

“The Way We Think is Different”: Digital Writing of Multilingual Students in a Hybrid First-Year Writing Class

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Introduction

Digital Realities in the Writing Class

The field of rhetoric and composition has demonstrated the need for a new approach toward online teaching to integrate digital realities in the classroom. This research traces four multilingual students’ writing performances which shuttle between a traditional in-class setting and an online platform. This study investigates how transnational students perceive the online space of writing in a first-year writing course in order to illuminate pedagogical implications particularly to multilingual students in digital realities. In this ethnographic study, I trace and analyze four multilingual students’ writing and literacy practices in writing classes.

- How do the multilingual students perform their writing practices in the hybrid format of a first-year writing course?
- How do they perceive the digital platform of writing, such as the discussion board of Blackboard and an electronic submission system, such as Turnitin?
- What do they say about their practices in the online or hybrid environment, compared to their activities in the face-to-face classroom?

What is Digital Writing?

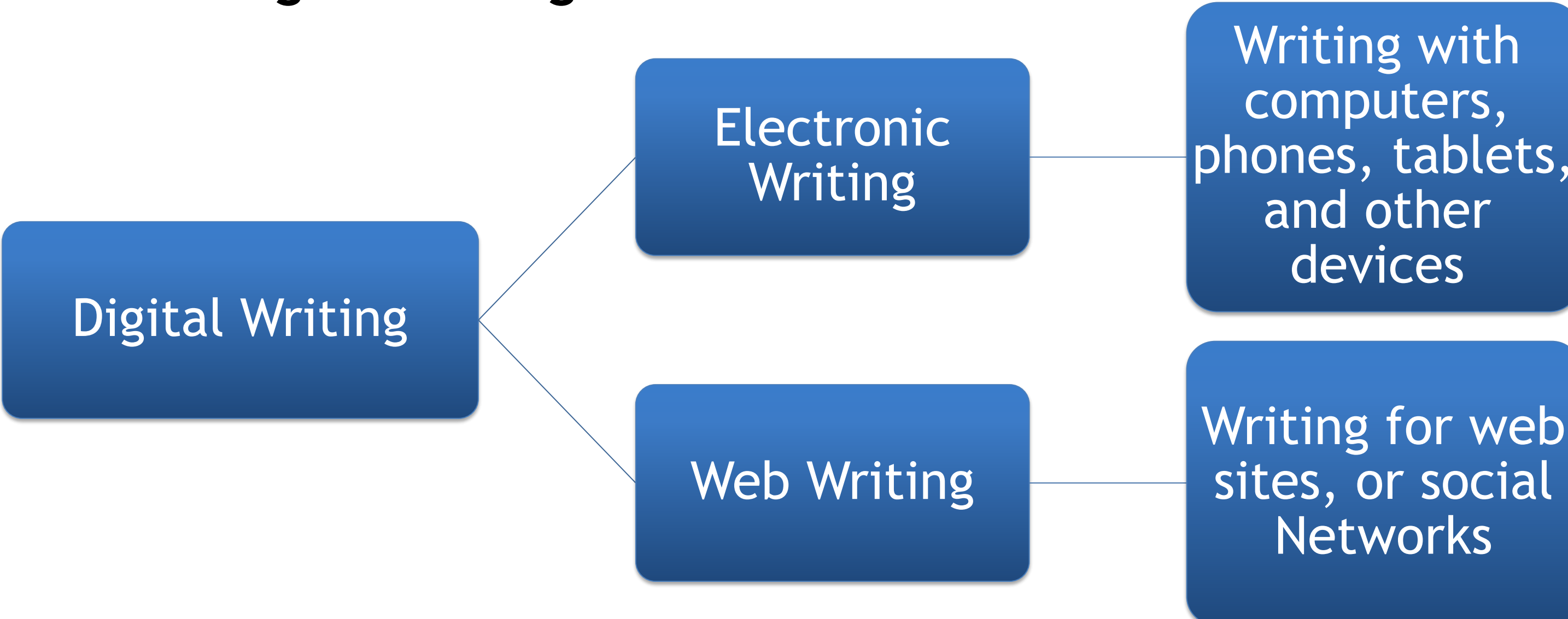


Fig. 1. Digital Writing from: Marie-Josée Goulet and Laurence Pelletier’s comprehensive model of “general kinds of Digital Writing” (“Contents and Approaches to Technology in Digital Writing Instruction” *Computers and Composition* 76)

Methods

Table 1. Methods

Face-to-Face Ethnography		Digital Ethnography	
All Students	Focal Students	Classroom observation	Out of the Classroom
27 Students	Interview with 4 Multilinguals	Blackboard	Facebook Twitter Instagram

Who are Multilinguals?

“Some of my family don’t know English. I relearned [Tagalog] accents, slangs, and relearned new vocabulary from them. My parents don’t want me to forget it. We always watch Tagalog TV.” (Santos’ interview)

“Our viewpoint is different. The way we think is different. In Vietnamese when we write something, we really avoid to use to offense anyone. In English you can be straight and firm about whatever you think” (Quach’s interview)

“For me, the biggest news outlet is BBC. I’ve read CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera... So, I feel like taking different perspectives about the same issue is insightful.” (Torres’ interview)

Table 2. Research Participants: Four Focal Students

	Santos	Nguyen	Quach	Torres
Gender	F	M	F	M
First Second Third languages	Tagalog	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Spanish
	English	English	English	English
	Spanish/Korean	Spanish	Spanish	Japanese
Born in	Philippines	Vietnam	Vietnam	U.S.
Age when migrated to the U.S.	5	10	15	Second generation

Results

I. Online Classes and Agentic Learning

- Education as a family affair
- Self-paced learning for self-inquiry projects
- Not a physical absence or lack of engagement, but an active and agentic learning space and time

II. Online Classroom as an Affinity Space

- “Affinity space” proposed by James Paul Gee in *Situated Language and Learning* (2004)
- The spatial boundary in which participants have different interests, goals, and backgrounds

III. Transcultural-Rhetorical Awareness and Critical Thinking

- Multilinguals’ transnational experiences and the use of online social media promote a transcultural literacy.

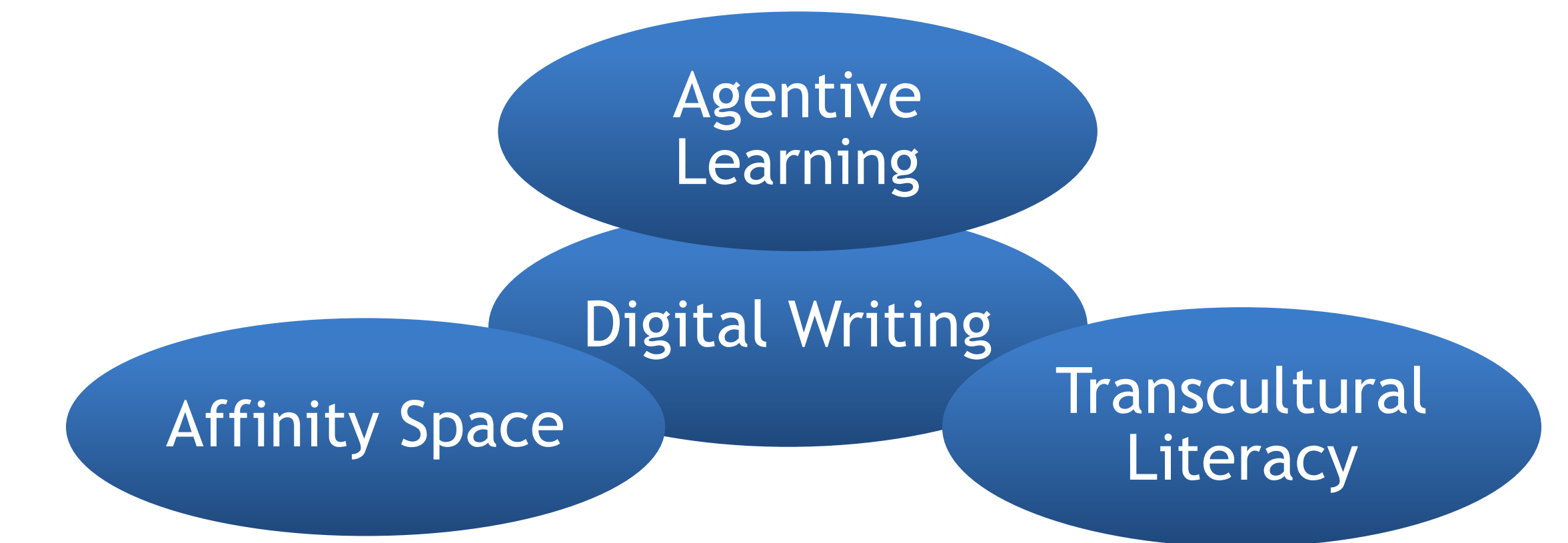


Fig. 2. Digital Writing in Affinity Space

“My family immigrated to the United States when I was nine-years old. In order to attend school here, one of the main requirements was to receive all the up-to-date vaccinations. Since coming to America, my family and I have received the annual flu shot. I have adjusted well to the vaccines...” (Nguyen’s web writing for the draft of his research paper)

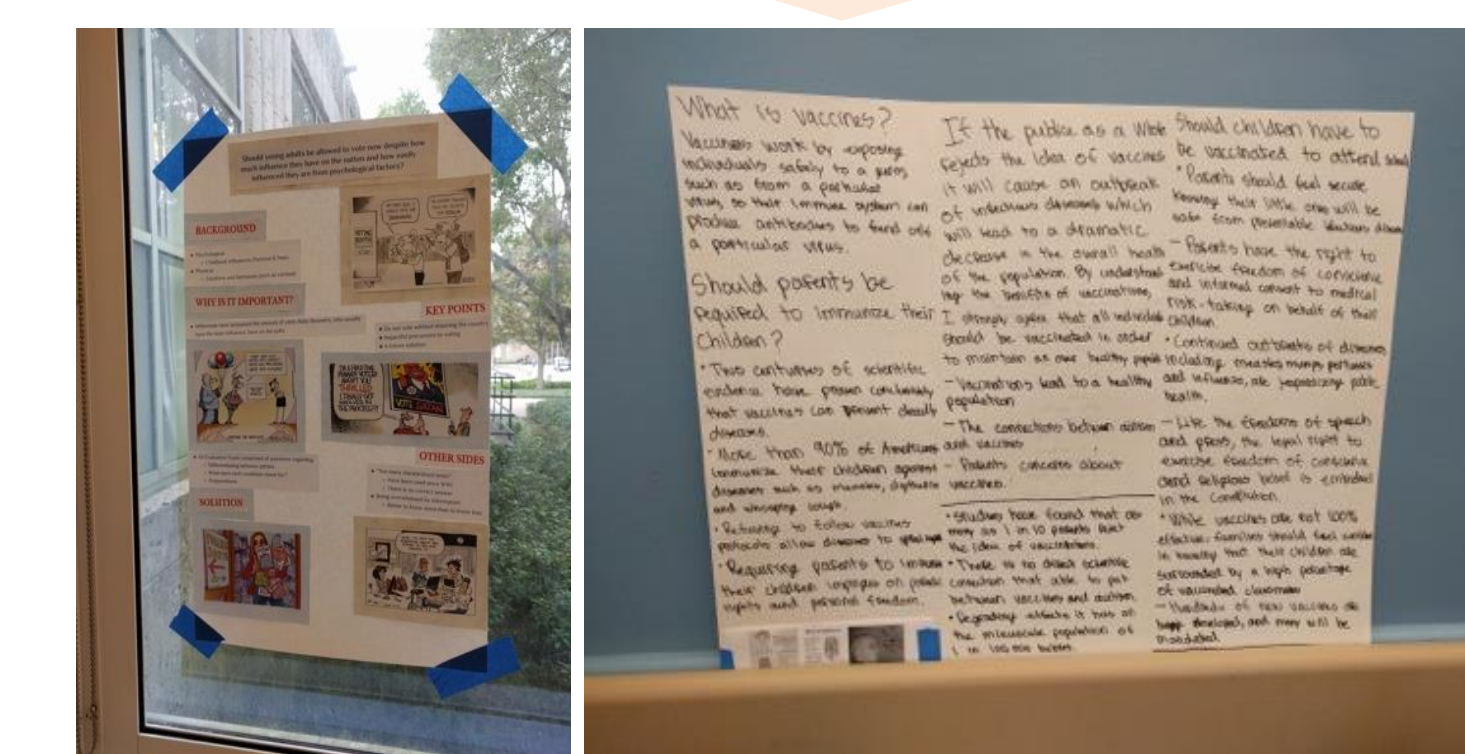


Fig. 3. Santos’ poster presentation and Nguyen’s one in the in-class Conference

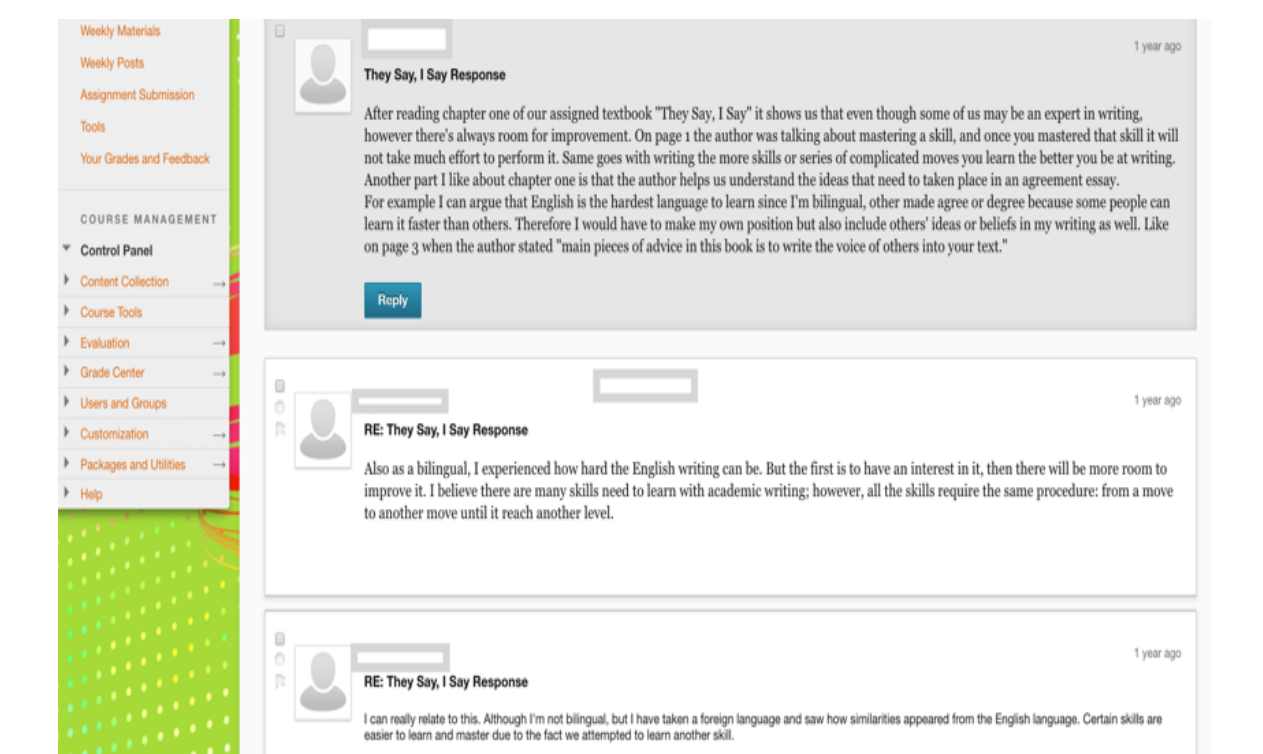


Fig. 4. Screenshot of Online Classroom Discussion on Blackboard

Conclusions & Pedagogical Takeaways

- The hybrid format can be used to promote agentic learning of students, especially multilingual students because it allows them self-paced learning.
- To view Blackboard as an affinity space is a key to promote students’ learning opportunities from peers
- Online discussion provides students with more personalized and contextualized understanding not only of the subject-matter but also of themselves. Teachers should consider ways to promote students’ interactions on an online discussion board in which they can bring their lived experiences.

*This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (16559-02).