



The Pedagogy of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives: A Survey

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Abstract

This study examines pedagogical uses of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), an online, publicly available, searchable database of autobiographical stories about literacy development. The DALN <daln.osu.edu> aspires to make visible the everyday literacy practices of ordinary people, a mission that makes it an invaluable resource for scholars and teachers. In particular, the DALN offers opportunities to deepen and complicate pedagogical approaches to literacy narratives in composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies. This article briefly reviews the historical uses of literacy narratives in composition courses before turning to current experiments incorporating the DALN. Based on surveys and conversations with instructors, the authors categorize and synthesize various approaches, providing specific examples and instructors' reflections that offer insights and highlight areas of concern. The final discussion considers what this research suggests about best practices and critical questions for educators interested in using the DALN in their teaching.

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If you've been to a conference on composition, literacy, or pedagogy lately, chances are you've been recruited to share a story with the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN). The brainchild of Cynthia L. Selfe and H. Lewis Ulman, the DALN is "a publicly available archive of personal literacy narratives in a variety of formats (text, video, audio) that together provide a historical record of the literacy practices and values of contributors, as those practices and values change" (DALN). Beginning from a collection of interviews with local academics, the DALN has grown exponentially over the past five years; at the time of this writing, it contains over 3,500 literacy narratives with diverse demographics, subjects, and media. This expansion has been made possible by outreach efforts that have encouraged educators around the country to become formal associates and informal assistants in the DALN project.

The authors of this study are among the partners and fans of the DALN. Comer was fortunate to serve as a research assistant during the project's launch in 2007 while studying rhetorical theories of narrative and composition pedagogy at The Ohio State University. This kairotic combination has since influenced her teaching; in various courses, she uses the DALN as a public space that invites students to critically engage with and compose their own literate lives. Harker has served as a DALN assistant at regional and national conferences for several years, recruiting participants

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and collecting narratives. He uses the DALN in both undergraduate and graduate courses at Georgia State University, employing the archive to introduce students to the defining concepts of New Literacy Studies: namely, the literacy myth (Graff, 1991); literacy sponsorship (Brandt, 2001); ethnography and literacy (Heath, 1983); strong theories of literacy (Street, 1993); and other interdisciplinary theories of language acquisition and development. Our own investment in the DALN has meant that we are regularly engaged in conversation with other users about how and why it has influenced our research and, more so, our teaching. These discussions regularly demonstrate the rich diversity of work inspired by the DALN; in turn, they have inspired us to share some of that developing knowledge. In particular, we are interested in why teachers are incorporating the DALN into their pedagogy, how they invite students to participate in this project, and what strategies they have developed to do so productively. By gathering, categorizing, and reflecting upon these uses, we aim to build a foundation for best practices and future development of the pedagogy of the DALN within (and potentially beyond) composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies.

1. Context

In many ways, the rise of the DALN reflects the popularity of the literacy narrative genre in contemporary composition studies. For years, composition has invested heavily in what J. Scott Blake (1997) termed “the literacy narrative industry” (p. 108). During the 1990s, discussion of literacy narratives focused on students studying others’ stories of literacy development in order to better understand their own. Peter Mortensen and Janet Carey Eldred’s (1992) “Reading Literacy Narratives” defined this genre as fiction or nonfiction texts that “foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy,” both oral and visual (p. 513). This move to incorporate readings about literacy into composition courses encouraged students to discover insights and inspiration from seminal works like Frederick Douglass’s *Autobiography* and George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*.

Despite the popularity of this approach, some scholars offered critiques of the resulting literacy narrative model. For example, J. Scott Blake (1997) and Caleb Corkery (2005) cautioned that the use of such models—specifically attention to published, polished exemplar narratives—might stabilize the ideas and stories of a few select authors and preserve limited conceptions about literacy and literacy development. As New Literacy Studies has shown, commonsensical attitudes about literacy, often rooted in autonomous and ambiguous definitions of literacy (Barton, 1994), make possible a host of unintended pedagogical consequences. Such approaches have “the potential to marginalize student writing” and “reinforce high/low distinctions between professional or literary and student writing” (Blake, 1997, p. 114). In response to these risks and the increased emphasis on students’ own writing as texts, most current discussions focus on having students compose and reflect upon their own literacy narratives.

Because literacy narrative assignments tend to position students as experts in their own literacy development and agents in future learning, they play a significant role in student-centered pedagogies (e.g., Scott, 1997; Bishop, 2000; Williams, 2003; Alexander, 2009; Kinloch, 2010; DeRosa, 2008). Likewise, literacy narratives are considered particularly effective in basic/developmental writing and second language learning (Sandman & Weiser, 1993; Anokye, 1994). The form and content of these assignments reflect expanding definitions of both literacy and narrative, resulting in subgenres like the technology autobiography (Kitalong, Bridgeford, Moore, & Selfe, 2003; Kirtley, 2012) and multimedia experimentation (e.g., Kinloch, 2010; Scenters-Zapico, 2010; Poe, 2011). In different contexts and across multiple media, literacy narratives have been praised for their ability to foster self-reflection and confidence. Other key advantages of this approach for students include the following:

- *Critical perspective.* Studying their own literacy development encourages students to “recognize the social-constructedness of their literacy attitudes and practices” and “recognize and critique their literacies in light of the discourse communities to which they belong” (Scott, 1997, p. 112). In this way, “[b]y foregrounding their acquisition and use of language as a strange and not a natural process, authors of literacy narratives have the opportunity to explore the profound cultural force language exerts in their everyday lives” (Soliday, 1994, p. 511). The result may be a more nuanced understanding of the play of power, access, and agency within and beyond institutional education.
- *Identity construction.* The process of composing literacy narratives encourages students to “claim ownership of their experiences” (Kirtley, 2012, p. 194); they can thereby “help validate students as authors and writers.. . [revising] their definitions of themselves as writers” (Scott, 1997, p. 112). The resulting narratives “confer upon students the importance and relevance of personal experience. They demonstrate how the individual voice can prevail over

institutionally imposed forms of literacy” (Corkery, 2005, p. 49). In this view, literacy narrative assignments offer students an opportunity to develop confidence as literacy learners and the agency to communicate their personal insights alongside or in spite of dominant narratives.

- *Community building.* Within the classroom, conversations about literacy narratives “can help establish [a] unique and sophisticated classroom language community” (Scott, 1997, p. 112). By challenging students to construct their own literate identities and reconsider the sociocultural dynamics surrounding literacy, literacy narrative assignments can help students participate in a “process of making the transition into a new, more empowering linguistic community” (Corkery, 2005, p. 49). By sharing these stories, students may take an active role in defining the nomenclature, boundaries, and expectations of the classroom community.

In addition to these student-centered outcomes, literacy narratives have also been used to help teachers better understand and serve their students. Like Mary Soliday (1994), Shirley Rose (1990) suggested that literacy narrative assignments offer instructors “key insights into culturally shared assumptions about the nature of literacy” (p. 245). More recently, William Carpenter and Bianca Falbo (2006) analyzed the literacy narratives of successful student writers and peer tutors at their university “as a valuable means of insight into the effects our theories and practices have on how all students employ writing in their academic, personal, and professional lives” (p. 105). Likewise, Kara Poe Alexander’s (2011) examination of student literacy narratives emphasized the interplay and complexity of *master* and *little* narratives in student literacy narratives. Alexander called for greater attention to narrative theory in the classroom, arguing that both instructors and students benefit from learning “that the stories we tell are part of larger cultural conversations on literacy” (p. 627). In such accounts, literacy narratives seem to educate teachers by offering increased understanding of students’ literacy background and beliefs.

Given these claims and the credibility of the research supporting them, the popularity of literacy narratives in composition is not surprising. After all, a pedagogy that builds upon students’ backgrounds to develop more critical attitudes toward literacy drives to the heart of contemporary composition studies. Even as scholar-teachers continue to investigate the stakes and strategies of literacy narrative assignments, their pedagogical value has been well established and has contributed significantly to the growth of the DALN in the past five years.

1.1. *The DALN in composition and literacy studies*

It’s worth noting that the DALN was not designed to be only, or even primarily, a teaching tool for college composition. As Ulman (2012) explained, one core goal of the project was to serve as a new kind of archive:

At a time when literacy practices and values are changing in response to new digital modes of composition and communication, we hoped that the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, as the archive came to be called, would create an invaluable historical record of a period of rapid change. (Origins section, para. 1)

The digital nature of the archive enables contributions in a variety of media and genres—audio essays, video interviews, alphabetic poems, and so on—which means the DALN contains not only narratives of literacy in-development but also examples of literacy-in-practice. As such, it reflects the multiple uses alluded to in Selfe’s original proposal:

The first large-scale repository of its kind, this Archive would provide researchers from a range of disciplines a site for studying the changing nature of U.S. literacy practices in the 21st century. Scholars could use the Archive as a site for identifying and studying emerging literacy trends and tracing literacy practices and values historically. Educators could use the Archive as a site for shaping increasingly effective instruction at all levels. (qtd. in Ulman, 2012, Origins section, para. 1)

As founders and allies experiment with its uses, the DALN remains more process than product, and therein lies its potential.

Poised between the public and academic, the digital and alphabetic, the DALN is shaped by tensions. As a public archive it necessarily reflects ambivalent and often ambiguous conceptions of literacy—characterizations that ascribe significant powers to literacy based on the presumption that it and its effects are simple or uncomplicated (Graff, 2010). However, because primary users of the DALN in its early years were closely aligned with composition and literacy education, the archive also reflects more specific, critical, and academic understandings of literacy. In this way, the archive functions simultaneously as both an open public record and an exploratory research project—creating a space that brings

together seemingly disparate views on literacy, its purpose, its place in our schools, as well as the attitudes and values that complicate literacy definitions and development. The pedagogy of the DALN taps into and asks students to negotiate these powerful forces; in this light, the stakes of identifying the best practices of the pedagogy of the DALN are high.

1.2. *This project: A survey of promising practices*

The exciting conversations taking place among DALN users have made it clear that these experiments merit close attention. Our goal here is to survey the most prominent pedagogical approaches, assemble examples of each, and offer shared insights on implementation; our hope is that this overview will inform and inspire new participants and strategies. At the same time, we are reluctant to establish what are conventionally termed *best practices*. This expression, now common in educational contexts, originated in fields like medicine and law

to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field. If a practitioner is following best practice standards, he or she is aware of the current research and consistently offers clients the full benefits of the latest knowledge, technology, and procedures. (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p. viii)

The language offers the kind of credibility associated with expertise and consensus. There is a risk associated with this borrowed phrase; however, as Maja Wilson (2006) noted, discourses surrounding educational standards have becoming increasingly prescriptive.

As a result, best practices can too often become specific mandates for the “right” pedagogical moves, regardless of context. Instead, we prefer to consider the work collected here as examples of “promising practice” (Wilson, 2006, p. xxii)—shifting the emphasis from *following* best practices to *creating, critiquing, exploring, and expanding* best practices. Best practices are always working toward betterment, always in progress. Our aim in categorizing and defining these approaches is not to systematize or regulate the paths of working with the DALN, but to build a better understanding of the affordances and, perhaps, the limits of the DALN as a pedagogical resource. The experts whose practices we’ve gathered here are working in different contexts, with demographics and institutional cultures that defy a singular model, but all demonstrate a commitment to critical literacy, pedagogical innovation, and public composition that is truly promising.

2. Method

2.1. *Publications*

When we embarked on this project, our natural first instinct was to look at the published scholarship on pedagogical uses of the DALN. But at that point, few pieces had been published that reflected classroom applications. The edited e-book, *Stories that Speak to Us: Exhibits from the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (2012), contained curated collections of narratives examined from a variety of perspectives, a few of which emphasized composition pedagogy. Every year, numerous conference panels and presentations appeared in the programs for the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the Computers & Writing Conference, among others. And in September 2012, Sally Chandler and John Scenters-Zapico (2012) edited a special issue of *Computers and Composition* on literacy narratives; their introduction highlighted the role played by the DALN in expanding literacy narrative research, and Krista Bryson’s (2012) article examined how the DALN “provides contributors both subversive and traditional frameworks for understanding literacy and literacy narratives” (p. 254). Nevertheless, in terms of detailed data about the DALN in/and pedagogy, very little of the fascinating work we knew was happening in classrooms had yet made it into academic press.

2.2. *Survey*

Fortunately, the DALN has developed a robust community of participants. Led by Selfe and Ulman, the DALN team of volunteers collects literacy narratives at conferences and institutions. They also remain connected through a web of email, social media, and listservs. Our access to these informants offered a direct route to answers about how the DALN is and may be used in composition pedagogy. For the first round, we developed an open-ended survey designed to generate as much information as possible about how, when, and with what results teachers were incorporating

the DALN in their classrooms (see Appendix). We circulated this survey on disciplinary listservs (H-Rhetor, WPA, Literacy Studies Working Group, CCCC-Talk) and among colleagues, receiving 78 initial participants, 22 of whom reported having used the DALN in their teaching and 7 of whom would consider doing so in the future. (The number of respondents who had *not* used the DALN in their teaching is also notable; approximately 43 respondents began the survey but did not indicate pedagogical uses, suggesting their interest in the project as a potential teaching tool.) These initial responses offered a starting point for the schema outlined below.

2.3. *Follow-up interviews*

Although the survey generated a big-picture view of teaching goals, strategies, and results, we wanted to include detailed snapshots that would help provide guidance and advice for instructors looking to develop their own DALN pedagogies. Again, we relied on the DALN community network. The survey, along with informal conversation and formal research, generated offers of additional help that we gladly accepted. Online and in-person, we collected specifics from a number of generous colleagues in order to provide color and shade to the representation of DALN pedagogies. Although this research could not fully account for the ongoing experiments inspired by the DALN, the combination of large-scale categories with these close-ups offered a perspective on current patterns and future potential.

3. Results

Below, we offer a synopsis of our findings: the most common, innovative, and promising uses of the DALN. Before we delve into particular approaches, a note on pedagogical contexts will be useful. According to the survey, almost half of these pedagogical experiments were taking place in first-year writing courses, followed by digital media studies and advanced composition. Four respondents indicated using the DALN in a course on literacy studies, and only one in an introduction to rhetoric course. Beyond these categories (provided by us), “other” contexts made up almost 28% of the results. This relatively high percentage indicated the reach of DALN pedagogies beyond our own assumptions; we will address these “wild card” applications—in disability studies, literature, and special topic courses—later. First, though, we present a schema for classifying and clarifying the most prevalent uses of the DALN in composition courses. Within each category, we offer detailed examples of these experiments in literacy sponsorship in action.

3.1. *DALN as database for student research*

The most common use of the DALN in composition pedagogy is archival. According to survey responses, the DALN regularly serves as a source of assigned and suggested readings and/or a research database for students’ individual projects. A typical sequence involves self-guided exploration, textual analysis, and synthesis in the form of an academic research paper. For example:

The assignment was to find three or four entries in the DALN and use those as research data. The students were then asked to find patterns/questions/interesting observations within their data set. Then students wrote a paper addressing a literacy-related issue that they found in their DALN data. (Anon., survey, 2012)¹

As this description attests, the DALN lends itself well to comparative analysis: Because students can access so many different narratives in one place, difference itself can become a primary focus. In most sample assignments described by our informants, students were encouraged to find and analyze literacy narratives that departed from their own experiences while also informing them. Such comparative analyses, [Julia Voss \(2012\)](#) hypothesized, may help students develop a critical perspective on their personal histories within larger community and cultural contexts and position their resulting insights within scholarly discourses on literacy. [Voss \(2012\)](#) also wisely cautioned:

[th]is move should not be one that universalizes individuals’ experiences to stand in for entire social groups, but rather one that follows Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’s mandate to draw out the larger social, economic,

¹ All survey responses are taken from the open-ended survey we conducted in 2012 (see Appendix).

cultural, and political factors which cut across literacy narratives and help put individual experiences in their wider context.” (p. 2)

The DALN’s collection of self-representations of lived literacy practices from around the world offers students and teachers a unique supply of primary texts for analysis that resist easy categorization or decontextualization.

3.1.1. Students as archival researchers

As a research site, the DALN offers students the same potential it offers all academic stakeholders: the opportunity to access, investigate, and compare first-person accounts of literacy (and, often, related artifacts) that would be nearly impossible to gather individually. Instructors have, therefore, employed the DALN as a prompt for students’ qualitative research. One promising analytic approach can be seen in Sarah C. Spring’s “Global Communication” course at Winthrop University. The Department of English at Winthrop partnered with the DALN in the fall of 2011; since then, Spring has developed a variety of pedagogical approaches in different courses, including first-year writing and digital media. Her work testifies to the wide applicability of the DALN as a teaching resource. “Global Communication” was a special topic course that contributed to a departmental “Year of Reading Globally” designed to prepare students “for success in a global society” as “informed and effective global citizens” (Spring, 2011). An upper-division writing course, “Global Communication” prioritized the following learning objectives alongside the department’s conventional core goals (e.g., rhetorical knowledge, research methods, composing processes):

- 1 Students will analyze and evaluate print and electronic communications, both for their ideas and their rhetorical choices through the use of critical reading strategies.
- 2 Students will discuss the rhetorical, contextual, legal, and ethical issues involved in global communication by familiarizing themselves with theories and works in the field.
- 3 Students will create electronic texts and multimedia projects, both individually and in groups, based on principles of good design and visual rhetoric.
- 4 Students will plan, organize, and develop persuasive, logical, and well-supported arguments by using strategies such as introspection, general observation, and deliberation of source material.
- 5 Students will apply feedback from the instructor, peers, and self-analysis to improve their writing.
- 6 Students will evaluate, document, and incorporate source material accurately and appropriately according to “The Correct Use of Borrowed Information” and MLA documentation style. (Spring, 2012b)

These goals were pursued through inquiry into “a myriad of issues regarding global communication: its history and theories, political and lawful issues, and global implications of the internet” (Spring, 2011). We focus here on the use of the DALN as a research database for “Global Communication” because it both reflects similar analytic assignments and demonstrates the transferability of these assignments across different course topics.

The DALN research project in this course was one of four short assignments that built toward the final multimedia composition:

For this assignment, we will investigate this relationship [between language and culture] by delving into the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives. Pick a topic or idea from class that interests you, then listen/watch 5–7 literacy narratives in the DALN that have listed that topic as a keyword or “tag phrase.” Record your observations (at least half need to be from other countries or by contributors who were not born in America):

- What do these narratives have in common?
- What are the key differences?
- What role does culture play in the stories?
- Does your own literacy story reflect or disprove these observations? (Spring, 2012a)

The results of this assignment attested to the utility of the DALN for encouraging students to explore difference not as an abstract concept but through the details of lived experience.

Comparing and contrasting their literate lives with others from around the world, these students worked to understand the global context within which they then began to situate themselves. Narratives from international contributors who struggled with writing in English offered student researcher Neville Butler (2012) insights on the challenges presented

by the vagaries of “American Standard English” as well as his own ambivalent relationship with reading and writing that resulted from its use as a punishment in his family. Similarly, Sally Beeson’s (2012) analysis of narratives about language learning highlighted the challenges and rewards of bilingualism, from “the feeling of being torn between two cultures, and a feeling of alienation among their peers” to “an advantage when it comes to picking up other languages and a better understanding of language and literacy in general from a very young age” (para. 3). This realization, that exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity shapes literacy development, was confirmed by a narrative from “someone like me: a white Anglo-Saxon female who grew up in America speaking only English.” That narrative of learning to love Spanish through cultural exchange connected to Beeson’s new understanding that “our experiences with other cultures... can help us understand language and literacy more than sitting in a classroom can... [by] closing up cultural divides and understanding those that are different from you” (Beeson, 2012, para. 5). Examples like this suggest that DALN-based research may enable a greater degree of cultural exchange than many other classroom-based lessons. Although users of the DALN cannot achieve direct digital contact with each other via comments or links, they participate in a shared space that becomes a kind of public community (a potential addressed later).

Students’ reflective accounts of their investigations combined burgeoning cultural and self-awareness. As Spring explained, students “discovered interesting connections between narratives, especially within certain countries or in a comparison between different countries and the United States” (personal communication, August 2012). Through access to stories foreign and familiar, different and similar, student-researchers in the DALN gained an expansive perspective on literacy beyond their own experiences and assumptions as well as fresh insights into their own learning. The resulting research, grounded in the idiosyncrasies of individual storytellers, seemed to successfully avoid generalization in favor of particularization; rather than paint a simplified or impressionistic big picture, students were challenged to develop a collage made of minute details. In this way the DALN enabled each researcher to compose a consciously partial and dynamic understanding of literacy.

3.1.2. *Students as curators*

In addition to the analysis of already-archived narratives, assignments sometimes asked students to gather new literacy narratives, to become active participants in the DALN’s mission of collection and preservation. The process of identifying and interviewing subjects, analyzing the results, and presenting findings (sometimes in multiple media) offered students a multifaceted perspective on what it meant to do research. In one DALN-centered course, co-founder Ulman asked students to find and analyze narratives within the DALN, code those texts using a qualitative data analysis software, write up findings, compose their own narratives, collect more from fellow students and local communities, and finally “create and present a digital exhibit of the literacy narratives they have helped others record” (Ulman, survey, 2012). As Ulman explained to the students, this immersion in the DALN pursued the following learning objectives:

to understand, at a level appropriate to an introductory course, how to: analyze primary sources using a grounded theory approach; compose a literacy narrative; conduct an oral history interview and record relevant contextual information; identify and describe related primary sources within a large online database of primary sources; use qualitative data analysis software to analyze multimedia sources, including text, images, audio, and video; use simple handheld video recording tools and digital cameras to capture literacy narratives; [and] assess and critically evaluate characteristics of literacy narratives. (survey, 2012)

Such a comprehensive process of research, analysis, and production engaged students in every aspect of academic scholarship as well as personal reflection; in fact, these moves were inextricably linked in a multifaceted examination of the “intersection of personal literacy histories... and community” (Ulman, survey, 2012). Although an isolated example, Ulman’s DALN-intensive course design suggests potential for using the project to create complete courses in independent or collaborative research. As we will discuss, many informants recommended delving more deeply into the DALN itself, as well as the resources it contains, in order to generate conversations about issues like technology, access, user-generated content, and sustainability. Inviting students to play multiple roles as DALN stakeholders in this way means inviting them to share more fully in the scholarly and public work of composition and literacy studies.

3.2. *DALN as site for student publication*

A significant percentage of respondents indicated that the DALN provides a valuable prompt for students’ production of literacy narratives. By offering students an exigency for their own narratives, the DALN “provides a real-life rhetorical

situation” for students (Anon., survey, 2012). Much like the research-oriented sequences that many instructors noted, the publication approach also works to expand students’ definitions of literacy. As one reported, “All students say that the DALN expands their perspective on what literacy can include” (Anon., survey, 2012). One result is an appreciation for their own literacy skills: “Ultimately, the literacy narrative assignment helped many of my students to value literacy practices not valued within an academic context” (Anon., survey, 2012). This awareness can lead students to move beyond simple stories of learning to read and write toward more complex examinations of diverse learning (and teaching) methods and modes of communication. By extension, the diversity of literacy categories, beliefs, and practices found within the DALN prompts students to reconsider the stakes of literacy in everyday life and to explore how literacy narratives can challenge the narrow perceptions that dominate public discourses.

3.2.1. *Students as audiences*

In most cases, assignment sequences that emphasized students’ production and publication of their own literacy narratives also incorporated a preliminary research process. Students were encouraged to first “read” other narratives in the DALN as an invention activity, using these examples to help generate topics/themes and narrative strategies. Instructors often presented their favorites for class discussion or asked students to find their own: “Before [students composed video literacy narratives], I asked them to search the archives and pick a few videos of different topics. They had to write about the videos and use them to help brainstorm what stories about literacy the students wanted to tell” (Anon., survey, 2012). Comparative approaches, again, prompted students to examine the contextual factors behind the samples:

After reading and analyzing three narratives, students write a multimodal narrative (text, links, pictures, and video) which (1) Connects to a literacy narrative they read, “How do you relate?” (2) Becomes the focus of their literacy narrative, “You relate. Give support from your experience.” (Anon., survey, 2012)

This kind of approach incorporates analysis en route to production, a strategy developed by Alanna Frost and Suzanne Blum Malley and demonstrated in Malley’s first-year writing course at Columbia College Chicago.

This assignment sequence, elements of which can be found on the DALN’s “Resources for Teachers” page, began by guiding students through a process of listening and reflection, observation and analysis, culminating in an exploratory essay about what they learned and how it relates to their own experiences. The initial listening assignment introduced students to the archive to help them:

get a feel for what a literacy narrative might be about, how it might be composed/arranged, what range of styles might be available to [them] when [they] compose, and what formats other than text [they] might be able to explore for [their] own literacy narrative. (Frost & Malley, n.d.c, “Step 1”)

Students selected four narratives they considered noteworthy and wrote a brief response to prompts about how the narratives related to each other, how the contributors defined/discussed literacy, how they influenced students’ understanding of the literacy narrative genre, and how effective the narratives were at “sharing a compelling and meaningful story” (Frost & Malley, n.d.c, “Step 1”). The next step in this sequence was similar to the analytic assignments described at the beginning of this section: Students were asked to analyze and interpret data from the DALN in a formal essay “that contributes to a broader understanding of the purpose and significance of literacy narratives as well as an understanding of literacy itself” (Frost & Malley, n.d.d, “Step 2”). As this sequence attests, Frost and Malley’s approach provided a significant amount of scaffolding before students began to plan their own contribution to the DALN. Their resulting projects were, therefore, focused on both literacy *and* narrative as they composed critical, rhetorical literacy narratives.

3.2.2. *Students as rhetors*

At this point, students were asked to compose two versions of their own literacy story. First, students wrote, in conventional alphabetic text, a “compelling, detailed” personal story that included “at least one reference to ideas about literacy from the published authors we have read in class [including Mike Rose and Deborah Brandt] and at least one reference to the DALN literacy narratives you analyzed in your first essay.” Specific instructions asked students to transform a particular memory into a narrative that “must be evocative, detailed, develop characters, AND have a ‘so

what,’ or strong sense of purpose” (Frost & Malley, n.d.a, “Literacy Narrative Assignment”). The assignment provided prompts to assist students in their invention process:

- What has the experience of becoming “literate” been like for you? Can you tell a story about that process—when something really “clicked” or when something just wasn’t working at all? What was helpful? What was not? Does being literate more than one language affect your understanding of language and literacy? How? Why?
- As a student of the arts and/or media, what literacies have shaped your life and your interests? Is there a literacy story that can help us understand how you ended up here at Columbia College Chicago?
- Do you have an “aha” moment about literacy, print or digital, in your life? Do you remember an experience that helped you turn a corner or achieve something, in school or out of school, related to some aspect of literacy or language learning?
- What other questions have surfaced in your literacy work this semester that you could ask yourself? (Frost & Malley, n.d.a, “Literacy Narrative Assignment”)

These questions asked students to do more than tell a story about their literate lives; they continued a process of critical inquiry by turning students’ analytic lens on their own experiences. In this way, the assignment asked students to balance personal characterizations of literacy with public conceptions of the term. Nevertheless, this first literacy narrative was not positioned as a contribution to the DALN; it set the stage for another rhetorical challenge ahead.

Finally, students composed a multimodal remix of their literacy narrative: “Your goal is to engage your audience with the message of your literacy narrative—the story and the meaning—in an alternate form, allowing you to take advantage of multiple means (semiotic channels) of reaching your audience” (Frost & Malley, n.d.b, “Literacy Narrative Multimodal Remix”). This focus on audience reinforced the idea that students’ narratives would not be merely personal reflections: They would address public audiences. In “Multilingual Literacy Landscapes” in *Stories that Speak to Us*, Frost and Malley (2012) examined three of the resulting literacy narratives from this process to illuminate the “linguistic and rhetorical versatility with which multilingual composers creatively navigate a variety of contexts, discourses, and modes of communication” (Multilingual Literacies section, para. 2). We encourage readers to refer to Malley and Frost’s article, which drew both from Malley’s first-year writing course and Frost’s similar writing-about-writing approach in a graduate composition pedagogy course for pre-service teachers; the authors made a compelling argument that “exploration of both literacy narrative performances themselves, in print and multimodal form, as well as the context of the production of those narratives is essential work for instructors who believe that literacy narrative assignments are valuable and instructive” (2012, Multilingual Literacies section, para. 3). Here, we focus on the pedagogical moves and resulting student productions that provide useful insights for other educational experiments.

The culmination of the extended sequence described earlier,² the multimodal remix assignment prompted students toward rhetorical innovation; in effect, the students were invited to push the boundaries of the literacy narrative genre, to transform the results of their previous, more conventional writing assignment. This transformation began with a formal proposal that addressed the following questions:

- 1 What idea/ideas from your literacy narrative do you hope to convey in the multimodal remix? Keep in mind that you will most likely not be able to just transfer your narrative essay, as is, to an alternate form effectively. What is your focus? How do you conceive of your “conceptual metaphor” for the piece?
- 2 What emotional or intellectual effect do you hope to achieve in your audience? How might you go about doing that?
- 3 How do you envision taking that idea or conceptual metaphor for your literacy narrative and remixing it using print, audio, image, and/or video? How would you do it if you had the time and the means? What would it look, sound, and feel like? (Frost & Malley, n.d.b, “Literacy Narrative Multimodal Remix”)

By this stage in the process, students’ primary focus shifted from the content of their literacy narrative—the story—to its rhetorical composition—the telling.

² These early assignments can also lead to a research project. See the DALN’s Resources for Teachers [<http://english.marion.ohio-state.edu/mccorkle/DALN/Teachers.Resources.html>] page for details.

The results, as the examples analyzed by Frost and Malley (2012) demonstrated, revealed students' implicit recognition of the monolingual materials of the DALN, course readings, and assignment prompts, as well as their strategic deployment of multimodal rhetoric within that context. For all the diversity of students' experiences, Frost and Malley (2012) identified a significant commonality in students' decision to focus on their English language learning: "[O]ur students chose the most rhetorically savvy move they could possibly make—a public demonstration of their proficiency in that language and discourse in which the instructor expresses herself and her course goals" (Focus on English section, para. 4). In a similar way, students tended toward positive accounts of progress, offering their audiences—their instructors and the DALN stakeholders more broadly—what (students thought) they wanted: "narratives of transcendence" (Frost & Malley, 2012). Frost and Malley identified this trend as a consequence of the assignment sequence; students were drawn to and, in turn, crafted narratives of heroic struggle and success.

Beyond these shared tendencies, however, students' multimodal narratives employed a variety of creative storytelling strategies. Sofia Gomez's (2009) original print narrative provided an extended account of her English education from Disney movies and books through a bilingual high school; in her multimodal contribution, she highlighted only one childhood incident, layering her current perspective (in voiceover) with home video footage for a classic reflective anecdote that concludes with, "Thanks, Mom and Dad," indicating her attention to multiple audiences. In contrast to this documentary style, Keunho Shin (2009) crafted a silent, stop-action animated clip in which the protagonist skips conventional studying in favor of watching TV and earns the same grade as his diligent sister. This video provided a charming day-in-the-life version of his print narrative:

[W]hen I was high school student, I watched many, many Japanese and American dramas and movies.. . I should have been studying for entering the university, but I almost completely focused on watching dramas or movies because watching movies was fun and I felt like a hero while I was watching dramas. As a result of this experience, I think that text books are not the only way to study or learn language. (Shin, 2009)

The transformation of Shin's general account into a singular event immersed the audience in his experience, while the labor-intensive stop-action style added humor and wit and spoke volumes about both his digital literacies and his investment in this composition. Likewise, Sky Wang's (2009) video narrative translated his alphabetic account of learning English through television and, more so, immersion in British and American contexts. The personality demonstrated in his written narrative—"I remember that there was this moment when the cab driver that was picking me up from the airport said something like, 'Where ya going mate?' and all I heard was, 'mehmehmehmeh, meh?' If that's not torture, what is?"—became visible and audible in his video composition (Wang, 2009). From its *Star Wars*-style introduction to character impersonations (complete with costume changes), Wang's highly entertaining narrative reflected his confidence not only in his English language skills but also in his facility with multimedia production.

By the time these students reached this stage in the assignment sequence, they seemed attuned to the unique rhetorical situation of the DALN. Their video narratives worked to contribute personal accounts of value to other learners and researchers; as Wang noted in the conclusion of his video, "I hope it was informative and maybe educative" (2009). But he also tacked on a flippant "I don't know" before his friendly wave goodbye. This casual teasing aligned with his previous comment that "I'll never be satisfied [with English language learning].. . and you'll never be" as he leaned confidentially in to the camera. Such moments, like Gomez's (2009) shout-out to her parents and Shin's (2009) pride in successfully flouting academic advice, suggest these contributors' attention to other audiences within and beyond the DALN, audiences that demand rhetorical inventiveness. As Frost and Malley (2012) pointed out, these video literacy narratives highlight "the richness of the narratives as a result of access to voice, gesture, tone, especially when compared to the print literacy narratives our students have produced" (Multimodal Matters section, para. 1). These students' work demonstrate the expanded benefits—for students as well as the DALN community—of expanding the available rhetorical resources through multimodal composing.

3.3. DALN as resource for teachers and administrators

A promising but less commonly documented application is to use the DALN as a site for teacher training by administrators. One respondent to our initial survey (2012) noted that in "an advanced composition course for pre-service teachers, their first assignment is to write a literacy narrative and analyze how the experience will affect them as a teacher of literacy." Another example, from Scott Lloyd DeWitt's (2012) "Optimistic Reciprocities: The Literacy Narratives of First-Year Writing Students" in *Stories that Speak to Us*, offered an additional perspective on the DALN as

an administrative resource. We highlight DeWitt's example here because it demonstrates how the DALN may function simultaneously as a pedagogical and administrative resource.

DeWitt collected narratives by incoming first-year students at The Ohio State University to create a 25-minute documentary intended to introduce new graduate teaching instructors to their future students. Interviews of students for the documentary were driven by two questions: "Can we find out what kind of writing students did before they came to college? What were students' thoughts on public writing?" (personal communication, DeWitt, August 2012). According to DeWitt, interviews with students revealed surprising results, especially for new instructors. When asked "generic questions about past writing," students began by reflecting on their literate pasts, but as the interviews progressed, they became enthusiastic about literacy more generally and "became animated when talking about the future of their writing" (personal communication, DeWitt, August 2012). These findings led DeWitt to examine the unedited interviews with students and to explore them for evidence of students' desire for reciprocal relationships with audiences as well as the presence of optimistic student dispositions.

Perhaps the most salient point to consider about DeWitt's use of the DALN is that his principal motivation for using it was not to help populate the DALN or to enrich instructors' or students' understandings of literacy. Instead, DeWitt needed a pragmatic way of addressing an administrative problem, specifically, introducing new composition instructors to their students:

We were nervous about using a live panel of freshman students because it wouldn't be a controlled setting (on both ends, students and TAs). We thought, wouldn't it be great to create a documentary that featured the students? But we didn't have production time or resources. We were coming to this idea of using actual students pretty late in the process. Then there was Cindy in archive building mode. All the solutions to the problems facing the production of the documentary were built in the DALN. So the DALN became the means to the end in a way. We would get students to talk about literacy practices in a DALN interview. And once we had narratives on the DALN we would have deed of gift or creative commons licensing in place so that we could use the raw footage in our documentary. Using the DALN in this way solved a digital video production dilemma. It also benefitted the DALN tremendously by building a collection of literacy narratives. (personal communication, DeWitt, August 2012)

Here, the DALN clearly helped DeWitt solve an administrative dilemma, but even more importantly, by inviting students to communicate with future teachers through literacy narratives, DeWitt's approach offered a pedagogical twist—a reminder that the DALN could act as a space for educational exchange and instructor preparation simultaneously.

Selfe (2012a), too, recommended the DALN as a space for teacher training, where instructors could develop a "rhetorical responsiveness" to students and their stories:

Rhetorical responsiveness involves us not only in paying close attention to what students are saying about literacy but also in using this important information to reconsider and re-shape our instruction in light of what we learn about the role that literacy has played in the lived experiences of individuals. (Rhetorical Responsiveness section, para. 9)

Selfe (2012b) argued that there is something distinctive not only about *what* teachers learn from student literacy narratives but also *how* that learning occurs, especially through video narratives. Digital video narratives in the DALN throw into relief the minute, visual details that convey the "lived experiences of individuals," and they do so in distinctive ways. In his follow-up interview, DeWitt elaborated on this point specifically:

The media affords these things that we wouldn't see with a written transcript. If I had read the audio transcripts of the interviews, TAs wouldn't be at peace with what was coming a week away, nor would they have really learned anything too meaningful about these students. Mariah's words about taking online classes are interesting, but seeing video of her two-year-old daughter sitting on her lap lets GTAs know that one of their students might need to bring their child to office hours if child care falls through. And you see her parental multitasking skills at work as she's completely engaged in the conversation while at the same time keeping her child occupied. (personal communication, August 2012)

DeWitt's and Selfe's focus on video literacy narratives highlighted how these texts convey important details about individuals' grounded experiences with literacy, details that may go unnoticed in other forms of production or composing. Although this point may seem obvious to teacher-researchers fluent in digital forms of composing, it offers

administrators a fresh glimpse into the affordances of the DALN for developing and sustaining student-centered and rhetorically responsive writing programs.

3.4. *Wild card: DALN as resource for critical contextualizing*

A common thread throughout the aforementioned approaches is an emphasis on expanding and complicating students' and teachers' understanding of literacy practices. Shared learning objectives associated with DALN-related assignments include "better understand[ing] the impact of literacy, personally and more broadly; [discovering] ways in which literacy is embedded in all aspects of life; understand[ing] different literacy practices and values" (Anon., survey, 2012). Many respondents indicated they were influenced by New Literacy Studies' emphasis on the social construction of language and literacy; they noted, in particular, a reliance on work by Deborah Brandt, Brian Street, James Gee, Diana George, and Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher. These influences permeated the pedagogical approaches to the DALN even when they were not assigned readings. As Frost noted:

Probably because this is my bias, most often, class definitions of literacy start from the "read/write" print texts but also, to varying degrees negotiate the meaning of multiple literacies—context and situated ways of communicating/making social meaning that utilize all available means of production. (personal communication, August 2012)

Because such concerns with contextualized meaning-making and the social forces surrounding literacy transcend neat disciplinary boundaries, so too does DALN pedagogy extend beyond the conventional composition course. For example, one respondent reported using the DALN within a course on African-American literary history:

Students viewed two pieces from the DALN that discussed literacy and slavery. We then juxtaposed the two DALN stories against the slave narratives we were reading in class. The learning objective was to underscore the value of literacy to African American slaves and the fear that that literacy posed in slave holders of the time... [T]he process sparked good discussion. (Anon., survey, 2012)

This use suggests the utility of the DALN's holdings to supplement students' learning by making connections between literacy and fields like history, cultural studies, economics, politics, religion, psychology, music, and so on. The DALN's subject browsing option—currently listing over 5,000 user-provided keywords—reflects the wide range of issues addressed with potential pedagogical value.

Prominent among these is disability studies, as contributors often address the interactions of literacy with cognitive and physical differences. The DALN's collection of literacy narratives from Deaf and hard-of-hearing members of The Ohio State University community provided primary sources for a disability studies course, in that the interviews:

illustrate points made in the readings about: "deaf pride," about the hazards of "mainstreaming"; about the importance of communication for deaf people; about the importance of technology/ies for deaf people; about what it means to be a CODA (children of deaf adults); about the concept of "deaf gain" (as opposed to hearing loss). (Anon., survey, 2012)

This course also prompted technical considerations of effective captioning, including "the placement/color/background of captions [which] is intriguing to them because it is something they really have never thought of before" (Anon., survey, 2012). As we discuss below, such practical and logistical concerns merit further attention.

Finally, the DALN's interest in gathering collections from particular local communities (like students of color and social activists) suggests extensions of its education reach beyond conventional academic spaces. For example, Richard (Dickie) Selfe has gathered literacy narratives from participants in a community literacy project to assess its lasting influences on their lives:

[T]he goal of the literacy narrative research is to better understand how volunteer community members learn and work with communication technologies, see if media projects can increase citizen activism, [and] explore whether citizen-developed documentaries are effective at making change on the ground. (survey, 2012)

As with the research-oriented approaches described earlier, this project suggests possibilities for further experimentation wherein, for example, students gather literacy narratives from their home communities or extracurricular activities to explore how they respond to the DALN project, whether it influences their beliefs or practices, and/or how public

participants might use the archive to serve their own learning and teaching agendas. Such potential, and the issues it raises about public-oriented pedagogy, is discussed further in the next section.

4. Discussion

The results of our survey make a strong case that the DALN stands poised to significantly influence the ways that literacy narratives are used in composition pedagogy. As a classroom resource, the DALN enables both analysis and production, offering students and teachers opportunities to play with multimedia rhetoric while studying multiliteracies, to combine research and criticism with reflection and creation. The examples outlined earlier provide only a glimpse of the actual and potential uses to which the DALN may be put, and we expect that further experimentation is taking place every day in classrooms around the country. In this section, we address some of the major issues that arose in our assessment of DALN pedagogy, issues that deserve further discussion among educators, students, and other stakeholders.

4.1. The DALN as archive

The DALN seems uniquely positioned to help sustain what researchers are describing as the *archival turn* in composition and rhetoric scholarship. Lynee Lewis Gaillet (2012) traced contemporary interest in archival research in our field to the now seminal 1999 *College English* issue devoted to the topic. As her review demonstrated, many of the questions that vexed scholars in the late 1990s remain pressing concerns for twenty-first-century archival researchers, especially scholars and students working with the DALN. Recent work by Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon (2007), Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan (2008), and Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo (2010) has considered questions of definition, access, and methodology—key terms in archival research that have long fueled ongoing debates about how best to perform archival inquiry. In addition to identifying intriguing continuities in archival scholarship, Gaillet (2012) also suggested that the direction and nature of archival research has shifted, reflecting interdisciplinary, technological, and more recently, pedagogical and professional pressures. This shift is not only exemplified in the emergence of digital archives like the DALN but also reflected in recent scholarship.

For instance, Jonathan Buehl, Tamar Chute, and Anne Fields's (2012) "Training in the Archives: Archival Research as Professional Development" described the development, implementation, and assessment of a graduate-level seminar that asked students to engage with archives over the course of a semester. Assessment of the course revealed that the seminar was an "extremely positive" experience (p. 287) with students reporting the following outcomes:

- (1) appreciating learning about the practical aspects of historical research,
- (2) diversifying information search strategies,
- (3) gaining a better understanding of the rhetoric of historiography,
- (4) understanding our discipline(s) by practicing historical research,
- (5) articulating what graduate students need from research methods training,
- and (6) imagining teaching with archives. (Buehl, Chute, & Fields, 2012, p. 287)

Celebrating the success of their experiment with archival research and pedagogy, the authors concluded:

If the fields of writing studies are to sustain an "archival turn" across varied contexts of research, teaching, and administration, then scholars need to consider why and how they might engage the archives on their own and with their students. Regularizing such engagement might reconfigure what archives mean as sites of scholarly and pedagogical praxis. (Buehl et al., 2012, p. 297)

In other words, and confirming Gaillet's (2012) findings, methodological and evidentiary practices in composition and rhetoric are, in fact, shifting toward archival research practice. But if the field is to sustain this shift, researchers and teachers must work to complicate long held assumptions about what counts as evidence in archival research, who carries out archival inquiry, and to what ends.

If Buehl et al. (2012) and Gaillet (2012) are right, and we believe they are, then we urge readers to recognize the ways in which DALN offers an ideal space and distinct perspective—specifically the pedagogical perspective—to take up the most pressing questions facing contemporary archival researchers. As previously discussed, our findings suggest that interest in the DALN is varied and complex, certainly widespread enough to support prolonged and renewed interest in archival inquiry more generally. But even more compelling is how our data point to the possibility of the DALN

supporting pedagogical innovations that affirm many of Buehl et. al.'s (2012) findings, specifically those benefits related to “diversifying information search strategies” (p. 287).

4.1.1. *The DALN and archival pedagogy*

As a space for research, the DALN can provide focus for an entire course, as the extended research projects demonstrate; others may use it only for one assignment within a particular course context. Whether or not the DALN becomes a primary object of study, it deserves and rewards sustained engagement. Even when, as discussed below, students struggle with the reality of user-generated metadata, the most common advice is to face these issues early and often, inviting students to assess others’ uses of the DALN to shape their own. Spring noted that her least successful attempt was undermined because “I didn’t have students engage with the existing narratives, just look at the site and upload their own versions” (personal communication, August 2012). Citing a similar concern, Malley recommended:

[making] use of the DALN as a resource at the beginning of the discussions of literacies and literacy narratives.. .. It can be difficult at first to push students to think about literacies and discourses, so I ask them to explore the DALN submissions at the beginning of the semester and they respond very well. (personal communication, August 2012)

First-year students, Spring noted, require “more help with what they are seeing, reading/viewing, and contributing to. Planning a sequence of assignments to acclimate them to the DALN should address some of these issues.” In the future, Spring “plan[s] to revise the assignment.. .. [S]tudents will now work with the DALN in a series of assignments rather than merely the autobiography prompt” (personal communication, August 2012).

This advice—to explore the DALN, and not just the narratives it provides, in sustained ways over the entire course—was echoed by others; the lesson learned by many has been that the DALN, in itself, offers a fascinating artifact for study. In fact, without this deliberate focus, some respondents expressed doubt as to whether or not students could engage with the DALN on critical levels:

Students in general like the audio literacy narrative project, but aside from appreciating the examples that come from the DALN, I don’t know that most of them—except maybe the ones who decide to submit their own narratives—give much thought to the DALN as a thing in itself.. .. Answering these questions is making me think that I’m using the DALN in a pretty superficial way in my course and that it would be more useful to talk about the DALN as a thing in itself and have students actually use it for their assignments. (Anon., survey, 2012)

Examining the DALN as a “thing in itself” may enrich students’ experiences with the project and, in turn, enable them to enrich the project themselves. Students’ feedback shared within our survey also offered productive critiques that can be used to deepen their learning.

4.1.2. *The digital in DALN*

An essential feature of the DALN is, not surprisingly, its digital nature. Working within the site demands a high level of technological literacy. In order to contribute, a user must navigate a technical process and understand issues of intellectual property. And in order to use the archive, a user must negotiate a challenging search system and download large files to assess whether a narrative suits the research. These material realities bring up issues of access and reach; many potential users may be alienated or intimidated by the project, as some informants reported their students could be. Krista Bryson (2012) has pointed out the ways in which site design, notably the images’ emphasis on traditional literacies, can belie its expansive definitions of literacy. Moreover, the interface of the DALN is not always conducive to student research. In part, this difficulty is a factor of the archival platform upon which the DALN rests, which was designed to facilitate sustainable storage and systematic access. But the Archive 2.0 spirit of the project, in which contributors provide all of their own metadata without reliance on pre-set key terms or strict guidelines, resists easy access. Instructors regularly characterized the site as “difficult for students to navigate and search,” leaving both students and instructors “frustrated” (Anon., survey, 2012). They noted that this constraint sometimes limited students’ engagement and, therefore, learning:

I was able to select moving, interesting entries from the DALN to show them, but I think they had a hard time finding ones that interested and inspired them.. .. [As a result,] they ended up with generic research questions and arguments. I told students to try search the database words related to things they are interested in like “food,”

“sports,” or “animals.” This worked for some, but many students complained that they did not know how to go about finding interesting material in the database. I felt like I didn’t have much more insight to give them other than to look around and search using interesting terms. (Anon., survey, 2012)

Another respondent regretfully indicated that this difficulty prevented him/her from incorporating the DALN into course assignments:

So far the DALN has not proved useful to my objectives because I feel that, if I have difficulty using the interface, then my students are bound to be frustrated. So, I mostly go to the DALN for ideas and inspiration at this point. I haven’t been comfortable directing my students to the DALN. Since my course theme is literacy and I use a standard literacy narrative assignment I am committed to the value of the DALN. However, I have yet to discover or invent a role for the database in the activities that I design for my students. (Anon., survey, 2012)

Such concerns were repeated, as was the desire for more systematic cataloging. Of course, this preference for consistency raises two objections: First, the labor involved in such a task is prohibitive given the realities of funding of academic projects; second, putting this responsibility on the DALN would effectively remove that power of self-representation from participants.

Instead of resolving these tensions, we suggest, DALN pedagogy might use them to engage students in the difficult negotiations at the heart of digital media and user-generated content. In this light, these practical constraints can become unique affordances. The difficulties students face finding useful material can prompt conversations about the challenges and rewards of archival research, particularly in the digital age. It’s important to note, at this point, that despite these challenges, most instructors who use the DALN in their teaching keep coming back for more. With persistence and patience, teachers and students find ways to make it work: “I haven’t found a student yet that can’t find *something* of interest in the DALN and then they have an inquiry/investigative way to start thinking about trends they find in the variety of definitions and considerations of literacies” (Malley, personal communication, August 2012). Within an open and experimental framework, the pedagogy of the DALN can help students and teachers interrogate the notions of *digital* and *archive* as well as *literacy narratives* themselves.

4.2. The DALN as public space

Just as the DALN’s archival structure reflects and can extend trends within composition studies, so too does the public nature of its mission. As we pointed out earlier, the DALN was not originally intended as a scholarly resource; rather, it aimed to gather and preserve contributions from and for diverse participants beyond and within academic circles. In this way, the DALN could be seen as a part of what [Paula Mathieu \(2005\)](#) termed the *public turn* in composition and rhetoric. This turn toward public-izing the discipline and student works includes traditional service learning as well as collaborative community literacy projects ([Flower, 2008](#); [Long, 2008](#); [Grabill, 2001](#)) and opportunities for students to participate in public discourses (e.g., [Isaacs & Jackson, 2001](#); [Weisser, 2002](#)). The DALN project seems to lend itself to each of these variations on the public turn: the archive crosses conventional boundaries by inviting participation from users outside the academy, and the pedagogy encourages students to draw from others’ publicized narratives, solicit contributions, and/or contribute their own voices. The DALN itself, then, is more than just an archive; it is a *public* according to [Michael Warner’s \(2002\)](#) definition: “an ongoing space of encounter for discourse” (p. 62). Everyone who participates—as contributors or audiences—becomes a member of that community. By inviting students into this space, pedagogical uses of the DALN can share in the benefits of, but must also take into consideration the ethical issues inherent in, the public turn.

4.2.1. Public literacy narratives

The public nature of the DALN provides students with rhetorical texts for analysis as well as an audience and exigency for their own literacy narratives. The examples discussed earlier demonstrate how this rhetorical situation can enrich students’ composing by providing inspiration and sparking invention. The seemingly boundless possibilities of texts that can be termed “literacy narratives” can serve to enhance classroom discussions about genre and media. In some ways, the DALN seems likely to constrain the definition of the genre as autobiographical in nature, completing the shift away from [Eldred and Mortensen’s \(1992\)](#) narratives about literacy development to the more specific *personal* narratives about literacy development:

[N]arratives must be based on personal experience; must focus on literacy, broadly conceived to include any mode of human composition and communication of meaning; and must be narrative in form (e.g., they must recount personal experience rather than offer abstract arguments about literacy). (Ulman, 2012)

On the other hand, this narrowed focus is counterbalanced by the expansive multimodality invited and encouraged by the DALN's digital platform.

Because “genres embody situational expectations and ranges of potential strategic responses” (Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko, 2002, p. 6), the conventions of literacy narratives contributed to the DALN will determine their potential influence on other participants. One way to promote the literacy narrative as public action is to encourage literacy narrators to fully explore their own and others' strategic resources. Such experimentation seems particularly likely when students are encouraged to compose multimodal literacy narratives that cause them to think in new ways about their rhetorical options. As the literacy narratives resulting from Frost and Malley's (n.d.b) literacy remix assignment sequence attest, challenging students to reconceive conventional print narratives into multimodal narratives can have exciting results for the students themselves and their audiences. Several of our informants confirmed this finding, noting that students not only enjoyed the process of composing digital literacy narratives but also benefited from its flexibility: “Many of them are developmental writers, or ESL writers, who reported that using spoken word was liberating or less anxiety-producing” (Anon., 2012, survey). As Hawisher and Selfe (2004) have suggested, students “can exert their own powerful agency in, around, and through, digital literacies” (p. 644). The acts of composition and circulation at the heart of the DALN extend the long-espoused benefits of literacy narratives—students not only develop confidence and critical awareness but also share those gains with others, multiplying their potential power.

This claim, however, rests on the assumption that students' literacy narratives are, in fact, shared with the DALN community. A surprising element of many of the assignments described in our survey is that students are not actually expected to submit their own literacy narratives to the archive. Many mentioned that they offer students extra credit if they do, but there seems to be some wariness about *requiring* students to share their personal narratives in a public space. This hesitation is certainly reasonable; asking students to expose themselves and their writing in this way can be risky, as the contributors to Emily J. Isaacs and Phoebe Jackson's (2011) *Public Works: Student Writing as Public Texts* explored. However, the fact that students usually view and analyze others' narratives before crafting their own—but then do not return the favor to the DALN community—suggests an ethical tension. Such a disconnect between using others' narratives and withholding their own raises an important consideration: What kind of relationship do our pedagogies establish between students and other participants in the DALN?

4.2.2. Ethics and community relations

Although the DALN may not have originally been intended as a scholarly resource, our findings indicate that this is (at least for now) its primary pedagogical use. Contributors are active participants, composing, tagging, and sharing their personal stories, but they also become research subjects of the academics who remain the primary stakeholders and users of the archive. It is, therefore, imperative that when instructors encourage students to analyze and incorporate others' narratives in their own work, they highlight the ethical stakes of such work. Certainly there are always ethical considerations when students study their own and others' lives, and previous work on literacy narrative assignments has raised questions about students' responses to others' texts. Because they are usually informal, unpolished, and even sometimes stream of consciousness, the literacy narratives in the DALN seem to avoid the risks that have led instructors away from an emphasis on students reading others' narratives—namely, that students may be intimidated or alienated by highly literary, highly literate publications by professional writers or famous intellectuals (Blake, 1997; Corkery, 2005). Instead, the collections within the DALN offer students opportunities to examine accessible accounts from everyday learners. In analyzing these tales, student researchers become involved in the kind of complex, grounded explorations that mark contemporary literacy studies.

But as our discussion has suggested, the DALN is not some sterile, static archive of primary sources. In addition to a public space, the DALN is a repository of personal memories and powerful emotions. People tell stories about their families, about traumatic moments, about deep insecurities and great achievements. And these vulnerabilities, thanks to digital media, are often visible and audible: Contributors' eyes well and their hands fidget; their voices crack and drift away reflectively; they laugh and perform and play with the audience. When instructors ask students to approach these contributors as research subjects—and/or to remix their personal narratives—they must consider

the potentially problematic ethics of that dynamic. The emphasis on comparative analysis and cultural exchange also demands thoughtful negotiation of difference. Such discussions, we suggest, should be integral to DALN pedagogy.

The language used by our informants suggests two possible strategies for negotiating these ethical issues—specifically, approaching DALN work as *qualitative research* and/or as *documentary*. As we suspect many are already doing, framing students' DALN-based research projects through the lens of qualitative research may help ensure that students engage with the ethical as well as the practical aspects of their research. Incorporating selections from, for example, Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch's (1996) *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* may assist student researchers to “grapple with the rhetorical construction of interpretive authority” as well as the “host of ethical questions regarding the rights and responsibilities of representation” (p. 2). Likewise, the Oral History Association's (2009) “Principles and Best Practices for Oral History” can prompt discussion about issues from informed consent to preservation—concerns that return to the heart of the DALN's archival identity. Such an emphasis would reinforce the complexity of real-world research into which pedagogy of the DALN invites students. From another angle, connecting both/either research projects and remixes to the genre of documentary would highlight the ethical debates that permeate discourses surrounding nonfiction storytelling, such as the code of ethics delineated by Bill Nichols (2001) and the Center for Social Media's exploration of documentarians' “conflicting sets of responsibilities: to their subjects, their viewers, and their own artistic vision and production exigencies” (Aufderheide, Jaszi, & Chandra, 2009). This frame may also help students situate DALN research alongside other rhetorical projects, thereby providing a connection between academic and public discourses. Much like multimodality expands the genre of the literacy narrative, documentary may encourage students to revise assumptions about the genre of the research project. Likewise, it can challenge students to investigate all available means of communication and to develop multimodal literacy skills with a rhetorical emphasis. These ongoing, unresolved conversations surrounding ethics in qualitative research and documentary can challenge students and teachers alike to critically examine the stakes of going public. Like pedagogy of the DALN itself, such discussions must avoid easy closure in favor of the risks and rewards of experimentation.

5. The Pedagogy of the DALN

Although we have attempted here to classify pedagogical uses of the DALN, a key finding has been that this work is, like all teaching and learning, very much in process. The experimental nature of the DALN spills into classrooms, inviting teachers and students to play with the possibilities, whether that means developing creative narration strategies or examining the complexities of coding multimodal data. For instructors most of all, DALN pedagogy is a process of both consistent return and constant revision. Tellingly, 73% of our survey respondents indicated that they would use the same assignment again, and 35% would revise or reuse the assignment in another course. No respondents indicated that they would *not* continue to work with the DALN in their teaching.

Without a doubt, these findings reaffirm our claims about the increasingly important role the DALN might play in both the *archival shift* and the *public turn* currently taking place in our field (Buehl et al., 2012; Gaillet, 2012; Mathieu, 2005). However, despite the popularity and obvious potential of the DALN for research and pedagogy, instructors would do well to remember perhaps the most important lesson that the DALN offers students: the opportunity to possess greater awareness about how composing and listening to literacy narratives provides agency within the complex, varied, and ubiquitous experiences they have with literacy in their everyday lives. David Bloome (2012) articulated this sentiment best in his foreword to *Stories that Speak to Us*, noting:

the provision of contexts for storytelling that allows people to become unruly is key to allowing the generation of representations of everyday life (including literacy in everyday life) that have some potential for allowing people to reclaim ownership over at least some aspects of their lives. (Reading #2 section, para. 7)

From Bloome's perspective, the value of storytelling—the engine of the DALN—depends on unruliness, playfulness, and a willingness to let go and allow these shared narratives to shape individual and community identities in distinctive ways.

If literacy narrative assignments are to promote the kinds of learning objectives discussed herein, as well as the performance of identity and preservation of history, pedagogy growing from and supporting the growth of the DALN must continue to do what our findings suggest it is already doing so well. It must inspire pedagogical innovation that both provides pedagogical structure for classroom environments and creates opportunities for play, intellectual

curiosity, and even the chance and space to make mistakes. In his analysis of discourse surrounding educational reform, [Mike Rose \(2009\)](#) emphasized this imperative: “There’s not much public discussion of achievement that includes curiosity, reflectiveness, uncertainty, or a willingness to take a chance, to blunder” (p. 27). As the DALN demonstrates well, literacy narratives are often marked by anecdotes about how compulsory education systems often leave learners feeling that they embody the ostensible mistakes they make while navigating the labyrinth that is literacy acquisition and development. The unruly pedagogies of the DALN, we suggest, can work against such individual and institutional histories by making space for students to play with narrative and work toward an understanding of the many paths, people, and institutions that have contributed to their understanding of literacy and its importance in their lives. Above all, this survey reflects and advocates a willingness to take pedagogical chances, to pursue the curiosities and uncertainties that have already made the DALN such a valued space for communal education about the distinctive tastes, experiences, needs, hopes, and aptitudes of our students.

After all, each of us teaches in a particular context, with particular resources, with particular students with particular needs. Any effective use of the DALN, then, must be particular to our own teaching situations. As [Paul Lynch \(2009\)](#) recently suggested, flexibility and adaptation must be the key to successful pedagogies in shifting contexts; the key question is not “What’s the right [DALN] pedagogy?” but “What’s the right [DALN] pedagogy for the students I have?” (p. 741). The examples and ideas we have provided here are merely a starting point to help instructors construct a DALN pedagogy that works for their students, their situations, and their goals. Our hope is that this article will help the DALN community continue to blunder and play toward an increasingly important end: to share an unruly pedagogy of storytelling with the rest of the world.

Appendix A. Online Survey

- 1 Have you ever used the DALN in one of the courses you teach?
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - Not yet, but I’m thinking about it.
 - Other (please explain)
- 2 What course(s)?
 - First-Year Writing
 - Advanced Composition
 - Introduction to Rhetoric
 - Literacy Studies
 - Digital Media Studies
 - Other (please specify)
- 3 What role(s) did the DALN play in this course?
 - Assigned readings
 - Suggested readings
 - Research database
 - Venue for publication
 - Target audience/arena
 - Site/project analysis
 - Textual analysis
 - Other (please specify)
- 4 Please describe the assignments in which students use the DALN.
- 5 What were the learning objectives of this assignment?
- 6 How did this assignment fit into the overall course design?
- 7 How would you evaluate the usefulness of the DALN for your pedagogical objectives?
- 8 In your opinion, how did students respond to the DALN project?
- 9 How likely would you be to use the DALN again in future courses?
 - I’ll use the same assignment in this course.
 - I’ll revise the assignment for this course.

- I'd try a new approach for this course.
- I'm not sure I'd use the DALN again in this course.
- I wouldn't use the DALN again in this course.
- I'd try this assignment in other courses.
- I'd design new assignments for other courses.
- I wouldn't use the DALN again.
- Other (please specify)

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