Multiliteracies in the Middle: Supporting middle years students

by

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Abstract

This project examines how a pedagogy of multiliteracies engages, motivates and creates powerful learning opportunities for adolescent learners. The literature confirms that middle years students learn best when they are in an environment that addresses the unique learning needs of the adolescent. A multiliteracies-based curriculum can effectively address those needs. The use of varied content area related literacies assists students with comprehension, making connections and finding meaning and motivation in class units of study. This project consists of a rationale for the project focus; a review of the relevant literature; a resource document outlining several multiliteracies based lesson plans for a Social Studies 8 unit of study on the Middle Ages; a reflection and reference list. This multiliteracies-based unit of instruction has been designed to aid educators in meeting the diverse and ever changing needs of adolescent learners and the forms of literacies they encounter in today's world.

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Acknowledgments

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family, most especially my husband Gary and sons Ian and Evan, and friends for encouraging me and especially putting up with me throughout the three year master's process! A special thank you to my old, but new again, friend Dawn for all her support, friendship, phone calls and laughter; I couldn't have gotten through this without you all!

Chapter 1

Introduction

Educators need to teach students, not just cover curriculum. This idea is especially

true for those of us who work with adolescent learners. If we wish to create successful

learning experiences, we need to remember that middle school students learn best when

they are in an environment that addresses the unique learning needs of the adolescent

(National Middle School Association, 2010). In this project I propose that a pedagogy of

multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) is not only important for adolescents'

engagement, motivation and academic success, but also serves to meet the unique needs

of adolescent learners. This chapter includes a brief introduction to the topic of

multiliteracies, outlines why I believe a multiliteracies approach is essential for middle

years students, explains why I chose to explore multiliteracies for this project and

concludes with an outline of the elements of this multiliteracies (or multiple literacies)

project.

What is a pedagogy of multiple literacies?

The New London Group (1996) coined the term multiliteracies to describe the

multitude of literacy forms that we encounter and make meaning with, and from, in our

world. Indeed, as Sheridan-Thomas (2007) notes, " literacy is more complex than simply

reading and writing and more encompassing than the ways reading and writing have

traditionally been used in schools" (p. 131). A pedagogy of multiliteracies draws upon

visual, oral, technology, print based, and multimodal sign systems, to engage, motivate

and make meaningful learning connections for students. A multiple literacies approach

allows students to access their "experiential store" (Zoss, 2009, p. 184), to make meaning

of the representations of different sign systems. The major appeal for me of a

multiliteracies-based approach is that such an approach engages readers and writers of all

abilities as this approach promotes a 'something for everyone' focus. Readers and

writers, of all abilities, are involved, recognized and frequently encouraged to expand

their learning borders within a multiliteracies-based approach.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies offers educators and students alike a pathway to

engaging, motivational and connected learning opportunities, while requiring students to

actively engage with the skills and abilities needed to create and use the multilayered

world of technology, text forms and literacies that are found in today's rapidly changing

world (The New London Group 1996, 2000).

A pedagogy of multiliteracies for today's middle school students

In recent years concern has been raised by many organizations about the decline

in the literacy levels of adolescents (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007;

Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). It is important that educators address the issue of

engaging and motivating adolescent learners in order to bolster adolescents' literacy

successes. A pedagogy of multiliteracies "…offers a promising path into the lives of

diverse adolescents. Adolescents who appear to be struggling readers and writers,

disengaged from academic literacies, may actively engage in multiple literacies…"

(Sheridan-Thomas, 2007, p.124) as this approach offers a variety of text formats and

representational opportunities for adolescent readers and writers. The use of varied

content area literacies with adolescent learners assists with comprehension, making

connections and finding meaning and motivation in their class units of study (National

Council of Teachers of English, 2007). To achieve success in learning, adolescent

learners need a curriculum approach that relates to their stage of development, interests and learning styles.

Adolescent learners' unique needs must be taken into account by educators if they are to be successful in creating effective learning opportunities for these students. Middle School is a time of immense physical, emotional and social change for adolescents and it is also a time when, for many adolescents, the academic literacy that is presented and endorsed in school becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate and comprehend. For this reason, it is essential that educators adopt an approach which appeals to adolescent learners, while also acknowledging the many differing literacies, both academic and hidden, that adolescent learners engage and navigate.

A multiliteracies based curriculum, with its inclusion of a variety of sign systems, provides a potentially successful approach to implement with adolescent learners (Alvermann, 2008; Atwell, 2007; Booth, 2008; Eisner, 2002, 2004; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009). Such a curriculum recognizes and values the many varied forms that adolescent learners choose to express their knowledge and ideas. A multiliteracies approach to a content area unit of study, with its inclusion of many different literacy forms, will assist students in making connections to their learning and to the world. It is essential, given the rapid changes in what constitutes literacy in our time, that today's students are able to make and share meaning through a variety of different text and representational forms. In order for adolescents to leave school and find success in the world they need to have the skills to understand, analyze and explore the many, and rapidly changing, genres of text and technology such as digital storytelling, graphic novels, film and tools such as Mix Book. A multiliteracies based curriculum recognizes

the importance of providing our students with opportunities to show and share their learning in a manner that is representative of not only their learning preferences, but also their abilities.

Background and rationale for the project

Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, is reported to have said, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." This quotation was prominently displayed outside of the Explorations wing (this wing included the "hands-on" courses of home economics, wood work, art and other assorted shop classes) in a middle school where I once taught. The message resonates with me as it reflects the manner in which I endeavour to teach. I strive to create learning opportunities for my students wherein exploration of concepts through different sign systems leads to both comprehension and connections both within, and beyond, content area knowledge.

I am fortunate that my teacher training was in both the areas of the arts and the humanities; I feel that these areas complement each other and can be combined to create meaningful learning experiences. Since graduating from the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in 1988, my teaching assignments have always been a mix of these two subject areas, and have been mainly at the middle school level. When it came time to explore possible topics for this final project I knew that I would want to create a resource that showcased the importance of combining the elements of several literacy formats for student learning.

The article Reading through a disciplinary lens (Juel, Hebard, Park Haubner, & Moran, 2010), provided the inspirational spark I needed to find my path. The article served to confirm my belief in the power of visual, print and oral literacies to create

background knowledge for students to assist them in acquiring new knowledge. The authors of this article support the National Middle School Association's (2010) *This We Believe* policy document premise that "middle school curriculum should be challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant…" (McEwin & Greene, 2010, p. 54). As such, I could see how a project based on the concept of supporting middle years' students through a pedagogy of multiliteracies could prove valuable to myself, and hopefully, other teachers.

Multiliteracies-based content area lessons, such as the Middle Ages lessons I include in the resource document of this project (see Chapter 3), allows students to not only 'read' the world, but also to see the inter-connectedness of the literacies that surround them. Multiliteracies-based lessons also support the use of content area text materials such as the textbook. An in-depth inquiry of a topic that incorporates multiple pathways for learning from more than one literacy/sign system can provide students with a transformative learning approach (McMillan & Wilhelm, 2007). For example, students can develop an understanding of how visuals can aid in developing an understanding of new topics in both science and English and how a technology tool such as digital storytelling can assist in the writing process for both English and social studies classes. Such learning offers students the lens through which to find and make connections to the learning opportunities within other lessons and teaching methods.

I consulted my students as I created the resource document of multiliteracies lessons for a Social Studies 8 unit of study on the Middle Ages. I asked them which lessons from our unit of study on the Middle Ages they considered to be effective at increasing their topic knowledge, made them want to explore further and were

interesting, engaging and fun. I found it telling to note that the lessons chosen incorporated multiple sign systems, unlike more traditional lessons which involved reading the chapter and answering questions. This discovery confirmed my premise that students learn best when they are involved in both the 'what' and the 'how' of their learning journey. Accordingly, the lessons I have included in the resource document are based upon my students' choices of meaningful, engaging and worthwhile learning approaches.

This project reflects my belief that a multiliteracies based curriculum is more likely to actively involve adolescent learners in developing an understanding of their unit of study. Such an approach allows students to see and remember, to do and understand.

Project overview

In this project I outline the benefits of using multiliteracies pedagogy as a means of engaging, motivating and providing learning connections for/with adolescent students. This project includes the following components: a review of the foundational literature and current research on the theoretical and pedagogical understanding of multiliteracies; a multiliteracies teaching resource document with a specific focus on a Social Studies 8 unit of study on the Middle Ages; and a reflection of my learning journey. Harste (2003) writes that what he wants to see in a curriculum "…is lots and lots of opportunities for students to explore their own inquiry questions using reading, writing, and other sign systems as tools and toys for learning" (p.11). I believe that my multiliteracies based lessons on the Middle Ages, provide lots and lots of unique opportunities for middle school learners to explore while learning.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

Adolescents are students in the age range of ten to nineteen who are undergoing dramatic growth and changes in both body and mind (Adolescence basics, n.d., National Council of Teachers of English, 2007; National Middle School Association, 2010). For middle school students especially, adolescence is a time of transition, disorientation and discovery (Adolescence basics, (n.d.)). Adolescents often struggle in middle years' content area classes due to the rapid changes in their emotional, physical and cognitive development (McEwin & Greene, 2010; National Middle School Association, 2010; Steinberg, 2011), their inability to connect with traditional academic literacies and styles of instruction and the formats and quantities of text encountered (Allington, 2002; Ogle & Correa-Kovtun, 2010).

Learning connections are of key importance in creating successful learning experiences for adolescents. Learning connections assist adolescents as they strive to make meaning in the world of middle school. The multiliteracies pedagogy revolves around the core concept of creating a socially and culturally responsive curriculum for learners (Jewitt, 2008) and, as such, aids students in the making of learning connections. Adolescents' prior knowledge, or schema, is the underlying background knowledge learners bring to all they do, and as such is helpful in providing adolescents with information to connect both their hidden and school based literacies. Multiple literacies can be viewed as ways of reading the world in different contexts such as oral, visual, technology and print (Kerka, 2003). These differing contexts aid in creating relevant, culturally responsive learning environments for adolescents.

As I reviewed literature on the topic of supporting middle years adolescent learners in social studies through the use of multiliteracies, I found it important to both recognize the particular characteristics and learning styles of adolescents and also to understand the nature of a multiple literacies based curriculum approach. The literature on the topics of developing students' schemata, content area text, semiotic sign systems, multiple literacies and adolescent development provides compelling evidence that supporting adolescent middle school students in content areas is crucial.

Schema

A student's background knowledge influences how they perceive the world around them and determines how they interpret new knowledge (Afflerbach, 2008). Students' family life, community culture, school experience and socioeconomic status all combine to impact their relationship with learning. Given the predominance of textbook-based content area instruction in many content area classrooms an adolescent learner needs knowledge to connect to newly presented information if learning through text is to occur.

Literacy events occur when a reader engages with some form of text (Pardo, 2004). For many adolescents this engagement is compromised because "a critical aspect of success or failure in reading relates to students' prior knowledge and experiential background" (Afflerbach, 2008, p. 251). A hard to comprehend textbook and little prior specific content area knowledge often create a lack of both motivation and comprehension for the middle school student. Goodman (as cited in Villano, 2005, p. 124) notes that "a reader's ability to make sense of written language is directly related to his or her familiarity with the terms and concepts presented." A multiple literacies based

method that can be used to develop familiarity with terms and concepts, as well as increase students' background knowledge, is found in student adoption of a historical lens when reading and studying history (Juel et al., 2010). A historical, or disciplinary lens, provides students with a content rich, background lens through which to view their new learning. The use of such a lens will allow students to create historical understandings to help them better comprehend the present by applying the lens of the past. Such lenses can be used to view other history topics studied throughout the year, thus creating a prior knowledge base for students to explore further; however, "viewing a text from a disciplinary lens does not compensate for lack of knowledge or conceptual knowledge…it does, however, give the reader an idea of how to proceed when there is a roadblock" (Juel et al., 2010, p. 14).

It is important for all educators, both new and experienced, to remember that a student's schema will broaden with each new experience. Therefore, it follows that a goal of educators should be to make students' learning experiences interesting, positive and motivational. A multiple literacies based curriculum allows educators to work towards this goal.

The literature I have read on schema points to the importance of building connections between students' existing and new knowledge. These connections are especially important for students in middle school content areas where many of the new curriculum areas, such as explorations classes, and the often more formal lecture style of teaching are foreign to students. Scholars inform us that if a student has no connection to a topic then little comprehension will take place. Teachers need to "use their knowledge and understandings of how one learns to comprehend to inform classroom practices so

they can most effectively help readers to develop the abilities to comprehend text"

(Pardo, 2004, p. 278.) The use of a disciplinary lens approach (Juel et al.,2010; Stahl &

Shanahan, 2004) can assist adolescents in developing a topic related focus and schema

which will, in turn, aid in comprehension of content area text.

Content Area Text

Middle years' content area texts most often are expository texts. As students

move to the middle grades they leave behind the predominant use of the more student

friendly, narrative form of text encountered in primary school (Fang, 2008). For many

adolescents the move from the familiar forms of text used in their elementary schooling

to the dense, complex expository text found in the middle years is a tough one. For many,

content area texts are a shift in direction not only from students' prior school academic

literacy experiences, but also from their home, or hidden, literacy experiences (Fang,

2008). Many students enjoy reading, but only if the text is one which interests and

engages them. Unfortunately, the content area texts found in middle years are not

commonly the type of texts that encourages adolescents' reading practices. Ivey (2010)

notes the importance of finding and providing students with texts that inspire and create a

desire to learn more. It has been my experience as a teacher that many of today's content

area textbooks do not inspire middle years' students to want to read or learn.

Such content area texts perpetuate the age-old problem of students struggling

with, resisting or faking textbook reading (Ivey, 2010). If a student becomes confused

while trying to read text then little learning is happening and this confusion could lead to

the student shutting down. Tyree, Firore and Cook (as cited in Villano, 2005, p. 122) note

that "textbooks are not designed for the below-average reader or even the average reader,

but for the above-average reader." One textbook doesn't necessarily fit all of our students' needs or the prescribed learning outcomes. Sadly, "conventional textbooks across the content areas often mask what is most interesting and relevant about the topics we are required to teach" (Ivey, 2010, p. 20).

Scholars speak to the importance of creating class wide topic based prior knowledge and using a variety of texts formats to generate comprehension (Dekonty Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009; Hansen, 2009; Juel et al., 2010). The addition of related content area texts within the curriculum can support students' comprehension in a manner that a sole text book alone may not achieve. The literature also suggests that teacher views of content area textbooks need updating (Atwell, 1998, 2007; Allington, 2002, 2007; Stahl & Shanahan, 2004) as many teachers rely heavily on the text book and don't recognize the many other powerful forms of information today's students have access to. Text books have been the mainstay of content area curriculum. Moving the textbook from the center of the lesson and turning it into a support for other related texts creates opportunities for adolescent students to make personal, emotional, and curricular connections to the material (Hansen, 2009).

Stahl and Shanahan (2004) suggest content area teachers integrate multiple texts as an accompaniment to and alternate focus for the textbook. Adolescents are better able to critically analyze material and ideas and make connections when immersed in topic related texts (Hansen, 2009; Juel et al.,2010; Stahl & Shanahan, 2004). Text can take many forms including print, visual, oral and multimodal texts and include genres such as novels, photographs, graphic novels, paintings, scripts, poetry and so on. Exposure to and engagement with multiple text formats, I believe, has the potential to engage students in a

deeper, more meaningful reading process than does just exposure to conventional expository style content area textbooks.

Allington, Johnston and Pollack Day (2005) found a multi-sourced instruction approach to learning created an engaging, exciting classroom atmosphere where successful learning occurred. Allowing elementary students to access texts that they could successfully view, interact with and listen to led to increased levels of engagement and topic knowledge. Study results indicated that thoughtful literacy instruction produced improvements in students' participation in literate conversations, internal thinking and critical reasoning skills. Dennis (2009) notes a variety of content area texts require students to continually build upon prior knowledge. A rich knowledge base both creates and maintains students' interests.

As a support of a text rich program, the textbook can take on a more stimulating role in the classroom's literacy environment (Allington, 2002; Hansen, 2009; Ivey, 2010). While the literature I reviewed overwhelmingly supports the view that expository content area texts do not lead to learning for every student (Allington, 2002; Dunn, 2000; Ivey, 2010) one must not be too quick to "throw out" classroom textbooks. The literature proposes that it is important to let the textbook guide the curriculum, not become the curriculum. Villano (2005) cautions teachers to remember that it is unlikely that content area textbooks were created to meet the exact learning outcomes of a specific grade or subject and therefore support from topic related multiliteracy text materials is crucial. I strongly agree with Villano's (2005) caution. In my experience many content area textbooks often only minimally meet the learning outcomes for a specific course and the teacher has to supplement the textbook with additional information. Such support helps to

provide learners with a wealth of engaging information on the topic of study and assists in building students' topic related knowledge, confidence and reading abilities (Afflerbach, 2008; Ivey, 2010). A pedagogy of multiple literacies, with its focus on varying text forms and literacies, provides educators with a creative and engaging platform from which to supplement content area text.

<div align="center">**Multiple Literacies**</div>

The term multiliteracies was first coined by the New London Group (1996) to describe the world of students' ever changing text forms and literacies, both in and out of school (Alvermann, 2003; Eisner, 2002, 2004; Tierney, Bond & Bresler, 2006; New London Group, 1996; Zoss, 2009). Purcell-Gates (2002), in Sheridan-Thomas, (2007) defines multiple literacies as "the many and varied ways that people read and write in their lives" (p. 121). Long (2008) informs educators that "…we are moving toward an expanded concept of language arts including not only reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but also viewing and representing" (p. 294). The literature reveals that a multiple literacies approach involves allowing and encouraging student exploration of a wide range of text forms and representational formats within a content area (Eisner, 2002, 2004; Dunn, 2000; Long, 2008; New London Group, 1996). Eisner (2002) supports the use of multiple literacies in the classroom when he notes that - "some students need to go farther in a different direction because that's where their aptitudes lie, that's where their interests are, and that's where their proclivities lead them" (p. 580).

Scholars suggest that the goal of educators should not be to limit students' thought processes, but to build upon our students' patterns of thought (Alvermann, 2003, 2008; Atwell, 1998, 2007; Allington, 2002, 2007; Juel et al., 2010). A multiple literacies

approach provides a means to expand and open students' minds to the vast potential of learning opportunities that are in their world (Eisner, 2002; Long, 2008; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009). A multiliteracies approach has been found to engage, motivate and educate students of all ability levels (Allington, 2002; Alvermann & Eakle, 2003; Booth, 2008; Dunn, 2000; Hansen, 2009; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009). Long (2008) confirms the value of a multiliteracies approach when he writes that "people learn most successfully when they have the freedom to make choices about the activities in which they engage and are given support, through processes of co-determination, of what to learn, and how best to do so" (p. 287).

A multiliteracies style of instruction exposes students not only to multiple texts and sign systems, but also allows students access to multiple ways of knowing (Dunn, 2000; Eisner, 2002; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Hansen, 2009). Such an integrated approach provides adolescents with opportunities to think about and make meaning with and from texts that are not limited to language (Hansen, 2009; Ivey, 2010; Juel et al., 2010; Mills, 2009; New London Group, 1996; Zoss, 2009).

Semiotic Sign Systems

The value of a multiliteracies approach to learning for middle years students becomes clear when we consider that "no one particular mode (written language, visual, gestural, music, digital, and so on) carries the entire message" (Sanders & Albers, 2010, p. 4). Research shows that providing students with a range of semiotic sign systems to use in supporting, exploring and representing their learning is a key element of a multiple literacies approach (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Eisner, 2002, 2004, Perry, 2009; Zoss, 2009), for "the more learners understand the tools, techniques, and language of a sign

system the better they are able to integrate it with the texts that they produce" (Cowan & Albers, 2006, p. 125).

Begoray and Morin (2002), in their research on multiple literacies in language arts, provide support for the successful experiences learners have when using a variety of sign systems. An expanded concept of content area learning requires the inclusion of a wide range of sign systems that students can use to make meaning of content and share their understandings with others in a literate manner (Allington, 2002; Begoray & Morin, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Zoss, 2009).

Zoss (2009) writes that "to present adolescents with a semiotics based integrated curriculum is to present a curriculum that values the variety of ways in which adolescents express their ideas and learning" (p. 185). Multiple pathways of learning are effective, essential and engaging for adolescent students (Cowan & Albers, 2006). These authors remind us that using a semiotics based approach allows for "…students (to) develop habits in strategy use and habits in knowledge and practice of sign systems that help them develop strong literacy practices" (p. 133). Further research reports that lessons which incorporate a combination of sign systems provide a new and unique manner in which to develop students' literacy and critical engagement skills while, at the same time, activating students' prior knowledge (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Eisner, 2002; Smith, 2008).

Hidden Literacies

Students' hidden literacies are comprised of the "rich multimedia composing practices adolescents use in their lives outside of school" (Zoss, 2009, p. 187), while students' academic literacies are composed of learning that is school based. One of the

multiple ways that students look at the world is through a hidden, personal and not academically focused, literacy view. Students' hidden literacies are "multiple ways to look at the world, [and they] impact how students make connections and understand their world" (Perry, 2009, p. 328). Teachers have the responsibility to access the hidden literacies (home literacy, personal literacy, popular culture literacy, and so on) of students and to incorporate them into the classroom to maximize learning (Perry, 2009). A multiliteracies approach provides educators with further opportunities to connect their students' hidden literacies to their school based academic literacies (Eisner, 2002, 2004; Dunn, 2000; Perry, 2009).

A multiple literacies approach combines these differing adolescent literacies and helps students to explore and "express the depth of understanding it takes to read the world around us" (Perry, 2009, p. 329). The Boxed Voices Project by Long (2008), wherein adolescent students explored how to "engage with peers in rich conversations, promote inquiry, and develop multimodal skills" (p. 286), supports the value of teaching within a multiliteracies framework that accesses both students' hidden and academic literacies. Additionally, research by Pirbhai-Illich (2011) on engaging Aboriginal students confirmed an increase in student engagement and success when the teacher participant in her study moved away from a teaching style based on traditional transmission pedagogy (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007 in Pirbhai-Illich, 2011) to an approach that not only encouraged an integration of students' hidden and school literacies, but also valued multiple forms of expression and representation. Students' hidden literacies must be valued and accessed by teachers as these literacy forms will

serve to both assist and increase student understanding, involvement and motivation in a multiple literacies based curriculum (Perry, 2009; Zoss, 2009).

The Integrated Multiliteracies Curriculum

Integrated curriculums, with their multiple pathways for learning, are important for adolescent learning (Eisner, 1998). Students need to learn to think and gather knowledge within the wide array of media (be they print, oral, visual, multimodal or technology based) they are exposed to in both their in-school, academic, and out-of-school, hidden, literacy worlds.

The multi modal, semiotics model of curriculum has differing forms of literacies which are strategically integrated into lessons. Scholars inform educators that "multiple literacies can be differentiated not only on the basis of the channel and medium of communication (print, image, page, screen), but also according to field or subject area (history, geography, science, math, etc.)" (Unsworth, 2001, p. 10). Zoss (2009) notes that, "[t]he content of an integrated curriculum includes both linguistic and pictorial texts; thus, the texts span a range from literature to painting, to nonfiction, to photography" (p. 185). Research further informs that an integrated approach allows students to "…learn to transmediate their responses from one text type to another…" (Zoss, 2009, p.183). McClay (2006) adds her findings that "classrooms in which students develop varied ideas and projects are rich learning environments, for teachers as well as for students" (p. 185). Today's ever changing world of technology use in literacy serves as a means to successfully integrate both teachers and students' skills and existing knowledge throughout content areas.

Technology based literacies

   Students today inhabit a world of ever changing interconnected text forms and

digital technology based literacies (New London Group, 1996). Digital literacy is "the

ability to assimilate, judge, and communicate information presented in a wide variety of

digital/electronic formats" (Mikulecky, 2003, p. 10). The integration of digital and

electronic technologies into curriculum provides students and teachers alike with unique

learning challenges and opportunities (Mills, 2007, 2009; Mikulecky, 2003; Pirbhai-

Illich, 2011). The literature reminds educators of their responsibility to integrate these

new technology based literacies into their classes and curriculum (International Reading

Association, 2009; Mikulecky, 2003). Educators benefit from attending to adolescents'

online literacies to inform their practice (Alvermann, 2008; Mikulecky, 2003; Tierney et

al., 2006). A multiple literacies approach affords opportunities to successfully engage

students with technology (New London Group, 1996; Tierney et al., 2006). Tarasiuk

(2010), for example, writes of a student who was not engaged with school based texts, yet

was a motivated, committed expert in the world of Information Communication

Technology (ICT). Tarasiuk (2010), claims that "students' involvement with ICT is their

literacy" (p. 544). This claim speaks to the need for teachers to recognize the potential of

technology and to seek to use technology to draw in their students. The literature further

emphasizes the importance for both students and educators to be able to "access, judge,

and communicate information in digital literacy formats" (Mikulecky, 2003, p. 13). Other

scholars note that "in some areas of the world, internet access is not a luxury; instead it is

swiftly becoming a legal right" (O'Brien & Scharber, 2010, p. 600). As such, educators

need to recognize that technology literacies change rapidly and that these literacies need

to be learned and continuously updated in order to keep up with both the times and our students (Mikulecky, 2003).

Technology based learning approaches such as threaded discussions (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006) demonstrate a means of successfully combining the best aspects of face to face discussion and the written word. Research by Pirbhai-Illich (2011) found "…that engaging students required tapping their interest in using electronic media, accepting their lived experiences, and inviting them to use their funds of knowledge in multiliteracies" (p. 264). Janks (2000) tells us that, "changes in technology are changing the communication landscape" (p. 176). Scholars repeatedly point to the fact that today's young people are writing for their own purposes far more than ever before and this is because such a large amount of their socializing takes place online (Thompson, 2009). McClay's (2006) research involving middle years student email response to literature successfully illustrates the engagement that occurs for students when writing and creating involves technology.

Technology, in its many forms, is inescapable and educators need to work with it rather than against it if they wish to engage, motivate and connect with their students. Educators need to use all the tools at their disposal to engage, motivate and connect today's students to the numerous avenues of learning, and their unique sign systems, that abound (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Haneda, 2006). Multiliteracies lessons, when they successfully incorporate technology and multimodal literacies, offer students an integrated, connected literacy pathway (Tierney et al., 2006; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009).

Multimodal texts

The literature defines multimodal texts as "those texts that have more than one 'mode,' so that meaning is communicated through a synchronization of modes" (Walsh, 2006, p. 24). Examples of multimodal texts include picture books, graphic novels and interactive web sites to name but a few. The transaction that occurs between the learner and these varying multimodal text forms can be empowering for middle school students (Hull, 2003). Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994) supports the value of such student/text transactions. The use of multimodal text formats provides students with a variety of print formats to interact with and make meaning from (Mills, 2007, 2009; Cowan & Albers, 2006).

Multimodal texts, with their varying combinations of text formats, offer enormous learning potential and hold great appeal for both educators and adolescent readers (Jewitt, 2008; Long, 2008; Mills, 2007, 2009; Perry, 2009; Zoss, 2009). Allington (2007) notes that giving students choice in text formats "…is a powerful factor in motivating engagement and fostering achievement…" (p. 276). Leckbee (2005) notes the power of multimodal texts for adolescents when she writes of her successful classroom experiences with this multimodal genre: "graphic novels, already popular with teen readers, act as a bridge allowing them to transcend the apathy usually felt toward reading assignments" (Leckbee, 2005, p. 30).

Mills (2009) writes that "students must be free to engage in new and multimodal textual practices, rather than simply reproduce a tightly confined set of linguistic conventions" (p. 108). Assignments which enable students to incorporate elements of their individual worlds, their hidden literacy, within their school based academic literacy

have the potential to create valuable and engaging learning opportunities for students to make meaningful connections (Begoray & Morin, 2002; Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Long, 2008; Zoss, 2009). Multimodal texts more frequently meet the learning needs of developing adolescent learners than do traditional content area text forms (Gee, 2000; National Middle School Association, 2010; National Council of Teachers of English, 2004; Robb, 2010; Steinberg, 2011).

Visual literacies

Visual literacies, in a manner similar to that of multimodal texts, allow meaningful learning connections to occur for many adolescent learners as visuals surround today's adolescent learners. Adolescents view images daily on television, magazines, video, iPads, iPods, You Tube, and the computer screen, to mention but a few sources. Visual literacy involves reading, or interpreting, the messages these visual images convey (McPherson, 2004; Pettersson, 2009; Seglem & Witte, 2009; Zambo, 2009).

The literature informs educators of the ever increasing importance of knowing how to view, analyze, comprehend and evaluate the images our students are absorbing on a daily basis (Begoray, 2001). A multiliteracies curriculum provides students with a selection of tools to use and multiple pathways to travel along in their learning journey. It is important that educators teach their students the tools required for them to successfully negotiate the world of visual literacies (Begoray, 2001; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009). For students and educators alike, developing and utilizing visual literacy skills is increasingly important in the visual world of the 21st Century (Begoray, 2001; Eisner, 2002; Gee, 2008; Hoffmann, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Walsh, 2009; Wilhelm,

2001; Zoss, 2009). Visual literacy is a key component of any multiple literacy approach (Eisner, 1997, 2002, 2004; Janks, 2000; 2000; Zoss, 2009), "[as] a means for students to learn to communicate about ideas and to learn new ways to think about problems and texts" (Zoss, 2009, p. 183).

Varying visual forms of representation captures the attention of learners and viewers alike and provides a means for students to make connections between the concepts featured in lessons and the images shown that relate to the topic of study (Begoray & Morin, 2002; Janks, 2000; Long, 2008). Zoss (2009) agrees with the important role visuals play in successful learning when she notes that "…adolescents working within a semiotics-based curriculum that integrates image and language signs can express and represent their ideas in multiple media" (p. 183). Seglem and Witte (2009) add that "[i]ncorporating visual literacy in the curriculum is vital for student success" (p. 217). It is my view that educators need to be aware of the power of visuals and not neglect these important learning tools when planning for the success of their adolescent learners.

Oral literacies

Just as the power of visual literacy needs to be recognized and valued as an important meaning making tool for adolescent learners, so too does oral literacy need to be recognized (Barnes, 1988). Adolescent learners, with their intense focus on their social worlds, frequently find oral literacies to be an important pathway to learning (Atwell, 1998, 2007; Bloom et al., 2008; Copeland, 2005; National Council of Teachers of English, 2007). Spoken language can be viewed as "…a tool for enquiry, discussion, and engagement in a range of activities directed towards increasing students' critical

understanding of the world they live in and their ability to take an active role in it"

(Barnes, 1988, p. 53). Adolescents use talk to make sense of their world, their place

within it and their learning experiences (Bloom, Klooster & Preece, 2008). Language is a

social practice (Clarke, L. 2007; Preece, 2008) and middle school students are by nature

very social creatures.

Three forms of oral expression educators of middle school students need to be

aware of are exploratory talk, reflective talk and deliberative talk (Bloom et al., 2008).

Educators need to understand these different types of talk and work to include them in

relevant oral literacy based activities so that students are aware of the functions of talk

and the responsibilities of talk and the power of talk within all aspects of their lives. Once

students become fully aware of the learning opportunities classroom talk affords them

students are more likely to purposefully participate in shaping and creating their

knowledge and increase their verbal confidence (MacLure, Phillips & Wilkinson, 1988).

The literature reveals that in today's middle years' classroom oral activities run

the gamut from guided discussions, to reading aloud, to Socratic Circles and literature

circles, to group work, to reader's theatre and to just plain old talk (Booth, 2009; Preece,

2008). Research conducted by Ogle and Correa-Kovtun (2010) found a connection

between increases in reading skills and comprehension and the use of partner talk with

level appropriate informational content reading texts. In their review of studies related to

discussion as a means to increase text comprehension, Alexander, Hennessey, Murphy,

Soter and Wilkinson (2009) found that discussion based strategies were most successful

with students of below average reading comprehension. Research with guided discussion-

based strategies and literature circles by Wilfong (2009) supports the value and success

of integrated oral literacies approaches for middle school students as guided discussion-based strategy lets students take control, to a large degree, of their own learning. Similarly, in his book *Socratic Circles*, Copeland (2005) notes that the oral literacy format of Socratic circles has the power to "change the way students think, discuss and view learning and literature" (p. 3). Such discussion based approaches enable students to better comprehend text and engage in higher level thinking (Alexander et al., 2009).

The discussion which takes place in such classrooms can be powerful, worthwhile, and serves to create learning connections for students (Allington, 2007; Copeland, 2005; Preece, 2008; Wilfong, 2009). However, the world of cell phones, Twitter and Facebook has created a generation that can communicate easily both orally and in print easily but too often without regard for the impact of their words (Villano, 2008). Educators need to be aware of this element of oral and written language and create awareness with students as to both the power of and appropriateness of talk. Patrick Clarke (2007), in his article on teaching controversial issues, describes how to guide students through a four-step classroom discussion based strategy and notes the importance of teaching students inquiry and discussion processes. van 't Hooft (2008) comments that conversation can take many forms and conversation rapidly and continuously occurs as "…learners are networked with peers, teachers, and digital tools…" (p. 13). The literature reminds us that educators must be "…aware of the deeper layers of conversations that occur…" (Clarke, L., 2007, p. 121) to ensure their students are aware of the positive and negative power of talk and teach students successful ways to use their oral language skills (Clarke, L., 2007; Clarke, P., 2007; Villano, 2008).

Preece (2008) writes that "…talk, real talk, between teachers and students, *is* teaching" (p. 3). The inclusion of oral literacies in the middle years' multiple literacies based classroom curriculum provides students and teachers alike with opportunities to "…uncover, probe, question, sort out and weigh up…" (Preece, 2008, p. 3). As such, oral literacy plays an important role in the multiple literacies classroom.

Multiliteracies in the Classroom

Why should educators adopt multiliteracies pedagogy? A main reason, as the literature informs us, is that "people learn most successfully when they have the freedom to make choices about the activities in which they engage and are given support, through processes of co-determination, of what to learn, and how best to do so" (Long, 2008, p. 287). A multiliteracies approach, with its focus on learners as individuals who can make choices in the ways in which they share their knowledge, provides middle years' students with engaging and motivating learning opportunities.

Eisner (2002) notes that "the point of learning anything in school is not primarily to enable one to do well in school…it is to enable one to do well in life" (p. 581). Similarly, the New London Group (1996) assert that "…the fundamental purpose [of education] is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (p. 60). A multiliteracies approach to learning, such as Eisner (2000, 2002) and the New London Group (1996, 2000) advocate recognizes the importance of connecting students' hidden, or personal, literacies with their authentic academic literacies (Perry, 2009).

Eisner (2007) continues to promote the use of multiliteracies when he states that "…it has become increasingly clear since the latter half of the 20th century

that knowledge or understanding is not always reducible to language" (p. 5).

A multiliteracies-based educational approach with its focus on multiple modes

of representation, multimodal text formats and integrated student learning in

content areas, provides not only a much more adolescent friendly curriculum, but also

is representative of the technology driven world we live in today (Leckbee, 2005; Long,

2008; Woelders, 2007). It is through the implementation of a multiliteracies style of

instruction that educators expose students to not only multiple texts and sign systems, but

also to multiple ways of knowing.

The National Council of Teachers of English in its 2007 policy brief

 on multiple literacies determined that "supported engagement with multiple literacies

increases student success and motivation" (p. 1). A multiple literacies based

curriculum in middle years has the potential to include more students in learning

opportunities, to motivate and engage learners of all abilities, and to support struggling

readers. Such a curriculum supports traditional text formats, allows for further

exploration and critical engagement within a topic or content area and encourages

connections to occur not only between content areas, but also between students' public

and private literacies (Eisner, 2002, 2004; Cowan & Albers, 2006; New London Group,

1996; Perry, 2009; Reithaug, 2007; Woelders, 2007).

Motivation and participation with multiliteracies

As I have previously noted, there is an increase in student motivation and

participation within a multiliteracies based curriculum (McMillan & Wilhelm, 2007; New

London Group, 1996; Pirbhai-Illich, 2011). Multiple literacies offer multiple learning

choices for students and teachers and, as a result, increase student involvement in their

learning (Eisner, 2002, 2004; McMillan & Wilhelm, 2007). In a multiliteracies-based

approach students learn that "…writing or composing need not be constrained to the

signs available in language" (Zoss, 2009, p. 187). Support for this statement is found in

the research of Boyd and Ikpeze (2007) when they used multiple text types to

successfully engage with adolescent learners. Epstein's (2010) research involving a social

action literacy project exemplifies how learning within and through a range of

multiliteracies based representational formats created motivated and responsive learners

who had a desire to learn, show and share their learning. Additionally, an increase in the

amount of successful learning experiences, and therefore motivation for students, has

been found as the pedagogy of multiliteracies takes hold (Kress, Jewitt, 2008; Bourne,

Franks, Hardcastle, Jones & Reid, 2005; New London Group, 1996)

Multiliteracies learning opportunities increase motivation amongst adolescent

learners (Bell, 2000; Epstein; New London Group, 1996, Woelders, 2007). An increase in

both student focus, participation and motivation was also found by Woelders (2007) in

his research on the use of film as a means to engage learners with history when he

discovered that "…twenty-six of twenty-eight students believed that the films aided them

in their learning of historical concepts" (Woelders, 2007, p. 373). A further look at the

literature (Begoray & Morin, 2002) finds that an increase in motivation and active

participation through a multiliteracies based approach is not just limited to adolescents. In

a follow up survey adult teacher participants from this study reported that "they had

continued their own education in viewing and representing over the year after the

institute" (Begoray & Morin, 2002, p. 8). A pedagogy of multiliteracies, by its very

nature, frequently creates students who want to become active, involved, motivated and engaged learners.

Critical engagement with multiliteracies

Critical engagement within a multiliteracies framework allows students to grow as learners, thinkers and citizens. Critical engagement within a multiliteracies approach means "learning to take a critical stance towards one's historical, ethnic, racial and gendered positioning" (Hull, 2003, p. 4). Research indicates that teachers need to encourage their students to confront texts and critically engage with them; a multiliteracies approach encourages such confrontation, questioning and exploration (Stahl & Shanahan, 2004).

The use of multiple text forms within a multiliteracies approach not only allows students to gather knowledge from many sources, but also allows students to critically engage with text and provides students with a 'depth over breadth' experience (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007). Walsh (2009) found that allowing students to critique and redesign school texts through multi-modal design increased not only students' critical thinking skills, but also increased student engagement and sense of connection with their learning. Walsh's research provides support for the use of multiliteracies as a theoretical framework for students to both connect to and transform their thinking from. Boyd and Ikpeze (2007) found that students need to think about a topic and to critically engage with it in multiple ways in order to truly understand and make connections to the topic.

Bell (2000), in his research on using internet resources to promote student understanding of science, provides further evidence of the increase in student participation and engagement a multiliteracies based approach produces. Similarly,

Woelders (2007) successfully incorporated the visual literacy of film in his classes to both engage and inform students about history. A multiple literacy approach, by its very nature, lends itself to making learning connections, critical thinking and new learning opportunities for learners (New London Group, 1996; Walsh, 2009; Woelders, 2007).

Connections with multiliteracies

Research indicates that, for many adolescent students, being able to make a connection between their two literacy worlds, their hidden or out of school literacy and their public or school based literacy, is a vital step in making learning connections (Atwell, 1998; DeBruin-Parecki & Klein, 2003; MacDonald). In a study on the use of multimodal literacy activities as bridges to create intercultural friendships with adolescents DeBruin-Parecki and Klein (2003) found that "teachers must be prepared to provide interesting and valuable opportunities that motivate students to demonstrate their existing literacy skills in meaningful contexts" (p. 511). If adolescents are encouraged to access and use their existing prior knowledge, or literacies, in meaningful ways then these students are more likely to actively make connections to their learning (Atwell, 1998; DeBruin-Parecki & Klein, 2003; New London Group, 1996).

DeBruin-Parecki and Klein's (2003) research was successful in part because it was carefully situated in a social environment that allowed students to learn and make connections both with and from each other. Perry (2009) believes that "middle school students benefit from teachers' understanding and valuing of multiple literacies in the classroom" (p. 329), and that such understanding must involve knowing one's students well in order to create the best learning environment possible. It is my experience that successful educational experiences involve teachers planning for students to interact with

each other, activate their 'experiential store' (Zoss, 2009) of prior knowledge, make

learning connections between their hidden and school based literacies and feel ownership

of their learning as they build up their personal funds of knowledge. The many learning

paths within a multiliteracies road to learning provide numerous new avenues from which

students can explore a topic while, at the same time, leading them back to a common,

connected learning destination.

Inclusion of students with a multiliteracies approach

Multiliteracies based pedagogy encourages educators to embrace the diversity in

their classrooms and create learning experiences based on their students' knowledge,

interests and experiences (Cuming-Potvin; Jewitt, 2008; New London Group, 1996), thus

creating an inviting approach to learning for students. It is imperative that, no matter

their distinctive situation, "middle school students…need to know that they have valuable

and unique ways to understand academic and nonacademic text" (Perry, 2009, p. 329). A

multiliteracies approach is especially good at creating a welcoming, all encompassing,

student friendly learning environment.

Research by Tierney et al., (2006) found that a multiple literacies approach, as

opposed to a traditional print-based school literacy approach, provides teachers and

students with increased opportunities to explore learning styles that prove individually

effective. English language learners, English as a second language learners and

Aboriginal learners especially benefit from a multiple literacies approach which

recognizes their particular learning styles and out of school literacies (Cuming-Potvin;

Haneda, 2006; Perry, 2009). Cumming-Potvin (2007) informs educators that "organizing

literacy events that draw on student's cultural and intellectual resources in purposeful and pleasurable ways may assist to reinvigorate school curricula" (p. 502).

The literature shows that a multiple literacies approach encourages and includes diverse learners (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; DeBruin-Parecki & Klein, 2003; Haneda, 2006). Sanders and Albers (2010) note that educators must "… make literacy more relevant to students while creating space in the English language arts classroom both for teachers and students alike to explore, compose, and share a range of texts with larger audiences" (p. 3). For today's diverse student population a multiliteracies approach can be seen to "…provide a lifeline for students…affording them opportunities that would have been out of their reach otherwise" (Tierney et al., 2006, p. 364).

Adolescent developmental characteristics

Adolescents are no longer quite children, but are also not yet adults and, as such, they face struggles with independence and self-identity which makes it especially important that they have teachers who understand them (Adolescence Basics, n.d.). The developmental learning characteristics of adolescents are impacted by rapid and tremendous changes including growth in cognitive processes, physical growth, social and emotional changes, the development of a personal identity and an increasing importance placed on peers and belonging (McEwin & Greene, 2010; Steinberg, 2011; Wormeli, 2011; National Middle School Association, 2009, 2010). Adolescent middle school students differ from primary students and these differences need to be addressed by educators who work with adolescents (National Middle School Association, 2010; Adolescence Basics, n.d.; Robb, 2010).

Friend and Thompson (2010), in their article on middle grade reforms, note that "…middle grades education should be distinctive due to the unique needs of young adolescents" (p. 4). The National Middle School Association's 2009 research summary on young adult developmental characteristics adds that "recognizing and understanding the unique developmental characteristics…of early adolescence and their relationship to the educational program…and to the structure of the middle school…are central tenets of middle grades education" (p. 1).   The middle school years are important social and cognitive stages of development for the adolescent (Langer, 2009; Perry, 2009). As such, it is vital that adolescents see themselves as valued members of their out of school community, their school community and their classroom community (Perry, 2009). In order for this identification process to occur it is important that teachers keep in mind the importance of engaging their adolescent audience and recognize their unique needs and maturity levels (McEwin & Greene, 2010).

As noted by Caskey and Anfara (2007), adolescents need teachers who know how students think. The literature indicates that a middle years' program must be designed with the knowledge that every student is not ready to master specific content and process at the same time (Atwell, 1998, 2007; National Middle School Association, 2010; Robb, 2010). McEwin and Greene (2010) add that "the developmental learning characteristics of young adolescents should serve as a basis for selecting instructional strategies" (p. 55). A research summary on young adolescents' developmental characteristics by the National Middle School Association (2009) further acknowledges the uniqueness of adolescent learners when it states that "young adolescents deserve educational experiences and schools that recognize their unique physical, intellectual,

emotional/psychological, moral/ethical and social developmental characteristics and needs" (p. 4).

A multiple literacies curriculum can serve the unique needs of adolescents (Atwell, 1998; Eisner, 2002, 2004; National Middle School Association, 2009, 2010; New London Group, 2000; Sheridan-Thomas, 2007; Zoss, 2009) because "an effective middle grades curriculum must be challenging, exploratory, integrative and relevant…"(National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 17).

Adolescent Literacies

The literature provides a definition of adolescent literacy as "…young people ages 11-18 …[participating in] the range of practices involved in the coding of socially and culturally relevant signs and symbols" (Lewis & Del Valle, 2009, p. 309). The National Council of Teachers of English (2007) adds that "literacy encompasses reading, writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand" (p. 2).

Adolescents use a variety of texts and literacies in their everyday lives from trade books to magazines, from mobile technologies such as texting and Facebook, to textbooks and graphic novels. Research supports the view that a social, involved and relevant to the adolescent's world approach to literacy creates successful adolescent literacy practices (Alvermann, 2008; Eisner, 2002, 2004; National Council of Teachers of English, 2004; National Middle School Association, 2009, 2010; New London Group, 2000; Woelders, 2007; Zoss, 2009). For adolescents literacy motivation is increased by opportunities for choice as well as active participation with learning materials which incorporate adolescents' many differing interests and vary in levels of difficulty (National

Council of Teachers of English, 2007). Adolescent literacies include the reading, writing and representing that adolescents take part in both in and out of their school based academic literacies (Robb, 2010).

Adolescents, by the very nature of their unique developmental stage, need literacy opportunities which connect to their interests, dreams, identities and learning levels (Lawrence, McNeal & Yildiz, 2009; Leckbee, 2005; New London Group, 1996; Perry, 2009; Tierney et al., 2006). As Perry (2009) tells us "students come to school already equipped with multiple literacies, multiple ways to understand the world; some are visible literacies…, but most are hidden literacies" (p. 329).

Hansen (2009) advocates that content instruction move from a cognitive perspective to an adolescent literary perspective. Mesch (2009) adds that adolescents of today integrate online communication into their everyday existence and this non-academic literacy needs to be recognized. Adolescents, by their very natures, present unique challenges for educators and it is important to encourage students to connect their personal hidden literacies, such as technology, to their school based academic literacies (Christensen, 2000; Jewitt, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2009; Lewis & Del Valle, 2009; Robb, 2010; Tierney et al., 2006) and thus avoid becoming "resistant to school based literacy" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 3).

Unique Adolescent Literacies

Adolescents bring their own unique identities, learning styles, literacy forms and attitudes to school (Eisner, 2002, 2004; Lewis & Del Valle, 2009; Robb, 2010). "Middle school students shuttle back and forth between naïveté and world-weariness" notes Atwell (1998, p. 56). In her research designed to engage Aboriginal students with

critical multiliteracies Pirbhai-Illich (2011) notes how "…students often come tired and unmotivated…they are disengaged and don't care…" (p. 257). Such scenarios are, I suggest, an all too familiar picture for teachers of adolescents. The literature does show, however, that when adolescents are presented with engaging and relevant to them forms of literacy, motivated learning situations frequently occur (Atwell, 1998, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2009; Pirbhai-Illich, 2011; Robb, 2010; Sheridan-Thomas, 2007; Woelders, 2007). Scholars report that "adolescents who appear to be struggling readers and writers, disengaged from academic literacies, may actively engage in multiple literacies outside of school" (Sheridan-Thomas, 2007, p. 124). This quotation reminds me of the importance of not overlooking the world of the adolescents' hidden, out of school, literacies.

However, as Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) note, many adolescent students lack the necessary skills needed to read the challenging texts used in content area classes such as science and math, and therefore their interest is often eliminated before the lesson is off the ground. If students are to be successful, teachers need to provide them with specific strategies that students can independently and successfully transfer between content areas (Alvermann, 2003; Atwell, 1998; National Middle School Association, 2010, Robb, 2010). In my experience, if students are given the opportunity to take ownership of their learning, then confidence and success often follow. A multiliteracies pedagogy recognizes both adolescents unique literacies as well as their learning styles; as such, the approach is directly responsive to the adolescent learners unique needs and experiences.

Conclusion

I found there to be a lack of research about both middle years' students' schema and reading comprehension. It seems that the bulk of the research concerned either primary or secondary levels; as a middle school teacher this concerns me. Nearly one third of students who struggle with reading comprehension are of middle and high school age (Allington et al., 2005). This statistic proves a need for a middle years' research focus. The middle years are ones in which adolescents grow and develop at a rapid rate and establishing sound reading and comprehension practices that connect to prior knowledge at this age is crucial.

Another gap in the research is the lack of Canadian content in the literature on struggling readers, content area text, schema and the inclusion of multiple literacies in the classroom. The majority of articles used in this literature review feature American research and refer to American statistics. I see a need for research on middle years' students that has both a Canadian focus and content.

There also appears to be a paucity of research into informing educators' practice with regards to how to make a change from a traditional style curriculum to a curriculum that features a multiple literacies based approach. While many scholars referred to research in existing classrooms, in most, if not all, cases the teacher participants were open to embracing change in their classroom approach. Jewitt (2008), notes that "multiple literacies challenge the current organization of traditional schooling" (p. 248). Perhaps the lack of research into this area is reflective of a lack of desire to accept the challenge of change amongst many educators of middle years' students?

The literature repeatedly points to the fact that, while the types of text students encounter in middle years become increasingly more difficult to read and comprehend, little is done by content area teachers to support their struggling readers (Allington, 2002; Dunn, 2000; Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002). I see a need for further research into how to facilitate a wider ranging change to a multiple literacies approach within a middle school. For if, as I believe, all teachers are teachers of English and reading then all teachers should want to engage in practices that support the needs of today's diverse learners.

Active engagement with a variety of content based multiliteracies is the key to increasing comprehension for middle years' students. The literature I reviewed points to a need for more specific research with adolescent readers and content area text. A multiple literacies approach, with its focus on making learning connections through the use of a variety of semiotic sign systems relevant to adolescents, provides an alternative to the traditional content area text pedagogy. After all, reading and writing have an ongoing importance in adolescents' present and future lives despite the growing presence and importance of other modalities. Adolescents, due to their unique developmental stage, learn best in an environment that recognizes values and supports and builds upon their varied interests, prior knowledge, abilities and stages of emotional, social and physical development. Multiliteracies based Social Studies 8 Middle Ages lesson plans, with a focus on exploring and making connections through various semiotic sign systems, have been designed with the goal of creating a successful, motivating and engaging learning environment for adolescent learners.

Chapter 3

Multiple literacies lesson plans for a study of the Middle Ages in Social Studies 8

This chapter consists of a series of six multiliteracies based lesson plans that I have created for use with Social Studies 8 students in a study of the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages is a time period that students are required to explore in Grade 8 Social Studies. I have chosen the Middle Ages as my focus for these lessons as, while this is a topic that offers many print and technology based resources, this topic is frequently seen as "boring" and holds little appeal for many students. My aim with these multiliteracies based lessons is to both engage and create meaningful learning connections to the Middle Ages for my middle years' students. The multiliteracies lessons I have created each include one, or more, text formats and literacies. These lessons are not intended to follow each other in any particular order, but rather offer ideas for the incorporation of various prescribed Grade 8 Social Studies learning outcomes within multiliteracies based lessons.

These lessons do not build on each other, but rather expand on concepts that have been previously taught within the Middle Ages curriculum for Social Studies 8. For example, my 'Castle for Sale' lesson builds upon the basic castle information that the Social Studies 8 textbook, *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time,* provides students. As well, my *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight continued....* lesson builds upon students' prior knowledge of both medieval legends and knights and the Code of Chivalry. The lessons I have chosen to include are lessons which I have used successfully with my own Grade 8 Social Studies students and that I have created to address a combination of the prescribed learning outcomes for both Social Studies and English 8. While creating these lessons I strove to develop lessons that not only provided choice in representational

formats for my students, but also engaged students while drawing on their prior

knowledge of the topic of study. It is my hope that these lessons will appeal to a wide

range of students and educators alike while providing students a chance to not only learn

new concepts, but also find success as they are able to choose representational formats

and texts that engage them while meeting their unique learning levels and needs.

Lesson Plan One - Written Communication: Then and Now

Subject Area Topic

Social Studies 8 and English 8 –   students will explore communication methods from both the Middle Ages and the present time in order to develop an understanding of how communication forms have changed and developed throughout history.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take approximately three sixty minute class periods.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of current and past methods of communication technology and language usage.

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: visual, print, oral and computer technology. Of emphasis in this lesson is the transfer of skills across content areas and the use of multiple text formats.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 Social Studies and English Integrated Resource Packages (2010).

It is expected that students will:

- gather and organize a body of information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources
- compare daily life, family structures, and gender roles in a variety of civilizations
- write purposeful information texts that express ideas and information
- use and experiment with elements of style in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry
- recognize and explain how structures and features of text shape readers' and viewers' construction of meaning
- select and use a range of strategies to revise, edit, and publish writing and representing

Resources

- Social Studies 8 textbook - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*
- Margaret Paston's letter to her husband on page 157 in *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*

- Class handout of assignment criteria
- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages to provide content material
- Assortment of books relating to the Middle Ages for students to peruse
- Optional – use of computer and printer to publish assignments

Instructional Plan

Note: This lesson would occur after students have had several lessons on the daily life of people in the Middle Ages and the role of women in this time period. This lesson assumes student familiarity with the peer editing process.

Model Lesson

1. As a class read through Margaret Paston's letter to her husband on page 157 in *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time.* Explain that this letter is typical of the formal writing style of the time.
2. In pairs have students complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the language and tone used in the letter from the Middle Ages with the language and tone of communication today. The teacher will lead a class discussion of what key points students noticed are similar and different between the two time communication time periods. The role of women in Middle Ages society (e.g. the way Margaret Paston addresses her husband) can be further explored as well.
3. On board, or poster paper, teacher will list the parts of a letter (address, heading, greeting, body, complimentary closing) and record students' observations from Margaret Paston's letter with regards to each letter section. Teacher will encourage class discussion about how this letter is different and old fashioned compared to the ways in which people communicate today.
4. In pairs have students generate a list of ways in which we communicate with one another in our world today. The list will most likely include the following: telephone, cell phone, e-mail, voice mail, texting, letters, Facebook and Twitter.

Practice lesson and learning activities

1. Teacher will review with class the differences and similarities found between the language and tone of Margaret Paston's letter and how we communicate today.
2. Students will help generate a list on the board of the methods of communication we most use today (see #4 above).
3. Teacher will introduce the assignment. Students are to create three written communications from a wife to her husband (as per example in textbook). Two of these communications are to be in "modern" format and the third is to follow the Middle Ages formal letter format shown on page 157 of the text book. Students are to convey their "modern" messages in the forms of an email and a text message.

Their letter must be written in a format similar to that of Margaret Paston's letter written in the Middle Ages.

4. The following information must be conveyed in each of students' three written communications:
    - name (students to use their own name)
    - date (date from the Middle Ages and current date)
    - place of writing
    - the communication is from a wife to her husband
    - the wife is informing her husband that she has sold their farm for a good price
    - the wife is informing her husband that she is in good health
    - the wife is informing her husband that she is packing up to join him in London
    - information conveyed in a style appropriate to the format chosen
    - facts and information reflect the style of communication
5. As a class develop a marking rubric that reflects what is important in this assignment. This rubric should be developed prior to students' rough drafts.
6. Students are to work on writing their rough drafts of the three communications. Rough drafts will be peer edited on the basis of criteria met, mechanics and structure with reference to the class developed rubric.
7. Final copies of the three communications can be typed or handwritten. A typed copy lends more credence to the appearance of the email and text. Students may wish to write out by hand their "old fashioned" communication and perhaps stain the paper with tea to make this communication appear old.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Students will share their three communications in small groups. Their finished assignments will be displayed in the classroom.
2. Teacher will use the class generated rubric to evaluate assignments.

Lesson Plan Two - Comparing and Contrasting using the Online Venn Diagram Tool

Subject Area Topic

Social Studies 8 – using an online Venn diagram tool to develop students' comparison and contrast skills.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take approximately three sixty minute class periods.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of how two groups of people meet their basic needs by creating an online Venn diagram.

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: visual, print, computer technology and multimodal literacies. Of emphasis in this lesson is the use of technology as a tool for gathering information that could be used across content areas. This lesson also allows for differentiation to meet students' learning needs.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 Social Studies Integrated Resource Package.

It is expected that students will:

- identify factors that influence the development and decline of world civilizations
- compare daily life, family structures, and gender roles in a variety of civilizations
- construct, interpret, and use graphs, tables, grids, scales, legends, and various types of maps
- analyze how people interacted with and altered their environments

Resources

- Venn diagram online tool located at
  http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/venn/index.html
- Social Studies 8 textbook - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*
- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages to provide content material
- Computer lab and printer
- Poster paper, felts, glue sticks etc.
- Assortment of books relating to the Middle Ages for students to peruse

Instructional Plan/Procedure

Model Lesson – one sixty minute class period

1. Model the Venn diagram online tool on the Smartboard or data projector using a topic that most students share prior knowledge of and can readily make compare/contrast references to, such as the elementary school world versus the middle school world. Use a think aloud approach and elicit student responses to complete the Venn diagram.
2. Choose a second topic that students share prior knowledge of (e.g., video games vs. board games or skiing vs. snowboarding) and create with students another sample online Venn diagram.
3. Lead a class discussion exploring the reasons why it is important to make comparisons, to explore many different sides of an issue or topic, and how a tool such as a Venn diagram can help identify and organise such information.

Practice Lesson and learning activities – one to two sixty minute class periods in computer lab.

Note: *all students must be at a computer with printer access*
1. Review with students the definition of basic needs, comparison, contrast and the key aspects of the online Venn diagram tool modeled last class.
2. The class, with teacher guidance, creates criteria list for Venn diagram poster. A list of the basic needs for both people from the Middle Ages and modern day people that must be represented in the Venn diagram should be developed in discussion with students prior to the creation of students' own Venn diagrams. The needs list developed should include the following items: water, food, shelter, protection and transportation. Teacher points out key areas from the textbook, students' own notes and so on where source material can be located.
3. Students complete their online Venn diagram ensuring that assignment criteria have been met. This may take more than one class period to do.
4. Students print their completed Venn diagram after peer or teacher has checked it over for completeness as per class developed criteria.
5. Students glue Venn diagram onto poster paper and include illustrations of any of the basic needs of the two groups of people being compared (e.g. car/horse, house/hovel, microwave/open fire). Posters are then displayed in the classroom.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Return completed Venn diagram posters marked according to criteria.
2. Students write paragraphs or essays describing the similarities and differences of the two groups of people with regards to how they meet their basic needs. Information to support student writing will come from their completed Venn diagrams.

Lesson Plan Three - *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Continued…

Subject Area Topic

Social Studies 8 and English 8 – a lesson incorporating students understanding of the Middle Ages, myths and legends, the technology of Mix Book with students' creative writing abilities. Students will create an on-line picture book which continues the tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from the tale's introduction.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take approximately four to five sixty minute lessons of which three should be in the computer lab.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the elements of myths and legends, their understanding of plot development, their knowledge of the Middle Ages and their creative skills as they plan and write the remainder of the tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* using the picture book technology of the program Mix Book.

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: visual, print, technology and oral literacies. Of emphasis in this lesson is student choice, transferable content area skills, and the ease of differentiation the lesson allows for both struggling and excelling learners alike.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 Social Studies and English Integrated Resource Packages.

It is expected that students will:

- gather and organize a body of information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources
- write effective imaginative texts to explore ideas and information
- create thoughtful representations that communicate ideas and information
- select and use a range of strategies to revise**,** edit**,** and publish writing and representing
- use and experiment with elements of style in writing and representing**,** appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry
- use conventions in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry.

Resources

- Picture book – *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by Selina Hastings (1991).
- Social Studies 8 textbook - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*
- Access to computer for each student and access to a Smart Board or data projector
- Assortment of books relating to the Middle Ages for students to peruse
- Class handout listing assignment criteria (included at end of lesson plan)
- Class handout of instructions for Mix Book program (included at end of lesson plan)
- Teacher created peer reading reflection handouts
- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages to provide content material

Instructional Plan

Note: *This lesson assumes that students are familiar with the Knights' Code of Chivalry, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, elements of medieval myths and legends, peer editing, the writing process and elements of plot. This lesson also requires the teacher to be familiar with the computer program Mix Book.*

Model Lesson – one sixty minute class period

1. Brainstorm with class what they know about knights of the Middle Ages. Have students create lists in their notebook from the class generated list.
2. In pairs, have students recall the elements of myths and legends. Create a class list that will later be displayed in the classroom as a writing resource. Elements may include the following: heroes, magic, conflict, good versus evil, larger than life characters, exaggerated strength and powers, monsters, dragons and so on.
3. Have students sit in such a way that they can easily see the picture book's pictures as the teacher reads aloud from the book. It is important that students do not see past page 4.
4. Introduce the book; the book is a retold version of a late 14th century Middle English romance outlining an adventure of Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table. Read aloud the first four pages of the book, pausing to show the wonderful colour pictures to the class. The pictures are important visual elements of the plot and need to be displayed and discussed as the story progresses.
5. Hand out to students the photocopied first four pages of the story. Have students quietly read the story again to themselves highlighting, or underlining, any key phrases that catch their attention and also any connections to the Middle Ages.
6. Introduce assignment criteria and explain that students are to write the rest of this tale. Ask students to think about possible plots that would continue on from page four for next lesson and to map out the elements of the plot (rising action, climax and conclusion) on a plot diagram (shark fin) for next class.

Practice Lesson and Learning Activities –one sixty minute class period in the classroom and then two to four sixty minute class periods in the computer lab

Classroom Session – one sixty minute class period

1. Review the basic points of the story's introduction with the class by making a list of the introduction details (setting details, characters, and initial incident) on the board.
2. Students share with their seat partner their plot diagram for their continued story. Go over story criteria (as per handout) with the class. Emphasize that the students' versions must "fit" with the tone present in the first four pages of the story. The tone is quite formal with proper (not colloquial) dialogue and the story is full of vocabulary and references related to the Middle Ages.
3. The remainder of this class will be spent working on developing students' rough drafts.

Computer Lab Sessions – approximately three sixty minute class sessions

1. Introduce students to the program Mix Book; use a Smart Board or a projector to share and demonstrate the program to students. Teacher will have previously explored the program, signed on and created a sample Mix Book to share with students. Give students the Mix Book handout to assist with accessing and understanding this program.
2. After an explanation of the Mix Book program students will log onto their computers, go to the Mix book site and create an account. Following the directions given on the Mix Book handout, students will begin to create their *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Continued…* stories. Students will search out and add images to their stories. Review with students the Internet sites they may and may not access to find pictures (the Google images site works well with this program). This activity will take approximately two to three classes.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Students will share their completed picture books in groups of three. If the class size is small it may be interesting to share each picture book with the whole class by using the Smart board.
2. In assigned groups students will take turns reading and viewing each other's picture books and providing comments on the author's peer reflection sheet. The teacher will also view and comment on all students' picture books.

3. After picture books have been viewed by groups, the teacher will read aloud to the class the "true" plot (from page 4 on) of the story. Before beginning to read have students brainstorm what they predict will happen in the story. After reading have students share their reactions to the "real" plot of the tale. Encourage students to share their versions of the tale with others through the use of the Mix Book site. If students wish to do so, the Mix Book site allows for the publication of individuals' Mix Books. There is a cost for this so parents would need to be aware of and approve this option.

Student handout: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Continued…*

Sir Gawain is one of the legendary knights of King Arthur's Round Table. In this particular story his honour and bravery are put to the test when he is challenged to combat by the mighty Green Knight. You have been given the first four pages of this tale (the introduction and initial incident occur in these four pages). Your task will be to write the rest of the tale. Think about what you have learned about the Middle Ages and the characteristics of medieval legends and tales. How could you incorporate these elements into your story? Follow along carefully as we read together the first four pages of this tale. Underline or highlight any key terms that you think are of importance or you have questions about.

Your tale must have the following elements:

- All remaining elements of a short story (rising action, climax and conclusion).
- A minimum of ten references to the Middle Ages.
- A plot line that "works" with the first four pages given.
- Descriptive language and use of dialogue.
- Proper sentence structure and mechanics.
- At minimum of one illustration per double page spread in your story.
- Picture book format created using the Mix Book program

Student Mix Book Instructions

To get started on Mix Book follow these steps:

1. Go to www.mixbook.com
2. Log in by creating your own account. You will need your email address and a password that you can remember!
3. Once logged into the site select Size – choose Portrait Photos Books (8.5" x 11" Classic).
4. Choose Select a Theme – choose General: Blank Canvas.
5. Next go to Choose Theme – choose "I don't want to choose theme."
6. You will now have a blank page on your screen. You will work the screen by using the buttons to the left of the screen (layout, background and text).
7. The first page of the book is your front cover. Select a background colour (e.g. green) and then select text block and insert the title (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight continued…*), your name and division. You also have the option to put the title on the spine of the book.
8. Work your way through the rest of the story by inserting text. Try to vary your page layouts and picture formats. Have fun exploring the program and creating your picture book! Remember to save frequently!

Lesson Plan Four - Castle for Sale

Subject Area Topic

Social Studies 8 – using multiple modes of representation to share both students' knowledge of castles from the Middle Ages and their understanding of persuasive writing or speaking.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take approximately five sixty class periods. Some students, due to their choice of representation format, may need more time.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the parts of a castle, the importance of castle locations, the defense systems used in a castle and the elements of a Middle Ages village. Through the form of representation chosen, students will also demonstrate their persuasive writing or speaking skills.

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: visual, print, technology, multimodal text and oral literacies. Of emphasis in this lesson is student choice in representational formats.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 English and Social Studies Integrated Resource Packages.

It is expected that students will:

- gather and organize a body of information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources
- write purposeful information texts that express ideas and information
- create thoughtful representations that communicate ideas and information
- use and experiment with elements of style in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry
- use conventions in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry
- select and use a range of strategies to revise, edit, and publish writing and representing

Resources

- Social Studies 8 textbook - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*
- Poster papers, glue sticks, coloured felts, pencils etc.

- Real estate flyers from local source (newspaper, etc.) enough for half the class
- Access to computers and printers
- Content area related texts – specifically books on the topic of castles
- Class handout listing assignment criteria
- Castle Comment sheets – one per student
- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages to provide content material

Instructional Plan

Note: *This lesson assumes students' familiarity with the feudal system, castle construction and layout and castle defenses.*

Model Lesson – one sixty minute class period

1. Review with class the key aspects of castles in the Middle Ages. Divide students into groups of four and give each group a piece of poster paper. Each group is responsible for gathering ten or more key points on the topic they are assigned. Facts may be gathered from students' notes, textbooks and content area texts available within the classroom. The topics to be assigned to individual groups include the following: castle defenses, castle construction, castle features, castle locations, and Middle Ages' villages. Students' information posters can include words, phrases, sketches and so on. Emphasize that these posters will be used for information gathering by the whole class so accuracy is important.
2. Display posters around the room and have each group share their information with the class in an informal sharing session.

Practice Lesson and Learning Activities – approximately five sixty minute class periods

1. This assignment involves students imagining that they are real estate agents. As a class brainstorm a list of what a real estate agent would do to sell a house (castle) and ways in which they could advertise a home (castle) for sale. Teacher should write the students' list on chart paper so that it can be posted in the classroom for students to refer to.
2. Teacher hands each pair of students a real estate flyer. Students will peruse the flyers and come up with points to add to the class list about what methods/words/phrases etc., realtors use to advertise homes. Engage students in a class discussion about what they noticed from flyers and ask each pair to contribute a point to the class chart.
3. Introduce the Castle for Sale assignment. Students' task is to find a purchaser for Lady or Lord (teacher's name) castle. Give students assignment criteria sheets to follow along on as the assignment is outlined.

4. Assignment details are as follows on the *Castle for Sale* handout following.

<u>Castle For Sale Student Handout</u>

Hear ye, hear ye!! You are a real estate agent in the Middle Ages. You have been asked by Lady Lawson to find a purchaser for her family castle. Her current castle is too small and not royal enough for her, so she wants to buy a new one!

Your task is to create a way to advertise this castle to potential buyers. The advertisement you create must include the following:

I. A detailed description of the castle (point form is fine)
- name of the castle
- size
- location (country, town, city)
- features - keep, moat, dungeon etc. (should be minimum of 6)
- area - hill top, lakeside, island etc.
- condition - recently renovated, falling apart, etc.
- history of the castle (who has lived there, what has happened)

II. Pictures should include the following:
- outside view
- inside views of a minimum of 3 rooms - great hall, dungeon, a sleeping
  chamber and so on.

III. Village information
- name of village
- features and services available in village

IV. Castle defenses
- list a minimum of 4 defenses
- defenses need to be clearly seen and labelled on castle illustration

V. Price and terms of sale – pieces of gold, trade, what is included?

VI. All work must be neatly and completely done and in colour. This is your opportunity to be creative and choose your own format for your work!

5. Brainstorm with students possible representational formats for this assignment. Representational formats could include the following: brochure, power point, model of castle, poster, essay, newspaper advertisements, talk show, and magazine. The choice of representational formats is endless – encourage students to be creative.

6. Students will need approximately four sixty minute classes to create their sale plan, rough draft of the assignment and then to create their finished project. As a variety of representational formats are encouraged in this assignment teachers will have to plan to accommodate students' creating needs (e.g. computer lab, model building, poster making).

7. Once projects are complete the students will participate in a 'walk about' to observe all students projects. Some projects may have to be shared via data projector. For each project observed students will write a response on the teacher created *Castle Comments* sheet. This sheet will be placed by each castle project and will have the student real estate agent's name on it and the name of the castle for sale and a space for students to write their comments under the heading of *what I noticed about your castle*. Students will be asked to make a comment (kind, not cutting) about the castle for sale advertisement on this sheet after they have viewed the project.

8. Completed projects will be displayed in the classroom.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Students will share their completed projects with the class in a scaffolded whole class *Castle Walk About*.

2. Student will provide their classmates with written feedback on their projects during the *Castle Walk About*.

3. Teacher will use a class generated rubric to evaluate assignments. This rubric will need to be generated early on in the assignment, perhaps after the first two 'work periods' on this assignment so that students have a clear picture of what is involved in this project.

Lesson Five – Scaredy Squirrel…Scaredy Knight

Subject Area Topic

Social Studies 8 and English 8 – students will share their knowledge of the life of a knight from the Middle Ages.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take one sixty minute class period.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the life of a knight and the knight's code of chivalry in a short informal creative writing format which is modelled on the picture book *Scaredy Squirrel* by Melanie Watt (2008).

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: print, oral and visual literacies. Of emphasis in this lesson is the transfer of knowledge from one content area to another, student choice in aspects of their story, the opportunities for differentiation and the use of multimodal text forms.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 English and Social Studies Integrated Resource Packages.

It is expected that students will:

- gather and organize a body of information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources
- listen to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate ideas and information from a variety of texts
- view, both collaboratively and independently, to comprehend a variety of visual texts
- write effective imaginative texts to explore ideas and information

Resources

- picture book *Scaredy Squirrel* by Melanie Watt (2008).
- *Scaredy Squirrel…*Scaredy Knight teacher created sentence starter handout – this handout should include approximately ten sentence starters from the story with the words Scaredy Squirrel changed to Scaredy Knight
- Social Studies 8 textbook - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time*

- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages with a focus on knights and the knight's code

Instructional Plan

Note: *This lesson assumes student familiarity with the knight's code of chivalry and general knowledge of knights in the Middle Ages.*

Model Lesson – approximately the first fifteen minutes of class period.

1. Brainstorm with class what they know about knights of the Middle Ages and the Knight's Code of Chivalry. Have students create lists in their notebooks from the class generated list.
2. Introduce the children's picture book *Scaredy Squirrel* to the class.
3. Have students sit in such a way that they can easily see the picture book's pictures as the teacher reads aloud from the book.
4. Read aloud the book, pausing to show the wonderful colour pictures to the class and to make predictions with the class. The pictures are important visual elements of the plot and add to the humor of the story. Discuss with the class what makes the pictures effective, humorous and memorable.

Practice Lesson and Learning Activities – approximately forty-five minutes of class period.

1. Explain to students that they are going to write about a little known Knight of the Round Table – Scaredy Knight! This lesson allows students to have fun and be creative, but not silly as students must incorporate their prior knowledge of knights of the Middle Ages on a cartoon picture book character. (*Scaredy Squirrel* is also a television show for youngsters). A possible extension activity for this lesson would be to have students share their Scaredy Knight stories with a preschool or kindergarten class.
2. Hand out to students the Scaredy Squirrel…Scaredy Knight sentence starters sheet. Students are to complete the sentence starters with reference to their knowledge of the life of a knight. Emphasize that while this activity is a "fun" writing activity, students' sentences must reflect accurately the details/elements of a knight from the Middle Ages and include descriptive language (adverbs, adjectives etc).
3. Once completed writing have students read aloud their Scaredy Squirrel…Scaredy Knight tales in small groups.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Students will orally share their completed writing in small groups.
2. Teacher will observe students' interactions in group situations.
3. Completed work will be displayed in the classroom.

Lesson Plan Six – Captured by the Franks

Subject Area Topic

 Social Studies 8 and English 8 – this is a lesson incorporating students' understanding of the early Middle Ages with students' creative writing abilities. Students will create a mind map which records the details of their capture and escape when a captive of the Frankish peoples.

Estimated Lesson Time

This lesson will take approximately three to four sixty minute class periods.

Literacy Strategy Outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the lifestyles, habits and customs of both the Romans and the Frankish peoples. This knowledge will be represented in the multimodal text format of a mind map which displays aspects of their experience and shows students' knowledge of the Franks and Romans.

Multiple literacies incorporated in this lesson include the following: oral, visual, print, and multimodal texts. Of emphasis in this lesson is the use of multimodal text formats, content area transfer of skills, opportunities for differentiation and choice in both developing creative content and representation format.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes (P.L.O.'s)

Student objectives are based on prescribed learning outcomes from the Grade 8 Social Studies Integrated Resource Package.

It is expected that students will:

- compare daily life, family structures, and gender roles in a variety of civilizations
- describe a variety of diverse cultural traditions and world religions
- compose effective imaginative texts to explore ideas and information
- create thoughtful representations that communicate ideas and information
- use and experiment with elements of form in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry

Resources

- Text book - *Pathways: Civilizations Through Time* (Grade 8)
- Content area related texts
- Class handout listing assignment criteria

- Class handouts and notes on the Middle Ages to provide content material
- Paper (11" x 18") for mind maps
- 2 felt pens and 2 (or more) pieces of chart paper for Romans/Franks brainstorming activity

Instructional Plan

Note: *This lesson assumes that students are familiar with aspects of the culture of the Roman and Frankish peoples and the mind map format.*

Model Lesson – one sixty minute class period

1. Divide class in half and give one student in each group a felt pen and poster paper. Assign one half of the class to be Romans and the other to be Frankish peoples.
2. Each group is to create a web which must contain as much information as the group members can recall about the culture, traditions, geographical locations, religious beliefs and daily life of their assigned culture. Discuss with class how the web could have subheadings and related ideas grouped together. Note: depending on the class size and composition it may be best to have two groups for each culture.
3. After groups have completed their charts discuss with class any obvious similarities and differences between the two cultures. Display completed charts in the classroom as a source of easily and readily available information for students. Have individual students create a Venn diagram to show similarities and differences between the Romans and the Franks for next class.

Practice Lesson and Learning Activities – two (or more) sixty minute class periods

1. Have students pair and share their Venn diagrams on the Roman and Frankish people.
2. As a class discuss the main similarities and differences between the two cultures and encourage discussion about which culture students would have preferred to be a part of and why.
3. Introduce to students the Captured by the Franks assignment (share handout following with students). Go over the criteria for the project and the form of representation to be used for the assignment.
4. Explain that students will need to not only use the facts that they have learned about these two groups to complete this project, but also their imaginations and creative writing skills. I often share an example of a previously completed mind map to remind students of the mind map format.

5. For the remainder of the period have students brainstorm their personal details e.g. Roman name, age, location, name and details of the Frankish family who had taken them in and so on.
6. The next two (or more) class periods will be spent gathering information and creating students' mind maps and developing an evaluation rubric for the assignment as a class.

Assessment Approach for Literacy Strategy

1. Students will orally share their completed mind maps and tales of capture in small groups.
2. Teacher will observe students' interactions in group situations.
3. Completed work will be displayed in the classroom.
4. Teacher will use a class generated rubric to evaluate assignments.

Social Studies 8

CAPTURED BY THE FRANKS ASSIGNMENT HANDOUT

You are a young Roman boy/girl of the same age as you are now who lived at a remote Roman outpost. Unfortunately, your whole family was violently killed in a barbarian attack; however you were lucky to escape as you were in the outhouse at the time!!

You have been wandering aimlessly for several days, but now have stumbled into a Frankish village. A family has taken you in as their servant. You toil day and night, but keep your eyes and ears open to learn all you can to help in your escape.

Your task for this assignment is to describe the following using a mind map format:

- your name, age, physical appearance and state of mind

- the name of the family that has taken you in as a slave and their social class

- a map showing your location in Europe - both now and where you lived before

- the weapons you see around you (drawings)

- a description of the chores you must do each day

- a description of the religious ceremonies you see the Frankish people practice

- a description of daily life among the Franks

- your plan to escape

Chapter 4

Reflection

A first understanding of multiliteracies

In my investigation of the concept of multiliteracies for this project, I found the concept of multiliteracies to be much broader than my prior knowledge had led me to believe. My original conception of multiliteracies was roughly based on the whole language approach that I was introduced to and expected to incorporate into my teaching back in the late 1980's when I first started teaching. I vaguely assumed that a pedagogy of multiliteracies basically involved supporting the text book through the use of visual images to assist with student comprehension and also having students do lots of "projects."

My knowledge of what constituted a multiliteracies based approach to instruction was quickly broadened when I took a graduate course on multiliteracies with Dr. Deborah Begoray at the University of Victoria. I came to realize, through this course, both how vast and essential for successful adolescent learning the concept of multiliteracies is. I excitedly realized the many learning opportunities that I could create for students by incorporating one or more of the many varying forms of literacies into my teaching. My further reading of various works by Elliot Eisner confirmed the potential for successful comprehension I could envision with a multiliteracies approach for, as Eisner (1997) writes, "…the form of representation we use to represent what we think influences both the processes and products of thinking" (p. 3). In this chapter I reflect on what I learned about multiliteracies through the process of creating this project, why I believe that pedagogy of multiliteracies provides an effective method of instruction for adolescent

learners, why I think the multiliteracies based unit for a study of the Middle Ages I created is an effective and engaging teaching approach, and lastly, how I plan to continue to work with multiliteracies both in my personal classroom practice and within the school learning environment.

What I discovered about multiliteracies

Upon reflecting on my learning journey, both with this project and my graduate courses, I feel that I have learned not only more of the theory behind what I do in the classroom, which has led to increased feelings of comfort in my teaching skills, but also I have broadened my practice to include new areas, such as technology, in my lessons while adding to my existing practice in ways that are designed to meet the needs of today's youth. The knowledge that there are students I have not successfully reached has always been a burden on my shoulders for, no matter how hard one tries, a limit of time, resources and support combine to swallow many teacher's best efforts to provide what every child needs. I see a lightening of this burden with the inclusion of a pedagogy of multiliteracies in my classroom.

Mikulecky (2003) confirms this thought for me when he writes that "teachers can't teach everything. They can however, learn more themselves, teach ways for learners to critically evaluate the quality of information they find, create learning environments in which learners use electronic literacy to accomplish real tasks, and build in ways for learners to collaborate and teach others what they've learned..."(Mikulecky, 2003, p.13).

Mikulecky's statement confirmed my belief that being a teacher is a life-long journey; no educator should stop along the journey. Rather we should always be looking for ways to improve our practice, recognize our mistakes and celebrate our successes.

Why are my multiliteracies based lesson plans a successful way to teach?

My reading of Allington, the New London Group (1996, 2000), Eisner (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 & 2007) and Zoss (2009) to name a few authors, combined with my own personal experience in the classroom, has provided me with a basis to state that a pedagogy of multiliteracies is a successful way to engage, motivate and create meaningful learning opportunities with students. I repeatedly thought of Eisner's belief that "the kinds of minds we develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that the school provides" (2004, p. 8), when creating my unit of multiliteracies based Social Studies 8 lessons for this project. The lessons I have included in this project provide students with opportunities to explore, imagine, create and learn in ways that stray from the more traditional text book based "read and regurgitate" approach. A multiliteracies approach to instruction, with its varying forms of representational formats and strategic demands on differing literacies, can provide all levels of learners with hooks to latch their learning onto. Struggling readers can gather knowledge from graphic novels, both struggling and confident writers alike can explore visual images as vehicles for representing knowledge and students who wish to explore topics further and in more depth can readily do so within a multiliteracies approach.

With its "something for every student philosophy" a multiliteracies based approach has proven itself to be an effective way to reach adolescent learners (Eisner 1998, 2002, 2004; Mills, 2007, 2009; New London Group, 1996, 2000; Perry, 2009;

Robb, 2010; Zoss, 2009). Through the process of researching, writing and creating this

project I have come to believe, as Sheridan- Thomas (2007) does, that adolescents need

to be "able to negotiate multiliteracies in the sense that they need to be able to interpret

and critique texts across cultures, media and genre" (p. 123). Learning in today's world

includes rapid "shifts to a more postmodern literacy that includes print, oral and visual

texts" (Begoray, 2001, p. 213). I firmly believe that it is important that educators

incorporate these multiple modes of literacy into the classroom and teach their students

how to successfully use and share these literacies, as by doing so educators will assist

students to develop skills that will aid them in both learning and life.

How will I enact my new knowledge in the classroom?

Harste (2003) tells us that "…literacy in the 21st century is not a spectator sport"

(p.10). My goal is to engage and motivate my students to learn by becoming active

participants in their learning journey and not just spectators. I wish to encourage critical

thinking, not passive acceptance of text based facts. I want to teach my students to make

connections between text and their world, to think "outside the box" and to discover the

creative potential that lies within. To achieve this goal I will continue to incorporate a

multiliteracies approach within my teaching wherever and whenever I can. The

multiliteracies based lessons I have created and included in this project have shown me

just how successful such an approach can be for students. I have experienced firsthand

how some of my students, who have never participated or wished to share their

knowledge with the class, were able to wow both themselves as well as me with their

digital tales of the Middle Ages. As well, I have also seen how the learning connections

between the past and the present made by my students have positively impacted their

ability to creatively engage within a variety of text formats and literacies. I have found

that my students' personal connection to their learning experience have become stronger

when I have taught a multiliteracies based program. My students' evident enthusiasm and

desire to explore the topic is evidenced not only in the quality of work completed, but

also in the quantity of work produced! However, it is important to be aware that

multiliteracies based lessons need to meet the needs of all one's students and to do so

involves taking the time to know one's students and plan accordingly. To this end, I plan

to continue to develop lessons which are based on a framework of multiliteracies and to

share, but not push, such lessons and ideas with my colleagues.

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