MOTIVATION TO WRITE: FINDING FLOW IN THE
SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM

A Thesis
Presented
To the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Teaching International Languages

by
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Spring 2014
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DEDICATION

For my parents, who never had any doubts.

My everlasting thanks for giving me the opportunity to live outside the lines.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Rights</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

### I. Introduction

- Background .................................................. 1
- Statement of the Problem/Significance .................. 3
- Purpose of the Study ...................................... 4
- Limitations of the Study ................................ 5
- Definition of Terms ....................................... 6
- Progression of the Thesis ................................ 7

### II. Literature Review

- The Social/Psychological Framework .................... 9
- Situating L2 Motivation in the Classroom .............. 11
- Cognitive Theories of Motivation ....................... 13
- Finding Flow in an L2 Context .......................... 21
- Motivation Through Digital Composition ............... 24
- Summary .................................................. 26

### III. Methodology

- Design of the Investigation .............................. 29
- Population ............................................... 32
- Treatment ............................................... 35
- Analysis ................................................. 40
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. Findings</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Does Flow Look Like in Writing/Composition?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Do Multimodal/Digital Methods of Composition Allow Possibilities for Flow?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Difficulty Does Being a Non-Native Speaker Pose to Achieving Flow, if Any?</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Summary and Conclusions</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Vision for the Future: Choose Your Own Adventure Education</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Interview Protocols</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Perception Questionnaire</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Example of In-Class Writing Prompts and Responses</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Human Subjects Consent Form</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Interview Information and Consent Form</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Assignment Titles and Descriptions</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Survey Data Spreadsheet</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Post-Data Collection Questionnaire</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Study Population Breakdown by Country of Origin and Gender.........</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interview Population Demographics</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

MOTIVATION TO WRITE: FINDING FLOW IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

by
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Spring 2014

Motivation is a growing problem in education, but it is also incredibly difficult to study due to the problems that surround its measurement. This study seeks to use the flow framework developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in order to better understand optimal experiences in a first-year composition class for second language learners. As it has been suggested that multimodal learning experiences may be a bridge to flow-like states in native speaker writing classrooms, multimodal activities and assignments are studied, along with more traditional writing assignments. The researcher articulates findings based on both quantitative data from perception surveys and qualitative data from student interviews and in-class writing. Participants in the study are drawn from a class of international students taking a beginning academic writing course at a state university. The researcher uses data to explore flow characteristics in a
writing/composition context, and to probe how multimodal and multiliteracy assignments may allow greater possibilities for flow, particularly in a second language learning environment.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Ask any language teacher and she will tell you, relying not on statistics or experimental data, but on instinct and experience, that motivation is an extremely important factor in learning to communicate in a foreign or second language (L2). However, motivation in the sense of ‘wanting to learn’ is difficult to define and problematic to measure. In the past four decades, there has been an enormous amount of research, debate, and development of various theories related to the deceptively simple question: “what motivates students to successfully learn a second language?” However, many of these theories and theorists have been criticized for remaining largely abstract, and not providing teachers or students with much practical understanding of how to gauge or facilitate motivation in a classroom context. Therefore, researchers are always looking for new ways to model or study motivation, particularly as it suggests practical methodology for teachers and learners.

One motivation framework from psychology that has recently been applied to language learning is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow and optimal experience. After noticing a state of total absorption in artists, intent on their work, Csikszentmihalyi began to study what it takes to become completely engaged in an activity. Over the
course of many years and numerous studies, Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues developed a model for achieving what they call a state of “flow” involving multiple factors: perceived challenge that matches skills, clear goals and feedback, focused attention, loss of self-awareness, a sense of control, and a loss of time awareness (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2002, p. 90). This research initially focused on people participating in hobbies of choice, such as art, sports, and other games, but gradually shifted to areas where choice was less present, such as employment and education. However, these studies were mostly concerned with questioning the existence or frequency of flow experiences in different areas of daily life, based on correlational data gathered from random batteries of perception surveys. When looking specifically at language learning, flow researchers realized they could not rely on random daily samples, and instead turned to interviews, observations, and targeted task surveys to better investigate how optimal experiences could arise in the classroom.

A similar question has occupied researchers from other areas of education, including writing and composition. Scholars have begun to support a move from traditional academic literacies to more multimodal, digitally developed forms of composition. Although much of this scholarship focuses on composition in a first language, second-language researcher Eli Hinkel (2011) states “… for L2 learners and writers, it is essential to attain capacities for multimodal communication in order to achieve social and educational equality and opportunity” (p. 535). This research demonstrates the importance of fostering multiliteracies in language education, but a previous study by Anderson (2008) shows that these multimodal composition activities
may also be a bridge to flow states in the classroom. If it could be demonstrated that multimedia activities lead to increased probability of optimal experiences in a classroom, instructors would have a practical theory around which to base their teaching methodologies.

Statement of the Problem/Significance

This study seeks to fill a gap left at the intersection of three fields: motivation studies using flow as a framework, second-language acquisition, particularly in the mode of writing, and digital and multimodal composition. First, there have been few studies to date involving the flow framework of motivation in an L2 context. Those that have been published typically agree that flow states were observed, but they are inconclusive as to how these states were achieved. Also of note is the lack of research looking at flow states in writing. The one published article by Abbot (2000) is a case study of two young male native speakers. Therefore, no studies have investigated the possibility of finding flow in a higher education classroom context.

Another gap this study seeks to address concerns multimodal composition and L2 writing. Though the scholarship on multiliteracies and digital forms of composition has begun to expand rapidly, it is still being looked at almost exclusively in a native speaker context. Showing another blind spot, research in second language writing tends to focus almost exclusively on the features of the written language as opposed to effective instruction strategies and methods (Hinkel, 2011). It seems only logical to question the impact that multimodal composition and multiliteracies would have on second language writing.
As years pass and we see more and more students struggling to find relevance in their education, motivation becomes a key factor. The current study questions whether a change in the method of teaching composition, by focusing on multimedia and multiliteracies, can allow students opportunities to find flow states while writing. The study also probes what optimal experience might look like in the context of composing. The findings primarily benefit instructors, who may choose to adapt activities or whole course structures in order to enhance possibilities for their students to experience flow as a part of their education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to use the flow framework as a way of exploring the effect of multimodal and digital literacies on students’ perceived motivation in an L2 composition classroom. Research has made it clear that digital and multimodal forms of composition are not only relevant to today’s classroom literacies, they are the new reality for education. This researcher agrees, and posits that these new literacies may also allow students more opportunity to find flow states in the composition classroom. Since this study seeks to fill multiple gaps in the research, it begins with three questions:

1. What does flow look like in writing/composition?

2. How do multimodal/digital methods of composition allow possibilities for flow?

3. What difficulty does being a non-native speaker pose to achieving flow, if any?
In the final chapter, the author will take up the bigger questions of how the information gathered in this study can help educators improve their courses to better promote optimal experiences, and why flow is an interesting and worthwhile lens for continuing to explore student motivation.

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, there are limitations to this study. First, and foremost, this study relies on perceptions of participants from a single class. This does not allow the study to be used for comparisons between native speakers and language learners, or even to be generalized to all composition classes. Also, the data is largely based on self-report interviews, though the study does try to triangulate the data by using student work and anonymous surveys. Self-report data is always limited, as the researcher cannot be certain that biases, external or internal, are not coming into play. As the researcher was also the instructor for the class, the students could have felt it necessary to give certain answers they assumed the teacher wanted to hear. However, all was done to insure that the participants were aware that their answers would not in any way negatively affect their grade in the class, and that they would be shown the final study before it was published or submitted for approval. Lastly, the study is limited in that it does not attempt to determine differences in language proficiency as a result of flow experiences. This is being undertaken as purely an exploratory study of flow state occurrence in a composition classroom of second language learners.
Definitions of Terms

Many terms used in this thesis have multiple meanings, or could be interpreted in different ways. In the interest of clarity, definitions are given below for key terms as they will be used in the thesis. It is the author’s hope that these definitions will help the reader and eliminate any confusion they may have felt upon seeing familiar words used in a different context. Although many of these definitions will be explored again in subsequent chapters, it is important to begin with at least an initial understanding of how these terms will be used.

• Write: In this work, writing refers not only to paper and pencil or word processing, but to all aspects of composition. While the word ‘writing’ in education spheres generally brings to mind essays or research papers, writing in academia exists in many more forms than these few limited genres. In this study, writing refers to all genres of textual composition, including multimodal and digital forms like videos and cartoons.

• Flow: Also sometimes referred to as optimal experience, flow is the state of being completely absorbed in an activity that is at the edge of one’s skill level. This state is often characterized outwardly by focused attention and little to no awareness of time passing, and inwardly by a feeling that success is possible, even if the challenge is perceived to slightly stretch existing skills, and that the individual has control over what they are doing.

• Motivation: This term is extremely difficult to define, and the definition will be explored further in Chapter 2, but in this study motivation describes the extent of a
student’s will to put their best effort into a project, educational or otherwise. Since this is an internal quality, its measurement is necessarily limited to self-report data.

• Multimodal: Literally this term means that something is composed from multiple ‘modes,’ which could mean many different things. In this study, multimodal is used to indicate that an assignment or project includes more than text, usually involving pictures, music, and/or animations. However, it also implies that these are non-traditional writing projects. For instance, the academic article assignment referred to in this study did sometimes include pictures or charts, but for this study’s purposes is not typically included when multimodal projects are mentioned. The connotation of multimodal is that the project is digital and created to share with an audience outside the classroom.

• Multiliteracies: A term coined by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), multiliteracies serves to highlight the world’s increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as focusing educators on “the multiplicity of communications channels and media” that are being used to make meaning. In a pedagogy of multiliteracies, students are encouraged to use all modes of meaning available to convey messages and share ideas.

Progression of the Thesis

This first chapter has given the context for the study and explained its purpose. Chapter two examines the historical development of, and continuing research in, the study of motivation, and makes a case for using flow theory as a lens for this study. The researcher also picks up the rationale for integrating multimodal forms of
composition into the writing classroom. Chapter three explains the design of the study, gives further details about the population, and describes the collection and analysis of the data. The chapter includes rationale for choices made throughout the study, and describes how the data were used to arrive at the findings. Chapter four, the findings chapter, is divided into sections based on the three research questions articulated above. The researcher uses the data to illustrate how this study adds to previous research on flow in education, and discusses the impact of multimodal assignments and an L2 environment in this specific case study. The final chapter, chapter five, summarizes the study and leaves the reader with some possibilities for using the findings to increase flow states in education by altering the structure of the traditional writing course.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review provides a necessarily limited synthesis of the vast field of motivation studies, specifically focusing on frameworks related to language learning. It examines some of the influential theories that have driven motivation research including the socioeducational theory, situated motivation theories, and the self-determination theory from cognitive psychology. Due to time constraints, the scope of this review focuses on published articles, and will at times rely on referenced anthologies to give a broader picture of certain untreated theories or branches of study in the field. The review then turns to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow and optimal experience as a different way of looking at language learning motivation, including relevant methods of measurement. The review points out the very few studies that have utilized the flow theory to understand language-learning motivation, and makes a case for adapting the theory with new measurements in order to investigate potential motivations in second language digital composition.

The Social Psychological Framework

Research in L2 motivation began in Canada when social psychologists Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) argued that reasons for learning language were distinct from other forms of motivation in education. Gardner and Lambert (1972)
characterized L2 learning as more than simply acquiring knowledge and developing skills, stating that languages are also inextricably tied to culture and a larger social context. Therefore, they hypothesized, learners’ attitudes towards the culture and community of the target language should have a significant impact on their motivation for, and success in, learning the language. From this hypothesis emerged what is commonly called the social psychological framework for studying L2 motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This framework, while admittedly much more complex than this simple dichotomy, has often been recognized (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 2003; Ushioda, 2008) for distinguishing between an integrative and instrumental orientation towards motivation. The integrative orientation is defined as “a positive interpersonal/affective disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community” (Dornyei, 2003, p. 5). By contrast, an instrumental orientation reflects the pragmatic outcomes of learning L2, such as gaining a promotion at work, or getting a good grade in school.

In an effort to test these motivation orientations, Gardner and associates developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994b). This lengthy questionnaire includes over one hundred statements which participants respond to on a scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” regarding their view of the L2, those who speak it, and their goals for learning. Numerous studies by Gardner and his associates (e.g. Gardner, Smythe, & Clement, 1979; Gardner, Moorcroft, & Metford, 1989; Gardner & Lysynchuck, 1990) have used this battery to help understand the relationship between attitudes, or motivational orientations, and achievement. As a result
of these correlational studies, and criticism that he wasn’t taking the educational context fully into account (Au, 1988), Gardner revised his framework into what is now termed the socioeducational model of language learning (Gardner, 1988).

At its heart, the new model is still interested mainly in the social aspects of language motivation, though Gardner and colleagues (2004) claim that the framework has always seen motivation as dynamic and situated in a learning setting. In a 2003 meta-analysis of Gardner’s work, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) did find that motivation (as assessed through the AMTB) was “more highly related to second language achievement than either of the other four variables” including integrativeness, integrative and instrumental orientations, and attitude toward the learning situation (p. 205). It seems clear that Gardner’s research, and research spawned by his socioeducational theory, proves that motivation, however it occurs, has a large effect on achievement in second language learning, but the question is: what does this mean on a practical level?

Situating L2 Motivation in the Classroom

The current author would have to agree with Ema Ushioda (2008) when she remarks:

At the risk of over-simplifying the social-psychological legacy of research on language learning motivation, however, I think it is true to say that the angle of inquiry it promoted yielded few genuinely useful insights for teachers and learners. (p. 20)

This statement sums up the most recent criticisms of the socioeducational theory (see Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Skehan, 1991; Dornyei, 1994) that point to the model’s failure to adequately address the classroom environment as a factor of learner motivation. These
critiques launched what has been termed a “motivational renaissance,” (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994b, p. 526) where researchers have broadened their definition of motivation and attempted to move toward what Dornyei (2003) calls a more ‘education-friendly’ approach to L2 motivation.

Beginning in the 1990’s, this newer approach investigates different aspects of the context in which learning occurs, and tries to make research more relevant to teachers and learners. For example, Dornyei (1994) designed a new framework for motivation based on language level, learner level, and learning situation level. At the language level, Dornyei (1994) follows Gardner and looks at integrative versus instrumental motivational subsystems. At the learner level, the framework assesses student ‘need for achievement’ and ‘self-confidence’, which is determined through a number of correlational indicators (p. 279). For the learning situation level, Dornyei (1994) describes three “motivational components” as 1) course-specific (based on student interest in tasks, relevance of material, expectancy of success); 2) teacher-specific (based on impact of teacher behavior, personality, and ability to socialize student motivation); and 3) group-specific (dynamics of group related to goals, norms, and cohesion) (p. 277-278). This framework was then followed by a list of strategies for teachers, organized according to the categories outlined above (Dornyei, 1994).

Dornyei’s (1994) new framework, along with the aforementioned critiques of Gardner’s motivational framework, led to a lively academic debate wherein Gardner and Tremblay (1994a; 1994b) claimed that the socioeducational model already addressed situational motivation, and called out scholars like Dornyei for not empirically testing
their strategies. The authors claim, “hypotheses, intuitions, and applications are valuable, but they must meet the test of empirical research” (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994b, p. 524). The current author must agree that it is easy to propose new models and strategies for teaching motivation, but the real usefulness comes from knowing that strategies will work. In response, Dornyei (2003) acknowledges the contributions of Gardner’s approach to a macro perspective of language motivation, but highlights the 1990’s research, including his own, as introducing a micro perspective in line with a parallel shift in psychology and cognitive research to studying the immediate social context of learning activities (p. 11-12).

Cognitive Theories of Motivation

As L2 motivation researchers began to narrow their focus to a more individual, contextualized learning environment, many turned to cognitive motivation theories to help them better understand L2 learners. In past years, this research has included “goal-setting, mastery versus performance goal-orientation, self-perceptions of competence, self-efficacy beliefs, perceived locus of control, and causal attributions for success or failure” (Ushioda, 2008, p. 21). To summarize all of these branches of research is far beyond the scope of this project, but for a comprehensive synthesis, many authors (Dornyei, 2003; Ushioda, 2008) point to the work of Pintrich and Schunk (2002). This review will focus on one of the most influential branches of cognitive motivation theory, and then let it lead us into a different way of thinking about motivation.
Self-Determination Theory

A conversation about motivation would seem incomplete without the now-common concept of ‘intrinsic and extrinsic’ forms of motivation. Recently popularized by best sellers like Daniel Pink’s *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, the idea that some motivation comes from within, while other motivation is imposed from without is nothing new. In 1985, authors Deci and Ryan first articulated the idea of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Instead of looking at motivation as one concept - either you have it or you don’t - Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000; 2008) differentiated between orientations of motivation. Although the theory is often defined by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the authors explain that the central distinction is actually between autonomous and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 182). This is important because although intrinsic motivation (when you do something purely for the enjoyment of doing it) has been shown to undeniably improve learning, experience and pragmatics tell us that not all learning activity will be intrinsically interesting all the time. Here, we are reminded of Dornyei’s (2003) emphasis on a process model of motivation that acknowledges temporal variation - that is, motivation fluctuates over short and long periods, and changes based on the task.

Deci and Ryan (2000) understand that a student will not always be intrinsically motivated to memorize spelling lists, for example, and may need an external push to complete the task. However, they note that there are varying levels of being extrinsically motivated, based on the level of felt autonomy. In their model, there are four forms of extrinsic motivation. Beginning from least autonomous: external regulation,
introjection, identification, and integration. External regulation is the form we most associate with extrinsic motivation: “behaviors are performed to satisfy an external demand or obtain an externally imposed reward” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 61). Introjection is only slightly better; although the individual feels an internal push to do something, it is motivated by the desire to enhance or maintain self-esteem, and often is felt to be externally located (p. 62). Identification refers to a more autonomous form in which the individual has found some way to find personal value in the behavior, and integration occurs when that value becomes part of the person’s self. While this may seem like intrinsic motivation, and does share similar autonomy and value, integrated motivation is still driven by the pursuit of an outcome (p. 62).

Now, we return to our student who was extrinsically motivated to memorize a spelling list. Based on the forms of extrinsic motivation, we see that if that same student can be made to see how spelling lists lead to better writing, he or she could internalize the ‘external regulation’ of memorizing the list, and move towards an identification with the value of this activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 62). Therefore, the student would have moved what they perceived as an external locus of control into themselves, and would be more motivated to complete the activity. In this way, extrinsic motivation can be extremely useful for students.

For this reason, knowing their students and knowing the factors that foster the different kinds of extrinsic motivation are important issues for any educator to consider. Some of these factors include: relatedness, perceived competence, and rationale (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 64). Since extrinsic motivation comes from an external prompt, people are
most likely to engage in the behavior or activity if they feel it is valued by people they see as significant in their lives. For instance, if a student has a strong connection with their teacher, they are more likely to want to please him or her through their actions. This is similar to the “teacher-specific” component in Dornyei’s motivational model (1994). In terms of competence, Deci and Ryan (2000) propose that learners will be more apt to engage in an activity if they feel that they have the skills to achieve it, suggesting, as have many L2 acquisition researchers, that task selection and design is a main factor in motivation. Finally, the authors cite research that demonstrates the importance of giving learners a rationale for what they may deem to be uninteresting activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 64).

At this point, it is important to note that while there may be outward similarities between integrative/instrumental orientations and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, they are not the same thing. In the socioeducational model, both integrative and instrumental orientations are based on the outcome of learning the language, and so would both be classified as extrinsic motivations. As Schmidt and Savage (1994) note in what has become a classic example, learners may have an integrative orientation toward learning the language (characterized by their desire to interact with the L2 community), but dislike studying and so lack an intrinsic motivation to learn. Hopefully, their integrative orientation to the language would allow them to internalize the extrinsic motivations provided by their courses, and thereby move toward a more autonomous form of regulation, giving them the will to continue their learning.
This framework has given us a new way in which to view motivation on a continuum. Instead of focusing on the larger social context of the socioeducational model, or even the classroom-based model of Dornyei (1994), SDT brings our attention to the learner and to their ability to process, or internalize, different kinds of motivation. However, it is still looking at motivation as a construct of a theory. As a teacher, the current author wishes to see what autonomous motivation looks like in the real world. For this, we turn to another branch of psychology that has been developing alongside motivation studies, but has only recently been investigated as a framework for language learning.

Flow Theory and Optimal Experience

In the 1960’s while studying creativity, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi noticed a trait in artists that enabled them to work for hours without seeming aware that time was passing. His interest piqued, he began a decades-long study of what he termed optimal experience, or the state of “flow.” Initially focusing on hobbies and games due to their intrinsically motivating qualities (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), the study of flow has expanded to sports (Jackson & Marsh, 1996), writing (Abbott, 2000), teacher development (Tardy & Snyder, 2004), quality of life (Asakawa, 2004; 2010; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989), academic achievement (Asakawa, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1982; Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Shernoff, D.J., Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Schernoff, E.S., 2003), and more recently to foreign and second language education (Egbert, 2004; Finch, 2007; Kimura, 2008; Su, 2011).
At its heart, the theory shares a lot of similarities with those surrounding intrinsic motivation. After all, it seeks to understand autotelic activities - from *auto* (self) and *telos* (goal) - experiences that are their own goal. In an effort to characterize these activities, flow theory specifies two necessary conditions for so-called optimal experience: (1) the perceived challenges stretch existing skills, but do not exceed them, and (2) there are clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about progress (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 90). If these conditions are met, the individual can “operate at full capacity” and enter a state with six defined characteristics: intense concentration, merging of action and awareness, loss of awareness of self as an actor, sense of control, distortion of the passage of time, and the experience that the activity is intrinsically rewarding (p. 90). It is interesting to note the many common idioms revolving around this state, such as ‘rising to the challenge,’ ‘losing yourself,’ and the experience of ‘time flying when you’re having fun.’

The most cited and studied characteristic of flow is the idea of an activity’s challenge being in balance, or just slightly exceeding, an individual’s skill level. As Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) state, this balance is “intrinsically fragile”; when challenge exceeds skill, flow gives way to anxiety, and when skills exceed challenge, individuals become bored (p. 90). The implications of this theory are that whenever skills and challenge are in balance, the individual should be able to achieve flow. This depiction of a necessary balance led to what has been called the “flow channel” (Egbert, 2003). Whalen (1997) refines the theory so that flow only occurs at high skill/high challenge moments because in his study a balance of low skills/low challenge created
what he called apathy rather than a flow state (cited in Egbert, 2003, p. 502). In terms of language learning, this idea of challenges just stretching skills is remarkably similar to Krashen’s (1985) concept of comprehensible input, or i + 1. It also bears resemblance to the Vygotskian zone of proximal development (ZPD), another important theory for L2 acquisition (for an in-depth understanding see Chaiklin, 2003). In all of these theories, the achievable challenge leads to growth, and the growth leads to the search for greater and more complex challenges. However, it is important to note that the challenges and skills mentioned in flow theory are by nature dependent on the perception of the individual; they are inherently subjective measures. For this reason, among others, Csikszentmihalyi (1992) has warned against depending on a single dimension to measure flow, and encouraged researchers to view the phenomenon as multi-faceted, much as we have previously depicted motivation.

Another important factor that is said to mediate the flow experience is attention. According to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002), “entering flow is largely a function of how attention has been focused in the past and how it is focused in the present by the activity’s structural conditions” (p. 92). By this, they show that attention is not only based on the learner’s prior experiences with the activity, but also dependent on the current context. Because the experience is shaped moment-to-moment, the authors describe “emergent motivation” as that which arises from the situation, and is not based on a “preexisting intentional structure located within the person (e.g., a drive) or the environment (e.g., a tradition or script)” (p. 91). This has beneficial implications for language learning, and education in general, due to the fact that it suggests we do not
need an intrinsic motivation for something in order to find flow in it. In a recent study, Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi (2011) found that attentional involvement (the degree to which the person’s attention was focused on the activity) fully mediated the relationship between optimal challenge (challenge matching skills) and enjoyment. These results prove the importance of attention for not only entering flow, but also maintaining it. We will return to this concept when we discuss flow and language learning.

According to Egbert (2003), there are two other dimensions of flow we need to consider: interest and control. Interest is another one of those terms in motivation studies, much like motivation itself, that we use all the time without fully agreeing upon what it means or how it should be used (Kimura, 2008, p. 88). In Egbert’s qualitative study, this dimension was highly linked to control, and since it was not a necessary condition for flow in other studies (e.g., Schmidt & Savage, 1992), it seems that we could conflate it with attention. After all, it would seem silly to focus your attention on something in which you had little to no interest, and attention is easier to measure. The dimension of control, however, has been shown to be more relevant. In her case study on two young writers, Abbot (2000) showed that if there was an element of autonomy and learner control, even assigned writing could lead to flow. Likewise, Kimura (2008) reports learner perception of control led to flow states even with challenging, assigned listening materials. This element of control seems linked to the concepts of autonomy, or choice, which have been central to our discussion of motivation.

Before we turn to studies of flow in the language classroom, it seems important to make a quick note of the methods through which flow has been measured.
Like the socioeducational theory, researchers often rely on correlational data to indicate flow states. In the early period of flow research, Csikszentmihalyi and others developed a tool to measure situated experiences. Called the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), it relies on participants filling out a questionnaire whenever they are signaled (usually by a watch or electronic device) at various times throughout the day. This method allows researchers to “take samples from the stream of actual everyday experience” and samples “cognitive, emotional, and motivational states” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 94). One interesting result from an ESM study showed that although most factors (including happiness, strength, creativity, concentration, and satisfaction) were dependent on flow/non-flow states, motivation and relaxation were dependent on socio-cultural labels that mark an activity as work or leisure (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989).

Likewise, in a longitudinal study of flow in adolescents, Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found that activities labeled as schoolwork provided high instances of flow, but dramatically lowered motivation and mood at the same time. We are left with a confusing picture of flow from these studies, which is one reason researchers have been turning back to interviews and observation for their studies of flow in L2 acquisition. Indeed, as we move into a newer field, it seems prudent to return to the roots of flow theory with Csikszentmihalyi’s long hours of observation and qualitative interviews that defined what it meant to be “in flow.”

Finding Flow in an L2 Context

To date, there are few published studies that investigate flow in the context of second or foreign language acquisition, though the idea does seem to be gaining
recognition in recent years. One of the potential reasons for this lack is that flow theory studies optimal experience, or “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4 cited in Kimura, 2008, p. 76). In general, this is not something many people associate with the idea of a formal education. Another conflict of interest between flow and SLA is described in Egbert (2003) and further elaborated in Kimura (2008). Flow, they explain, is characterized by focused attention that leads to task automaticity. In Abbot’s (2000) case study this was described as “blinking out” and “having the touch,” while athletes in the Jackson & Marsh (1996) study called it being “in the zone” or “in the groove.” All of these figurative expressions denote an element of losing themselves in the activity, but in current language learning research, emphasis is put on being aware of language or “noticing” the input and structures, not just being immersed in an activity. As Egbert (2003) asserts, “whether language learners can focus on form and be intensely focused on the greater task at the same time, or whether they even need to be, is not clear at present” (p. 504).

To date, research involving L2 in listening (Kimura, 2008), and walkthrough games (Su, 2011), has been based on the four dimensions of flow described in Egbert’s (2003) study on the ability of various task types in a fourth-semester Spanish course to stimulate experiences of flow. Her findings, based on perceptions surveys given after each task, observational data, and one-on-one interviews, report that participants did experience flow during some of the language tasks and that the four dimensions were shown to account for flow. However, she acknowledges that these results do not give a
greater understanding of what task characteristics cause high levels of flow, nor whether one dimension is more influential than another (Egbert, 2003, p. 513). Similarly, Kimura (2008) sees some evidence of flow characteristics in her interviews of two students in an extensive English listening course, but concludes that it is impossible to determine for sure whether they achieved a flow state (p. 89). Although Su (2011) also found evidence of flow using computer walkthrough games for language learning, this study did not collect any personal feedback from participants, but relied upon passing or not passing game levels as a measure of learner performance.

So what does this say about flow and second language learning? Should researchers give up, and leave flow to the more intrinsically motivating hobbies and games from whence it originated? Kimura (2008) writes that the reductionist approach to flow might be its downfall when investigating activities as complex as learning another language. Instead, the author urges future research to consider a more holistic view of the phenomenon. She writes, “there may be four essential aspects in language learning or nine important dimensions in flow experiences in general, but the sum of the four or the nine might not generate the enjoyable experience desired” (90). We should not be disheartened; after all, measuring flow or any kind of motivation has always been an imperfect endeavor. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) invite researchers to consider alternative methods of measurement, “such as analysis of videotaped sequences of individuals in flow. This might encompass tracking a set of observable markers of flow, collecting self-reports about the associated course of subjective experience, and/or combining the two data sources” (p. 101). These suggestions will be relevant to the
current study, as we look at the possibilities for finding flow in a university-level composition course for international students studying English as a second language.

Motivation Through Digital Composition

As technology begins to mediate nearly every aspect of our daily lives, it would seem surprising for it not to infiltrate the classroom. Yet, we continue to see schools and instructors locking their doors against mobile phones, and even banning laptops or iPads for note taking due to their potential for ‘distraction.’ While this study does not intend to take up the technology argument for all of education, it is relevant to our context of the L2 composition classroom. Eli Hinkel (2011), noted scholar of second language acquisition and linguistics, takes researchers to task for devoting their time to studying the features of L2 writing, while neglecting to give practical advice for writing instruction. This situation seems similar to the problem in motivation studies of researchers’ agendas not helping the students or the teachers. Hinkel (2011) reviews the field of research on L2 writing and concludes that, “for L2 learners and writers, it is essential to attain capacities for multimodal communication in order to achieve social and educational equality and opportunity” (p. 535). Here, multimodal is a reference to the addition of digital, as well as visual and auditory genres in L2 writing education. Likewise, discussing the lack of research at the intersection of L2 and digital writing, DePew and Miller (2005) claim, “As multimodalities and multiliteracies become the reality of the writing classroom, claims of disciplinary ignorance are becoming increasingly irresponsible” (p. 260).
With this admonition, we turn to the question of how to integrate these multimodal forms into writing instruction. Anderson (2008) gives one possibility in his discussion of what he calls ‘low-bridge’ media. These media are all free, consumer-ware, such as YouTube and PhotoPlus (a free program like Photoshop) and their value comes in their ability to engage students in remixing more familiar literacies. For instance, Anderson shows student examples of a project where they were asked to create an image representing the poem “The Tyger” by William Blake. It is clear from these images that the multimedia platform enabled them to add more depth to their images than we would find in a paper and glue collage. These new literacies or “design grammars” are advocated by the New London Group (1996) in their seminal work on multiliteracies for their ability to help students see themselves as active ‘makers’ of their social futures (cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 41).

More relevant to this review, Anderson describes these multimedia literacies as extremely motivating. Even citing Csikszentmihalyi’s work on flow, Anderson remarks that “the entry-level nature of low-bridge technologies ameliorates difficulties that can shut down flow, but the challenge of composing with unfamiliar forms opens pathways to creativity and motivation” (p. 44). He also mentions the sense of control these new media can provide, again building on our understanding of flow theory. Perhaps a better indicator of what we might call the flow-state occurring during these media projects comes from the students themselves. While discussing her digital collage of “The Tyger,” one student describes how she always “finished my collages really early because once I started on each collage I would get addicted to working on them and
would not be able to move from my computer for hours…” (p. 51). This clear statement of flow is joined by many others of its like throughout Anderson’s (2008) article.

In order for these results to occur though, we cannot simply layer technology on top of existing pedagogy for teaching L2 writing and composition. Anderson calls for a learning framework built around the idea of a studio-arts classroom. Instead of theorizing or talking about projects in class, the production of the composition must take center stage. This allows the classroom to become what Bruno Latour termed a “construction site,” where technology, making, and understanding “flow together” (cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 58). Although this article does not specifically address the second language classroom, perhaps this is the direction that is needed to create flow and promote real motivation for composition in both L1 and L2 contexts.

Summary

Motivation, while extensively studied, is clearly still a relevant and important issue for education research in general, and language learning in particular. Although this literature review attempted to sequence the theories in a logical order, it is important to note that many of them developed alongside each other. This implies that instead of “advancing” in terms of their focus, the frameworks are simply looking at motivation from different viewpoints. While Gardner and his colleagues focus on the larger social context of learning a language and becoming part of a new community, largely affected by their physical location in multilingual Canada, Dornyei seeks to bring attention to the classroom context. Deci and Ryan narrow their focus to the interactions the individual learner has with his or her environment. Likewise, Csikszentmihalyi focuses on the
learner and their ability or propensity to engage in autotelic activities and create optimal experiences. This theory of “flow” seems promising as a framework for studying educational motivation, but has yet to be sufficiently tested in a second language environment. While Anderson’s (2008) quotes from students engaged in multimodal literacies certainly predict that flow-states can happen in a composition classroom, this study validates that finding using both qualitative and quantitative data. This study also builds on the meager literature of flow in L2 contexts, and questions what, if any, impact language has on flow.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study investigates motivation to write in a second language composition classroom, based on the characteristics typically associated with Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow. Although there have been studies on flow in education, most have employed purely quantitative methods, or random sampling of data through the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) that seeks to determine how the individual feels that their skills match the challenge of the activity they were just engaged in. However, these studies are typically looking for a specific dimension of the flow state, and they are not studying a specific environment, but the existence of flow in different areas of daily life. Since this study seeks to use the flow framework as a way to understand motivation in the composition classroom, these random samples will not work. Csikszentmihalyi argues that, based on the initial flow studies, “qualitative interviews have yielded domain-specific descriptions of deep flow in diverse activities” (96). This study uses qualitative as well as quantitative methods, through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and student work, to better understand student motivation surrounding writing in a second language setting. One obvious question is whether the language barrier for students still learning English is enough to prevent or prohibit the
flow state, and thereby affect motivation. Another goal of this study was to consider the impact digital platforms and multimodal projects had on possibilities for flow.

Design of the Investigation

The study utilized three sources of data in order to gather both qualitative and quantitative information; however, the main focus is on the semi-structured interviews the author conducted with four students over the course of the semester. Other data sources were anonymous surveys given after each major assignment during the course, and written reflection journals students kept in Google Drive and updated almost every class period. The interviews were audio recorded to preserve the conversations so the author could return to student responses during analysis. It was decided that since student perception was such an integral part of understanding flow, exact wording would be more beneficial for this study than field notes taken from the interviews. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed prior to the meetings with the students, but it was used as a loose guide for the conversations, and to make sure the author touched on all of the same aspects of student experience with the assignment, rather than a rigid structure of questions. The areas of interest mainly related to student perceptions of assignments in areas generally related to flow, such as challenge, skill, interest, and attention.

The decision to conduct qualitative interviews was made because the author felt that most studies of flow had moved too far away from Csikszentmihalyi's initial studies in which he used in-depth interviews to help understand and define what it meant to be in a flow state (1982). Since the current author was not sure how the language
barrier would affect flow, and indeed was not even sure flow would be possible in this second-language setting, interviews were determined to be necessary so that students could explain their perceptions of assignments in addition to filling out survey responses. This conversation methodology allowed the author to dig deeper into student statements such as “it was interesting” to better understand the various aspects that contributed to that interest. Since flow states are based entirely on the perception of the individual, it was necessary to allow the participants in this study the opportunity to voice and explain their perceptions. However, there were some challenges that came with interviews. In order to talk about flow, the author needed the participants to have a basic understanding of what the word meant. Therefore, the first interview began with a brief verbal description, and participants were given a short printed passage to read which was from Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) study of an poet describing the flow state (see Appendix A). After this, a few probing questions were asked to make sure that participants understood flow as being different from a general state of contentment, and the interview proceeded from there. Another challenge arose in the form of the language barrier, in that some participants were unfamiliar with a few words in the description. In an attempt to ensure that everyone started out with an equal understanding, the author allowed those students to look up a translation of the word in their native language. The rest of the interview was conducted purely in English. By conducting qualitative interviews, the study sought to give voice to second language speakers as they explored and explained their own engagement with writing and their motivation to compose, something that has not extensively been done in the past.
Due to the relatively short duration of the study, the author was only able to conduct three rounds of interviews with the same four students. In addition to the interviews, it was decided that all of the students in the class would complete surveys called “perception questionnaires” so that the author could get a larger sample size of data. These surveys were distributed digitally, using Google Forms, after every major assignment, and the same form was used each time, with the only modification being the title, which reflected the name of the assignment they were reviewing. The survey prompts were adapted from Egbert (2004) and were meant to elicit perceptions that would give the author insight into the characteristics generally associated with flow (for a printout of the form, see Appendix B). The surveys were given anonymously to account for the probability of some bias in the in-depth interviews, even though the participants were informed that nothing they said would negatively affect their grade in the class. By allowing the entire class to take the surveys, the author attempted to discern the bigger picture of motivation across different assignments, and searched for patterns that existed in the data.

The third source of data, the reflective journals, were mainly used to identify where there were questions or concerns about assignments. These journals were kept in Google documents for each student, shared with the instructor (the author), and updated at almost every meeting based on prompts given. Many of these prompts focused on student perception of assignments, and asked them to articulate any questions or worries they had about course content or the projects they were assigned. By analyzing these journals along with the surveys, the author was able to gain a greater insight into how
assignments were perceived and taken up by the students in the class. Examples of prompts and responses from student journals can be found in Appendix C.

Population

The participants in this study lived in a semi-rural town in Northern California, but all of them were studying at the university in this town as international students, and were from four different countries. For purposes of confidentiality, the name of the university and all participant names given are pseudonyms. The university, which will be referred to as Redwood State University (RSU), has a large international presence, which merits some specific English classes that are only open to international students. One of these classes is the equivalent of Freshman Composition, and this is the class the participants in this study were from. None of the participants were native English speakers, and none were classified as minors, since all participants were over the age of eighteen. All students in the class filled out a consent form agreeing that the author could use their class work, survey responses, and any observation notes made during class time as data for the present study (for consent form, see Appendix D).

Survey and Reflection Journal Population

The population invited to participate in the reflective journal and survey portions of this study consisted of the 25 students enrolled in the class. However, one student ceased to attend after a week of class, therefore the final population size was 24. Of these, five were female and nineteen were male. Although this class section was open to all international students, the majority of the class (13 students) was from Saudi
Arabia. The other students were from South Korea, China, and Kuwait. Table 1 shows the breakdown by gender and nationality. It is important to note that most of these students were in their first semester as matriculated RSU students, though a few of them had taken a previous English course in which they gained experience with the research process. The work with multimodal digital composition was new to almost every student, and none of them had written a research proposal or academic article before. This newness needs to be stressed because comfort with an activity or material has been shown to be important for the flow state to occur. Although efforts were made to gather data from every student for each survey, some students were gone during meetings when the surveys were taken, and some students may have chosen not to submit on purpose. Since the surveys were anonymous, there is no way to be sure who submitted or not each time, but the author notes that larger trends should still be visible without an exact match in the sample population each time.

Table 1

*Study Population Breakdown by Country of Origin and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Population

Although it would have been ideal to interview every student who took the survey, this was impractical for many reasons. First, the interviews and their transcription took a lot of time, and the author simply could not make all of the students’ schedules fit the study’s timetable. More importantly, the author was asking students to express perceptions and feelings that would have been difficult for beginning English speakers to voice in their second or third language. Therefore, the author chose to seek out a representative sample of students who would be able to articulate themselves without feeling the need for a translator. This identification process took some time, as the author had to determine which of the students might be able to take on this challenge without undue stress being put on them. In the end, the author selected four students – two males and two females - to invite to participate in the interviews. See Table 2 for their pseudonyms, countries, and a brief description of their personas. Detailed demographic information about these students was not gathered, as it was not relevant to this study.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name in Study</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>General Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Very shy, soft-spoken, studying psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Outspoken, near-fluent spoken English, studying Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Quiet, short answers, unsure of major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Outspoken, near-fluent spoken English, studying Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once these students had been identified, in the third week of the course the author approached each student individually with an offer to be a part of this research study. Students were given an interview consent form (see Appendix E) that explained their participation in greater detail, and they were informed that if they completed all three interviews during the semester they would receive five extra credit points for the course. This amounted to just two percent of their final grade, which was not a significant amount, but it was intended to show them that their time was valuable. Although one student hesitated, and one student initially thought the time commitment was too much, all eventually decided to participate in the interviews. The only instance of a student not completing every interview was Hannah, who was not able to meet for the final interview at the end of the semester.

Treatment

The data were collected in an ongoing manner throughout the semester. As mentioned, the reflective journals were updated nearly every class period, and the instructor used these reflections to gain an overall impression of student motivation on different assignments. These journal entries were prompted by a question or set of questions from the instructor, but students were encouraged to also use the journal space as another platform for communicating their own questions or concerns about the course. Although none of these entries focused on the concept of flow directly, they did give the researcher another window into student perceptions of the assignments in the course. If many students had questions about a particular assignment, or were expressing worry, the researcher might assume that the perception of challenge would make it difficult for those
students to achieve a flow state. However, by having this window into their perceptions at the time of the assignment, the instructor could, and did, work to minimize perceptions of challenge and heighten perceptions of existing skills going into each new project. After the course was over, the researcher went through the writing prompts and highlighted those questions which would have shown student perceptions of class assignments. Then, all student responses to those specific prompts were copied from their individual journals into one document so that the researcher could search for patterns in the perceptions. No coding system was needed, as this data source was mainly used to gather a general understanding of how students felt about assignments, and to compare this qualitative data with the quantitative data from the surveys.

The data collected from the surveys gives us a general understanding of how the assignments were perceived by the students. However, it is important to note that all of the surveys were submitted after they completed the assignments and before they received a grade. This was in attempt to reduce bias that would have been present if students had been formally evaluated before they assessed themselves. Ideally, some of these questions would have been asked just after they received the assignment, or while they were in the middle of writing/composing, but logistically it made more sense to have fewer surveys and ask students to recall how they felt during the assignment process. By filling out a different survey after each major assignment, the researcher hoped to minimize the time period the students had to remember in an attempt to get the most accurate perceptions.
The first survey, or perception questionnaire, was given after the completion of the first assignment – the Why I Write video (for a complete list and descriptions of the assignments included in this study, see Appendix F). Students had already been informed of the research study, but the author reminded them of the study’s focus and explained the survey’s purpose. As a class, we located the survey on the class website and the instructor reminded students to press ‘submit’ at the bottom of the survey to ensure that their responses would be collected. The first iteration of the survey received 20 responses. As mentioned, it is impossible to tell whether the four missing surveys were due to absences, students not submitting surveys correctly, or students intentionally choosing to withhold their responses. The next survey, for the research proposal, received 22 responses. The third, for the research article, received only 16, and the final survey for the impact film received 17 responses. It is reasonable to assume that the decrease in submitted surveys may have been due to the fact that the students had already completed two and were getting tired of filling out the forms. Once the researcher had all of the survey data, it was compiled into a spreadsheet. The left-most column contained each question from the survey, with a row for each of the seven options from the range the students were given (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Each subsequent column represented the four assignments. Using Google Form’s “summary of responses” the researcher was easily able to fill in the numbers of answers received for each choice within each question. After the numbers were input, they were converted to percentages based on the number of surveys received for each assignment. The completed spreadsheet allowed the researcher to compare results based on question or assignment. To better
track patterns, the researcher highlighted the majority percentage for each question on each assignment (for full spreadsheet, see Appendix G). These numbers gave an overview of how the class as a whole perceived each assignment and allowed the researcher to make generalized claims that will be explained in the next chapter.

The interviews were collected three times during the semester. The first series of interviews occurred in September, after the research proposals were due. Although it would have been better to conduct the first round of interviews right after the first videos to coincide with the first survey, it took time to identify the students who were interested in participating in the research study at the interview level. The interviews were conducted separately with just the interviewee and the researcher in the room. Each interview began with the researcher briefly reminding the student of the focus of the study and their rights as interviewees. Before proceeding, the researcher asked the student to give a verbal acknowledgement that they agreed to have their voice recorded for the duration of the interview. The researcher was careful to do this every time, so that the students were always aware when their words were being recorded, and that they could always choose to opt out of the study if they wished. Beginning the interviews this way set the tone for serious and respectful conversations and showed the students that their ideas and opinions were valued in an academic setting. The first set of interviews continued with the researcher describing the flow state in greater depth and each student read a short passage of a poet’s definition of flow. Some students required translation of a few words in the definition to fully understand it. From there, the researcher loosely followed the interview protocol defined in Appendix A. However, since these interviews
were intended to be more conversational in order to put the student interviewees at ease, the exact order and wording of the questions was not strictly adhered to. At times, the researcher asked questions that were not on the protocol when they made sense in the context of the conversations.

When possible, the researcher attempted to meet with all of the student interviewees in the same week for each interview cycle. However, there were a few instances of needing to accommodate student schedules when the researcher had to meet with one or two students the week after the other interviews. There was also one instance at the end of the semester when Hannah was unable to meet for the final interview due to final exams.

In order to keep these interviews informal, the researcher chose not to take field notes during the conversations. Therefore, transcriptions of the audio were necessary for analyzing the interview data. To save time, the researcher’s questions were paraphrased in the transcriptions, and also sections of the conversation that were not directly relevant to the study. For example, Hannah spent about five minutes describing her favorite Korean television show. Since this information was not relevant to my question about flow, it was not transcribed in full, but paraphrased. For the most part, however, student answers were transcribed word for word so that there was less room for misinterpreting their perceptions and opinions.

After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher analyzed the interview data for answers to the three questions guiding the study:
1. What does flow look like in writing/composition?

2. How do multimodal/digital methods of composition allow possibilities for flow?

3. What difficulty does being a non-native speaker pose to achieving flow, if any?

Since interest was a major factor shown to influence flow, statements indicating interest were highlighted in yellow. As the researcher read through the transcripts, notes were made when students mentioned: perceived challenges or skills, remarks relating to level of choice they had, impediments to flow, time spent on assignments, language barriers and cultural differences, attention, aspects particular to multimodal projects, and moments when students declared themselves to have achieved a flow state. After these notes were made, the researcher separated the interview data into these categories in order to be able to see all of the comments from each category together. Once the interview data was separated into categories, the researcher compiled a list of the categories and added bullet points to represent the kinds of comments that made up each category. For instance, under the category ‘impediments to flow’ there were comments about friends’ influences, other assignments/classes, deadlines, too much challenge, noise, lack of choice, and grades. These lists allowed the researcher to not only see the larger categories in the data, but also to collect the relevant comments from the interviews in one place.

Analysis for Findings

In order to reach the findings in the following chapter, the researcher analyzed the data separately for answers to each of the major questions in the study:
For the first question “What does flow look like in writing/composition”, the researcher first wrote a narrative summary of the survey and interview data for each assignment. This writing allowed the researcher to see trends and formulate claims, but having the data organized by assignment pulled the emphasis away from flow. Instead, the author decided to organize data for this question based on the two main factors shown in previous studies to generate flow experiences: challenge/skill, and goals/feedback. Once this decision was made, the researcher began with the section on challenge. By using the survey data for the statement “this assignment was challenging for me”, the researcher gained an overall picture of the perceived challenges in the course, but it was the interview data that made it clear that challenge was perhaps not as important as interest in determining whether students could achieve flow states in writing. Survey data was then used to support the notion that interest directly mediated flow. In this section, the researcher also relied on the in-class writing data to see where students had questions or anxiety about their work. For the next section, on feedback, the surveys were not helpful. Instead, the researcher relied entirely on the interview data. Reading for mentions of friends or outside audiences, as well as anything else that could have provided feedback allowed the researcher to make the claim that some form of immediate feedback was always present when students achieved flow in this study. At the end of the section, the author revises the first research question based on the data. Instead of seeking to understand what flow “looks” like in composition, the question is “What different factors mediate flow in the context of composition?”
The second question “How do multimodal/digital methods of composition allow possibilities for flow?” also utilized the survey and interview data, but student writing from the course was not used. The survey helped support the author’s claim that students enjoyed working on the videos more than the text-based assignments. Specifically, responses to the following statements were taken into consideration, “I would enjoy doing this assignment again” and “This assignment was fun for me.” Though specific numbers are not mentioned, the general idea that both of the videos were more fun is stated. Then, the researcher quoted student comments from the interview data to support the claim that multimodal projects did offer benefits over traditional assignments that made them more supportive of flow experiences.

Finally, the third question “What difficulty does being a non-native speaker pose to achieving flow, if any?” was entirely answered using interview data. Specifically, this section focused on Mary’s interviews because she was the only one to specifically mention language being an issue during composition. However, the researcher used her comments to realize that one of the problems for second language students is their anxiety about mistakes they make in any writing that is visible to outside audiences. By integrating more low-stakes writing, or multimodal projects that hide a lot of the writing involved in their creation, instructors can help lower the anxiety and give students more opportunity to generate real interest in their composition, which in turn gives them more possibility for optimal experiences.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study primarily utilized interviews with students about their own perception of flow and the flow characteristics of their work for assignments in the class. This data is supplemented by quantitative survey data and passages from student work to investigate the existence of flow in a second language composition classroom. The specific questions the study sought to answer were: (1) What does the flow state look like in writing/composition, (2) How do multimodal/digital methods of composition allow possibilities for flow, and (3) What difficulty does being a non-native speaker pose to achieving flow, if any? Each of these questions is taken up as a section in this chapter. Relevant data pertaining to each research question is presented and discussed. In the final chapter, the researcher reviews the findings and discusses their implications for future studies of flow and multimodality in education.

What Does Flow Look Like in Writing/Composition?

Past studies have determined what it means for an individual to be in ‘flow’ in various activities. It was found that two conditions are necessary: (1) perceived challenges utilize or stretch, but do not greatly exceed, existing skills, and (2) there are clear goals and immediate feedback about one's progress (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi,
2002, p. 90). When these conditions exist, individuals have the possibility of entering a flow state characterized by focused attention, interest, a sense of control, loss of time-awareness, and a feeling that the self and the activity have merged in the pursuit of a rewarding outcome.

In order to better understand if and how students experience this state in education, specifically in the context of a writing/composition class, the researcher tried to address all of these characteristics through surveys and interviews. It is important to remember that the surveys were taken after the completion of each assignment, to be used as a general picture of how the task or project was perceived by the class as a whole. The interviews and in-class writing, by contrast, provide specific information from students about their experiences with each form of composition.

This section takes up the question “What does flow look like in writing and composition” by examining the factors that have usually lead to flow, and using the study data to determine how those factors affected student experiences in this composition course. The researcher begins by investigating the oft-cited challenge/skill binary, where an interesting finding questions the need for a similar challenge to skill ratio. Next, the idea of immediate feedback is discussed, and a case is made using the data for integrating digital assignments in order to heighten a student’s sense of feedback. The researcher concludes with a summary and analysis of what the data tells us overall about flow in writing/composition.
Challenge vs. Skill

Although Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues have warned in the past that flow is a dynamic state and should not be narrowed down to the idea of an equal perception of challenge and skill, that does seem to be the most commonly studied characteristic. On one hand, it is easier to ask someone how challenging something was than to ask them if they felt their self and the activity merging in pursuit of a satisfying objective. Also, the challenge/skill ratio gives rise to nice, neat figures like the flow channel (Egbert, 2003) where it seems that if an activity challenges an individual's skill at the right level, they will be able to achieve flow. In these studies characteristics like interest and attention are described as by-products of the flow state, where equally high challenge/skill perceptions are necessary conditions. This breakdown may be true in voluntary activities and hobbies such as chess and sports, but the current study shows that the situation may be different in the context of education, specifically in this composition class.

First, the researcher became aware that initial perceptions of challenge could be mediated in many different ways, both by the instructor and by the students, in order to make achieving flow more possible. However, the study also shows that having the “right” amount of challenge and skill perception is not always the best indicator of flow. In fact, the interview data indicates that interest may be more important than level of challenge in generating flow states. These ideas are discussed in the following three sections.
Initial Perceptions of Challenge can be Mediated

The survey data for perception of challenge shows that most students found all assignments challenging by either strongly agreeing, agreeing, or agreeing a little with the statement ‘this assignment was challenging for me.’ However, as noted, these surveys were taken after the assignment was submitted. Since flow states typically occur in the moment of the activity, the researcher was interested in the initial perception of challenge and if or how this changed during the course of working on the assignments. The data showed that tools, structures, and prior experience were all mediators of challenge perception.

During the first interviews, it was clear that most students were initially very concerned about the Why I Write videos (see Appendix F for assignment list and descriptions). Joe, especially, indicated that he didn’t want to do it at first. He said, “The first impression was no, I’m not doing that. It’s like it’s something different that I’ve never done in my life, like a video related to me and something, I just thought, I’ve never shared a video or something like with any other people like about me.”\(^1\) The in-class writing documents also showed preliminary anxiety. One student response said, “The whole project is totally challenging because I have not created a video same as this before,” and another wrote, “It will be my first time of making movie on my own. So I am excited and afraid of creating my own movie.” However, the post-assignment survey showed that 70% strongly agreed or agreed that creating the video was fun. One of the

\(^1\) All student quotes are directly transcribed. The researcher did not correct grammar errors in an attempt to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of their ideas.
potential reasons for this is because the digital platforms they used lowered their initial perception of the assignment’s challenge.

AJ had never made a movie before and said he didn’t have any previous experience with iMovie, but that “when I first like opened it, like I saw the editing and the files and I like just figured out, it wasn’t that difficult.” Likewise, Mary admitted that previous experiences with Windows Moviemaker had made her apprehensive about creating another video, but that the different tool she chose for this project made her experience much better. She said, “I designed something on Moviemaker, but you know I have to focus on the design and my writing and pictures and everything. For Animoto no, I just like I just have to focus on the content, not on the design.” Hannah also said that although she was initially worried about working with the computer to make her own video, after working with the program a little bit “it was easier than I thought it would be.” The same kinds of comments were made when students discussed a side project they did in class where they created public genres like online quizzes and cartoons to share their research. Hannah said, “there are many good websites on the internet that I can make some new genre easier. It was really easy, making quiz it was very easier than I thought.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students didn’t mention anything about word-processing programs making writing any easier. This might be a factor of newness, in the sense that they are so used to using this tool, it has ceased to be thought of as something that makes their work easier, unlike the newer web-based tools. Although the word-processing tool did not seem to be an important factor, the interviews showed a different
element that mediated the perceived challenge of the more traditional writing assignments.

   Again, the initial perception of challenge was pretty high for both the research proposal and the academic article. Hannah explained that it seemed different from any other assignment she had done: “When I write essay or paper I spend a lot of time how to um write hook, after that I can easily write everything… but the [research proposal] structure was very different from other essay and it’s hard to understand assignment.” AJ also said, “I was a little worried because when I was reading in the syllabus what is the assignment and stuff like that I thought we would have like a lot of things to do and research and write, and so I was a lot worried about this assignment.” However, he followed that statement with “…but uh, when I began to start, like I had all the annotations inside, so it was a little easier for me because of the annotations.” He is talking about the low-stakes assignments where students were asked to find sources related to their area of interest and summarize, analyze and extend the ideas in that source to think about how it could help them answer their research question(s). Joe also mentioned them when he said “because we did the research like as parts, annotations, it didn’t really make it really hard…it’s like one annotation and another one and the other one the other one and then like bringing all the parts together.” This indicates that allowing students to use prior work, by breaking large projects into smaller pieces that they can draw from in subsequent assignments, was helpful in reducing challenge perception.
The final, and probably least surprising, finding was that students with prior experience completing similar assignments experienced a lower perception of challenge than those facing a new mode of composition for the first time. This was most apparent in the final interviews when every student agreed that they had an easier time working on the impact film than the Why I Write video. When asked why, AJ said, “It might be because we tried the first video, uh, so it was a little easier for me to do this one because I already used iMovie and I know how to do like the editing and all the stuff. So it was a little easier and I felt more confident to write.” Joe also mentioned the benefit of prior experience: “I got used to the program which was pretty complicated at the beginning. And now I know what I’m gonna do, and I know how to put the song, I’ve already chosen the song I’m gonna use…” The researcher also noticed that students who had prior research experience were less daunted by the proposal and article because they could make connections to activities they were already confident about.

While some of these findings may seem intuitive, the important fact is that perception of challenge is not static. This means that even assignments that may initially seem very difficult can be mediated to become more approachable for students, which may help bring the perception of challenge/skill ratio to a level where flow has been shown to be possible. However, the next section questions whether challenge perception is really a defining condition for flow in an educational context.

The “Right” Challenge is Not the Best Predictor

Since so many previous studies put an emphasis on an equally high challenge/skill ratio as a condition for flow, this researcher included a measure for
challenge perception on the surveys. The statement the students responded to was ‘this assignment was challenging for me,’ to which they could strongly agree, agree, agree a little, be neutral, disagree a little, disagree, or strongly disagree. As noted in the previous section, these responses do not indicate a student’s initial perception of challenge, but should reflect how challenging they felt the assignment was after completing all the work. At first glance, the survey numbers show a majority strongly agreeing that both the first video and the academic article were challenging, where the majority ‘agreed a little’ that the proposal and final video were challenging (see appendix G for details). Based on previous studies, we would expect flow to happen in instances where the students ‘agreed’ or ‘agreed a little’ that the assignment was challenging, since strong agreement would seem to indicate the assignment may have been too hard, and disagreement could show that it was too easy for their skill level. From this initial look at the perceptions of challenge, we might expect students to have found the most flow from working on the proposal and the impact film. However, the qualitative data indicates otherwise.

First, some of the most apparent moments of flow arise during the interviews about the first video assignment. Mary’s description of her work on the Why I Write video is a perfect example:

I spent all the day on working on that assignment and I was looking for the music, for the words that I have to write, and for the pictures and everything and I was like, I was enjoying and working on this assignment and at the same time I didn’t realize anything like the time, my dad even he is living with me and I didn’t saw him. And then, yeah I came to school here to work in that again like, I think till 12 in the night yeah and I saw that video maybe 50 times in the same moment and I called all my friends to see that so, I just was thinking in the assignment or in the video, it’s not assignment real assignment it’s a video just it’s for you, so I think it’s yeah. I was real interested yeah.
Not only does she specify interest and loss of time-awareness, she even brings up getting instant feedback from her friends while working, all of which are indicators of a flow state. Other students also talked about spending a long chunk of time working on the first video, and the survey shows that a large majority found the work interesting and fun. So even though many students found the assignment very challenging, perhaps because they had never created a video before, flow was still a possibility. This finding could also be linked to the idea in the previous section that perception of challenge could be mediated by the tools certain students chose to use.

By contrast, the research proposal, where the researcher expected to see flow experiences based on the survey data, did not seem to provide the conditions for optimal experience. The picture that emerges from the interviews and in-class writing is that the newness and specificity of the research proposal made it challenging to understand and difficult for students to feel successful. The in-class writing documents show that the week before the assignment was due, students still hadn’t started or were still feeling confused. In response to the questions “What do you still need to know in order to write your proposal? If you could suggest anything for Thursday’s class what would you want to learn/do/see?” students wrote:

- I want to ask questions about the format and some writing structures to do the research perfectly.
- We want to learn and see about the examples of research proposal in thursday class. I think I didn’t understand completely that I should write on the research proposal.
- Do we need write down all of the information like PC page 47-57?

These questions and concerns show that although there was a lot of structure built into the assignment, it did not seem to help scaffold student work in a productive way. In fact,
it may have been too limiting. In our discussion about this assignment, Hannah tried to 
explain why it was different than other papers she had written: “When I write essay or 
paper I spend a lot of time how to um write hook, after that I can easily write 
everything…but [research proposal] structure was very different from other essay and it’s 
hard to understand assignment.” This emphasis on structure shows us that the students 
were focusing more on form than content, which would seem to indicate that they were 
not focused enough to find a flow state in their work. This is in direct contrast to the first 
video, where Mary explains that using an online video-creator allowed her to “focus on 
the content, not on the design.”

Another typical indicator of flow, focused attention, was also absent from 
student experiences with the research proposals. The surveys showed that 41% agreed 
that it was easy to be distracted while they were working on this assignment. Hannah 
explained, “Even though I very interested in the topic, it’s really hard to get idea, so I 
just want to relax every ten seconds in,” and mentioned friends, hunger, and the internet 
as her main distractions. Mary said it was easy to be distracted while researching, but 
when she decided what she would write she could just sit down and do it. However, she 
reminded “after I finished the first one [section of the proposal], okay now I had to take a 
break like maybe every 20 minutes. It’s interesting but at the same time there are a lot of 
words so it’s easy like to work on anything else.” These statements certainly do not 
indicate that flow was achieved.

Findings like these forced the researcher to reconsider challenge perception as 
the best indicator for flow-state occurrence. Specifically, assignments perceived to be
very challenging, like the first video, elicited multiple statements that seemed to indicate flow. However, the assignments expected to produce flow experiences based on challenge perceptions did not. Therefore, the author began to search for another factor that could predict optimal experience.

**Interest might be More Important**

After describing the flow state and discussing it with students, the researcher made sure to ask at every interview if the students felt they had had any flow experiences. Most of the time, students would bring up experiences outside of school, such as playing video games, volunteering, or engaging in hobbies like sports or art. The researcher was careful to remind students that flow states usually only exist when individuals feel they are working towards a meaningful goal, and that things like talking to your friends or watching television generally do not result in optimal experience. When questioned about education in particular, flow states seemed to be largely dependent on interest.

Both Mary and Joe are very interested in being engineers, so the difficult work they have to do for their mechanical engineering classes does not seem unduly challenging. Mary said, of her lab class where they often stand up working for five hours, “it’s frustrating for some students, but for me, no I think this is the real engineering.” Similarly, Joe explained that while many of his friends rely on tutors to help them, he prefers to struggle with the very challenging projects by himself because he is interested in knowing how to do those things in the future. He also mentioned that choice was important for his interest: “I had my choice to choose my design for my project, so I worked on it like pretty hard so I can design something good.” These student experiences
indicate that even highly perceived challenges and lack of existing skill can lead to flow experiences if there is high enough interest. An alternate example is Hannah, who loves many of her psychology classes and sits through lectures in her second language easily, except for in her research psychology class where her lack of interest makes the class seem more challenging. She explains the difference by saying, “it’s psychology class but we just focus on research so I’m not interested in it so I keep on checking my watch what time is it.” Hearing students focus on the importance of interest in their major classes, the researcher looked for similar experiences with their writing and composition.

In fact, students seemed highly aware of how important interest was for their motivation to write. Mary expressed this when talking about choosing her area of research, “I just worried about the topic of my research because like, I’m the kind of people like, if I didn’t get anything or if I bored from anything, I just didn’t complete it very well, or I just ignore everything on the assignment.” Joe also focused on his interest as something that changed the way he saw writing. He said, “Yeah, here’s the thing, yeah, the level of interest, because I’ve never been into writing, so I don’t want to really be a professional writer, so that’s why I haven’t improved my writing before. But in your class I liked writing and I knew that it doesn’t have to be on research and stuff. I can not like writing researches and essays, but I can like writing another way.” This is certainly a first step towards seeing the benefit of all writing, including its more academic or ‘formal’ modes.

Also, as in Joe’s explanation of his interest in engineering projects, the ability to choose the issue they would write about also stood out as a positive in the student
interviews. All of the students admitted that the academic article was a challenging assignment, but that having an interest in their topic helped them get through it. Mary said, “For me, I don’t like to write, so, but as an idea to write about something? Yeah, it’s interesting. If you are real interested in your topic and you want to know about it, so it will be interesting.” Likewise, Joe explained that his interest in the subject really helped make the writing seem meaningful; “when I talk about the subject I don’t feel like uh I’m saying something like useless. Something interests me, and something that I can talk about more and more and I can’t stop and I can argue about it. Something that I’m pretty confident of. That’s what makes it easier.” Hannah also agreed, and said that even though it was hard to get ideas, it was easier because she was researching something she was interested in, which in her case was school bullying.

These findings suggest that, in an education setting, interest may be a better predictor of flow experiences than perception of challenge. This is actually not surprising when we consider the differences between voluntary activities and school assignments. In the kinds of activities that have previously been studied for flow, such as painting, rock climbing, sports, and even chess, interest is a given. There would be no reason to pursue these activities if there was no interest. Therefore, the level of perceived challenge becomes the predictor of flow. If someone is very interested in succeeding in an activity, but feels the challenge is too high for their skills, they may stop participating. However, in the context of this writing class, and most educational situations, the given factor is not interest, but challenge. Especially in this study, where students were attempting to write in unfamiliar genres and in their second language, the assignments seemed to be
challenging by default. However, this situation would not seem to be largely different than the experience native speakers have when learning to write in academic genres. In both of these cases, the level of interest in rising to meet this challenge, at whatever level it is perceived, becomes the defining factor for whether or not the student will be able to achieve a flow state.

With this in mind, it is interesting to return to the survey data. For the first video, 40% of the students strongly agreed with the statement ‘this assignment was interesting,’ 40% ‘agreed’ and 15% ‘agreed a little.’ No student disagreed at all with that statement. We see a huge drop for the proposal, with only 14% strongly agreeing that it was interesting. Although 36% ‘agreed’, 18% were neutral or disagreed with that statement to some degree. Interestingly, we see similar numbers for the last two assignments, though the final video had 47% of students ‘agree’ that it was interesting. When we compare these numbers with the interview data, it makes sense that the most frequent instances of what we would call flow occurred during the first video, where interest was highest. In the other assignments there were some examples of flow-state, but they were also mediated by interest. Mary’s interviews show that she may have found flow during her research, when she found websites and articles that she couldn’t put down, but when she started to write about it her interest waned. She explained, “I just like, you know when you read something and you say ‘oh yeah that’s interesting’ but after that, okay I have to write about it. No, that’s boring.” Both research and writing are difficult in a second language, so again we see that interest may be a necessary condition for flow, as opposed to being a result. Now that we have come to an understanding of the
different roles challenge and interest play in this educational context, we turn our attention to the second “necessary” condition for flow: clear goals and immediate feedback.

Clear Goals and Immediate Feedback

As mentioned, previous studies of flow revolved around activities where an individual could easily specify goals, and could generally get instant feedback as a consequence of his or her actions. For instance, a rock climber has the clear goal of reaching the top. Along the way, if she reaches for a hold and misses, she gets instant feedback that she was not successful when she falls. In chess, an opponent’s response gives immediate feedback to an individual’s move in the game. However, in education contexts students have different goals for assignments and classes, and rarely get immediate feedback as they complete their work. Although clear assignment descriptions that lay out specific objectives are undoubtedly important to students, the concept of goals is so individual that this study cannot address it more than acknowledging its importance. Feedback, on the other hand, arose as an important theme in this research. When analyzing the interview data for flow experiences, the author realized that most instances of flow were accompanied by an external element of feedback, though not always from a person, and never from the instructor.

After articulating a clear description of achieving a flow state while working on her first video, Mary follows up on that moment saying, “I told you I was like working during the whole day, and my friends were with me, and I told them like maybe 10 times they watched the video. ‘Okay just for this time please see it and tell me what’s your
comment about that video?“ Since she could not depend on the instructor to give her feedback during the video-creation process, she relied instead on her friends. Hannah also utilized her friends, both from the USA and from her home in South Korea, and workshop teachers to help her find pictures to use, and to figure out the video editing program. This use of more capable peers to give instant feedback during the composing process is comparable to the kinds of immediate feedback we see in sports and hobbies. This finding would suggest that creating a classroom more like a studio-space, as suggested by Anderson (2008) might be beneficial for flow in allowing students to access feedback during the composing process, rather than relying on feedback from the instructor after completion of their projects.

Another way students got feedback was from the tools they used to compose. In an explanation of how the video project differed from the text-based assignments Hannah said, “I can see while I make, I can see the process...and I like it.” By having the ability to preview her movie and watch it grow, she was getting feedback from the video program about her progress. This finding is especially interesting, because it seems to indicate that the tool can be instrumental in determining whether or not an individual can find flow. However, there are no statements to indicate that students feel this way about the tools that help them with traditional writing, like word-processing programs. It is possible that collaborative writing through digital writing platforms like Google Docs could help to change this view of text-creation, but this is a topic for future research.

The data from this study do support further investigation of collaborative writing. When asked to describe their idea writing class, many of the students
interviewed mentioned they might be more motivated if they didn’t feel they had to compose in isolation. AJ specifically said “I think like if there was an assignment for research and article that we don’t have to do alone, like every two classmates work together for the same subject, so every two choose the subject together and write together, yeah that might be more fun.” Joe followed up, saying that while he thought the videos were fun and interesting, he suggested changing the last video to a presentation so that students could interact more. In the explanation he talked about sharing writing, but when reminded about the peer feedback they did in the course he dismissed it saying, “Mmm, the feedback is different a little bit.” Although he was not able to clearly articulate why, it seems from the data that he might be referring to the idea that peer feedback is not present at the time of composing, and what he is looking for is more immediate feedback in the moment of need. This concept is similar to the idea of just-in-time learning which has become a major topic in game development and learning theory. It stands to reason that this kind of instant feedback, from people or from tools, would be beneficial to creating and sustaining an engaged, flow state.

Answering the Question

After analyzing the data, we return to our first question: “What does flow look like in writing/composition?” and we realize, this is the wrong question to ask. Indeed, the researcher was never able to directly observe what flow “looks” like, because flow moments did not occur during class. From student description, it seems that flow states were very difficult to achieve while working on traditional writing assignments, but students may have had some forms of optimal experience while working on videos or
while conducting research in their area of interest. Since the researcher was not present while students were working, moments of flow are identified based on times when students exhibited the traditional markers of that state: focused interest, lack of time-awareness, and high confidence, for example. As the researcher analyzed the interview data, it became clear that the question was not “What does flow look like” in composition, but rather, “What different factors mediate flow in the context of composition?”

To this new question, the author found some interesting answers. First, we saw that perception of challenge was not as important in generating flow states as was the level of interest in overcoming those challenges. Both the data and student interviews supported the notion that perception of challenge could be mediated in a number of ways, but that the really important factor was how interested students were in the assignment. Further, the researcher realized that every instance of flow state observed in the data was accompanied by some type of immediate feedback, which is in line with previous studies of flow conducted on various voluntary activities. This feedback did not have to come from a person, however, as some tools were helpful in giving students insight and encouragement on their progress. Ultimately, the data shows that while the flow state may “look” the same, there are some major differences in how flow is achieved in an academic writing/composition process. Instructors should be aware of these factors as they endeavor to offer their students the best possibilities for having optimal experiences in writing classes, and in education in general.
How Do Multimodal/Digital Methods of Composition Allow Possibilities for Flow?

Although the main goal of this study was to investigate if and how flow appeared in a second language writing class, the author also wanted to add research to the gap between multiliteracy studies and second language writing/composition. This research question deals with Anderson’s (2008) claim that multimodal projects and digital platforms can give students an gateway into flow states. He argues that the challenge of composing in new media encourages creativity and interest, while the user-friendly nature of the newer digital platforms eases anxiety and what we would call perception of challenge (Anderson, 2008). From the survey data, we see that although they were challenging, the videos were perceived to be the most fun, and they were the projects the students would most enjoy doing again. In the interviews, the students back up these numbers, insisting that the multimodal projects had many benefits over the traditional writing assignments. While students emphasize their enjoyment of using media other than text, the two most interesting findings revolve around heightened audience awareness and a feeling that they are not ‘writing’ while composing.

One of the most common themes from the interviews was that the videos gave students multiple means of making their meaning known. Students enjoyed being able to use pictures, themes, and especially music to help share their ideas. Mary mentioned the difference between the videos and writing, explaining, “Yeah, the videos are more easy than the paper. Because in the video, you can put photos, which is like the words and the pictures they complete each other. So you can, the pictures can explain what you are
thinking about or what you are writing about. But in the research you can’t do that, you have to write everything.” When the author pointed out that she also put pictures in her academic article, she responded, “Yeah but, like, when you put pictures in research it has to be like really related to the research. Strict, like very strict.” This is such an interesting finding, that the perception of research and ‘academic’ forms of writing is that they are strict and have little room for creativity and play. From the previous section, we know that interest is often key to finding flow in composition, and by viewing academic writing as strict, students may often be prevented from generating sincere interest in their writing, which then impacts the probability of their finding flow. Perhaps if instructors could change student perception by emphasizing the way experts play with their ideas in textual and multimodal ways, students would feel less constrained by ‘academic’ writing.

Another theme that arose in the data was that of audience awareness. Elementary teachers have long known that students feel better when others get to appreciate their work, which is the impetus behind open-house nights, hallway bulletin boards, and recognition events. However, in higher education it is still very common for assignments to only be seen by the student author and the instructor. Student comments in this study question that trend, and show that a more public audience can increase motivation to compose. One example comes from Joe, who said that although initially he was worried about the video, the reaction of the class helped him feel good about his work. He explained, “I think the video at the beginning was very challenging and it was a new idea and when I did it I felt glad and proud of myself...after the comments and response that I got from the feedback from my class, so I thought it was a good thing that
I did, and I shared it with others and everyone gave me his opinion about it, so I felt proud of it at the beginning of the class.” Watching the videos in class made the audience for the work real. AJ talked about the digital poster he created and put on Facebook, and mentioned that he liked the idea of having lots of eyes on his work. This is in direct contrast to the research proposal and academic article, which were only officially shared with the instructor, though both had other students’ eyes on them during peer review. For some reason, students didn’t see peer review of research writing as being the same thing as when the class watched the videos together, or when their friends commented on public genres they posted on Facebook. Perhaps one explanation is that the audiences for the multimodal projects were more familiar to the students than the audiences they directed their academic articles to because most of their friends or families would not be interested in reading long research studies. However, they were willing to watch and comment on the videos that the students created for class, maybe feeling more authority to give feedback on a video than a paper. Hannah even sent her video to friends in South Korea for their comments. The shareability of these digital projects is clearly a benefit over more text-based assignments. Aside from giving them more feedback, which was established as an important aspect of flow, the idea that their work will be seen by larger audiences of people they know seemed to create higher levels of interest in the video projects.

The final benefit of the multimodal projects was the feeling of students that they were not doing a lot of “writing”, even though their creation requires a large amount of writing, planning, and reflecting. AJ explained of the video project, “I think it’s more
different because the paper assignments require a lot of writing, a lot of researching...I think what makes it interesting that those assignments [videos] tried to make us more creative, yeah, so it tries to make you think of something new and something else to do, instead of writing.” The key here is that, for these students who are not yet confident with writing in English, much less writing in academic styles, the videos have less room for obvious errors in grammar and word-choice. The reason is that these projects do not have as much published language as research papers do. Much of the writing that goes into these projects is informal, what we might call “writing to learn”. Mary sees her videos as a way to “mix the fun with the writing” and as “just a story” that doesn’t need what she considers academic language to be meaningful. Hannah said that putting together the videos didn’t seem like writing because she was working with a mixture of text, image, sound, and the digital platform. Even the academic article was perceived as being a “different kind of writing” because students got to communicate their ideas with design features and images. However, this does not mean that students are putting less thought into the choices they make to convey their message.

Some of the most interesting moments in the final interviews were when students explained the choices they were making in their videos. Often, multimodal projects can mask the amount of time and effort that goes into them more than a long paper can. Each of the final interviews included descriptions of how a student carefully chose to put themselves into the project. AJ said that picking the music took the most time, and he thought he may have been in flow while searching for the perfect song for his video. He explained, “I didn’t want something very loud, because I wanted them to
focus about the video not the music, and I didn’t want something very slow or very calm. 
So I tried to find something in between like kind of calm, kind of…I guess so yeah, I tried to find something about like slow hip hop.” Here, he indicates a clear awareness of his audience, and the specific choices he made to create the experience he wanted for that audience of his peers. Joe also mentioned wanting to find the right song, and being a little upset that his friends encouraged him to use a song that was ‘too loud’ for the video. He also noted that he decided to include a lot of writing in his video, rather than speaking, so that he could take that chance to show the class how his writing had improved. Mary’s story about her video really shows the depth of thought that can go into multimodal projects. She had created a reflection video around the theme of snow, where she related each assignment’s difficulty to a different kind of snowstorm. When asked how she came to that theme, this is what she said:

I was thinking on another theme which is about Christmas, because we’re at Christmas, and I went to a movie before a couple of days, which is Frozen, and they had that song, and that song has taken my mind, and I just wanted to put that music on my video. And when I was looking on the [video] website I saw a theme which is about snow, and I said okay, I can put that song to the theme, and then, I was thinking to put it as a story. Uh, I have to relate the theme with my story and the song, and everything it’s different so. I was thinking to put the name of the snow storms, so I was looking for the names of the snow storms and which one it’s like in the beginning and which one it’s more difficult and more difficult. Yeah, and I ordered it like that.

It is telling that none of the students gave this kind of thoughtful commentary on their research proposals or academic articles. The videos really seem to have given the students more room for creativity. Joe acknowledged this when he said, “I think yeah, you can use your imagination to deliver your message in any way you want in a video. I
mean like, I saw videos of others and everyone does his idea like some of them brought videos of themselves and some of them draw and some of them did, I mean they had a chance like to get a combination of all like pictures and everything and make it worthwhile.”

This play with text and other modes of communication led to an interesting observation that multimodal assignments were ways of making writing more ‘physical,’ which the students associated with higher interest. When asked if he could think of ways to increase flow in education, AJ said “maybe it’s because some classes don’t have some physical stuff to do in class, like it’s all homework and lectures...they don’t have anything to do in class like an activity or anything like that, so maybe if some classes had more activity, they might have more moments of flow.” When the researcher asked how this could be applied to a writing class, AJ said the videos were the best way. Other students also brought up the idea that multimodal projects were more ‘physical’ and could lead to flow. Although this is interesting terminology, we can assume that the students are trying to put into words that the videos have a more present element of ‘making’ than do the text-based assignments. From the previous discussion of flow in writing, we know that interest is key, sometimes more important than level of perceived challenge, and if the multimodal video projects were more ‘physical’ and therefore more interesting, these are the assignments most likely to lead to flow.
The third and final research question brings to light a facet of the study that has, until now, remained in the background. Since all of the participants in the study were second-language learners, all of the data was gathered from non-native speakers. However, we have not focused on how their language backgrounds may affect their ability to achieve flow states when writing/composing in their second language. Previous studies have been skeptical, arguing that intense focus on a language task may not exist while learners are still worried about form (see Kimura, 2008, p. 504). In order to answer this question, the researcher mostly turns to Mary’s interviews, as she was the one most vocal about how her non-native speaker status affected her perception of assignments and her writing.

During the first interview, Mary flat out said “I don’t like to write.” The researcher found this interesting because she had clearly put so much time and effort into the first video and her in-class writing was fairly detailed. The second time she mentioned not liking to write was during the interview about her research proposal, and the researcher prompted her to explain this statement further. She replied:

Because I think I don’t have like too much vocabs to use it in my research and this is, I have to learn it or have like to gain more academic vocabulary so I can use it in my research, and I think this is my problem with my writing… because when I write I think like when I read it, ‘okay this is like someone maybe from middle school when she or he writes something,’ yeah, I think this is my difficult thing.

Prior to this statement, the researcher had not mentioned anything about being a second language learner or about academic vocabulary. However, once Mary brought it up, it
became a theme throughout her interviews. When asked whether she felt the writing process would be different for her if she felt more confident in her vocabulary, she immediately responded, “Yes, of course…if you get more vocabulary so you will be like maybe professional in writing, of course beside grammar.” Interestingly, she did not see the writing assignments she did in class as a way to improve her vocabulary and grammar. Rather, she saw her perceived second-language deficiencies as leading to unavoidable mistakes in her assignments. For this reason, she preferred the videos because they had a smaller amount of visible writing in the finished product, and therefore less probability of making mistakes. We have already seen that this does not mean they have less writing overall, just that the planning and reflective writing remains hidden from the viewing audience. Mary seems to equate academic language with a large amount of public writing, saying, “Well in the writing, if you write something academic, at least you have to write one page, at least.” The larger quantity of writing that someone else will see definitely gives those ‘academic’ assignments a higher perception of challenge than the videos, and the anxiety tends to inhibit flow.

By contrast, the videos and ‘non-academic’ genres she created in class allowed Mary to use daily language, which she said made the assignments easier. She clearly juxtaposed academic language and colloquial language when she said, “...if it’s academic writing, which is mean like academic vocabulary and it’s not our language, which is make it more difficult, and the academic writing we have to look for like articles all research and we have to read it and this makes it more difficult.” In this statement she also notes that all of the work the students are doing in this course, including the reading
and research, is not in their native languages, which adds to the perception of challenge for any assignment. When talking about the academic article she wrote, Mary said, “It’s interesting, but at the same time there are a lot of words so it’s easy, like, to work on anything else.” This emphasis on the amount of words and the difficulty of the vocabulary shows the researcher that being a non-native speaker of a language clearly and negatively affects the possibilities for flow, mostly by increasing the perception of challenge a student feels when faced with a new assignment. Although interest has been shown to be more important than challenge perception for flow, it stands to reason that a lot of anxiety about the assignment’s level of challenge would mediate the amount of interest a student could generate.

One way that an instructor might work to overcome this barrier is to introduce more low-stakes writing into the course in order to reduce the amount of “visible” writing required in any one assignment. It seems like the real anxiety comes from students feeling that their language is being evaluated or judged. When they are able to articulate their ideas in informal genres, such as the in-class writing documents, they feel less worried about their grammar and correct usage. AJ mentions the in-class writing as one of the highlights of the class for him: “we had to write all the responses ... for the question you had in like ten minutes or fifteen minutes. So in that time we can’t check for grammar or spelling or anything so, it like made us getting used to write.” The more informal writing that can be done to help students prepare their ideas before presenting them to an outside audience, the more comfortable they may be. In this study, the instructor attempted to do this by breaking the research section of the class into smaller
assignments like the annotations and research proposal. By allowing smaller assignments to build on each other, the instructor was able to help the students see that their prior work could be recycled throughout the research process. Knowing that they didn’t have to start from a blank page helped all the students feel more capable of completing the assignments.

These interviews give us a better understanding of the problems non-native speakers face in composition classes and show that language does have an impact on flow. However, the multimodal assignments help to overcome that added perception of challenge by reducing the amount of visible writing, though students do much more planning and reflecting than is visible in the finished product, and giving students like Mary space to use daily language to express her ideas. Of course, the current author is not claiming that all assignments should be converted to videos, but rather that a mix of more multimodal assignments with traditional text-based ‘academic’ writing may give students just enough opportunity for flow states that they will leave the course with a greater appreciation for communicating in their second language. Joe was the study’s best example of this appreciation:

Well the thing is that in my other classes, I haven’t had flow. Like, in other writing classes… maybe the subject that I used in here was really touching, and was something that I used to think about like everyday…and I think that’s something that encouraged me to write more and more. Yeah, I think I’ve shared one of my like real ideas.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been an exploratory study of optimal experiences in a second-language education setting. The study places itself at the intersection of three fields - motivation studies, multimodal composition and multiliteracies, and second-language writing/composition - in an attempt to understand if and how flow states can be generated in a higher education context, and further, to investigate whether flow states support second language learners. This final chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the study, including its purpose and methodology. The second section outlines the major contributions this study makes to the literature on flow, including the impact of multimodal forms of composition and the challenges non-native speakers face in achieving flow states. The final section suggests practical strategies for instructors on how to give students the greatest possibilities for finding flow while composing, and shares an idea for a different course structure in which to apply these strategies. It is the author’s hope that this final section will move the thesis from the purely theoretical realm and give educators and researchers ideas for improving motivation through supporting flow experiences.
Summary

This study began as an attempt to better understand student motivation in the context of a second language composition classroom. Motivation has long been an object of interest to educators and researchers, but there have been few studies that offered practical advice to teachers on how to better motivate students. By using the idea of flow, or optimal experience, as a new lens, the investigator sought to move away from more quantitative and abstract measures of motivation, such as the batteries of tests or random survey samples used in prior studies. Instead, the researcher focused on student perceptions and awareness of their own engagement through in-depth interviews, perception questionnaires, and samples of in-class writing. Few previous studies looked for evidence of optimal experiences in education, and those that did were not focused on composition or second language populations specifically. Due to the unique instructional context of the study, the author was able to pursue answers to three research questions:

1. What does flow look like in writing/composition? What different factors mediate flow in the context of composition?

2. How do multimodal/digital methods of composition allow possibilities for flow?

3. What difficulty does being a non-native speaker pose to achieving flow, if any?

Research was conducted in a first-year composition class for international students. This course included twenty-four students from four different countries. All participants gave their written consent for the investigator to use any observations or compositions produced for the class in the research. Each student kept an in-class writing
document, and all were invited to participate in the study by filling out perception questionnaires after each major assignment. In addition, four students, two males and two females, were asked to participate in three rounds of semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Questions on the surveys and in the interviews were adapted from previous studies to probe for evidence of flow states based on factors like: perceptions of challenge and skill, depth of attention and interest, availability of immediate feedback, and loss of time awareness.

Contributions

Flow Factors

Findings from the study indicated that while flow states in composition may present themselves through similar characteristics as seen in voluntary activities, the factor that mediates the existence of flow is different. Generally, flow has been observed when an individual’s perception of the challenge of an activity matched their felt skill level. In these cases, interest was described as a by-product of flow. However, it can be assumed that interest was already present for an individual participating in activities they wished to pursue. Therefore, the level of challenge mediated the possibilities for flow. By contrast, this study’s data about involuntary class assignments showed that challenge was the existent factor, and that the level of interest was more important for mediating flow. This finding is encouraging because it means that even if students perceive an assignment’s challenge to be above their skill level, high interest can still produce moments of flow. The challenge for educators then is to encourage high levels of interest.
The interview data shows that choice is key for this. When students were able to choose their own research questions, their own modes of presenting information, or even their own page design for an academic article, their interest was generally heightened, making flow states more probable.

The data from the study also validated previous claims that immediate feedback is essential to creating and maintaining flow states. Every instance of flow found in the study was accompanied by observations of feedback in the moment of composition. For instance, some students worked together on assignments and gave each other comments and suggestions, which kept them motivated and helped them feel a sense of success throughout the process. Interestingly, one student experienced this same in-the-moment support from the digital tool she used to compose, remarking that being able to preview the film and watch it grow was very motivating. This finding is especially important for educators, who often put so much emphasis on giving feedback on a finished product. While this form of feedback may be beneficial for students in their future compositions, it comes much too late to have any effect on helping students achieve flow states. The author does not mean to imply that written feedback to drafts and projects is not valuable, but it may be important to consider giving students more opportunities to gain feedback in the moment of composition, through work-groups or the integration of digital platforms that can give their own feedback and support, much like modern-day video games aspire to do. The author will return to these ideas of interest and feedback in the third section of this chapter, when a case is made for changing class structures in an attempt to promote moments of flow.
Multimodal Composition

The data clearly validated Anderson’s (2008) claim that multimodal compositions utilizing user-friendly digital tools can be a useful gateway to flow experiences. When the researcher analyzed the data to understand why multimodal forms of composition have a beneficial impact on flow possibilities, three very interesting themes arose. First, students noted that videos and other multimodal projects gave them more freedom to express their ideas and share their messages. This was opposed to what they called “academic” forms of composition, which they saw as very strict and entirely text-based. Scholars and educators realize this belief is not true, as there are many academic forms of composition that utilize more than one mode of expressing meaning. However, the fact that students hold this belief seems to be detrimental to their ability to generate a lot of interest in these forms of composition, which in turn affects their ability to achieve flow states.

Second, the researcher noted much more audience awareness than was found in the text-based assignments. By encouraging students to publish to an audience of their peers, through digital distribution to social networks and popular websites, the instructor saw heightened interest and thoughtfulness to even the smallest details. Sharing digital compositions with the internet public gave students more ownership of their compositions, and assured them that they were not just creating something for the instructor. This public nature of the multimodal projects also gave students greater opportunities for feedback than they would have for a typical assignment, though this
feedback did not occur until after they published the texts, meaning it did not help them achieve flow in the moment of composition.

Finally, the students mentioned the physicality of multimodal composition as being distinct from text-based writing. While the investigator reminded students that their word processing programs were also used to put pieces of text and images together, the interviewees insisted that it was a different feeling working on videos and other less “academic” genres. This finding returns to the belief laid out above that academic texts are inherently more challenging and less interesting than multimodal digital forms. It may not be true, but for motivation the belief is the most important part. If instructors could somehow help students see the play that goes into academic research, they might go a long way towards repairing the belief that “I don’t think there is any idea to make academic writing to be fun.” In this pursuit, the insight that digital and multimodal platforms help students feel a sense of physicality and play has strong pedagogical implications for assignments and for the potential of flow experiences.

It is important, here, to acknowledge that by investigating flow states we are only indirectly studying motivation. However, since motivation itself is so difficult to quantify or measure, the investigator turned to instances of flow as a prime indicator of the presence of motivation. Students would not be able to reach the flow state if they were not highly and autonomously motivated. Therefore, by understanding more about the conditions behind these optimal experiences, educators gain greater insight into how to promote and maintain moments of motivation that help students stay engaged in and excited about their education. The fact is, flow states are motivating. Being able to stay
focused and engaged in an activity is a pleasurable experience. If we can give students more of these moments in their education, they will be much more likely to enjoy learning in school.

**Second Language Influence**

Unsurprisingly, language did have an impact on flow, though it did not make attaining flow states impossible. Mary mentioned that not knowing a lot of what she called “academic vocabulary” made it frustrating to read and write in her second language. This anxiety over not having the correct words to express her ideas clearly affected her ability to achieve flow while working on the more text-based compositions such as the research proposal and academic article. However, the multimodal compositions gave her the sense that the “writing” was less prolific and therefore there was a lower possibility of making mistakes that would be judged. Although these assignments were surrounded by a large amount of planning and reflective writing, the fact that this writing did not appear in the finished product lowered the students’ anxiety. Knowing this, instructors should think about helping second-language speakers in class by incorporating assignments that require less visible writing, along with more traditional text-based compositions. Though many have thought that these multimodal assignments are simply thrown in “for fun,” it is clear that their benefits in terms of lowered anxiety and greater probability for flow experiences make them extremely important in a composition classroom.
Thus far, this thesis has drawn on empirical data to understand the ‘whys’ of flow experiences in second-language composition through students’ own voices and perceptions. We have seen that while flow states have similar characteristics in voluntary activities and education, the factors that lead to flow are different, or more complex. In the introduction, the author stated that theoretical knowledge is only helpful to instructors when there is also information about how to apply this theory to improve education. In this last section the researcher hopes to use the data from this study as a jumping off point for imagining a course that will allow students the greatest possibilities for finding flow.

The author is calling this type of course “Choose Your Own Adventure Education (CYOAE)”, in order to recall the excitement of making choices that affected a story’s plot in the Choose Your Own Adventure books of childhood. This study determined that interest is probably the most important factor leading to flow experiences in education. High interest levels were generated when students felt they had a lot of choice in what they were doing. Therefore, CYOAE makes choice a pivotal part of the entire course.

Rather than having a traditional course syllabus that lays out linear assignment sequences for all students to follow and complete at the same time, CYOAE relies on a map-like syllabus with multiple nodes that relate to the central concepts of the course. Each node, or concept, would have texts or assignments associated with it, and it would be up to the students to work individually and with small groups of students focusing on the same concept to produce a text (often multimodal) that satisfies the requirements of
that node. They could also have the option to define their own project for any node, thereby encouraging them to think outside of traditional forms of composition to illustrate their understanding of the concept. Once they successfully ‘completed’ a node, multiple other nodes would become ‘active’ or available for them to choose to explore. The benefits of this style of syllabus or course design would extend further than the individual student, as everyone would be able to see what other students were working on, and the class could work as a whole to understand how the different concepts are related or connected to each other. As students collaborated to complete different projects around the same concept, groups would be able to have conversations about the rhetorical effectiveness of each text, and students (guided by the instructor) would achieve a fuller understanding of the options they have in composition.

How does this promote flow? This is an important question, given our assertion that increased flow experiences should indicate and further encourage engagement and motivation. Let’s take the factors that lead to flow one by one:

• Interest: CYOAE gives students multiple choices of not only how to present their knowledge, but also what order to approach different concepts in, and who to work with in their quests to learn. This large amount of choice forces the students to be the creators of their own learning experience, while the instructor stands by as a guide and facilitator. The beauty of the map syllabus is that the instructor can shape different paths through the course by not opening up certain nodes until students have completed necessary others, yet by allowing multiple pathways through the concepts the students retain a sense of agency and ownership over their learning.
• Feedback: This model of education lends itself to a studio-style classroom, where the instructor guides students but most of the composition work is actually done in the classroom. In CYOAE students individually pursue the concepts that are interesting to them, but they can draw on the other students who have chosen that concept for instantaneous feedback as they compose individually or together in groups. Perhaps most interestingly, students also get feedback on their progress as they move through the map and visually establish connections between and among concepts - literally watching their knowledge ‘grow’.

• Physicality: It is the author’s hope that the studio-model of CYOAE will give students a greater sense of movement through ideas and projects. It was clear from the data that many students feel traditional writing is boring because it seems to come entirely from their heads, as opposed to the videos, which felt more concrete and manipulable - more physical. By encouraging students to follow their own paths through the concepts and come up with their own projects to demonstrate their growing knowledge, CYOAE attempts to infuse composition with a more ‘physical’ than purely ‘mental’ feeling. However, the author acknowledges that this sense of physicality needs to be further researched in order to better understand how it relates to flow states and motivation.

While as yet untested in traditional classrooms, research has begun on how to integrate these kinds of mapping syllabi into online distance education (Coffey & Cañas, 2000), and it won’t be long before this is a possibility for all instructors. Until then,
integrating any of the above strategies in a more traditional course structure will also help
students find more flow experiences in their education.

As stated in Chapter 1, student motivation has always been an interest for
engaged educators. However, issues with measurement and theoretical rather than
practical advice have made it something that instructors strive for without really
understanding the best ways to encourage motivation. Flow theory gives instructors
something to watch for, and specific factors to be aware of when designing their classes.
Although this concept deserves further research to be truly valuable to educators outside
of this study’s second-language composition context, it seems clear that increasing flow
experiences in education will be beneficial for both students and instructors in all
disciplines as we strive to make school more relevant and engaging for all.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
MOTIVATION TO WRITE: FINDING FLOW IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Student Interview Protocol - Initial Interview
(30-45 minutes)

Disclaimer:

The goal of this study is to understand student engagement in school using the concept of “flow” as our method of investigating motivation. I would like to spend about 30 minutes talking with you about this concept, and your experiences with it in your life and particularly in this course. This interview will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in any report or sharing of the data, and what you say in these interviews will not in any way affect your grade in this class.

Background:

In order to have a discussion about “flow”, we first need to understand what that is. I am going to have you read a definition that a poet wrote about being in flow while he was writing. Remember that flow can happen anytime though, and typically occurs when you are doing something that you find enjoyable, and that you feel capable of doing well.

Subject reads a description of flow:

You’re right in the work, you lose your sense of time, you’re completely enraptured, you’re completely caught up in what you are doing . . . when you are working on something and you are working well, you have the feeling that there’s no other way of saying what you’re saying.
– a poet describing a flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 121)

Questions:
1. Have you ever had an experience like this?
2. Can you describe that experience for me?
3. What about in other areas of your life?
4. How did you feel during those times?
5. Have you ever had an experience like this in school, or while working on school-related projects? Please describe.
6. Are there times when you think ‘flow’ is more or less likely to occur for you?
7. Can you think of things that might prevent ‘flow’?
Disclaimer:

Remember that the goal of this study is to understand student engagement in school using the concept of “flow” as our method of investigating motivation. In this discussion, I would like to spend about 30 minutes talking with you about this course, particularly related to the project we just finished. Again, this interview will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in any report or sharing of the data, and what you say in these interviews will not in any way affect your grade in this class.

Background:

Tell me a little bit about your experience in this class so far. In what ways have you felt successful? What has been challenging for you? Have you found yourself in any flow states since we last talked?

Questions:

1. We just finished (assignment). What did you think of it?
2. Were you worried about it at first?
3. Did it seem too challenging, or were you confident that you could do it?
4. Was it interesting?
5. Was it easy to get distracted while you were working?
6. What kinds of things distracted you?
7. Did you feel this project helped you learn/see anything in a new way?
8. Would you use these skills in another class?
9. What would make you feel more confident about the assignment?

Additional questions asked during the last interview:

1. Did you feel less worried about this video than the other one? Why?
2. Do you find videos in general more interesting than writing papers? Why?
3. What would your ideal writing class be like?
MOTIVATION TO WRITE: FINDING FLOW IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Perceptions Questionnaire (adapted from Egbert, 2004)

The questionnaire will be filled out after each major assignment in class, using the digital platform Google Forms.

Each statement will be assessed on a Likert scale 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)

1. This assignment excited my curiosity.
2. This assignment was interesting.
3. I felt that I had no control over what was happening during this assignment.
4. When doing this assignment, I was easily distracted.
5. This assignment made me curious.
6. There were times during this assignment when time passed quickly.
7. This assignment was challenging for me.
8. I would do this assignment again.
9. This assignment allowed me to control what I was doing.
10. This assignment was fun for me.
11. When doing this assignment, I was totally absorbed in what I was doing.
12. This assignment was boring.
13. When doing this assignment I thought about other things.
14. This assignment engaged my imagination.
15. I would do this assignment even if it were not graded.
16. I feel that I did very well on this assignment.

Open Answer: Is there anything else you want to say about this assignment?
EXAMPLE OF IN-CLASS WRITING PROMPTS AND RESPONSES

Prompt:
September 17
- QW: In your Google doc titled “In Class Writing” please answer the following question:
  - Are you happy with your final video? What was challenging? What should I focus on when evaluating? What would you do differently next time?

Student Responses:

I’m not that happy with my video because I couldn't find photos of me to put on the video. The challenging part is the editing section. I think all of the video. I will try to find more resources to make my video more professional

Not really because I have some spelling and grammar mistakes
The challenging was about the points that I talked about
I should focus on grammar, spelling and adding more details
I would like to make it longer, try not to have mistakes, and give more details that can make the audience to pay attention.

I am satisfied with my final video. In this video, there is my clear reason that I write. It is based on truth and it has coincidence. There is a connection between this topic is why I write and my dream is copywriter which is related to writing. I spent almost a whole day to make this movie. I want you to focus on my effort and contents of my video when you evaluate this movie. This was my first time of making movie. I found images from Google image, and I downloaded music on 4shared.com. I was concerned with choosing music for my video. I chose new age music, which is silent and beautiful. I am not good at making something on computer, so I couldn’t do better than now. I will learn about making movie from my peers, then I will do my best on next time.

It is so excited when you create a video and put it on YouTube. It was special for me because I have never done that before, I like it. the challenge for me is when I got start my mind stopped thinking because I don’t know how to start then when I start creating the video I feel it’s more easy then I thought.

1. When I finished my final video I was very happy, because I never did this before. I am so happy i can create out my own video. In the same time I also have a little bit worried about it was not good.
2. I hope you can found out where I have the problem or something wrong, then tell me. I hope you can focus my grammar and spelling.
3. Maybe i will change my idea about this video. And change my wrong grammar.
APPENDIX D
HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM FOR “INVESTIGATING INSTANCES OF FLOW IN A SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING CLASSROOM”

My name is Karissa Ringel and I am a graduate student in the Teaching International Languages Department at California State University, Chico.

I would like you to allow me to use your data in the research I am conducting on student motivation in a second-language writing class. The objective of this study is to investigate issues of motivation surrounding traditional and digital/multimodal assignments. The project will use flow theory as a way to view and understand motivation.

If you agree, I will analyze my field notes and any composition done by you during the semester for this course (English 130E, section 01), including major assignments and informal writing. In addition, I may analyze video and audio taken during class or during our interviews if you agree to be recorded.

The risks of the research are that you might find some of your recorded behavior embarrassing or you may be uncomfortable sharing your written work. I will take care to minimize these risks. Your grade will not be affected in any way by your responses to the perception questionnaires or by anything you say during any interviews.

There is no substantial benefit to you from the research. I hope that the research will benefit teachers by increasing our understanding of student motivation, particularly in the context of a second language writing class.

All of the information that I obtain from audio/videotaped sessions, my field notes, and your writing will be kept confidential. I will store the audio and video recording, all writing, and my notes about it in a locked cabinet. I will use a pseudonym to identify your audio files, your writing, and my notes about it. I will keep your name and its pseudonym in a separate locked location. I will not use your name or identifying information in any presentations or published findings of my research.

After this research is completed, I may save my notes for use in future research by myself or others. However, the same confidentiality guarantees given here will apply to future storage and use of the materials.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to permit me to keep the record of your participation. Whether or not you permit me to use it, your data will be kept confidential and will not affect your grade in this class.
If you have any questions about the research, you may e-mail me at karissa.ringel@gmail.com. You may keep the other copy of this form for future reference. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact the California State University, Chico, Human Subjects Research Committee (HRSC) via Marsha Osborne at 530-898-5413.

I have read this consent form, and I agree to allow myself to be recorded (through audio and/or video) with the condition that I am told before recording begins.

___________________________________  __________________________________
Signature                                      Date

___________________________________
Print name
APPENDIX E
MOTIVATION TO WRITE: FINDING FLOW IN THE
SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM

Interview Request

My name is Karissa Ringel and I am a graduate student in the Teaching International Languages Department at California State University, Chico.

I would like to offer you the chance to be a more active participant in the research I am conducting on student motivation in a second-language writing class. The objective of this study is to investigate issues of motivation surrounding traditional and digital/multimodal assignments. The project will use flow theory as a way to view and understand motivation.

If you agree, I will ask you to meet with me three to four times this semester for thirty minutes to one hour. During these meetings, we will have informal conversations about your assignments, your process for completing these assignments, and your overall feelings about your writing. If you agree, these meetings will be audio recorded.

All of the information that I obtain from audio/videotaped sessions, my field notes, and your writing will be kept confidential. I will store the audio and video recording, all writing, and my notes about it in a locked cabinet. I will use a pseudonym to identify your audio files, your writing, and my notes about it. I will keep your name and its pseudonym in a separate locked location. I will not use your name or identifying information in any presentations or published findings of my research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to permit me to keep the record of your participation. Whether or not you permit me to use it, your data will be kept confidential and will not negatively affect your grade in this class. I realize you are busy, and in return for your time and participation, I would like to offer you five points extra credit towards your final grade in this course.

I have read this consent form, and I agree to allow myself to be recorded (through audio and/or video) with the condition that I am told before recording begins. I further agree to meet with the investigator at least three times during the semester in order to receive the extra credit.

__________________________________________________________________________    ____________
Signature                                              Date

__________________________________________________________________________
Print name
APPENDIX F
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<th>Assignment Title</th>
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<td>Who I am, Why I Write</td>
<td>The first assignment asked students to gather different sources - text, images, music, and/or video - and craft a short video about their personal history with writing and composing. Students were encouraged to think of all forms of writing, not just the genres they would think of from school. The intent of this short film was for students to introduce themselves to the class and to begin to think about writing as something that mediates their entire life, not just their academic lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>This assignment was designed to help students plan to write their academic article, and make sure they did not fall behind during the research process. It included very specific sections and instructions for each section, such as personal background with the issue or problem chosen, statement of research claims, research summary (mini literature review), definition of audience, ideas for article outline, and works cited. Students were not encouraged to deviate much from the instructions, though they were advised to utilize the detailed annotations they had already completed after reading academic articles in their area of interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Article</td>
<td>The instructor purposefully called this assignment an academic article rather than a research paper in order to break students out of any routine they might have for academic writing. Many days were dedicated to looking at the difference between essays and journal articles, and students were encouraged to make the formatting their own, as well as add images, charts, or graphs as they saw fit. Students were given many models, and they were also told to use their source articles as examples of different formatting and presentation. Emphasis was put on crafting research claims, as well as creativity while presenting research in an academic manner.</td>
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<td>Impact Film</td>
<td>This assignment was intended to be a research-based multimodal project where students reflected on the impact their research had on themselves and others through the genres they created in class. However, many students took it up as a video reflection of their experiences in the class, less based on the questions and themes of their research. There was very little direction on exactly how to create the film, or what to include. The instructor hoped that the students’ prior experience creating the first video would give them a high possibility for achieving a flow state with this final film.</td>
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HUMAN SUBJECTS IN REVIEW COMMITTEE
Post Data Collection Questionnaire

Under Federal law relating to the protection of Human Subjects, this report is to be completed by each Principal Investigator at the end of data collection.

Please return to:    Marsha Osborne, HSRC Assistant
Office of Graduate Studies
Student Services Center (SSC), Room 460
CSU, Chico
Chico, CA 95929-0875

Or Fax to: Marsha Osborne, 530-898-3342

Name: Karissa Ringel      Chico State Portal ID#005837430

Phone(s) 530-514-5091    Email: karissa.ringel@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor name (if student): Dr. Jaxon      Phone

College/Department: English

Title of Project: Motivation to Write: Finding Flow in a Second Language Composition Classroom

Date application was approved (mo/yr.): 09/2013  Date collection complete (mo/yr.): 12/2013

How many subjects were recruited? 24  How many subjects actually completed the project? 24

*HARM—Did subjects have severe reactions or extreme emotional response? No

If yes, please attach a detailed explanation:

Your signature: Karissa Ringel    Date: 3/24/2014

*Final clearance will not be granted without a complete answer to this question.

Approved By: John Mahoney, Chair    Date: 3/27/14

*****************************************************************************

VERY IMPORTANT: If you will or have used this research in your project or thesis you are required to provide a copy of this form (with John Mahoney’s signature in place) to your graduate committee.

Do you want a photo copy of this form emailed to you? Yes
If yes, provide email address: karissa.ringel@gmail.com

109