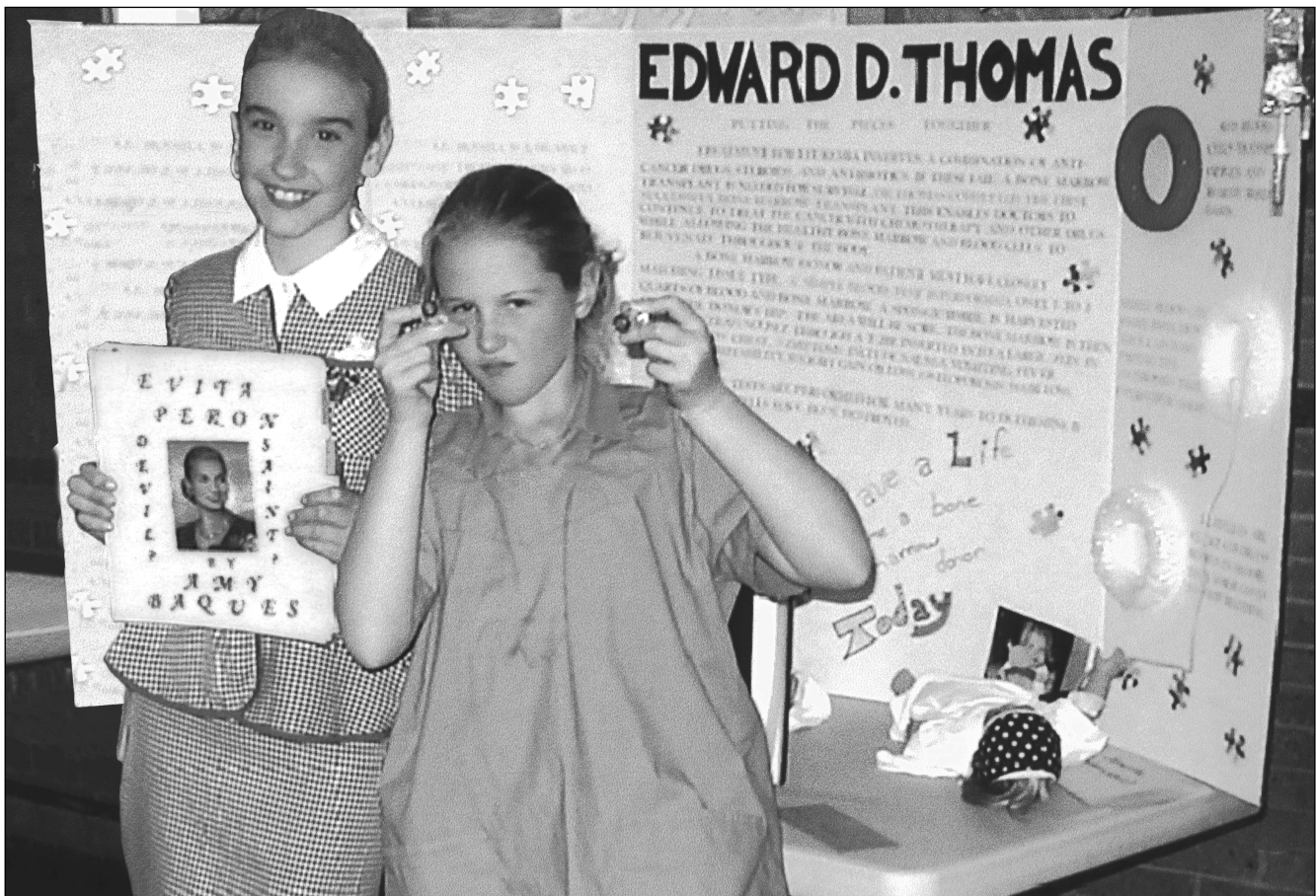# Multigenre Research: The Power of Choice and Interpretation

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Laurie Swistak

Supporting students in selecting topics and organizing information for planning is key to writing with purpose and passion in multigenre research.

Letisia, a fifth grader, stands before an audience of parents, teachers, university students, and classmates and reads the following piece from her multigenre paper on Rosa Parks:

The Ride of Freedom
As she walks in, she slides her change
    into the machine.
Glancing out the window, she sees
    patient people waiting at the bus stop.
She is surrounded by rows of empty seats.

Bright sunlight beams through the
    window and bothers her tired eyes.
She sees shadows on people's faces
    outside the bus.
The sun reflects off the black, shiny
    leather seats.

As the bus moves, she hears the
    engine roar.
About to stop, she hears the
    squeaky brakes.
The door slowly opens and she hears
    bus riders' footsteps.

Are people still mad about integration?
Are people scared to sit next to her?
Is she proud of what she did?
How far will the bus go?

She is glad about the change.
She finally got her freedom.
She sits uncomfortably, yet still
    feels proud.

She has changed the world!
I am proud!
She has changed the world!
We are proud!

The audience claps and Letisia beams with pride. At the same time, other fifth graders are spread out in adjoining university classrooms making their presentations about famous people and events such as Bill Gates, D-Day, and Anne Frank. Parents snap photos and tote their video cameras to capture the moment when their child makes the much-awaited oral presentation.

The initial euphoria achieved when a multigenre research project is successfully completed can't be matched. For five years, my university preservice teachers and I have collaborated with Laurie Swistak and her fifth graders to write multigenre research papers and give oral presentations. My students serve as mentors during our weekly meetings and teach minilessons on genre, library skills, and organization skills. We celebrate our semester-long effort with an evening called Multigenre Madness. This culminating activity takes place at the university where the fifth graders give oral presentations on their research. Accompanied by their university mentors, the fifth graders dress in costume, carry props, and read many of their genres to an audience

of parents, teachers, and friends. As Chaney and Burk (1998) state, "The quality of life is enriched when individuals choose to engage in ethical, constructive, self-aware communication with their families, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and fellow community members" (p. 7).

MULTIGENRE RESEARCH PROJECTS

I began my exploration of multigenre when I read Tom Romano's *Writing with Passion* (1995). I was intrigued by the prospect of engaging preservice teachers in a long-term project involving them in the very things we want for our elementary children. They needed to learn how to read and write with purpose and passion. What better way for university and elementary children to collaborate than to write and share multigenre papers?

A multigenre research paper involves students in conducting research, and instead of writing in a traditional research paper format, they write in a range of genres. Each

> The paper is a collage of writing, often punctuated with artistic sketches, paintings, or graphics.

genre reveals one facet of the topic, and it can stand alone to make its own point. There are no traditional transitions like in a regular research paper, and the pieces are not necessarily in chronological order. The paper is a collage of writing, often punctuated with artistic sketches, paintings, or graphics.

Multigenre research has been documented at the secondary and college level (Davis & Shadle, 2000; Elbow, 1997–1998; Grierson, 1999; Moul-

ton, 1999; Romano 1995, 2000), as well as in middle school (Grierson, Anson, & Baird, 2002). Many elementary teachers have spoken with me or written to me about their experiments with multigenre. Some ask questions, some tell tales of success, and some even send copies of their students' final papers. Most are happy with the results of their efforts. They are amazed by the sustained interest and creativity their students, even the most difficult, have exhibited. Once teachers have tried multigenre research papers they want to continue with the process.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE MULTIGENRE RESEARCH PROJECT

When Laurie and I first tried writing multigenre research papers with our students, we were faced with questions such as: How can we integrate this project into our existing curriculum? Will it meet national and local standards? How should we organize our time? How do we approach the logistics of such a project? What will our students learn? We simply began having our students write multigenre papers and give oral presentations, and then we evaluated and revised the project each year. We now find that we can easily mesh it with our curriculum, meet both national and local standards (NCTE/IRA, 1996; RI State Literacy Frameworks, 1996), and figure out the nuts and bolts.

Laurie and I begin our project each spring by helping students to choose topics from the categories of important events or people who have influenced them. We ask our students to buy a notebook and divide it into sections. In the first section, we provide them with samples of the different genres that they can choose to use. The second section is for drafts of their pieces of

writing. The third section is a folder with pockets in which they place all the printouts from the Internet and any note cards they have written from their research.

The fifth graders keep journals where they write about their progress and experiences with my university students. Laurie asks them to answer these questions weekly: What did you accomplish today? How do you feel about it? What questions do you have at this time?

We create a timeline so that over a period of 14 weeks, I travel with university students to the elementary school 10 times. The university students and fifth graders begin by selecting topics. The following week, fifth graders come to the university to borrow books and to use individual computers to access the Internet. They also stay for lunch at the university cafeteria. Each Tuesday morning throughout the semester, my students spend 75 minutes teaching minilessons to small groups of peers and fifth graders, followed by writers' workshop time in which each fifth grader gets to conference individually with his or her mentor (Graves, 1994; Calkins, 1994). Topics include how to use the library, conduct research, write in multiple genres, and make strong oral presentations. Outside of the weekly time we spend together, all of the students are responsible for continuing on their own with their multigenre research. Laurie and I are also busy teaching the rest of our curriculum. For Laurie, this includes a poetry unit and a newspaper unit where the children learn about the 31 types of genre within a newspaper.

Laurie sets a schedule so that fifth graders have equal access to the computers in her room or in the library. Those who do not have computers at home get first preference. All drafts must be written by hand, checked by my students, turned in to Laurie to review, and then returned to be typed on the computer.

Laurie sends notes home to parents where she explains the project, shares students' topics, and asks for any resources that can be shared with students. She updates students' progress weekly and informs parents with a quick note. My preservice teachers also write their own multigenre papers and they share their weekly progress with fifth graders.

The last time Laurie and I worked together, I included two sections of my language arts course and Laurie invited another fifth grade teacher and her class to participate. We were 86 strong. This provided us with a wide variety of topics, writing, and feedback from our students. (For a more in-depth description of our procedures, see Allen, 2001.)

STUDENTS EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC CHOICE

Each year Laurie and I ask for written feedback from all the university students and fifth graders throughout our work together. We also enlist parent feedback and often

conduct interviews with many of our students. We even get unsolicited responses from former students. One of Laurie's students stopped by after two years just to reminisce about her multigenre project. She thought it was the best thing she ever did in school, and she hadn't had the opportunity to do anything like it since. We agree with Hansen (1998) when she says,

Evaluation starts with the learners. When we start to ask for our stu-

dents' evaluations, they often surprise us, and we realize how far we might have gone astray without their insights. Their thoughts beget our teaching and then we have to ask them, again, what they think. They evaluate. We revise what we do, and, eventually, we find ourselves in a teaching situation that can't exist without the frequent evaluations of students. We thirst for their insights. (pp. 1–2)

Among our interviews were Amy and Caroline, two of Laurie's fifth graders, because their papers and presentations were particularly successful. We wanted to know why they thought their projects were successful and how they thought we could help future students improve their multigenre projects.

Through our conversation, we found that the girls placed more importance upon the university oral presentation than upon the writing of the multigenre paper because of the chance to present before their peers. They got to dress up and expand upon their research through creative interpretation. As Sylwester (1998) says, "The arts are a win-win situation. The

> After talking with Amy and Caroline, we were more convinced than ever that initial topic choice is critical to deeper thinking, richer writing, and more powerful performances.

doers and the observers both discover something about the further reaches of being human" (p. 34).

Amy and Caroline commented on how certain fifth-grade presentations were better than others and felt the outstanding ones were those where their peers really connected with their topics. Both felt they had connected with their topics.

Amy, who was born in Argentina and can speak Spanish, chose Evita Peron. She had heard many stories

about Evita from her father. When Laurie introduced the multigenre project and asked students to think about a possible topic, Amy knew immediately she wanted to choose Evita. When I asked, "Now that your project is done and you know more about Evita, would you still have chosen her?" she responded, "Yes, I most definitely would. In fact, I still pay attention to news about Evita when I see it on TV or read about it on the Internet." Amy's engagement with her project reminds me of a statement Howard Gardner made in an interview with Goleman (1995).

We should use kids' positive states to draw them into learning in the domains where they can develop competencies. Flow is an internal state that signifies that a kid is engaged in a task that's right . . . you learn best when you have something you care about and you can get pleasure from being engaged in. (p. 94)

Likewise, Caroline had a strong attachment to her topic. She chose Edward Donnall Thomas, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1990 for the first successful bone marrow transplant. Caroline's two-year-old cousin was diagnosed with leukemia, and Caroline wanted to know more about the topic. Caroline loves her little cousin and even included photos of her in her multigenre paper. Sylwester (1994) explains the role emotion plays in learning. "We know emotion is important in education—it drives attention, which in turn drives learning, and memory" (p. 60).

At the university level, I have noticed that students whose papers and presentations made an impact upon their peers were the ones who wrote about topics that had personal significance. As Cameron (1998) states, "When we write about something we care about, something in which we have an emotional stake, our writing automatically acquires

'voice'" (p. 160). Jaime, a university student, wrote a very compelling paper about lung cancer. Her grandfather had died the year before of lung cancer caused by secondary smoke. Another university student, Karen, wrote about the power of black women throughout history. She showed their accomplishments in the space program, in politics, and in sports. Both Jaime's and Karen's presentations were powerful because they believed in their topics and wanted their peers to hear their message. They expressed their passion and it made a difference.

After talking with Amy and Caroline, we were more convinced than ever that initial topic choice is critical to deeper thinking, richer writing, and more powerful performances. We decided that we needed to spend more time on getting to know our students and guiding them to a topic selection that was personally important to them.

Before we begin the project, Laurie and I share an ever-growing list of topics chosen by former students.

Our list now includes over 200 topics. Laurie also shares a list of the top 100 events of the century. Figure 1 offers a sampling of some successful topics.

In addition, we also help our students to select topics by asking them the following questions:

- Is there someone you really admire and would like to know more about?
- Can you think of someone doing a job that you might like to do when you grow up?
- What famous person have you seen in the news?
- Is there a certain period in history that you would like to explore?
- What kinds of music do you like?
- Have you asked your friends what they are researching?
- Does anyone in your family have suggestions?
- When you think about your favorite subject in school, is there someone connected to that subject whom you might want to learn more about?

Historical Events	The Arts	Sports	Historical Figures
Apollo 13	The Beatles	Muhammad Ali	Princess Diana
Hiroshima	Beethoven	Larry Bird	Amelia Earhart
Berlin Wall	Elton John	Lou Gehrig	Ben Franklin
Declaration of Independence	Steven Spielberg	Michael Jordan	Jackie Kennedy
Great Depression	Leonardo da Vinci	Tara Lipinski	John Kennedy
Hindenburg	Walt Disney	Mickey Mantle	Martin Luther King
Holocaust	Norman Rockwell	Michelle Kwan	Mother Teresa
Pearl Harbor	Vincent van Gogh	Mary Lou Retton	Harriet Tubman
Titanic	Anne Geddes	Babe Ruth	Wright Brothers
Underground Railroad	Michelangelo	Ted Williams	Helen Keller

Figure 1. Samples of successful topics

- When you look at the list of topics written by former students, is there any particular one that you might be interested in?

This general set of questions has led students to believe that any of several topics would be fine as long as they had a vague interest and thought they might like to know more about it. We didn't lead them to believe otherwise.

Laurie also tries to help students realize that although everyone's life has a purpose, there are certain people who have made outstanding contributions in history. Using Michelangelo as an example, Laurie found that her students knew he painted the Sistine Chapel and that he was a famous person of the Renaissance. Probing further, Laurie asked, "What would happen if Michelangelo were never born?" One boy said, "Somebody else would have done those things." How could we get him to understand that we study this person or any famous person because of their incredible contributions to the world? If this boy chose Michelangelo, would he be committed to his topic?

We realized that we were not providing enough guidance towards topic selection when we noticed children were selecting their topics with only scant knowledge and even less interest. This made it difficult for the children to maintain enthusiasm over the four months of our project. We remember that Emily, who chose Queen Isabella as her topic, ended up sobbing three months into the project because she thought her topic was boring.

ACCOUNTABLE TALK

To ensure that children really connect with their topics, Laurie and I have developed a new procedure. We place responsibility upon our university and fifth-grade students to defend their topic choice to their peers and to us before making a final selection. We refer to this process as accountable talk.

We still begin by sharing our list of topics and holding a general discussion focused around the bulleted questions. We ask students to select two topics that they think they might choose for their multigenre research papers and have them list five facts that they already know about each. Next we place them in

> **Children were selecting their topics with only scant knowledge and even less interest.**

small groups of university and fifth-grade students where they share their topic and the five facts that they know about it. Others in the group act as detectives and "Probe for Proof" in an effort to help each other analyze why they selected their topics. We suggest that the detectives ask the following questions:

- How did that person impact the world?
- How would the world be different if this person had never been born?
- How did the person triumph?
- Why do we still study their works today?
- What is your need to study this person?
- How do you personally connect to this person?
- Why did you choose this topic?

We suggest the following questions if a student selects an event for his topic:

- How did that event impact the world?
- How has this event changed the world?
- How would the world be different if that event had never happened?
- Why do we study this event in history?
- What is your need to study this event?
- How do you personally connect to this event?
- Why did you choose this topic?

To help students finally decide which of the two topics they should select, members of the small group ask each other:

- Of your two topic choices, which one do you think you will find the most information about?
- Of your two topic choices, which one do you really like the best?

Michelle chose the Titanic and the Ku Klux Klan as possible choices. When Sarah, her mentor, asked her for five facts, she was easily able to list them about both topics. However, when she had to answer the probing questions, it was obvious to Sarah that Michelle's real interest was in the Titanic.

Sarah: *How did the sinking of the Titanic impact the world?*

Michelle: *You hear about it and people talk about it and I saw a scientist go and try to raise the Titanic. That's when I became so interested in it. I even read a book Mrs. Swistak has in the classroom. She lets us pick books for independent reading.*

Sarah: *What is your need to study this event?*

Michelle: *Because so many people died and I wanted to know why it happened, and I don't think it needed to. I'm wondering if it could have been prevented? What do you think?*

Michelle raises questions that have meaning to her. These will help

her to sustain her curiosity and interest in the Titanic over this long-range project.

If a student is still having a tough time selecting a topic, his university mentor will help him or her to complete a K-W-L for both topics and list five facts. Then the student is asked to come up with five things he or she wants to learn. If the student is not curious enough to be able to generate five things, that topic is probably not a good choice.

If the student is still having difficulty, the university mentor or Laurie will ask about books the student likes to read and why. They talk about experiences the child has had such as travel, personal tragedy, or difficulty. Even a discussion of places where the child has lived, sports of interest, or special relationships with extended family might uncover a topic. One of Laurie's students lived through the devastation of Hurricane Hugo and through discussion decided she would choose that topic. Finally, it might prove fruitful to explore the child's ancestry as a way to tap into a topic where students could do personal research with relatives as a means to connect with some historic event. Questions flow naturally as my students and Laurie's talk and tease out a good topic from even the most reluctant students.

BREAKING WITH THE TRADITIONAL RESEARCH PAPER

After topic choice, the next most important part of a multigenre research paper is a solid research piece. When Laurie and I first began the multigenre project, we had the children complete their research and write a brief report before writing their other genres. As our experience with multigenre grew, the research piece also grew and was at least 2–4 pages long. We required that the children complete the writing of the research piece before they

wrote in any other genres. We felt they needed a firm foundation of knowledge to be able to select the genres that would follow.

Through our summer discussion with Amy and Caroline, Laurie's fifth graders, we came upon another discovery that caused us to change our expectations for students' research pieces. When we asked Amy and Caroline, "Now that you've completed your papers, what five facts would you list about the lives of Evita Peron and Edward Donnall Thomas," we did not hear what we expected. Amy told us:

- Evita was born in Argentina
- She became an actress in 1935
- Her family was very poor and her parents were not married
- Her mom was her dad's cook
- Evita was married first in a civil then a religious ceremony

She didn't list many of the important facts she had included in her research paper. Instead, she talked of the more personal aspects of Evita's life. We realized that often the small events in a person's life might be the most interesting to the researcher. We asked why Amy chose to talk to us about these five events since she placed little or no emphasis upon them in her paper or when writing her genres. She told us she didn't include some of them in her research piece because she didn't think they would be worthy of mention. This caused us to think that maybe we were limiting our students' writing by forcing them to conform to the traditional perception of a research paper. We wanted to encourage them instead to write about the smaller events and to question how or why these events might have impacted the future course of this person's life.

During our discussion with Amy, Laurie asked, "What role do you

think poverty might have played in Evita's life?"

Amy: I think that because Evita was so poor she wanted to gain power. She had a series of boyfriends, each one more powerful than the last. She finally met and married Juan Peron to become the wife of the President of Argentina. Maybe because Evita was so poor early in life it caused her to want to help the poor by giving them money. This led to the eventual downfall of the government because Evita gave away Argentina's fortune.

Amy was very perceptive during our conversation, but this deeper analysis didn't emerge in her paper. Laurie and I had never asked our students to delve deeper and to interpret events in a person's life. We simply asked for the facts. Seeing how Amy's speculation led to her interpretation showed us that what we wanted our students to do when they planned and wrote their multigenre papers was to engage in this deeper thought.

THE FQI

We decided to use Amy's paper on Evita Peron to develop a new strategy, the Facts–Questions–Interpretations (FQI), which we use as a model to show students how to move from dry facts to rich interpretation. We selected the major facts from Amy's paper and listed them in a bulleted chronological order under the column titled Facts. (See Figure 2).

We ask students, "When we read these facts, what questions naturally come to mind?" "What are we curious to find out?" Together, we generate possible questions, which we list under the column headed Questions. As an example, Evita's father, who had earlier abandoned her and her family, was killed in a car crash. Evita, her mother, and siblings, were not allowed to go to the funeral

	EVITA PERON	
FACTS	QUESTIONS	INTERPRETATIONS
• Born May 17, 1919	What was her family life like?	Birth announcement
• Parents not married and father Juan Duarte abandoned her family shortly after her birth.	Why did her father abandon the family? How did the family survive?	Note left to family telling why he had to leave
• Father killed in car crash and Evita and family not allowed at funeral because not his legal family.	How did she and her family feel when they were not allowed to go to the funeral? How did she feel that she was not considered his family?	Evita's diary entry explaining her feelings Eulogy
• At 15, Evita moved to Buenos Aires, joined the Argentine Comedy Company and became an actress.	Why did she choose to become an actress? What were some of her accomplishments and how did she feel about them?	Ad for one of her plays Six-room poem Movie review
• Had many boyfriends, each one more powerful than the previous one until she met Juan Peron.	What made her search for more powerful boyfriends?	Dialogue on a date
• Juan Peron became the Secretary of Labor and Welfare under Pedro Ramirez, President of Argentina.	Why is this important?	Notice of Juan's appointment to Secretary of Labor and Welfare
• January 15, 1944, earthquake hit San Juan and killed 7,000 people. Peron organized a national relief effort and invited important and famous people to help. That's where he met Evita.	What was it like to work side by side with Juan Peron in the earthquake situation? What kinds of things did they try to accomplish? What did they talk about? How did they get to know each other?	News broadcast of earthquake and request for volunteers Newspaper article
• Juan and Evita married in civil ceremony on Oct. 22, 1945, followed by religious marriage on Dec. 19, 1945.	How were the two ceremonies different? Who came to the wedding? How did Evita feel about her marriage to Juan?	Wedding announcement
• Most of the time she represents Evita Peron but uses nickname Evita.	If she is the wife of the President of Argentina, why does she use a nickname? How did she lead the people?	Speech to people of Argentina
• Evita took money from the aristocrats and gave to the poor the "descamisados" (shirtless ones or laborers).	How did she take the money and why did she care about giving money to the poor?	Bank statement Bank check
• Evita didn't pay for what she took, gave money not jobs to poor.	Why didn't she give jobs to the people? Why did she just give money?	Workers posters for jobs
• Argentina today is a very poor country.	What are the conditions in Argentina today? Did Evita's actions really cause these problems?	TV news analyst
• Evita helped pass a law in Argentina so women could vote.	Did Evita vote? Did she lead others in campaign? What was her role?	Evita's conversation with some local women
• Evita used Argentina's federal reserves to pay the poor and the country ended up bankrupt.	Did the country go bankrupt while she was alive? How did Juan Peron feel about Evita giving all the money to the poor?	Juan's note to Evita
• Evita died on July 26, 1952 at 33 diagnosed with cancer of the uterus.	How was the end of her life? How did she feel about what she had done for Argentina?	Eulogy by Juan Obituary

Figure 2. FQI on Evita Peron

because her parents had never married. They were not considered his legal family. We wondered how Evita felt about not being able to attend the funeral. We also wondered how she felt about not being considered his real family.

We realize that some of the questions we generate with students might not be answerable through the children's research. Unless a detailed biography or autobiography is available that students can read and analyze, the answers to some questions will come from the imaginations and interpretations of students. When writing multigenre papers, writers are allowed and encouraged to meld fact with fiction.

In the past, we focused on making students complete the research and write about the major facts at the expense of investigating and interpreting the less well-known facts that might have more relevance to the writer. We now encourage our students to place more emphasis upon those parts of the person's life that have more meaning to them as writers.

Using Amy's FQI model with students, we spend time helping them select appropriate genres by asking, "Which genres could we use to express our interpretation of the questions we proposed in column two?" We list their suggestions in column three of the FQI chart. We try to generate a good number of possible genres so we can later select from among them to be sure our papers have balance and do not contain too many of the same genre. We emphasize that all of the facts students write about in their research pieces do not need to be questioned or translated into a genre. They need to ask themselves, "Which questions mean more to me as the writer of this multigenre paper?" "Which genres would I like to learn about and include in my paper?"

This process engages students in critical thinking.

As we create the third column together with our students, the FQI

> **In the past, we designed minilessons on the genres *we* thought students should learn about.**

evolves as a blueprint for the entire multigenre paper. Students begin to see the value of completing a chart such as this for their chosen topic. They must think through their topics and select the most appropriate genres. It also helps us as teachers to plan minilessons on the most popular genres selected. In the past, we designed minilessons on the genres *we* thought students should learn about. When students choose their genres, the minilessons are more relevant because they have a need to know.

One final benefit from our inclusion of the FQI occurs when planning a multigenre project. In the past, students wrote their research piece first and then wrote their additional genres, creating a dichotomy between the research and the rest of the genres. In order to get a flow within a student's project, we tried such things as putting genres in chronological order; placing stanzas from poems or lyrics from songs between individual pieces of writing; even interspersing the papers with diary entries, interviews, and artistic pieces. Some of these attempts were successful. Others seemed like afterthoughts once the projects were finished. And they were.

Now we encourage students to take their FQI blueprint and to consider breaking their research piece into sections that are punctuated by

their various genres. We explain to students that if Amy were trying to show that Evita's father abandoned his family, she could insert a note within her research piece from the father explaining why he decided to leave. When he was killed in a car crash, Amy could include a eulogy that Evita might have written for her father. It would make sense to the reader to be able to see the "evidence" or "fictitious artifact" at this point. It would make Amy's paper more interesting and realistic. It would also be beneficial at this point to include sketches, graphics, or photos to enhance the project.

Laurie and I came to the conclusion that a multigenre research paper really is a break with traditional research, so we had to ask ourselves why were we holding on to the research paper format. We encourage students to integrate their genres and artwork within the research paper. We also give them the liberty to make comments or add critiques, much as an unauthorized biographer might. With their modification of the traditional research report, students add to the essence of what made this person so special.

Romano (2000) writes, "Multigenre papers require a great deal of readers. So much is implicit, so little explicit that multigenre papers can be quite a cognitive load (Romano, 2000, p. 149). Laurie and I continuously try to help students write their papers in ways that satisfy them as writers, but also make their message clear to their readers. The FQI blueprint aids them in their clarity of purpose and expression.

CONCLUSION

Working together as a community for the past five years has helped Laurie, my university students, and me become better teachers of lan-

guage arts. Likewise, the project has made us all, including the elementary children, better writers, researchers, and learners. From the first day that Laurie's students enter her classroom in September, they are anxious to know when the project will begin. My students feel the same way. The multigenre research project has earned a strong and positive reputation.

Laurie feels there are many significant "teaching moments" as she watches her children go from nervous and tentative 10-year-olds to confident presenters of research and writing. Their sense of pride and accomplishment is written in their journal entries and also expressed in their smiles. The individual help and encouragement that each mentor provides has long lasting rewards.

I find that my university students gain a rich understanding of what it means to be a writer and how necessary it is for teachers to model the writing process for their students. The preservice teachers also enrich their background information through researching a topic in depth and through learning about a wealth of other topics when their peers share their writing. Above all, they realize how effective it is to act as guides and to facilitate learning rather than direct it. They see how this process empowers children. One of my students commented,

> It made me realize that reading, writing, and research can be made into something that kids actually want to do. They loved it, and it worked. I was so impressed by what the kids did. They picked their topics, picked how to write, and picked how to put it together—it was great.

This year in our multigenre project, Laurie and I focused on the importance of topic selection and modeled how to organize research information into the FQI as a blueprint for planning. This helped our students to connect their research with the variety of genres they could use to express themselves. They also looked deeper into a person's life or an historical event and truly appreciated how their chosen topic affected so many others. This is such an important part of a child's entire educational process that we felt compelled to help them begin this journey.

Each year as Laurie and I revise our expectations for our future students, we ask ourselves what we want

Theory and Research on Multigenre Writing Projects

Romano, T. (1995). *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

- The term "multigenre research paper" was coined by Tom Romano in this book, written for secondary teachers, but also relevant for elementary teachers. Romano outlines his students' processes for writing biographies using multiple genres and provides solutions for problems that might arise, such as documentation and grading.

Romano, T. (2000). *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

- Romano focuses on writing multigenre papers, offering advice in the form of lesson plans, helpful sources, examples of multigenre papers, and suggestions for discussing genres.

Grierson, S. T., Anson, A., & Baird, J. (2002). Exploring the Past through Multigenre Writing. *Language Arts, 80(1),* 51–59.

- This month-long study of sixth graders showed that multigenre writing helped most students grow as researchers, thinkers, and writers while they developed a fundamental understanding of the different purposes for which text can be used.

Moulton, M. R. (1999). The Multigenre Paper: Increasing Interest, Motivation, and Functionality in Research. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 42(7),* 528–539.

- Moulton found that having preservice English education students write a multigenre research paper incorporated practical skills and creative thinking, and was a feasible option to the typical research paper. Students enjoyed the process of research and took ownership of their products.

—Karen Smith

them to learn from this multigenre project. We now know that we want them to become passionate about a topic, to develop the research skills to be able to satisfy their curiosity, and most of all to be free to think and write in ways that let them connect and relate to their topics.

Scollon and Scollon (1986) capture the essence of the expectations we have for ourselves:

Planning is our most frequent defense against the unknown future. . . . With a plan we seek to control outcomes, to eliminate change, to eliminate the random and the wild. . . . Preparing is different. In preparing we always expect diversity of outcomes. In preparing we enlarge the future in our imagination . . . [and] we work to make ourselves ready. (p. 94)

Each year Laurie and I seek to better prepare our students with the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in the future. We will continue to listen to our students and we know that they will help us make multigenre research a more powerful tool for those students who follow.

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