “Love” also grabs the reader’s attention, particularly because G. writes in the next sentence that he “wasn’t infatuated with football; honestly [he] could take it or leave it.” The joint use of “love” and “infatuated” assigns a pleasurable component to participating in the sport that he indicates he had not experienced at the time. Indeed, it was not until “a couple [of] seasons went by [that] he
started to like it more and more,” making it seem as though G. probably continued playing because of other factors, such as pressure from his father, rather than personal interest. At this point in the essay then, the audience is left with an impression of G. as exacting little influence on decisions surrounding what would become a major element of his life.

He further cements this impression when he writes of his dependence on his father to be willing to continue playing. G. only felt he could resume playing the next season after his injury “if [his] dad was the coach,” an idea he repeats when he writes that “the only way [he] would play again was if [his] dad coached [him].” The repetition commands notice, suggesting G. is articulating a point he wants the reader not to miss, but it can be surprising he chooses to highlight this particular information since it further reinforces the impression of him as reliant on his father to shape his actions instead of being the agent of his decisions. Just like earlier in the essay when he described his consideration of quitting football following his injury and then his continuing to play after his father “insisted” he do so, here as well G. depicts himself as needing his father in order to go forward. Like some of his peers, G. refers to “addiction,” in his case the “addiction” of football, but in contrast to them his addiction appears to be one that was largely grounded in habit and lack of control rather than also satisfaction and personal choice, at least initially.

As the essay nears its end, though, G. makes it clear that the pressure his father placed on him is the reason why he thinks he is now a successful football player with a promising future. Thus, the audience may interpret his descriptions of his father and himself as G.’s attempt to credit his father for leading him to where he is now despite the consequences to his own portrayal. Indeed, he refers to the moment of committing to RU to play football on “a full athletic scholarship” as “the most exciting day of [his] life, and there is only one
person to thank.” He acknowledges his father, claiming “if it wasn’t for him encouraging [him] to get back on the field when [he] was five [he] probably would have been going to a community college or right into the work force after graduation.” His use of “probably” signals G. acknowledges his father alone is not responsible for his success since it is possible he would still be in the same situation without him, but it is arguably more notable that here he describes his father as “encouraging” him to continue playing since that word carries a more positive connotation than his earlier characterization of his father “insist[ing]” he continue. Further, the fact he states “there is only one person to thank” captures notice because it seems to dismiss the contributions that others, including his mother as well as he personally, made to his success.

G. appears to realize his oversight since he ends the paragraph acknowledging his mother, writing, “Of course there is Mom; she was at every single game I played in.” Despite this acknowledgement to grant her credit for her support, the disproportion in the amount of space he spends discussing her role in comparison to his father’s calls notice, as does the language he uses to describe both. Whereas G. allots five sentences to writing about his father, he takes just three to write about his mother. Further, his discussion of his father centers on the lengths to which he went to enable him to play and succeed, with G. writing, “My dad sacrificed a lot for me to get my scholarship; he would take off work, book airplane flights, and even rent vehicles for us because his beat up work truck couldn’t make it to most of the football camps we went to.” His use of “sacrificed” emphasizes the extent to which his father was committed to his playing, giving up time and money to help his son pursue his goals. In addition, his father “would come from work to practice every day” as well as assist with coaching, so he “knew everything going on.” G. explains he and his dad would also
“spend hours a night studying the playbook cover to cover, so when game time came we would be ready for anything Coach [name omitted to protect anonymity] threw our way.”

The image he projects of his father here then is one of steadfast dedication, so much so that G. makes it seem as though he and his father were one in the same through his references to “we” in “we would be ready” and “our” in “our way.”

His mother, on the other hand, is acknowledged as well for her dedication, but it is in terms of “cheering [him] on” rather than making it possible for him to play. She was in the stands whether it was “pouring . . . rain or showering . . . snow,” and he “always knew where” she was in her “black number [number omitted to protect anonymity] jersey.” This description of his mother is in keeping with the earlier representation of her as attuned to his emotional needs, acting as his constant cheerleader, but it does not depict her as self-sacrificing to the extent his father did. Whereas his father is described as constantly putting his time and energy into enabling G. to play and helping him to prepare to play, a seemingly around-the-clock commitment, his mother is only dedicated insofar as attending games to cheer. In addition, whereas G. does not include any words with negative connotations when describing his father’s sacrifices and commitment to his playing, when describing his mother in the stands he refers to the “annoying cowbell in her right hand.” Although he acknowledges her support of him then, he also calls attention to the irritation of the prop she used to do so; his otherwise positive representation of his mother is thus blended with the negative descriptor “annoying.”

Despite this conflicted description of his mother, it is clear G. is grateful to his parents for their support. In fact, in an ending to the essay that reads more as a speech after receipt of an award than a traditional essay conclusion, G. writes, “I just want to thank my
parents for not only allowing me to play football my whole life but for being there when I need them.” His use of “allowing” calls attention because of its suggestion he wanted to play football and was able to do so because his parents permitted him to, which is not how he represented his participation in the sport earlier in the essay when he indicated he was disinterested, but his father pushed him to play. Perhaps this seeming rupture can be explained, though, as his desire to try to emphasize the sacrifices that were made to keep him on the field. G. is heightening his expression of gratitude through acknowledging his parents’ willingness to let him continue playing despite all of the time, effort, expense, etc. that doing so entailed for them.

Further, as the conclusion continues, he appears to revert back to the way he earlier represented his father, stating his “wish [that] every person in the world had the opportunity to have parents like [he does], they (sic) sculpted [him] in (sic) the person [he is] today.” The inclusion of “sculpted” indicates material being shaped, just like when G.’s father “insisted” he continue playing football when he wanted to quit; he was molded to do as his father wanted rather than to act according to his own wishes. At the same time, in order to be “sculpted” there must be material with the potential to be made into something new in the first place. In that sense, G. may be subtly acknowledging his own role in his success, which is then reinforced when he describes his parents “see[ing] the diamond underneath and . . . polishing [him] till [he] shined.” His use of “polishing” recognizes the importance of his parents to making him into who and what he is now, but because he was a “diamond underneath” that means he already had the potential to shine/succeed, granting him more agency in his life experiences than suggested through his diction earlier in the essay.
Thus, although initially G.’s conclusion reads as though it is largely centered on his parents, to the point it can appear almost cliché, it is possible to read it as a more complex treatment of his relationship with his parents that also helps to maintain coherence across the text. He appears to acknowledge that the audience may question his approach to ending his essay, writing, “‘Well of course they are there your whole life.’ What I’m trying to say is that many kids my age can’t talk about personal stuff to parents.” The quote he includes as what he imagines the reader is thinking underscores how trite he realizes his statement may seem to be, with the inclusion of “[w]hat I’m trying to say” reinforcing he is doubtful and/or self-conscious about how he has chosen to word his sentiment. It may also be, though, that he does not want the reader to dismiss the praise he is ascribing to his parents. Through calling attention to the possible reaction of the audience to his claim about his mother and father “being there” for him, he prompts the critical reader to recognize that he is not just making a commonplace statement, but rather genuinely commenting on the unending support he has had throughout his life. Further, through referring to his parents “never one time . . . throw[ing] [him] under the bus”—the phrasing calling the reader’s attention because of the violent metaphor to represent selfish sacrifice of another—G. is able to emphasize again how constant his parents’ support was.

Indeed, as he ends the conclusion, G. repeats the idea of his future being different had he lacked his parents’ support, which hearkens back to earlier in the essay when he claimed he would likely be attending a community college or entering the workforce if not for his father’s efforts to push him to play. He writes, “I can’t see myself here right now if it wasn’t for them cheering me on, dusting me off when I take a hard fall, and loving me all the time.” Interestingly, his choices of which contributions to refer to—“cheering me on” and “dusting
me off”—seem largely aimed toward his mother, whom he described earlier in the essay as always attending games and tending to him when he was injured, whereas his father did not come to his side. Perhaps, though, “dusting me off” refers to the idea of pushing him to continue playing, wiping away the “dust” of being uncertain whether to persist with the sport.

As the audience finishes reading the essay, possessing a clear understanding of the extent to which G. attributes his success to his parents and is grateful for their influence on his life, what is less clear is how he defines literacy and in what ways he considers himself literate. The word “literacy” does not appear at all in the writing, nor does G. explicitly call attention to any particular communication practice of his to suggest he is purposefully tracing his literacy acquisition. Instead, the focus of the writing appears to be establishing how his interest in football changed, the success he found, and his parents’ role in that success. The audience is thus left with a rupture as genre expectations are not clearly met, a rupture that is perhaps reconciled by G.’s inclusion of football terminology, such as “huddle,” “fumbled,” “pass play,” etc. that indicates his knowledge of the language and ability to use it appropriately as he progressed in the sport. Perhaps for G., what is most important about his literacy acquisition is how his attitude toward football changed and the relationships he had with his parents as a result of playing the sport. According to such an interpretation, it is the effect, or, in this case, effects, of his literacy that the essay’s title alludes to and that he prefers to highlight rather than the logistics of his literacy acquisition.

Analysis of S.’s Narrative

In comparison to the titles of the other students’ essays that highlight interests and/or effects of those interests, the title of S.’s essay (Appendix P) grabs attention because of its emphasis on him: “I’m The (sic) Maestro.” Beginning with the personal pronoun “I’m,” he
firmed establishes the writing will focus on him rather than others, such as family and their role in his literacy acquisition. Further, he claims a strong identity related to his literacy—“the maestro”—that articulates his perception of his mastery of music and that, through the inclusion of “the,” situates him as superior to others who identify as maestros as well. Ironically, though, his self-labeling as “the maestro” appears to be a misnomer since the relationship to music he describes throughout the writing is that of only a listener and simulated instrumentalist. He does not describe himself as a composer, conductor, or teacher of music as generally understood to be the defining characteristics of a “maestro,” but rather more so as a music enthusiast who recognizes the poetry of lyrics and music’s interconnection to emotions and sense of self.

In fact, as the essay continues he explains that he initially referred to himself as “the ‘maestro’” when he “joked with [his] teammates” from soccer. The name was used humorously as he “would say that [his] touch on the ball was as smooth as the fingers playing the strings on a violin,” and his “favorite saying was that [he] would move the team and the ball as a conductor would move an orchestra with the perfect tempo and rhythm.” The two similes he uses to compare his athletic talent with musical talent call the reader’s attention, linking sports and the arts in an unusual combination, but also demonstrate he understands the definition of “maestro.” The question then arises, “Why does he identify himself as a maestro since the experiences he describes with music, which are the focus of his essay, are not ones that seem to sufficiently support his doing so?”

S. appears to offer an answer to this question when he writes that he “believed [he] was a maestro due to the music in [his] head.” He would sing or hum daily as well as simulate playing music, “[his] hands in mid air (sic) moving and swaying to the music,” his
“fingers moving separately as if [he were] playing the piano or guitar,” and his arms “making the most over exaggerat[ed] . . . movements ever” as he pretended to play the drums. His repetition of “moving” and then subsequent use of “movements” call notice, the sensory details of his language enabling the reader to visualize his imaginary playing. Further, for S., it seems being a maestro does not necessitate possessing actual musical talent or training, but rather just being so in tune with music that it is a part of your daily life and almost an extension of your body; your hands, fingers, and arms gesture in rhythm to the music that only you can hear. Thus, if you can imagine yourself playing or conducting music then you can identify yourself as a maestro because it is how you see yourself that matters, rather than whether that perception is grounded in reality.

If the reader were willing to accept this approach to understanding why S. calls himself a maestro, though, the question would remain why he considers himself to be not only a maestro, but the maestro. Specifically, if his relationship to music is one based only on an appreciation for it and simulated playing rather than a mastery of instrumentation that maestros generally demonstrate, what makes him superior to others with the same title? It may be that in S.’s opinion, although he does not know how to play an actual instrument, his extensive practice with simulated playing makes him as skilled as someone who does. He writes, “I have always wanted to play an instrument but I have never had found (sic) the time to; however, I do have Guitar Hero (sic) to make up for it.” According to this sentence, playing the game Guitar Hero seems to be on equal footing to playing a real guitar, so in being able to do the former, he is as skilled as someone else capable of the latter.

Further, he takes a moment to express his gratitude to the game makers, writing, “Thank you to the makers of Guitar Hero (sic) because thanks to you I feel like a true rock
star and a true artist.” The repetition of “true” captures notice and also suggests that to S.,
adeptness with music is largely related to attitude, as he continues on to write that “[j]umping
on top of tables, playing the guitar behind my back, and just rocking is something that I enjoy
doing.” He does not indicate his simulated playing has taught him skills that would enable
him to play guitar outside of the game, but that seems to be beside the point; what matters is
that he has the emotional connection to music expected of “a true rock star and a true artist”
and the demeanor to represent that connection.

In the process of establishing he has this emotional connection and demeanor, though,
S.’s stylistic change in the writing to thank the makers of Guitar Hero leads to a rupture. His
sudden expression of gratitude toward the game designers disturbs the continuity of the
writing, stepping outside of audience and genre expectations, and the rupture is further
exacerbated by his inclusion of “thanks to you.” This language appears to signal a switch in
audiences, a transition that likely would grab the actual reader’s (the instructor’s, and perhaps
classmate’s) attention because he/she would suddenly no longer be the reader he is
addressing, yet remain the actual reader. Such a distinction between the authorial audience
and narrative audience is not unexpected in a work of fiction, particularly one in which the
voice of the author and that of the narrator are clearly split. In an autobiographical piece of
writing, though, particularly one written for a class with a designated reader, such a change in
audience that suggests a transition from the author to the narrator speaking is arguably less
expected. Further, not only does the rhetorical situation change as the audience does, but the
fact that the new audience (game makers) would presumably never read the essay makes the
rupture that much more jarring and confusing.
Why does S. include the change in audience then? There is no clear answer that emerges from the text itself, but it is possible to speculate on the likely reason(s). Perhaps he does so merely as a technique to call the reader’s attention to this section of his essay in which he admits he does not know how to play an instrument, but his experience with simulated playing makes him feel similarly to the way he would if he did. If he anticipated the critical reader may question his use of the phrase “the maestro” to describe himself, then his treatment of playing guitar in a game may help him to respond to or deter that criticism. The phrasing “to make up for” indicates he acknowledges a deficit on his part (in order to “make up” there must be something missing), and he has thus offered a way of understanding how he addressed that deficit through gaming. Perhaps the change in audience is instead or also a reflection of his understanding of the literacy narrative, though, specifically that it should thank those who played a role in the author’s literacy acquisition. Because *Guitar Hero* made it possible for him to “play” an instrument in a more sophisticated way than just air guitar, positioning him closer to being an actual instrumentalist than he otherwise would be, presumably it has been an important part of his literacy acquisition and thus he wants to call attention to it.

The same sentence in which he expresses his gratitude toward the game makers is seemingly problematic in an additional way, though, due to his claim he “never . . . found the time to” learn how to play an instrument. His attribution of not learning how to play to a lack of time garners attention because it seems that if he were as dedicated to music as he states, particularly so much so that he considers himself “the maestro,” that time would not be a barrier to learning how to play. Furthermore, since he had sufficient time to play soccer, at least during his senior year, as well as *Guitar Hero*, the reader may question the legitimacy of
his reasoning for not learning to play an instrument, speculating it is an excuse or perhaps an alternate explanation posing for the real reason. His character could be called into question then if the audience decides he is offering a lame explanation for his lack of knowledge regarding how to play or that he is falsifying the reason, unless it is due to some factor beyond his control, such as, for example, lack of access to instruments or ability to afford lessons.

Regardless of the reason for his not learning how to play an instrument, S. repeatedly attempts to make it clear to the audience that he does care deeply about music. He explains that as he entered high school, “music became an even more important source in [his] life,” and that in addition to soccer, music was one of his “biggest passions.” Further, he begins the conclusion by writing, “Music has become one of the greatest things in my life.” The use of “biggest” and “greatest” grabs the audience’s attention, establishing a hierarchy of S.’s priorities that situates music at the top. In addition, much like his choice to identify himself as “the maestro,” the use of “the” creating a comparison between himself and others, “even more,” “biggest,” and “greatest” mirror the language of comparison/contrast he uses in the essay. Indeed, it is such language that he ends with, the final sentence of the essay reading, “Maybe I’ll never be able to play an instrument or be a good singer; however, I will have a great understanding, appreciation, and attachment to music that no other person I will meet will.” It seems for S. then that comparison/contrast is an integral part of how he establishes both his passion for music as well as his status in relation to his music literacy.

Of course, just as his claim to be “the maestro” can appear problematic, reflecting the challenge of relying on comparison/contrast when the foundation for said comparison/contrast seems to be lacking, so can the last sentence of his essay. Although the
sentence circles back to the title in terms of highlighting how S. compares to others in his connection to music, maintaining coherence across the text, it is unclear why he considers his “great understanding, appreciation, and attachment to music” to be so unique. Arguably no one can possess the same blend of “understanding, appreciation, and attachment” he does, but the experiences with music that S. describes throughout the essay do not seem that particular to him. Many people grow up singing and performing in church as he describes doing when he was five years old, listen to music on a regular basis and try to interpret the lyrics, as well as air play guitar and drums. Further, particularly in light of his lack of formal training/education regarding music, it seems unlikely no one would possess the qualities he mentions to the same extent as he does.

As a result, this ending may raise questions for the reader regarding how accurate S.’s self-assessment is, whether perhaps in his attempt to relay the importance of music to his life he has exaggerated. It is possible to dismiss such criticism, though, due to his inclusion of “I will meet.” Although it is unlikely no one else possesses the “great understanding, appreciation, and attachment to music” he does, it is more likely he will not encounter someone who does. His choices to compare himself to others in their musical knowledge and appreciation are not necessarily the most successful strategies to use then, potentially prompting criticism from the audience rather than agreement he is superior or unique in his relationship to music. With that said, although the emphasis on comparing/contrasting himself to others makes the identity he is attempting to communicate susceptible to skepticism, it also does enable him to call attention to experiences and qualities that mark his literacy acquisition.
More successful to demonstrating his music literacy is his actual tracing of becoming more knowledgeable of music and nuanced in his preferences as he aged. Starting the introduction with his claim that “[s]ince the age of 4 in kindergarten [he has] always enjoyed the sound that any instrument or person can make,” he presents himself in his childhood as non-discriminatory about music quality and preferences. If he “enjoyed” listening to “any instrument or person,” then there appeared to be no criteria by which he ranked some sounds as more pleasing than others; his ear had not yet been refined to enable him to judge music as would be expected of a maestro, or really anyone well informed about music. Continuing on, he explains that at the age of five years old, all of the songs he knew were “from church and the meanings of the lyrics meant nothing to [him]. As long as the beat made [him] move [he] loved it.” His understanding of music was still unsophisticated and typical of a child at that age then, though in this case it was in terms of the lyrics that carried no significance or suggestion of interpretation for him.

In contrast to this broad, undiscerning appreciation of music as a child, when he became older he “was able to understand music in a completely different emotional level” after his cousin in California introduced him to rock music. The use of “completely different” calls the reader’s attention because of its indication of total transition, which S. reinforces when he claims he “could hear a completely different tone and mood in the voices and even in the beat of the songs.” The repetition of “completely different” again captures notice and links the two sentences together, suggesting his increasing understanding of music and its nuances also enabled him to become more aware of the relationship between music and emotions. After all, he would select which songs to listen to “depending on the mood [he] was in,” the music correlating to how he felt. Further, S. explains his older brother “always
taught [him] about what good music is. He always said that great music must be felt from inside.” Music is not (just) something to listen to then, but rather is something to be experienced, almost like an extension of self.

Indeed, S. articulates a connection between music and identity as he claims, “Listening to rock I felt like myself. I felt like the person that likes to have fun and just was ready to be a teenager.” He seems to represent music as intertwining with self-awareness then, fostering an understanding of who you are and a sense of freedom that accompanies that understanding. In addition, he describes his brother telling him “the lyrics, tempo, and rhythm had to feel like [he] belonged to it.” The language of “belong[ing]” to music warrants notice because of the personification of music; it is something that can exact ownership, forming community with the listener so that it shapes him/her rather than just passively being listened to. When coupled with his brother’s aforementioned claim “that great music must be felt from inside,” it is clear S. thinks music is connected to inner being; rather than something that exists outside of a person, it is instead something that is deeply connected to who you are.

Perhaps this connection among music, emotion, and sense of self is what enables music to be lifted up to the status of art, specifically poetry, in S.’s opinion. As he describes his changing tastes in music, which included growing into listening to international artists, he states he “started to wonder about the meanings of the songs,” noticing that rhyme schemes made the songs like poetry. The perception of music as poetry is one he repeats throughout the text, his first reference appearing in the introduction when he writes that music “is something that [he] believe[s] is the most valuable style of poetry and art in our society.” His use of “most” demonstrates the pattern in his writing of using comparison/contrast to
articulate major ideas, and because S. ends the introduction with this sentence, the audience must continue reading to understand why he has made this claim. As the essay continues, he again links music and poetry together, stating that when he “became a junior in high school the music started to become poetry to [him].” It is at this point that he transitions from only telling the reader about his increasing music literacy to demonstrating it, specifically through integrating analysis of lyrics like he is interpreting poetry.

S. describes starting to listen to the bands Coldplay and The Killers, stating he “listened carefully to their lyrics” and “laid on [his] bed going over and over each lyric.” The use of “over and over” acts as a feature of the rules of notice, the repetition of the diction mirroring the repetition of listening to the lyrics. The reference to his “bed” also grabs attention, integrating arguably the most personal space in his life into his writing and creating an image for the reader of S. in that space listening to the music like a typical teenager. He then includes lyrics from The Killers’ song “When You Were Young,” offering his interpretation of their meaning: “Those lyrics to me mean that people believe its (sic) alright to sin every now because (sic) they believe as long as the (sic) ask God for forgiveness they’ll be safe.” The inclusion of “to me” enables him not only to reinforce that the interpretation he is offering his own, staking his claim and thus commanding authority, but also to mitigate possible criticism if the reader were to disagree with his interpretation.

For S., this ability to analyze lyrics is a source of accomplishment, and the fact he integrates a sample analysis into his writing suggests he wants the reader to recognize this competency. He notes that “[w]hen he found out the meaning [of lyrics] or [he] think[s] [he] found it [he] feel[s] like [he] the (sic) smartest kid in the world.” His mention of thinking “[he] found it” garners attention because of the acknowledgment his interpretation could be
wrong, but despite this possibility he nonetheless has the same feeling of pride. The inclusion of “smartest” again draws on the common technique in his writing of using comparison/contrast, with the inclusion of “kid” enabling him not only to call attention to his age at the time, but also to temper his comparison/contrast; the use of “person” instead of “kid,” for example, could seem to exaggerate the point too much. Further, S. states he “would try to show off to [his] brothers and friends” through his ability to analyze lyrics, behavior that seems more expected for a “kid” rather than a mature adult and that, therefore, makes his use of “kid” to refer to himself seem that much more appropriate.

The desire to be looked up to on the basis of his music literacy is not just limited to his analysis of song lyrics, though. S. also indicates his efforts to impress others with his knowledge of songs they likely are unaware of, claiming he tries to “spread . . . music through [his] friends.” His choice of “through” calls attention because in contrast to “among,” for example, it enables him to refer to sharing his music both with his friends and also beyond them; his friends become a conduit to reach others, sharing their knowledge of songs/artists he has taught them so that a community centered on shared music preferences is formed. He highlights his constant search “for new type[s] of music from different countries,” listing bands such as Mando Diao, The Hives, and Movits he considers to be “really good, especially thanks to their own unique style that you will never find in the U.S.” The listing of artists lends support to his claim regarding his literacy based in part on his broad knowledge of music, and the use of “you” calls the audience’s attention because although he has framed his discussion of “spread[ing] . . . music through [his] friends,” in the process of naming artists the reader is also being educated; “you” signals that this process of instructing the audience is occurring.
S. ends the paragraph drawing on his frequent technique of comparison/contrast, writing that he is confident “one day the music that [he] love[s] will be listened to more than songs that sing about just sex, money, and the artist being famous.” The inclusion of “just” signals his opinion these topics, common among mainstream music that would be popular with his generation, are inferior to those addressed in the songs he plays “out loud on purpose for others to hear” in hopes they’ll “ask what [he’s] listening to.” His reference to playing music purposefully “for others” to hear recalls his earlier indication of “spread[ing] . . . music through [his] friends,” with ambiguous “others” reinforcing the idea he does not limit his efforts to educate about music to just those he knows. Instead, he appeals to anyone willing to listen and express curiosity about his music when they hear it, his attempts to instruct both friends and strangers perhaps underscoring his identification as the maestro since he depicts himself as a teacher of music. Finally, his being “sure” his preferred music will ultimately surpass other, more commonly listened to music also suggests his literacy, his tastes more refined than seemingly those of the general public who like songs about superficial topics like “just sex, money, and the artist being famous.”

He seems less certain, though, of the future of music in general as he writes in the conclusion that he “pry (sic) that it will always be around.” The inclusion of the religious reference to “[pray]” calls notice because it’s the only one to appear in the essay and is thus unexpected. Furthermore, the suggestion that spiritual assistance may be needed to ensure music will continue to be around stands in stark contrast to S.’s confidence just a couple of sentences earlier that his preferred music will supersede the lesser music currently more popular. As he continues on to indicate music has historical and cultural significance, it seems further surprising that he questions its permanence. He claims “that each song is part
of our history,” and “[i]ts (sic) our culture and will be something that [he] will keep in [his] heart.” If music is a fundamental part of who we are, as suggested by his linking of music to history and culture, then it seems it would and cannot disappear. In addition, whereas before he described the notion of “belong[ing] to music,” his mention of “keep[ing] music in [his] heart” flips those roles of ownership, calling notice and also suggesting the unlikelihood that music will go away. If music is something we “keep,” then why would it not “always be around”?

Perhaps the uncertainty he expresses about music’s permanence acts as another means of critiquing the current popular music that is of lower quality than the music he prefers, and, in the process, again establishing his authority. If the music most commonly listened to continues to focus on such menial topics that carry no deeper significance, then presumably it is possible music could disappear, or at least the kind of music that matters. Thus, S.’s music literacy is that much more important to recognize and his position as the maestro teaching others about it that much more critical.

Further, through granting music a physical presence, describing it as “a place to go when [he] need[s] time alone to think,” S. is able to demonstrate in yet another way his music literacy and the importance of that literacy. The metaphor calls attention not only because of the suggestion of escape and refuge, but also because as “a place” to inhabit, music is presented here as larger than the listener. The listener becomes a figure in the expanse of music, underscoring the significance S. assigns to music because it is beyond the person. Therefore, rather than music being a part of us, we are a part of it, subsumed by the larger entity that it is. To lose music would, in a sense, be to lose ourselves, and this may be the most important lesson S., “the maestro,” has to teach his audience. Despite the omission of
any reference to “literacy” in his essay then, which may seem problematic in light of the genre in which he is writing, he nonetheless is able to make it clear that he is literate as well as that he has lessons to teach the reader to increase his/her own music literacy.

Analysis of D.’s Narrative

The title of D.’s essay (Appendix Q), “The Perfect Play,” which is bolded and includes extra white space beneath it to further capture the reader’s attention, is unique compared to the titles of the other students’ essays in that it offers no clear suggestion of what the focus of the writing will be. The ambiguity of the phrasing forces the audience to continue reading to learn what D. has chosen to write about, though the first sentence does not clarify other than to indicate he will adhere to assignment expectations by discussing literacy: “Literacy, the ability to read and write, is used mysteriously in our everyday lives.” Because literacy is only described here in terms of what it is and how it is “used mysteriously,” rather than connected to something pertaining to a “play,” the meaning of the title continues to remain unknown. Further, due to the phrasing “used mysteriously,” the first sentence adds its own ambiguity to the writing, prompting the reader to ask in what ways literacy is “used” and what makes that usage, or those usages, mysterious.

Despite the confusion that the title and first sentence creates, what does seem clear is that D. subscribes to the traditional definition of literacy since he claims it is “the ability to read and write.” He is careful to distinguish himself from others who would limit literacy to just academic reading and writing, though, stating, “Most individuals think of it [literacy] as only developed for schooling but that horizon is not vast enough.” His choice to claim “most” people think of literacy in academic terms alone commands notice because D. is setting himself apart from the majority of people rather than just some people (which the use
of “many,” for example, instead of “most,” would have suggested). He identifies himself as a member of the minority group that recognizes literacy extends beyond just school, so his understanding of the broader application of literacy thus positions him as possessing unique knowledge.

In addition, the metaphor of “horizon,” a feature that calls the reader’s attention under rules of notice, further reinforces his point that literacy does not pertain to schooling alone and that the belief it does is too limiting. This point is central to his essay and enables him to then effectively transition into the next sentence, which reads, “I am literate in football.” Without his claim that literacy extends beyond just schooling, the reader may (initially) think there is discontinuity between the first sentence defining literacy in a traditional way and the third sentence indicating his literacy is in football. The second sentence acts as a bridge, therefore, to maintain coherence so that D. does not appear to contradict his stated understanding of what literacy is.

As the introduction continues, he establishes that football necessitates literacy, noting that in addition to being athletic, the sport requires you to be “smart in order to be successful,” and “[p]arts of this literacy consist of a playbook.” Although the wording “this literacy” is awkward in terms of where it appears, seeming more appropriate to follow the first sentence defining literacy than the second stating the importance of being “smart,” its placement suggests D. is drawing on the master cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success. He appears to link being “smart” with possessing “literacy,” and because being “smart” is necessary to become “successful,” literacy is thus connected to success. Later in the introduction he again suggests he subscribes to the belief that literacy leads to success, claiming that “[f]ootball playbooks have had a large impact in [his] life” and
“[u]nderstanding what one is allowed [him] to continue playing and knowing the concepts of the sport.” Being able to read a playbook, the form of literacy he has focused on up to this point in the essay, has thus been essential to enabling him to understand the sport and participate in it in order to become the athlete he is now. Without his literacy he would lack “the knowledge to know what’s happening on the field” as well as to be able to “[keep his] head in the game,” prohibiting him from enjoying the opportunities that he has had access to.

D. transitions from just suggesting the master cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success, though, to explicitly integrating it through an anecdote about a former teammate in high school. As a precursor, he explains that at his school “a student athlete had to maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0,” and that “[s]ome of the most athletic players [he has] witnessed were made ineligible to play and this ruined their careers.” His language choice of “witnessed” calls attention, indicating that he personally saw this process unfold and thus the information he is sharing is more reliable than if he had only been told what happened. In addition, because of the connotation of “witnessing,” hearkening to seeing a crime occur, the language captures notice as well because of the suggestion that a talented player becoming ineligible because of academics is criminal, a dubious and unfair practice. Further, his use of “careers” calls attention to the dedication that athletes show to their sport as well as the long-term possibilities of their participation in that sport, so becoming ineligible can (seem to) destroy their prospects in life just as committing a crime can.

As the paragraph continues, D. describes his former teammate as “without a doubt one of the most impressive athletes that had ever been through” their high school, “[breaking] and creat[ing] school and state records” in football. The phrasing “without a doubt” captures notice as he establishes certainty that his teammate was incredibly talented
and likely would have been recruited to play college football; indeed, D. states he “knew that [his teammate] would be the first one to make it out of the city,” the diction “make it out” suggesting escape and access to opportunity otherwise absent. Despite his former teammate’s athletic promise, “[w]hen it was time for [him] to start getting into colleges it was absolutely impossible because of his lack of literacy.” The inclusion of “absolutely” before “impossible” signals how extreme his teammate’s non-literacy/illiteracy was, and D. makes it clear through his use of “because” that it was this non-literacy/illiteracy that was solely responsible for holding back his teammate. His teammate ultimately “found himself sitting at home, in [the city in which they lived], doing nothing.” According to D. then, not only did his teammate’s lack of literacy prohibit him from being recruited to play college football, but it also led to a complete lack of opportunities; he was left “doing nothing.” Thus, literacy is integral to success, and the lack of it not only results in missed opportunity and/or failure, but also an absence of anything of importance to note.

Further, D. not only attributes his former teammate’s lack of literacy to the end of his prospects to play college football, but also blames his teammate for his non-literacy/illiteracy. He writes that the “[t]eachers and principals tried everything they could do in their power but at the end of the day, no one could do the work for him.” His phrasing “everything they could do in their power” calls the audience’s attention as it emphasizes the commitment school officials were making to help his teammate. In contrast, D. does not use such language to describe the efforts his teammate was making toward his education, suggesting that the teammate was less committed than the school officials. Because he omits any comment at all on what his teammate was doing, arguably he is attempting to indicate his teammate did nothing. Further, “work” in the phrase “no one could do the work for him” may
be interpreted in two ways, one of which would speak directly to his teammate’s lack of effort to enhance his skills. The word could signal that despite all of the time and energy teachers and principals dedicated to helping his teammate, they could not make him “do the work” of purposefully trying to strengthen his literacy, “work” such as attending tutoring sessions perhaps, or completing exercises outside of class to supplement what he was supposed to be learning in his classes. It could also refer, though, to the teachers and principals being unable to complete his teammate’s assignments for him that were used to gauge his literacy, such as tests, papers, etc.

Despite the openness to interpretation of some of the language of this section of the essay, what is clear is that D. faults his teammate alone for the failure to meet academic eligibility requirements. He writes, “Everyone was disappointed with the way things had happened but there was no one to blame except [his teammate’s name] himself.” The use of “everyone” calls notice, signaling how widespread the disappointment was since all rather than just some/a few were affected by his teammate’s failure to learn and meet eligibility requirements. Further, D.’s choice to write “blame” rather than alternate phrasing, such as “no one was responsible,” for example, also acts as a rule of notice, emphasizing the judgment he is passing on his teammate for not acquiring the literacy he needed. Through his use of this anecdote about a former teammate then, D. instantiates the common belief that failure to attain the literacy required to succeed in school, a job, etc. lies with the non-literate/illiterate person.

This belief is often interlinked with the impression someone who lacks literacy is lazy and/or unambitious, and although D. does not use such language to describe his teammate, he implies it through how he describes himself learning from his teammate’s example: “From
then on [after the teammate was not recruited to play college football], I made sure that I maintained on top of my studies and took care of business. This is one way football allowed me to stay studious in school and also work hard to become literate in football.” D. thus developed the work ethic needed to succeed, staying “on top of [his] studies” and “[taking] care of business,” unlike his teammate who did not and ultimately was left in the town “doing nothing.” It seems D. considers his self-sponsorship of literacy to be one of his defining features then, and it is a crucial part of how he wants to represent himself to the reader. Indeed, at this point in the essay he appears to draw on the hero “little” cultural narrative of literacy as he emphasizes his role in his literacy acquisition and portrays himself as the “hero of [his] literacy story” (Alexander, 2011, p. 615).

His anecdote about a former teammate enables him to start establishing the importance of self-discipline, which emerges as a theme of the essay. He again discusses his self-discipline while explaining to the reader that sometimes two players may compete for the same position in football, and in some cases these players may be “equal in both size and talent.” What may distinguish the two players to determine who gets to start is their knowledge: “[o]ne player may know more about what goes on in a playbook and that may give that individual the edge or advantage to earning the starting role.” He then describes competing against a friend to play the position of free safety, a friend who was also “very talented” and who “had an edge on” him because he was a senior and D. was just a sophomore. He “had to figure out a way to come out on top,” the phrasing “on top” calling attention because of the repetition of “on top” from earlier when he discussed dedicating himself to his studies, and he realized “that if [he] knew more material than” his friend, he “would have a better chance” to secure the starting spot. As a result, he “began to study [his]
playbook every day [he] woke up and every day that [he] went to sleep.” The repetition of “every day” acts as a rule of notice, mirroring the repetition of his routine of studying the playbook day in and day out and emphasizing the extent to which he dedicated himself to enhancing his knowledge.

As the paragraph ends, the reader learns that D.’s efforts—his self-discipline to study the playbook constantly—“paid off,” and he “was rewarded with the starting role.” He is careful to note that this outcome was because he “deserved to be out on the field,” and, thus, just as the reader was shown how failure to commit to one’s betterment can lead to downfall (the anecdote about his former teammate), here D. demonstrates how self-discipline and hard work are “rewarded.” Indeed, this connection between self-discipline and reward becomes intertwined with his later discussion of self-discipline in the essay. For example, he describes how “there were days when [he] did not feel like doing anything” and he would sometimes see “players [who] would cheat themselves by doing fewer repetitions [of lifting weights] than assigned to them,” but “[b]ecause [he] had the discipline learned from football, [he] was always the individual to do all of [his] repetitions and complete the whole workout[,] separating [himself] from the others in strength and health.” His self-discipline was compensated then in terms of physical benefits that made him a better athlete, including in comparison to his teammates that did not demonstrate the same degree of self-discipline that he had.

Further, D. offers another example of self-discipline and how lack of it can result in consequences, explaining that in eighth grade his teacher left the classroom due to an emergency and that before she left she instructed the students “to remain in [their] seats until she returned.” In contrast to some of his classmates who got out of their seats and were
throwing paper balls, he remained in his seat despite how “much [he] wanted to join” them. He describes the classroom atmosphere once the teacher left “as if fireworks lit the night’s sky,” the phrasing calling the reader’s attention to the experience that seems minor, but that was an important self-affirming moment for him since he “was proud that [he] remained in [his] seat.” After “[t]he principal crept into class, the use of “crept” garnering notice because of the suggestion of surreptitiousness, those students who were “off task” were suspended, a fate D. escaped due to the self-discipline “football had inserted . . . into [his] life.” He claims that if it were not for football he would have “lack[ed] self-discipline and most likely would have been one of those students that had been suspended.” This anecdote thus reinforces the connection between lack of self-discipline and punishment as a result that his earlier anecdote about the former teammate established, and although D. is not “rewarded,” per se, for his self-discipline in the classroom, arguably the fact he was able to take pride in his following instructions was its own reward. For D. then, self-discipline, “the control you have over yourself even when no one is looking,” appears to be a fundamental part of his life, and he describes it as “one of the most impressive things that [he has] learned.”

Although the experiences he chooses to share with the reader are largely focused on moments that demonstrate his learning, self-discipline, and success, D.’s discussion of his father and the role his father had in his experience with football introduces a darker side to the writing. When he first begins to describe his father, he suggests he will retell uplifting memories of trying to emulate him, writing, “As a young boy I grew up watching my father play college football and wanted to be just like him; very (sic) talented in the sport.” The reader is presented here with the heartwarming image of a son adoring his hero-like father, an image that is quickly dispelled as the writing continues. Indeed, his sudden transition in the
sentence that immediately follows to focusing on the sport of football instead of his father suggests this image will be disrupted. D. writes, “The hard tackling, fast running, safety equipped sport amazed me.” The appearance of “sport” toward the end of the sentence surprises as the descriptions “hard tackling” and “fast running” read at first as though they will be used to characterize his father, offering support for his claim his father was “very talented in the sport,” but ultimately are just references to football.

D. returns to discussing his father’s talent in the third sentence of the paragraph, writing that he “was a high school star and had many records at his school,” but rather than functioning to praise his father it seems that this content is used more so to establish the pressure he was under to be a successful player as well. He explains that “by . . . being his son, everyone expected [him] to be at least as good as he was,” the use of “everyone” capturing notice because it heightens the scrutiny D. felt he was under. Indeed, as he continues he explains that to his family, football “meant so much . . . as if it were a tradition,” and “[t]he few relatives [he] had wanted all of their kids to be the best so it became extremely competitive and intense.” This sense of competition among the family members about “whose child was better at the sport” prompts D. to describe them as “like hyenas fighting over the last scraps,” the simile acting as a rule of notice. In this phrasing “scraps” could be interpreted as referring to the children since the family members were “fighting over” whose child was the best football player, and if they were “scraps” then their worth was undermined as they became just pieces of who they once were.

Although D. does not specify his father is one of the family members he is comparing to a hyena, his later comparison of him to another animal, discussed further below, suggests it is likely he was including him in the simile. Like G., who described his father pressuring
him into playing football, D. explains his “father created his own football team and was the head coach,” so he “had no choice but to play for him and his team.” As a result, he thought “that [he] would have to be the best by any means,” the phrasing “any means” calling attention as it suggests the extent to which D. was willing to go in order to perform to his father’s (and likely others’) expectations. He explains that his father “pushed [him] extremely hard to become better at the sport from a very young age, harder than any kid should be working.” The inclusion of “extremely” acts as a rule of notice, emphasizing how intense the pressure was that his father placed on him, with the use of both “hard” and “harder” in the same sentence reinforcing this impression of his father pushing him to the max. Further, “kid” suggests the vulnerability D. presumably felt as his father tried to mold him into the player he wanted him to be.

Indeed, his father pushed him so “hard” that others took notice, “want[ing] him to ease up on [D.] but he never listened.” Using the colloquialism “through one ear and out of the other” to describe his father’s response, D. continues on to claim there were “times in a little league recreation game that [his father] used abuse (sic) [him] in front of everyone over a game that is supposed to be played for fun.” The word “abuse” likely calls the reader’s attention, suggesting how harsh D. found his father’s treatment of him to be, though he does not specify whether he is referring to an attack that was physical, verbal, or both. It is also notable that he indicates his father abused him “in front of everyone,” indicating not only that his father was willing to mistreat him, but that he was willing to do so in such a public way, likely bringing embarrassment to D. It is no surprise to the reader then that he states he “began hating football” and that “[w]hen [he] entered middle school [he] no longer wanted to have anything to do with the sport.”
Similar to G. whose father “insisted” he continue playing following his injury, though, D.’s “father was not going to put up with that [him quitting].” The phrasing “put up with” commands notice because of the suggestion D.’s preference/decision to quit was something to be tolerated, as though it offended his father. Despite his desire to no longer play football then, he “was forced to play,” “forced to do something that [he] wanted nothing to do with.” The repetition of “forced” acts as a rule of notice, signaling to the reader on no uncertain terms that D. was under his father’s control, control that left him “feeling like a gazelle trapped in the mouth of an alligator.” The simile, like the one that preceded it to describe his family as “hyenas,” also grabs the audience’s attention and highlights how helpless, language D. later uses to describe himself, he was. Thus, although when he began discussing his father it seemed he was establishing the groundwork for retelling how his football star father taught him to play, mentoring and supporting him to become the athlete he is now, instead his father becomes the source of his most significant criticism and a potential barrier to his future success because of prompting him to want to quit.

D.’s discussion of the coach he later started to play for, Coach S., further exacerbates the impression of his father’s harshness since the coach appears to be represented as a foil to his father. Describing Coach S. as “a very energetic, competitive, and compassionate coach,” these characteristics call the audience’s attention, especially because “competitive” here seems to be used in a positive way in contrast to how his father was competitive, and also because whereas the only adjective used to describe his father was “talented,” here he assigns a series of adjectives to describe the coach. In addition, D. explains that the coach “had kids of his own and was very religious,” factors that presumably influenced why Coach S. “allowed [them] to be kids and understand that football is just a sport and as long as [they
gave their] best effort that [was] all that matter[ed].” In contrast to his father and family members who treated football as strictly a competition then, an opportunity to try to one-up each other with whose son was the best player, Coach S. let the sport be about enjoyment instead.

Indeed, D. acknowledges that it was “because of [Coach S.’s] morals” that he “began gaining interest in the sport,” the complete opposite reaction to his father whose strictness and “abuse” caused him to want to quit. With that said, Coach S. was strict insofar as “lecturing” to the players about football being “about life lessons as well” and “always [making] sure all of the football players were in dress code and gave [their] teachers respect.” Players who did not adhere to the guidelines “would get punished with conditioning at practice.” Thus, although Coach S. may share some of the same basic attributes as D.’s father, they manifest much differently to create someone he respected and wanted to play for.

As D. concludes the writing, he circles back to focusing on his literacy and claiming he has “no clue of where [he] would be or what [he] would be doing without this literacy.” Although “no clue” can seem like an exaggeration since his anecdote about a former teammate indicates at least one possible future (“doing nothing”) if literacy were lacking, perhaps he genuinely does not know where he would be because football has been such an integral part of his life. After all, he represents his relationship with his father as inextricably intertwined with his participation in football, and it was football that enabled him to meet Coach S., who appeared to be a sort of role model for him, teaching him “life lessons.” Further, D. attributes his admission to RU on a football scholarship to his literacy, writing that he is “proud to announce that it [literacy] has allowed” him to reach this point in his life. Like earlier in the essay then, he draws on the master cultural narrative of literacy as pathway
to success, and it is a pathway he intends to stay on as he “plan[s] to continue to learn more and improve [his] literacy as [he] proceed[s] with [his] football career.” Thus, although the reader may come away from the essay not knowing exactly what “the perfect play” is that his title refers to, perhaps it is the decision(s) he has made throughout his life to commit to his literacy, building his self-discipline along the way.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Ironically, while highlighting basic writers’ struggles with academic reading and writing, the composition classroom may present one of the few directed opportunities for these students to critically reflect on their learning and literacy, particularly within the context of a larger system that often makes their presence in higher education foreign and/or unjustified. Similarly, despite the common criticism of the literacy narrative as lacking rigor and thus leading to the kind of response described by Newkirk (1997) in the epigraph above, the genre is arguably one of the best ways to facilitate such critical reflection. Although teachers frequently lament the clichéd writing they see in students’ literacy narratives—writing they think demonstrates a lack of purposeful reflection on the writers’ experiences and the broader discourse surrounding what it means to be literate (or not)—as I have argued and my analysis shows, the literacy narrative is a complex genre both to write and to analyze. Perhaps to a greater extent within the context of the basic writing classroom than the non-basic writing classroom, it calls attention to the intertwining of literacy with identity, privilege, and power.

Rather than dismiss the literacy narrative as “lesser” compared to more traditional argument and analysis essays then, we should instead consider how our conceptions of it and approaches to teaching it ultimately affect the way our students write. Specifically, we should examine how the literacy narrative is a merger of rhetoric and narratology, and how we can draw from this merger in both our research and our pedagogy. Below I outline my theoretical
Theoretical Contribution

As a form of storytelling the literacy narrative demonstrates many of the same features present in fictional writing, yet concepts from the field of narratology remain underused to analyze this genre. For that matter, the scholarship examining how literacy narratives function rhetorically is limited as well, a notable exception being Morris Young’s *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship*. Although the primary purpose of this dissertation then is to call attention to basic writers’ perceptions of their literacies and the ways in which they use certain storytelling techniques to shape audience response, in the process highlighting the need to engage more with basic writers in the scholarship written about them, an additional goal is to demonstrate the utility of applying narratological frameworks to examine how rhetoric and narratology come together in the literacy narrative.

Narratology scholarship has focused extensively on the analysis of fictional literature, but authors such as Rabinowitz (1987) offer methods that hold much promise for gaining deeper insights into the literacy narrative and what it can tell us about the student writer. To my knowledge, this is the first time that Rabinowitz’s framework for reading has been applied to the analysis of literacy narratives, and as such my research demonstrates both the promise of drawing on his taxonomy as well as the limitations of doing so. Indeed, as discussed in the prior chapter as well as again below, although certain features appeared consistently throughout the students’ essays (i.e., those falling under rules of notice), others, such as source and chaining that fall under the category of rules of signification, did not
appear as frequently. It is possible to attribute this lesser inclusion of those features to the ways in which the literacy narrative is commonly defined and/or also taught; however, we should consider as well that Rabinowitz’s rules were not created specifically with the literacy narrative as their intended subject of analysis.

Thus, it is necessary to explore ways in which features of literacy narratives can be accounted for through additions and/or other appropriate adjustments to Rabinowitz’s framework. For example, liked noted earlier, largely underrepresented in the students’ essays I analyzed were source and chaining. Barring changes to how we define what a literacy narrative is as well as teach it, which I discuss further below, it may be that source and chaining, particularly source since literacy narratives are so frequently written from a single perspective (that of the author), are not as relevant to include in a framework for analyzing the genre. We may find through further study with a larger corpus of literacy narratives that source and chaining are generally not used, and, therefore, they could be omitted from the analytical framework or perhaps otherwise modified.

**Pedagogical Contribution**

Although each student’s tracing of his literacy acquisition was unique, as the analysis in the prior chapter shows, patterns nonetheless emerged across the students’ writing both in terms of their approaches to defining literacy and the storytelling techniques they used. Such patterns offer insights certainly into how we can read the students’ writing, but also into how our expectations of what a literacy narrative is and our ways of teaching the genre may influence our students and, ultimately, benefit from reconsideration and possible change.

Regarding the approach students in the sample took toward defining literacy, there was a tendency to draw on the traditional definition of literacy as the ability to read and write
whether or not the students otherwise dedicated (significant) attention to their reading and/or writing in their essays. For example, although D. specifically writes that literacy is “the ability to read and write” and tells the reader that he is literate in football in terms of knowing how to read a playbook, he does not elaborate on how he learned to do so as his central theme. Rather, his writing is focused more so on how he acquired and exemplified self-discipline, including his use of a cautionary tale about a former teammate who became ineligible to play due to not meeting academic requirements. Defining literacy then did not in itself ensure that the student would follow through on demonstrating that definition through the experiences he chose to share, and in some cases it actually contributed to what could be interpreted as ruptures in the writing. For instance, in addition to the aforementioned rupture found in D.’s essay, R. also defined literacy as “the ability of reading and writing,” yet he dedicated almost no attention to his literacy throughout the remainder of the content.

Further, in some cases the students offered no explicit definition of literacy, but did trace their literacy acquisition, presuming the reader’s definition of literacy aligns with what the students described. S., for example, details his increasing understanding of music with regard to learning about new genres and artists as well as interpreting lyrics similar to poetry, but he omits any actual reference to “literacy” throughout his essay. The fact he does not focus on reading and/or writing suggests he defines literacy as extending beyond the traditional definition, but unless the reader is already willing to accept that literacy can be defined in an alternate way, he/she may interpret the essay as failing to meet genre expectations. Since S. does not clearly establish what literacy means to him and, in doing so, indicate he is intentionally writing about what he thinks is a personal literacy, it is possible then for the critical reader who subscribes to the traditional definition of literacy to suspect
he misunderstood the assignment. Similarly, G. does not refer to “literacy” at all in his essay either, but because he makes clear he has been playing football almost all of his life, knows how to read a playbook, and understands football-specific language, he underscores that he is literate in the sport and his literacy pertains to language-based practices; of course, in order to accept the claim that he is literate the reader would need to recognize other factors besides reading the playbook as speaking to his literacy or consider the minimal discussion of reading a playbook as sufficient demonstration of his literacy.

To what extent then should it be expected that students define literacy when writing a literacy narrative, and what are the potential benefits and/or drawbacks of them doing so? As aforementioned, although S. and G. do not explain what they think literacy is, it seems clear they are literate in music and football respectively, with both demonstrating their literacies as proof for the reader—S. in terms of including a sample analysis of lyrics and G. in terms of integrating football terminology. The absence of a definition of literacy only seems problematic in these cases then if the reader thinks literacy is limited to traditional reading and/or writing practices alone. In addition, although M. defines literacy as knowing how to read and write and his discussion of texting upholds that definition, had he omitted defining the term the reader would presumably still interpret his essay as meeting genre expectations unless operating from a limited perception of what *counts* as reading and writing (i.e., only more formal/academic reading and writing practices constitute literacy). Thus, is the absence of a definition of literacy in a literacy narrative problematic, and, if so, is that in all cases or perhaps only when literacy is approached outside of the traditional definition?

Further, is it possible that encouraging students to define literacy can increase the likelihood they will draw on the traditional definition of the term? Despite Erin reviewing
with her students multiple ways literacy is defined and requiring them to engage with submissions to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) of their choosing, as noted earlier, when the students did define the term in their writing the tendency was to adhere to the traditional approach. Perhaps this speaks to the lack of confidence student writers, especially basic writers, may possess to challenge the general consensus about what literacy is and that they likely are most familiar with upon entering the writing classroom. Can such a short amount of time spent educating them about other ways to define what literacy is suddenly transform (likely) years of direction to interpret literacy as the ability to read and write, often in an academic sense? For that matter, is it likely such transformation would occur at the beginning of a course on academic writing? Is it reasonable to expect students to offer a dissenting opinion, especially when, as is the case for basic writers in particular, their own literacies are often considered lacking?

Similarly, if we expect students to define literacy and, in the process, perhaps encourage them to reinforce the traditional definition they are most accustomed to from prior learning, is it also possible we may lead them to repeat the dominant cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success? To what extent does the genre of the literacy narrative, or at least the way we commonly approach it in our teaching (including samples we provide to students), suggest the writer is expected to tell a story of how literacy led to opportunities and accomplishments otherwise out of reach for him/her? Regarding the study sample, whether drawing on the traditional definition of literacy as M. and D. do or posing an alternate definition as C. does, the students often appeared to subscribe to the belief that literacy and opportunity were interlinked. Because their connection of literacy to progress/upward mobility did not seem dependent on the specific definition of literacy they used then, it is
likely attributable to other factors. For example, it may be that the students interpreted the literacy narrative assignment as intended for them to describe how they had become better readers, writers, speakers, or communicators in some way so that demonstrating their success was the clear outcome, almost forcing them into upholding the dominant cultural narrative. Further, in essays such as B.’s that did not explicitly discuss the student’s understanding of literacy and/or trace literacy acquisition, the writing still focused on relaying accomplishments as though that is what the student writer thought the reader expected to see.

This is not necessarily surprising since students are likely to want to impress their instructor(s), who are their authorial readers, as well as possibly classmates who will read their writing for peer review and/or other in-class exercises. Why would a student choose to present himself/herself in a way that could threaten his/her image then, especially if, as was the case for Summer START, the literacy narrative is the first assignment in the curriculum and thus the first opportunity to write formally for these audiences? In addition, if a student were willing to write the literacy narrative as a story of learning that ended in failure, for example, or that included rebellion against authority figures who attempted to teach him/her, it seems reasonable to expect that the suggestion literacy and success are connected would still appear, whether to highlight how the writer’s expectations were not met and/or to demonstrate the writer understands success should be the result. Does the genre itself then, at least as it often manifests, set up the student writer to reinforce the idea that literacy leads to success? If so, how can teachers empower students to challenge this idea and to recognize the importance of sharing stories that instead, or, in addition, highlight alternate perceptions of literacy and the route to acquiring it?
Perhaps the answer to the aforementioned questions lies in taking a rigorous approach to teaching the literacy narrative that engages students in (deeper) discussions about narrative conventions, the ways in which those conventions are (likely to be) read, and the master and “little” cultural narratives (Alexander, 2011) that reflect and shape our beliefs about literacy. Regarding teaching students about narrative conventions and their impact on the reader, doing so could help them to complicate their expectations about the form the literacy narrative should take and to understand (to a greater extent) their ability to manipulate their stories to accomplish different ends. Further, examining dominant and little cultural narratives surrounding literacy as well as the implications of those narratives could help students (and their instructors) to recognize that there are many equally valid ways to approach telling one’s story of literacy acquisition; literacy as pathway to success is just one possibility, and although it may be a useful starting point, it shouldn’t be the end goal.

Rather than interpreting the assignment as a straightforward tracing of acquiring literacy then, starting from the beginning stage of possessing no knowledge/skill to possessing said knowledge/skill (and subsequent success), students (and their instructors) may instead come to see it as assuming a messier path that does not always end in the outcome that is hoped for or anticipated. Especially if students are knowledgeable about the distinction between author and narrator, able to draw on this distinction, and confident in their ability to do so, then it may make them more comfortable challenging the dominant cultural narrative of literacy. The ambiguity surrounding narrator reliability and the extent to which the narrator reflects the author’s beliefs could make it less threatening to tell stories that challenge or otherwise differ from the narrative that literacy leads to success.
Of course, the skeptical reader may question the approach I am proposing here, wondering whether it would encourage writing that is less “truthful” than it otherwise would be if we focused (primarily) on teaching students how to just plainly, so to speak, tell their stories. To me, such criticism begs the following questions: 1) “Is the literacy narrative meant to be as honest of a story of literacy acquisition as possible, regardless of what that may mean for the artfulness of the writing?”; 2) “To what extent can someone tell his/her story with complete honesty, especially when drawing on memory to relay experiences?”; and, 3) “What is the basis for our expectations regarding what the literacy narrative should be?” These questions, I think, are interlinked with one of the common criticisms of the literacy narrative that it is not rigorous enough, particularly in comparison to other assignments such as traditional argument and analysis essays, and it is worthwhile then to consider the reasoning behind that criticism as well as its legitimacy.

Perhaps one of the reasons, or the reason, why the genre is considered wanting compared to others assigned in the composition classroom is because of the (over)emphasis on tapping into the “truth” of students’ experiences (the autobiographical component of the assignment) rather than also the skill of writing about those experiences (the narrative component). Although drawing on real experiences and genuinely reflecting on those experiences are integral to the assignment, at the same time, ultimately the literacy narrative is a story being told to the reader. As such, it benefits from integrating features of storytelling, non-fictional and fictional alike, that appeal to the reader, engaging him/her in not just what is being written about, but also in how it is being written. After all, we so often encourage students to demonstrate audience awareness in their writing, to be mindful of the expectations of the reader and the experiences he/she may bring to the reading that will affect
his/her response. Does it not make sense then to interpret the literacy narrative as what it is—a blend of truth, as close as the writer can get to it, that reflects the actual experiences he/she has had with the creativity that makes for a good story—and to focus our instruction on helping the student writer to successfully demonstrate that combination?

If teachers are willing to balance the autobiographical and narrative components of the assignment in their instruction, the question of how to do so then arises. Especially for those whose backgrounds are not in creative writing and who otherwise lack (significant) experience with fiction writing, it may seem a daunting task without any clear direction for where to begin. A useful starting point, though, may be employing models for narratological analysis, such as Rabinowitz’s (1987), that offer a taxonomy for narrative techniques and their effects on audience response. Just as we can use these models to analyze student writing, it is also possible to use them to inform our approach to teaching. Because the rules reflect expectations readers bring to narrative writing, students are presumably already aware of them on some level, so calling attention to them through instruction on what they are and/or how to skillfully draw on the features of the rules could help enhance students’ writing. Indeed, the patterns that emerged through my analysis of the students’ literacy narratives may suggest not only the utility of using models such as Rabinowitz’s to instruct students on narrative conventions and how they shape reading, but also which conventions students are most likely to integrate into their writing and which may benefit the most from greater instructional attention.

Of the four rules Rabinowitz identifies, features of the rules of notice emerged the most frequently when I analyzed the students’ writing that composed my sample. This is not surprising since some of the features of these rules must manifest out of necessity,
particularly those pertaining to privileged positions, such as titles, beginnings, and endings. Further, other features that fall under basic indicators of rules of notice, such as figurative language, are likely to appear and it would arguably be unusual not to see them, particularly when examining a sample of multiple essays. With that said, although I cannot know with certainty the extent to which the students were integrating the features of the rules of notice deliberately, it seems reasonable to interpret at least some of their usage to be purposeful.

For example, presumably the students understood the role that a title plays in preparing the reader for the content that will follow, creating the first impression to shape the audience’s response and expectations. When D. wrote “The Perfect Play” as his title, it seems unlikely he did not realize that the ambiguity of it would mean the audience had to keep reading to try to learn what he meant, or that “play” could be interpreted differently. Similarly, presumably the students also understood the importance of the conclusion to creating the final impression the audience has of the writing, including reinforcing the earlier content, calling it into question, adding new information to prompt the reader to reflect further, etc. In the case of B.’s essay, which ends, “I met a lot of people, travelled out of state to a few places for once, and witnessed lifelong dreams that everyone will remember because of my year of success,” the last sentence reflects the emphasis on being recognized by others that is a theme throughout the writing, as well as summarizes what appear to be the major accomplishments to him that he earlier addressed. The conclusion fulfills its intended function then, which we can reasonably assume was deliberate and not happenstance. Thus, it appears that students are quite comfortable with the narrative conventions that fall under rules of notice, at least those that belong to the categories of privileged positions and basic indicators.
On the other hand, rupture, another feature of rules of notice, seemed to occur largely unintentionally, specifically when students included what appeared to be contradictions in their ideas. For example, rupture presents in L.’s essay when he describes watching basketball on television to become literate, but then later explains how his uncle, a former college basketball player, played an integral role in teaching him how to play. If one can become literate in basketball by just watching sports broadcasts, then it seems it is possible to be literate without any experience actually playing. Is this interpretation what L. intends to communicate, though? Why would it be necessary as part of his story tracing his literacy acquisition to describe his experience playing basketball rather than just watching it if only the latter is what makes him literate? In this example then it seems the rupture probably is accidental, though it still has the effect of capturing audience attention and can influence how the audience interprets L.’s beliefs about literacy. Similarly, rupture appears to occur in S.’s essay as well, such as when he describes himself as “the maestro” and acknowledges the traditional way of defining what a maestro is, yet indicates he does not know how to play an instrument and may never learn. This discontinuity (and irony) between his self-labeling as a maestro and his lack of training/education regarding how to play presumably would not go unnoticed by (most) readers, particularly because S. clearly demonstrates he does indeed know what a maestro is and is not just mistakenly using the term.

In both of the aforementioned examples then, the reader is prompted to try to reconcile the disparities in order to read the essays as “the best text[s] possible” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 45), using rules of coherence to do so. Regardless of whether the reader finds coherence, though, or whether L. and S. intended the ruptures to appear in their writing, the ruptures may lead the reader to a deeper questioning of what it means to be literate in the
ways the two claim to be: whether application/physical skill is needed in addition to knowledge in order to become literate in basketball, or whether it is necessary to be able to play an instrument rather than just simulate play, interpret song lyrics, and possess broad knowledge of musical genres and artists in order to be literate in music. As a result, the ruptures can perform an important function in encouraging the reader to critically examine how we define literacy and the consequences of how we do so, which may not otherwise occur had the ruptures been absent. With that said, because the appearance of ruptures in the students’ writing seems to likely be unintentional, it is worthwhile to consider whether and how students can be taught to purposefully integrate ruptures into their literacy narratives as a way to shape the audience’s understanding of their experiences as well as perhaps the larger issues surrounding literacy that are implicated in the sharing of those experiences.

For example, if students think of their stories as plots in which they and others appear as characters, how may they be able to use some of their experiences as potential plot “twists” that still accurately reflect what happened, but that simultaneously enhance the reading? Especially in light of the frequency with which the dominant cultural narrative of literacy as pathway to success emerged, perhaps drawing on a “little” cultural narrative instead, or in addition to the dominant narrative, would offer both a plot change/purposeful rupture to engage the reader as well as a more complicated representation of literacy acquisition. Similarly, in terms of characterization, teaching students about rupture through the representation of character behavior that may seem inappropriate, for example, such as M.’s description of himself mistakenly texting his stepfather about sex, can be an additional way to enable students to use rupture deliberately to accomplish multiple effects (e.g., adding humor, albeit bawdy, to writing that may otherwise take a more formal/serious tone).
In contrast to the frequency with which features of rules of notice appeared, whether intentionally or not, features of rules of signification were noticeably less demonstrated across the majority of the essays based on my analysis, though in light of the categories (source, morality, truth and realism, and causation) that fall under this rule, their limited usage speaks more to the genre as it is typically taught as well as the need to perhaps add to and/or restructure this set of rules for literacy narrative analysis/instruction. In terms of genre, the first category of source seems to be almost a moot point since, as earlier discussed, the literacy narrative assignment is commonly approached without distinguishing between author and narrator. Students often are not encouraged to think about the narrators of their stories as separate from them, personas through which they can shape their writing to reflect their genuine interpretations of their experiences and/or more embellished versions of those experiences (the reliable versus unreliable narrator). Instead, instructors often emphasize reflection linked to historical accuracy and clear demonstration of how the students’ experiences led to their growth. Although such emphasis makes for seemingly straightforward assessment in terms of whether the student writer has exemplified his/her literacy acquisition through tracing experiences the instructor would expect to lead to learning, it also pushes students to tell their stories as truthfully as possible to the extent that they default to becoming the narrators of their writing.

As a story about maturation—how the student has entered into a community of writers, readers, speakers, and so on—the literacy narrative is an opportune assignment for encouraging students to think about voice and how the slightest change in voice can lead to an (almost) entirely different story. For example, what would happen if B.’s essay, or at least part of it, was told from the account of a narrator who was a teammate or one of the many
people he generically refers to as “everyone” or “everybody” who was aware of his incredible talent? In what ways would such a change in perspective, or source, as Rabinowitz (1987) refers to it, affect the reader’s interpretation of narrator reliability and thus his/her assessment of B.’s experiences and what they suggest about him? Finally, how could instruction in source and its effects lead to more nuanced, sophisticated writing that, in the case of basic writers, could further demonstrate how problematic the term “basic writer” is?

Although Rabinowitz (1987) is referring to fictional writing when he explains how to understand who the narrative audience is, suggesting asking the question, “‘What sort of reader would I have to pretend to be—what would I have to know and believe—if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?’” (p. 96), there is no reason why his question should be restricted to just explicitly fictional writing. Yes, we expect the literacy narrative to be grounded in reality, drawing on genuine experiences the writer has had, but at the same time we accept that the writer is basing his/her storytelling on memories and interpretations of those memories. Of necessity then we accept that there will always be a balance of truth and fiction in such autobiographical writing, so why not encourage the student writer to try adopting different voices to see how they affect that balance and best articulate the representation of his/her experiences that he/she desires? Enabling, and maybe even encouraging, students to experiment with the truth and realism category of rules of signification could lead to more insightful, and perhaps more honest, writing than just pressing for the truth as told by the student as narrator.

Though not surprising then that features of the rules of signification, particularly because of the categories of source and truth and realism, were less apparent than other rules across the data set based on my analysis, it is unexpected that the students would generally
refrain from integrating these features with regard to morality considering so many of them were athletes well known for their physical attributes that made them top performers in their sports. It seems reasonable to anticipate that they would use descriptions of their bodies to suggest their inner qualities, such as their leadership, dependability, and/or ambition, for example, yet R. alone did so, interlinking his large build with his strong work ethic, repeating descriptions of both throughout his writing to make the former seem symbolic of the latter. Perhaps it is possible to attribute the general omission of this technique in the data to the student athletes’ desire to highlight who they were aside from their physical appearance, but the fact they mostly chose to focus on their literacies in terms of their sports (or in some cases, such as B.’s, to write about their participation in sports without explicitly calling attention to literacy) makes this rationale seem unlikely.

Further, none of the students integrated chaining to create more well-rounded depictions of their personalities, such as through establishing their integrity in their academics to suggest their sportsmanship on the field/court. Since most of the students did address both their educational and their athletic performance in their writing, it seems reasonable to anticipate that they would use discussion of one to reflect the other. Thus, the general omission of features of the morality category of rules of signification suggests a missed opportunity for the students to integrate this technique into their writing. When combined with the fact that the students so regularly employed the basic indicators of rules of notice, the omission may suggest that they were more comfortable with easily decipherable language in the form of similes and metaphors as a way to communicate their characteristics. Therefore, instruction on composing literacy narratives may benefit from a more complex treatment of chaining in terms of how to use it both when describing self as well as
describing others, such as family or friends who are generally integral to the stories students
tell about their literacy acquisition and those who did or did not support them along the way.
For example, when D. described his father as an “alligator” to underscore the extreme
pressure he put him under to excel in football, if his father bore any physical resemblance to
the animal, then D. could have described that resemblance and relied less on directly telling
the reader about his feeling of helplessness as a “gazelle” to his father’s “alligator.”

Regarding the students’ use of features of the rules of configuration, all of the essays
make it possible to easily apply the two metarules Rabinowitz (1987) outlined under the
basic rules, which is unsurprising since it would be difficult, if not impossible, to fail to do
so. The first metarule, which addresses the reader’s expectation “that something will happen”
(p. 117), applied as the reader learned how the students had changed across time, who they
presented themselves as by the end of their stories differing from who they were at the
beginning. For the majority of the essays that focused on tracing the students’ literacy
acquisition, the changes that were highlighted were connected to learning, such as S.’s
increasing exposure to different musical genres and artists. In contrast to the young child who
sang in church and had no critical understanding of music that he represents himself as
toward the beginning of the essay, by the conclusion he has become a music enthusiast who
tries to spread his knowledge to anyone willing to listen. Change was also connected to the
students’ intellectual/emotional maturity, though, such as D.’s increasing self-discipline and
C.’s financial responsibility/independence. Regarding the latter, whereas C. starts the essay
depicting himself as immaturely overspending and relying on his parents to continually help
him out, the conclusion shows him as becoming a businessman who is more conservative in
his spending in order to sustain his company.
The second metarule, which reflects the limitations on the reader’s expectations since “not anything can happen” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 117), manifested as the reader could discern patterns in the students’ essays, such as the escape from a childhood neighborhood/home to pursue greater opportunities. R. and B. both integrated this pattern into their writing, prompting the reader to expect that success would result after they left behind their pasts. Similarly, L. begins his story with a description of himself as a child watching his sports heroes playing basketball on television, and although the reader may not be able to know that he would become the phenom he indicates he ultimately turned out to be, within the context of the genre the reader can anticipate that he will describe building skills that led him closer toward resembling those athletes L. so greatly admired.

It should be noted that because none of the students experimented with source, this limited the extent to which they could integrate features of the rules of configuration. For example, there were no shifts in perspective so that it was necessary to create balance by restoring point of view to that which appeared at the beginning of the essay. Further, because most of the students’ literacy narratives lacked dialogue, the subcategories of undermining and balance were also less likely to manifest in the writing. With that said, there are two examples of balance appearing in the students’ narratives that I would like to mention here since they demonstrate how the technique can be used effectively and, thus, why greater instructional attention to it may be beneficial. The first occurs in G.’s essay when he describes his desire to quit playing football after getting injured playing flag football as a child. He sets up the potential for a significant change in his life course had he followed through on quitting, and the genre allows for him to address how he shifted course from a focus on athletics to academics, for example, or some other path. G. did not quit, though,
specifically due to the pressure his father placed on him to continue playing, and thus he is able to draw on balance as a way to surprise the reader when he does not fulfill the potential expectation of quitting. The second example of balance appears in M.’s essay when he articulates a warning regarding texting, claiming “texting can also be a wrong turn if you don’t do it at an appropriate time and place” and that he “will elaborate more on this later.” Through these comments he prepares the reader for the experiences he later shares of sending his stepfather a text intended for his girlfriend as well as getting in trouble for texting at school.

Regarding the final set of rules, rules of coherence, in addition to being called upon when ruptures appeared in the students’ writing, as discussed earlier, they also were called upon in my analysis with regard to surplus and bundling. In terms of surplus, M.’s inclusion of the language of the text he mistakenly sent to his father, which is sexually charged and thus seems out of place within the context of the rest of the essay as well as the genre/academic nature of the assignment, can be made coherent as an effort to interject humor into his writing. After all, he presents himself in a humorous way when he describes his interaction with his grandmother who warned him about staring too much at his phone, to which he responded that she should buy him a new one. Although generally writing his essay with a more formal, serious tone then, M. does occasionally punctuate the writing with moments that seem to be designed for comedic effect, and the rules of coherence partially enable him to do so.

In addition, the bundling category of rules of coherence was drawn upon in my analysis throughout the essays, particularly in terms of the conclusions in which the students appear to articulate the most important meanings of their stories. For example, despite his
earlier description of his father as essentially forcing him into continuing to play football, G. concludes his essay emphasizing how thankful he is to his parents and also how he was sculpted into the person that he is now. His choice of phrasing enables him to balance then his description of how he was pushed into continuing to participate in the sport that appeared earlier in the writing with his representation of himself as playing an important role in enabling him to be the successful athlete he is now. B., on the other hand, uses his conclusion to continue the pattern he established throughout the essay of presenting himself as someone others (“everyone” or “everybody” in his words) took notice of and who is both successful and aware of how successful he is. For B., the literacy narrative appears to be a way to communicate to the reader how skilled he is so that the reader who was not among the “everybody” or “everyone” to witness him compete can still learn of his talent and thereby join the crowd of spectators he claims to command.

Thus, rather than dismiss narrative writing as “easy to write and academically suspect” (Newkirk, 1997, p. 20), my analysis shows we need to approach such writing through a more critical lens and, in doing so, we can see the complexity of it as well as its utility in the composition classroom. Brooke (1988) argued that “[a] writer’s identity . . . is what composition courses should be fostering, for it is in a writer’s stance towards experience that written language, both writing and reading, moves from being just a ‘skill’ to being a way of acting in the world” (p. 38). Rather than focusing writing instruction so much on “the imitation of forms and processes,” we should instead focus on “the imitation of identity” because it “is a more powerful means of learning” (p. 36). Through not just encouraging students to write about their experiences and who they are in relation to those experiences then, but also facilitating their experimentation with identities through
manipulation of narrative conventions, we can move beyond the seemingly clichéd writing that can result from just teaching the “form” of the literacy narrative. Further, we can empower students to understand not only their own voices, but also how those voices can be positioned within the academy as legitimate, warranting notice and respect.

Although admittedly the literacy narrative has become a popular assignment in the composition classroom, critics continue to often cite its supposed lack of rigor compared to more traditional argument and analysis essays as reason to exclude it from the curriculum. Based on the complexity of the research participants’ writing, though, it should be clear that this opposition is problematic and that such autobiographical writing can play an important role in offering teachers insight into how their students interpret their literacy acquisition experiences as well as their roles in those experiences. Such insight may then enable teachers to (better) understand students’ attitudes toward their learning and to adjust their pedagogies in response. In addition, despite assuming a different form than the more common argument essay focused on debating a topic, the literacy narrative is nonetheless grounded in persuasion. It is a genre that requires the writer to state a claim about his/her growth in relation to some reading, writing, and/or other communication practice and to then offer support for that claim, using personal experiences to do so. The blending of self-reflection with argumentation thus makes the genre a challenging assignment not only to write, but also to teach. Theories and taxonomies from narratology studies, such as Rabinowitz’s (1987) work, are, I argue, untapped resources that teachers would benefit from consulting.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the most significant limitations of this research was the sample, which consisted of just one teacher and nine students from one section of “basic writing” taught at
RU. In order to reach broader conclusions, both in terms of the utility of applying Rabinowitz’s (1987) rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence to analyze literacy narratives as well as of how basic writers use certain techniques in their writing that can shape audience response, it would be necessary to obtain a larger sample. Further, although the sample was somewhat diverse insofar as the teacher was White/Caucasian, eight of the nine students were Black/African-American, and one of the students was Hispanic/Latino, it is clear that it did not ethnically represent basic writing programs at institutions located throughout the United States. Similarly, all of the students were 18-19 years old, and, therefore, do not represent older and non-traditional students who also enroll in basic writing classes. In addition, all of the students, like the majority of the students in the Summer START program, were male, so there was no representation of a female student in the data. Thus, a more eclectic sample in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender would be useful to determine whether similar results to those I found with such a limited group of participants would be repeated.

An additional limitation pertaining to the sample relates to the class in which the students were enrolled and that the instructor taught. RU does not identify English 100 as a basic writing course though within the context of Summer START it certainly functioned in that capacity, and as noted in an earlier chapter, one of the administrators affiliated with Summer START firmly stated her belief that basic writing should be taught at the local community colleges rather than at the four-year institution. Thus, there is no language in the course title, and therefore in the course materials, such as the syllabus, as well, to indicate English 100 is essentially “basic writing.” As a result, the students from whom I collected data may differ from students enrolled in courses designated as “basic writing” or “remedial
writing” in terms of their awareness of how their academic reading and writing preparation has been assessed as inadequate. In addition, they may not have experienced the stigma students enrolled in explicitly labeled “basic writing” or “remedial writing” courses may feel by being in such a course. It is possible then that had the students been in a course with “basic writing” or “remedial writing” in its title, and therefore that had such language in some of the course materials, that they may have been more self-conscious about their reading and writing and chosen to write their essays differently.

Regarding my analysis, a further limitation of this research is that the data I collected could not in itself offer a complete understanding of the students’ perceptions of their literacies and experiences surrounding their literacy acquisition. Among the goals of this dissertation was to create a space in which to integrate the voices of students considered basic writers, engaging them more in the scholarship that is so often written about them. Although excerpting significant portions of the students’ essays into the analysis as well as looking beyond errors to identify the potential purposefulness of their writing strategies makes strides toward accomplishing the aforementioned goal, these efforts alone cannot account with certainty for how the students intended their writing to be read. Of course, it is not necessarily possible to determine intention regardless of the kind and amount of data collected since arguably some composing decisions are made subconsciously. Further, an author may not be able to clearly articulate why he/she made the decisions that he/she deliberately did, and any self-reported data is always subject to possible inaccuracy, particularly when it pertains to information that could pose threats to the participant’s face/impression management. Nonetheless, a more robust data set, including think-aloud protocols while students draft their literacy narratives, could offer more insight into
intentionality in their writing and their impressions of who they are in relation to their literacies as well as who they present themselves to be when retelling their literacy acquisition experiences.

In addition, when we consider the contrasts between the students who composed the sample—all of whom were minorities and had struggled academically, and some of whom had come from broken homes and otherwise difficult backgrounds—and the teacher, program administrators, and myself, presumably privilege contributed to how the students’ experiences in the program were shaped as well as the research that I conducted and findings I reached. I did not account for privilege in my analysis, though, instead focusing on other factors directly related to my research questions. With that said, privilege is a substantial area of promise for future research when considering basic writers, particularly those demonstrating characteristics like the students in my sample.

Finally, another limitation of the data is that it does not account for possible changes the students made to their drafts based on peer and instructor feedback. Perhaps some of the students added further details about their experiences based on comments that then led to an increased presence of rules of signification, for example, or omitted some material that was considered extraneous and that thus led to the need for the audience to draw on rules of coherence. Tracing revisions across drafts as well as having access to any feedback offered during one-on-one meetings between the instructor and her students or between the tutor(s) and the students that prompted revisions would have been useful then in case (significant) changes were made to suggest the students were altering their writing based on known audience response.
Aside from addressing the aforementioned limitations, it would be beneficial as well for future research to focus on programs similar to Summer START that include basic writing among their course offerings. Due to the condensed time frame of the program as well as its purpose to introduce students to college life through a more low-stakes, cohort approach, the participants had a unique educational experience compared to students who enroll in more traditional, semester long basic writing classes. Arguably, the students who participated in Summer START had a greater opportunity to form a close network of support with their peers than students in more typical basic writing classes, and this perhaps affected their outlook on higher education and expectations for their performance. Thus, gathering data from students enrolled in programs similar to Summer START could both further demonstrate the problematic nature of the term “basic writers,” as explained earlier, as well as create opportunities to research the role of peer/cohort support in basic writer retention and success. Further, longitudinal research examining how basic writing cohorts do or do not maintain a support network throughout the duration of their studies following completion of the basic writing course could speak to the potential long term benefits of cohorts to basic writing instruction.

An additional promising area of research regarding basic writing instruction would be to examine the approaches that basic writing teachers use to assess students’ writing. With regard to assessing literacy narratives specifically, Alexander’s (2015) study of what she referred to as “instructor uptake,” or the perception that reflection was occurring in the students’ writing based on what the instructor interpreted reflection to be, establishes a strong foundation upon which to build. Through her research she identified three components that resulted in instructor uptake, the most common being “analytical moves of cause-effect and
evaluation” followed by “vivid, metaphor language” and then “ideological critiques” (p. 43). As Alexander shows then, instructors most often interpreted the linking of past experiences to change, or problem to consequences, as indicating reflection had occurred, which is unsurprising considering that the literacy narrative highlights defining moments for the student in his/her literacy acquisition—moments that generally represent growth or change. Arguably more unexpected is that “ideological critiques” ranked last and that only three features were identified as the basis for what instructors considered to constitute reflection. Thus, further exploration of how basic writing instructors assess students’ writing, especially how they determine when certain crucial assignment outcomes are met, could both offer useful insights into the beliefs that inform how teachers respond to students’ writing and help to ensure reasonable expectations to make assessment (more) equitable (Alexander, 2011).

Relatedly, another potential focus for research going forward is to examine teachers’ “misreading” of basic writers’ literacy narratives. Rabinowitz (1987) argued “a reader’s attempt and failure to join the authorial audience implies that something is keeping him or her from applying interpretive strategies that the author, at least, believed to be more or less readily available” (p. 195). Collecting data from basic writers about the intentions behind their use of certain narrative conventions and comparing that information to teachers’ interpretations of the students’ writing could shed light on why “misreading” occurs. Do the students not fully understand the conventions they are using so that they problematically apply them, for example, and/or are teachers not noticing how the students are using narrative conventions because they are instead focusing on other features of the writing?

Finally, another future direction for research is including basic writers in the actual process of composing and publishing scholarship, particularly about them. Basic writers
could benefit from increased opportunities to co-author literature that examines their beliefs about literacy, for example, and their identities in the academic community in relation to their home and/or school literacies. Such opportunities would allow them not just to share their ideas, but to do so with a wider audience and using a platform that would generally be (considered) out of their reach. The ability to co-author scholarship could offer one additional way then through which to legitimate the writing “basic writers” do and to acknowledge their attitudes toward how their literacies are or are not valued in the academy.

Conclusion

If we are to continue the shift away from representing basic writers according to a deficit model, we must recognize not only the challenges that these students may encounter in the classroom for reasons beyond any supposed personal shortcomings, but also the contributions they can and do make to the classroom. Although more recent basic writing scholarship has demonstrated significant changes in terms of the ways in which we conceptualize basic writers and approach teaching them compared to the scholarship historically, the reality is that the perception of basic writers as “not belonging at the university” lingers in both academic and public discourse. For example, we can look to the NPR article, “Taking High School Courses in College Costs Students and Families Nearly $1.5 Billion,” published April 6, 2016, as an indicator of the attitude toward how out-of-place basic writing is in the academy. The article’s author, Kamenetz (2016), writes, “When is a college course not really a college course? When it's classified as ‘developmental,’ or, less euphemistically, ‘remedial.’ These courses cover material considered high-school level. . . .” As she states then, “developmental” or “remedial” courses are not “really” college courses, but rather seem to be masquerading as such. Thus, despite the strides that have been made to
change beliefs about basic writers and basic writing, it is clear there remains a need for more progress to be made.

Fundamental to such progress is continued discussion about how we define literacy and privilege certain forms of communication at the expense of ignoring or dismissing others. Within the context of the academy, and particularly the composition classroom, what is gained and what is lost by framing literacy narrowly in terms of the ability to read and write alphabetic texts following correct Standard English? Separating orality and literacy? Neglecting or denying what Elbow (2012) refers to as “vernacular eloquence”? Further, what messages do we send through not only our pedagogical practices, but also the very language we use to describe our students and our courses? Although the introduction of the phrase “basic writer” was an important turning point within the context of open admissions during the 1970s, as Carter (2008) has argued, the term is a misnomer; “no one really is” a basic writer (p. 151). If this is the case, and I agree with Carter that it is, then is the continued use of the term for reasons grounded in our evaluations of these students as actually “basic” in their reading and writing abilities, and/or is it motivated by other factors? I’m not persuaded that it is the former, and if it is, then I hope my analysis of the students’ writing demonstrates how problematic such an assessment can be.

Specifically, my analysis shows that the students who comprised my study sample integrated, successfully, many of the features that a reader would anticipate seeing in a literacy narrative and that not only did they integrate those features, but they did so in ways that lent complexity to their writing. The language “basic” suggests a more elementary level of reading and writing ability, yet the students who participated in my research composed stories of their literacy acquisition that demonstrated many of the techniques Rabinowitz
outlined in his set of rules. Yes, some of their writing demonstrated what many would consider a hallmark of basic writers’ writing—errors—but if we look beyond the appearance of errors to the ideas being communicated, arguably the students’ literacy narratives are not that dissimilar to literacy narratives written by non-basic writers. Furthermore, as indicated earlier when I described the characteristics of the students, in some ways they shared similarities with other students considered basic writers (particularly in terms of standardized test scores and high school GPA), but in others they did not. Basic writing scholarship has shifted away from facilitating the development of a model for “the” basic writer to instead situating basic writers within particular contexts, but can we really escape the suggestion of a uniform model for the basic writer as long as we retain the language “basic writer”? And again, what does “basic” even mean?

Particularly considering the implications for students labeled “basic writers” in terms of the stigma often attached to that title as well as the impacts on their educational experience (e.g., enrolling in/completing courses that bear no course credit, are considered high school courses, etc.), we should continue to reexamine both the terminology we use to refer to them as well as our practices for placing these students. The language “basic writer” no longer seems needed to fulfill the rhetorical function it once did during the peak of open admissions, and if that is the case, then can we shift away from its use? Simply changing the language we use to refer to “basic writers” and “basic writing” will not in itself create a sea change in beliefs about either, though certainly further examining how the language is bound up with assumptions about literacy and privilege is a necessary step in the right direction.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below is the list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interview I conducted with Erin. The questions are organized thematically.

Summer START Overview Questions:

1. Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I’d like to begin by discussing the Summer START program and your involvement with it. Could you give me an overall description of Summer START, including the goals of the program, as you understand it?
2. What, if anything, do you think makes the Summer START program unique compared to other programs designed to help students?
3. To your knowledge, why was English 100 chosen for this Summer START?
4. What do you hope students will learn as a result of being enrolled in your class and participating in Summer START?
5. As the instructor of one of the English 100 courses, which is “Introduction to Academic Writing,” you are teaching students identified as “basic writers.” Have you ever taught “basic writers” before?
6. *How long have you been teaching basic writing?
7. *Why did you decide to start teaching basic writing?
8. What writing classes did you teach before the Summer START English 100 course?
9. Why did you decide to teach those classes?
10. What made you decide to participate in the Summer START program?

Selection of Students Questions:

11. Thanks for describing Summer START and your role in the program to me. I’d like now to focus on your perceptions of the students you will be teaching and your strategies for teaching them. Why do you think the students enrolled in your class were selected for the Summer START program?
12. What information were you given regarding why the students you are teaching were selected for the program?
13. Who provided this information to you?
14. Have any of your students talked with you about their selection for the program? If so, what did they say?
15. Have any of the students asked you for additional information regarding why they were chosen to participate in the program? If so, what did you tell them?
16. *What challenges, if any, did you encounter as you decided how to explain their selection for the program and enrollment in your class?
Perceptions of Students Questions:

17. I’d like now to focus on your perceptions of the students. What were you expecting the students to be like before you met them? Why?
18. Are your impressions of them now different, and if so, how?
19. What led you to change your opinions of the students?
20. Based on your experience teaching the Summer START participants so far, how would you describe the students as readers and writers?
21. As I mentioned earlier, since you are teaching students enrolled in English 100 you are teaching students identified as “basic writers.” Based on your experiences teaching, what, if anything, distinguishes the students enrolled in your Summer START class from those you have taught in the past who were not considered basic writers?
22. What is your opinion of the term “basic writer”? For example, do you agree or disagree with the use of the term and why?
23. What other term(s), if any, would you propose instead of “basic writer” to describe the students you are teaching?
24. Why do you think those terms are more appropriate than “basic writer”?

Teaching Strategies Questions:

25. When designing a basic writing class, what do you think are the most important areas to focus on for instruction?
26. Why do you think those areas are the most important?
27. How do the areas you focus on for English 100 compare with the areas you focus on for English 101?
28. How has your experience designing the basic writing course for Summer START compared to your experience designing non-basic writing courses?
29. What challenges, if any, did you encounter while designing the English 100 course?
30. How did you respond to those challenges?
31. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate encountering as you continue teaching the students enrolled in your Summer START course?
32. Why do you anticipate those challenges?

Changes to the Program / Final Questions:

33. Thanks for all of the information you have shared with me so far. I would like to conclude the interview by inquiring into any changes you would make to the Summer START program as well as any other information you may want to share that I did not ask about. What changes, if any, would you make to the Summer START program? These changes may be to the program as a whole, your participation in it, etc.
34. Why would you make those changes?
35. Who else would you recommend I speak with?
36. Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me that I did not ask for earlier?
APPENDIX B: CLASS MATERIALS

Below are the descriptions for the diagnostic essay, literacy narrative assignment, and class planning exercises as they originally appeared, excepting their combination into one series of pages.

Diagnostic Essay Description:

Part I: In-Class Written Response: Definition

For your first assignment you will write a literacy narrative, and this in-class written response will help you to get started thinking about the way(s) you may want to define what literacy is. You have probably heard or seen the word “literacy” used at some point, perhaps in school, in a radio announcement, print ad, etc. I would like for you to think about the word “literacy” and write a definition or definitions for what you think it means. Remember that a good definition is succinct, doesn't include the word itself, and often provides an example of the word in use. Definitions of alternative meanings are also often included. Consider the example below, taken from Merriam Webster's online dictionary:

diverse (adj.)

1: differing from one another : unlike <people with diverse interests>

2: composed of distinct or unlike elements or qualities <a diverse population>

Part II: In-Class Written Response: Illustration / Stance

Choose one of the two prompts below and write a response. Your response should demonstrate your best writing under the circumstances. Concentrate more on clearly expressing and organizing your ideas and less on things like spelling and formatting.

Option 1

In order to illustrate literacy, describe one or two situations that require literacy, made-up or real. Treat your examples like they are support for your definition—you might write “_____ requires literacy because . . .” and then show how the skills and knowledge required by the situation fit your definition.

Option 2

Take a stance about literacy and come up with one or two examples to support that stance. This will look more like a traditional essay—you might say “Literacy today is different than
it used to be because . . .” or “literacy is important because,” and then go on with your examples for support.

**Literacy Narrative Assignment Description:**

**Overview:**

For this first writing assignment you will be asked to draw on class readings and discussions as well as your search of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) as you reflect on your personal experiences with literacy. You will prepare a literacy narrative describing in detail your development of a particular form of literacy (as you define it), and should refer to your notes from the planning exercises to help you. The purposes of this assignment are to:

- Encourage you to think about the ways literacy is talked about in different contexts (school, the workplace, etc.)
- Encourage you to think about how you personally define “literacy”
- Help you recognize the various literacies you have and the knowledge and abilities they require
- Help you to think about and trace your development of those literacies
- Encourage you to think about how your existing literacies can translate into your academic experience at ----
- Introduce you to the college-level writing process: invention, drafting, review, and revision
- Introduce you to the narrative form of writing
- Provide you with practice using MLA style (if appropriate)

**Process:**

We’ll begin this project with freewrites in class. As you move towards a working draft, look back at your notes from those exercises to see the kinds of literacies you identified and the associated knowledge and abilities you noted. Remember that you will submit your freewrites with this assignment, so hold on to them until you are to turn them in with the final draft of your literacy narrative.

**Instructions:**

This assignment will require you to prepare a 5-7 page literacy narrative describing in detail the experiences surrounding your development of a particular literacy. Remember that there is no “right” or “wrong” definition of literacy, so don’t worry about coming up with a “perfect” definition. You may choose to describe your development of any of the kinds of processes of understanding, interpreting, and/or creating text(s) that you identified in your freewrites, so you are not restricted to addressing any one “type.” Your audience for this assignment is your instructor.

Keep these questions in mind as you write:
• How old were you when the action(s) occurred? How will you distinguish between the “present you” who is reflecting and the “past you” who is acting?
• Where were you? Who helped you? What materials were used?
• How have you continued to build on the literacy over time? What have you learned since first developing the literacy? How did you learn this new information?
• What kinds of knowledge and abilities do you think the literacy requires? What makes you an expert?

Class Planning Exercises Descriptions:

Objectives:

• To make connections between the class readings/discussions and your personal experiences to decide what “literacy” means to you
• To consider the different kinds of literacies the various roles you have require
• To identify relationships between/among the literacies required by your various roles

Exercise #1 Instructions:

As you have learned from our class readings and discussions, people define “literacy” in a number of ways. For your first assignment you will be asked to think about how you define literacy and the kinds of literacies you have in relation to your various academic, personal, social, and/or professional roles (and any others you can think of!). To help you get started brainstorming for the first assignment, I would like for you to begin thinking about the different kinds of ways by which you identify yourself and to prepare a list based on what you come up with. My list, for example, would look something like the following (“short” version):

• English teacher
• Ph.D. student
• Researcher
• Animal shelter volunteer
• Resident of State X
• Resident of City X
• Wife
• Daughter
• Sister
• Friend
• Mystery literature fan
• Crime television shows aficionado
• Indie music fan
• Bargain hunter
• Health-conscious dieter
• Crochet-er
Take approximately 20 minutes to develop as comprehensive a list as you can (you can come back to your list later to add items). When you are finished we will discuss as a class some of the items you included in your list. You may decide to add to your list as we put together a “class list” on the board if you hear/see an item (or items) you feel pertains to you as well.

When you have completed your list and we have finished talking about some of the class’s items together, I want you to start thinking about the categories to which you would assign each item in your list. You can use the categories of “School,” “Personal,” “Social,” and “Professional,” for example, or you may choose to create categories of your own. In some cases you may find items could fit in more than one category, which is okay! Make a decision, though, about which category you think fits better/best, and add the item to that category (you can make changes later if you want). Take approximately 10-15 minutes to sort your items into categories. Once you are finished we will discuss any of the categories the class came up with as well as problems you encountered when sorting the items. Afterward, please make sure you hold on to your list and bring it to the next class meeting.

Exercise #2 Instructions:

Today we will use the lists you developed during our last class meeting to help us think about literacy, how we define it and how it develops in relation to the various roles we maintain. Let’s get started by looking at your lists. At this point you have compiled at least a fairly comprehensive list of your roles and divided those roles according to certain categories. Now, I want you to think about what you have learned so far in terms of the ways people define “literacy.” Are there definitions you have come across that you like or dislike? Why do you like or dislike those definitions? How would you define “literacy”? Take approximately 15-20 minutes to think about these questions and jot down some responses to them. When you are finished we will discuss your answers as a class.

Now that you have thought about the different ways “literacy” is defined and your own understanding of what literacy is, I want you to think about the different kinds of literacies that each of the roles you included in your list requires. Take approximately 30-40 minutes to brainstorm the literacies associated with the items in your list and write notes about those literacies to help you keep track of what literacies you are identifying with each item. When you are finished please make sure that you hold on to all of your notes and bring them with you to our next class meeting.

Exercise #3 Instructions:

During our last class meeting you further developed your original list of roles you maintain to include the literacies you associate with each of those roles. Today we will be building on that list again by considering the relationships among the different kinds of literacies—where you see possible overlaps and where you see none. Take approximately 15-20 minutes to review your list and jot down notes about which literacies you see as related.
and which you do not. As you look at your list and identify literacies that are related and/or those that are not, think about why some literacies may seem related and others may not. When you are finished we will come together as a class to discuss patterns you noticed and points of dissimilarity among the different kinds of literacies.
APPENDIX C: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Below is the list of questions included in the SurveyMonkey student questionnaire.

1. What is your name? ________________________________

2. What is your age? ________________________________

3. Where were you born (city and state)? _______________________________

4. Please mark the appropriate box below to indicate your race:
   □ White
   □ Black / African American
   □ American Indian / Alaska Native
   □ Asian
   □ Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander
   □ Hispanic / Latino
   □ Other ________________________________
   □ Prefer not to answer

5. Please mark the appropriate box below to indicate the highest level of education of your mother:
   □ Middle School
   □ High School
   □ Two-year College
   □ Four-year College
   □ Graduate School
   □ Prefer not to answer

6. Please mark the appropriate box below to indicate the highest level of education of your father:
   □ Middle School
☐ High School
☐ Two-Year College
☐ Four-Year College
☐ Graduate School
☐ Prefer not to answer

7. Why do you think you were chosen to participate in the Summer START program?

8. What do you hope to learn from this class?
APPENDIX D: STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below is the list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interviews I conducted with students. The questions are organized thematically.

Summer START Selection Questions:

1. Thank you for agreeing to let me interview you. I’d like to begin by asking some questions about your participation in the Summer START program. In the questionnaire you completed the first day of class you indicated you thought you were selected for the program because of . . . Could you elaborate on why you thought you were chosen for Summer START?
2. What information was provided to you regarding your selection for the program?
3. What additional information, if any, did you and/or your parents/guardians seek regarding your selection for Summer START?
4. How, if at all, did your selection for the program affect your perceptions about your preparedness for college?
5. What expectations did you have for your English 100 class before entering it? Why?
6. In your questionnaire you indicated that you hoped to learn . . . from your English 100 class. Do you think that the class is helping you to improve in those areas?
7. How would you describe yourself as a reader/writer before entering the class? Now?
8. How do you think your teacher would describe you as a reader/writer?
9. Why do you think she would describe you that way?

Family and Family Literacy Questions:

10. I’d like now to talk about your family and its reading and writing practices. Who are your immediate family members and what are their ages?
11. How would you describe your role in the family?
12. How did your parents/guardians talk about reading and writing when you were growing up?
13. Did you think that your family valued reading and/or writing when you were growing up? What made you think that your family did or did not value reading and/or writing?
14. What stories, if any, do you remember your parents/guardians telling about their own reading and writing when you were growing up?
15. What effects, if any, do you think those stories had on your perceptions about reading and writing?
16. Could you tell me what kinds of reading and writing activities you participated in when you were growing up?
17. What effects, if any, do you think those activities had on your perceptions about reading and writing?
Childhood/Adolescence Experiences with Reading/Writing Questions:

18. Thanks for telling me about your family and its reading and writing practices when you were growing up. I’d like to change topics somewhat now to focus specifically on your reading and writing during your childhood and adolescence. When and how did you first learn to read and write?
19. What do you remember reading and writing when you were growing up?
20. Did you enjoy reading and writing? Why or why not?
21. I’d like for you to think back to your most positive experience with reading and/or writing when you were growing up. Can you describe that experience for me?
22. What effects, if any, do you think that experience had on your attitude toward reading and/or writing?
23. I’d like you now to think back to your most negative experience with reading and/or writing when you were growing up. Can you describe that experience for me?
24. What effects, if any, do you think that experience had on your attitude toward reading and/or writing?

Current Reading/Writing Experiences Questions:

25. Let’s change topics now to talk about your more recent experiences with reading and writing. How often did you read and write when you were in high school? Now that you are in college?
26. How often did you read and write for personal enjoyment when in high school? Now that you are in college?
27. Do you enjoy reading and writing? Why or why not?
28. What kinds of material do you enjoy reading?
29. What kinds of writing do you enjoy doing?
30. How do you think your teachers in high school would have described you as a reader and a writer?
31. Why do you think your teachers would have described you that way?
32. Do you think your experiences with reading and writing in high school prepared you for the transition to college-level reading and/or writing? Why or why not?
33. What do you remember your high school teachers telling you about how college would be in terms of reading and writing?
34. What was your reaction to what the teachers told you?
35. How do you think your experiences with reading and writing in high school affected your attitude toward reading and writing, if they did?

Literacy Narrative Questions:

36. Before we conclude the interview, I want to ask you some questions about your literacy narrative. I noticed that you chose to focus on . . . for the assignment. Could you tell me why you chose that literacy to describe?
37. What do you think makes the literacy you described a literacy?
38. Could you tell me what your greatest challenges were to developing the literacy you addressed in the narrative?
39. How did you overcome those challenges?
40. What were your greatest challenges while writing the narrative?
41. How did you overcome them?
42. What impression of yourself as a reader/writer/etc. were you trying to create with your narrative?
43. Do you think you were successful at creating that impression? Why or why not?
44. Is there additional information pertaining to the literacy you described in your narrative that you would like to share?
45. In the class freewrite exercises you wrote down multiple literacies that you demonstrate. Could you tell me about some of the literacies that are most important to you? Why are they most important to you?
46. Were there other literacies you considered discussing that were not in your planning exercises or the narrative? What were they?
47. Why did you choose not to discuss the other literacies you noted in your freewrites and just mentioned to me?
48. You have read some material for class and participated in class discussions about literacy that have helped you learn about the different ways literacy is defined in various contexts. Could you tell me how you define “literacy”?
49. How did that definition shift, if at all, as you read/learned about literacy?
50. What words do you associate with the term “literacy”? Why did you choose those words?
51. What literacies do you think are necessary to succeed?
52. Why do you think those literacies are important?
53. What do you think are the greatest challenges to developing those literacies that people face today?

Interview Wrap-Up Question:

54. Thank you for all of the information you have shared with me so far. We are now at the conclusion of the interview, and I have just one question left. Is there any information you want to share with me that I did not ask for earlier?
APPENDIX E: SUMMER START COORDINATORS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below is the list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interviews I conducted with Summer START program coordinators, excluding the Director of the Undergraduate Tutorial Center whose interview questions are listed in the appendix immediately following. The questions are organized thematically.

Summer START Overview Questions:

1. Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I’d like to begin by discussing the Summer START program and your involvement in it. Could you give me an overall description of Summer START, including the goals of the program, as you understand it?
2. What is your official position in the program and what responsibilities does that position entail?
3. How long have you been involved in Summer START?
4. Why did you decide to join the program?
5. How did the Summer START program get started?
6. What, if anything, do you think makes the Summer START program unique compared to other programs designed to help students?
7. Could you tell me why the two courses, English 100 and Sociology 202, were chosen for this Summer START?
8. What do you hope students will learn from these courses and their participation in Summer START?

Selection and Notification Process Questions:

9. Thanks for describing Summer START and your role in the program to me. I’d like now to focus on how students are selected for the program and notified of their selection. Could you tell me what is involved in the selection process for students who are invited to participate in Summer START?
10. How many students were considered for Summer START this summer session?
11. How would you describe the students who were chosen to participate?
12. What makes those students stand out compared to the other students who were considered for the program?
13. Were there disagreements regarding which students to select for the program? If so, could you tell me about them?
14. *Why do you think those disagreements occurred?
15. The title of the English 100 class at --- is “Introduction to Academic Writing,” and as a precursor to English 101 the class targets those students who would be identified as “basic writers.” How would you describe the students chosen to participate in the program in terms of their writing and reading abilities?
16. What information do you use to assess the students’ writing and reading abilities?
17. Now I’d like to talk about how students are informed of their selection. Could you tell me how students who have been chosen to participate in Summer START are notified of their selection?
18. *Who is responsible for preparing the notification materials? Distributing them?
19. *Could I receive copies of those materials?
20. What processes are involved in preparing the notification materials? For example, how do you determine what language to use to describe the students and why they have been selected to participate?
21. Could you tell me what students are told regarding why they have been selected for the program?
22. Were there disagreements regarding how to inform students of their selection, for example, what language to use to describe the program and/or why students were chosen? If so, could you tell me about those disagreements?
23. *Why do you think those disagreements occurred?
24. I’d like to switch topics slightly to ask about students and/or their parents’/guardians’ reactions to the students’ selections for the program. Do students and/or their parents/guardians ever contact you for further information regarding why the students were chosen for Summer START? If so, what additional information do you provide them?
25. Did students who were selected choose not to participate?
26. What reasons did those students and/or their parents/guardians provide for choosing not to participate in the program?
27. If a student and/or parent/guardian informed you the student will not be participating in the program, how did you respond?

Changes to the Program / Final Questions:

28. Thanks for all of the information you have shared with me so far. I would like now to conclude the interview by inquiring into any changes you would make to the program as well as any other information you may want to share that I did not ask for. What changes, if any, would you make to the Summer START program?
29. Why would you make those changes?
30. Who else would you recommend I speak with?
31. Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me that I did not ask for earlier?
APPENDIX F: DIRECTOR OF THE UNDERGRADUATE TUTORIAL CENTER

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below is the list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interview I conducted with the Director of the Undergraduate Tutorial Center. The questions are organized thematically.

Summer START Overview Questions:

1. Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I’d like to begin by discussing the Summer START program and your involvement in it. Could you give me an overall description of Summer START, including the goals of the program, as you understand it?
2. What is your official position in the program and what responsibilities does that position entail?
3. How long have you been involved in Summer START?
4. Why did you decide to join the program?
5. How did the Summer START program get started?
6. What, if anything, do you think makes the Summer START program unique compared to other programs designed to help students?
7. How long have you been the Director of the Undergraduate Tutorial Center?
8. Why did you decide to take on that role?

Tutoring Questions:

9. Thanks for describing Summer START and your role in the program to me. I’d like now to focus on how you determined and responded to the tutoring needs of the students. Could you tell me what decisions needed to be made about tutoring for Summer START? This includes logistical, ethical, and other kinds of decisions.
10. How were those decisions made?
11. Were there disagreements regarding any of the decisions? If so, what were they?
12. How were the disagreements resolved?
13. Were there any challenges that arose prior to the beginning of Summer START and/or during the program? If so, what were those challenges?
14. How did you respond to those challenges?
15. Were there any special tutoring needs you thought needed to be addressed for the Summer START students compared to other students who receive tutoring here? If so, what were those needs?
16. How did you determine those needs?
17. How did you respond to those needs?
18. How many tutors were there?
19. Could you tell me how the tutors were selected?
20. What were the tutors told regarding the Summer START students?
21. How were decisions made about what to tell the tutors regarding the students?  
22. Were there disagreements regarding what to tell the tutors about the students? If so, what were those disagreements?  
23. *How were the disagreements resolved?  
24. What training did the tutors have to prepare them for Summer START?  
25. How does that training compare to the usual training for tutors?  
26. How did tutoring for Summer START compare overall to usual tutoring here?  
27. Could you tell me how tutoring sessions were run?  
28. Who determined what to focus on during tutoring sessions?  
29. The title of the English 100 class at --- is “Introduction to Academic Writing,” and as a precursor to English 101 the class targets those students who would be identified as “basic writers.” How would you describe the students chosen to participate in the program in terms of their writing and reading abilities?  
30. What information did you use to assess the students’ writing and reading abilities?  

Changes to the Program / Final Questions:  

31. Thanks for all of the information you have shared with me so far. I would like now to conclude the interview by inquiring into any changes you would make to the program as well as any other information you may want to share that I did not ask for. What changes, if any, would you make to the Summer START program? Both in terms of the program as a whole and for your part in it, if you can speak to both.  
32. Why would you make those changes?  
33. Who else would you recommend I speak with?  
34. Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me that I did not ask for earlier?
APPENDIX G: SUMMER START TUTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below is the list of scripted questions I used for the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the Summer START tutors. The questions are organized thematically.

Summer START Overview Questions:

1. Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I’d like to begin by discussing the Summer START program and your involvement with it. Could you give me an overall description of Summer START, including the goals of the program, as you understand it?

2. What, if anything, do you think makes the Summer START program unique compared to other programs designed to help students?

3. As a tutor for the Transition Program students and student athletes, you assisted students enrolled in the English 100 course, which at our institution would be considered “basic writing.” Have you ever worked with basic writers before?

4. *If so, could you tell me what were the circumstances surrounding your prior work with basic writers?

5. *What were the measures used to determine which students were basic writers at that institution/those institutions?

6. Prior to Summer START had you tutored before?

7. *If so, for what subjects did you tutor?

8. *Did you have experience tutoring students considered “at risk” prior to Summer START?

9. *If so, what were the circumstances surrounding that tutoring experience or those tutoring experiences?

10. Prior to Summer START had you taught before?

11. *If so, could you describe your teaching experience for me?

12. *Did you have experience teaching students considered “at risk” prior to Summer START?

13. To your knowledge, why was English 100 chosen for this Summer START?

14. Why did you decide to participate in the Summer START program?

15. What is your opinion of the Summer START program?

16. Did your opinion of the program change at all from before you began participating in it until completing it?

Selection of Students Questions:

17. Thanks for describing Summer START, your role in the program, your prior tutoring and teaching experiences, and your opinion of the program to me. I’d like now to focus on your perceptions of the students you were working with and your strategies for tutoring them. Why do you think the students participating in the Summer START program with whom you were working were selected?

18. What information were you given regarding why the students you were working with were selected for the program?
19. Who provided this information to you?
20. Did any of the students you worked with talk with you about their selection for the program? If so, what did they say?
21. Did any of the students you worked with ask you for additional information regarding why they were chosen to participate in the program? If so, what did you tell them?
22. *What challenges, if any, did you encounter as you decided how to explain their selection for the program to them?

Perceptions of Students Questions:

23. I’d like now to focus on your perceptions of the students. What were you expecting the students to be like before you met them? Why?
24. What were your opinions of the students when you first met them? Why?
25. Did your opinions of the students change during the course of the program? If so, how?
26. What led you to change your opinions of the students?
27. As I mentioned earlier, since you were tutoring students enrolled in English 100 you were tutoring students identified as “basic writers.” Based on your experiences tutoring, what, if anything, made the students you worked with basic writers?
28. Based on your experience tutoring Transition Program students and student athletes in Summer START, how would you describe the students as readers and writers?
29. What is your opinion of the term “basic writer”? For example, do you agree or disagree with the use of the term and why?
30. What other term(s), if any, would you propose instead of “basic writer” to describe the students you are teaching?
31. Why do you think those terms are more appropriate than “basic writer”?

Tutoring Training and Strategies Questions:

32. Thank you for sharing with me your perceptions of the students with whom you worked for Summer START. Now I’d like to focus on your training and tutoring strategies for the program. Could you tell me what was involved in your training to tutor for Summer START?
33. Following the completion of your training did you feel prepared to tutor? Why or why not?
34. What parts of the training did you find most useful, if any, once you began tutoring the students and throughout the duration of Summer START? Why were those parts of the training most useful?
35. What parts of the training did you find least useful, if any, once you began tutoring the students and throughout the duration of Summer START? Why were those parts of the training least useful?
36. What were your most significant concerns about tutoring for Summer START? Why did you have those concerns?
37. What expectations, if any, did you have for what tutoring in Summer START would be like? Why did you have those expectations?
38. What was it like working with the Transition Program students and student athletes?
39. What were the greatest challenges you encountered while tutoring, if any? How did you respond to those challenges?
40. What did you find to be the greatest tutoring needs of the students with whom you worked?
41. Were you surprised by those needs? Why or why not? How did you decide the most effective ways of responding to those needs?
42. Could you tell me how decisions were made regarding what to focus on in tutoring?
43. Did you agree with those decisions? Why or why not?
44. Were there any challenges in particular that arose while the students were working on the literacy narrative assignment? How did you respond to those challenges?
45. What were the responses of the students with whom you were working toward the literacy narrative assignment? Why do you think they reacted to the assignment that way?

Changes to the Program / Final Questions:

50. Thanks for all of the information you have shared with me so far. I would like to conclude the interview by inquiring into any changes you would make to the Summer START program as well as any other information you may want to share that I did not ask about. What changes, if any, would you make to the Summer START program? These changes may be to the program as a whole, your participation in it, etc.?
51. Why would you make those changes?
52. Who else would you recommend I speak with?
53. Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me that I did not ask for earlier?
APPENDIX H: OVERVIEW OF RABINOWITZ’S RULES

Below is an overview explaining Rabinowitz’s (1987) rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence.

Rules of notice: Not all details are as important as others, so rules of notice “tell us where to concentrate our attention” (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 53). Rules of notice provide “a basic structure on which to build an interpretation (p. 53), and include:

1. Basic indicators – These features include explicit direction/instruction to the reader (“Remember this”); repetition; semantics (e.g., words such as “suddenly” or unexpected profanity); syntax (e.g., “It was after an August afternoon” instead of “After an August afternoon”, p. 55); modeling of an action expected of the reader (e.g., a character re-reading a note the reader should also pay close attention to); figurative language; and typography (e.g., bolding, italics, etc.).

2. Privileged positions – These features include “[t]itles, beginnings and endings (not only of whole texts, but of subsections as well—volumes, chapters, episodes), epigraphs, and descriptive subtitles” (p. 58); features in plot structures such as threats, warnings, and promises; “details at climactic moments” such as “peripeties, discoveries, revelations, recognitions” (p. 64); characters whose actions significantly affect plot; events affecting major characters’ relationships/interactions with others; events/occurrences that resolve major plot questions; and features representative of genres (e.g., “the meeting around the fireside at the end of a detective story” (p. 65).

3. Rupture – This refers to disruption in the continuity of the writing and “[deviation] from extratextual norms” (p. 65), such as silences/pauses in character dialogue, irrelevance, inappropriateness (e.g., character behavior), plot changes, style changes, and references “(parodies, quotations, allusions)” (p. 74) in relation to certain genres.

Reviewed on pages 47-75

Rules of signification: Once the reader’s attention has been called to certain features of the text through rules of notice, the rules of signification then enable him/her “to recast or symbolize or draw the significance from” (p. 44) those features. The rules of signification include:

1. Source – These features help us distinguish among author, narrator, and character, and include shifts in voice, point of view, linguistic style, tense, perspective (e.g, changing “from a general perspective to the limited perspective of one of the characters” (p. 82)) and knowledge (e.g., providing information a character could not know, signaling the narrator as source).

2. Morality – These features help us explore characters’ ethics/values, and include descriptions of physical appearance (which “can be assumed to stand metaphorically for inner quality” (p. 86)), voice/sound, and chaining. Chaining occurs when the “presence of one moral quality is linked to the presence of another that lies more or
less contiguous to it” (p. 89), “we trust the friends of our friends and the enemies of our enemies” (p. 90) based on association, we “assume that one moral failing naturally accompanies another” (p. 91), and we use allusions “to transfer judgments when characters are explicitly or implicitly compared to characters in a previous, familiar text” (p. 92). We also determine morality through characters’ abilities to judge others based on their appearances as well as through characters’ “aesthetic views” so that “people with the correct aesthetic views are also morally correct, while those with aesthetic failings have moral failings as well” (p. 92).

3. Truth and realism – These features help us assess truth and the relationship between the narrative and reality. They rely on our identification and understanding of the narrative audience, “a role which the text forces the reader to take on” (p. 95). In order to understand who the narrative audience is, we can ask the question, “What sort of reader would I have to pretend to be—what would I have to know and believe—if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?” (p. 96). Although there are distinctions between the narrative audience and authorial audience (the audience to whom the author is writing and about whom he/she has made assumptions, conscious and/or subconscious), the two must share some beliefs in common in order for the former to be able to make sense of the narrative.

4. Causation – These features help us “to determine the future course” (p. 104) of a narrative as well as “why things are the way they are, or why characters act as they do” (pp. 104-105) through the relationship between cause and effect and effect and cause, respectively. The authorial audience “generally assumes that the kinds of causal connections assumed to hold in the world around it will apply” in the narrative, but the author can also use “maxims and other kinds of general statements” (p. 105) to guide the audience. The author can also rely on what Rabinowitz (1987) refers to as temporal causation, which allows us “to assume that temporally connected events are causally connected unless there is a signal to the contrary, and that the information necessary to determine the causal chain is available either in the authorial audience’s prior knowledge or in the text itself” (p. 108).

Reviewed on pages 76-109

Rules of configuration: Certain literary features often appear together, and because we are accustomed to these “groupings, we know how to assemble disparate elements in order to make patterns emerge” (p. 44). This then enables us to “both develop expectations and experience a sense of completion” (p. 44). As Rabinowitz (1987) noted, “a rule of configuration can be just as important to the reading experience when the outcomes it predicts turn out not to take place as when they do” (p. 111). The rules of configuration include:

1. Basic rules – The author or narrator may offer (fairly) explicit signals, such as epigraphs as well as “prophetic titles, inverted chronologies, mythic patterns, or simply straightforward descriptions of what is to come” (p. 114). In addition, Rabinowitz identifies two metarules that state 1) “it is appropriate to expect that something will happen” and 2) “it is appropriate to expect that not anything can
happen” (p. 117). Regarding the first, we can anticipate that the ending situation will not be the same as the beginning situation, or that if it is, there will have been “some movement of departure and return” (p. 117). Regarding the second, the reader “can experience a text as meaningful literature only if we assume, even before we pick it up, that it will be patterned in some more or less recognizable way” (p. 118); thus, there is a limit to the possibilities of what will occur in the text.

2. **Undermining** – These rules work in conjunction with the two metarules outlined in the “basic rules” above, particularly the first, and pertain to the ability of the reader to “expect situations of inertia to be upset” (p. 119). There are conditions that affect the probability of change, including: 1) “the reliability of the person claiming [a state of affairs] to be permanent” (p. 119); 2) “[t]he content of a claim affects our judgment about the likelihood of its reversal” (p. 120); and 3) “whether the initial situation or the predicted future is positive or negative” (p. 120). The last condition “depends heavily on the novel’s period and intended audience” (p. 120).

   In addition, “novels are more likely to move from the familiar to the unfamiliar (although perhaps back again at the end) than vice versa,” and “[w]hen a character states with assurance that which he or she has no good reason to believe to be the case, we can expect that he or she will turn out to be wrong, especially if the claim is important for the outcome of the plot” (p. 121).

   Another rule of undermining pertains to the time period in which the text is set and states that “[i]f a story begins at a specified moment right before a generally known upheaval . . . we are probably being asked to read with the expectation that that upheaval will influence the course of the novel” (p. 123).

3. **Balance** – These rules work in conjunction with the second metarule of the “basic rules” previously outlined and “can occur along several axes” (p. 126). Rules of balance are broken down further into emphases of focus and action.

   For those rules pertaining to focus, Rabinowitz (1987) explains they “are not prescriptions for producing well-made texts, but authors can use the knowledge that readers will apply them in order to shape readers’ experience” (p. 126). These rules then “restrict the world that a novel will inhabit” (p. 132). For example, the text may return to the perspective it opened with to “create a sense of closure” (p. 126). In addition, focus on characters can help the reader develop expectations for a text, such as that novels “may have several main characters, [but] they rarely center on one of them for a long period of time at the beginning and then switch, without preparation, to another—unless the change in focus is intended as an aesthetically significant jolt” (p. 129).

   Warnings/notice can be used to help the reader anticipate what will happen, but as Rabinowitz notes, “[w]hen such warnings are not given, disruptions of focus more often than not are used to startle us” (p. 129). Finally, just as readers can often tell early in a text “who will be the main characters, so we have ways to tell what a novel
is likely to be about” (p. 131). Titles can help us establish the subject matter, “but
more usually, the text itself counts on shared conventions to inform us about what its
primary subject(s) will be” (p. 131).
For those rules pertaining to action, they “inform us about the events that will take
place in the book to come” (p. 132). For example, we can expect “repetitions will be
continued until they are in some way blocked” (p. 132). In addition, “readers can
usually start with the presumption that diverse strands of action will in some way be
linked” (p. 132); thus, we can expect parallels.

Another rule is that we can “expect literary events to come in patterns of antecedent
and consequent” (p. 133). For example, “when one shoe drops, you should expect the
other” (p. 133). Similarly, “it is generally appropriate to assume that events will
produce results—that noticeable events that will not have consequences have
probably been left out, unless they are included for their signification value, are
inherently amusing, or are intentional red herrings” (p. 133). This rule can also “be
invoked and not fulfilled in order to surprise” (p. 133), however.

We can also expect relationships to follow the antecedent and consequent pattern;
typically “we expect that strong attractions and dissonances between major characters
in novels will have consequences; the more notice that such attractions and
dissonances are given, the stronger our expectations will be” (p. 134). In addition,
what characters say can demonstrate the pattern. We can typically expect “that
warnings and promises will be followed up” (p. 135). However, if a minor character
offers this information we do not assign it equal weight compared to if a major
color does. Further, “those that promise events that will be significant for the
plot—as we suspect it will turn out at the time the promise is made—are more
forceful than those which promise something tangential” (p. 135).

Maxims function similarly to warnings and promises, and “[t]hose that are given
prominence in a novel—especially when they come toward the beginning—create the
expectation that they will be followed up” (p. 136). Readers can also typically
“expect important questions to be answered and major tasks to be confronted,
although (at least in nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels) failure to fulfill the task
is more common than failure to answer questions” (p. 137). Finally, “[a]ntecedents
and consequents can work in reverse, as well. If a strange event is narrated, it is
normally a signal for the narrative audience to look forward to an explanation of its
causes” (p. 138).

Rules of coherence: As the audience “we should read a text in such a way that it becomes
the best text possible” (p. 45), and, thus, we make sense of deviations that in other speech
situations would likely not be interpreted as intentional. These rules “presuppose that a work
is not apparently coherent—that there are some surface incoherences that need to be
explained in some way, or at least made the subject of our critical discourse” (p. 145).
Rabinowitz (1987) explains “the fundamental rule of coherence is parallel to the second
metarule of configuration: We assume, to begin with, that the work is coherent and that apparent flaws in its construction are intentional and meaning bearing” (p. 147). There are three sets of rules of coherence that pertain to texts being “insufficient,” “overabundant,” and “simply disparate” (p. 148).

1. **License to fill** – Because no text can “tell us everything that the characters do or think” (p. 149), we must find ways to fill the gaps to create a coherent text from start to finish. One way we do this is “we assume, unless we are given reason to believe otherwise, that events in the blank spots continue along the same path as the events preceding them” (p. 151). In addition, “narrative gaps can be filled through reliance on the authorial audience’s assumptions about the way things are” (p. 151). We can use our understanding of cause and effect to help us fill in gaps, for example, since “unless signaled otherwise, we assume that gaps contain those events that are most likely to produce the effects that we see in the events that are explicitly narrated” (p. 152).

2. **Surplus** – Sometimes a text provides us with more information than seems necessary, but rather than read this extra information as an authorial error, we tend to try to make sense of it as part of the narrative, and, thus, it is “no longer excessive” (p. 154). For example, “when notice is given to apparently irrelevant textual features—features that do not contribute to plot or characterization, for instance, or that do not serve some immediate function, like the provision of verisimilitude or local color—then they are to be treated as figurative” (p. 154).

In cases where the surplus information is contradictory, “[t]he most general rule . . . is ‘trust the last’ (p. 155). For example, if we are given several versions of an event, “we are generally to accept the final version, rather than one in the middle, as the ‘correct’ one” (p. 155). The trust-the-last approach is connected to genre, however, so that it does not apply in all cases. It also is connected to rhetorical context. For example, “when the contradiction comes in the spoken words of a character—as opposed to his or her thoughts, or the statements of a reliable narrator—the circumstances in which the words are spoken also put pressure on whether we are to apply the rule of trust the last” (p. 156).

3. **Naming, bundling, and thematizing** – These rules pertain to tying up the text “to treat it conveniently as a whole” (p. 158). Naming and classifying works enable us to achieve this effect, such as “by appropriating [texts] to particular generic categories, by elucidating their central theme, or by finding their governing metaphoric or mythic structure” (p. 158). Rabinowitz (1987) claims that “if a reasonable number of textual features unite [a text] with another known textual pattern, then that pattern can legitimately be treated as an appropriate ‘name’ for the artifact in question” (p. 159).

Regarding bundling, this can occur “through the use of parallelisms. It is generally assumed, for instance, that parallels along one axis imply parallels along another” (p. 159). Typically we can “assume that any elements—characters, plot lines, settings—that can be treated as parallel should be treated in that way” (p. 159).
Another bundling feature pertains to the conclusion of a text. Specifically, the conclusion “is not only to be noticed; there is also a widely applicable interpretive convention that permits us to read it in a special way, as a conclusion, as a summing up of the work’s meaning” (p. 160). According to Rabinowitz, “readers assume that authors put their best thoughts last, and thus assign a special value to the final pages of a text” (p. 160). In some cases the reader may need “to reinterpret the work so that the ending in fact serves as an appropriate conclusion” (p. 161).

In those cases where a conventional ending is undermined, it “is to be read at least in part as a critique of that convention” (p. 163). When endings are left open, the “lack of closure does not mean lack of conclusion” but instead “the authorial audience will take these open endings and assume that open-ness itself is part of the point of the conclusion” (p. 166). In other cases the ending’s conclusion may be followed “in such an ostentatious way that it looks absurd” (p. 167), thus undermining it and leading the reader to try to find a way to make it coherent.

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APPENDIX I: R.’S UNTITLED NARRATIVE

Below is R.’s literacy narrative.

[No title was included]

Literacy is considered as the ability of reading and writing. I am football literate because I am able to comprehend its well developed language. My football position is an offensive lineman. In order to effectively play my position, you have to be a massive individual and be quick on your feet. Earlier in life, I also played basketball competitively. Considering my height of 6’8” and my weight of 315 pounds, basketball helped the quickness of my feet and it also helped my awareness. I always felt assured that I would have a future in football or basketball because I have been bigger all my life and I have always worked just as hard if not harder than everyone else.

In the midst of my sports career, I moved in with a family that I had known for about a year or two before moving in with them. [Names omitted] were my legal guardians as my career in football began. I had been acquainted with this family since I was eleven years old because I played basketball with their son on a travel AAU basketball team. I was fourteen when I moved into the [name omitted] home. The reason for me staying there was to escape the surrounding environment in which I lived in with my mom. Also, moving in with the [name omitted] family would give me an opportunity to make something out of myself and become successful in life. Taking the step of joining in with this family was the best decision I have ever made in my life. I have come so far from where I was six years ago. [Male guardian’s name omitted] gave me the key concepts that every athlete needs in order to become successful in today’s sports world and sports industry, which are integrity, determination, and pride.
Football can be related to becoming literate in a few ways. One way that literacy can relate to football is reading a playbook. One may think that football does not take much literacy to perform, but in reality, being literate is one of the key things in order to play football. Without knowing how to apprehend the plays and learn the terminology of football how can one play the game of football? In my position, terminology such as “kick step”, which means stay low and kick back as you block the DE (defensive end) from sacking the quarter back or tackling the ball carrier is used. My position is significant because I play on the left side of the line, which is the back side of most quarter backs because they are right handed. My job is to make sure he doesn’t get hit by the DE on his back side. One year I played with a left handed quarterback so I had to switch to the right side of the line and learn a different “kick step” and slide so I could protect my quarter back.

The game of football has impacted me in numerous ways. All of the hard work was paying off learning the concepts and specific vocabulary. I constantly woke up early and practiced keeping my foot work well by working on the ladder. A ladder is an agility drill that is also considered to be another literate “football word”. It is helpful in assisting as you work on your foot performance. Most of the time the ladder is really small so you have to move quick so that your feet won’t get caught in the ladder and so you can get quicker as you use it. Pulling the sled also helped me because I had to stay low and pull a ladder with 145 ponds on it and if you didn’t stay low it wasn’t budding. That helped me against the shorter, quicker, defensive end.

Due to my hard work and success I now have a free opportunity to get a college education and also to play football at the collegiate level. I am a freshman and have a really good chance at receiving playing time this year. As I stated earlier, it is because of my
footing skills and body size. Not only that but also my work ethic in the classroom. Without putting forth effort in the classroom there will be no chance to play in any sport, no matter what team you may be playing on.

Football has given me a schedule in which is very time consuming and keeps me busy. So because of the busy schedule, it prevents me from getting into any trouble like most athletes that have a lot of time on their hands. Also, in order to play sports on a high school level and collegiate level, it is most important for me to keep my grades up in order to play football. My guardians have always stressed good grades because every body’s parents are not fortunate to have enough money to pay for four years of college. So playing football has given me that opportunity to keep my grades up at a reasonable level.

I can remember growing up as a child and how fun football was. My mom would wake me up with a warm breakfast every Saturday morning and turn the television on as I sat at the living room coffee table eating my eggs and bacon as I watched cartoons. We would then leave the house and I remember driving through the fog that was on the street. At this time, I believed that football was the greatest game that any child could play. There really was not any love for the game of football, but more so a lust for having fun. Another reason I started playing is because I was so big and I couldn’t play many other sports because of my size. I was too big to play soccer, hockey wasn’t offered in my home town [city and state omitted] which I was probably to big for anyway. I played a little bit of basketball but I started to get even bigger so the last option was to play football and it was one of the best decisions I ever made besides deciding to turn my life around while leaving with the [legal guardians’ family name omitted].
As the years grew football became more competitive. While in the eighth grade, everyone played football. My team was an awesome team. We didn’t lose a game that year and it felt great winning and seeing my teammates happy. Seeing my coach hold up our trophy was an exciting feeling. When my coach let me hold the trophy I had a “kool-aid” smile, which is what we can today a smile from ear to ear.

Football was something that all parents made their family do in [city omitted]. It was more like a family event. I on the other hand, there was no question that I was going to play. My teammates used to ask me “[nickname omitted] are you going to play?” My answer was “hell yeah”, there was nothing else that really sparked my interest. Football was one of the only things that held my interest. It gave me the feeling to want to pursue a career in football. The feeling of motivation was one thing. An example of this would be that I was really big into listening to music before games. My hype song was “Who let the dogs out” by Baha Men when I was nine years old. Another feeling that it gave me was the feeling of invincibility. In the eighth grade, being that I was two times bigger than everyone, I felt as if I could do anything on the football field. Last, at this age football was one of the only things that I actually enjoyed doing. Growing up I didn’t actually have fun playing video games or playing with toys, even watching cartoons. I love sports, but mainly football.

High school finally came up and football became more of a job rather than actually being fun. My life revolved around football in high school. In ninth grade it became noticed that in order to play football at the high school level I had to manage at least a 2.0. Although a 2.0 is a very reasonable grade to accomplish it was still an important factor that could not go unnoticed. Setting a required GPA just to play football shows that I had to work hard in the classroom. This is a great example of why literacy is important in today’s society. In
order to make something out myself I had to realize how valuable literacy was and playing football was the key for me finding the reason it was so important.

As my career in football continued I began to play the game of football very well. I was the number [number omitted] lineman in the nation and I had offers form everyone in the country from the Florida Gators, University of Southern California, and I cannot forget about North Carolina State University. Along with fifty others. As a sophomore in high school I was invited to a high school players dream camp. The Army All-American camp it was a great accomplishment. Then one Saturday morning I woke up whipped the cold out of my eyes and walked down my long driveway to the mailbox. You can believe what I saw it was an invite. I questioned myself as to where this invite could be from, so I opened it and I was invited to play in the 2010 U.S. Army All-American game in San Antonio Texas. The feeling I got from seeing this letter in my opinion could be compared to a child having his first Christmas that he would remember forever. That required even more literacy. We had to learn something brand new in one week worth of practice. The overloaded we with an abundance of new plays and we had to run them accordingly to the defense. I was so ecstatic when I opened the letter because only the best high school players get picked. The Army All-American Bowl game is a big football game that selects the top ninety players in the nation. At this time, I was ranked the [ranking omitted] best player in [state omitted], I was ranked the [ranking omitted] best offensive tackle in the nation, and I was ranked the [ranking omitted] best football player overall in the nation. This game was one of the best experiences I have ever had. This game is what high school football player’s dream of playing in. After playing football since I was nine years old all of my hard work had finally paid off on the field.
APPENDIX J: B.’S NARRATIVE – “SPORTS HAVE CHANGED MY LIFE”

Below is B.’s literacy narrative.

Sports Have Changed My Life

When I was younger I never would have thought I’d be the person I am today. Coming from the shy child in the neighborhood who had few friends to a well known name in the entire city. As my life progressed, there were things that fell out and was replaced by new things that came and lead me to where I am today and brought me to be who I am, and it’s all because of letting sports come in my life and take put me a path that brought me success, friends, motivation, ambition to always believe in myself and much more.

As a child in elementary school my moved me and brothers from one county to another for a better education system. The previous schools we were at had horrible teachers and hardly any books for the classes. The neighborhood wasn’t good either, it was a lot fights and robberies but luckily none with my family. I had unbelievable jumping abilities for my age and my gym teacher and teachers would always tell me try and dunk the ball in gym and try and pursue playing basketball because of my speed and jumping skills, it brought me to so many new friends and people because they all wanted to see how someone so young could jump higher than kids his age. So one summer when I was maybe 7 or 8 years old I went out and tried to play for a summer team, but I it only lasted 2 days because I wasn’t able to get rides to the gym and actually try out for the team because my mom sometimes didn’t want to take me or just was out doing things with the church so I just played a few pickup games with my brothers and a couple friends. So when I went to middle school I decided to take up a few sports actually. I decided to wrestle, run track and play football my 7th and 8th grade year. I was really good in all there but I didn’t play football my 7th grade year because of my
size compared to the other players. My 8th grade year was when I was the starting running back and one of the stars of the team and I did fairly well to be my size. I excelled only because I was faster than the other kids. I wrestled and ran track and I succeeded very well in both of them. In track I was undefeated in my event the 100 meter hurdles both my 7th and 8th grade year. I knew I wasn’t going to take up wrestling after middle school after I wrestled this guy from my rivalry school and he pinned me in about 15 seconds into the match. I knew I would continue to run track and play football in high school. I didn’t stop there. My 8th grade year I tried out for the basketball team of my school and I decided to stop for some odd reason and decided to just focus on football.

Then, its freshman year, it’s the first day of camp for football and meeting the new friends/teammates. As the camp begins everybody was wondering who the fast freshman that was on the team was but nobody would expect it to be me, considering I was about 115 lbs with the smallest legs you can ever imagine a guy having. But once the coaches had everyone introduce themselves everyone’s then assumed I was the worst player on the team regardless if I was fast or not. It always made me laugh but at the same time brought so much motivation for me because I was driven off of being underestimated. During every practice the coaches would come up to me and ask how I feel about moving to varsity. I couldn’t imagine playing at that level, well at least not yet considering my size, so I just stuck and played with my new friends. As the year went on I became really close with my teammates some becoming lasting friendships to this day. Everybody always wondering who I was all because of fast I was and it was only my freshman year. I had numerous friends al because of the sports I played and how well I did at them. Being with my teammates helped me learn how to be more calm and interact better with having conversations with girls or whoever the
person may be. Every day they would joke around and tell me it should be easy to get a girl or talk to anyone they would say “You are [student’s name omitted] you are a division I athlete and you are going to play in the league (NFL).” I always laughed so hard. When we would eat at lunch they would introduce me to girls and their friends saying how successful I was, it was funny to hear how they talk to other people about me and it was in a good way at that. They always would tell me how I would make it to a big college some day and always be in my ear encouraging me to keep shooting for higher success in everything I do and football.

As my freshman year ends my success doesn’t nor was the amount of the new friends I was soon to meet. Going into my sophomore year for another summer camp I turn my meniscus, I was out for the season and I had to have surgery, friends from the team and school texted me and called to check and see how I was doing and it showed me who really cared for me and was looking for my best interest and it meant a lot to me and some of the people who checked up on me are still be my side till this day.

As the year came to an end, I became a junior in high school excited and ready to get back to playing football. A new coaching staff came in and replaced our old coaches because they hardly were able to lead the team to a winning season. I met my new position coach, coach Kerby Harrison, who was basically another father to me more than a coach. He not only coached me into a new position and prepared me for the upcoming season, but he also taught me how to decide what college to go to, how to be more relaxed, just an all around father figure and a coach. He would talk to me about my day, send me encouraging texts before the games on Fridays, I even met his wife and kids, we became real close. I tried my hardest to learn and do what he said on and off the field to be the football player he believed I
could be and the student because I didn’t want to let him. He brought me confidence and keep me focused on the season and school and never eased up on me, which helped me excel through football and school. By the end of the season, I was able to say I had 21 scholarships and they were from everywhere. I was shocked to believe I was able to get that much success! It brought me so much confidence and gave me a new outlook my life. I received calls and letters from colleges asking me to come play for their school, I never seen my mom so happy and proud of what I did. I travelled places and met new people talked to a few people around the city about my success and how it felt to be in my shoes. Everyone knew who I was and wanted to see me play and wanted to play against me to see if they could compete against me. My name was out in football as the player to watch out for.

Finally came track season, I haven’t ran since my 8th grade year, let alone being serious about going to practice and doing what the track coach tells me to do. Back in middle school the coach didn’t care what we did we just came to practice and just hung out, if you were good you didn’t have to do anything you didn’t want to do. Now the high school coach demanded you were at every practice in order to be on the team and in you expected to run in the track meets.

As the outdoor season went on, our relays dominated all the competition. We never lose in our 4×200 meter relay and were just juggled runners on and off our other relays to see who would be the best fit for the relay but when we put the usual squad together we wouldn’t lose. Leading up to the state meet we placed 1st in all our relays in our region and qualified a lot of people to be able to run in the state meet. It’s my first year running high school track and I’m in the state meet, my heart was pounding every second waiting to run and the anxiety was too high to stay calm. It seemed forever as I waited for the official to shoot the gun to
start the race, it made it my heart pound ever more, as soon as he shot the gun it the
nervousness turned into energy cheering for my other relay members as they tried their
hardest to put me, the anchor of the relay, in a good lead. I was so amazed at how hard they
ran for me and for our school, finally it was my turn I got the baton in a decent lead and made
the lead bigger, but towards the end, since it was only the preliminaries and not the finals I
slowed down and we took second. I felt so horrible because I slowed down and didn’t give
my full potential while everyone else did, even though it wasn’t the finals it still counted in
what lane we would have for the finals, and we ended up with the worst lane, 8.

After the meet everyone talked to me about how I shouldn’t just take it easy because I
can not only track but in life always shoot for the best and not settle for less, it’s something
that has stuck on me ever since. As the meet went on we placed in everything we came to the
meet in and we had done a really good job and had enough points to have a chance to win the
state title which was the big objective we were aiming at. As the finals began we first started
with the 4x200 meter relay which is the one I got caught in the end with. People behind the
gate were asking me how we got the worst lane when all I could do was shake my head in
despair. The crowd was silent which means that the race is about to start. My palms
sweating, heart pounding, and shaking because I was nervous. The gun goes off, once again
my teammates giving all they got but one of the seniors on the relay had a foot problem so
his run wasn’t to the potential it could’ve been at, but he held the lead just enough to keep us
in 3rd, so I get the baton and start to run one team is all the way in front because his team had
the lead, but I held my own and held off everyone but one team, which snipped me in the
end. I felt so horrible to only get the team to take 3rd but it’s very impressive to do that all the
way in lane 8. After that I thought my day was over so I rested in the stands with a few
teammates in discourage that I couldn’t do better, but they just telling me that it was ok and that I did my best considering it was my 1st year running since 8th grade, but then the coach comes running to me saying get ready for the 4x400 meter relay. My mouth dropped and all my energy just left my body. I sat there in shocked, with my eyes staring off into nothing like I was just shot. All I heard was “get ready the race starts in 30 minutes.” I couldn’t believe I was about to run a race I never ran before in my life. One of the assistant coaches walked with me all the way to the rest of the relay to encourage me and let me know that no matter what I do give it all I got.

As I get set for the race, I just here a few teammates and few fans of the school screaming my name to bring me up, I never thought people would even know who I was unless it was for football. Before I knew it the gun shoot off to send me off into the race. I felt bad running the whole race, I wanted to stop, I knew I couldn’t catch up to the other teams I wasn’t ready for it. But then all the words that everyone was telling me from football and track just came into my head. I didn’t continue for myself I did it for the seniors it was their last shot to win a title. So I pick up my pace and begin to push harder until I didn’t have anything left, I was coming down the last 100 meters exhausted, horrible face, using every muscle I had to move faster until I gave the baton off to the next teammate. After I gave it off I felt so slow, I felt I ran the worst time, and put them in the worst place, 6th. After the race was over the senior came up to me yelling and screaming mad at my performance. But the head coach came to me and the senior smiling like it was no tomorrow. The senior was going off but the coach lifted me and told me that it’s ok you ran a 49 second 400, that’s really good for anyone’s 1st time and he continued to smile and said “we just won our 1st state title.” He said it was because of me because if I didn’t run they didn’t have anyone else to run the
race. I was in awe. I couldn’t believe we won, let alone it is because of me. Everybody who was cheering for the school came up to me and congratulated me and was telling me how proud they were of me, people I never met but a few who still talk to me because of my success. Everyone so proud of me and for the team. It was the day of history of our school and I was a part of it and was the cause of it. The following week the team and I met the mayor, and the rest of the office, the board of education, and we even had a photo shoot for the [magazine title omitted] magazine that is seen by people all around the world.

Throughout the summer and the following year, my name was really out there as one of the top athletes in my school history and in Ohio. I met a lot of people, travelled out of state to a few places for once, and witnessed lifelong dreams that everyone will remember because of my year of success.
Below is T.'s literacy narrative.

**Literacy and its Understanding**

Literacy today is very important to our people, because it shapes and makes the English language, speeches, and laws of the land. Therefore making it a big part of society, we as people use literacy everyday. The different jobs require literacy to help people understand and learn, just by talking we use literacy in some type of way. For example the president gives speeches everyday he has to use literacy in his writing because if he does not people may take what he said and make it a tool against him in the future. Literacy has transformed over the years and is still developing; it is in churches, schools, and football.

I remember the days when I just woke up and waited to see what the day had planned for me. I did not care about the bigger things or smaller things life had to give. One day my best friend’s dad who was also a coach gave me this crazy idea about playing little league football. At first I blew the idea off, because I had no real sense of direction or mean. I just wanted to do things that I believe to be fun, like playing my video game and following my big brother around, because to me it’s all I like doing so I went on with my life. But just like a coach he continued to try. Then one day my mother comes home and tells me that she signs me to play little league football. All at once my life began to change. As I got older football became more than just a game that we play, you had to use literacy to understand it and my literacy came from note taking, it help me to take my level of skill to a place that at times I could not believe it myself sometimes it was even scary or me because I began taking the game as a job and so did the coaches. By note taking I do not mean just writing the word and things you hear, but writing them in a way that helps you to understand and remember them.
I first started taking notes when I was no more than seven years old. I had this teacher she used to give presents to the children in class that took the best notes and did the best on the tests she gave, this was the first time I had seen or really hear of note taking. I recall that the teacher was young, looked like she just got out of college and was still celebrating her graduation. She had the look of a young college student ready to start educating, but was unsure where to start and how. She gave me my first through of and about literacy just the way she showed me to take notes. And sure I had other teacher some old some young, but they did not take the time to help me get the structure or understanding. I guess to them it was not one of them things they saw as a need.

In the seventh grade I had this history teacher named [name omitted]; he was also a real good friend of the family and to my luck a high school football coach. He explained note taking and literacy to me on a level that just made my mind wrap around the reading and the understanding of the structure within my writing. He showed me the methods, tips and tools required to mastering the ability. Mr. Norris also told me that the world smartest people take notes; it’s what gives them the edge. As school and sports continue to come and go I began to notice things about myself and the way I started to view my classes, my self, and my over all work in life. I started to become the same student that my friends and I used to give hard times because they did what was right and they turn in work when it was due. Finally I made a choice to change the people I was friends with. As I continue to channel my literacy into note taking and the things I loved to do it was able to transform me as a person and as a student athlete. My understanding of literacy continued as I got older by the time my sophomore year had come I had become this total different person that had a new soul that wanted to see what opportunities and doors could be open by just using literacy.
One morning I was just sitting in my extra long history class just thinking to myself about life and out of the blue the loud speaker came on like a car horn that catches you by surprise and by my luck they called my name to report to the principal office. When something like that happens all your classmates have to turn around and ask you what you did and I don’t know about you, but all at once things started racing through my mind and I just knew it had to be bad. By the time I got to the office I see this ball tall men with a orange shirt burning a hole in me with his eyes, then all at once he began walking towards me and with a smile he said “you must be [name omitted].” I could not think of the words to say back so I just moved my head and smiled. Then he started asking all these questions about me and my life. He said his name was [name omitted] and he was one of many coaches that were to come. He wanted me to play football for him and his college. I was shocked the entire day, so he had told me that his school was going to offer me a full scholarship to play football. All at once I felt this emotion inside build up, the emotion came out as tears of joy and this came from all the hard work I had put in and earned for myself and for my family.

Before the day was over at school everybody knew the great new I was blessed with all except my mama and father. When I arrived at home I could not keep the look of joy off my face I was like a kid on Christmas morning waiting to race down stair and open all the presents that are waiting under the Christmas tree. So I march in the house and told my mom and dad we needed to talk and parents being parents the first thing that came to mind was “I aint taking care of no babies.” I just laughed and said no. You could see the relief on my mothers face and she asked me what was so important and why I was smiling so much. I told them I was offered a scholarship to play football and they just went crazy like we had just won the lottery or something she begun to break down and cry. Tears was them of joy,
because she remember the hard times of football like when I torn something in my knee and had to have surgery and the times she had to watch me leave going off to football camp. She started calling the entire family up and telling them the good new I had receive. All of this new was acquire through the help and work I put in by note taking on and off the field.

Note taking on the field is very different, you have to be able to see the motions required in a set of plays, how your body is suppose to move, and how you are demanding it to react to make you the very best player on the field. You have to be able to listen to the coaches as they tell you how a play is design and how it is meant to works; as all of this is happen you have to take visual note in your mind. This tools and examples are what I used to make myself the very best.

Now with the knowledge and enjoy of success I was enter my senior year of high and had a number of different scholarships I cause choose from all over the state and still more was coming with the pasting day. Sports are just one half of my life that I have to think about. Student come before athlete and I had the duties as a student to for fill the part as a student with the season and stuff approaching I had to make and find a way to complete my work if I had to miss a little down time on the weekend. Because without my grade the rest did not matter, and it would have been a wait of time for me and for all the school that for looking at me. But note taking went to another level when I started to take the SAT and ACT.

Now at the end of my high school years I was faced with the hard decision in my life “were did I want to go to school for the next four years.” I had over seven colleges to choose from. I had to make the best decision for myself and for my life. And I used note taking to do so I took notes on what school is best on student athletics, which schools gave me the best chance for a great future, and what school was close enough for my over protective mother.
With all this on my mind and graduation around the corner my mind was stress and over worked. But I got it together and made my decision to go to [school name omitted] to continue my learning and my love of football. With the choice I had made a lot of people proud, but at the same time people were upset because I didn’t pick the college that they wanted me to attend and as you can tell this is another form of note taking. This kind of note talking tells you who is there for you and who just wanted something from you because they knew you was in control of what was going to happen in your life. Looking at the way classrooms are setups these days a student must be able to adapt to the ways of literacy and the structures it teaches us to develop. By the coaches showing literacy in telling me as a person, what they wanted and what they were looking for in me, becoming a student of higher learning helped me make one of the toughest decision of my life this far.

Out of all the things I shared with you hopefully you have a grip on the understanding and nature of literacy and the ways it’s locked around the world we live in and the English we used. By me telling and explain the way literacy impacted my life and opened the door to a bigger and brighter future you should come to a conclusion on literacy and see the way it help create and develop the world we live in.
APPENDIX L: C.’S NARRATIVE – “SWEET SHOES, BUT NO MONEY”

Below is C.’s literacy narrative.

**Sweet Shoes, but no money**

Shooting up Nikes, smoking Polo, popping Brooks Brothers, were all drugs that consumed my head as a child. Clothes and unnecessary spending took over my life in a way that drugs and alcohol would; I was infatuated. I did not understand where the money that funded my habits came from on a regular basis. Ever since I could remember I thought money was a thing that did not have much meaning, it was just there when it was convenient for you.

Being literate is being able to read and write. To me being literate is being able to understand a topic and explaining it competently to someone else. Money is a topic that everyone should be literate in, but so many people don’t understand it. Money is like a ticket to a rollercoaster, if you miss handle your money, you might just miss your ride. That is why learning at a young age what the worth of a dollar is and how long you would have to work to earn money is a very important lesson. Being literate in money is like being able to speak every language in the world, and even through different currencies if you understand money it transpires countries. Everyone needs and loves money.

I was ten years old in my sixth grade year attending a small Lutheran private school, [school name omitted], my parents and I just moved into a new house with a new car and I thought everything was fine. Two years went by living well under my parents, and I was going into eighth grade at [school name omitted]. It was a strange transition from a small Lutheran private school with a population of 300, to a large school with a couple thousand. It was also stressful because my parents were having a hard time with work and money; we
were selling our car and moving out of our large white house into a condo. I will always remember when I came into our new condo and my sister was over giving my parents money and buying my school clothes and I was just sitting there in my uniform and wondering why would my sister give my parents money. I never asked my parents about it, I just went on like nothing happened. I was a little concerned and worried and I knew my parents have been acting very stressed out at the time. At the time my sister was doing really well as a pharmaceutical scientist and she was helping the family in a time of need. One day after school I came home wondering where the family car was, and why were some clothes packed up and at the door. My parents just simply told me that we were moving and there has been an accident. We moved into a small condo and sold our car, and this was all into my transition into middle school. As years past I was in middle school and my parents told me that they have invested money and lost it in a scandal like Ralph Madoff.

At that time I did not get all the things that I used to be so pleasured to. For example, we used to go out of the country to France and the islands every year for vacation, but that particular year we did not go. Money was tight and at a young age I was seeing the power and importance of money. My parents really showed me the importance of money at that time, by showing me how to budget my money correctly and the necessities of life. My dad taught me about investing and stock trades back when I was very young and would purchase me small stock to play with, I always had a good understanding of money just never had the concept of how, where, and the struggle of getting it. This was the beginning to my literacy of money.

In my junior year my parents had to have an intervention with me because of my spending habits. They would give me an allowance, but I would ask for more money and
things in addition to it, they became annoyed with my incoherence of money. My father always used to tell me, “Work before pleasure”, but I didn’t really understand because I have never had a real job before, just volunteer work. My parents wanted me to learn the worth of work and money, the comparison they would use is that for one pair of Nikes a person at McDonalds would have to work a whole week. In hope of teaching me the worth of a dollar my parents went all around the city looking for jobs and internships I could take part of, but instead of finding a well paying job. I was laced working 24 hours a week for free at the museum of natural science. They sat me down and showed me the importance of money once again as a child, and that to go to college you have to learn how to budget. At first I blew it off as if they cared what I did with my own money, and that I would always have them to provide. In the first week of school my parents told me that I must budget my money and that they wouldn’t give me money. It was rough I didn’t listen to them and didn’t budget my money and at the time I wasn’t fully literate in money. In the first couple of days my money was gone and didn’t know where it went; I was stranded for two weeks without money until I get my allowance again. After the volunteer work I still didn’t understand the concept of money, because I never acquired any during my time. My life was rough I didn’t have gas, lunch, and chill money to hang out with my friends. That is when it really hit me that to become a successful adult I must learn how to control my spending habits. You see adults all the time who are homeless now because they did not handle their money wisely and businesses that go under. I had a small business making designs, and some different types of clothes, and all of my income was going to my food or personal clothes. To run a successful business I had to change my habits and become literate in money.
This process has been strenuous over the years with getting grounded and having to make spreadsheets on Microsoft Excel to budget my money. My sister [name omitted] has invested in my business of making t-shirts and other designs, the only way she would do this is if I went to money handling classes. I enrolled into a class that was held at my local church, and this class was 3 weeks that taught how to live well but still have control over your spending. I loathed this class from the bottom of my heart; it was a hot small classroom with adults that stunk of coffee and a sense of tension and stress. As a class everyone had to make a budget and write down every little thing you spent for a week, living your life normally. It became apparent after the assignment that my priorities were in all the wrong places, such as food, clothes, and frivolous things with my friends. Not enough money out of my profits were going back into my business to keep it up and going. I started to change my spending habits by packing my lunch and taking the lunch money my parents gave me. Almost immediately my income changed and I began to have more money to spend.

To this day my shirts and designs have been a success and it was all to the budgeting that the money handling class taught me. My parents do not have to loan me money as much and they are happy with my spending habits. Without that class I would not be able to control money and be as literate as I am today in money. Money is one of the most important things in this world and knowing how to take care of it is even more important than owning it. Homeless people start off with money, but they loose it through other circumstances mostly the misusing of funds like gambling, drugs, and other things. Mine was clothes, food, and stupid things with my friends. Now I understand how to be a good stewardess of my money. This last year has been great I have a bank account that I have not been out of money this whole year. It has been a long road to becoming literate, but it was worth every time I was
grounded and had no money. Because money makes the world go round and being literate helps you go around also.
Below is M.’s literacy narrative.

Texting better than talking?

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Literacy is important because in our society you need to know or learn how to read and write. For example to get a job you have to fill out applications and that takes reading and writing. You also need literacy throw school or you will not get far. Literacy also applies to college and other important aspects of life. Just knowing how to read, write and comprehend what people say and do will get you somewhere in life. I believe you have to be literate in order to be successful in life. You also have to start learning literacy at a young age and in this day and time we have a lot of assistance doing that. For example we have tutors and teachers to help with literacy. Literacy starts from kindergarten on up, you can gain it thought-out life. Texting is away to show literacy, if you know how to text your showing your somewhat literate.

Now one main thing I’m literate in is texting. Texting is performed in many ways you text on your cell phone, email, face book, etc. It was invented to send messages through computer other than a house phone. I think being literate in texting is one of the best skills you could have under your belt. It is important to others and me, because texting is one easy way to communicate. It’s also easy to teach and learn how to text as long as you have ideas of typing on a computer. You can also express yourself through texting, because it is much more convenient when you do not feel like speaking in person or on the phone. You know how you can have a long conversation with a parent or friend but instead its texting with no talking its takes away those drawn out lectures. Texting is a habit for me. People say I text every second I get. Sometimes I think texting eases my mind when I’m stressed. I say that
because I could text anyone that I feel like texting and just express how I feel through words. When you are reading a text for some reason it takes you somewhere else, it is like you’re zoned out until you are finished reading the message. For example, I text my sister when I’m going through anything, she is like my personal physiatrists. I could text her about funny situations and very personal situations. I remember this time when I didn’t make a good grade on a test that I wanted and needed to pass. I started to text my sister she made me relax and laugh and told me to keep doing my best and it will all work out. I text my family members often, because we barely get the chance to call each other. So texting is very important in my family. I also have a select amount of friends, associates I text. But texting can also be a wrong turn if you don’t do it at an appropriate time and place. I will elaborate more on this later on in the text.

I am proud to say I started texting at a young age. My sisters and brothers had cell phones while I was growing up. I envied their phones so much, because I always saw them typing or pushing buttons and creating letters. This made me want to always play with them and dial numbers and sometimes I would see letters. Now, I thought texting was amazing I could actually write on a cell phone. Having a cell phone was something I wanted for a while and it was something I asked my mom frequently “if I could have one”. So I finally broke my mom’s hold on a cell phone for me. Once I got a cell phone things changed for me. I was finally able to do what I craved and watched my sister and brother do for a while.

Which was texting; I was so happy and ready to explore everything I could learn from a cell phone. The first thing I did was program my phone and asked my mom for all the close relatives’ numbers. The second thing I did was try to steal some of my sister and brother numbers. The third thing I did was text my best friend Tony. But believe it or not it took me
awhile because my format on my phone was on T9 word instead of regular. T9 word is when you write one letter and it gives you three to two words to select from. I did not understand the T9 word way until my sister explained that too me. Once I got a full instruction on how to text from my sister and brother, I was a text fanatic.

By this time my literacy in texting was ok and still developing. I learned how to use abbreviations, punctuations and more. I could have a paragraph in my mind but then condense it to three sentences or less. It’s like I use so many abbreviations to where my sentences are shaped to three or four words.

I was in eighth or going into the ninth grade and I was tired of texting my grandma, mother, aunties and uncles. The ones who were tired of me were my brother and sister. They would not even text me back sometimes because I would be annoying them so they say. So I stepped my game up, ask my brother for a few pointers and started asking girls for their numbers. That worked out pretty good, I had girls texting me left to right. It was to the point my mom got tired of me being on the phone texting all the time. I never thought she would be on my back so much about texting. She even yelled a couple of times to me to call someone on the phone because my eyes would be glued to the screen of my cell phone. I would text when we went grocery shopping, movies and even the dinner table when she wasn’t looking. My mom says Grand mom [name omitted] use to ask if I was going to be a computer whiz or a guy that can fix phones, when we went to her house. I remember one time I was over there and I was just texting my girl at the time and she started cursing at me, because I went out the night before without telling her. I started looking at the phone as if I could not believe what I was seeing or reading. My grand mom thought I was going to need glasses from the way I was looking at the text in my phone. The reason for my grand mom
thinking that is she thought the words I was typing and reading in my phone were just too small and that I was straining my eyes to see them. She also thought that I stayed in front of my phone a little too much. I thought what she was saying was funny and told her most of the time she would catch me when I’m making a facial expression showing how I felt about that message. But I would just laugh and reply to her that she needed to get me a bigger and better phone when she said anything about me texting. As time passes I’m still getting better at texting.

Now I’m at the time and age where the quality of the phone and how big or how small your cell phone matters. I needed a big phone because my hands are big enough to palm a basketball. I needed enough space on the buttons to where I would not type too buttons at one time. I have had that happen to me and it is very aggravating and also slows me down. Plus I had to be quick because I would be texting up to five or six people at one time. Now that’s kind of hard because I have texted the wrong thing to the wrong person before and got into a lot of trouble, or just felt real embarrassed with the girl or relative I accidently sent the message to. I remember I was texting a girl named [name omitted] and our conversation was about sex. My step dad name is [name omitted; same as girl’s name except one letter difference] and I accidently texted him a message that said “how you want me to give it to you baby”. I got a reply from him that said what the hell are you talking about son. I was so embarrassed I didn’t know what to say LOL. I just told him I was texting a girl about a situation and he laughed and told me to be safe.

Texting has gotten me in a few other predicaments too. Texting can easily have you in trouble. One example is when I’m in school its so many friends texting back and forth about nothing, but you’re so easily to be trapped to texting back. Like for instant I had a fight
go on at my school, but I missed it. The fight was all around the school before the police
even got there; this is all because of texting. I received a message five minutes after the fight
happened saying it was crazy and blah, blah, blah. At the same time I was in class trying to
read these messages. That is where I took the wrong turn my teacher caught me looking at
my phone and requested me to give it to her. I started to not do it until she told me the officer
that was on duty would use force to take if I did not give it to her. So I did but still got my
mom called. But nobody wants their mom called, and I got home to an empty room and no
remote in the living room. I was on restrictions for using my strength in literacy which was
texting. I was wishing I had never known how to text or even had a phone at the time to text.
I quickly got over that only because I got off punishment pretty quick. I used my silent
treatment on my mother, she always falls for that.

Now I’m eighteen and in college I have been texting for at least ten years now. I
would say my literacy in texting is off the charts. I say that because I spend 50% of my day
texting and it’s what I’m excellent at. I hope this paper shows everyone that I would choose
texting over talking on a phone. I am proud to say texting is my literacy.
APPENDIX N: L.’S NARRATIVE – “BASKETBALL LITERACY”

Below is L.’s literacy narrative.

Basketball Literacy

As a child I always looked up to the NBA basketball players that I would watch on television but I never really knew what was going on in the games because I was so young. I watched basketball every single day just so I could be literate at it because I knew that I wanted to play when I got older. Time flew by and I began to learn everything about basketball that’s when I knew I was ready to start playing. Once I began to learn everything about basketball I started playing, so I could be just like the players I watch on television.

My uncle Dorrel played college basketball at Arkansas State and I always looked up to him. He would always come back home from school and teach me everything that he learned from college because he knew that I was interested. He showed me dribbling moves, shooting drills, and other things that he learned from college. After he would show me new things I would go out in the back and try every move that he showed me. The moves he showed me were basic but still very challenging to me. Getting the moves down took a while but I was never the type of kid to give up on what I was doing. Bouncing the ball on the hard concrete each day had me exulted, because I was so small and the ball was so big. My goal was to try my hardest so I could be just like my uncle Dorrel. He would always tell me the smarter you are the better you’ll be. I took those words to the only advantage that I had and I listen to every word he said. I focused on everything that I did, every time I would go out and practice it would be complete silence because I believed if I didn’t know the game I wouldn’t know what I was doing and I owe that all to my uncle.
My family really saw how much I enjoyed playing basketball and they saw that I really wanted to learn the game of basketball. They enjoyed to watch me play and I enjoyed them coming to support me. My family wasn’t the only ones who noticed that I was improving, my friends also saw that I was getting better they noticed the fact that I was working hard each and every day and they supported me as well. I remember when my friends and I would all go to the park a play against each other, there would always be good games going on against us but it became a time when my team would always win. I would score all the points and my friends couldn’t believe that I was beating them all by myself; it really got them confused about how good I had gotten so fast. I wanted my friends and family to know that I wasn’t going to stop until I knew it all, and at the age of eight that’s what impressed them the most out of everything that I was doing. It got on their nerves at times because they would hear the same noises every day. The ball bouncing up and down every day, it got to a point where I had to go far away from the house just so I could practice my basketball skills.

I started playing basketball on teams at the age of ten, by the time I was 14 I was one of the nation’s best players. People would pack them gyms I was playing in just because they heard I was one of the best players in the tournaments my team was playing in. It was a great feeling to know that people were coming to watch me play. I figured that it wasn’t my skill it was because I knew the game better than any other kid that played the game. All the other kids I played against played basketball because they just wanted to play, I actually studied the game and wanted to be the one that always made it at the end. I believe that’s why I was ranked one of the nation’s best players. It came to a point where I began to go to camps for free when they actually costs hundreds of dollars to attend. There I learned so much that I
have never even thought about before, it was like I was a basketball movie. I received so much knowledge from the camps I went to I felt like I was already ready for the NBA. The dream of becoming of pro has always been in my head but I just need the concentration and literacy of the game of basketball to make it that far and that’s not an easy thing to accomplish.

My motivation always come from my mom. She gives me that extra boost every time I see her face. I do the extra mile for her because I know she has sacrificed a lot for doing her days of raising me as a child, she is what really gets me going each and every time I step on the basketball court. Looking at each person’s face gives me the confidence that I need to play a ball game, I know they believe in me and they know I can play well; I give it all I got each time this happens. My family are the ones who really give me the strength I need to play basketball. I believe that your family is always going to know what’s best and following along with what they are telling you will get you where you want to be, that’s a big part of something I had to learn as I was growing up.

Maturing in this sport would have to be the biggest accomplishment for any young player who has ever played basketball. Basketball takes a lot of concentration, and when your young in the mind you always seem to do crazy things. People don’t like a player who always throws tantrums in games just because they got fouled by another player and the ref didn’t call it. You are supposed to keep your cool and just keep playing. That’s what separates the good players from the bad ones; attitudes would get a player in a lot of trouble if there not careful. Making any kinds of hands gestures or smacking your teeth at an official can get you a technical foul or thrown out of the game and if your any type of basketball
player who loves to play you know would know as much as I do not to/get any of those things.

My attitude has always been the same ever since I was 10 years old. I’ve been told that I show no emotions when I play and people seem to enjoy that. I must say that I look at things way more different than I did when I was younger. I see things that others players do to try to stop me from scoring like punching me, grabbing my shorts, or even pulling me down to the ground. I want to get mad but I always think of the consequences I have if I do so and I don’t think any of them would be good. Attitude shows everything about you, people can tell if you’re a good a bad person on the court by the way you express yourself. That’s another thing that is needed when you are learning the game. Keeping your cool in a game can always make you seem like the best player on the court, the bad attitude players won’t stand a chance because they’re the ones that are always frustrated and then they begin to make mistakes.

Having the right mind set and knowing what your actually doing comes with the game of basketball. Players are known for making mistakes that’s okay everyone makes mistakes you can’t always beat yourself over the head and get made all the time because you made a small mistakes that won’t get anybody where they want to be with any dream that they have. I learned lots of things the hard way; but the hard way seemed like the best route to take in my course of become a good basketball player. Looking up to older friends and family members really can help a person with anything because they are much wiser than a student of the game. I had to learn from my uncle for the first few steps of the game of basketball but from then on out I was by myself. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to
know what you want to do for the rest of your life. I don’t if basketball will ever lead me to
the NBA but I figure if I just follow the rules that I was brought up by I’ll be just fine.
APPENDIX O: G.’S NARRATIVE – “FOOTBALL AND ITS EFFECT”

Below is G.’s literacy narrative.

Football and Its Effect

Third game of the year, five years old and in an ambulance. On a play that I have ran for close to three weeks prepping for the season, “T-bone special” this play was designed especially for me. My father who was the coach followed by his assistance felt that this would be a play that we used in a tight squeeze. I pitched the ball back to the running back and headed for the sideline; the running back flips around and throws a ball over my right shoulder. I turn around mid-stride and the ball hits my hand but that’s not the only thing that hits. A player from the other team sniffed out the play and was headed right for me. We collide, and the only thing that hit was my face into his forehead. Dazed and unfocused the only thing I could do was cry. The pain coming from the right side of my face was excruciating. I could hear my mom in the stands yelling at my dad to call an ambulance, when mom got to my side she told me that the collision sounded like a bowling ball being dropped on the floor. I’m glad she was there at the game because Dad was just sitting by the fence waiting for the ambulance to arrive, Mom made me feel better by telling me that everything was going to be okay. I guess that’s what Mom’s are for. I couldn’t quite remember much of the ride but sure do remember the doctor coming in and telling me that I had a third degree fracture running from the top of my eyebrow to the bottom of my cheek bone. It was only flag football and at that point I never wanted to play again! My father has never been easy on me, and even then he wanted the best for me although at the time he didn’t know that I would be a foot taller than him and playing collegiate football eleven years down the road. He insisted that I just finish the season, considering the fact that I was his
quarterback and didn’t want to be the laughing stock of the league I felt obligated because horrible teams were common occurrences for my father and I! I got through that season alive, and started liking the game. I felt that I could play next year if my dad was the coach; at the time I wasn’t completely in love with football, and the only way I would play again was if my dad coached me. I wasn’t infatuated with football; honestly I could take it or leave it. As a couple seasons went by I started to like it more and more. I didn’t see myself playing for so long but years went by and I never stopped thinking about the sport. It was an addiction and I couldn’t get off of it.

“Alright freshman, bring it up! This isn’t sissy push over football like the league you have been playing in for the past two years; this is big boy football now! It’s time to separate the boys from the men, Oklahoma’s and hurry up!” I remember standing there watching my friends, flailing into each other inside the little spaced area that the coach’s coned out. On the cones it read “OKLAHOMA” and that is when I realized what separating the boys from the men meant, I didn’t hesitate! I jumped in with the next group. I was the ball carrier, lowered my head and had never felt anything like it in my life. It somewhat felt like hitting a sweet spot on a baseball bat; I was pumped up and ready to go again. That is when I realized I wanted to play football for the rest of my life; I got a rush that I have never witnessed up until that point. Coach Sexton approached me before saying anything he spat out a stream of long black spit, adjusted his chewing tobacco and shot me a face that I have never seen before.

“[Student’s last name omitted], I’ve been coaching for some time and never have I ever seen a quarterback get in this drill. You seem to be the type of quarterback I want coming in this program. Tough, big, strong, it’s going to be a long road, not gonna be easy
that’s for sure. You’re going to have to overcome some adversity and work your butt off, but I don’t want to get ahead of myself; we’ll see what you do on junior varsity this season! You might possibly be able to dress out for some varsity games this year, but not making any promises! Strap that bucket on and get ready for the remainder of practice.”

As the season went on I felt like I did fairly decent and was having a blast. The varsity was struggling, okay who were we kidding it was awful. If there is one thing I learned from Coach Sexton it was not to sugar coat anything; our varsity football team was 1-7 at the time. The upcoming week was [rival school’s name omitted]; they were as terrible as we were, if not worse. So coach called me in on Wednesday after practice and told me that I was to dress out for the varsity game on Friday, still play on Thursday with the junior varsity! Friday night arrived; sitting on the sideline watching our team lose to the worst team in the conference I was just happy to be considered a varsity football player.

When I heard a faint “should we put [student’s last name omitted] in?” “Yeah, yeah, where is he?” “[Student’s last name written in all caps omitted]!!!” I rummaged through sweaty players, helmets, and broad shoulders.” Yes sir.” “Trips right liz delta sky on one . . . go.” I raced my way to the huddle; looking into all the upper classmen’s eyes I recited the play. Ready, break snapped the lineman; I called the cadence and the ball dropped into my hands. I released a pass down field landing into a senior wide outs hands [player’s name omitted], started to take off down field and fumbled at mid field. There was a scrum on the giant “T” in the middle of our field. When the dust cleared; our left guard “[Student’s name omitted]” recovered the ball and held it high above his head, sprinting around like he just won a marathon. I found my way back on the side line; coach grabs my helmet by the face mask and whispers another pass play. From the stands I heard a loud “Go [student’s
nickname omitted]” I turned around to see my mom standing up with a number 12 jersey on. I saw the biggest smile I have ever seen on my mother. I knew she was proud of me and no matter the outcome of the game she was going to be my number one fan. I threw a thumb’s up and tucked my head into the herd of players standing on the forty-five yard line. We broke the huddle and marched to our positions.

“Set . . . GO” At that very instant I felt everything go numb, couldn’t hear a thing, legs were . . . well at that moment I didn’t have any; and my vision seemed as if there were no fans just an empty field with a team in a different shade of black. I relapsed and saw [teammate’s name omitted] streaking down the sideline and unleashed a pass that was off mark. Laying on my back with a two hundred and eighty-five pound lineman on my chest I hear our home side erupt, sitting on my butt I look through calves, waists and bodies to see [teammate’s name omitted] lying on his back with his arm outstretched in front of him holding a worn and tattered ball that I just threw to him. My job was done, we were in field goal range and we had no doubt that our kicker would make the kick! Standing on the sideline, locking arms, we sat as team watching and waiting. Snap, the hold and the ball goes up! Wide left! We were devastated, but there was a flag on the play. We all waited for the referee to make the call, roughing the kicker! That gave us one more shot to make the attempt, there was 13.4 seconds left on the clock and fifteen yards closer to the goal post; it’s just a chip shot. This time the ball splits the up rights, referees throw up both hands signaling that the field goal was good. Everyone stormed the field dog piling [teammate’s name omitted], the hero, the kicker that made the game winning kick and kept us from being the worst team in the conference. What a great accomplishment? Kept from being the worst team in the conference? It was a great time and this game will always be in my memory book. I
looked up to every guy on the field that night and when the coaches called my number I
didn’t want to let them down! It was their last high school game in [stadium’s name omitted].

As I was sitting in my high school’s library surrounded by family and friends,
sporting the logo of my favorite team, I was about to do something that every high school
football player wants to do, sign his name on the dotted line of a full athletic scholarship. It
was the most exciting day of my life, and there is only one person to thank. My father, if it
wasn’t for him encouraging me to get back on the field when I was five I probably would
have been going to a community college or right into the work force after graduation. My
dad sacrificed a lot for me to get my scholarship he would take off work, book airplane
flights, and even rent vehicles for us because his beat up work truck couldn’t make it to most
of the football camps we went to. Dad would come from work to practice every day and
coach the wide outs for our new coach. ([coach’s name omitted]) This meant that Dad knew
everything going on, Dad would get the play book and bring it home for us to study together.
We would spend hours a night studying the playbook cover to cover, so when game time
came we would be ready for anything [coach’s name omitted] threw our way. Of course there
is Mom; she was at every single game I played in. It could be pouring the rain or showering
the snow and Mom would be there cheering me on. I always knew where Mom was in the
stands, wearing a black number [number omitted] jersey with an annoying cowbell in her
right hand.

I just want to thank my parents for not only allowing me to play football my whole
life but for being there when I need them. ”Well of course they are there your whole life.”
What I’m trying to say is that many kids my age can’t talk about personal stuff to parents. I
told my parents everything and they never judged me; they gave their input on the rights and
wrongs that I did but never one time, throw me under a bus and I respect them for that. I wish every person in the world had the opportunity to have parents like I do, they sculpted me in the person I am today. They could see the diamond underneath and were polishing me till I shined. I can’t see myself here right now if it wasn’t for them cheering me on, dusting me off when I take a hard fall, and loving me all the time.
I’m the Maestro

Since the age of 4 in kindergarten I have always enjoyed the sound that any instrument or person can make. Being literate in music has been one of the biggest achievements in my life due to the meaning it has. Each lyrics and beat helps me get out of or get into a mood. It’s something that motivates me depending on what the situation that I’m in; furthermore, it is something that I believe is the most valuable style of poetry and art in our society.

When I was 5 years old I loved to go up in front of my church and sing. Back then it was ok because it was cute, but now my singing would be something painful to go through for the audience. I would listen to the songs in church and beg my mom to join me up in stage. My heart would race and in my mind I would think this is my turn to shine. I would hear the grown ups joining in and my heart would pound faster. Every song that I knew was from church and the meanings of the lyrics meant nothing to me. As long as the beat made me move I loved it. The rhythm was all that would get my attention around that age. My world wasn’t made of much and I just wanted to be outside and have fun. Any song was great as long as I could tell it was joyful. My life was happy and all I knew was that the itsy bitty spider was washed out by the rain.

When my knowledge of music was expanded when my family and I went to visit our family in California I was able to understand music in a completely different emotional level. The first time I could remember listening to rock was when my cousin played a CD of Blink-182. I could hear a completely different tone and mood in the voices and even in the beat of
the songs. Listening to rock I felt like I was myself. I felt like the person that likes to have fun and just was ready to be a teenager. Soon I started listening to different type of rock music. Each song had its own unique sound. My understanding for music started to grow and so did my appreciation for it. As I grew older I became exposed to different varieties of music and soon I started to forget about just Rock-n-Roll. My older brother, Alan, always taught me about what good music is. He always said that great music must be felt from inside. He said that the lyrics, tempo, and rhythm had to feel like I belonged to it. Soon I started listening to music from different countries.

As I entered middle school I started to deal with what I thought was drama. I would think because some girl would say that she was mad at me that my world would end. I was very over dramatic in 6 grade. Anytime I would get mad I would put some music depending on the mood I was in. I would listen to System of a Down, if I was ready to go on a rampage or wanting to jump around. I also would listen to The Red Hot Chili Peppers, to enjoy life and just look up to the sky. Listening to soothing lyrics that would say, “In between the cover of another perfect wonder and it’s so white as snow. Running through the field where all my tracks will be concealed and there’s nowhere to go” is something very pleasant to the ear. I would also listen to Eminem to get hyped up for my soccer games. Soon I started to wonder about the meanings of the songs. Each line rhymed with the one before it just as a poem. As I listened more to the lyrics I started to understand what the song was about; Furthermore, I found myself relating my life to the songs.

Soon music became an even more important source in my life as I went into high school. I had to play music every time I did homework, chores, exercise, or when I went to bed. Each song became a great aspect in my daily life. My emotions would change
depending on the type of music I listened to. One example is that I listened to rock alternative rock to just be cheerful or to get out of bored mood. I would not want to see or speak to anyone after having rough drays or problems with my ex-girlfriends. However, when I listened to music I would be able to create balance out of something that felt like chaos to me.

I would lay on my bed and just close my eyes. Slowly I would start to sing along with my feet swaying side to side. I would start to imagine myself being the singer. I would see myself on stage singing and expressing the music through my movements and facial expressions to the audience. The lyrics and words would speak to me. Anytime I would feel alone or sad I would turn to the music for counseling. Lyrics from a song from a band from Sweden, Mando Diao, says, “When you’re all alone we become your home. We’re the music, we’re the music.” Those lyrics are exactly how I see music. Music to me is a place to go when I need time alone to think. I felled in love with music because there is always a song that relates to me and my life.

As I became a junior in high school the music started to become poetry to me. I started listening to Coldplay and The Killers. I listened carefully to their lyrics. I laid on my bed going over and over each lyric, such as “They say the Devil’s water it ain’t so sweet. You don’t have to drink right now, but you can dip your feet every once in a little while.” I would analyze and study if for no reason at all. Those lyrics to me mean that people believe its alright to sin every now because they believe as long as the ask God for forgiveness they’ll be safe. When I found out the meaning or I think I found it I feel like I the smartest kid in the world. I would try to show off to my brothers and friends. Lyrics that have a deep meaning to me are quotes that will stay with me forever.
Weeks went by where music became the thing I would do the most besides playing soccer during my senior year. In soccer I would sing songs that would get me into the mood before a game or relax me while the game was be going on. Without realizing it my two biggest passions came together. Soon I moved in soccer to the music that I played in my head. I joked with my teammates by calling myself the “maestro” in our soccer team. I would say that my touch on the ball was as smooth as the fingers playing the strings on a violin. But my favorite saying was that I would move the team and the ball as a conductor would move an orchestra with the perfect tempo and rhythm. I believed I was a maestro due to the music in my head.

Everyday if you were near me you could see me walking and singing or humming down the hall or as I just practiced soccer or tennis; furthermore, I would be having my hands in mid air moving and swaying to the music. My fingers moving separately as if I was playing the piano or guitar. Everyday after being done with work I would start acting like I would be playing the drum. With a pencil in each hand and making the most over exaggerating arm movements ever. My favorite song to air play the drums is to “First Date” from Blink-182. I have always wanted to play an instrument but I have never had found the time to; however, I do have Guitar Hero to make up for it. Thank you to the makers of Guitar Hero because thanks to you I feel like a true rock star and a true artist. Jumping on top of tables, playing the guitar behind my back, and just rocking is something that I enjoy doing.

I can’t really express to you how much music is a part of my life. I always have music in my head and when I’m not singing in my mind I’m listening to some music on my ipod. I cannot be home alone without having music being played or cleaning up the house without music in the background. I am always looking for new type of music from different
countries. Mando Diao, The Hives, and Movits are a couple of bands that are really good, especially thanks to their own unique style that you will never find in the U.S. One of the things that I try to do is spread that music through my friends. Sometimes I play my music out loud on purpose for others to hear. I’m always hoping that they’ll like it and ask what I’m listening to. I’m sure one day the music that I love will be listened to more than songs that sing about just sex, money, and the artist being famous.

Music has become one of the greatest things in my life. I value it and I pray that it will always be around. I feel that each song is part of our history. Its our culture and will be something that I will keep in my heart. The meaning behind lyrics and the rhythm is what helps me deal with stress or it just makes me happy and grateful of my life. Maybe I’ll never be able to play an instrument or be a good singer; however, I will have a great understanding, appreciation, and attachment to music that no other person I will meet will.
APPENDIX Q: D.’S NARRATIVE – “THE PERFECT PLAY”

Below is D.’s literacy narrative.

The Perfect Play

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is used mysteriously in our everyday lives. Most individuals may think of it as only developed for schooling but that horizon is not vast enough. I am literate in football. You must be physical, athletic and smart in order to be successful in the sport. Parts of this literacy consist of a playbook. Playbooks are generally notebooks that contain descriptions and diagrams of the plays that a team has, usually in reference to American Football. Football playbooks have had a large impact in my life. Understanding what one is allowed me to continue playing and knowing the concepts of the sport. They are usually more visual, using “X’s” and “O’s”, than wordy. You would have to know the ins and outs of football from the positions to the fielding measurements in order to understand a playbook. It is important because it gives me the knowledge to know what’s happening on the field, having this understanding keeps my head in the game.

Football is related to literacy. From grade school to college you must keep your grades up in order to be allowed to play football for the school team. At my high school in [state omitted] a student athlete had to maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0. Many athletes were affected by this rule. Some of the most athletic players I have witnessed were made ineligible to play and this ruined their careers. In high school I had a team mate named [name omitted]. [Name omitted] was without a doubt one of the most impressive athletes that had ever been through [high school name omitted]. In football he had broken and created school and state records. I knew that he would be the first one to make it out of the city of [city and state omitted]. When it was time for [teammate’s name omitted] to start getting into
colleges it was absolutely impossible because of his lack of literacy. Teachers and principals tried everything they could do in their power but at the end of the day, no one could do the work for him. By the time colleges started classes in the fall, [teammate’s name omitted] found himself sitting at home, in [city omitted], doing nothing. Everyone was disappointed with the way things had happened but there was no one to blame except [teammate’s name omitted] himself. From then on I made sure that I maintained on top of my studies and took care of business. This is one way football allowed me to stay studious in school and also work hard to become literate in football.

In football there may be two football players competing for the same position. They could be equal in both size and talent. One player may know more about what goes on in a playbook and that may give that individual the edge or advantage to earn the starting role. Who would have figured that such literacy would be the stem of who I am today, transforming me into a better person. I once had a close friend back at [high school name omitted] and we competed in everything we did from playing checkers to seeing who could eat their food the fastest at lunch. We both played the same position, free safety, in football and were both very talented. Our coaches were very impressed with the way we competed but there could be only one player with the starting position. He had already had an edge on me because of the fact that he was a senior and I was only a sophomore, so I had to figure out a way to come out on top. I began to ponder and figured that if I knew more material than he did then I would have a better chance. I began to study my playbook every day I woke up and every day that I went to sleep. Soon enough, at practices, the time I invested into learning the playbook paid off. I was making plays left and right, showing the coaches that I deserved to
be out on the field, giving my team a better chance of winning. By the next game, I was rewarded with the starting role.

As a young boy I grew up watching my father play college football and wanted to be just like him; very talented in the sport. The hard tackling, fast running, safety equipped sport amazed me. My dad was a high school star and had many records at his school. By me being his son, everyone expected me to be at least as good as he was. The sport meant so much to my family members as if it were a tradition. The few relatives I had wanted all of their kids to be the best so it became extremely competitive and intense. My family had conflicts like hyenas fighting over the last scraps all because of opinions of whose child was better at the sport. Growing up, my father created his own football team and was the head coach. I had no choice but to play for him and his team. When this occurred I figured that I would have to be the best by any means. He pushed me extremely hard to become better at the sport from a very young age, harder than any kid should be working. People use to want him to ease up on me but he never listened. When talking to him the words went through one ear and out of the other. I remember times in a little league recreation game that he used abuse me in front of everyone over a game that is supposed to be played for fun. Then I began hating football.

When I entered middle school I no longer wanted to have anything to do with the sport. My father was not going to put up with that. Again, I was forced to play football. I had no clue of what to do next; I was being forced to do something that I wanted nothing to do with. This made me feel like a gazelle trapped in the mouth of an alligator. I was helpless. At this time I began playing for someone other than my dad for the first time in my life. His name was Coach [name omitted]. Coach [name omitted] was a very energetic, competitive, and compassionate coach. He had kids of his own and was very religious. Coach [name
omitted] made the game of football fun for me. He allowed us to be kids and understand that football is just a sport and as long as we give our best effort that is all that matters. I then began gaining interest in the sport because of his morals. Coach [name omitted] began lecturing us about how it’s about more than football; it’s about life lessons as well. As I continued through high school I began to understand the things he would lecture us about. In middle school he would always make sure all of the football players were in dress code and gave our teachers respect. We would get punished with conditioning at practice if he had received any emails from teachers informing him otherwise. By the time I entered high school I was accustomed to being in dress code and respecting my teachers, while others lacked discipline.

I learned many lessons just by playing football. One lesson it taught was responsibility. In my eyes responsibility is the liability to hold yourself accountable for something. I was responsible for being on time for practice and responsible for making sure that I had all of the equipment needed for the safety of the game. If you did not obtain all of the equipment needed for football then you would be at a high risk out being injured. I then began using the tool for different things other than football. I was making sure that I was on time for school, made sure I did my homework, and made sure to take care of my pets. Without football I would have most likely ignored those priorities. Being responsible allowed me to stay as healthy as possible and succeed in high school – all because of football.

Along with responsibility came self-discipline, which I believe is one of the most impressive things that I have learned. Self-discipline is the control you have over yourself even when no one is looking. While playing football you must remain discipline or it will hurt your team. Things like not going off sides or not holding while blocking are examples
from football of being disciplined. It takes time to create self-discipline; you have to mold this characteristic. I have always loved lifting weights but at times there were days when I did not feel like doing anything. At times when the team had to lift weights some players would cheat themselves by doing fewer repetitions than assigned to them. Because I had the discipline learned from football, I was always the individual to do all of my repetitions and complete the whole workout separating myself from the others in strength and health. I remember an event from the eighth grade where I exhibited self-discipline. My classmates and I were sitting in our algebra class as our teacher had to step out for a moment for an emergency. Before she left the class she asked us to remain in our seats until she returned. As soon as she left the classroom it was as if fireworks lit the night’s sky. My classmates were pumped with adrenalin. Paper balls flew across the room and the floor thumped. As much as I wanted to join my classmates, I remained in my seat. The principal crept into class and suspended everyone that was off task. I was proud that I remained in my seat not knowing that football had inserted the status of self-discipline into my life. Without football I would lack self-discipline and most likely would have been one of those students that had been suspended.

Playing football has also taught me how to work as a team and get along with others. There are various amounts of members on football teams and many individuals all have different personalities. There are eleven players on the field at a time and everyone must work together in order to defeat the opposing team. Everyone’s role is important; it helps make everything flow smoothly. School plays a large role in my life. Every year there are new classes and new people to meet. Football has made it easier to meet and interact with others comfortably. There were those times in high school when my teachers would assign
my fellow classmates and I group projects and assignments. Gathering with others and working together was never a problem, and even when there were problems I was able to regulate and advise through my football experiences.

Football has impacted my life in many different ways. I have no clue of where I would be or what I would be doing without this literacy. I am proud to announce that it has allowed me to receive a football scholarship here at [university name omitted]. I plan to continue to learn more and improve my literacy as I proceed with my football career.