

Mask-making as identity project in a high school English class: a case study

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Abstract

This study reports on the composing process of one student, Petra (a pseudonym), as he reflects on a significant composition he produced during a unit on identity in a 12th-grade English class in a U. S. high school. The unit was the first thematic exploration of the year for the students and was designed to help them think about themselves as students and writers, and individuals. The teacher's goal was to have students' engagements with literary and artistic texts serve as vehicles for developing better understandings of themselves. The study demonstrates how students' engagement with more 'traditional' artifacts is essentially an example of multimodality and evidences why teachers and researchers should see such work as part of the long tradition of creativity within English. It also demonstrates how such an apparently 'traditional' artistic approach in fact covers the same territory as that of the digital revolution, that is that multimodal 'tools' engage all the cultural resources of students from their domestic, community and school settings, in contrast with much typical school activity that is perceived as pointless and tedious.

Key Words

Arts, at-risk students, multimedia composing

Introduction

The particular composition we study in this research is not the typical writing that students do in English classes. It is, rather, a mask that Petra made from gauze and plaster and decorated in ways that represented his identity (see Figure 1). The mask was a form of composition assigned by his teacher, co-author Cindy O'Donnell-Allen, as part of a year-long exploration of self in relation to the senior curriculum. The curriculum was ostensibly focused on British literature, but Cindy adapted it at the beginning of the year to include accessible international literature focused on issues of personal identity. The mask-making activity was part of Cindy's year-long effort to include the arts among her students' meaning-making efforts and compositions (see, e.g., O'Donnell-Allen, in press; O'Donnell-Allen & Smagorinsky, 1999; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) as part of the ongoing curricular conversation (Applebee, 1996) that Cindy encouraged about students' notions of self and personal life trajectory.

Figure 1: Petra's mask



The arts have traditionally been undervalued in U.S. schools, often being among the first programs cut during times of economic stress. While Gardner (1973), Eisner (1976), and others have long argued for the importance of the arts in a mainstream education, arts have remained a peripheral domain, justified more in terms of cultural aesthetics than cognitive development or democratic participation (Moody, 1990). While some political arguments have recently been mounted to support the idea of expanding the range of semiotic systems available to students (e.g., The New London Group, 1996), few schools have taken up the challenge, particularly in the face of the current high-stakes standardized testing movement that has overtaken U.S. schools.

The study

Our study of Peta suggests that much worthwhile learning can occur during the process of artistic composition. To explore his experiences while composing his mask, we investigate the following questions:

1. How was the mask-making activity situated within the culture of this classroom?
2. What composing processes are revealed during Peta's production of his mask?

Method

Data Collection

Data included field notes from daily classroom observations, Cindy's teaching log, and curriculum materials. Each of these sources enabled us to reconstruct the classroom activities to account for the setting of Peta's mask composition.

The primary data source was a retrospective protocol (Ericsson & Simon, 1993) conducted with Peta based on his completed mask. In a retrospective protocol the participant reconstructs a recently-completed thinking process, stimulated by consideration of the finished product. Peta's protocol was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Peta's protocol was collaboratively analyzed by the first and second authors, and their analysis was reviewed and verified by Cindy. The coding system included three general types of codes to help us understand the students' situated composing process: *goal* that provided the structure for the activity of their text production, *tool* employed to solve goal-oriented problems, and *setting* that served as the social context in which they learned to use the tool. The full set of codes and their frequencies is listed in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1

Goal:Context:Material affordance/constraint	5
Goal:Context:Teacher-imposed framework	5
Goal:Mask Qualities: Color relations	6
Goal:Mask Qualities: Effect	7
Goal:Mask Qualities: Expressiveness	4
Goal:Mask Qualities: Form/color relations	3
Goal:Mask Qualities: Repeated element	5
Goal:Self:Communication	10
Goal:Self:Expectations	4
Goal:Self:Expression	13
Goal:Self:Identity	16
Goal:Self:Investment	9
Goal:Self:Meaning ambiguous	6
Goal:Self:Meaning directly attributed	10
Goal:Self:Projection	11
Setting:Intercontext:British Literature	6
Setting:Intercontext:Home	20
Setting:Intercontext:Personal experience	7
Tool:Artist's Qualities:Emotional mediator	8
Tool:Artist's Qualities:Spiritual mediator	6
Tool:Artist's Qualities:Reflection	13
Tool:Design Convention:Abstract design	2
Tool:Design Convention:Genre	3
Tool:Design Convention:Pattern	3
Tool:Design Convention:Representation of emotion	6
Tool:Design Convention:Rightness of fit	3
Tool:Design Process:Formative evaluation	5
Tool:Design Process:Materials-based process	6
Tool:Design Process:Non-linear thinking	7
Tool:Design Process:Pre- or post-writing	6
Tool:Design Process:Problem-solving hierarchy	4
Tool:Design Process:Provisional text	6
Tool:Image:Narrative	7
Tool:Symbol:Color	9
Tool:Symbol:Facial features*	9
Tool:Symbol:Linear element**	6
Tool:Symbol:Nonfacial features***	6

*Tool:Symbol:Facial features include cheek, eyebrows, forehead, mouth, nose

**Tool:Symbol:Linear elements include angular, curvilinear

***Tool:Symbol:Nonfacial features includes vine, water drop

Goal

We identified three kinds of goals in the protocols:

- those suggested by the *context* of production, including the ways in which available materials both afforded and constrained the students' composing; the ways in which Cindy's teacher-imposed framework directed their work; and the ways in which the temporal framework of their activity limited their composing;
- those related to the *mask quality* such as color relations, the effect of the mask on others, repeated elements that produced a pattern, and so on;
- the students' *self-selected* goals, such as their communication of an idea or emotion, the expression of emotions, their use of the masks to reveal or develop their identity, their investment in the activity, their projection of self into the mask through images, colors, and symbols, and so on.

Setting

Setting codes described the activity setting in which the students learned how to use the tools they employed. We identified two types of settings, the *intercontext* and *intertext* of production. The intercontext refers to the recurring social practices in a setting (Floriani, 1993), such as the routine use of writer's notebooks to sketch out ideas in Cindy's class or the habitual practices students used when doing art at home. The intertext refers to the ways in which all texts are interconnected, that is, each text is derived in some sense from a prior text (Barthes, 1981). For Peta, these included personal experiences, which were the 'texts' which he drew on for his mask.

Tool

The tools that we identified in the students' composition of masks fell into five categories: *artist's quality*, *design convention*, *design process*, *image*, and *symbol*.

A number of artist's qualities contributed to Peta's efforts to compose his mask. These included what we termed *emotional mediators* (e.g., the use of swirls to represent chaos in both nature and personal life), *spiritual mediators* (e.g., the use of the color brown to represent a spiritual connection to the earth), *reflection* (i.e., how the process of mask composition prompted Peta to think about and represent himself), and so on.

Peta drew on a number of design conventions to help shape his design, including genre features such as what he called 'primordial' elements he borrowed from the African National Museum of African Art, *patterns* for colors and images, the *representation of emotion* such as the rage he depicted through the mask, and so on.

Peta's design process included *formative evaluations* made during the process of composition, the use of a *materials-based process* (i.e., a plan that emerges through engagement with the materials of production), *nonlinear thinking* rather than wholly planned composition in the production of the mask, *pre- or post-writing* in relation to the mask design, the use of a *problem-solving hierarchy* to compose the mask so as to prioritize decision-making, and so on.

The primary type of image that Peta employed was *narratives*, which he drew on from personal experiences to provide content for his mask.

Peta's use of symbols included *color*, *facial features*, *linear elements*, and *nonfacial features* such as a vine.

Context of the Investigation

Participants

Cindy: At the time of the data collection, Cindy was in her ninth year of teaching in public high schools. Cindy valued play-oriented activity, multimedia composing, group work, process-oriented approaches to writing, reader-response approaches to literature, strategies for inquiry-based and inductive learning, methods for instructional scaffolding, and assessment through student portfolios. She was strongly influenced by two factors in her orientation to teaching. First of all, her mother was a kindergarten teacher, and Cindy's own young children were at the time enrolled in a kindergarten in which discovery and play-oriented learning were emphasized. Her exposure to the constructive nature of kindergarten activities of play, projects, and growth-oriented activities informed her approach to teaching high school students. Second, she was influenced by her first professional assignment as a drama teacher, an experience that led her to structure her classes to promote activity, interaction, and performance in responding to literature.

Peta: Peta was a male who counted a variety of nationalities in his ethnic heritage: The Native American tribes of the Cherokee, Delaware, Kiowa, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho; and the European nationalities of the English, Irish, Scottish, and French. His primary identity was as a Native American. (His real name was that of a Comanche tribe chief, we chose his pseudonym based on a Comanche chief from the 1800s, Peta Nocona.) With long black hair and deep copper skin, he maintained traditional Native American beliefs and practices. He recounted, for instance, several experiences from his childhood and youth, including his tribal naming ceremony:

I would be about a year old, and my dad, he is real into the Indian religion, and there was this naming ceremony. [My Indian name] is not my given name, but my given name is [Peta Small] which is on my birth certificate, and look at what the Indian given name is,

you have got this teepee, and you have several members of your clan and sometimes friends and relatives, and they take you into the teepee and they have songs going on and prayer. And periodically you would go out - you would leave and walk around the teepee and just sort of experience what is going on such as - you would notice things such as any wildlife that is around, the weather, anything that happens to be going on.

When asked the meaning of his Indian name (which was inaudible on the audiotope), he said, 'I can't remember the exact translation, but it had something to do with running water [because] there was a river nearby.'

Another aspect of Native American culture that Peta reflected was his cyclical orientation to time (Krueger, 1989), a way of observing time that fits poorly with Western notions of punctuality, deadlines, etc. Two colleagues of Cindy's - one who taught psychology and one who sponsored the school's Native American student club sponsor (a club that Peta was leader of at the beginning of the year) - told her that his difficulty in keeping schedules, being punctual, and meeting deadlines made it hard for him to meet the expectations of school. Peta said while composing his life map for Cindy's class - a 'map' that represented key events from his life on a journey path - that 'I don't like the idea of this life map being linear either. It doesn't make sense. No way in life is linear but the maps are linear.'

Peta's challenges in satisfying school requirements were further compounded by the fact that his father had abandoned his family a few years previously, and his mother had a series of medical problems that required extended periods of hospitalization. Peta was working two part-time jobs to help with the family's finances. Cindy was concerned in the year about his prospects for seeing the year through and remaining in school, writing in her journal,

I'm so hopeful for him this semester. He's almost ebullient (for Peta) right now, but I fear it's only a matter of time before the absences reappear and he falls into his characteristic state of numbness. Last year (when he was in my class), he just stopped coming, and I worried [that the problem] was me. But now he's re-enrolled in my class. 'I requested you,' he said. So somehow I must have connected with him more than I thought I did last year.... I just want him to graduate from high school, but the odds don't look good.

Cindy's concern was realized when Peta's attendance tailed off and he dropped out of school by the first semester's end. His dissonant experiences in school stood in stark contrast to the intelligence he

showed through his mask composition, which we describe later, and his own nurturing personality which he revealed through his role as a mentor to a youngster in the community and his statement that, whatever awaited him in life, it would follow from his central value that 'I like helping people.'

The Mask Activity

The mask activity took place as part of a unit on identity. Prior to the activity students had bought and begun to use writer's notebooks (places where they could draft or sketch ideas), learned to keep double-column reading logs in response to their literary reading, started to keep writing portfolios in which they reflected on their identities as writers, constructed life maps, explored significant childhood memories, and used mirrors to sketch out how other people saw them and how they saw themselves.

The mask activity was taught by Cindy's friend Candace, who worked as an artist in residence for the state Council for the Arts and had previously taught English in one of the district's middle schools. Candace told the students that 'masks serve as identities because when you put on a mask you become what the mask represents - we become our mask.' She showed several masks made by people from workshops she'd conducted and discussed with students what the various symbols might represent.

She then asked for a volunteer and went through the whole process of mask construction: a base of petroleum jelly, on top of which she layered plaster strips. When the student model's plaster was dry, Candace helped her peel the mask off, and the rest of the class began to work in pairs to create their own masks.

During the next class session Cindy modeled how she had used her own writer's notebook to create her own cluster that outlined her sense of identity. She encouraged students to 'Think of some qualities that make up your character.' She told the students that they could either do a cluster or a more conventional outline. She then explained how she had moved from the cluster to her mask, thinking about such things as color, placement, and symbols, which Candace then explained further. Students spent the remainder of the class thinking and talking about how they might use symbols on their masks. During the next class the students decorated their masks based on these preparations. Peta was absent on this day but composed his mask at home. When he returned to class, he provided a retrospective protocol about his process of composition for first author Peter.

Results

Peta's protocol revealed that he engaged in a variety of composing processes often identified by writing theorists as critical and even exclusive (e.g., Enig, 1971) to writing. As Table 1 reveals, he worked within a set of parameters defined by his teacher's expectations and the limits and potentials allowed by the materials he used. In this report we focus on his production within these constraints and affordances, both of which followed from the contextual information we have already provided.

Our focus in this study is on aspects of Peta's composition process that particularly contributed to his human development. We focus on his design process, his self-selected goals for the mask (particularly in terms of how his composing process both represented and contributed to his understanding of his life's meaning and his development of an identity), the emotional and spiritual realizations he came to through his composition, and the symbols and images he used to represent these issues on his mask.

Design Process

Peta's design process reveals an emergent approach to his mask design. That is, he did not plan his mask design ahead of time and then execute it wholesale, but rather engaged in planning as his conception of the mask unfolded. The following exchange, for instance, reveals that he began with a sketch on the mask's surface as part of what we called a *materials-based process*: a design approach in which planning emerges through engagement with the materials of production rather than being conceived of prior to working. Such an approach tends to produce a *provisional text*, a draft of the composition that inevitably will be reconsidered through a process of reflection and revised or extended through further materials-based decision-making.

Peta: *It's just very - it was a very loose composition. Like you could see where I put a pencil here.*

Peter: *Yeah. So you did actually sketch some of this before you painted it?*

Peta: *Yeah.*

Peter: *Did you do that with all of that or just some of the parts?*

Peta: *I did it with the vines, but I didn't do it with the leaves. I just did the root of it. There where the red is. That's basically all I did and then with this, I just went like that - a little like spike circles or something. And then with this, I just did like that so I could follow a basic pattern, but not really. I didn't keep to it.*

Such an approach relied on a *formative evaluation*. Peta's in-process assessments of his provisional texts as a way to determine his next action.

Peta also engaged in what we termed *nonlinear thinking*, which Allen (1987) argues is more likely among Native Americans than Westerners. When asked what the blue drops of water were on the mask's forehead, Peta said, 'It's just sort of how I was representing the - when you're thinking, you're not thinking, you know, linear or anything, it's just - it's not one thing, it's like multiple things and it's like the rain of ideas and thoughts just happened to be going on.' This approach was consistent with his materials-based approach to design in which he was not bound to a plan but made new decisions as his design emerged.

Further, Peta used writing as part of his design process. His mask composition was part of a multimodal exploration of self, one in which he produced a poem in conjunction with the mask. He wrote the following, for instance, after completing his mask, saying that it put into words some of the ideas he was trying to express through his mask:

So its people have many faces to get to the meanings of some unknown point and find a marker that are within the words of this saying. With all of your nice guys' and gals' faces of innocence smiling with such a lie that you think can't be seen, but I have lost my ignorance and refuse to play the drama of joy and misery, for I am my keeper and the thrilling fluid binds my words. With the pouring and beating drops of my mind raise up a rage from deep inside, and you will find a stream of flash and flood of imagery coming down on your sleeping mind, and if you hit the sleep bead on man's simple machine, then you shall get and deserve a little silence.

Peta read this poem aloud; he said,

I don't let other people read it. You notice I didn't let you read this? I read it to you. I almost - I used to let people read it, but then people would talk to me about it and they would take it in a different point which is perfectly fine but when I write, it's usually for someone and I want them to get - I don't want them to - I want them to get how I mean it so I read it to them.

Because he intended to read his writing for others, and because his performance relied on the reaction of his audience, 'I wrote pause at the bottom' because 'I was just going to like look out or look at whoever I was reading it to' to determine how to proceed.

These various processes suggest that for Peta, his mask composition was nonlinear, emergent, and interactive. Given the generally linear ways in which U. S. schools work, his decision to drop out of school and focus on his Native American community's ways of engaging with the world is, if unfortunate from an educator's perspective, not surprising in terms of his school's relatively limited avenues for thinking and acting. Cindy's class notwithstanding.

Goals

Most of Peta's goals for his mask were personal: to communicate, to express himself, to embody his identity, to express meaning, to project himself into his mask. These goals suggest that for the most part he saw his mask design as a personal project in which he was highly invested. Peta, we recall, had a history of spotty attendance, erratic effort on school assignments, and tenuous commitment to school; at the same time, he revealed himself to be a serious, thoughtful, and committed young man in relation to issues that concerned him. School on the whole, however, provided few opportunities for engagement in what he found important.

The mask activity, however, was something that commanded his attention and interest. He missed a number of classes after making the plaster mold, but then completed his composition at home. Later, he returned to class to discuss his completed mask with the researcher. We see, then, that the mask provided him with learning opportunities that were absent from most of what he did in school.

Peta's work on his mask embodied a series of goals that are revealed through the following exchange:

- Peter: *Why is your nose yellow with a kind of a red triangle or pinkish?*
- Peta: *Because that is how I was wanting to represent the inner rage.*
- Peter: *The yellow is rage?*
- Peta: *It's coming from - you know, sometimes when you get mad, you have pressure that's like right here.*
- Peter: *Up between your eyes?*
- Peta: *Yeah. And I put it around the brow.*
- Peter: *Uh huh. Is that why the nose is yellow?*
- Peta: *Uh huh.*
- Peter: *So that's where you feel it coming - is it coming out or is that just where - or does it stay there?*
- Peta: *It seems to like - it kind of feels everything else. It's, I guess maybe - yeah, it just kind of feels everything else. It kind of - it sets things in motion. Of course, by thinking about it and expressing it and all that stuff, it cools it down.*

- Peter: *Is that what your point at the forehead is, why you say that?*
- Peta: *Yeah.*
- Peter: *And that's a -*
- Peta: *So you actually think it over and all. And like in my poem when it says with pouring and beating drops of my mind raise up the - I guess the rage from deep inside.*

Peta hoped that through his mask design he could communicate aspects of his experiences and emotional makeup to people who viewed it; he directly attributed particular meanings that he hoped to convey to his viewers such as feelings of rage. He also achieved an expression of these feelings through the mask that, as we will illustrate next, helped to provide him with emotional mediation that served to cool down the rage.

More broadly, his comments illustrate the larger issues of identity and projection. Gee (2003) describes what he calls a projective identity, which employs two senses of the work 'project': 'to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character' [in a video game and to see] 'the virtual character as one's own project in the making.' This virtual character is 'imbued' with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want that character to be and become' (p. 55). From an identity standpoint, Peta's mask depicted, through symbols, his identity as a person whose experiences had caused him to develop a 'rage from deep inside.' His ability to represent this rage in the mask was part of a projection of himself onto the mask.

Emotional and Spiritual Realizations

As the previous section illustrates, Peta often used his mask design as what we called an *emotional mediator*, that is, as a tool for exploring or representing his emotions in relation to his identity. In addition, his mask served as a *spiritual mediator*, that is, as a way to express his broader connection to the earth, an orientation that Jacobs and Jacobs-Spencer (2001) maintain is central to a Native American outlook. In describing the vine that he inscribed on the mask, for instance, he said,

- Peta: *I tried to leave covering my mouth. It's just, I guess, the way I write and stuff. I bring it out, it's kind of entwined.*
- Peter: *Entwined?*
- Peta: *And fluid and it just seems natural - the vine. And I've got the leaf as my lips.*
- Peter: *As I look at it, I'm wondering, it doesn't look as though the leaf is, say, covering up to keep you silent. Is that - or is it intended as something you can open?*
- Peta: *That's kind of how it looks, but that's not really how I intended it. I just made the vine red because - and it's like a life that was kind of entwined through it all.*

Peta's mask included several types of symbols representing his spiritual connection with the earth. He said, for instance, that

Peta: *[The reason] I did brown is because it's earth tones.*

Peter: *Uh huh. As a background?*

Peta: *As a background. And it just happened to be the color of my skin, but it's, it has nothing to do with my skin.*

Peter: *Yeah. Just kind of the earth?*

Peta: *Yeah.*

His decisions about how to depict his life on the mask, then, were designed both to convey emotion (e.g., rage) and simultaneously to manage those emotions (to cool the rage). He further represented his spiritual connection with the earth and the whole of life; indeed, his relationship with the earth involved few if any of the adversarial emotions that followed from his interactions with his (mostly White) schoolmates, those whom he abandoned with his decision to leave school.

Symbols and Images

The previous examples illustrate how Peta used symbols to express himself in his mask design. He used *color* (such as brown to represent the earth) and *nonfacial features* (such as the vine to represent the interconnectedness he saw in life) to depict central aspects of his Native American identity. He further incorporated his use of colors and natural elements to express his emotions. When describing the blue drops of water on the forehead of his mask, for instance, he said that

I wanted that to look like a rain image and I wanted the purple - since I had already used blue for the rain, I wanted the purple to give it sort of a mellow because the way I think. The way I actually think is pretty calm. The way I feel is very, I guess, sort of - I wouldn't want to say violent, but it's kind of that degree.

Peta also used what we termed a *curvilinear element* throughout his mask design, again as part of his effort to symbolize his relationship with nature. When Peter pointed out that his mask included 'a lot of swirls... a lot of circular motion,' Peta replied, 'Yeah. Well, the thing is, chaos is very circular. And randomness is very circular. So it's just kind of - I guess nature is kind of chaotic.'

In addition to using symbols on his mask, Peta included images, particularly those derived from the narratives he constructed from his life experiences. He was asked, for example,

Peter: *What did you intend with that - this bright yellow and red, green and then a kind of a more drab green in the background.*

What -

Peta: *It's kind of the - it's like the sorrow and the envy and the pain that - I mean we all go through certain things and I feel that I have experienced many things to give me insight on a lot of - and it kind of reflects on how I write. And I've always noticed that, you know, you get that sort of ache when you hurt? And I've always noticed that it's been stronger like on my left side.*

Peter: *Interesting. Is that what the sharp images are?*

Peta: *Yep. I guess that it could be it. Yeah. It's sort of the pain and emotion. It's always very - like I said, I was - the way it - is always strong. I guess I always go to extremes on how I feel like being extremely happy or extremely angry.*

Peter: *Uh huh. Is that all on the inside, because you told me that you have kind of mellow outer appearance and that's mostly what I see.*

Peta: *Yeah.*

Peter: *But inside, there's a lot more going on than you show?*

Peta: *Yeah. But it doesn't bother me because I can write about it.*

As we have illustrated previously, Peta engaged in a variety of identity-developing thoughts while composing his mask. He drew on the narratives of his life story to depict emotions through symbols such as color and shape, often using writing in conjunction with his art to work through his broader identity project. In enabling such important work, the mask project and other activities in Cindy's class were among the few academic assignments that he found worthwhile in school.

Discussion

Peter: *When you write for school, is that a problem, that you don't like for teachers to see what you've written?*

Peta: *... Yeah. I mean that's just - it's kind of weird how I see school work and my work and it's - I mean everybody else sees it, you know, when you put this much effort in this, why can't you put this in school?*

Peter: *... Do you feel that you need school?*

Peta: *... Not this school. I enjoy being in [Cindy's] class. ... I like the drawing. And I like all the little construction work and stuff. It's just like being in preschool, you know. It's the - I guess it's more the people. It's like if you have - and I imagine you do, uncreative, unmotivated people working around you, you tend not to be that way with yourself. ... It's really hard to do stuff when you're in a group and you're the only one doing it. And everybody else just doesn't care.*

In this study we have looked at the composing of Peta shortly before he dropped out of school. Ironically, Peta left in part because his classmates, he felt, were unmotivated to work and learn; his out-of-school opportunities afforded him a greater opportunity to grow. He was also at odds with the generally linear nature of the thinking required and the obligation to have others read his writing, something he felt very strongly against. This bright, motivated, compassionate young man was left to find his way in life outside the bounds of formal education.

Our study has revealed that in particular kinds of environments and tasks, Peta engaged with the curriculum in thoughtful, reflective, and provocative ways. We see Cindy's approach to incorporating the arts with introspective reading and composing as having great potential for involving students who share Peta's attributes but find school to be disenfranchising, shallow, and tedious. As we have shown, his thinking during his process of composition on this 'preschool' type of assignment was among those experiences that he pursued intently and intensively at home in sophisticated, highly symbolic and synthetic ways. Such experiences were virtually absent from most of Peta's coursework and - if the studies of Goodlad (1984),Sizer (1992), and others are still relevant - the classes of most students in U.S. schools. Peta's plight highlights the consequences of disaffecting curriculum and instruction, and his performance on this assignment offers possibilities available through expanding the range of tools and texts accessible to students in school.

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