200 Years Later....

Table of Contents

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Editorial:

The Gift of Education

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One of the greatest gifts is the opportunity to learn. Many, blessed with rich learning opportunities at home and in school, take this for granted. Many here and around the world are not so fortunate.

Gift Days, a picture book by children's author Kari-Lynn Winters (2012), is a powerful reminder of the limits to educational opportunity and a testament to how caring individuals can give the gift of learning in even the most adverse circumstances. Nassali, an African girl unable to attend school, fulfils her wish to read thanks to the gift days offered by her brother, Matovu. As educators, we are uniquely positioned to provide young people with gift days of wonder, knowledge and understanding.

"Please Matovu, tell me what the squiggles say," Nassali asks in *Gift Days*. In the first article in this issue, "The Missing Tooth: Case Illustrations of a Child's Assembled, Out-of-School Authorship," Kari-Lynn Winters draws on theories of social semiotics, New Literacy Studies (NLS), and critical positioning to explore how a child's modes of meaning-making and socio-cultural environment can contribute to literacy and, ultimately, authorship. Through this powerful and deeply personal piece involving interactions with her young son, Winters invites us to think of the gift of literacy in ways that take into "account children's social lives, their personal relations and connections, and their authentic ways of creating and communicating meaning."

Nassali says, "I will teach myself to read" but is unable to do so until she receives help. Most of us learn better when other adapt the lessons to our the lives we lead. In "Food Chains, Frenemies, and Revenge Fantasies: Relating Fiction to Life in a Girls' Book Club," Nancy Taber, Vera Woloshyn, and Laura Lane explore the complex ways in which the girls negotiate their everyday lives by studying discussions about *Dork Diaries* in a book club. While the girls were capable of reading the book on their own, the structured activities helped them "illuminate their own lives, giving the group the opportunity to critique food chains, frenemies, and revenge fantasies. In each case, the girls first validated and then critiqued these aspects of their lives, moving away from an unquestioned acceptance of meanness in the food chain." This article reinforces the importance of educators as guides to deeper forms of literacy, social understanding, and authorship among learners.

"Maama always said an education is the path to a better life," Nassali recalls in *Gift Days*. Parents and teachers are powerful influences who can help students along that path. In "Honouring Roles: The Story of a Principal and a Student," Jerome Cranston explores the principal-student dynamic through a narrative inquiry into his interactions with a student during his time as a principal. Cranston argues that "school leadership should be focused on developing

the relationships that support student and teacher learning rather than narrowly concentrating on technocratic approaches to managing things."

Every day is a potential gift day. Teacher educators are blessed with the opportunity to prepare teachers who can make a difference in the lives of children. The final three papers are testaments to the possibilities when teacher educators strive to deeply engage teacher candidates.

Teaching is a challenging profession, especially for teachers motivated to go the extra mile for their students. John Vitale, in "The Perfect Storm: Stress, Anxiety, and Burnout in the Secondary School Music Classroom," reminds us that we must take time to care for ourselves in order to offer students the gift of education. Vitale investigates the stress, anxiety, and burnout he experienced teaching music. For Vitale, transitioning from teacher to teacher educator, this process was valuable preparation for his future role. He writes, "I have much more insight and knowledge into the demanding role of the secondary school music teacher, which I can pass on and share with my students."

Lorayne Robertson and Janette Hughes are interested in developing critical literacy and promoting social justice. In "Surfacing the Assumptions: Pursuing Critical Literacy and Social Justice in Preservice Teacher Education," they examine how new literacies and technology-supported learning can be directed toward social and educational change. As they puzzle over their successes and struggles pedagogical innovators, they realized that new literacies and technologies need to become central themes in the learning of teacher candidates, not just vehicles to support critical literacy and social justice. This is a gift that may lead to better days for teacher candidates and the students they will eventually teach.

To make each school day a gift day, Nancy Maynes and Blaine E. Hatt argue in "Shifting the Focus to Student Learning: Characteristics of Effective Teaching Practice as Identified by Experienced Pre-service Faculty Advisors," teachers "need to make each instructional decision on the basis of its impact on student learning." In this article, they identify and examine instruments and processes for teacher growth. In their ongoing work, they are exploring ways of identifying these characteristics in hiring and developing them in teacher education and professional development.

In *Gift Days,* the gift of education led Nassali to university. I hope that the articles in this issue of *Brock Education* will inspire us as educators and teacher educators to make each school day a gift day.

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The Missing Tooth:
Case Illustrations of a Child's Assembled, Out-of-School Authorship

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Abstract

Case illustrations of a six-year-old boy's adventures with a missing tooth are used in this paper to re-define a broader notion of authorship. Drawing on theories of social semiotics, New Literacy Studies (NLS), and critical positioning, this notion of authorship not only interweaves the boy's preferred modes of meaning-making and communication, but also considers his sociocultural environments. Findings suggest that each mode of meaning-making (linguistic, symbolic, musical, etc.) has its own semiotic potential (both affordances and limitations) and that all authorship needs to be framed critically, within social contexts, in order to better understand and facilitate young children's abilities to garner, interpret, design, and communicate ideas across a range of semiotic systems.

Keywords: authorship, assemblage, multimodality, social practices, critical literacies

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Introduction

Research suggests that children create and communicate by using a range of multimodal systems (e.g., drawing, singing, writing, talking) within their social contexts (Dyson, 1997; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Ranker, 2006). Additionally, within these environments they build critical power relations with others (Larson & Marsh, 2005; Lewis, 2001; Marsh & Millard, 2001; Moss, 2003). Defining authorship in these broader ways — in ways which include the multimodal, sociocultural, and the critical — have recently been publicly supported by international and national organizations (cf. Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; IRA, 2011; NCTE, 2012). Yet despite research findings as well as concerted efforts from numerous organizations to expand notions of authorship, there is still a tendency to simplify it, to think of authorship as words alone or as an isolated, non-social event (Siegel, 2006; Winters, 2010). Instead of isolating authorship or opposing printed texts to other expressive forms (e.g., drawing, singing, writing), this paper suggests that authorship is always multimodal, social, and critical. Meaningful information is created and communicated through the processes of design, negotiation, production, and dissemination within diverse and differently situated communities. And within these social communities, authors identify power relations and develop their identities (Kendrick, 2003; 2005). When thinking of authorship in these broader ways, authors are offered broader and more authentic communicative options (Rogers, Winters, La Monde, & Perry 2010; Stein, 2008; Winters & Vratulis, in press.)

Using theories of social semiotics, New Literacy Studies, and critical positioning alongside close analyses of my son's out-of-school meaning making and communication, I demonstrate how even young children have the potential to author purposefully and with sophistication, in ways that are semiotic, social, and critical. Further, this paper offers a way to document and analyze these complexities, suggesting one way that education stakeholders (e.g., parents, administrators, teachers) might trace and assess broader notions of authorship (cf. *Authorship as Assemblage,* Winters, 2009). I believe that there is much at stake for education if adults continue to ignore children's representations of thought and their complex ways of knowing in an ever-changing global economy. Not only are we limiting children's thinking potentials by defining and practicing authorship in narrow ways, we are also disenfranchising children who have other pathways of sense making and communicating (Eisner, 1998; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Walsh, 2011).

Narrow Views of Authorship and Meaning-making

People often think that authors only "write the words" and ignore the participatory and multimodal preparation as well as the sociocultural and critical understandings that they bring to their work (Dyson, 2004). As an author of 16 children's books, I encounter these narrow views of authorship all the time. Adults are frequently astonished when I explain that I take two years to write a picture book, or about the ways I generate ideas within social contexts, or the ways I play with different media in order to understand and write the story. Sometimes they respond with pitiful inflection, "Yes, it's easy to procrastinate" or "you should just put pen to paper and get on with it." Surprisingly, these people do not consider doodling an idea, charting actions, studying the craft of a scene from a movie or play, embodying a character, discussing themes, mapping plots, or any other "non-alphabet-based writing task" to be authorship. In other words, there is a perception that an author is only creating when printing letters, typing, or revising a manuscript (Dyson, 2004; Murray, 2004). Is this perception being brought into schools? Are young people only considered authors when they are physically writing with words? Do some modes carry more cachet (Dyson,

2004; Jennifer Rowsell in conversation, June 2012)? Many authors believe and many researchers have shown (e.g., Kendrick, Rogers, Smythe, & Anderson, 2005; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Rogers et al., 2010; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010) that authorship happens all the time — throughout the day, every day, through a variety of modes (including the linguistic) — and always in relation to the social and cultural situational contexts these authors bring to bear.

This is not to say that speech and print are not important systems to master. Surely, without mastery of the linguistic mode, a child would not fully understand the potentials of authorship. As Heath (1983) and Janks (2010) have demonstrated, students who do not learn linguistic forms of writing have the potential to fall behind in school, may have additional problems in their communities, and may even encounter future difficulties in their adult years. Indeed, words are important, but as Graves (1999) writes, "[they] only represent one part of a thinker's inner language" (p. 79). Thus, by privileging the linguistic mode and by not attending to the multiple systems of representation and communication students bring to bear, education stakeholders may be depriving students of reaching their fullest thinking potentials.

Modally Integrated, Participatory, and Critical Visions for Authorship

> Becoming literate, in the broadest sense means learning how to access in a meaningful way the forms of life that meaning systems make possible. (Eisner, 1998, p. 12)

Longstanding evidence from education scholars and literacy researchers (e.g. Dyson, 1997; 2004; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1996; Kress, 1993; 1997; Siegel, 1995; Street, 1984), plus the significant contribution of education critic Elliot Eisner (1998), demonstrate that meaning making is always a participatory and modally-integrated process. In regard to writing, others too have demonstrated for nearly twenty years that authorship does not begin when an author picks up a pencil or types on a computer (Bakhtin, 1986; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1999; Kress, 1997), nor does it only occur in schools or the workplace (Barton & Ivanic, 1991; Kress, 1997; Murray, 2004). Rather, authorship is constantly being composed and communicated by authors across multiple modes and social environments. Within these modal and social spaces, power is always being negotiated. The concept of authorship, like any other "ideological" practice, always links semiotic resources and individual agency within social structures (Janks; 2010; Winters & Vratulis, in press). In this paper, *authorship* is defined as the assembled semiotic, social, and critical process of designing, negotiating, producing, and disseminating meaningful information within diverse and differently situated communities. Moreover, an *author* is defined as any person or group who "donates meaning" (Barthes, 1977) within situational contexts to any piece of work, be it declared, hidden, or withdrawn (Winters, 2009). This broader definition of what it means to be an author not only suggests that meaning-making and communication are more expansive than language alone, but that within contexts authors compose and communicate both internally (designing and negotiating) and externally (producing and disseminating), adding to the social texts or cultural storylines that are being created. Defined in this broader way, it is important to note that authorship includes both the interpretation and the actualization of information.

Declared authors are those that are visibly present; they can be seen or heard creating meaning and contributing to a text within a social context (Barthes, 1977). For example, through case illustrations shown later in the article, a child, Leon, can be seen creating a map. Hidden or withdrawn participants in this paper include authors that are less visible or may have "dialogically" at one time been involved in donating meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; Barthes, 1977), such as Leon's

classmates, who called him a "baby" in the weeks before his first tooth fell out. These hidden participants play a role in this literacy event, for these authors positioned Leon in particular ways and within the narratives he creates (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Looking at authorship through this extended lens not only offers nuanced and layered perspectives, it suggests that authorship is always modally constructed and socially- and critically-negotiated. And it poses broader questions about the participatory nature of communication, modal integration, recursive meaning making, and the ways children situate themselves within contexts and construct power relations (Holland, et al., 1998; Janks, 2010).

Background Theories of Modal Authorship

At its most fundamental level, semiotics — from the Greek work *semion* (σημειον), "sign" — is the study of symbols or signs. This field was founded on two divergent traditions: the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1916), and the Peircian tradition, from American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1931).

While Peirce's tradition of semiotics does suggest a combination of the social and the semiotic, the social is often implicit. Scholars such as Vygotsky (1980), Hodge and Kress (1988), and Van Leeuwen (2005) have critiqued Peirce's model, arguing that semiotics should not be and can not be devoid of the socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded, because meaning-making and communication never occur in isolation. These more recent theories extend the field of New Literacy Studies, a field that emphasizes that semiotic resources are not composed in silos, but rather, within various and situated communities of social practice (Kress, 2010; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Larson & Marsh, 2005; Rogers & Winters, 2010).

What is important about contemporary notions of multimodal authorship and to this paper is how knowledge is always simultaneously constituted and communicated on multiple levels: (1) through specific semiotic modes and resources; (2) by individual or groups who come with their own values, beliefs, and so forth; and (3) within social practices and situated contexts. Authors help to shape the communicational situations they encounter, co-constituting the social and modal interactions that are assembled (Janks, 2010; Kress, 2010; Rogers et al., 2010).

A recent study exemplifies these ideas about multimodality, specifically one that investigates children's use of iPads in a grade three classroom (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). These scholars suggest that today's authorship is both semiotically integrative and socially interactive. They demonstrate that with the development of "Web 2.0," technology literacy has changed and expanded, making it neither sensible nor feasible to continue to separate the linguistic processes of reading or writing from the modes that are semiotically integrated, nor from the authors themselves and the social relations that they bring into these processes. In other words, multimodality (including digital technologies and other modes of meaning-making) has permeated the ways that people design, negotiate, produce, and disseminate information. Therefore, without a push to redefine multimodal authorship in social, semiotic, and critical ways, "educators run the risk of teaching and learning language and literacy skills in anachronistic paradigms and frameworks" (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011, p. 53).

Social Out-of-School Literacy Practices

New Literacy Studies (NLS) are theoretically grounded in the fields of social semiotics, sociocultural theories and ethnographies, digital technologies, and the shifting landscape of literacy.

Scholars from this field have not only demonstrated that what counts as text and what constitutes reading and writing are changing — but rather, that they have already changed (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 2000). Indeed, broader literacy frameworks compiled with a proliferation of accessible modalities demand that schools reinterpret what is required for students to emerge as literate citizens (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Stein, 2008). When using technology, for example, semiotic resources are not seen in opposition to one another; when used together, they can advance students' meaningful constructions of knowledge and communicative options (Larson & Marsh, 2005; Walsh, 2011).

Scholars also demonstrate that children naturally move between semiotic systems in their out-of-school environments (Kendrick, 2003; 2005; Kendrick et al., 2005; Ranker, 2006; Pahl, 2003). Perhaps this is because they are less inhibited by the school's structured routines and rules of engagement (e.g., including notions of common practice, affordances of eligibility/authority, distributions of power), or perhaps because they intuitively recognize that no one semiotic system fully represents all the possible knowledge available on any one topic. Regardless, when children are given authentic opportunities to render meaning across multiple semiotic systems, they have broader opportunities to take control of their own learning and to generate new and diverse organizations of meaning (Ranker, 2006; Rogers & Winters, 2010; Winters & Vratulis, in press). However, new literacy researchers Larson and Marsh (2005) posit that there is still a void in the literature that closely analyzes children's out-of-school thinking and communicative practices. They urge other scholars and education stakeholders (e.g., parents, administrators, teachers, researchers) to also consider children's out-of-school communicative practices — which involve a wide array of modes — because the home is not only intimately connected to the meanings children produce, but it also shapes their in-school communication.

Critical Positioning

While combining the social and the semiotic is becoming a more trodden ground in the field of literacy education, criticality is often an implicit factor (Stein, 2008, Kress, 2010). For example, multimodality scholar Gunther Kress (2010) writes:

> Authorship, in particular, is in urgent need of theorizing…. the redistribution of power in communication, an effect jointly of the social conditions…and the facilities of digital devices, both leading to the remaking of power-relations, has the most profound effect on conceptions of learning of knowledge and hence on the formation of subjectivity and identity. (p. 21)

Kress goes on to say that young people negotiate and act within their own notions of identity and power and that authority can not be separated from authorship, nor from the spaces where literacy is constructed and communicated. This idea resonates with the work of Pippa Stein (2008), Hillary Janks (2010), and Rogers and Winters (2010). These literacy scholars suggest that situational power relations need to be captured in studies, including ideas around participant subjectivities, contexts, access and eligibility, and structured routines, in order to better understand the various ways that young people narrate their social identities, participate in the world, and ultimately shape global literacy practices.

Davies and Harré (1990) coined a theory called "Discursive Positioning," which highlights the ways that, within discourses, authors imagine storylines for themselves and others. They suggest that authors shape their situational contexts by assuming and assigning flexible and imagined positions in order to psychologically or physically locate themselves. Some scholars (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Leander, 2004; Winters & Vratulis, in press) discuss how these discursive positions play out in varied social situations, further demonstrating how people create storylines in order to know their own lives, and further, to author how their lives connect to the lives of others. Discursive positioning theories are taken into consideration in this paper to better understand the place of power and empowerment within children's authorship practices.

Method and Study Context

During the summer of 2006 I had the opportunity to observe and collect data on my son Leon[*] for three weeks across several of his out-of-school contexts. I used a side-shadowing interview technique (McClay & Mackey, 2009), where I sat next to Leon keeping detailed research notes (both in the moment and reflective), interviewing him, collecting documents/artifacts that he created, and audio/video-taping whenever possible. In this way, Leon's meaning making and communications guided the study.

Leon, then six-years-old (in kindergarten), is a sensitive and thoughtful Caucasian boy who loves Lego, computer games, reading books, and writing in his journal. At the time of the study, Leon had just became a big brother to Kenzie and the caretaker of his two cats. I was finishing grad school and Leon's father, John, was finishing a training program to become a registered massage therapist. Together our income totaled just over $23,000, well below the poverty line. The six of us (Leon, myself, his father, sister, and two cats) lived in an urban environment in Western Canada in a one-bedroom apartment. Being scholars, John and I were both very involved with Leon's education and schooling continues to be a high priority. Leon's teacher often told John at pick-up time about Leon's day and made comments such as "Leon is the top of his class in academics" or "he is a leader on the playground." Leon's report cards support these claims, stating that in class he is studious and attentive. Leon has many friends at school, with whom he loves to talk and play, but he is also quite content to play on his own. Many of these friends have developed faster (physically) than Leon and have lost their teeth. This was an important aspect of Leon's school culture at the time the data were collected.

I was curious about the ways that Leon constructed and shared meaning, particularly his thinking and communication processes within his out-of-school environments. For these three weeks, I was with Leon as much as possible, recording throughout the day, every day. In total, I captured/transcribed over 168 hours of data. When it was time to code and analyze the data, I first looked for narrative themes. Several themes emerged, including sports and activities, relationships with others, boys vs. girls, etc. One special theme, indicative of Leon's age and development, was about losing baby teeth. I compiled these data in the form of narrative case illustrations. Then, using the "Authorship as Assemblage" framework shown below (see Table 1 in the following section), I began analyzing, with specific regard of the semiotic, the social, and the critical theories mentioned above.

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[*] All names (son, daughter, husband, and Leon's friend Atlan) have been changed.

An Analytic Framework — Authorship as Assemblage

Drawing upon the semiotic, the social, and the critical together, I devised an analytic frame called *Authorship as Assemblage* (cf. Winters, 2009; 2010). This theoretical and analytic framework emphasizes modal choices, situated contexts, and critical storylines. Here, theories speak back to one another and to the data, suggesting that meaning making and communication are always fluid, interconnected, and recursive. Additionally this framework suggests ways that multimodality can be coded and transcribed.

In the next section I apply this framework to case illustrations of a six-year-old boy in order to better understand and document the different ways this child authors in his out-of school environments. I am particularly interested in knowing:

- how this young child becomes both a consumer and a producer of modal texts;
- which semiotic resources Leon chooses, along with the potentials of these resources;
- what social "inter(actions)" (Winters, 2009) shape and are shaped by Leon; and
- how Leon discursively positions himself as he authors (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

Table 1. **Authorship as Assemblage Framework**

Discursive Event	Principle #1 External and Internal Meaning-Making	Principle #2 Semiotic Resources		Principle #3 Social (Inter)actions	Principle #4 Discursive Positions of Author	
	Declared, Hidden, or Withdrawn	Semiotic Resources	Semiotic Potential	Designs Negotiations Productions Disseminations	Of self Of others	Structured Routines e.g., Who is eligible, rules of engagement

This analytic frame draws from the work of Barthes (1977), Bakhtin (1981), Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), Baldry and Thibault (2006), Davies and Harré (1990), and to some extent the work of Hamilton (2000). Each element of the frame is defined in Appendix A.

Narrative Case Illustrations

In this section, I use two different fonts in order to distinguish the "*field notes or transcriptions collected at the time*" (rendered in italics) from the "data analyses" interpreted after data were collected (rendered in non-italic Roman).

Case Illustration 1 — July 15th, 2006

It is a summer day in Western Vancouver, Canada. Leon is eating an apple, which he believes will make his loose tooth fall out. Over the past week, Leon has expressed an interest in teeth. Not only is his loose tooth a common topic of conversation, he can be seen wiggling it regularly.

When finished eating, he decides to read a book entitled Franklin and the Tooth Fairy *(written by Paulette Bourgeois and illustrated by Brenda Clark). It is a story about a little turtle named*

Franklin who doesn't have any teeth. Franklin believes he will never "grow up" or get a reward from the tooth fairy. So he tricks the tooth fairy by putting a tooth-shaped white rock under his turtle shell. The tooth fairy, however, cannot be outsmarted. In the end, Franklin's parents give him a present to celebrate his growing up.

> *Leon (laughing and pointing at the pictures): The tooth fairy would never fall for that joke.*
> *Me: Why not?*
> *Leon: Because the tooth fairy is smart and magical. And besides, loosing a tooth is serious business.*
> *Me: How?*
> *Leon: Kids really do make fun of you if you don't lose a tooth. Sometimes they call you (emphasizing the word) "BABY!"*
> *According to Leon's teacher, Leon had an encounter at school the week prior. Apparently the children in Leon's grade class, those who have lost teeth, called him "baby".*

Critical positioning theorists (Davies and Harré, 1990; Holland et al., 1998) suggest that authors position themselves in terms of categories (e.g. I have lost a tooth vs. I have not lost a tooth) and imagined storylines (e.g., Franklin and I are both worried we will never grow up — this is "serious business") based on their own experiences. Once located within these discursive spaces, children learn about themselves, their relationships with others, and about power differentials. Here, the affordances of a fictional storybook seem to give Leon a better understanding of himself and his previous school playground encounter.

> *This conversation reminds me of a set of pictures I had just been emailed.*
> *Me: Leon, come and see these pictures.*
> *Leon runs over to the computer. The caption for the digital photograph reads "And Then There Were None." The photograph shows Leon's friend smiling a gummy toothless grin. He had apparently lost his four front teeth in the previous week. Leon laughs again, and then tries to wiggle his own loose tooth.*
> *Leon (dancing): Look! Mine's gonna fall out soon too!*
> *He pushes at the tooth forward, twisting it awkwardly in his mouth.*

In this case illustration, Leon's authorship is primarily linguistic and gestured. Leon chooses the linguistic mode to articulate specific memories (e.g., "Sometimes they call you BABY!") and his subjectivities (e.g., "…the tooth fairy is smart and magical"). Meanwhile, the gestures he uses afford spatial and emotional potentials (e.g., demonstrating which tooth is loose, dancing his excitement). Together, the modes and his previous social relationships interanimate each other (Winters & Vratulis, in press), resulting in a totality of meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts. His actions and words together clarify and expand his communication.

<u>Case Illustration 2 – July 16th, 2006</u>

The next day, Leon and I go to Jericho Beach to meet friends and play. Leon and a friend have a water fight. During their play, Leon, in order to avoid a solid soaking, trips and loses his balance. He quickly moves his knee forward to stabilize himself but ends up hitting his mouth on his knee. At once, blood drips downward and is absorbed into the sand. At first Leon looks panicked, then notices his tooth is missing. He smiles and points to his blood-soaked mouth, gesturing the

message that he lost his first tooth. My friend Sandy and I grab towels, trying to help him. At a loss for words, Leon continues to point out his good news. Then, suddenly it dawns on him: he needs to retrieve his tooth so that he will receive a reward from the Tooth Fairy. His smile turns into a look of fear. He falls to his knees and frantically sifts through the sand.

Leon: If I don't find it the tooth fairy won't come!

Sandy, Sandy's son (Leon's friend), and I try to help him, but it is no use — there are thousands of tooth-shaped white rocks.

On the walk back to the car, I see Leon pick up a small white rock.

Me: Whatcha doing?

Leon (muttering): Just in case.

We stop at Sandy's house to clean up the blood and change our clothes. From his body language (looking around, tapping his foot, pursing his lips), it appears as though Leon is becoming more and more anxious.

Leon (blurting out): The tooth fairy will never come now!

Me: Yes she will.

Leon: How can she? She won't know where to come.

Me: She'll know. She's magic, remember?

Apparently my reassurance is not enough. Leon asks for a pencil and a piece of paper. He draws a map, complete with a compass rose, indicating North, South, East and West (see Figure 1). The map includes the places that are important to Leon, including his own house in what he calls "the city", Sandy's house, and (most important) an X to mark the spot on Jericho Beach. He also indicates with parallel lines the route that the tooth fairy should take. Creating this map calms Leon.

Leon: At least now she will know where to go to find my tooth.

Do children know intuitively about the semiotic potential of different systems? From reviewing this case illustration, it appeared that Leon did. For he moved between different semiotic systems, choosing the ones that would most aptly provide the kinds of meaning he desired. For example, when Leon wanted the tooth fairy to know where he lost his tooth, he drew a map (Figure 1). He knew that maps afford spatial information. But so do pictures. Why then did Leon choose to draw a map rather than a picture? This is where the "functionality" of each mode of representation becomes important (Halliday, 1975; 2004). I believe that Leon may have chosen to draw a map rather than a picture for two reasons. First he needed to convey to the Tooth Fairy the exact location of the tooth. He didn't want to show a picture of any beach (what a drawing of a beach might afford), he needed to show a specific beach, Jericho Beach. Because maps combine both pictorial and linguistic semiotic resources into one layered or hybrid system, Leon could convey to his audience (the Tooth Fairy) the exact location of his tooth. Second, he drew a map to demonstrate a spatial relationship, where his home was in relation to Jericho Beach. His map affords a specific route that the Tooth Fairy can take. And if the Tooth Fairy can't find the tooth, Leon himself has a resource that will guide him in order to find it.

The map itself affects Leon's critical identity construction. It gives him an opportunity to re-position himself, taking him from a place of helplessness (i.e. a boy who lost his tooth) to a place of empowerment (i.e. a boy who has the tool that will help the Tooth Fairy locate his tooth).

Figure 1. Leon's Map

Case Illustration 3 – July 16th, 2006

> *That evening, Leon's thoughts go back to the tooth fairy.*
> *Leon: Do you think she'll come?*
> *He fidgets with his pajama buttons, appearing upset that he has no way to communicate with*
> *her.*
> *Me: She'll come.*
> *Leon frowns, demonstrating his disbelief. Unsatisfied, Leon composes a letter* (see Figure 2):

Figure 2. Leon's Letter to the Tooth Fairy

(To: The TooTHFAiRY I AM SORRY I DIDN'D TELL YOU WHEN IT HAPPeNeD BUT I WANT TO TELL YOU NOW I LOST MY TOOTH ON JeRRIKO BEACH CAN YOU FIND It AND give Me A ReWARD)

He carefully folds the map and the letter and puts them both under his pillow.

Typically, children in North America put their tooth under their pillow in order to claim a reward from the tooth fairy. Leon knew this tradition, not from personal experience — as this was his first tooth to fall out — but from literature and the media (e.g. books he has read, television shows he has watched). Yet, it occurred to Leon that the tooth fairy might not show up because he didn't have a tooth to put under his pillow. "Do you think she'll come?" he asked. To ensure her arrival, he wrote a letter.

Why did Leon write a letter instead of, perhaps, singing a song, acting out a play, or drawing a picture? NLS research suggests that authors use particular resources and materials in specific situational contexts because each elucidates its own particular "semiotic potential," its own affordances and limitations (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005). I believe that Leon chose to write a letter for a couple reasons. First, writing affords evidence of its occurrence. There is a permanence about the written text (Halliday, 2007; Kress, 1997). Because the

tooth fairy was not there yet, he was unable to simply have a spoken conversation with her. Yet, a drawing of the event would have also offered concrete evidence; why didn't Leon create a picture? Perhaps because a drawing can be "polysemous" (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) or too open for interpretation, and it may not have offered the specific meaning he needed to communicate. Here, he needed to address the tooth fairy, not an elf fairy or a flower fairy and so forth. Second, Leon is familiar with the genre of letter writing. He has written and received letters at school and he had recently just read the story *Franklin and the Tooth Fairy,* where he saw that the Tooth Fairy reads children's (and turtles') letters. Moreover, writing a letter is something he is able to do. If perhaps he didn't know the alphabetic code, he may have chosen another more accessible semiotic system (e.g. pictorial) or a different mode of production (e.g. transcribing his letter to Kate) (Walsh, 2011). In this instance, he could position himself as an "able writer."

Writing a letter gave Leon these distinct affordances: (1) the ability to address a specific reader, the Tooth Fairy; (2) to communicate his emotional thoughts; (3) to recount his story; (4) to persuade his reader; and (5) to orient his reader. Table 2 demonstrates the close analysis that I made of Leon's letter, specifically recognizing the semiotic, social, and critical potentials that he identified with.

Table 2. Semiotic, Social, and Critical Potentials of Leon's Letter to the Tooth Fairy

Evidence of a Written Letter Text	Potentials of a Written Letter Text
To: The TooTH FAiRY	1) To address his reader: Leon addresses a specific reader — the tooth fairy, demonstrating his cultural beliefs and situated context.
I AM SORRY I DIDN'D TELL YOU WHEN IT HAPPeNeD BUT I WANT TO TELL YOU NOW	2) To communicate emotions and thoughts: Leon explains that he forgot to tell (perhaps by writing a letter) the tooth fairy about losing his tooth earlier in the day and that he has a purpose for telling (writing the letter) now.
I LOST MY TOOTH ON JeRRIKO BEACH	3) To recount his story: He tells the tooth fairy where he lost his tooth. At the same time, he is given an opportunity to set up his circumstances.
CAN YOU FIND It AND give Me A ReWARD	4) To persuade his reader: He asks the tooth fairy to help him find the tooth and to give him a reward. He positions himself as someone who needs help and as someone who is deserving of a reward.
FROM: Leon	5) Orient his reader: So the tooth fairy knows who to give the reward to, Leon offers information about who wrote the letter.

<u>Case Illustration 4 – July 17th, 2006</u>

The next morning, Leon discovered the envelope with his name on it. Inside he found $5.00 along with a letter. Leon hummed a gleeful song as he flashed the money and danced around the room (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Leon's Song

(transcribed from an audio recording by a professional musician)

Me: What does the letter say?
Leon reads the letter (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Letter From the Tooth Fairy

Dear Leon,
I found your tooth at Jericho Beach.
Thank you for the map and for the letter too.
Here is your reward.
Love: The tooth Fairy
P.s. I like teeth like yours — the ones without cavities. So keep brushing and
    flossing.

Me: That's a lot of money!
Leon: Well, which would you want? A rotten apple or a good, healthy, tasty apple?
Me: The good one.
Leon: Well the same is true with the tooth fairy. I got $5.00 because I kept my tooth clean and healthy.
Me: That must be why.

The song Leon hummed authentically demonstrated his happy mood. Music has the potential to create some meanings that challenge and elude linguistic semiotic systems. For example, music has the potential to carry visceral knowledge (such as emotional messages) that is felt in deeply intuitive and embodied ways (Van Leeuwen, 1999).

In this social context, Leon positions himself as the informant. He suspects that his mother will want to know what reward the tooth fairy gave him. Leon, wanting to convey his enthusiasm, goes beyond simply telling the story; he sings and dances it. Here, the song, the gestures, the dance, and the socio-critical meanings behind the letter interanimate one another, providing a joyful environment.

Some scholars argue that music, like pictorial systems, can also be "polysemous," too open for definite interpretation (Barthes, 1977). This is because musical notation systems seem more arbitrary (there is no apparent reason why certain musical notes signify certain moods) (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 1999). Moreover, without lyrics it may be difficult to interpret an author's exact meaning. So without the assemblage he constructed — the social context, the semiotic resources employed together (the artifact in his hand, the song, the gestures), and the ways Leon positioned himself, I might not have understood the meaning he was composing and communicating. For instance, if I had home from work and found Leon singing a gleeful tune, I might believe that Leon simply had a good day at school. However, by assembling the semiotic, the social, and the critical together, I was given a chance to better understand the ways that Leon thinks, communicates, and is shaped by his literacy practices. Additionally, by assembling these three systems together (the semiotic, the social, and the critical), Leon was given more opportunities to express and reshape meaning and to position himself as an expert meaning-maker.

It is important to note that, although a song without lyrics may be considered arbitrary, it is never culturally neutral. Leon and I live in a society where songs that hold quick, constant rhythms and upbeat melodies have the potential to evoke happiness (e.g., "Happy Birthday" or "For He's A Jolly Good Fellow"). As NLS researchers have suggested, semiotic systems impart the potential to frame our experience because we cannot escape the social, historical, and cultural worlds that we inhabit (Janks, 2010; Kress, 2010; Rogers & Winters, 2010).

Case Illustration 5 – July 18th, 2006

Later, Leon realizes that his grandparents might like to know about his missing tooth too. He asks if he can call them.

Me: Both Nana and Bubba are at work. You will have to wait until they get home.

But Leon can't wait. Instead he pulls out a piece of paper and tries to draw a picture of how he lost his tooth. His picture appears cluttered and filled with random pictures and words (e.g. Leon with his toothless grin, a beach-like scene, red marks "to show blood," he explains); a map similar to the one he drew earlier; a little elf-like girl with wings; and a $5.00 bill. Leon huffs with frustration. His eyes well with tears.

Me: What's wrong?

Leon: I don't like it. I don't have enough space. How can I remember everything to tell when I don't have enough space?"

Me: It looks fine. I can see the whole story.

Leon: That's because you were there. Anyways, I don't like it!

And with that comment, Leon rips up the paper and puts it in the trash. I stare at him, confused.

Me: Now what are you going to do?"

Leon: Draw another one. A better one.

Leon sits down again. He picks up a pencil and draws lines, charting out his paper into eight sections. He draws a comic strip (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Leon's Comic Strip
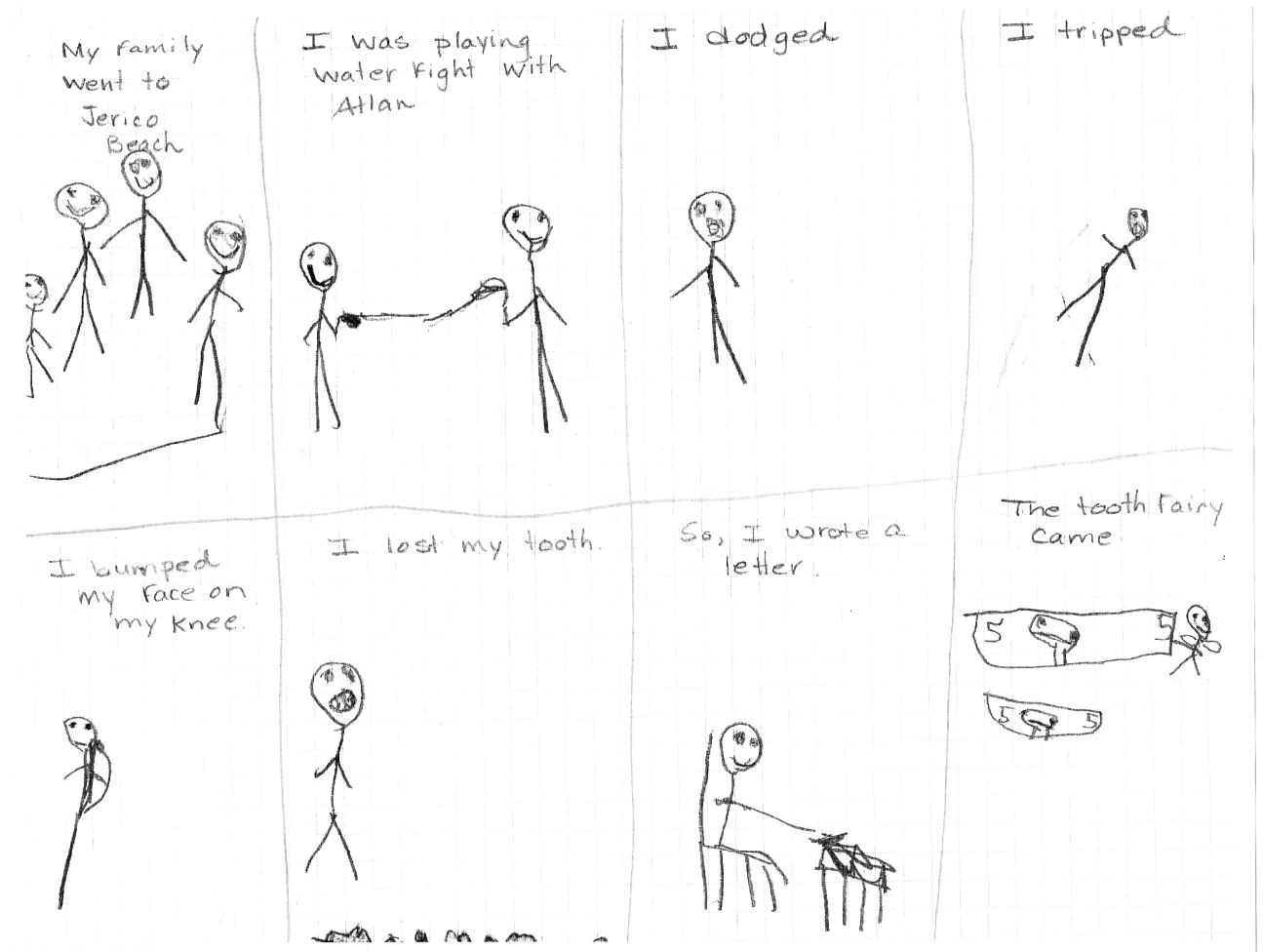
Next, Leon draws the stick figures.

Leon: Can you write the words small enough?

Me: To fit in the frames? Yes, I can help.

He recites, pointing to the different frames:

> *My family went to Jericho Beach.*

> *I was playing water fight with Atlan.*

> *I dodged.*

> *I tripped.*

> *I bumped my face on my knee.*

I lost my tooth.

So, I wrote a letter.

The tooth fairy came.

Feeling satisfied, he places his comic strip beside the phone.

Leon: This will remind me what to tell Nana and Bubba.

Here, more than the other case illustrations, I realized that I was a part of Leon's critical world and that my intentions were also playing a role in our situational context. For example, I really didn't want him to rip up the picture he had drawn, because I wanted to keep it as data. Although Leon probably didn't recognize it at the time (he certainly didn't let on that he did), he assumed a position of power by ripping the paper. By destroying something I wanted, not only did he become empowered, his reaction disempowered me.

Leon decided to create a comic strip rather than a picture. Comics, like maps, interweave linguistic and pictorial semiotic resources. Assembling these two systems together has its advantages. As Eisner (1998) argues, linguistic systems alone are limiting because they tend to "homogenize," or treat members or objects as a particular class. For example, when we say "that is an oak tree," we are suggesting that all oak trees are the same. Pictures, on the other hand, show the distinctness of each particular tree. Additionally, using only linguistic semiotic systems makes it tricky to demonstrate the social distances between people and objects or certain gestured movements (e.g. gaze). Yet pictures, in isolation, have limitations too. For example, because pictorial semiotic systems are organized spatially, not temporally, it is difficult to demonstrate time. Graphic devices such as a clock or the location of the sun, or a sequence of pictures, are sometimes used to convey these temporal factors.

Given that comics recognize the affordances of at least two different semiotic systems, Leon could author more nuanced meanings than he could express with either the picture or the words alone. Thus not only did the comic format offer Leon a new design choice — one that enabled him to assemble multiple semiotic resources together — it positioned him as a legitimate storyteller and gave him a pathway to remember the event.

Individual authors have distinct ways of symbolizing their memories and knowledge; these ways do not always "fit" with institutional expectations for literacy practices (Kendrick, 2005). I wonder how, if Leon were in school, he might negotiate this situation? Would the structures and routines of school allow him to rip up his picture in order to design a comic? And if this weren't the case, what happens to children like Leon — children who rely on multimodal design choices in order to tell/show their stories, to shape their identities, and to participate in their social and cultural worlds? Anne Dyson (1997; 2001) discusses this idea. She argues that writing programs need to shift their emphasis away from writing mechanics to broader emphases on communication, including all the modes it encompasses. All authorship exists in and relies upon other people's contexts (e.g., at schools). As children interact with their social worlds (e.g., through authored designs, negotiations, productions, and disseminations), they call upon and use the semiotic resources available to them, while at the same time positioning themselves within the structured routines and common practices of these environments. Therefore, the author is always internalizing and externalizing his/her own identity and at the same time shaping and participating in larger cultural dialogues. (Holland et al., 1998; Rogers et al., 2010). This means that social and modal

utterances lean on each other in complicated ways and that critical relations of power play a role in shaping individual and group identities.

Discussion

For nearly a week (of the three weeks when data were collected), Leon authored an assemblage of what it might meant to lose a tooth, demonstrating what Eco (1978) and Halliday (1975) suggested decades ago: there are multiple pathways to any one piece of knowledge. Leon fluidly wove webs of meanings using the semiotic systems that were available to him within his social contexts. And at the same time, within each situation he created imagined storylines, assuming and assigning subject positions. This case illustration suggests that even young children have the ability to weave together diverse semiotic, social, and critical systems in rich ways.

Eisner (1998) states that each mode "enables us to experience the world in ways that are distinctive" (p. 15). This is because each semiotic resource holds its own meaning potentials and limitations (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Eisner, 1998; Halliday, 1975; Kress &Van Leeuwen, 2001) and its own processes of meaning making/communication. For example,

> Musical cognition requires the individual to think about, experiment with, and control patterned sound. The ability to write poetically requires skill in the creation of allusion and an ear for the melody of language. Visual art makes demands upon the student's ability to perceive emerging opportunities on the canvas, paper, or clay and to control materials well enough to mediate the possibilities he or she conceives. (Eisner, 1998, p. 17)

When assembled together, semiotic resources, social environments, and power relations have the potential to interanimate one another, whereby meaning becomes layered and re-mixed (Winters & Vratulis, in press). Moreover, when authors are given opportunities to authentically assemble and embed these hybridized meanings into their daily lives — as children do at home — they are given additional opportunities to think through and negotiate their social and critical surroundings.

In addition, authors position themselves and are positioned by the literacies that are embedded in their lives. This positioning is based on the contexts that surround them, including their preferred authorship practices, the materials that are available to them, the audience they are addressing, their personal histories and experiences, distributions of power, etc. (Davies & Harré, 1990; Janks, 2010). The case illustrations demonstrate that, through multiple semiotic resources, Leon sees himself as someone who has the power to offer directions, to persuade, to express his emotions, and to retell/reshow his own story.

Leon's relationships with others and the modes he was using were taken up and re-mixed across social contexts in fluid, recursive ways — in ways that I would argue were "assembled" (Winters, 2009). For instance, Leon used a musical semiotic system (singing a tune) in order to convey his enthusiastic mood. However, this was not the only semiotic resource functioning at the time, for he also used the semiotic resource of gesture (gross motor movements and facial expressions) and the visual semiotic resource (the artifact or the bill itself) to indicate his pleasure. This example demonstrates what some researchers (Baldry and Thibault, 2006; Jewitt and Kress, 2003; Street, 1984) suggest, that when used in social contents, meaning-making is never mono-modal or isolated. This example also shows how Leon draws on his/her experiences and skills from the larger society, constructing and communicating new knowledge by relating to the ideas and meanings that we see he has experienced in the past.

Within each new social context, Leon fluidly assembled modes that blended semiotic systems: linguistic and pictorial (reading a picture book, drawing a map, creating a comic strip), musical and

embodied (singing tunes while dancing with the $5), and linguistic and gestural (facial expressions, ripping up the paper, writing a letter), demonstrating that knowledge is authored in socio-contextual, multimodal, and critical ways—ways that may exceed the structured routines of institutions, which often rely on language alone.

Conclusion

Long before they enter school, young children learn to author semiotic systems in order to make sense of their social and critical worlds. They negotiate and create understandings intuitively and in multimodal ways — through play, drama, song, art, language, numbers, and so on — with natural ease, never fretting about which semiotic resources they will use. Additionally, they chose these modalities by inevitably drawing on their past connections with the world, their present relationships within the socio-cultural context, and with the semiotic systems that are available to them. These rich literacy practices all speak to the reasons that we need to consider authorship more broadly in the lives of young children.

Throughout this paper I have attempted to demonstrate some key ideas. First, educational stakeholders (including parents, administrators, scholars, teachers, etc.) may want to expand their notions of literacy, moving away from narrowly defined ideals which oppose or privilege linguistic forms of communicating, and moving toward the textured and assembled ways that children authentically author in their out-of-school lives. By assembling and rendering meaning through pictorial, linguistic, musical, and digital semiotic systems, Leon was able to generate broader "organizations of meaning" (Siegel, 1995, p. 456) than what he would have been able to do through language alone. And he positioned himself within social contexts as proficient and empowered. Second, meaning making is always socially constructed; knowledge changes within different sociocultural contexts and also when humans employ different semiotic systems. Hearing a story in the home offers different meanings than hearing it within a classroom. Moreover, humans regulate and move between different semiotic systems in fluid and dynamic ways depending on their past experiences, their appropriating of previous dialogues, and their social and cultural contexts. Third, distributions of power are always present in literacy practices and authorship as a whole. Sometimes these critical relations feel flexible and fluid, and at other times they feel more permanent. Regardless, these distributions of power are shaped by or are in response to the social conditions that have been created in the author's past and by the subject positions that authors assume and assign within their situational contexts.

In an ever-developing information economy where meanings are infused with multiple semiotic resources (words, images, gestures, technology, etc.) in dynamic and complex ways, children need broader opportunities to author in order to learn about and participate in their diverse social and cultural worlds. I realize that new ways of defining and practicing authorship will take time to implement in educational environments (both in the ways of in-service training for the educators and in-class implementation time), but I feel it is worth it (something to chew on). I see great potential for education stakeholders to support children in developing various multidimensional ways to think and learn. Broader models of authorship — like this assemblage model — take into account children's social lives, their personal relations and connections, and their authentic ways of creating and communicating meaning.

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Appendix A: Elements of the Multimodality Analysis Frame

- Discursive Event: any occasion where multimodal discourse is authored (designed, negotiated, produced, or disseminated) among participants and within situational contexts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

- Authors make meaning both externally (producing and disseminating) and internally (designing and negotiating): this section describes how the participants "donate" meaning to the texts or storylines that are being created (Barthes, 1977). Meaning contributions apply to both the interpretation and the actualization of meaning.

- Declared Participants: the authors that are visibly creating meaning and contributing to the text within the social contexts (Barthes, 1977).

- Hidden or Withdrawn Participants: the less visible authors that are or may have been involved in donating meaning and contributing to the text within the social contexts (Barthes, 1977; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

- Semiotic Resources: The signs that people use within discourses and situated social contexts to make meaning and to communicate. These signs may be written, spoken, gestured, drawn, and so forth.

- Semiotic Potential: The potential (affordances and limitations) arising from the perceivable properties of a mode or a semiotic resource (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

- Social (inter)actions: the multimodal actions or activities that authors do to construct meaning, including the ways they design, negotiate, produce, and disseminate information within situated contexts. In addition, social (inter)actions include the ways that authors interact with one another, and how their actions relate to the discourses across and within sociocultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1981; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

- Positions Self: How, within a discourse, authors narrate their lives, situating themselves and assuming discursive positions (i.e. socially, culturally, economically, and politically) in visible and hidden ways (Davies & Harré, 1990).

- Positions Others: How, within a discourse, authors narrate their lives, situating others and assigning discursive positions (i.e. socially, culturally, economically, and politically) in both visible and hidden ways (Davies & Harré, 1990).

- Structured Routines and Pathways: understandings about how specific literacy events work, including routes that facilitate and regulate actions, including rules of appropriate behaviours and eligibility — who does/doesn't, can/can't engage in particular activities — and authority (Hamilton, 2000).

Food Chains, Frenemies, and Revenge Fantasies: Relating Fiction to Life in a Girls' Book Club

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Abstract

In this article, we explore the experiences of four girls with reading difficulties who participated in a book club designed to promote critical discussion of sociocultural gendered issues. Using the book Dork diaries: Tales from a NOT-SO- fabulous life*, they connected content in the book to their lives as relates to school "food chains," frenemies, and revenge fantasies. The participants demonstrated the complex ways in which their reading of texts intersects with literary, educational, and societal gender issues, expounding the need for an ongoing problematization of girls' representations and experiences.*

Keywords: book clubs, critical literacy, girls, struggling readers, children's literature, gender

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Introduction

Why are girls represented as "dorks" and boys as "wimpy"? How might girls respond to these categorizations? Do graphic novels hinder or support learning, particularly for those who struggle with reading? How can girls be supported in learning to read as well as in critiquing societal gender issues? These are the questions that drew us to this research. Precipitated by an analysis of diary cartoon novels (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a), and grounded in the literature discussed below, we set out to understand how girls who struggle with reading would respond to a girl empowerment book club, using the lens of "dorks" as an entry point. We believe that it is crucial to support girls in reading for critique as well as for understanding.

In this article, we explore the experiences of four girls with reading difficulties participating in a book club designed to promote critical discussion of sociocultural gendered issues. First, we discuss literature that examines girls' experiences with literacy, the gendered content of children's/young adult books, and the use of book clubs for reading improvement and critical literacy. Next, we detail our case study methodology and briefly present the content of the selected text. Then, we explore our findings of the following themes that emerged from the girls' discussions of the book and their lives: school "food chains," frenemies, and revenge fantasies.

Girls' Literacy, Gendered Texts, and Book Clubs

Girls are increasingly being represented as opponents against boys in a competition for scarce educational resources. Cries of *what about the boys?* abound (Baskwill, Church, & Swain, 2009), while girls continue to be marginalized (Fenwick, 2004; Osler, 2006; Sadker & Sadker, 2005) and often blamed for their own lack of success (Gonick, 2003; Ferri & Connor, 2010). Girls' marginalization is particularly prevalent with respect to learning exceptionalities. For girls who struggle with reading, early and continued interventions are required to support success in the language arts (Sprague & Keeling, 2009). However, girls are often overlooked by their teachers as boys' needs typically receive more attention (Osler, 2006), with the result that boys are more likely to be considered for extra support (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Sadker & Sadker, 2005).

In order to be successful learners, it is critical that students understand texts in deep and meaningful manners that allow them to analyze the content critically with respect to sociocultural issues (Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2009; Zipes, 2002). Such depth of process (and engagement with texts, see Scheffel, 2012) is difficult for many students, especially those who experience reading difficulties (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008; Winzer, 2007). For girls, the difficulties can be even more complex, particularly when an inability to conform to grade-level requirements is attributed solely to personal failure with no consideration of systemic inequities (Ferri & Connor, 2010). If girls behave well, any underperformance is "likely to be overlooked," with boys gaining attention and extra support (Osler, 2006, p. 574). Girls (particularly young women of colour, but also girls in general) "often fall under the radar" when considerations are made with respect to participation in programmes and resources intended for those with learning disabilities (Ferri & Connor, 2010, p. 107). For those who are not necessarily diagnosed with a disability but nonetheless struggle with reading, access to assistance may be even more elusive. Girls' exclusion from school resources is "a form of systemic violence" (Osler, 2006, p. 572) wherein their needs and experiences are often overlooked, leading to their educational marginalization.

Girls' marginalization is present not only in their school experiences, but in the content with which they interact. With respect to children's literature, female characters are typically represented stereotypically and/or tangentially. Children's books more often have plotlines with boys as central characters than girls (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido & Tope, 2011) and typically represent girls and boys in stereotypical ways that privilege boys as active characters and girls as more passive ones (Diekman & Murnen, 2004), demonstrating "a heteronormative reinforcement of traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities" (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a, p. 239). Furthermore, much young adult fiction "contains many representations of young women that reinforce negative body-image stereotypes" (Younger, 2003, p. 46) and privilege girls' looks over other aspects of their identity. Certainly, some books do centre on girls as strong independent main characters, but they are typically represented as individuals who can do anything, if only they stand up to sexism, without an acknowledgement of the social systems that serve to marginalize women (Hubler, 2000). In still other books that ostensibly celebrate the power of girls' friendships, girls are shown to crave, above all else, male companionship and attention (McInnally, 2008). In certain award winning books, girls are represented as "change agents capable of engaging in meaningful critique of societal hierarchies and norms" but "usually did so only after male characters were no longer available, able, or willing to do so" (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011b, p. 899). As Marshall (2004) states, "literature written for children…surface[s] as cultural products tied to a discursive legacy that attempts to regulate and define children's bodies in terms of gender and sexuality" (p. 259).

It is therefore important to problematize the various ways that girls are represented in texts. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate the "readers' role in constructing textual meaning" (Hubler, 2000, p. 90). Children do not simply passively receive messages from texts, but make their own interpretations of stories and characters based on their understandings of the world. Reading, as Cherland (1994) argues, is "a social practice, shaped by gender, race, and class, that is lived in complicated ways in people's lives" (p. 10). For instance, Davies (2003) explores preschool children's responses to feminist fairy tales, discovering that social scripts are more powerful in affecting how they made meaning of stories than the content of the story itself. It is crucial to engage with children and deconstruct the texts that they read, whether the story is stereotypical or feminist, or somewhere in between. Educators can assist students in "'locat[ing] a space' from which they can critique and rewrite familiar but destructive cultural storylines" (Trousdale & McMillan, 2003, p. 26).

Book clubs (also referred to as literature circles or learning clubs) are one way in which children can learn to become better readers (Casey, 2008/2009; Certo, Moxley, Reffitt & Miller, 2010; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). Participation in book clubs can enable readers to use a book's content to engage in a societal critique for women (Twomey, 2007) and explore issues of self-image by connecting texts to real life for girls (Polleck, 2010). Although there is a growing body of research about book clubs as learning environments, there is a lack of literature on book clubs with a gendered sociocultural focus for adolescent girls who are struggling readers (particularly with respect to out-of-school clubs). In fact, in one research project with a school book club (Broughton, 2009), the researcher specifically focused on academically average or above average girls who enjoyed reading due to a belief that they were more likely to maintain commitment to the project and catch up on any work they missed due to their participation. This preference for girls performing well academically demonstrates yet another way in which girls who struggle with reading (and therefore may claim not to enjoy it) are often marginalized. Our

research thus aims to work with girls who struggle with reading to improve their comprehension skills as well as introduce societal issues related to gender and self-empowerment.

Methodology: Book Club Case Study

Our research was focused on exploring the experiences of junior-intermediate grade level girls who experience reading difficulties in a book club designed to promote critical discussion of sociocultural gendered issues. The research followed Merriam's (1998) sociological interpretive case-study format wherein our focus was on a particularistic setting with thick description aiming for heuristic understanding. The unit of analysis of our case was a book club for girls who "struggle" with reading (i.e., demonstrated below grade level decoding and comprehension scores as indicated by parental, teacher and self reports and/or psycho-educational assessments). As such, we believed that these participants may be especially reluctant to read and discuss books, thus missing opportunities to improve their comprehension and critical analysis abilities. Invitations to participate were sent to eight girls from grades 5-8 attending a local reading clinic who met the recruitment requirements. The parents of four girls responded and agreed to participate. The girls' pseudonyms (chosen by the participants) were Aryton (grade 5), Madison (grade 6), Bridget (grade 7), and Taylor (grade 7). All four girls stated that they disliked reading and were "not good" at it.

Each participant was shown three books—*The Skin I'm In* (Flake, 1998/2007), *Ella Enchanted* (Levine, 1997), and *Dork Diaries: Tales from a NOT-SO-Fabulous Life* (Russell, 2009)—from which to choose for discussion in the book club. These three books were narrowed down from a much larger selection of books, by the faculty members, about girls that would suit this age group and provide content we could discuss from a gendered sociological perspective. Each of the girls chose *Dork Diaries: Tales from a NOT-SO-Fabulous Life* (Russell, 2009).

In order to provide an estimate of the girls' overall decoding and comprehension skills and confirm the appropriateness of the selected reading material, the girls completed the San Diego graded word list and graded reading passages contained in the *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory 5th Edition* (Shanker & Cockrum, 2009). They then participated in an individual interview. They were asked for their responses to short poems about girls, to explain their thoughts about reading, and to describe their everyday life as a girl. The book club took an activity-based approach, designed to engage readers in the text, prompt discussion, and promote reading enjoyment (e.g., reading together, reviewing/predicting/summarizing, drama and role plays, script writing, diagramming and imagery, reader response journals, critical questioning, dialogue, film viewing). In between sessions, the participants completed reading on their own (supported by audio-recordings of the book as needed) and engaged in brief response exercises. The exit interview entailed providing a second response to the poems and discussing their experiences in the book club. In these ways, our approach demonstrated the importance of acknowledging and integrating multimodalities and multiliteracies in learning (Rowsell & Walsch, 2011). For us, literacy takes many forms and should be connected to social context; it is not simply about decoding and basic comprehension. Analysis was completed using Merriam's (1998) case study application of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method. Researchers individually coded the data for themes, than met for collaborative analysis sessions, agreeing on the final themes.

Our case was a unique one, as it was constructed entirely by the researchers. We wanted to create as secure a place as possible for the participants to engage in reading, dialogue about

the content of the book, create meaning, and explore sociocultural gender issues. (See Lane, Taber, & Woloshyn (2012) for an extended discussion of the ways in which we negotiated our various roles as facilitators, advocates for girl empowerment, and researchers). The book club was held in an off-site multi-use campus building in the evening hours, when we were frequently the only occupants. We had access to a large comfortable meeting room and a kitchen. For each session, we brought snacks that related to the content of the book (in one case, hosting a spaghetti dinner), as well as played games and facilitated ice-breakers to help the girls become comfortable.

Participants were encouraged to relate the book to their lives by exploring text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. The book club was not intended to be an extension of schooling, but a created space for learning and promoting girl empowerment. By providing the opportunity for the participants to bond with each other, create a level of mutual trust, share thoughts, and critically discuss "being a girl," we intended to not only "research" but facilitate, in a Freirean (2000; see also hooks, 1994) way, with a gendered reading of the word and the world.

Dork Diaries is a cartoon novel presenting a mixture of prose and images that focus on the life of Nikki, a working-class scholarship student who is a "dork" at a private school. She encounters a clique of popular, rich, "mean girls" led by MacKenzie who she "hates" while at the same time wishing she were part of their group. The book centres on her developing relationship with two other girls, her crush on a boy, and their conflicts with the mean girls. (See Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a, for an extended analysis of this and other diary cartoon novels that explores representations of girls as "dumb" and "dorky" and boys as "wimpy".)

Findings and Discussion

Throughout the book club sessions, the girls focused on the popularity of the rich, pretty, fashionable mean girls, paradoxically condemning them while coveting their status. They discussed school "food chains" based on hierarchies of popularity, frenemies (where enemies were also coveted friends), and revenge fantasies as a way of coping with bullying and exclusion.

"Food Chains"

Madison introduced the idea of school "food chains" – a concept that resonated strongly with the group and became a main theme of their subsequent discussions. The conversation began after reading a section of the book where Nikki was tripped by one of MacKenzie's mean girl friends in the cafeteria. The image in the book is of a map of the cafeteria, with groups of students segregating themselves at various tables. After reading this section, we asked the girls to collaboratively create their own representation of their schools using cut-outs (e.g., of stick figures, sports equipment, tables) and markers (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Representation of school areas

In explaining their diagrams, Madison discussed how most people "hang out" in separate groups. Where you sit depends on "where your status is." She pointed to the popularity graph she drew (centre right of photo), calling it a "food chain." (Note: The book club she is discussing is not the book club for struggling readers explored here, but a school book club.) She stated:

> This as you can see are the jocks, top of the food chain, as I said, not the brightest of the bunch but at the top for some reason. Cheerios [cheerleaders] …also known as part of the dating group…known to be the second number of the food chain… Now, this is the art people. They're kind in the mixture of both, and…this is the book club... the people who stay after school and come early ... and stay in recesses to help teachers and also reads books 24/7, basically. And this is me [down near the bottom]. Mostly people when this [move down the food chain] happens, you don't really have to worry about the popularity thing, but you might wanna watch out for the jocks. The jocks mostly have their attention to A) annoy you or B) call you names, or 3) kinda play a few pranks on you, such as maybe tripping you during gym class or maybe making rumors about you.

What is particularly interesting is how Madison specifically rates the jocks (boys) above the cheerleaders (girls) at the same time as she wonders about the specific attributes of the jocks that afford them popularity. She highlights the unfairness of the rating and explains that being near the bottom means that others "pick on you." Madison believes that she does not fit well into any category, necessitating that she "try to hang out" with different groups. In relating the food

chain to the characters in *Dork Diaries*, the participants positioned MacKenzie near the top of the food chain, in the "Cheerios" category (even though she is not a cheerleader in the book). They equated gaining popularity with moving up the food chain, with the goal of becoming MacKenzie (or at least a member at the top of the chain). Her response demonstrates not only how popularity is often equated in books to conforming to various types of masculinity and femininity (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a; McInally, 2008; Younger, 2003), in her case with girls as cheerleaders and boys as jocks, but demonstrates the need to explore these representations with a societal critique (Hubler, 2000; Kwan, 2010; Trousdale & McMillan, 2003).

In her exit interview, Madison again highlighted the importance of the food chain stating, "The food chain is something that everyone needs to know…. If you don't, you're gonna get trampled." Furthermore, the chain is viewed as sacred and unchangeable. "The head cheerleader will always date the head football player. It's basically like a tradition, okay. If that doesn't happen, it's like burning the Canadian flag to 'em." In order to protect oneself and survive, "You gotta stick together with [your own] group." With the exception of Taylor, who claimed that students in her school "all kind of get mixed up together," the other participants concurred with Madison's analysis of the "food chain" and claimed that one existed in their schools as well.

Taylor expressed surprise at Madison's personal placement of herself on the food chain. When questioned about the episode in her exit interview, Taylor replied, "It was like, 'What? What is she doing?'" She continued, "I didn't think she'd like share all that information about where she is in that little bar graph." We believe that it was in these sorts of discussions in the book club, where the girls shared their daily lives and expressed their different perspectives and experiences that they began to challenge the food chain itself by becoming friends. Madison stated she had "kinda tried to sort them [the girls in the club] out into their own little groups" during the first session, but was unable to do so, explaining, "They're [the group] kinda moving." Although they each had different interests and went to different schools, the girls formed a collaborative group where each girl could feel welcomed, accepted, and belonged. Madison's revelation and Taylor's response demonstrates that the girls were willing to engage in difficult conversations that made them vulnerable, helping to bring them closer together (hooks, 1994).

In part of her response to a question about her favourite part of the book club, Taylor stated, "We got to do fun stuff and learn cool things about each other." Bridget was originally nervous about who else might be in the club, explaining, "I didn't really know what was gonna happen" because "some people are like mean." She said that if there were mean people in the group, she would not be "talkative. I wouldn't give my answers." Bridget was very vocal and enthusiastic in the club, demonstrating her comfort with the other girls. There was no food chain, so to speak. Initially, as Bridget explained, "everybody was like quiet. They wouldn't talk to other people. And by the end have everybody talking like they knew each other for like 20 years." Gradually, the girls "weren't scared to be themselves with their comfort with each other increasing across the sessions." Aryton described herself normally as a "tag-along" who did not really fit in. But in book club, "I got to be my own person" who she described as "awesome." The girls created their own niche where they formed their own allies and bonds, accepted each other, felt as if they belonged, and did not expect perfection. Ironically, they were enjoying reading a book about "mean girls" while demonstrating their own fear of being victimized (as "dorks") by real people emulating the mean girl phenomena that has created and villianized (Gonick, 2003, 2004, 2006) a contemporary embodiment of girlhood. (See Taber & Woloshyn,

2011a, for a further discussion of the ways in which the concept of "mean girls" must be problematized, particularly as relates to young adult fiction.)

Frenemies

The girls' relation of food chains in the text to their own everyday lives, as well as with respect to their own friendships in the book club, is paralleled by their discussion of frenemies, which are, as Bridget explained, "friends that aren't really friends." Madison expanded, stating, "They're basically your enemies but they're kinda your friends. From time-to-time, they're your friends, and from time-to-time, you completely dislike them." The concept of frenemies was most relevant in context of mean girls, who are admired for being popular, pretty, and rich at the same time as they are despised for their nastiness and privilege. Taylor characterized the mean girls in the book as "rude, obnoxious, selfish, and spoiled." Madison said a mean girl "makes fun of peoples' clothes, what things that they like, who they hang out with, basically everything." Bridget stated, "MacKenzie thinks she's all that." The characters of Nikki and MacKenzie conformed to gendered scripts common in literature, with girls presented as victims *or* perpetrators, good *or* evil, deserving of punishment *or* pity (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a; Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Marshall, 2004; Parsons, 2004); in short, as mean girls or dorks. Yet, despite her negative characteristics, MacKenzie is popular. However, the girls see the popularity as being tenuous and somewhat phony, qualifying that her friendships are based on others' desires not be bullied. In answer to the question, "Why is MacKenzie so popular?, the girls explained:

Madison: Because she keeps on making fun of everybody else, so they wanna be her friend to feel good, and also she has all of these expensive clothes and they're thinking that if we're friends with her, we'll get something out of it...

Bridget: I think because they don't wanna be bullied, so they're her friends so she doesn't be mean to them....

Taylor: I think they might want to be with her because she won't be bullied, like people won't be bullied if they hang out with her.

The girls perceived MacKenzie's popularity to be based on her socioeconomic status, appearance, and position at the top of the food chain rather than her true character or identity. Nonetheless, for three of the four participants, MacKenzie was their favourite character. For instance, Aryton stated that MacKenzie was her favourite, "Because she was mean. I like the mean girls mostly….They always get their way….she's rich." However, at the same time, she acknowledges, unprompted, "That's not right though." Interestingly, Aryton stated that she related more to Nikki, but clearly would rather be MacKenzie. Bridget wanted to be MacKenzie as well, in order to be popular and respected. For Madison, both Nikki and MacKenzie are "awesome" although MacKenzie was "born awesome, like William Shakespeare."

The girls also recognized the falseness of these friendships. For instance, Madison believed that MacKenzie's awesomeness comes from her life of privilege, stating "MacKenzie has a little bit higher advantage with her life, with money." "She thinks she's perfect because she has a big house, a big bedroom, a big bathroom." The girls recognized that real friends were not frenemies, but those who cared for and accepted each other for who they were. In their exit

interviews, Bridget and Taylor commented that they felt they could be themselves in the club and that others could as well. Aryton perhaps most directly addressed the concept of frenemies (without using the word itself) when she compared her friends at home with those in the book club. She said she was relieved that no one in the book club was "like my friends" because they "tell me what to do." The girls in the book club "were nice" and she did not "get bossed around"; they "didn't say anything" when she made mistakes or "said wrong things." Being able to be oneself was identified as a key aspect of being friends, not frenemies. The structure of the book club facilitated these relationships, in particular the fact that it was all-girls in a respectful environment (Polleck, 2010; Smith, 2000; Twomey, 2007).

Nonetheless, the concept of frenemies was alluring to the girls, as was getting revenge on those who bully you. Taylor's favorite character was Nikki's little sister, Brianna, because she "kicked MacKenzie," demonstrating that she was not afraid of MacKenzie nor was she lured into idolizing her. Valuing Brianna's violent response is an example of the revenge fantasies that the girls often expressed in relation to discussions of how they could respond to individuals similar to MacKenzie. This response also further demonstrates how the girls' initially believed that the only way to stop their victimization was to become a bully themselves.

Revenge Fantasies

When asked how they would respond to MacKenzie's bullying and intimidating behaviours, the girls spoke about the need to "fight fire with fire" (Aryton). Specifically, the girls focused on giving her a taste "of her own medicine":

> …ask some people who are getting teased by her a lot and instead of giving compliments… everyone's saying, "Oh, I like your shoes, I like your hair,"…so what you can say to MacKenzie is, "Got a new haircut," and if she says "yes" or "no," then you say, "It wasn't a compliment, it was a suggestion" (Madison).

Bridget continues, "After she starts feeling like us, we'd tell her, 'How do you like that?' That's how you've been treating us." Another solution suggested by Bridget was to:

> Go over to MacKenzie and say, "Hey! Can I talk to you for a second?" And then say, "Close your eyes," and make sure everybody's watching, and you walk her right into the boys' change room and say, "Oh, MacKenzie, I'm so sorry," and lock the door and make sure she can't come out.

The girls equated standing up for oneself with putting others' down, perceiving a direct relationship between meanness and popularity. None of the girls suggested befriending MacKenzie. While they acknowledged the unfairness of the popularity food chain, they nonetheless condoned the use of meanness in order to survive and possibly advance in the chain. One of the aspects of MacKenzie that they admired was her ability to be mean while retaining her popularity, obtaining what she wanted, and being secure in her own group. The revenge fantasies appeared to make the girls feel empowered in situations where they felt relatively powerless. Mirroring the ways in which the book represented characters as mean and powerful or nice and powerless (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a), they choose to fantastically respond as the former over the latter; they would rather be characterized as a mean girl than a dork.

However, when asked if they thought their strategies would be effective in a real-life scenario, the girls acknowledged that they were not likely to actually engage in such behaviours, "because then you get in trouble because she'll [a mean girl] blame it on you, and everybody believes her" (Bridget). The revenge fantasies appeared to be a first, perhaps knee-jerk, response

which became more reasoned with further discussion. For instance, in her exit interview, Bridget related an experience that had happened to her that day, where her parents called the school to address a bullying incident that helped resolve the situation. This juxtaposition of responses demonstrates the importance of providing space for discussion and critical analysis of the content of children's literature (Polleck, 2010; Trousdale, & McMillan, 2003).

In *Dork Diaries*, Nikki's grandmother tells her about the importance of choosing to "be a chicken or a champion" (241), regardless of the circumstances. When discussing these ideas, the girls initially defined being a champion as taking any sort of action against a mean girl, regardless of its appropriateness. Bridget explained, "A chicken is like somebody that isn't brave, and a champion is somebody that is brave." Her definition of a brave champion was originally someone who would "flip out of her head" in response to meanness. When asked in subsequent book club sessions if there was a way to be a champion without being mean, the girls described some specific strategies they could carry out, including avoiding mean girls, laughing off their bullying, making friends, standing up for others, being empathetic, and fostering confidence in oneself. For instance, in response to a possible dilemma the group was discussing about playing a prank on a new girl at school, Bridget responded that a champion would remember what is was like being a new girl, and should say to her friends, "I don't really think that's mature because I was the new girl before and so were you."

Perhaps the most insightful (and unsolicited) response to a chicken or champion dilemma was made by Taylor in the second last group session. The group was watching *Sydney White* (Robinson & Nussbaum, 2007), a movie about a working-class girl raised by her father who joins a university sorority of rich mean girls, eventually moving out to live with the "seven dorks" next door, who turn out to be her real friends. Taylor brings up the concept of chickens and champions in response to the final scene where Sydney gives a speech to run for Class President. All the dorks of the university (i.e., anyone who did not fit into a stereotypical rich, good-looking, popular group) support her, validating Sydney's decision not to quit and not to conform. Taylor then connects the plot to Nikki's decision at the end of Dork Diaries to leave her school in order to avoid embarrassment and the mean girls. She explains:

> But I think for *Dork Diaries*, Nikki, at the end, I don't even think she was a champion because she was just gonna give up, and go to her old school…. She kind of was a chicken, but then it was kind of luck that made it all better.

As the book club progressed, the girls displayed understandings that revenge fantasies were fun, but not overly helpful. They concluded that, although often difficult, champions would advocate for themselves but not at the expense of others. This is where the girls began to deconstruct the meaning of "power," commencing to refute the idea, so prevalent in children's literature, that girls need to be mean in order to be assertive. Their responses to the book demonstrated a critical ability to connect *Dork Diaries* to their own lives and to the world in which they live.

Conclusion

The three main themes that emerged from our analysis of the data demonstrate the complex ways in which the girls negotiate their everyday lives. They quite astutely described hierarchies of popularity, friendship, and bullying that reveal an awareness of the ways in which power operates in schools. The in-depth nature of the book club case study format facilitated the reading of *Dork Diaries* as a springboard into discussion of the girls' lives. When asked during the initial interview to describe their life as a girl, the girls talked generally and with very little

detail about going to school and playing with friends; as the book club progressed, the discussions became more in-depth and nuanced. The structure of the book club enabled the researchers to build rapport with the girls and the girls, in turn, to build rapport with each other, thus creating a trusted space where they could share freely.

The book was used as a lens to explore the girls' lives, beginning from a distal, impersonal position moving into a more proximal personal one. For instance, when first directly asked whether they saw connection between their own lives and the book all the girls responded in the negative. However, in group discussions, they continually provided examples that linked the text to their lives (e.g., the school food chain). Gradually they seemed to come to understand that the context, plot, and characters in the book did illuminate their own lives, giving the group the opportunity to critique food chains, frenemies, and revenge fantasies. In each case, they first validated and then critiqued these aspects of their lives, moving away from an unquestioned acceptance of meanness in the food chain.

The *Dork Diaries* series has, as Smith (2000) describes in relation to the general genre of teen romance, a "formulaic structur[e] with [relatively] predictable solutions." It similarly "involves the careful attention to the style, color, and detail of female appearance and fashion" (p. 31). It is for this reason that it is so important to deconstruct books' content, so readers can actively engage with and critique it. Nikki and MacKenzie are very focused on appearance, perceiving that their looks will result in their popularity and success, mirroring social messages that girls and women receive, wherein "from cradle to grave, attractiveness correlates with desirable social outcomes" (Kwan, 2010, p. 146). For Nikki, true friendship ultimately trumps superficial frenemy friendship focused on appearance and popularity. However, this focus on friendship in the final pages of the book can easily be overshadowed by the book's message throughout that mean pretty girls always win. Furthermore, it continues to pathologize and malign "mean girls" as without any good qualities. The book club group fell into this trap as well, demonizing MacKenzie. Only with explicit prompts were the girls able to consider MacKenzie as a complex versus a simplistic antagonist. In the book, the mean girls' group is presented in ways similar to Gonick's (2004) discussion of popular understandings of mean girls in real life, "as almost cult-like organizations" (396), with MacKenzie's cult needing to be deconstructed here.

As we found in our research exploring the girls' interactions with *Dork Diaries*, "not only are differences between girls and the particular circumstances of their lives glossed over, but girls' layered and complex expressions of identity, power, and resistance are collapsed into certain ubiquitous meanings of girlhood with an ever expanding reach" (Gonick, 2004, p. 397). Girls are represented and understood as either unpopular, dorky, and working-class victims or as popular, pretty, and rich bullies (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011a). As Gonick (2006) explains, girls are often positioned "as simultaneously empowered and 'in crisis'" (p. 18) wherein "the[ir] future is thought to be securable only through creating and enhancing powerful identities acquirable by consuming the right products, having the right look, and resolving difficulties and problems by following the guidelines for self-improvement found in self-help books" (p. 19).

In short, success is attained by becoming MacKenzie, which is who three of the four girls in the book club wanted to be. In reflection, it is little surprise that they would choose a position of power as opposed to one without. Fortunately, we were able to begin to problematize these representations, exploring the social construction of girlhood, in reality and in fiction. We were successful in promoting girl empowerment, helping the girls discuss the gendered aspects of their lives which they may have previously taken for granted. While we do expect that they will

continue to struggle with food chains, frenemies, and revenge fantasies, we are hopeful that they will question them as opposed to taking them for granted.

The book club also had an unexpected and pleasant outcome for us as researchers. We were able to create strong bonds with the girls and they in turn, with each other. That the girls were involved in creating a secure space to be themselves, as girls who struggle with reading, was powerful for them, confirming the importance and need to create other such similar environments. Our research demonstrates the possibilities that are created by using a book club format, building on similar research/reading formats (Polleck, 2010; Smith, 2000; Twomey, 2007), for not only reading comprehension but critical literacy, with a focus on a gendered sociocultural critique.

In fact, each of the girls wanted to continue with the book club after the final session. While we initially had no intention of continuing with the book club, we were convinced to by the girls' enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment. We entered into a second phase of the research where we engaged in reading a more complicated book with larger social issues (*The Hunger Games* by Collins, 2008), providing the girls with even greater responsibility for reading and leading sessions. We thank Aryton, Bridget, Madison, and Taylor for working with us, sharing their lives, taking risks, and helping us learn about their experiences.

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Honouring Roles:
The Story of a Principal and a Student

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Abstract

The importance of the teacher-student relationship in educational practice is well established, as is the idea of principal leadership in relationship to staff. Even though principal leadership is regarded as a factor in student success, the principal's effect is usually assumed to take place via the teaching staff. There is an absence of research about the "lived experience" of direct principal-student relationships that shed lights on the ways in which these relationships play a role in student success and principal transformation. This paper presents two narratives written about a particular set of principal-student interactions experienced by the researcher (principal) and participant (student). The analysis uses a narrative inquiry approach to explore both the individual and collective meanings of this principal-student relationship. The stories and their derived meanings have the potential to enliven and influence educational practice as they explore the subtleties of the principal-student relationship.

Keywords: principal-student relationships; lived experience; narrative inquiry

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I always felt you were completely the authority figure, you know the person who runs the school who is a
little scary, a little bit scary at least. [But], I think that for once in my life there was actually someone who
listened to me when I spoke, believed me and could hold my story safe.

Anique at age 21 years

Introduction

The primacy of the teacher-student relationship as critically important to the educative process
has been explored from many different orientations and perspectives (Freire, 2003; Noddings,
1984, 1992; Pianta, 1999; Purpel & McLaurin, 2004; Shor, 1992; Stipek, 2006). In general,
positive teacher-student relationships are believed to be a necessary substrate for effective
teaching and learning to occur (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Bondy & Ross, 2008).

Various theoretical perspectives support the centrality of the teacher-student relationship.
Some models of education have suggested that the teacher-student relationship is a nested
influence that affects other spheres of a child's interactions with the world (Bronfenbrenner,
1979). Other learning theories have placed the teacher in a significant relation to the student as
someone who scaffolds the growth of the learner (Vygotsky, 1978), while yet others have
suggested that teacher-student relationships are central to notions of student engagement (Stipek,
2006). While an increasing concern for the centrality of the teacher-student relationship is
apparent, how this relationship is conceptualized, theorized, and practiced, varies considerably.
For some, the critical aspect of the relationship is what happens "between" the teacher and
student (Hartrick Doane, 2002).

Regardless of the theoretical perspective through which one studies the teacher-student
relationship, it seems clear that for teachers, being in a relationship with students through their
learning experiences is significant.

The Relational Nature of Education

The teacher-student relationship has also been thought of as a relational connectedness. Goodlad
(1990) proposed that teaching is inherently a moral enterprise and that the kind and quality of
relationship that occurs between teachers and students profoundly influences what is learned and
how it is learned. Relational connectedness describes a basic bond of the relationship such that,
as human beings we live to relate; connectivity being basic to our humanity (Bennett, 1997,
2003; Palmer 1998).

While researchers are increasingly exploring what is meant by positive teacher-student
relationships and why they are important, little is known about the effects of principal-student
relationships on student success despite the fact that principals are seen as influencing student
achievement both directly through principal leadership and indirectly through the quality of
relationships they have with all of the members of the school community (Leithwood & Jantzi,
1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; McEwan, 2002). Testimony from principals and students about
the formative nature of positive principal-student interactions is certainly less common than
accounts of teacher-student interaction.

Narrative as Inquiry

The paper employs a narrative inquiry research approach, one in which researchers write about their experiences and then discuss their understandings of those experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative research is, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Montero and Washington (2011) contend, about understanding experience as lived and told in stories that capture unquantifiable personal and human dimensions of life. Narrative inquiry has value because the re-storying of experience has the potential to create a new sense of meaning and understanding, not only for the author of the narrative, but also for others who work in similar professional contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling to explore the complexity of life from a human-centered perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience. Clandinin and Connelly noted that we are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is, in fact, the study of the ways humans experience the world (Van Manen, 1990).

Rather than selecting randomly from the many possible principal-student interactions that I lived through as a school principal, I chose to use a "critical events" narrative inquiry approach to determine the specific narrative that is highlighted below, and to inform the process of its analysis (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In "critical events" approaches to narrative inquiry, one looks at incidents that are particularly inspired or charged with meaning or nuance; events become critical when they have the right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Ultimately, as Webster and Mertova posited, what makes an event critical is the impact it has had on the storyteller. This approach to narrative inquiry allows the narrative to function as both phenomenon and method (Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Challenges to Narrative Inquiry Approaches to Research

While some might argue that narratives are socially constructed and therefore only forms of fiction, and as such not worthy instruments for research and/or learning, the fictive nature of narratives does not invalidate them (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). There is no evidence that narratives are less valid than the facts and opinions individuals write on surveys; we make claims for who we are and who we would like to be in the stories we tell and how we tell them (Aranda & Street, 2001; Mischler, 1999).

Thus, in telling this story I acknowledge that my narrator's knowledge, like that of other individuals, is constrained by my own historicity (Hall, 1999). Accordingly, in order to broaden both the reader's and my understanding of the story, I enlisted the other subject of the narrative as co-creator. While one person can recount a dialogue with some accuracy, two people's accounts of the same phenomenon create a view that gives the story a multi-dimensional view of a shared reality. Respecting that "different perspectives bring different skills and values to the

table" (Haller & Kleine, 2001), this paper is strengthened significantly by the presence of the student's perspective.

Although my eight-year-long story of being a principal contains recollections of hundreds of students, only one story was chosen for the purposes of challenging, enlivening, and exploring the discourse around this underrepresented set of relationships in schools. The story that is presented for analysis explores the nature of one pivotal set of principal-student interactions that occurred throughout one academic year that can be presented in a manner that both retains anonymity for the student and illustrates the tone and texture of the relationship, so that the underlying relational ethics become unearthed.

To protect the student, pseudonyms have been given to all persons mentioned in the narrative except for the author. In 2004, the University of Manitoba's Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board approved a study using a narrative inquiry approach to explore a series of stories of shared experience written by the author and the narratives' subjects, specifically two former students and a teacher who had remained in contact with the author after his departure from the school. These narratives are drawn from that study.

Story One: A Student Named Anique

Before the first day of school, I tried to read through all of the new students' files with a hope that I might discover something that would help me feel like I knew something about each of them. This habit was based on the rational belief that I might glean something meaningful, but it was probably a desperate maneuver meant to make me feel a bit empowered in my role. To be aware of each and every student at my school would be to somehow know my school thoroughly. And a principal who knew his school thoroughly had a chance at being a good principal.

There was also a social dimension to my scouring the files in advance of the academic year. I searched to find any background information that might stand out so that when I met a new student in the hallway I would be able to say something, just anything, about the adolescent I had just encountered.

I did not remember hearing much about Anique until around mid-September. When I had opened Anique's file in August, I was drawn to the fact that she had begun kindergarten as "Anique Daigneault," but in fourth grade had become "Anique Wilson." The note in her file stated that she had taken the name of her adoptive parents, "Carol and Fred Wilson" at age ten. All this information told me was that during the four years of school from kindergarten to Grade four she had been "Daigneault," but was now "Wilson." Any clues pointing to why and how that significant change for a child had happened were absent. The file also contained a recent picture of Anique. While that information was helpful, it was a series of telephone calls and a year of spontaneous conversations that would imprint Anique in my mind and heart, and develop my understanding of her complex lived experience in a way a file probably never could. While my interaction with her did not lessen my understanding of the necessity of roles for both principals and students, it did fundamentally change my understanding of the way students and principals can be mutually implicated in the profound process that is learning.

The first phone call I received was from a woman who introduced herself as Anique's "great aunt" but admitted a few minutes into our conversation that she was not really an aunt but

rather a friend of the family. In reality, she might have been best described as a benefactor of Anique's father. The conversation was more of a monologue focused on convincing me that Anique's father was not as bad as some people had made him out to be. This was not hard for me to accept since I knew nothing about Anique's father. She explained how she had known him, for a while, before he went to jail. She tried to describe how he was not to blame for all of the suffering Anique experienced in her life even though, Anique's aunt insisted, Anique's mother's side of the family blamed him for everything.

Next, she inquired about how Anique was doing at school and then asked if it was okay if she told Anique's father about her progress and asked if she could tell him to call me, to talk about Anique. I am not sure why I agreed to the request, but I told her to tell him that he could call me.

Not long after that call ended, I had Anique's file pulled to re-read it. There was nothing in it about her father or mother. Later that afternoon, I had Anique paged to my office and I explained to her that I had had an unusual phone conversation with her "Auntie Payette," who I knew was not really her aunt. I attempted to explain the conversation and how the woman seemed intent on brokering some contact between Anique and her father through me.

After I uttered that last sentence Anique's eyes grew wide with recognition. She raised her head, her eyebrows rose up on her forehead and Anique said she did know who this lady was. The woman had taken in her father when he was having troubles. Anique said her adoptive parents would never permit her to talk to her father or even get letters from him, and that she had been told there was a court order to prevent contact between them.

I admitted to Anique that I did not know what was going on and that I was most certainly feeling very confused by all of this. I told her that I thought that I should contact the Wilsons and tell them about the phone conversation and ask them to help explain it.

Anique's look suddenly changed to one of fear as she begged me not to call the Wilsons. She said she had been in contact with her father through her two older siblings. If the Wilsons found out, she would be in serious trouble. She insisted that if I told the Wilsons her life would be considerably more difficult.

I looked at Anique and saw what looked like the seeds of panic. I reluctantly agreed to keep the conversation with Auntie Payette to myself, but only for the time being. I had no real idea what I was agreeing to and hoped that I had not just committed one of those career-limiting moves I had been warned against ever making.

Anique went on to provide me with some details about her life. Her mother was in an institution, incapable of functioning on her own and had been there for some time. A real aunt and uncle, named Carol and Fred Wilson, had adopted her when she was about 10 years old after she had spent a few years in care, a foster home, where she had been placed after her father had hurt her and her two older brothers. I gathered from this that Anique had been placed with the Wilsons due to a breach of a standard of care. But, I also knew it was, more accurately reflected in what she termed as, "neglect and just some other stuff."

I knew immediately that I did not want to know what "some other stuff" might mean but got the sense from the way she said the word "stuff" that it was something dreadfully painful for a child to endure.

Anique despised Carol and Fred. According to her, they made her change her name and move in with them, very far away from her brothers. The Wilsons did not like any of her friends

and they spied on her all of the time. She was placed under house arrest for no reason. The Wilsons never trusted her and worst of all they could never find anything good in her, she said. No matter what she might accomplish they would remind her that she was only one step away from her next mistake and ruining her life.

When that conversation ended I sent Anique back to her classroom, too embarrassed to admit that I could not really make much sense of it. While I had grown up in a hectic home, and could empathize with some of her struggles, trying to identify with the depth of pain that Anique was expressing was beyond what I understood.

Over the following few weeks I got to know Anique and, unfortunately, I got to know the Wilsons better as Anique's school life became increasingly tumultuous. Anique was caught breaking school rules and was increasingly getting into trouble with staff by being rude, belligerent, and defiant. I had to call the Wilsons to explain why she was receiving so many detentions and alert them to the fact that if nothing changed, she would certainly be suspended from the school and might possibly be expelled.

Each time I spoke to one of the Wilsons, I heard how they had tried their best with Anique but nothing was working. They had raised their own children who had turned out just fine, but Anique was just one problem after another. Something was wrong with Anique they suggested and they confided that they were at their wits end in knowing what to do about Anique. Did I have any suggestions to offer, in how to deal with an out-of-control teenager?

I fumbled through the sad excuses that I had no teenagers and I was not in a position to offer parenting advice. I knew what do with Anique at school, I would say, but I could not tell them how to raise their adopted daughter.

Sometime before Thanksgiving I received another phone call from someone else wanting to know how Anique was doing. It was a real aunt this time who had heard that Anique might be suspended or even expelled. She was concerned about how Anique was handling things, but was also calling because she hoped that I would not expel Anique. She asked me how well I knew Anique. I replied that I was getting to know her a little bit better each day.

She went on to confirm much of what I had heard from Anique. After the Wilsons adopted her at age 10, they had moved her far away from her childhood home, changed her surname, forced her to take their religion and severed as many ties to her former self as they could. The Wilsons were trying to distance Anique physically, emotionally and psychologically from her father and his family. The Wilsons, who were on Anique's mother's side of the family, blamed her father for all of Anique's suffering and her mother's illnesses.

I wondered as I listened how Anique made sense of any of this. At age thirty-four I was having a difficult time trying to make sense of Anique's life. After my reassurance that I would not just give up on Anique, the conversation ended.

I did not bother to call Anique down after this phone call, as I did not know what to say to her. However, I called her to my office a few days later, just before Thanksgiving when I received another phone call, this one from Anique's father asking about her wellbeing.

"Hello Mr. Cranston? We have never met, but I am Anique Wilson's father, Serge Daigneault. If it is not too much trouble I was wondering if you could tell me how Anique is doing? How is she doing in French? What are her friends like? Is she behaving herself?" he asked.

I never expected a call from Anique's father, not really, even though I had said I was willing to receive one. As I listened it seemed as if he was genuinely interested in Anique. But, I did not really know. I wondered if my thoughts were nothing but a reflection of a hope that I held that a father might be concerned about his daughter. For a moment, I caught myself thinking about my three children and hoped that when I spoke about them that people would think I loved them.

I was short in my replies: "Fine;" "Fine;" "Fairly nice;" and "Most of the time." The phone call only lasted a few minutes and my brief answers seemed to suffice, or maybe he sensed the caution in the tone of my voice to offer him anything more.

Mr. Daigneault ended the phone call by asking if he could write to me and asked if I might be willing to write back to let him know how Anique was doing at school. I was hesitant to agree but said I thought it would be okay for me to receive the letters. Then, surprisingly, Mr. Daigneault asked if he could send me photographs of Anique from when she was little, before everything had happened.

I was not sure what I was supposed to say. It did seem odd, worrisome even, that he wanted to send me baby pictures. However, I also felt uncomfortable flatly denying his offer, and so I agreed.

He never sent any pictures. He never wrote to me. He never phoned me again. I never heard from Serge Daigneault after that single telephone call.

Over the remainder of the year, Anique would come by my office to talk about once or twice a week. Anique would walk up to my office entrance between classes, stop and ask if I was busy. If I said "no," she would bite her bottom lip on one side, frown a little and ask if we could talk. She would come in, sit down, drop her head a bit forward so that her bangs covered her eyes, and begin to talk.

Sometimes she talked about her father. Anique would say that she felt that he was pushing her to let him back into her life. She would say she did not know what to do with her mixed-up feelings towards him. I would ask her what she thought she wanted to do and she would reply that she was not ready to let him back into her life, at least not yet. She said, "she had totally forgiven him," but was not sure she was ready to have him back in her life. All I knew to do was to encourage Anique to listen to herself. I was hesitant to counsel her, but thought that it was important for her to learn to listen carefully to her thoughts as she considered making decisions.

I would almost always end these conversations by telling Anique that she should not push herself, in terms of relationships, any faster than she was comfortable with and that she should not beat herself up with the fact that she felt torn about her feelings towards her father.

From time-to-time we talked about her friendships at school. More than once I told Anique that she seemed to be so needy for affection that she would become involved with anyone who paid attention to her. I always knew at these times that I was counseling her, but I felt confident that advising her on how to relate with other students was part of my responsibility as principal. Anique admitted that some of her friends at the school took advantage of her naïveté, and then after she said something foolish they would ridicule her in front of her peers. Without telling her that she needed new friends, even though that is what I thought, I tried to explain that this was not what friendship was really about.

It was not often, but sometimes Anique wanted to talk about teenage boys and her thoughts about boys. She would ask me what I thought about the ways teenage boys acted. I was always self-conscious about these conversations because, I think, I knew that while it was important that she be accepted as a whole person and not have yet another person cut her off, I had to avoid crossing a boundary into something too personal in our dialogues. These conversations, which seemed to be simple, were the ones I worried about the most because the gulf usually created by these titles of ours seemed to dissolve a little bit more during them.

I had read about the importance of principals nurturing authentic, warm, and caring relationships with students and found myself right in the middle of an authentic, warm and caring relationship with Anique. We seemed to arrive at a place of equivalence, through the mutual trust we had developed over time. Equivalent in our humanity, equivalent in our desire to understand wrongdoing in the world, and similarly committed to having a cordial and real exchange we proceeded with simple openness to process through the developing storyline and challenges she faced. At times, though neither of us ever probably forgot I was the figurehead of the school, the confines of titles like "principal" and "student," seemed to dissolve.

I never mistook myself as some champion of advocacy efforts on the behalf of Anique, or substitute counselor or life-long friend. As the principal of the school I hoped only to be doing that job well. But I realize, as I look back on it, how humanizing this difficult period in Anique's life was for both of us as we processed through it in our ongoing conversations. I do not believe that fact was ever articulated, just felt. While the conversations were often about seemingly superficial topics, they were also very personal, as I would later find out, for both of us.

How had this happened? As we talked, I found myself subconsciously drawn into her world, the world of a teenage girl who was trying to make sense of her life, a life pierced by hurt. And, oddly once in a while I also found myself imagining what I might do if I were in her place. Anique offered me a small window into her life, but one that certainly pushed me to see beyond my own experience. And I knew that her story was representative too, unfortunately, of so many young females who lived through similar horrendous experiences and yet came to school, my school, everyday.

When Anique would smile at the end one of our conversations I knew we were done. Each conversation was essentially unresolved, just a part of a larger arc of an ongoing dialogue with no action plan or easy solutions.

Anique was suspended for three days shortly after Thanksgiving but was not suspended again and was never expelled. However, she left the school at the end of that school year and did not register after the summer break. I worried about Anique for a long time and I think I ended up sort of in the same place that Serge Daigneault had been in during that one phone call - genuinely concerned over her well-being.

Story One Continued: Anique Four Years Later

Four years after she left the school, Anique phoned me at work. I had by then moved to a different province with my family and was principal of another school. Anique happened to be attending university in the same city. She had heard where I worked from someone and had decided to call me up for a chat, and we arranged to catch up over a cup of coffee. She was then a 19-year old young woman, a high school graduate and second-year university student.

Over the next two years, Anique came to visit me at my school in my new principal's office and we would talk – mostly about her father, her brothers, and her career aspirations. I learned that after withdrawing from the school that she had left the Wilsons' home and finished high school by living with friends' families and working at part-time jobs. As we reconnected, I was amazed by the resolve of this young woman. I told her she had certainly made an impact on my life in terms of my understanding of the thoughtfulness and resiliency of a teenage girl who had had many obstacles to deal with. Two years after we had resumed the coffee chats in my office, I decided to work with Anique and several former students as part of a research project that explored relational ethics between principals and students. I gave Anique a copy of my story of her and asked her to write down what she thought about her experiences of our relationship. Below is what Anique wrote.

Story Two: In Anique's Words at Age 21

I had a lot of issues that year when I came to the school. I wanted to leave the moment I set foot on the property. I wanted to scream when I saw the cliques of girls moving so tightly down the halls together, arm in arm like they were all best friends. I trusted no one, hated everyone, and spent my time planning ways to get out of there. My home life had fallen apart, my school life was no better, and I just wanted to get away from the Wilsons and everyone else who tried to order me around.

I would pass by the receptionist guarding the front doors of the school with her finger on the intercom button ready to report people leaving campus. While passing by her area I would also have to pass by your office. I would peek through your open door and could see you sitting at your desk. Most days I ate my lunch at the back table in the cafeteria, planning which way I would make a run for it if I ever got the chance to just leave. I actually tried to sneak out with a casual-looking walk one time only to confront a teacher who had just pulled up in her car outside so I made a bee-line back into the only open door and ended up in the hallway in front of the principal's office, your office. And, there you were at your desk and you seemed like you were expecting someone outside your office door, because you looked up, smiled and said, "Hi."

I sat down and I remember the chair you had for visitors was kind of uncomfortable and squeaked a little bit. We began talking about something and from then on I would stop by periodically, pretty regularly, actually, to talk with you. I do not really know how it all began, but I started to trust you and some of your opinions. You gradually became someone I could talk to about issues in my life, but I do not know how that happened. It was not like you suddenly stopped being the principal. I always felt you were completely the authority figure, you know the person who runs the school who is a little scary, a little bit scary at least. But, at the same time you seemed to just listen and just sit there like you wanted to know what I was thinking and how I was doing.

I remember the times when you were on the phone, dealing with the Wilsons and how as I listened it felt like you were there to keep me shielded from some of their craziness. You were honest with them but would not give them every detail about what

had happened. I think that for once in my life there was actually someone who listened to me when I spoke, believed me and could hold my story safe.

As for other relationships I had with teachers and my other school principals, I never really related much to any of those other people. You did not really see many students, even the good ones, in much contact with them. I never felt like I was ever really visible to my teachers and I never got to the point where I would say I trusted one even though I knew some of them were nice people.

I would trust you. I just remember sitting in your office and I knew you were the principal but you were also somebody I could talk to and somebody who trusted me as well. It was more than just a plain teacher and student relationship. Our relationship meant a lot to me at that time. I liked how you would just believe me and then tell some story of something that had happened to you a long time ago or someone else that you knew. You would find ways to make me smile and we would just sort of sit there really puzzled about why people behave like such jerks to kids. So that was quite important and I took that, I valued that, and it meant a lot to me. Since then, I think I have become much stronger than the people who hurt me, and I am a lot smarter about keeping myself from getting mixed up with their issues. I think that started happening, now that I think about it in those conversations.

You let me come to you. You never said, "Well, we had better keep meeting about this, you know, this is serious stuff." And you never seemed to need to know when I would swing by next but you made it seem like I was welcome. You never pushed for anything. I remember people making "responsibility contracts" and things like "action plans" out for me in middle school, but you never really talked about what was wrong with me. That feeling was kind of weird, having someone believe you, but after a while it was something that I appreciated. And I think you did not have such an easy life either and that was why you probably got what I was saying better than the "counselors" I was supposed to go see. Your office was one of the only places where I felt safe.

The relationship that we had was something that I appreciated because it seemed just, well, like I could breathe when we were having a conversation, like I could relax and know that there would be something to talk about. Every time I dropped in and you could see me and you would just begin with, "How are you doing, Anique?" "What are we talking about today?" I knew my day would be a little bit better. The relationship that we had as a student and principal was really surprising to me. I never expected to be on good terms with a principal, for one thing, and what ended up happening was I sort of looked forward to our chats. I relied on them to feel okay. I could not explain it, the way it was just so constant and calm. It certainly made me happy. And it made a lot of sense that this was how adults could treat me if they took the time to know me.

Finding a Purpose in Our Stories

Issues related to personal relationships, and our values and beliefs take on greater meaning as they are presented in stories of practice (Danzig, 1997). Stories allow us to refocus the ethics and experience of the teaching professions on the nature and significance of relationship. Our stories, in this instance Anique's and mine, underscore the notion that relationships are the

location for ethical action (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Necessarily, human flourishing is enhanced by healthy and ethical relationships (Bergum & Dossetor). Even the much-deserved focus on teacher-student relationships can potentially obscure the emphasis on the possible benefits of direct principal-student interactions. The interconnectedness of the narrative and the memories of the experience suggest that professional experience cannot be captured simply through empirical approaches to understand the complex web of relationships that exist in schools. The two narratives exploring this principal-student relationship form a story that can guide us in thinking about the principal-student relationship more intently (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Our profession is not served well by the banality of the mantra that "it is all about relationships" without the concomitant acknowledgement that relationships are powerful, which means they can also be powerfully wrong (Fullan, 2001). While some relationships are linear, many are dynamic, reciprocal and therefore highly unpredictable. And, clearly, students' lived experiences are interwoven with the experiences of the adults they encounter in school (Boström, 2006). Increasingly, we find that principals are being encouraged to get out of their offices and "walk the halls" of the school to initiate and sustain dialogic relationships not only with staff but also with students (Ryan, 2002, p. 129). This is critically important for those who lead schools because relationships that are rooted in an ethic of receptivity and responsiveness refocus us as we regard people as interdependent moral agents and pay attention to the quality of the commitments between them (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005; Goodlad, 1990; Noddings, 1992).

Too often principals look for definitive statements or search for tools for their toolkits that might enable them to be more effective as ethical leaders. And, just as often, they find solutions that offer up prescriptions that are devoid of the very life and the substrate of the ethical work of what it means to teach and lead. While there might be some insight gained from clinical analyses of ethics, it seems that the stories of teachers and principals, corroborated with those of the students to whom they attend, successfully illuminate the reality of personal human experiences and highlight the importance of relationships in the teaching professions (Strike, Haller & Soltis, 2005). Principals' stories also remind us that educational leadership is more about character than it is about technique. Effective school leadership should be focused on developing the relationships that support student and teacher learning rather than narrowly concentrating on technocratic approaches to managing things (Pink, 2004; Wolcott, 2003).

Though single decisions made by characters in a setting can always be argued with, after all, maybe a principal should not say yes to an estranged father's offer to send baby pictures to him, ethical leadership practices in schools are best judged by the shapes of the lives we see our students fashioning. Rather than producing conclusions of certainty about how principals ought to act, narrative inquiry opens up the possibilities of the kind of relationships principals and students experience (Boström, 2006).

Concluding Comments

The stories of the lived experience of the principal-student relationship, and their meanings, have the potential to sensitize school administrators to the nature of the relationship and the ebb and flow experience of relating with students. Ontological considerations are concerned with how we are as beings together in the principal-student relationship, that is, how we are with another

person. Such considerations reach past theories of relationship and become known and understood only through recollections of shared experiences.

There is a need to better understand the experiences of principals through their stories because while it might be true that the telling of our stories can be cathartic and liberating, it can also be a powerful research tool. As Connelly and Clandinin (1999) noted as they listened to administrators' stories, principals' narratives can be more than the embodiment of the institutional story. The stories told by principals can provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. And, perhaps most importantly, they remind us to remember that principals are also committed to teaching and learning to improve the human condition (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

If principals are to take seriously the challenge of creating schools where students experience an individual and collective sense of belonging, they cannot lose sight of the delicate and intimate dimensions of human belonging (Beck & Foster, 1999). While it is true that people are individuals who need to be understood as such, clearly they are in relation and social context when at school and, thus, they cannot be fully understood only as individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). A narrative inquiry approach that focuses on principal-student relationships opens up the possibilities to better understand schools as a coherent set of relationships and how those relationships shape both those who attend and those who work in schools.

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The Perfect Storm:
Stress, Anxiety, and Burnout
in the Secondary School Music Classroom

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Abstract

This study investigates teacher stress, anxiety, and burnout through my experience teaching music in a suburban Toronto secondary school between 2002 and 2008. Primary data sources include a rich collection of journal entries I have written over a six-year period, which were retrospectively analyzed in this study. Hence, this study is principally rooted in reflective practice. In addition, this study is informed through autobiographical and phenomenological lenses. These other two lenses have allowed me to incorporate secondary source data (anecdotal notes, emails, text messages, and video footage) that were repurposed for this study. Findings have exposed two principal thematic representations from the data, namely; (a) those that directly or indirectly addressed extracurricular performances, and (b) fear of failure. Re-experiencing my experience has been exceedingly therapeutic and cathartic for me, providing insight and transparency into the demanding nature of music pedagogy at the secondary school level. In addition, findings have helped me to refine and develop my current and future pedagogy as a teacher educator.

Keywords: reflective practice, autobiographical, teacher stress, anxiety, and burnout, music education

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Introduction and Purpose

I consider myself fortunate to have had the experience of teaching secondary school music for well over a decade. Despite the numerous successes that I have had during this experience, stress and anxiety slowly began to imbue my daily teaching. In the end, I exhibited many signs of teacher burnout. The most valuable coping mechanism for me during times of elevated stress and anxiety, however, was reflective practice. It is no surprise, therefore, that the largest number of reflections that I have written during my entire educational career coincided with a six-year period of teaching music in a suburban Toronto secondary school (from 2002 to 2008), where I experienced extreme levels of stress and anxiety. I will refer to this particular secondary school as Melody High (a pseudonym) throughout the duration of this article.

As an individual who made the switch to teacher educator, I quickly realized that the six-year period of teaching at Melody High provided me with an extensive pool of rich and detailed primary data. Hence, I started the arduous process of sorting and categorizing my reflections about a year ago. As I started to comb through the primary data, I discovered many other secondary data sources (anecdotal notes, emails, and video footage, for example) that helped paint a clear picture of my six-year tenure at Melody High. In sum, the retrospective investigation of these stress, anxiety, and burnout-laden data sources is the principal purpose of this study.

Contextual Framework: The Perfect Storm

Prior to my arrival in 2002, Melody High had been in operation for nine years with a scant and paltry music program and not one wind instrument in stock. The lack of financial support and a very low level of music education advocacy created a revolving door of music teachers. In its 10th year of operation, a new administrator finally recognized this tragedy and wanted to right the ship. He started by hiring an experienced music teacher (myself) as well as injecting $100,000.00 into the program over a 4-year period to purchase wind instruments. With so much financial commitment and a series of failures before me, there were very high expectations placed upon my shoulders to breathe life into a dead music program. This huge responsibility was exacerbated by the fact that 95% of grade 9 band students entered into this school as complete beginners on wind instruments, as they came from feeder schools where no instrumental music education transpired. Looking back now, it was the largest challenge of my teaching career to date. In many ways, it was the perfect storm -- a storm that ultimately spawned extreme levels of stress and anxiety, which eventually lead to burnout.

Literature Review

Teacher stress has been the subject of numerous research studies over the years. Kyriacou (2001) describes teacher stress as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28) Chang (2009, p. 193) connects teacher stress to burnout: "Habitual patterns in teachers' judgments about student behavior and other teaching tasks may contribute significantly to teachers' repeated experience of unpleasant emotions and those emotions may eventually lead to burnout." What exactly is burnout? Stern and Cox (1993) describe teacher burnout as overextending oneself to the point that the teacher loses excitement for the subject matter.

Specifically within music education, teacher stress and burnout have received much attention over the years. In fact, Haack and Smith (2000) indicate that teaching music is "the most challenging job in the teaching profession." (p. 24) Similarly, Hodge, Jupp & Taylor (1994) indicate that over half of music teachers consider their subject the most difficult to teach, and no music teachers consider their subject area the easiest to teach. Moreover, Carson (2006) argues that music teachers are more prone to burnout. Hodge et al (1994) found that music teachers experienced more job-related stress than math teachers did.

In general, high levels of stress and eventual burnout within music education is a serious situation for the profession as a whole, as burned out teachers are prone to more sickness and absenteeism (among others), which significantly affects the overall quality of teacher instruction and ultimately student learning (Hodge et al, 1994). Stern and Cox (1993) further elucidate on this point:

> A burned-out teacher will tend to display almost no enthusiasm for the subject matter or for teaching. He or she will also not be receptive to answering questions or responding to student needs, and as a result, will not encourage students to learn. (p. 2)

Poor pedagogy and minimal student learning resulting from stressed out and burned out music teachers is over and above the fact that music education is constantly striving to increase its profile and importance within mainstream public education (Scheib, 2002; Jorgensen 2003; Pio, 2007), which adds significantly more stress to the lives of music educators. English teachers, for example, do not have to worry about student enrollment, as English is a compulsory subject for all students at the secondary school level in Ontario. Music, however, is an optional subject, and music teachers must simultaneously teach and market their programs -- a very challenging and stressful task indeed, particularly when curriculum can be constraining.

Ultimately, teacher stress and burnout is an occupational hazard that can be seriously debilitating and inevitably warranting treatment (Hamann, 1990; Hamann & Gordon, 2000). In fact, Hamann & Gordon (2000) argue that teacher burnout typically follows a five-step pattern, namely; (i) honeymoon stage; (ii) fuel shortage; (iii) chronic symptoms; (iv) crisis; and (v) hitting the wall. Such a pattern is indicative of the widespread and predictable phenomenon of teacher burnout.

Why are so many music teachers burning out? There are numerous factors, but the following four factors continuously emerge over and over again in multiple studies, namely; (i) a dearth of resources, (ii) minimal budgets, (iii) heavy workloads, and (iv) large class sizes (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Stern & Cox, 1993; Hamann, Daugherty, & Mills 1987; and Hamann, Daugherty & Sherbon, 1988). Moreover, the literature has identified four principal groups of music teachers that are suffering from burnout. The first group is music educators right at the beginning of their teaching careers, which has been referenced by Jorgensen (2008): "Without adequate mentoring and workload reduction or amelioration, and with low pay, it is not surprising that so many music teachers suffer burnout or quit teaching within a few years, and thus are lost to the profession." (p. 84) This is also confirmed by Ryan (2009) who states that: "The many facets and stresses that come with the realities of the job are, unfortunately, reflected in the high rate of burnout among young music teachers within the first few years on the job." (p. xii) Teaching, then, becomes more about surviving rather than learning how to teach more effectively (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Moreover, new music teachers feel isolated

during their first year of teaching, which contributes to high levels of stress and premature burnout (Ballentyne, 2007).

A second group of music teachers that are susceptible to burnout are "often the most productive, dedicated, and committed in their fields" (Hamann, Daugherty, & Mills, 1987, pp. 128-129). Music teachers from this group are typical Type A personalities and often seek perfection and excellence in everything they do. This is consistent with Friedman and Rosenman's (1974) research, which indicates that individual's with Type A personalities are often the victims of stress and more susceptible to heart attacks. Moreover, Bramhall & Ezell (1981) cleverly state that "you have to have been on fire to burnout." (pp. 128-129).

The third group that is more susceptible to burnout is male music educators. In fact, Hamann, Daugherty & Sherbon (1988) and Gordon (1997) have indicated that male music teachers suffer from the problem of burnout at significantly higher rates than their female counterparts do. Gordon (1997), who reported that inner-city teachers experience greater stress, particularly regarding student discipline and motivation, over their sub-urban and rural colleagues, has identified the fourth group.

Theoretical Framework

Given that all of the data are my own words (either written or spoken), this study is essentially qualitative in nature with a richly descriptive product (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002) rooted in reflective practice. Donald Schön's (1983) publication *The Reflective Practitioner* was instrumental in coining the term "reflective practice," even though elements of reflective practice date back to the work of Dewey (1933). Schön (1983) argues that the basic premise of reflective practice is to engage in a process of continuous learning by reflecting on action. One of the most effective ways to engage in meaningful reflective practice is through journal writing. Specifically, journals allow the writer to break routine ways of thinking, develop reflective judgment, facilitate self-exploration and personal growth, and acquire solutions (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997; Mitchell & Coltrinari, 2001; Moon, 1999).

Although reflective practice is the principal theoretical lens, other lenses, namely autobiographical research and phenomenology, also inform this study. The autobiographical lens is somewhat paradoxical (as the researcher studies his/her own experiences), but it has been gaining in popularity (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003). In addition, autobiographical research reveals many "patterns in experience" not easily demonstrable in other types of research frameworks (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16), making it ideal and sublime in many respects (Gusdorf, 1980). From an educational perspective, autobiographical research can "help both teachers and students redefine their educational experiences on their own terms and in their own voices" (Pinar & Pautz, 1998, p. 72). Moreover, autobiographical research by an educator leads to his/her "nuanced perspective on interpreting the world of teaching and learning" (Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 416).

Since I am interested in my own life experiences, this study has a phenomenological lens (Moustakas, 1994; Trochim, 2006). According to Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman (1995), phenomenology is "a disciplined, rigorous effort to understand experience profoundly and authentically" (p. 405). Moreover, reflective practice is the primary process of any phenomenological inquiry (Mostert, 2002). Similarly, Aoki (1988) and Grumet (1988) have praised autobiographical research as legitimately phenomenological in nature.

Methodology

Data Collection

The wide variety of reflections emanating from my last 6 years of teaching at Melody High are representative of how I experienced the world of music teaching, and are the primary source of data for this study. I classified my data into three categories. The first category consists of 28 journal entries, while the second is a large melting pot of anecdotal notes captured in various forms, such as my teacher daybook (lesson plans), post-it notes, rehearsal notes, and even restaurant napkins. The third category is electronic in origin, including qualitative data captured from emails, text messages, as well as conversations/comments recorded in video footage. In terms of the video footage, the Music Student Council at Melody High filmed each and every performance put on by the Music Department, which always included commentaries by students, other teachers, and of course, myself. I categorized the data into two strands. Primary data sources are journals as intended to be reflective in nature and in the first strand category. The second strand, however, is secondary source data, repurposed from the original intent, such as the anecdotal notes, emails, and video footage, for example. Such diversified sources of both primary and secondary data (as referred to above) are now "more and more commonplace" in autobiographical research according to Lagemann & Shulman (1999, p. xvi).

Data Analysis and Findings Presentation

With such a diverse range of data sources, data analysis can become a very complicated and arduous process. The most commonly used data analysis method in qualitative research is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is a quest for themes that materialize as being important to the description of the phenomenon being studied (Aronson, 1994; Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). This approach involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258) and is essentially a type of pattern recognition within the data itself. The task of the researcher, therefore, is to identify a limited number of themes, which adequately reflect their textual data (Hewitt & Cramer, 2008). All of the data sources for this study involved words (both written and spoken). Journals and anecdotal notes were already in written form, and video footage of me speaking was transcribed. Once all of the data was assembled, traditional coding of key words, phrases, and expressions was conducted -- no software was used during this process. Initially, multiple codes emerged from the data. Through subsequent analyses, these codes were reduced to larger themes through the process of eliminating redundancies (Creswell, 2012).

Findings

The findings of this study can be summarized by the following two principal thematic representations from the data, namely (a) extra curricular performances and (b) fear of failure. In this section, I will elucidate and explain each of these themes with the support of primary data source passages and secondary repurposed data. The extrapolation of these two themes will provide insight into the extreme levels of stress and anxiety that I was experiencing at Melody High, which eventually lead to teacher burnout.

Theme One: Extra Curricular Performances

A number of reflections directly and indirectly pointed to the theme of extra-curricular performances. Despite a full time teaching timetable, the entire success of the music program rested on extracurricular performances, which usually necessitated a multitude of early morning, lunchtime, and after school rehearsals, as well as numerous phone calls, emails, and late night planning sessions. Moreover, concert dates for each school year were set in June of the previous year in order to avoid conflict with other departments within the school as well as local community organizations that were holding events in the school gymnasium. These fixed dates, therefore, put enormous pressure on me right from the first day of classes in September. Although these predetermined dates kept me focused and on track in my teaching, it was simultaneously very stressful. There was no margin for error, no extension of concert dates, and no realistic opportunity to bow out without embarrassment. This stressful situation was exacerbated with grade 9 beginning band classes, where students did not know how to play a single note on day one in September. Yet, they were scheduled to play at least two songs in the Holiday concert in mid-December. Practice, prepare, practice, prepare, and play the concert; this was the very nature of my music program (Bernhard, 2011). These sentiments are captured in a reflective journal entry that I wrote on September 4, 2007:

> There is nothing like the first day of school! Even though I have been through this routine several times, I never feel totally prepared. In large print, I wrote the words "Music Night: December 13, 2007 – mandatory performance for all students" on the blackboard before classes started this morning. I could feel my heart beating as I was writing this date on the blackboard. Deep down in my core, I just knew how much work it would take to get my students ready for this concert. An entire semester worth of teaching, before and after school rehearsals, phone calls, meetings, blah, blah, blah, -- all of these things would play over and over in my mind in just a few seconds. Sure enough, as each of my classes came in throughout the day, I could see and hear scrums of conversations about the date on the board. Some of these conversations were pleasant, and some of them were not. The bottom line is that summer is over, and it's time to prepare for Music Night in December. My job has become far too predictable and I must admit that I am not looking forward to all of the work that lies ahead. Music Night is just over 3 months away and I am already thinking about it and preparing for it – go figure!

The stress and anxiety of the looming concert date peaked during the last 2 weeks of preparations. Students were often not ready, which necessitated a number of precautionary measures. I often had to rewrite charts for students—simplifying rhythms and raising/lowering specific notes. This was usually done at the dinner table and often interfered with familial obligations as well as my relationship with my spouse. A reflective journal entry from December 5, 2005 summarizes these emotions:

> My wife asked me at the dinner table last night if I was married to her or to my students. Although she was joking and generally speaking is very understanding, I can readily detect the stress in our relationship, which continues to steadily rise the closer I get to Music Night. In recent years, she has even asked me if my salary is worth all of the extra work that I put in, especially when many other teachers go home right after the final bell

of the day and make just as much money as I do. I must admit that I do agree with her, but I only know two speeds – fast or slow. Preparing for Music Night can only be done at full speed ahead.

Moreover, I would have impromptu after school sectionals during the 2 weeks leading up to Music Night, which were over and above the heavy rotation of before and after school rehearsals already scheduled. These extra sectionals were indicative of the extra workload that would manifest itself during the last 2 weeks before the concert, exponentially adding to already high stress and anxiety levels. These sectionals were necessary when a certain instrument had a difficult part within one of the songs that we were scheduled to perform. I can specifically recall an incident 2 days before the spring concert in May of 2006, where I had not stopped all day long. I had an early morning rehearsal with Senior Band, followed by two regular classes, a lunch hour Junior Band rehearsal, and two other regular classes to finish the school day (my prep had been taken away during last period, as I had to cover for a teacher who went home sick that afternoon). Realizing that I did not eat anything all day long, I was suffering from a headache, dizziness, and extreme fatigue, only to face the fact that I had a Junior Band trumpet sectional (which was scheduled that day over lunch hour) starting right after school. Since my classroom desk was completely upside down, I searched for a piece of paper to write a note for my Junior Band trumpet indicating that I would be about 10 minutes late. The only thing I could find was a napkin from the school cafeteria, which I used to write my note and posted on the front of the music room door. The note said: "Junior Band Trumpet Sectional: Please do not leave, I will be about 10 minutes late. I need something to eat or else I will die. Your famished music teacher, Mr. Vitale." Although somewhat comical in nature, this short but valuable reflection (I still have the napkin today) clearly illustrates how stressful my life was just before Music Night. So stressful, in fact, that I obviously ignored basic good health practices (such as eating), and my body suffered as a result.

Stress, anxiety, and burnout often manifest themselves through the physical body in a variety of forms (Rada & Johnson-Leong, 2004). This happened to me on a number of occasions, but nothing more pronounced than the events of December 2006. In addition to having a regularly scheduled Music Night during the second last week of classes before the holiday break, I also had six offsite performances with the Senior Band scheduled in the last week before the holiday break. A week before Music Night, I was teaching band and I started seeing stars (blacked-out) while conducting. Sensing something was clearly wrong, I gave the class a five-minute break so I could get some fresh air outside, but the same thing happened again once class resumed. Luckily, I made it through the rest of the class and I traded my lunch hour rehearsal for a trip to my doctor who was only 5 minutes away. After begging and pleading with the receptionist, my doctor gave me a quick check-up and was startled to find out that my blood pressure was sky high. Fearing a stroke or possible heart attack, he ordered that I stay home for the next 2 weeks. I called in sick for the rest of the day, but had some important decisions to make. I had Music Night in a week and over 300 tickets had already been sold, not to mention the six off site performances scheduled in 2 week's time. Here is a journal excerpt from December 7, 2006 that captures the very essence of my predicament:

> It feels as if my whole life is falling apart. My health is suffering because I am taking my job too seriously. Although my doctor has asked me to stay home for two weeks, how can I cancel Music Night? We have worked so hard and the students would be disappointed.

> My wife thinks I am crazy if I don't take the doctor's advice. She is worried about my well-being and the well-being of our two children should something happen to me. I think I will definitely cancel the six off-site performances scheduled for two-week's time. As far as Music Night is concerned, I will still run with it. I will take three days off and return two days just before Music Night to run through final rehearsals. The students are 85% of the way there and I still think they can successfully do the show.

Here is another journal excerpt, post concert, 7 days later (December 14, 2006) that truly captures the essence of my elevated stress, anxiety, and burnout:

> Music Night came and went just the same. It was not as good as I thought it could be, but truth be told, it was still a great show. Life is strange, my wife is still upset with me and I also get the feeling my Principal is upset with me for cancelling the six shows at the local elementary schools. He is a first year principal and he really wanted me to do these shows to attract students to our school. The students are also upset, as they wanted to perform at these schools, particularly since they came from these schools. It is a great opportunity to go back to their former elementary schools and show their former teachers how well they can play. Life is strange, my wife is upset at me for performing, and my students and principal seem upset at me for not performing. I cannot win. This job is getting too difficult for me. Music teaching used to be so much fun, now it seems like heavy work that I cannot handle. I feel like I have very little to give anymore.

Theme Two: Fear of Failure

Although the primary and secondary source data found in this section deal with extracurricular performances, they are imbued with a clear sense of fear. Even when I reread these excerpts many years later, an evident sense of fear, trepidation, and uneasiness came over me compared to the other excerpts in the previous theme. Hence, a new theme – fear of failure – clearly emerged from the data. I can specifically remember the spring of 2006, where the dress rehearsal did not go well, particularly with Senior Band. My wife had sent me a text message right after school asking me how the dress rehearsal went. I responded with the following text message: "The buggers were horrible. I am not confident about our chances this evening." My wife responded back: "Everything will be fine; don't worry." The performance that evening was satisfactory, but not before four hours of trepidation and fear. This fear was even captured in video footage taken by Music Student Council before the concert. A student asked me how I was feeling and I simply responded: "Nervous, I am really, really nervous about the performance this evening."

Even when I was not conducting on Music Night and had a chance to catch my breath during a solo or ensemble performance, fear still manifested itself. I can specifically remember the spring concert in 2007 where a senior student (Linda) did a trumpet solo to a backing CD track. She struggled from the very first note, exhibiting erratic breathing and poor tone, and halfway through the song, she completely stopped and walked off the stage in tears. Although the audience cheered her on to return to the stage and redo her song, she never did. I was mortified when this student left the stage and fearful for the student. My journal the day after the concert (May 18, 2007) summarizes this incident:

> I've never felt as bad for a student as I did for Linda last night when she walked off the stage. She had played so well in class and has lots of performing experience, but she just didn't have it last night and flubbed too many notes. What a horrible way to end your high school music career—crying and walking off the stage. After the show, I asked her what had happened, and she just said the notes were not coming out and she didn't know why. She was clearly upset and very emotional. Since Linda's performance was early in the program, I was extremely fearful that there was bad karma in the air, and that something else would go wrong last night. Even though everything else ran smoothly, I was scared to death for the remainder of the show. It felt as if the weight of the world was taken off my shoulders when the show was over. It's amazing how one bad performance can affect my own feelings and psyche.

Every year, Melody High held their annual graduation ceremony off-site at a local banquet centre, as the school auditorium could not handle the large number of guests due to the sizeable student body. Every year, the Senior Band performed a number of songs for a very large audience of over 1,400 guests during the evening of graduation. Although I had a small crew of students who helped me to transport some of the bigger instruments (e.g., bass drum, timpani, etc.) right after school, the remainder of the band provided their own transportation to the event every year, which started at 7:30 p.m. For six consecutive years on the evening of graduation, I feared students coming late, which was arguably the largest community event of the year with such notable attendees as the mayor, the superintendent and director of the school board, and local media. The hour leading up to the first note was dreadful every year as there would always be a few students showing up in the very last minute. The journal entry of October 19, 2005, the day before graduation, captures the theme of fear.

> Well, we have Grad tomorrow night, and all the big wigs will be there. No matter how many times I tell the students to arrange their transportation and show up early, there are always a few students that show up late or right before we are scheduled to start, which really scares me. I get very nervous, start to sweat, and my ability to conduct becomes compromised.

Every year, the holiday Music Night would always be held during the last week or two of scheduled classes just before the Christmas break. Year after year, there were a few students who would give me one or two weeks warning that they could not play in the holiday concert because of some sort of family commitment. It always seemed that these students were the top players within their section, and their section always sounded horrible without them. Even though I always bought into the "show must go on" mantra, it was like a dagger in your heart when these students informed me that they would not be showing up. There was always fear that a particular song would not go over well if a specific student was absent. The journal entry of December 6, 2004 clearly captures this fear:

> What a busy day! Our concert is next week and things are really in full swing. Mike, the best trumpet player in the Senior Band, informed me today that he will not be able to make Music Night as his family has some sort of church function that evening. No matter how hard I pleaded with him, he said that he could not make it. There is one song we are performing (Overture Espagnol) that really relies on the first trumpet part, and Mike is

really the driving force behind the first trumpet section. I may have to pull the song from the program, and, go figure, the programs have already been printed. Otherwise, I will be terrified to perform the song.

Similarly, I would have numerous skirmishes with other teachers at Melody High whenever a performance necessitated one of my students from missing other classes. Although some teachers were very cooperative, many teachers resisted and resented me withdrawing students from their classes, even when I had the principal's endorsement. Students were often put in the middle of this ridiculous power struggle, and they often did not show up to off-site performances during the school day as they were afraid of losing marks in their other subjects, particularly senior students who were university bound after graduation. This would usually happen the day or two before a scheduled performance, and the fear of performing without specific students always reared its ugly head. The following excerpt from my daybook on December 17, 2007 under the heading of "After School" captures how these last-minute absences weighed heavily on my mind. *"Final rehearsal for Christmas performance at the mall on Thursday. I wonder who is not showing up this time?"* The following email was sent to my principal in December of 2007, which addresses this very issue:

Hello Ryan,

> I am surprised at the large number of teachers who do not approve of me withdrawing students out of regularly scheduled classes for a musical performance. All of the planning, time, and effort that goes into a musical performance can easily be compromised when a few students are absent, making my role as band director very frightening at times. I think we need to develop a school policy for such situations – not just for music, but also for sports and any other extracurricular event that necessitates students being withdrawn from classes. If we had such a policy, I could not only work with it, but it would also level out the playing field for all teachers. It is unfair that students are often forced to choose between teachers and classes.

Discussion and Meaning Making

In this article, I have offered a candid and honest look into my life experiences at Melody High (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). There are essentially two aspects of my reflective journey. The first was reliving specific moments in time during my tenure at Melody High through re-reading journals, emails, and re-watching videos, for example. The second aspect was noticing how my reflections had changed and evolved over a six-year period. The two aspects are duly represented by the two themes of (i) extracurricular performances and (ii) fear of failure.

Ultimately, many findings were consistent with the literature in the field of stress, anxiety, and burnout. I certainly experienced many unpleasant and negative emotions (Kyriacou, (2001) as well as emotional exhaustion (Chang, 2009). I have had the experience of teaching subjects other than music early on in my career, and I must concur with Haack and Smith (2000) and half of the participants in the Hodge et all (1994) study that teaching music is the most challenging/difficult to teach. Not surprisingly, I certainly agree with Carson (2006) that music teachers are more prone to burnout, as well as sickness, absenteeism, and diminished enthusiasm (Hodge et al, 1994; Stern & Cox, 1993).

By the end of my six-year tenure at Melody High, findings uncannily supported Hamann & Gordon's (2000) five-step burnout pattern. There is no doubt that I had a honeymoon stage (step one) during my first two years. In fact, I left another school board to take the position at Melody High, and I relished the opportunity to build a program at a school where multiple teachers before me had failed. As I entered my third year at Melody High, the program began to expand rapidly. With no other teacher in the music program to assist me, I was essentially working much harder and certainly felt a significant lack of energy in my daily teaching, which corresponds perfectly to Hamann & Gordon's (2000) second step of fuel shortage. By the fourth year, I clearly experienced step three (chronic symptoms) and step four (crisis). I was blacking-out in class and I had severe hypertension. The doctor ordered me to stay home. This resulted in me cancelling some scheduled performances and simply dreading my job. The final stage (hitting the wall) was indicative of the fact that I just could not do the job anymore, and I eventually took a three-year leave of absence, which ultimately resulted in a resignation from the school board.

In terms of the four factors that perpetuated music teacher burnout -- (i) dearth of resources, (ii) minimal budgets, (iii) heavy workloads, and (iv) large class sizes (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Stern & Cox, 1993; Hamann, Daugherty, & Mills 1987; and Hamann, Daugherty & Sherbon, 1988), findings were consistent with one out of the four (heavy workloads). Even though data did not specifically address large class sizes, I can certainly concur that my class sizes at Melody High were exceedingly large.

When it came to the four identified groups of music teachers that were susceptible to stress, anxiety and burnout, findings clearly aligned with two of the four groups. As a veteran teacher, I could certainly not relate with the first group of beginning teachers burning out. To the contrary, I had more time and energy in my first five years of teaching than I ever did while teaching at Melody High. My findings, however, markedly and keenly echoed the second group – the Type A personality teacher that was prone to eventual burn out. It was very clear to me then, and now, that perfection and excellence were the very measuring stick for my music program. Although I did not suffer a heart attack as Friedman & Rosenman (1974) have suggested could happen, I certainly suffered severe hypertension and as previously mentioned, which could have lead to a heart attack. Moreover, Greenberg (2002) indicated that stroke and coronary heart disease have been associated with stress because of increased blood pressure.

In addition, I suffered many other physiological symptoms (such as stomach cramps, severe migraines, and fatigue) that are consistent with the results of a longitudinal study on teacher stress conducted by Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer (1996). Although triggers for stress, anxiety, and burnout vary from person to person, the most critical aspect for a teacher's well-being is the recognition of such triggers, something I was not able to do until my own doctor ordered me to stay home for 2 weeks. Even then, I did not fully comply with my doctor's order. Music teachers ultimately need to find balance between achieving results and managing stress; otherwise, burnout is inevitable. Moreover, there is an awkward and compromising risk (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Mercer 2007) in exposing the state of my health during my time at Melody High, which is now publicly accessible for former colleagues, students, and parents.

Moreover, findings verified the third group (male music teachers suffering from burnout significantly more than females) as referenced by Hamann, Daugherty & Sherbon (1988) and Gordon (1997). The fourth trend (inner-city teachers experience greater stress over their sub-urban and rural colleagues) does not apply on paper since Melody High was in a suburban setting. Having taught in two inner city schools for over 5 years, however, I can honestly say that Melody High did have many inner-city characteristics, including student drug use, lack of

parental involvement, and student apathy (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). For such reasons, Melody High was considered one of the least desirable places to work at by virtually all teachers within the larger school Board. Hence, I would argue that this category was to a certain extent represented in my findings.

My reflections from Melody High that exuded the theme of fear were intimately connected to situations when I was vulnerable and susceptible to public scrutiny. When key students did not show up for a performance, for example, I was always scared to death about the quality of the performance, as all fingers would eventually be pointed at me as the musical director and conductor. I even felt this sense of fear when I did not have the baton in my hand. When I think about how horrible I felt for Linda and her flubbed trumpet solo, I was ultimately concerned more about how her bad performance reflected my own teaching and aptitude. I guess to a certain extent this reveals a sub-theme of selfishness in my own teaching that I did not know existed. As an educator who gave every ounce of time and energy that I had to my students and my program, I have never once thought for a second that there was an element of selfishness to my teaching until I completed this study, which is inherently one of the great advantages of reflective practice. This tells me that there are many layers and strata to who we are as professionals in the classroom. Much like geology, it takes a lot of time and movement for these layers and strata to form and manifest themselves. This leads me to question what other aspects of my teaching I have yet to discover.

However, I did have significant success at Melody High. Student enrolment increased by 400% in a six year period and the Holiday and Spring Concert was selling over 500 tickets per concert. In many ways, however, I was the victim of my own success and the old adage: "be careful what you wish for, it might come true." Although it is now apparent to me through this study that a perfect storm was brewing when I took control of the reins at Melody High, I had no idea at the time. In fact, I absolutely relished the opportunity to build a music program essentially from scratch, as I did not have that opportunity in previous schools, which were well-established music programs (another example of my selfishness that manifested itself).

Initially, success was easy, as basically, there was no measuring stick to go by. As each year went by, the on and off-site concerts became bigger and better, which ultimately produced more stress, fear, and success. This was compounded by the fact that I was the only full time music teacher at the school and assumed much of the administrative duties as well, which contributed to elevated levels of stress and anxiety (Scheib, 2002). Ultimately, I could no longer maintain and manage the music program I created, which is why the flame that once burned brightly eventually burned out (Bramhall & Ezell, 1981).

Conclusion

At the end of the day, reflective practice allows teachers to track their thoughts, feelings, and emotions throughout their teaching career. Such reflections are advantageous in the moment of writing, and are equally advantageous years later from a retrospective lens. The bottom line is that reflective practice allows practitioners to critically examine and improve their future teaching. Sharing the results of reflective practice through publications such as this one is vitally important for all practitioners. Sharing experiences creates a collective pool of ideas and thoughts that cultivate meaningful clusters of knowledge, ultimately helping to inform us about the practice of teaching music at the secondary school level specifically, and teaching in general.

Teacher practitioners often lack a support network, particularly in non-core subjects (such as music) at secondary schools where teachers frequently operate a program on their own, as was the case with myself at Melody High. Although there was an abundance of other teachers, there were no other music teachers to share my feelings with—both successes and frustrations. This is why reflective practice is so important, as the journal writing allowed me to share my trials and tribulations with myself (Schön 1983). This is why autobiographical and phenomenological inquiry is important, as it allows the opportunity to look at your own reflections in a new and fresh manner (Gusdorf, 1980; Aoki, 1988; Grumet, 1988).

In reflection, my perceptions of what happened are much clearer and more lucid today (many years later) than they were when I was at Melody High. Re-experiencing my experience has been exceedingly beneficial and liberating, allowing me to question what I was thinking and why (Denzin, 1989; Grumet, 1980). The process of revisiting, rearranging, and reorganizing data about my experiences has increased my knowledge and shed light on my own views, values, ideologies, and representations of the world (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Much like an archeologist, I have searched and uncovered relics from my past that will assist me in my future teaching. I now feel that I have closure to the chapter of my life spent teaching music at Melody High. The final piece of the puzzle has been put in place and the big picture has revealed itself (Williamson, 1997).

Even today as a teacher educator, I have much more insight and knowledge into the demanding role of the secondary school music teacher, which I can pass on and share with my students. In sum, what I did and where I am going has ultimately been grounded in my experience at Melody High (Kitchen, Ciuffetelli-Parker, & Pushor, 2011).

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Surfacing the Assumptions:
Pursuing Critical Literacy and Social Justice
in Preservice Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper outlines a four-year study of a preservice education course based on a socio-constructivist research framework. The preservice English Language Arts course focuses on critical literacy and teaching for social justice while employing digital technologies.The research study examines two concepts across all aspects of the course: 1) new literacies and multiliteracies; and 2) technology-supported transformative pedagogy for social and educational change. While the authors originally undertook the study to evaluate separate assignments of the course, the lens of the two themes has provided an opportunity for a scholarly review of their teaching practices. Research data include three course assignments over a 2-year period; an open-ended survey; and focus group and individual interviews with pre-service teachers. The authors discuss some of the affordances, challenges, and learnings associated with preparing teachers to teach critical literacy in a digital age. They also consider the development of critical literacy skills which encourage preservice teachers to bring their literacy histories and assumptions to the surface, examine them critically, and consider social justice alternatives.

Key Words: critical literacy, social justice, new literacies, multiliteracies, preservice teacher education, transformative learning

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Introduction

We designed this reflective study to examine the teaching and learning outcomes of a preservice teacher education course at a laptop university. The findings reported here summarize four years of research on a single English Language Arts (ELA) course taught by two preservice teacher educators to four annual cohorts of elementary preservice teachers; each cohort was enrolled for ten months in a post-Baccalaureate teacher education program. The purposes of this systematic review of our teaching practice are two-fold: (1) to identify and discuss some of the challenges associated with preparing preservice teachers to teach critical literacy in an era where their future students will engage in many digital literacy activities both inside and outside of class; and (2) to identify the transformative learning (Cranton & King, 2003; Keegan, 2011; King, 2002) opportunities for preservice teachers that are enabled through engagement with new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) and technologies (Kellner, 2000), and through presenting opportunities to teach for social justice (Brandes & Kelly, 2004).

Context: From *Literacy* to *Literacies*

The authors teach two consecutive semesters of a blended but mostly face-to-face ELA course in a preservice teacher education program that has an overall technology focus. From the first class, the preservice teachers are asked to engage in critical literacy. For example, the course begins with an instant, early, and deliberate immersion into the complexities of *multiple literacies* (Bearne, 2003; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003) including media literacy, computer literacy, and digital literacy. Secondly, the preservice teachers are asked to consider the concept of *new literacies* (Kellner, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) as a set of social practices which may or may not include digital technologies. Third, the preservice teachers are asked to consider how literacies are constructed socially; how these literacies are reflected in schooling and in life histories (Jewitt, 2008a; New London Group, 1996); and how critical literacy practices (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004) might lead teachers toward *social justice* purposes, and empower groups who traditionally have been excluded from the curriculum (Brandes & Kelly, 2004).

To encourage an understanding of education as a force for democracy (Kellner, 2000; New London Group, 1996) all elements of the course: the classroom activities; the a-synchronous discussions; the lessons preservice teachers are asked to create; and their assignments, are modeled on a *multiliteracies* pedagogical framework that encourages teachers to examine their own schooling histories and reflect on how they have impacted their views on literacy. This framework also asks them to interrogate voice and representation in resources and encourages teachers to be change agents for social justice (New London Group, 1996). The course readings provide examples of how social justice issues can be integrated into classroom practices with children and adolescents (e.g., Moller, 2002) and the readings also challenge them to bring assumptions to the surface and to consider the impact of power, voice, and representation in curriculum materials.

To illustrate this early immersion into understanding critical literacy, in their first class, the preservice teachers examine inclusive curriculum resources and compare them to the curriculum materials they experienced in their own schooling. For example, the first read aloud book is *All the Colors of the Earth* (Hamanaka, 1994) within which each child's characteristics are valued equally in beautifully descriptive, poetic language. Inevitably, the preservice teachers

begin to discuss how their literary experiences have impacted on their own feelings of exclusion or belonging in school. Those preservice teachers who were left out of the curriculum discuss it with their peers. Some preservice teachers who have never questioned the curriculum realize that their families and their lives were more included and legitimized in school. This raises issues of hegemonic representations starting with the first class discussion. This is followed by a reflective reading on privilege (McIntosh, 1989) and online discussions in small groups.

The assignments of the course also encourage an instant immersion into multiliteracies and conceptual complexity. The preservice teachers prepare and present their literacy life histories in the form of five-minute digital stories using text, sound, graphics, focus and movement built into a simple software package such as Photo Story 3. They consider both their successes and struggles with literacy acquisition and how their literacy was shaped by social practices. The preservice teachers are invited, but not required, to share their literacy/life digital stories with their peers and many do. In the classroom debrief, they reflect on the diversity of their peers' lived experiences and are asked to consider how this new knowledge would impact their roles as teachers (New London Group, 1996).

For the second assignment, the preservice teachers create social justice digital book talks. Many areas where teachers and students can make a difference are raised through these digital book talks such as: racism, heteronormative family representations, bullying, homelessness, poverty, and many others. The preservice teachers are asked to engage with the picture books by applying four dimensions of critical literacy: disruption of the commonplace; consideration of multiple viewpoints; a focus on the political and social issues; and possible action steps for social justice (Lewison et al., 2002). In doing so, the preservice teachers negotiate meanings. For example, one of the social justice books discussed was, *My Princess Boy* (Kilodavis, 2010), which is a non-fiction account about the public's lack of acceptance for a boy who likes dresses. After reading the book, the preservice teachers can identify that schools need to be more inclusive, but they have difficulty identifying that certain views seen as natural (such as the devaluing of feminine characteristics) need to be surfaced and interrogated because critical literacy is a practice of negotiating meaning (Ferrarelli, 2007).

The course is designed so that the preservice teachers utilize their critical literacy skills, technology skills and considerations of social justice actions (Conklin, 2008) concurrently throughout their subsequent assignments. They also use an open source e-book authored by Hughes for their course readings (http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/). We undertook a study of the learning outcomes from the course in order to provide evidence for our own review and reflection. At the present time, the study is in its fourth year of data collection and analysis. This study has both reflective and retrospective elements, as the data and reflections inform and deepen our practice. While the study actually commenced as four distinct research components, it has evolved to the point that broader themes have surfaced. The first study was qualitative research based on three data sets: the preservice teachers' digital stories, their written reflections, and interviews (Robertson, Hughes & Smith, 2012). Next, we used a case study approach to examine preservice teachers' uses of digital video (Hughes & Robertson, 2010). Third, we analyzed the social justice book talks and lessons created by the preservice teachers and discussed them with the preservice teachers in interviews (Hughes & Robertson, 2011). The fourth study was an analysis of the level of criticality evident in critical media literacy lesson plans and an open-ended survey (Robertson & Hughes, 2011). There is still one course assignment that has not been researched: the integrated units.

It is not these individual research components which inform the study at the present time, however, but rather a consideration of how the integrated, thematic elements have emerged as important through this reflective examination of our practice: new literacies (Jewitt, 2008a; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006); new literacies, new technologies and democratic teaching (Kellner, 2000); and multiliteracies and teaching for social justice (Keegan, 2011; New London Group, 1996). In this paper, we examine the findings of all of the previous research in our course, consider what understandings have surfaced this research, and re-examine our current practice through two lenses: multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and teaching for social justice (Brandes & Kelly, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

When considering how to teach with new literacies (Jewitt, 2008a; Kellner, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), there are two key considerations to bring to the attention of preservice teachers. First, there is the transition from thinking about *literacy* as a single skill that an individual possesses at a particular level, to considering the term as a plural noun: a set of complementary practices that are applied in different ways, based on the setting and circumstance. The literacies used to communicate in an email differ from the literacy skills used to enjoy a novel, for example. Secondly, there is a consideration of how these new literacies can open spaces for teaching and learning to become more accessible, inclusive, and empowering. With new technologies and new ways of collaborating and co-construction of knowledge, there are new possibilities for student ownership of learning. The affordances of technology provide a window for new forms of pedagogy that are more empowering and democratic in their orientation. Theoretical framework that follows is organized around these two constructs: a) the expanding definitions of the term literacy; and b) how to teach and learn with these new, multiple literacies.

New Literacies and Multiliteracies

In the ELA program reviewed here, there is first of all, a deliberate expansion of the term *literacy.* While *literacy* in earlier times referred to the level of acquisition of certain skills by an individual, new thinking of *literacies* as a plural term brings into consideration different literacy practices, such as those that are situated historically, socially and culturally (Jewitt, 2008a). Many exciting and different literacies are emerging: 1) the school's idea of literacy may not align with the community's; 2) the world of classroom literacy is gradually blending with global literacies; and 3) more aspects of the learners' lives, cultures, knowledge, and experiences are blending into classrooms (Jewitt, 2008a). This blending of the out-of-school experiences of students with their literacy learning offers an opportunity for educators to build on these new literacies. For example, one of the preservice teachers in our course contributed a unit on Dub Poetry for her peers. This gave the preservice teachers an opportunity to expand their (traditional) understandings of poetry, and to broaden and become more inclusive in their considerations of curriculum. It allowed the preservice teacher presenting the Dub poetry to bring her community into the preservice classroom.

Another form of new literacies includes multiple literacies (Bearne, 2003; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003) encompassing computer literacy, digital literacy, critical literacy and media literacy. Jewitt (2008a) conceptualizes these in the form of "modal affordances"

which have the potential for both expressing meaning and representing meaning which "enable image, sound, and movement to enter the classroom in new and significant ways" (p. 257). Examples of these new literacies include the increasing use of images alongside of text and the use of hypertext. Jewitt concludes that educators need to take advantage of these new literacies, encouraging schools to include students' out-of-school literacies into the classroom. She reminds teachers that the new modal affordances also provide an opportunity to help students develop their understanding of strategies for engaging more effectively and critically with media.

Lankshear and Knobel (2006) offer the same conceptualization of *new literacies* but make an important distinction between what they call the "technical stuff" of new literacies and the "ethos stuff" (p. 25). The technical aspects include multimodal processes such as the mixing of text, images, and sound. The new aspects of *ethos* include more participatory and collaborative forms of communication. They offer the consideration that some of the new literacies are not necessarily associated with digital technology advances. We can utilize new forms of collaboration and consultation using print formats, for example.

Kellner (2000) offers another key consideration to this discussion of new literacies and new technologies, calling on educators to reconstruct and to democratize education. He defines multiple literacies as those skills needed to access information, interpret it, engage critically with it, and communicate with it. He supports the use of technology for these purposes, arguing that the use of technology helps learners to understand the world, but it will also help learners and teachers to transform it. In his view, new technologies require teachers to have "new curricula, pedagogy, literacies, practices and goals" (p.246). In particular, he suggests that teachers expand their concept of literacy to include multiple literacies for democratic purposes. Kellner (2000) summarizes in this way:

> Individuals should be given the capacities to understand, critique, and transform the social and cultural conditions in which they live, gaining capacities to be creative and transformative subjects and not just objects of domination and manipulation.... Crucially, multiliteracies and new pedagogies must become reflective and critical, aware of the educational, social, and political assumptions involved in the restructuring of education and society that we are now undergoing. (pp. 257-258)

While the ELA course syllabus originally included the study of literacies and the affordances of multiple literacies such as digital literacy, media literacy, and computer literacy, our understanding of the term *new literacies* (Jewitt, 2008a; Kellner, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) has grown as a result of this research project. Now, when we use that term, we encompass understandings of multiple, different literacies converging into the classroom space, and have a vision of the term *literacies* that is more expansive, emancipatory, critical, empowering, and oriented toward agency and social justice (Brandes & Kelly, 2004; Ferrarelli, 2007).

New Pedagogies

A second theoretical orientation for the ELA program is the adoption of a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). There are four pedagogical components within this framework: *situated practice,* which is the immersion of a learner in practices that are meaningful to his or her professional life within a learning community; *overt instruction,* which includes lessons and modeling to guide the learning; *critical framing,* which is intended to help the preservice teachers recognize that literacies are socially constructed within a framework that includes culture and politics; and *transformed practice,* which we interpret to mean that the preservice teachers are given support to change notions of how they will teach relative to how they were taught (New London Group, 1996).

Applying this theoretical framework to the ELA program, s*ituated practice* means that we immerse the preservice teachers in authentic activities that promote educational and social change. In their first assignment, the story of their personal literacy histories, we encourage them to discover how their histories have created their perceptions about literacy. *Overt instruction* in the context of the course involves direct instruction in deconstructing media and text to surface the assumptions present (Ferrarelli, 2007) while considering the histories and perspectives of their peers through the shared literacy stories; and examining and naming taken-for-granted assumptions, privileges and areas of disadvantage (McIntosh, 1989) that they and their peers have experienced. The action of *critical framing* means that we encourage our teacher learners to study literacies within a broader context of history, politics, culture, and ideologies – asking them to consider whose voices have been traditionally dominant and whose are marginalized or silenced. In a new era of digital literacy, this includes discussions about how to include students' out-of-school literacies in the classroom (Jewitt, 2008a). We interpret *transformed practice* to mean that preservice teachers want to change their practices from the way that they were taught because they see a need for educational and social change. We want preservice teachers to be comfortable discussing social justice issues and projects in their future classrooms, even though this may not have been an aspect of their own schooling.

In his seminal work on the importance of considering teacher beliefs in educational research, Pajares (1992) suggests that teachers' beliefs should play a role in educational research as long as careful consideration is given to key assumptions that underlie those beliefs. In the first assignment in the course – the creation of a digital literacy story -- preservice teachers recall incidences from their own classroom experiences with literacy and consider how these experiences helped shape or influence them. When they view the literacy stories of their peers, they are confronted with their own assumptions. For example, preservice teachers will share experiences with ethnocentrism and assimilation which challenge the previous assumptions of their peers who saw that same curriculum as natural and did not question it. Teachers have a responsibility to understand how schools can perpetuate dominance. Preservice teachers who, for example, believe that issues of race do not persist need to listen to the preservice teachers who face racial assumptions daily. Through exposure to others' different experiences of literacy, the preservice teachers reflect on these underlying assumptions and what they mean for their future classrooms.

In a similar process, King (2002) explores how teachers in graduate school examine and change their teaching practices and perspectives with technology. Central to her argument is the concept of the teacher as a critical reflective practitioner (e.g. Brookfield, 1995; Cranton & King, 2003). Cranton and King (2003) see professional dialogue and collaboration as key elements in supporting teachers in changes in practice or transformative learning. They observe that the goal

of those who teach teachers is to open their perspectives to new ways of thinking about teaching. Similarly, Keegan (2011) finds that successful teaching and learning with technology is transformative in nature and includes critical reflection, discussion and action. He describes it as, "the process by which we call into question our taken-for granted habits of mind or mindsets to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open and reflective in order to guide our actions" (p. 66). This view of transformative learning for adults (Cranton & King, 2003; Keegan, 2011; Mezirow, 2000) aligns with the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996).

Theories such as a multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group) help to define transformative learning for teachers including preservice teachers. As a result, part of the research study design became the search for evidence that our preservice teachers saw a need for educational and social change, and were changing their beliefs. In the research, we looked for evidence that they could recognize and name normalizing structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, and appearance; and that they acknowledged a need for more democratic, social justice approaches.

Methodology

The investigation of the preservice teachers' understandings from the ELA course did not begin as a study of the entire course, but started as an examination of the individual assignments from the course combined with focus groups and interviews to understand at a deeper level both what and how the preservice teachers were learning. Because of this approach, the research methods differ for each assignment. The methodology section first explains the different research components and methods used. The second section of the methodology explains how each of these separate components was analyzed.

Research Components

In this section, we give an overview of each of the components of the research, identify the data sources, and discuss how the data were analyzed. The bulk of the research followed a qualitative design; however, we also did some open-ended surveying which allowed for triangulation with the other data, which included observations, field notes, individual interviews, focus groups and visual and content analyses of the print and digital texts created by the preservice teachers.

The first research component was based on the preservice teachers' personal narratives/life histories in the form of digital literacy stories. For this analysis, we collected 150 digital stories and 150 written reflections from preservice teachers over a three-year period. This was combined with focus group discussions and 6 face-to-face open-ended interviews with the preservice teachers who used digital stories in their practice teaching sessions. Separately, we each examined the digital stories, reflections and interviews for evidence of changes to the preservice teachers' previously-held paradigms or assumptions about literacy, teaching, and teaching using digital technologies.

The second research component focused on the use of digital media. Through the analysis of in-depth case studies based on three of our preservice teachers, we identified four persistent themes related to their use of digital media both in our program and in their teaching practice, either during field placements or as beginning teachers. Following Stake's (2000) practices for

in-depth case studies, the data for this study drew on the preservice teachers' written reflections, transcribed interviews, and the digital and multimodal texts created by them and their students. Our findings suggest that there are important implications for education if we focus on the performative, collaborative and multimodal affordances of digital media, as well as tap into the potential for using digital media as "identity texts" (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007).

The third research component in our study employed multiple data sources including: a) ninety digital book talks created by the preservice teachers; b) reflections on the book talks; and c) interviews. We examined their use of digital book talks to support classroom discussions about social justice issues. The book talks were analyzed and were rated based on criteria such as the quality of their hook to engage students to read the book; the quality of the questions raised related to social justice, and the teaching activities that were proposed by the preservice teachers. From the original group of ninety book talks, we selected eight of the more interesting and effective ones to analyze more closely. We conducted interviews with the creators of these book talks.

The fourth component was based on the creation of critical media literacy lesson plans and the data included: a) 48 surveys of preservice teachers' understandings of social justice; b) document analysis of 71 digital lessons produced by them over a two-year period; and c) twelve open-ended interviews on the design of the critical media literacy lessons. We conducted a content analysis (Berg, 2004) of the open-ended survey responses to identify themes informing their pre and post impressions about the importance of incorporating social justice issues into their Language classes. For the analysis of the critical media literacy lessons, using blind review, we assessed the critical media literacy lessons as having one of four orientations: Protectionist, Media Art, Media Literacy or Critical Media Literacy, employing a framework adapted from the work of Kellner and Share (2007). We subsequently met to compare and discuss the ratings assigned to the lessons.

Data Analysis

There were multiple approaches to the data analysis in this study. Analysis of the data from the preservice teachers' reflections on the digital stories and their interviews required several different layers of coding and interpretation of the themes which emerged. We followed traditional coding procedures (Berg, 2004) working individually and then compared findings in order to identify recurring and overlapping thematic and structural patterns (Black, 2007). At a later point in time, we returned to the reflections and tabulated the frequency of some of the key findings based on this categorization of the anecdotal comments.

The multimodal texts (digital stories and book talks) created by the participants were analyzed within a framework of semiotic meta-functions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2008b; Burn, 2008), which considers design and production as representational, interactive and textual. Because of the complex blending of multimodal data elements, we also used the digital visual literacy analysis method of developing a "pictorial and textual representation of those elements" (Hull & Katz, 2006, p.41); that is, juxtaposing columns of the written text, the images from digital texts, data from interviews, and field notes to facilitate the "qualitative analysis of patterns" (p.41). Our analysis focused on the various modes of expression (i.e. visual image, gesture, movement) and how these work in concert to create meaning, as well as a focus on the topic of the multimodal text. We were particularly interested in moments that might be interpreted as "turning points" (Bruner, 1994) in the representation of identity and/or the

conceptual understanding of relevant issues. Where applicable, a cross case analysis was conducted to compare/contrast the cases of the individual participants.

The analysis of the critical media literacy lessons was done in two stages. First, using blind review, the lessons were evaluated according to levels of criticality (Kellner & Share, 2007). Next, the lessons were analyzed to determine the elements that were missing that could have been included to build criticality.

In the next section, the findings from each of these four research components are reviewed and analyzed using a broader framework of two theoretical constructs: new literacies and multiliteracies; and transformed practice leading to social and educational change.

Findings

The data analysis of the preservice teacher reflections provided insights into both their overall impressions of the digital story assignment and individual insights. The findings reported here show that four themes were raised by a significant number of preservice teachers. All of the reflections indicated that they found the assignment valuable and learned from it. More than two-thirds of the participants gained important insights about the teachers that they wanted to be. One in three preservice teachers also indicated how their views of literacy were changing. These findings are detailed next, accompanied by the words of the participants.

Findings from the digital stories, written reflections and interviews

We were initially surprised to find that *every* preservice teacher who participated in the study indicated that the digital literacy assignment was a positive experience. They indicated that they experienced multiple emotions and found that the assignment touched them in powerful ways. Although they did not use the word *transformative*, their comments detailed below indicated that the assignment was perspective-changing.

There were, in addition, four findings which were reflected most frequently in the data. First of all, while preservice teachers indicated different areas of struggle in preparing the assignment, the first finding was: *Every preservice teacher indicated in the reflection that he or she had gained learning, insights or understanding from the preparation of the digital story.* One preservice teacher wrote:

> I now realize that teaching literacy is not simply about reading and writing – but rather it requires a far deeper and much more meaningful approach which allows students to think critically, read between the lines, and express themselves in a multitude of forms.

Another wrote:

> Creating a digital story was a challenge for me at first. I had never encountered this type of assignment and found myself unable to get started. However, when I eliminated my writer's block, the way I saw literacy shifted. I realized that literacy is multimodal. I saw literacy as much more than the standard definition of being able to read and write. In particular I began to realize that digital and social literacy are especially important for our society and myself personally.

The second key finding which emerged the most frequently in the data was not an anticipated one; *Preservice teachers gained strong and deep understandings from viewing the digital stories of their peers.* More than two-thirds of each cohort reported that they had realized gains in understanding from viewing their peers' stories. They wrote that they had "seen each other's histories" and "where the other preservice teachers had been" prior to attending the faculty of education. Based on these digital stories, the preservice teachers articulated that they learned about "not making assumptions", and "not being judgmental" about their peers. They recognized the power of literacy to broaden perspectives and to build empathy. One preservice teacher wrote that she would no longer believe that her reality was another's. Another wrote that he realized now that he had been judgmental and "had made assumptions about others" based on superficial characteristics.

Preservice teachers reported other connections to the viewing of each other's stories, such as a need for differentiated curriculum based on the understanding that each person was different. They reported a better understanding of the needs of English Language learners and that they believed that the viewing of others' digital stories built empathy within the preservice teacher cohort. In addition, preservice teachers reported a developing connection to the learner and empathy for the experiences of their future students in their future classes based on hearing others' literacy histories.

The third finding of this study was that *the preservice teachers were able to make connections from the assignment to the kind of teacher they would be in the future.* While some of the reflections were deeply personal and rooted in the past, the majority of the preservice teachers (at least two-thirds of the preservice teachers in each cohort) were able to connect their literacy story and that of their peers' to build understandings about changes they would like to make as future teachers. Some of the understandings were clinical and practical, such as deciding to give students the "right to pass" or not requiring them to read aloud. Other understandings were deeper, with students expressing that they realized that their lives had been privileged compared to their peers and that they needed to make sure that every student felt valued and welcomed in their future classes.

A fourth finding was that the *preservice teachers found that their views of literacy expanded beyond reading and writing and that multimodal formats provided more spaces for expression.* This was articulated by at least one in three preservice teachers in each cohort. For example, one preservice teacher wrote, "Literacy is a unique fabric, a powerful thread, unraveling and weaving throughout a person's life, creating new experiences and opportunities as we go, defining and redefining who we are." While the preservice teachers found the technology requirements and the complexity of the digital story task to be intimidating, they were amazed at how quickly they were able to use the technology to represent themselves more authentically than through written text, or text and pictures alone. In an interview, one preservice teacher reflected:

> Creating a digital literacy story proved to be a very valuable learning experience for me. Not only did [it] provide me with an opportunity to learn about the multiple layers of literacy, it gave me a way to enhance my teaching practice. Assigning a digital story was something new and exciting for my students and my associate teacher.

Similarly, another wrote that the digital story "helped all of us gain a sense of identity, relearning exactly who we are." No preservice teachers told us that the digital medium was restrictive. One participant commented that she valued the digital literacy assignment because it gave her the tools, the space, and the audience to help her to reflect on both her life and her conception of literacy. In her written reflection on the assignment, she commented:

> Literacy involves both the ability to *make* meaning of the world we live in and to communicate *meaningfully* within these contexts. It is more than words on a page. Through my personal digital story, I was able to present the bullet points of my life with volumes of emotion and memory and presence that mere words could never have done in the same time and space.

One preservice teacher wrote that the point of the digital story was so that "each person could work to find their voice." Surprisingly, three of preservice teachers indicated that the digital format gave them a mask under which they felt more liberated to expose more of themselves. Some individual reflections were quite compelling in their candor. One preservice teacher used the opportunity the digital story created to reveal deeply personal circumstances to the class. Another reported that creating the story allowed her to rebuild her past, opening a door of silence that had been closed for years.

Finally, the findings indicate that starting the Language Arts course with the digital literacy history assignment provides a bridge between the preservice teachers' out-of-school digital literacy practices and the multimodal literacies in the program; it also allows preservice teachers to showcase their digital skills. Some, but not many (less than 20%) of the preservice teachers are comfortable creating and posting videos prior to enrolling in the BEd program. For the rest, the digital story assignment is initially intimidating but ultimately satisfying.

In summary then, the digital stories are a source of learning and reflection for the preservice teachers. The assignment provides them with insights into each other's literacy learning histories which the preservice teachers utilize to begin to articulate their views of the teacher they want to become. In the next section, findings from the second assignment, the digital book talks indicate that the preservice teachers build on the multimodal aspects of the first assignment while considering their roles as teachers for social justice.

Findings from the digital social justice book talks

The second course assignment is the creation of a digital book talk based on a social justice issue because book talks can help novice teachers see possibilities for discussion and positive social action. Although the preservice teachers were able to select the social justice books for book talks and create digital book talks, they were challenged by the portion of the assignment that required them to state how they would use the social justice book with their future classes. Approximately one in three preservice teachers was able to create both an effective digital book talk and the critical questions that would accompany it.

When we did a comparative analysis of four of the most effective book talks, we noted that some key features set the more successful book talks apart from the others. For example, three out of four of the best book talks utilized solely illustrations from the book. Perhaps this strategy helped to build the atmosphere and recreate the world of the book. In comparison, all of the less successful book talks utilized images, primarily from the Internet, in addition to the

book's illustrations. Also, none of the four best book talks provided additional information about the book and author over and above the title and the names of the author and illustrator. The book talks that were the most effective created mood and an artistic world from the start; captured students' interests; and placed students within a context where they could engage with social justice questions and become motivated toward action.

One challenging aspect of the assignment is the requirement to develop critical questions for the class discussion of the book or with designing the lesson activities to accompany the book. In the analysis of their book talks and lesson activities, it became evident that while preservice teachers seemed comfortable with interspersing imaginative/predictive and self-evaluative questions throughout the book talks, they did not include critical questions that demonstrated an understanding of existing inequalities and the need for social change. Half of the teacher candidates struggled with these critical questions. As a result, our fifth finding is that: *Preservice teachers require support and critical framing* (New London Group, 1996) *to articulate the deeper and broader issues of social justice.*

In the preservice teachers' lessons to accompany the book talks, less than 10% of the preservice teachers addressed the positional and representational aspects of text or the understanding that texts are not value-neutral. They also struggled with text deconstruction and reconstruction. This finding is a reminder that critical literacy is a somewhat recent pedagogy. The assignment did immerse them in digital media and encouraged them to see how digital book talks could help them create spaces for their future students to discuss issues of social justice. In terms of our own practice, we noted that new teachers need time and modeling in order to see critical literacy as something that accomplished readers do. Based on the findings from this portion of the research, we have recently placed more of a focus on encouraging teacher candidates to write about their own lives using Christensen's (2004) model of bringing students' lives into the classroom. We hope this modeling will prompt them to bring more of their future students' lives into their classrooms, making the curriculum more inclusive in a natural way. In this way, we hope to raise their awareness that texts and media are not neutral.

The challenges with articulating the social justice issue persisted in the findings for the next assignment in the course, the design of critical media literacy lessons.

Findings from the critical media literacy lessons

In the next component of the study, we analyzed 71 critical media literacy lessons, the preservice teachers' open-ended surveys of understandings of social justice, and transcripts of teacher interviews following their final practice teaching sessions. In the interviews, the preservice teachers reported that a very small number of their host classrooms had social justice books and social justice approaches, but when preservice teachers did have a chance to see this pedagogy modeled, they had found it to be powerful. Some preservice teachers said that they wanted to be change agents and help children see the *sell* in media, but others thought that teachers should be a neutral presence that does not influence children. While the number of preservice teachers interviewed was small, the data indicated once again that preservice teachers support social justice teaching but may have difficulty articulating the issues.   This was also apparent in the surveys they completed, which are discussed next.

The preservice teachers were asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous, open-ended survey at the beginning of the course and again toward the end of the course. The survey asked them to outline their understandings of critical literacy and the teacher's role in teaching for

social justice. The majority of those who volunteered for the survey (58 out of a possible 90 preservice teachers) did complete the survey, providing 43 completed pre and post surveys. These surveys were analyzed according to whether or not the preservice teachers provided evidence that their views of critical literacy and teaching for social justice had changed.

The analysis indicated that 12% of the preservice teachers did not articulate a change in their views. Approximately one in four (23%) said that their views had changed, but their description of the change was reported in non-specific terminology so that the change in concept or understanding could not be clearly discerned. The majority (65%) who completed the survey, however, provided clear evidence that their views of critical literacy and teaching for social justice had changed over the duration of their preservice year. These preservice teachers offered specific examples. They said that teachers had a role to be guides and facilitators to help students read and deconstruct texts and media. The most frequently-reported roles for teachers were as follows: to lead discussions with students; to help students see that all texts are biased; to help students understand that there are multiple perspectives; and to build empathy among students. Other responses included that they saw the role of the teacher was to help students "deconstruct stereotypes" and "challenge oppression, discrimination and stereotypes." Overall, the survey responses led us to our sixth and final finding: *Preservice teachers are supportive of the development of critical literacy skills and teaching for social justice.*

The preservice teachers offered their critical media lessons for review for the research and these were analyzed based on a framework of criticality developed by Kellner and Share (2007). The analysis revealed that most of the lessons the preservice teachers developed did address media literacy outcomes (85%). Less than half of the lessons produced by them, however, were assessed as *critical* according to the critical media analysis framework (Kellner & Share, 2007) that was applied (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of Media literacy lessons per category

Media Literacy Approach (Kellner & Share, 2007)	#	%	Media Literacy lessons	Critical Media Literacy lessons
Protectionist	1	1%		
Media as an Art Form	0	-		
Media Literacy	28	39%		
Approaching Critical	15	21%	85% of the lessons demonstrated understanding of media literacy concepts	45% of the lessons demonstrated understanding of critical media literacy concepts
Critical Media Literacy	17	24%		
Not Applicable	10	14%		

Note: n=71

The finding that less than half of the critical media lessons were, in fact, critical, was important in our study, causing us to reflect deeply on the results, and concomitantly, how an examination of our alignment with the pedagogy of multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996)

might further inform our practice and increase the criticality in this assignment in future years. This was not a new finding, however, because we had found this also in the social justice book talks (Finding 5: *Preservice teachers require support and critical framing* (New London Group, 1996) *to articulate the deeper and broader issues of social justice.*)

In summary, we have accumulated and examined a considerable amount of evidence over a four-year period. At each stage of the study, we saw more data that might be gathered to triangulate results and potentially provide deeper insights. While in the past we saw the different components of our study as somewhat distinct, we now interrogate the course using two theoretical orientations as lenses: multiliteracies; and transformed pedagogy for social justice approaches - both of which have foundations in critical literacy. It has been instructive to examine our practice through these broader lenses. We find that, while preservice teachers can and do use digital media to teach in interesting, engaging, and innovative ways, they appear to be much more comfortable with the new technologies than with the articulation of deeper understandings about critical literacy, critical media literacy, and teaching for social justice.

Discussion

More than a decade has passed since Alvermann and Hagood announced that, "Literacy is on the verge of reinventing itself" (2000, p. 193). As they considered the world of the 21st century learner, they saw that the rapid advances of technology would have significant implications for literacy educators. They commented that binaries are at play in school systems, one of which is the distinction between the "official knowledge accepted by the dominant culture" (p. 200) and the students' out-of-school lives which include popular culture. They theorize that, "Binaries forged and instantiated within the discourse of school leave little room for literacy instruction of the multiliteracies of students' everyday lives" (2000, p. 201). They and others see the study of critical media literacy as a "natural" element of literacy instruction (p. 201) that provides an opportunity to blur the distinctions between the traditional, established curriculum and life.

Alvermann and Hagood (2000) were interested also in the pedagogical implications of helping students enjoy media (pleasure) while simultaneously acquiring the skills (work) to identify how media could potentially silence them through its representations. They identified critical media studies questions to be, "Who does this text address through its words, images and sounds? Who is absent in this text, and what might explain that absence? Whose interests are served in this text? How am I positioned by it?" They argue that a crucial theoretical construct to be acknowledged is "mode of address" or how the reader/viewer is positioned by the communication (p. 201). They employ a multiliteracies pedagogical framework (New London Group, 1996) to explain how a teacher might include *mode of address* to help students deconstruct and reconstruct media text. We find that these examples such as these which utilize a multiliteracies framework can also help preservice instructors address gaps in preservice teachers' understandings of how to engage critically with media texts.

Central in this endeavour is the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) with its four components which we consider as we reflect on the findings of this study. The first is *meaningful practice* in a learning community who can play, "multiple and different roles based on their backgrounds and experiences" (p.85.) Our preservice teachers indicate that they are initially somewhat intimidated, but not overwhelmed, with the amount of technology that they are expected to use. They find more spaces for expression with the technology and they find voice where previously their voices may not have been heard. With the digital literacy histories

assignment, the social justice book talks, and the introduction to critical media literacy, we are satisfied that we are providing meaningful, authentic practices in the preservice program. Preservice teachers, as both learners and teachers can begin to connect their understandings of power, voice, and representation to the need for social and educational change.

With respect to *overt instruction* in a multiliteracies pedagogy, the research has been helpful in identifying where we as preservice educators can scaffold learning activities and interventions to allow the preservice teachers to build on their understandings from other preservice teachers' experiences. Based on the review of the critical media literacy lessons, for example, we are reconstructing the assignment to scaffold the steps. Thoman and Jolls (2005) see the inquiry process in critical media studies as "two sides of the same coin" (p. 188). They theorize that inquiry in media literacy education needs both the production skills and the deconstruction skills. We have realized that the critical media literacy lesson assignment presently focuses more on deconstruction than production; attention to this imbalance might improve the outcomes of the assignment.

The third component of a multiliteracies pedagogy, *critical framing*, has presented us with some challenges. First, we find that some preservice teachers are challenged to articulate critical concepts. For example, multiple preservice teachers indicate that they are unhappy about advertising and body image but most cannot articulate underlying assumptions associated with judging women by their appearance, or recognizing a relationship between a public unhappy with body size and the media sell of gym memberships and weight loss programs. In addition, we have found that some preservice teachers are not aware that representations of meaning, whether they are in texts or media, are sites of present complexity and struggle. They see some issues, such as gender discrimination and racism, as points of conflict in the past rather than the present.

In addition, some preservice teachers indicate that they are not sure that they should have a role in leading students to examine media and print critically. Our findings resonate with those of Kelly and Brandes (2001) who theorize that teachers' visions of democracy in Canada differ: some feel that the teacher's role is not to question; some want students to have multiple perspectives but see the playing field as level; but a third teacher perspective recognizes inequalities and sees a need for social action (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). We concur that preservice instructors should lead preservice teachers to consider that they have a role to play in building a more democratic future.

Luke and Freebody (1997) have identified critical literacy as a set of literacy practices that help students become aware that text can present points of view while missing or silencing other points of view. Supporting preservice teacher discourse on these and similar understandings is a direction forward for us as teacher educators. Technology opens another window for addressing issues of power, voice and representation (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Jewitt, 2008a; Kellner, 2000) as does media literacy (Floures-Koulish, 2006). As instructors, we need to find ways to frame the issues in ways that preservice teachers can understand, possibly through the introduction of pedagogical models of critical literacy (e.g., Ciardiello, 2004).

The final component of a multiliteracies pedagogy is *transformed practice,* by which we mean that preservice teachers will connect critical literacy understandings to the need for social and educational change. Technology's affordances allow us to employ new digital technologies and new learning strategies to transform our teaching and learning in positive directions for society and in ways that can empower both our preservice teachers and their future students

(Labbo & Reinking, 1999). Kellner (2000) argues also that new literacies should be considered for how they can empower people who have traditionally been excluded; in this way, education can be reconstructed to be more responsive in a multicultural society. While there were elements of transformed practice evident in the data, there was also room for growth in this outcome area.

While our study confirms that the preservice teachers are gaining experience and expertise with multiliteracies, we are aware that the rules and conventions of multiliteracies are continually evolving (Kellner, 2000) and we need to make a deliberate effort toward the continuous improvement and updating of the ELA course in order to keep up with changes in society and in technology affordances. At the same time, we need to encourage preservice teachers to be comfortable in both the print and digital worlds.   Kellner (2000) considers that these new multimedia sites are the "new frontier of learning and literacy, the great challenge to education for the millennium" (p. 256). Again, the findings of the study and our understandings of the literature, confirm our earlier direction toward an emphasis on critical media literacy.

We began this study with a focus on the ELA program and its respective elements without a key consideration of the thematic elements that linked all of the components of our study. We have moved now to a place where we see new literacies, and transformed practice using technology, as central themes that will support and sustain our future reflective efforts. The recursive nature of the study is a rich source of data, contemplation, and discourse for us. Also, we hope that our story resonates with other preservice teacher educators employing new literacies and new technologies in their work with preservice teachers. From a sociolinguistic perspective, we are reminded by Gee (1996) and the New London Group (1996) that literacy is embedded in the social practices of a culture. As we continue to develop theories of new literacies, we recognize that "multiple, critical literacies populate the new literacies … requiring new skills, strategies and insights to successfully exploit the rapidly changing information and media technologies continuously emerging in our world " (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004). It will be helpful to share approaches which encourage preservice teachers to successfully accomplish these goals: to bring to the surface their assumptions; to teach in new ways; to participate fully in a democratic society; and to consider themselves change agents for a better world.

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Shifting the Focus to Student Learning:
Characteristics of Effective Teaching Practice
As Identified by Experienced Pre-service Faculty Advisors

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Abstract

Cochrane-Smith and Power identify trends in teacher education programs with some relating to heightened teacher accountability for students' learning. In this paper we provide a model that identifies characteristics believed to be critical elements related to a teacher's conceptual focus shifting from an emphasis on their teaching to their students' learning and we have grounded these characteristics in current educational research. Through focus group inquiry, we have identified those teacher characteristics thought to account for effective teaching practice. These characteristics include: a professional growth perspective, passion and enthusiasm for the content, pedagogical content knowledge, a rich instructional repertoire of strategies, awareness of assessment for, as, and of learning, ability to read the body language of the learner, caring classroom management strategies, and instructional efforts (e.g., social justice). Our research data provide a conceptual framework for further study.

Keywords: learning processes/strategies, teacher induction, teacher education-pre-service

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Objectives

Research calls for accountability measures that emphasize the impact of teacher preparation programs and pathways on student learning outcomes (Cochran-Smith, Gleeson & Mitchell, 2010; Noell & Burns, 2006) or evidence of teacher candidate learning outcomes from their programs (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). Cochrane-Smith and Power (2010) identify trends in teacher education programs, which are related to heightened teacher accountability for students' learning. Recent research shows that the relationships between teachers and their students have many complex impacts on students (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011); however, the complexity of factors that may influence students' learning outcomes, when viewed from this perspective, renders a linear assessment of influences futile.

Alternatively, we envision students' learning potential from the perspective of imaging of the teacher. If the teacher has the skills and dispositions to focus on student learning, we believe that the teacher's instructional actions support improvements in student learning. To provide a background for this belief, we identified the characteristics of effective teachers as they emerged from our focus group discussions with experienced pre-service teacher faculty advisors.

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

Pre-service teacher preparation programs attempt to expose pre-service teachers to the practices, accreditation requirements, and the continuous climate of performance assessments that characterize the profession of teaching. Various jurisdictions do this through programs that have a variety of structures and timelines. However, virtually all programs include an apprenticeship element or practicum component, sometimes supported by ongoing mentorship through individual or small group connections with a faculty advisor as in the case of on-line chat groups. However, teacher preparation programs acknowledge the limitations of time as a factor in determining the extent to which pre-service teachers can be prepared for the complex realities of professional responsibilities in a classroom. Graduates of all teacher preparation programs require and receive further support in their professional preparation after graduating from their program. The hiring practices of a school jurisdiction, the induction processes used by employers, the novice teacher mentoring supports available to new teachers within a school, the on-going professional development available to teachers during employment, and the career trajectory supports made available to experienced teachers are all part of the preparation of teachers to manage the challenging task of ensuring student learning.

We believe that a critical part of maximizing the impact of all of the supports available to teachers throughout their careers needs to be focused on a single shift in teachers' thinking: the shift from focusing on their teaching toward focusing on their students' learning. On a minute-to-minute basis in the classroom, teachers must make instructional decisions. Teachers need to learn to make each instructional decision on the basis of its impact on students' learning (Abbot, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1992). Increasingly, teachers have been called upon to demonstrate public accountability by showing the impact of their instructional decisions in terms of student performance data (Amos, 2012; Stratham & Ware, 2001). While efforts to collect student performance data in the classroom may be authentic and focused on big ideas, enduring understandings,

and holistic goals that influence attitudes and beliefs along the knowing/doing/being continuum, the measurement of instructional impact also serves other masters. Public accountability requirements have resulted in practices that reflect the accumulation of hard data that can be reported in absolute numbers to address public confidence in the educational system (Amos, 2012).

Testing is often used to amass data that may include high stakes (pass/fail) single event opportunities for students to demonstrate learning. Teachers are faced with the contradiction about the purposes and processes of assessment and the types of data that appear to be given status and value as evidence of student learning. Consequently, they are receiving confusing messages about their professional role. Authentic assessment foci direct teachers' attention toward the learning. Accountability focused assessments direct attention toward the teacher. This contradiction makes the professional maturation of a teacher more difficult than it should be and delays or derails the critical shift in teachers' growth required to ensure that teachers' instructional decisions are filtered through their ability to impact students' learning (Amos, 2012; Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011).

The continuum of teacher preparation needs to be focused on maximizing through various career stages its' contributions to the professional maturity of the teacher (Figure 1). The teacher growth that is the result of pre-service learning, hiring practices, novice teacher induction, in-service professional development, and career trajectory choices needs to be coordinated to provide a single clear message about the goal of all instructional efforts.

Figure 1.

The Various Stages of Professional Growth to Teachers' Professional Maturity

Pre-Service Preparation Program

⇓

Hiring Practices

⇓

Novice Teacher Induction

⇓

In-Service Professional Development

⇓

Professional Career Trajectory Preparation
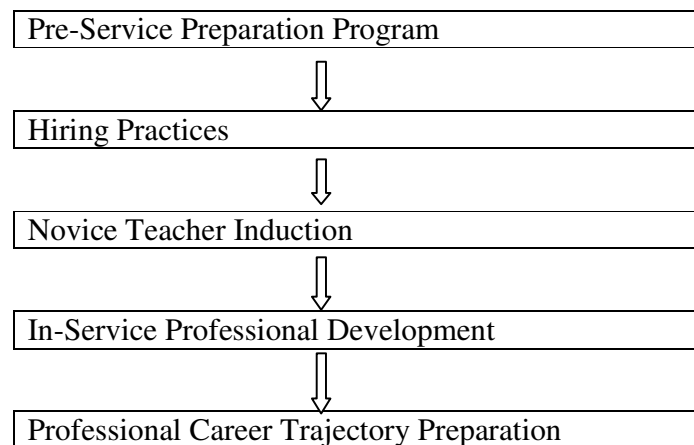
When we examine teacher effectiveness by gauging student learning, findings show that student learning plateaus after the teacher's first three years in the profession (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011). This trend indicates that we should focus considerable attention on optimizing practices focused on student learning in the pre-service preparation of teachers and in the early years of their professional work. Early career focus should help novice teachers make a strong shift toward student learning. If this is

done, the effects of plateauing could have minimal effect on students' learning because the teacher would already be focused on ensuring learning as a filter for their professional practice. The teacher would understand the characteristics necessary for their professional effectiveness.

Our focus of investigation in Stage 1 of our research was *What are the elements that characterize a teacher's shift in focus from their teaching to students' learning?* In re-conceptualizing our vision of teacher preparation as a continuum of supports that focus all efforts on the professional goal of improving students' learning, we needed to ask ourselves what existing, or new, theory supports this re-conceptualization. Theory provides the capacity to conceptualize phenomena in sophisticated ways (Trier, 2009) and drawing from disparate sources strengthened our efforts, as researchers, to identify a theory that would support professional growth designed to increase student learning. In understanding the elements that create or contribute to the shift in teachers' focus from individual teaching to students' learning, we, as pre-service teacher educators and researchers, can support teachers' professional growth more effectively (Chen & Rossi, 1983; Donaldson, 2007; Rogers, Hacsi, Petrosino & Huebner, 2000; Coulter, 2010). And, if we can identify the elements that characterize the shift in teachers' focus and that contribute to their professional maturity, we have a unique opportunity to align the various stages of their professional growth to attain high levels of student achievement. Naming a theory makes it more readily accessible; we, therefore, call the theoretic diagram that resulted from Stage 1 of our study *Professional Shift Theory (pst).*

Before we turn our attention to identifying how we went about conceptualizing this shift in professional focus for teachers, it is necessary to address the role of the apprenticeship and practicum experiences that are a universal element of teacher preparation. Induction mentorship is also becoming increasingly common and even legally mandated in some jurisdictions as a stage of professional preparation of new teachers. Teachers are more likely to recognize and address substantive changes in their own professional performance if they have access to the professional practices of other teachers (Coulter, 2010). The value of having the professional guidance of a mentor teacher focused on assisting the novice teacher in their desired learning is self-evident. If everyone is working toward the same learning goals for the pre-service teacher in their preparation practica and for the novice teacher in their mentorship, then the desired outcomes are more likely to be achieved. If teacher associates, faculty advisors, and mentors understand the common elements to be addressed in the pre-service and novice teacher's learning, they have a better chance of ensuring that such learning occurs by avoiding conflicting messages about priorities, and by optimizing the learning time during practica and in-service professional development. The vision shared by stakeholders who have responsibility for the professional growth of the pre-service teacher and the novice teacher becomes the direction and that direction becomes the filter for learning efforts. If apprenticeship opportunities are further aligned with the other aspects of teacher preparation (Figure 1), the impact is optimized and the priorities of the profession are clear to all involved. The model we provide in Figure 2 presents a vision for professional characteristics that could inform each stage of a teacher's career growth.

Our method of inquiry and the findings in Stage 1 of our research provide an expanded vision of the elements that we theorize are part of the professional shift in thinking that is required of teachers to reach the end goal of optimizing student learning.

The conceptualization of this vision (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008) is presented in Figure 2 in the results section of this paper.

Methods of Inquiry

This paper outlines the outcomes of the first stage of a three-stage study. During this stage of the study we isolated the characteristics of effective teachers that represent a shift in teachers' professional focus from their teaching to focusing on their students' learning as identified by a focus group of experienced faculty advisors. During the second stage of the study, we will work with various jurisdictions that include a faculty of education and coterminous school boards to identify hiring, induction, and in-service practices that support the conceptualized shift in teachers' professional focus. In the third and final stage, we will work with personnel in these jurisdictions to strengthen the vision and focus of support efforts provided along the teacher professional growth continuum to ensure a sustained and clear focus on professional growth that supports students' learning.

As stated above, our research purpose in Stage 1 was to isolate the elements of the professional shift in teachers' focus from teaching to a focus on students' learning. In doing so, we were able to identify the characteristics of effective teachers that were valued by experienced faculty advisors. In our Faculty of Education, there are 70 full time Faculty members. Among this group were 7 full time faculty members who had, as part of their workload, the role of Faculty Advisors responsible for visiting pre-service teachers in classrooms to lend support and to evaluate their practice teaching. We felt that faculty advisors working with pre-service teachers as both instructors in their professional preparation programs and as mentors/evaluators within the context of their practicum experiences were in an ideal position to provide academic and professional insights on pre-service teachers. The group of seven faculty members who served in these conjunctive roles was invited to participate in a focus group inquiry. All seven faculty members accepted the invitation to participate. Research ethics approval was sought and given to interview and transcribe data from the focus group sessions for the purpose of identifying the elements that were thought to contribute to a teacher's professional focus on students' learning.

In focus group discussions, the group of seven faculty advisors engaged in a conversational interview with appropriate open-ended prompts being used to encourage discussion. During three focus group meetings, participants were directed to consider the elements of practice and provide examples they had observed that would provide evidence of pre-service teachers who had made a professional shift in their thinking from focusing on their teaching to focusing on students' learning. During these meetings, researchers made audio-recordings of the discussions and made summative notes of key points. Following each meeting, the researchers transcribed recordings and examined data for recurring themes and observations (Cresswell, 2002). Transcriptions were presented to focus group participants at each successive meeting for the purposes of verification, clarification, and member checking.

As recurring themes became evident in transcriptions and were supported by follow-up discussions, a saturation of ideas was reached. Ideas were repeated and reinforced with further examples from the experience(s) of various participants. The decision was made to capture the main points of discussions in a diagram that would

represent the elements of teachers' conceptual shift in focus and that would provide ease of access for a wider audience. An initial diagram was developed and the transcripts were then rechecked to ensure that the elements included in the diagram were also in evidence, to the point of saturation, in the dialogue of participants. The resulting diagram was revised to include connections among ideas and to make the interrelated concepts more accessible. A clear understanding of interrelated concepts was necessary to move the study into Stage 2 and to provide the background concepts of the diagram for a broader audience of educators.

The resulting diagram has the value of capturing program theory in an easy-to-access and understandable format. It also provides a conceptualization of how a program might operate to ensure its efficacy. Program efficacy is achieved by conceptualizing the influences on program functions and by identifying their potential impacts (Chen & Rossi, 1983; Donaldson, 2007; Rogers, Hacsi, Petrosino & Huebner, 2000; Coulter, 2010). An additional and critical advantage of the conceptual diagram is to provide a filter for the efforts that should *not* become central aspects of the limited resources in time and funding available along the teacher maturation continuum (Figure 1).

Results: Elements of Professional Teachers' Focus on Student Learning

In this study, all participants perceived that a shift in focus takes place within many pre-service teacher candidates as they begin to develop conscious competence in their profession. As the pre-service teachers begin to focus on students' learning, observers in the faculty advisor role could see the shift in the pre-service teachers' professional practice. This shift underlies all of the characteristics of conscious competence.

This study started with the premise that during their tenure as teachers, continuous growth and maturation as a professional will result in a shift in professional focus away from teaching actions and toward students' learning. All participants in the focus group discussions had experience as classroom teachers, faculty of education professors engaged in teacher preparation programs, and faculty advisors involved in practicum supervision, including mentoring. All participants unanimously agreed that this shift in teachers' focus is a characteristic that reflects the teacher's increasing professional maturity. Their participation in the focus group discussions evidenced their willingness to examine the impact of specific activities on performance and their belief in the necessity of improvements in teaching as a professional characteristic (Allen, 2004). All participants agreed that a clearer conception of the elements that contributed to a professional focus on learning was timely and necessary as a filter for program improvement in a pre-service context. Participants also believed that certain actions and dispositions are critical to creating a focus on students' learning. In the program change process, a positive program change would include application of a consistent vision of the elements present when teachers focus on learning (Maynes & Hatt, 2011).

The conceptions that resulted from Stage 1 of our research helped us frame the next two stages of this study which will focus on student learning as a function of teaching (Phelan, 2009) rather than as a function of students' efforts to learn. Stages 2 and 3 will help us to see teaching as "a site of possibility" (Phelan, 2009, p. 106) capable of effectively influencing student learning. The elements of the shift in focus towards focusing on students' learning are presented here, in Figure 2, as developed through our focus group interactions (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Professional Shift Theory (pst)
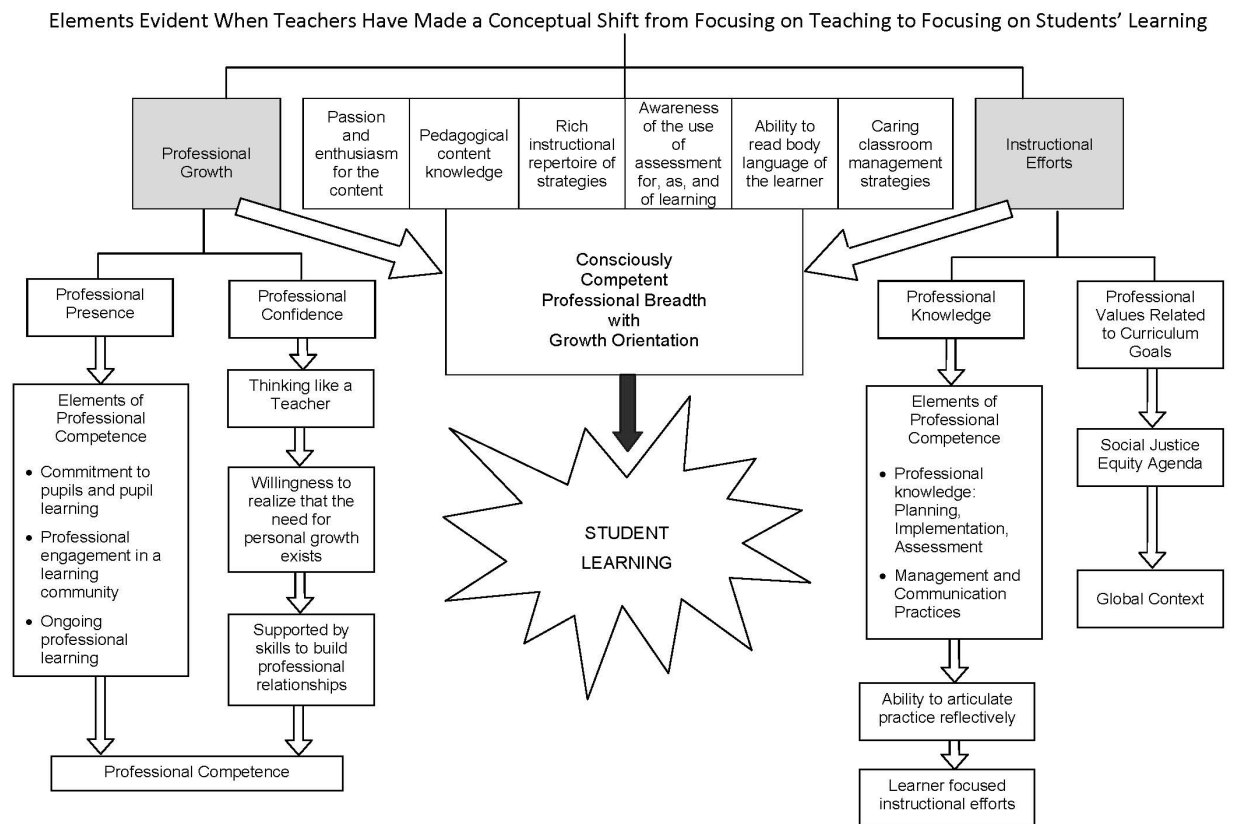
To create this schematic, data collection, analysis, and conceptual formulation were connected in a reciprocal and recursive manner. Examination of emerging themes during the different meetings provided opportunities for participants to guide analysis and facilitate the process of diagramming. The diagram was subjected to the four requirements identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Specifically, 1) the fit between the diagram and the 'shift in conception' phenomenon, including its evolution from diverse data and its adherence to the common reality of experienced faculty advisors; 2) the ability of the diagram to support understanding of this shift in thinking for teachers; 3) the applicability of the conceptualizations in this diagram to broad contexts; and 4) the potential of the diagram to provide direction about its applicability and to support reasonable action related to teachers' professional growth. The following paragraphs explain the elements represented in this diagram and anchor conceptions in previous educational research.

Understanding the End Result: A Consciously Competent Professional

The data contributes to the major theme of a *consciously competent professional*, and six contributing attributes necessary to be defined in this manner, along with supporting

skills, attitudes, and dispositions. The main element in this shift was identified as the conception of a consciously competent professional, with professional and instructional breadth and a growth orientation. This conception is evident in the research literature and in professional resource books about teaching (Boyatziz, 1982; Brundrett & Silcock, 2002; Leat, 1993). The consciously competent professional's focus on instructional and professional actions would make improved student learning a priority. According to the data, the consciously competent professional teacher, who focuses on student learning, would require a cadre of attributes to support instructional efforts and maintain a professional growth orientation (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Fenwick, 2001). These attributes include: 1) passion and enthusiasm for the subject content, 2) pedagogical content knowledge, 3) a rich instructional repertoire of teaching strategies, 4) awareness of the various productive ways that assessment data can be used, 5) sophisticated ability to read the body language of the learner, and 6) caring classroom management strategies.

1) Passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter provide a platform for engaging students' interest (Day, 2004; Hobbs, 2012). By demonstrating this passion and enthusiasm, the teacher motivates and provides reasons for students to attend to new ideas. Teachers develop engaging strategies when they have an interest in a topic. Students benefit from having high levels of interest stimulated through meaningful engagement (Meador, 2012 0nline; Mroz, 2008). Both positive and negative teacher-student relationships during learning have been shown to have medium to large impacts on students' engagement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011).

2) Pedagogical content knowledge is a level of comfort and familiarity with a topic that allows teachers to engage examples and non-examples; to explain, clarify, and expose students to complex opportunities to consider consolidations and applications (Shulman, 1987; Van Dreil & Berry, 2012). Consolidation and opportunities to apply learning support students' internalization of new ideas. This attribute allows teachers to anticipate common misconceptions and provide learners with opportunities to examine and consider various aspects and perspectives about a topic. Strong pedagogical content knowledge allows teachers to differentiate effectively because they can provide variations within the scope of central ideas to respond to students' interests, learning profiles, prior learning, and readiness (Tomlinson et al, 2009). Pedagogical content knowledge can be enriched by engagement in professional self-examination in professional learning communities (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

3) A necessary attribute of teachers who focus on students' learning is *a rich instructional repertoire of strategies* for use during the instruction, consolidation, and application components of lessons (Garmston, 1998; Goodyear, 1991). Being able to vary approaches allows teachers to provide learning opportunities that maximize students' ability to learn through their preferred learning styles (Maynes, Julien-Schultz & Dunn, 2010; Maynes & Julien-Schultz, 2011). The ability to select direct instruction through modeling, or to choose from among a rich variety of indirect approaches such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, web quests, or inquiry, provides both exemplar exposure and experiences to support internalization of central concepts (Maynes & Straub, 2010).

4) Awareness of the possible uses of assessment is an essential attribute of effective teachers. Teachers who focus instructional efforts on students' learning arrange opportunities to gather assessment data *for, as,* and *of* learning (Davies, 2012; Earl 2006; Earl, 2008; Tomlinson, 2007) and include assessment that is embedded and non-intrusive. The learner has a role in self- and peer-assessment. Learning and assessment of the learning become seamless.

5) Teachers who focus on students' learning are *able to read the body language of the learner* (Craig, Graesser, Sullins, & Gholson, 2004*).* This body language provides early signals that learning is happening or that the student's grasp of the learning is problematic (Coulson, 2004). The ability to understand the body language of the learner allows teachers to adjust learning opportunities (reflection-in-action) and remain sensitive to the potential for adapting content, processes, or products to improve learning (Conati, 2002).

6) Caring classroom management strategies are essential to ensuring the preeminence of learning as a focus in the classroom (Noddings, 2002, Hatt, 2005, Hatt, 2008). Through the appropriate, supportive, and proactive use of rules and routines in the classroom (Breaux & Whitaker, 2006), teachers who focus on students' learning ensure that learning time is optimized, that the focus on learning is a central filter for all decisions, that learning happens in responsive and flexible environments, and that respect for individuals is the guiding premise (Charney, 2002).

All six of these attributes must be present for a teacher to be considered a consciously competent professional. These basic attributes are expanded and enriched by *professional presence* and personal *professional confidence.*

A teacher's *professional presence* in the classroom projects a sense that the teacher is in charge, has a direction, and is guided by a sense of purpose. Elements of professional competence that relate to a teacher's professional presence include: their commitment to students and their learning, their engagement in a professional learning community through cooperative professional growth, and their commitment to ongoing professional learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Conscious competence is deepened by the person's ability to *think like a teacher.* This includes their ability to focus efforts on issues and strategies that can impact students' learning and expanding their conceptual repertoire of professional knowledge to encompass concepts that enable the operation of effective practice (Kameenui & Carnine, 1998: Killen, 2006; Orlich et al, 2010). Being open to professional growth is critical to the teacher's ability to expand their realization of the need for personal growth and extend their capacity and willingness to grow. Professional growth is seen as a function of the desire to improve student learning. Recent research (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011) reports the tendency of teacher growth, as measured by increases in their students' learning, to plateau after their third year of teaching. However, professional growth that is supported by the interpersonal skills to build professional relationships may offer support for continuous growth that is reflected in the teachers' actions and measureable in the students' achievement data. These supports may further professional growth through cooperative stimulation and constructive peer mentoring and collaboration. *Professional competence* is the outcome of the coexistence of professional presence and professional confidence.

Professionally competent breadth with a growth orientation is supported by the teacher's instructional efforts (Maynes, 2012) and the cadre of skills they develop to support these efforts. Instructional efforts are enriched by the teacher's professional knowledge and their professional values in synchronization with curriculum goals. Elements of the teacher's professional knowledge include their knowledge of effective curriculum planning, implementation, and assessment, as well as their management and communication practices with related stakeholders such as students, parents, guardians, support agencies, care providers, administrators, and policy makers. In a learner-focused environment, the teacher's ability to reflect and articulate their professional practice is a key to the ability to use, improve, expand, and actualize practice when needed. When the teacher can name and describe what they do, they have the advantage of reflective and responsive use of what they do. Reflection allows the teacher to understand the impact of specific actions in an instructional context on specific outcomes in student learning. When all instruction is focused on what the student is learning in relation to the time and effort spent, an economy of effort characterizes the instruction. The instruction becomes responsive and learner focused.

The cadre of specific skills and a set of professional values that are synchronized to the current curriculum goals of the jurisdiction support instructional efforts. Each curriculum guideline identifies knowledge, skills, and values that are contextualized in the expected learning outcomes of the jurisdiction. The teacher who has made the conceptual shift toward focusing on students' learning will be able to understand, teach, and exemplify the values that are espoused in a guideline. These values will often relate to the big ideas or enduring understandings of the subject. Additionally, these values reflect the commonly espoused values of the community and evolve in the context of general social awareness. These values will include and are encompassed by a *social justice equity agenda* and relate to the *global context*. The professional values related to curriculum goals that are held by the teacher will be reflective of the inclusive social goals of the era. They will be understood and modeled for students in the classroom context. The classroom norms of behaviour are used to model and practise the predominant social norms of the society.

Conclusions

The diagram (Figure 2) represents the conceptual shift at end point. The elements represent the attributes that require development in order to make the conceptual shift from focusing on teaching to focusing on student learning. This shift in focus is characteristic of effective teachers.

The schematic can be used broadly in pre-service and in-service contexts to guide professional discussions, growth plans, professional evaluations, and school improvement efforts. It has the potential to provide direction about reasonable actions related to teachers' professional growth along the continuum from pre-service to professional maturity. In addition, the conceptual diagram allows researchers to consider the potential impact of situational factors such as the curriculum, work factors, resource limitations, space constraints, the learning setting, the interest of the students, classroom disruptions, and the intensity of reform on student learning (Kennedy, 2011). It also allows educators to consider how "fundamental attribution error" (Kennedy, 2011, p. 597) may lead to

assignment of some effects to the wrong causes. The details of the conceptual diagram provide specific and particular direction about theorized attributes that may promote learning. Such details provide structure for further investigation.

If this schematic, or conceptual diagram, is used to inform the next transition in teaching from the pre-service program to hiring, hiring practices could be anticipated to change significantly. For example, interview practices might include examination of the candidate in a classroom context to determine the extent of their focus on students' learning. Additionally, interview questions might change in focus. Performance based questioning that attempted to determine the candidates' skill from anecdotes about past experiences would provide indicators of the candidate's ability to sustain a focus on learning. Questions could be generated directly from the conceptual diagram and focus on the main elements of the teacher's professional knowledge and dispositions, their professional growth, and instructional efforts, beliefs and commitments. These questions could be designed to target the outcome of student learning. The conceptual diagram provides a framework for interviewers to filter interviewee responses to questions; the "look-fors" of the answers. This extension is the focus of Stage 2 of this research study, now underway. Similar applications could be anticipated to support design of induction programs for novice teachers, in-service programs, and career trajectory paths.

Educational Significance

This conceptual diagram was designed for two purposes. First, it anticipates teachers' instructional actions with corresponding positive changes in students' performance when the program elements at the pre-service, hiring, novice teacher induction, in-service, and teacher career trajectory paths are considered (Coulter, 2010; Elsmore, Peterson & McCarthy, 1996;). This investigative focus is timely as it aligns with a very large meta-analysis of previous research identifying correlated impacts on students' learning (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Second, the diagram is the schematic that informs Stages 2 and 3 of our research.

Many current in-school professional development efforts involve professional learning communities that focus on student achievement, and examine ways to improve student achievement (Abbot, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992; Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993; Little, 1990; Strathan & Ware, 2001; Coulter, 2010; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Rozenholtz, 2001); but, these efforts have competition. There is a tendency to focus some professional time and attention on current "hot" topics that may be characterized by narrowness of vision, a focus on one population, or a single issue to the detriment of a broader focus on student achievement. As new trends are highlighted in the context of pre-service teacher preparation, the larger vision of preparing teachers to impact students' learning can be diminished. Cochrane-Smith and Power (2010) identify ten such trends in teacher preparation. While some of these trends incorporate a focus on students' learning, an equal number of emerging trends do not. In a recent research report Henry, Bastien, and Fortner (2011) conclude in their work on new teachers that, "…in light of novice teachers' significant capacity for growth, improving their initial effectiveness as rapidly as possible seems to us to offer the greatest promise for improving student performance" (p. 279). Our conceptual diagram (Figure 2) provides a broader vision of strategies that extend teachers' focus on student learning/performance to all levels of their careers

(Timmons, 2006; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). Additionally, our diagram has the potential to become an overarching framework that can provide filters to direct time, resources, and professional energy to the most promising aspects of the complex dynamics of student learning in schools. This focus will direct Stage 2 of our study.

During Stage 2 of this project, researchers will partner with several school boards that have coterminous faculties of education. We intend to examine the pre-service programs to determine the extent to which pre-service courses are addressing the elements conceptualized to contribute to the shift in teachers' professional focus. This aspect of the research will be addressed by examining course outlines against an analysis framework reflective of the diagram (Figure 2), and by interviewing a sample of faculty to determine their beliefs and instructional goals within the pre-service program. Hiring practices within coterminous boards will be examined. In-service opportunities within the boards will be investigated to determine their contribution to the elements. Novice teacher induction and mentoring programs will be examined for their goals and activities to align these with the conceptual elements that contribute to the shift in professional focus. Finally, teachers in later years of their career will be interviewed to determine the nature of the supports they seek and acquire to extend their career trajectories, and the extent of alignment of these trajectories to the elements of the shift in focus will be examined.

During Stage 3, the final stage of this project, researchers will work with coterminous faculties of education and school boards to plan for the alignment and improvement of teacher preparation supports. Alignments and improvements are anticipated to have an impact on student learning. This is the goal of school improvement. We anticipate that our research will support ways that professionals go about their practice in the future. In the words of Coulter (2010), this research should "restore the logic chain of program theory" in relation to the alignment of teacher education and professional growth. This research agenda provides a fit between the conceptual diagram that describes elements of teachers' professional shift in focus and the professional growth continuum for teachers. It has the potential to provide direction for reasonable action related to the examination of a consistent message about what is valued in teachers' professional growth (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While the characteristics of effective teachers, as measured by student learning, are identified in the diagram (Figure 2) that is the focus of this paper, we cannot ensure that every teacher who demonstrates evidence of these characteristics will maintain a focus on students' learning. We are, however, suggesting that this diagram is a starting point for further research into this complex dynamic. This diagram will allow us to promote professional development that is focused on constructivist and situational theories rather than on behavioural approaches that may currently be uncovered through traditional teacher hiring practices (Van Driel, & Berry, 2012; Borko et al., 2010).

Instruments and processes to help examine the continuum of teacher growth have now been developed for the Stage 2 of this research. We are currently working with several school boards to determine hiring practices as they may relate to aspects of a new teacher's tendency to focus efforts on improving students' learning. The consistency of underlying conceptions for each stage of the process of teacher development will be examined. This research can help school boards determine how to address the hiring of new teachers in the most effective way to ensure that they hire teachers with a learner-

centered focus. It can also help Faculties of Education reexamine their programs to determine elements that might be refined or added to their program to make pre-service teachers aware of the critical shift required in their professional focus as they teach. It is our hope that Figure 2, *Professional Shift Theory (pst)*, will become a schema for visioning by those who provide services to the profession of teaching and those who wish to focus on student learning as the central element of pre-service program renewal and school improvement. In the words of Mitchell and Sackney (2009), "Awareness is the beginning but it can't be the end, so it is critical that there are strategies in place for people to move forward" (p. 90).

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BOOK REVIEW

Title: Quiet: The Power of Introvert in a World That Can't Stop Talking

Author: Susan Cain

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Do you pay attention to the differences between extroversion and introversion? It can be fascinating to consider who is and is not aware of the distinction between the two, as well as the significant formative role they both play in daily perceptions and interactions. In my experience, more often than not it is the introverts who recognize and appreciate the difference, while too many extroverts remain unaware. In *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* (2012), Susan Cain reminds us of the potency and power of the gift of introversion. She challenges her readers to recognize and celebrate the unique insights and contributions that may be latent in communities and organizations—present, but hidden from view, and likely to remain so unless given the space to flourish and to find a voice. She also suggests that creating a space for the introvert voice may bring unforeseen blessings to an organization or community.

Despite focusing on introverts, Cain clearly wants to restore a healthier balance between introversion and extroversion in our North American culture. As she points out in her TEDTalks video (Cain, 2012), her husband is an extrovert, as are some of her best friends. Cain values both introversion and extroversion. Her focus, however, is clearly on speaking out for the introverts in our midst. She notes that around one-third to one-half of the population is introverted, and that introverts living in our extrovert-dominated North American culture can easily be overlooked. Cain challenges us to not only value and attend to the introverts in our midst, but to intentionally foster and create the conditions that will allow introverts to thrive and develop; conditions that she suggests will benefit extroverts as well. She also reminds us that there are no "pure" extroverts or introverts, but that the extrovert/introvert distinction is based on a continuum that includes every single one of us.

This is a book brimming with insights and references to numerous subtle, important topics that warrant reflective consideration. Many of them may have profound implications for a vast variety of communities and organizations, particularly businesses and schools.

Introverts are not necessarily shy people. Drawing heavily on powerful anecdotes and an impressive array of research, Cain notes that introversion is more about one's response to stimulation, including social stimulation. While extroverts thrive on stimulation, introverts tend to be more stimulus-sensitive, and therefore can be easily over-stimulated. Introverts need time and space to reflect, process, and to consider possible response options. Shyness implies social discomfort, while many introverts simply need alone-time in order to recharge. Cain points out that each person needs a "zone of stimulation" that is right for them, but that many workplaces and schools are not set up this way.

Introverts need to stop feeling incomplete. Caine hits this theme in both the book and in her TEDTalks video. In a culture that can often seem extrovert-dominated, introverts can get caught in a pattern of self-negating choices, and assume that there is something wrong with them. They often wish they could and believe they should be more extroverted. The net result is a loss of unique insight, leadership, and creativity. Cain challenges her introverted and extroverted readers to address and confront this powerful misperception.

Introverts perceive differently and may notice what others miss. Because of their innate wiring, introverts are often characterized by heightened sensitivity and an ability to notice subtleties others miss, and they often think in a more elaborate, complex fashion. They pick up on things that other people will not notice, at least not easily. Introverts may need gentle encouragement, however, to point out what they have observed. There is a very real danger that their insights could remain unarticulated.

Communities need to create space for the introvert voice. Cain challenges businesses and organizations to create the space for the voice of the introvert, who may perceive things that are critical to organizational success. Their voices are too often overlooked, and they may never find the space to speak, particularly in the business world's current emphasis on group tasks and organized professional dialogue.

The recent emphasis on working in groups or work teams is problematic at a structural level. Similarly, current emphases on open-office or open-classroom concepts may pose unnecessary challenges for introverts and extroverts alike. The problem is not collaboration, but the fact that too often dialogue is structured in such a way that it misses out on the unique insights and contributions of each participant and too easily tends toward "groupthink." Putting people directly into groups can bypass the critical step of individual reflection, and can easily create a culture driven by dominant voices. The missing voices of the quiet could hold the key to the conversation…and it is quite possible that no one will even hear their words. Cain spends some time in her book exploring the 2007 bank crash in this regard, sharing a number of stories of introverts who "saw it coming."

The Introvert/Extrovert distinction is a global reality. The extroversion/introversion continuum is the one trait that can be measured reliably across the globe. There are distinct differences between cultural groups. Western cultures are often predisposed to extroversion, while Eastern cultures are often more inclined to introversion. Cain reminds us that Western culture tends to be organized around the individual, while Eastern cultures are more focused on the group (be it family, business, or culture community). For those in leadership positions, particularly in business and educational institutions, this is a significant point to keep in mind.

Free Trait Theory reminds us that we can choose to overcome our natural tendencies. While people are born with specific personality traits they are naturally inclined toward (extroversion, introversion, etc.), one can act "out of character" in some situations, particularly when there is a perceived need to do so. Cain includes a number of comments from introverted leaders who share examples of occasions where they did not want to speak out, but felt compelled to do so. Ironically, some people may be so accustomed to speaking out of character that others do not even realize how hard it is for them to do so. They are often seen as extroverts, when in fact they are introverts choosing to step out of their natural comfort zones.

While not specifically aimed at educators, references to schools and classrooms appear throughout the book's pages. *Quiet* has significant educational implications. The key insights from the preceding section will certainly be of value to educators and educational leaders, but I would like to draw specific attention to four education-focused implications.

1. Teachers need to understand the extrovert/introvert distinction, and be able to recognize introversion in their own students. While most teachers tend to have a general awareness of their students' tendencies, the unique differences between the two ends of the continuum are essential for understanding and connecting with students. Participation could have very different definitions, depending on one's orientation. Sometimes silent students are actively participating, even if it may not appear to be that case. Teasing quiet introverts for their shyness can backfire. Assuming there is something wrong with them or that they simply need to "grow out of it" is not the answer. Not providing opportunities for the voices of the introvert in group tasks and class discussions can result in significant missed opportunities. As significantly, the differences between introverted students and an

extroverted teacher or between extroverted students and an introverted teacher will have a marked impact on relationships and interactions. Knowing the differences is a first step in acting on the blessings the two groups can offer to each other.

2. Students need to be taught about the extrovert/introvert distinction in order to know themselves and understand others. It is important for both introverts and extroverts to know themselves and to appreciate and understand those who are wired differently. There is significant value for individuals to know and understand their own introversion or extroversion, but also to begin to comprehend the significance of the differences between the two. There are neat opportunities to unpack this in a classroom context in a way that will build community and develop skills and insights toward self and others that could transcend the classroom.

3. Educational leaders need to recognize the extroverts and introverts in their school communities, and must factor this into their leadership tasks. It is very important for educational leaders to be aware of the introvert/extrovert distinction in their staff teams and communities. Up to half of the people they work with are introverts, and it is incumbent upon educational leaders to create space and opportunities for the introvert voices to speak their unique insights. Introverted teachers will often see things that others need to hear about, but may not always have an authentic and "safe" forum in which to speak.

4. Educators need to be very aware of the difference between group work and properly structured cooperative learning. Cain raises a legitimate point of concern about the tendency in schools and businesses to lean toward "groupthink" in collaborative dialogue and activities. This pattern runs the risk of missing out completely on the unique insights and contributions of the introverts in their midst. In this reviewer's opinion, too often teachers do not sufficiently understand and apply the insights of cooperative learning into their planning and structuring of group activities. Cooperative learning draws a careful distinction between individual reflection and group process. When structured properly, individuals are given an opportunity to reflect individually, even if only briefly, prior to working in a group context. When an introvert is presented with this expectation, particularly when they are required to contemplate and prepare to contribute in advance, they are more likely to have something to say. When the teacher also creates the pattern of expectation that each individual HAS something prepared to share, and that all voices need an opportunity to speak, it is much more likely that the unique insights of the introvert will emerge, and the full benefits of cooperative, collaborative interactions will be seen. There is a distinct difference between group work and cooperative learning, and the former, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the groupthink that concerns Cain, does not provide the intentionally structured opportunities for quiet voices to speak.

Teachers can take specific actions in order to support the introverted students in their classroom. Redefine participation so that it is no just about talking, but also about active listening, reflection, elaboration, etc. Provide rehearsal/preparation time, so that introverts are able to consider what they might contribute to a small-group or whole-class conversation. Use small groups so that introverts can develop greater comfort levels and confidence. But structure them carefully based on cooperative learning principles. Provide permission NOT to speak in order to reduce anxiety and increase focused participation. Teach all students about personality differences in order to understand both self and others better. Communicate clearly that introversion is not a "problem" to be fixed, but a unique difference to be valued and welcomed.

What I appreciated most about Cain was her balanced approach, which comes through clearly in both her writing and her speaking. She is not trumpeting introversion and blasting and bemoaning extroverts and their apparent preferred status in North America. She clearly values and celebrates both ends of the continuum, and recognizes that humanity benefits from this natural diversity. Extroverts and introverts need each other. Cain focuses on reminding us of the difference and its significance.

She also encourages her readers to pay more attention to introverts and to the unique challenges they face in their extrovert-inclined cultural contexts.

While *Quiet* is a book that should be widely read, it definitely needs to be read by extroverts who don't "get" introverts, and by introverts who believe their introversion is a problem or weakness that needs to be "fixed." The voices of the quiet often wait silently to be heard. And their insights are worth hearing.

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