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Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in One Grade Six Classroom: Possibilities and Constraints

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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MULTIMODAL LITERACY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN ONE GRADE SIX
CLASSROOM: POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

by

Terry Loerts

Faculty of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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Abstract

Multimodal literacy is underrepresented in the educational research literature. The goal of this qualitative case study was to provide insights into the place of multimodal literacy learning opportunities in the junior classroom literacy curriculum. The study aimed to document the students' literacy practices within these opportunities. It asked: What multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom afford? How do students engage in them? What enables and constrains these learning opportunities?

This case study focused on four student participants and their teacher in a grade six classroom within Ontario, Canada, over the course of four months during language arts classes. Through participant observation, the prominent data collection method used was interviews. Captured observational data was done through the use of photographs and video. Artefacts were collected and analyzed for its content and curriculum documents and classroom resources that the teacher used in her instructional planning were examined. The documentation of the classroom context which included the collection of details about the class and classroom such as classroom layout, timetables, and student-teacher interactions also took place. Classroom curriculum literacy events were analyzed in relation to the study questions using a Modified Constant Comparison Method.

The study found that multimodal literacy learning opportunities were most often enabled in the classroom curriculum when the students' knowledge and multimodal interests took primacy. A narrowed emphasis on print literacy constrained multimodal

literacy learning opportunities. This narrowing was largely the effect of a provincial, standardized literacy assessment, standardized outcomes-based report cards, workshops, school-wide rubrics directed towards improving students' performance on the provincial assessment, and a lack of support for the teacher's acquisition of multimodal pedagogical knowledge. The study confirms and extends through illustrations of Canadian classroom curriculum literature related particularly to literacy assessment washback and students' literacy practices within classroom literacy curricula that are print-centric. It makes suggestions for how multimodal pedagogies might be included in classroom curricula so as to enhance students' multimodal literacy learning opportunities.

Keywords:

literacy, multimodal, curriculum, multimodal literacy pedagogy, case study, washback effect, institutional curriculum, programmatic curriculum, classroom curriculum, funds of knowledge

Acknowledgments

Little did I know when I started my doctoral program what a journey awaited me! It has been challenging in so many ways, yet also enjoyable because I always love the learning that results. This journey has stretched me so much and has allowed me to think of creative (if not demanding!) ways to juggle work, family, and school. I could not have done it without the support and prayers of many people in my life. My faith has been able to keep me grounded and has given me strength to persevere and for that, I thank God from whom all blessings flow.

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also cheering long-distance from Alberta and have always been supportive of any educational pursuits, even more so when they knew that I enjoyed what I was doing. I know I have my dad's blessing, even though he didn't live to see this journey to completion, but I will always be thankful for his love, support, and ever-listening ear.

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Chapter One

Coming to the Question: My Stake, My Story

Some worlds may be realised mainly through language. Others may be realised in complex multimodal ensembles which move beyond language, for example, into gestures, action, images or sound. Some may be represented in the absence of language and the presence of silence. The riches in children's texts lie undetected because most teachers need the tools to unearth them. (Stein, 2008, p. 147)

I remember growing up surrounded by books. To say I was an avid reader would be an understatement as I devoured books, requiring my family to make yet another weekly trip to the library. Back in the day where every book was checked out by hand, the librarians would see us walk in and they would immediately grab a stack of cards to start stamping due dates on them, knowing we would once again take out a mountain of books. I lost myself in reading – in words crafted through skilled authors linking my imagination to unforeseen worlds. Accessing those other worlds as Stein (2008) describes was my favourite pastime. I would read outside in the coolness of our shady tree, in the comfort of my bed, in the car, waiting at a doctor's office – much like I continue to do to this day!

The sheer amount of reading that I did was not only enjoyable to me as it opened up other worlds - it also set me up for success within school. Looking back to those days, success in school was measured by how well a person could read and write. Literacy *was* reading and writing. Because of this, I was considered a successful student as I had

managed to '*crack the code*' early on and I found myself participating in the highest reading groups throughout my elementary years. My engagement and facility with reading positioned me well in my writing; I crafted imaginative stories, creative poems, and speeches. I excelled at weekly spelling tests, and I remember all the gold stars that documented my success, proudly displayed on the bulletin board. Looking back I think even the reading incentives gave me an unfair advantage as I would zoom around the room on my personally named rocket way beyond my peers. This love of reading was also encouraged by my teachers and my parents. I was read to from a very early age at home, and I got lost in the stories my teachers would read out loud to the class. To this day I can remember certain stories that captured my imagination and made me seek out other stories by much-loved authors.

Reflecting on those days on the enjoyment of reading and writing, it doesn't surprise me that I chose a teaching career. I wanted to instill this same love of reading and writing in my own students so they too could open up unexplored worlds. My experiences in teaching influenced me to do graduate education in the area of literacy. I still continue to enjoy reading and writing but through my own teaching experiences in both elementary and undergraduate education I started to realize that literacy and the school success that came with it was much broader than reading and writing.

Success can be measured in so many different ways but I remember as a new teacher being passionate about instilling a love of learning, of enjoying literature, and utilizing students' gifts, interests and abilities to make learning relevant and to open up different worlds. Teaching students to be literate meant helping them become proficient in the four dimensions of language arts – reading, writing, listening and speaking. My

understanding of literacy all these years ago was linguistically based, to be sure. However, upon further reflection, I also realize that I was able to open up other worlds that, as Stein (2008) indicates, move beyond language. My students visually represented stories through drawings, made models of various systems of the human body for a health unit, created 3-dimensional topographical maps of the Canadian provinces, and engaged in drama. Using photographs, artifacts, historical maps, and film, my students evaluated and analyzed how they selected, shaped, and applied information in Social Studies lessons. These were the kinds of literacy learning opportunities I had with my own students as practiced within the classroom curriculum (Doyle, 1992). So was I able to help students move beyond language? In many ways, yes. Can I say that my teaching helped students communicate through different modes? Absolutely. However, was I purposeful about what that really meant? Hardly. I certainly did not have the theoretical understanding about multimodal pedagogy, and I dare say that because of this, I probably did not understand the true depth of meaning that my students were communicating through their various texts which ultimately limited their literacy success and access.

Contemporary definitions of literacy have certainly expanded from my days in school. The position statement from the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (2008) states that literacy is situational and embedded within the kinds of literacy practices that the 21st century demands. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2013) sees 21st century literacies as “multiple, dynamic, and malleable” (para. 1), as students “develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology” (para. 1), “design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes” (para. 1), “create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts”

(para. 1) and “solve problems collaboratively” (para. 1). Paramount in both these definitions is the focus on the multiple modes through which communication may occur. Many educational researchers equally define literacy as multimodal and highlight the need to recognize and foster multiple modes in students’ communication (Alvermann, 2002; Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2011).

Being able to communicate through multiple modes (which of course include reading and writing) and understanding how modes operate and relate to each other creates *expanded communication options* (Heydon, 2012). Students have more options for meaning making (receptive and expressive) when they know how communicational resources work to produce meaning, what the potentials of modes are for making meaning, and their interests and knowledge are permitted to influence the possibilities for communication, based on available resources (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001). Multimodal literacy entails knowledge of and facility with the process of design where texts are produced and understood through modes such as writing, image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech, and sound effects (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2011). What enables all of this is a shift in literacy pedagogy which the literature calls *multimodal pedagogy*.

Despite the innovations offered by multimodal literacy and pedagogy, the literature suggests that students are not always getting multimodal literacy learning opportunities within schools (Walsh, 2009). Short, Kauffman and Kahn (2000) go so far as to say that “it is only in schools that students are restricted to using one sign system to think” (p. 160). Restricting students in their possibilities for multimodal literacy learning

is something that I have been party to for different reasons, the first of which as I have mentioned earlier – that I was very much unaware of what multimodal literacy entailed when I started teaching. Today, most teacher candidates that I have taught are just as unaware of multimodal literacy when they start their teacher education program – a fact that is also supported by the research literature (e.g. Begoray, 2002; McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2012). Second, thinking purposefully about what an expanded definition of literacy meant pedagogically within my classroom was non-existent at the beginning of my career, but thankfully has continued to expand as I continue teaching. I have come to understand that multimodal literacy pedagogy needs to be an integral part of the literacy curriculum and not just a bridging pedagogy that brings students' out-of-school literacy practices into the school setting – a fact that has been recognized in the research literature (e.g. Alvermann & Moore, 2011; Dyson, 1999; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Marsh, 2006; Pahl, 2006). This concern will be addressed further in my literature review in chapter two. Thirdly, the confines of the programmatic curricula (Doyle, 1992) made me feel at times that as an educator, I did not have the time or the freedom to explore alternate modes of literacy to the degree that I could have to align more closely with multimodal literacy pedagogy. As the programmatic and institutional curricula focuses on curriculum documents, policies, and materials in the classroom, I felt that I needed to be responsive to these documents. From the way I interpreted the programmatic curriculum, the students had print literacy skills to master and I had literacy outcomes that needed to be fulfilled and if I didn't deliver these outcomes, I would not be doing my job as a teacher. Similar sentiments are expressed throughout the research literature (Klinger, Maggi & D'Angiulli, 2011; Tierney, Bond & Bresler, 2006; Walsh, 2009; Wien & Dudley-Marling, 1998; Williams, 2005) and by Linda, the grade six teacher in this study – the

specifics of which I explore in chapters four, and five. Lastly, even as my understanding of multimodal literacy expanded throughout my teaching career, it was difficult to assess these multimodal literacy practices and I found myself reverting back to mono-modal assessments that favoured reading and writing. Have these teaching practices honoured the students that I have taught, especially in light of 21st century literacy pedagogies? I wish I knew back then what I know now.

And I am not alone.

My story is echoed by students and educators alike with the literature reporting many barriers to multimodal literacy learning opportunities being offered in classrooms. Albers (2006), for instance, notes that for many students literacy in school is “doing only bookwork” (p. 80). Moving to pedagogies that recognize that literacy is more than bookwork, particularly literacies that involve viewing and require a “shift in mindset” (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2008, p. 3) can be met with an “antagonistic attitude” (Lancaster & Rowe, 2009, p. 114). Other challenges or barriers to multimodal literacy and pedagogy identified in the literature include that teachers may be restricted by the programmatic curriculum (Ben-Peretz, 1990). Programmatic curricula have been found to be “both strongly classified and framed ... so that teachers feel they have little opportunity to introduce new ideas” (Millard, 2006, p. 235). Certainly the literature reports increasingly narrow government demands (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Kress, 2001), curricular standards (Siegel, 2012) and standardized literacy tests such as those administered through the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) for Ontario students in grades three, six, and ten which

must take precedence over multimodal literacy and pedagogy (Klinger, Maggi & D'Angiulli, 2011).

Rationale for the Study

The literature is replete with calls for educators to rethink what counts as literacy within classrooms (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013; Cummins, 2006; Dyson, 2001; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Millard, 2006) and to consider how curricula and pedagogies can engender multimodal literacy learning opportunities for students so that they can be positioned as active designers of literacies (Cummins, 2006; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 1997; Ferguson, 2011). These calls come even when many teaching and learning contexts include programmatic curricula that can make expanded views of literacy and literacy teaching difficult to achieve. This study is designed to provide insight into classroom literacy curricula and the ways in which multimodal literacy learning opportunities might be afforded and/or constrained. Specifically, the study asks:

1. What, if any multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curriculum afford?
2. How do students engage in these multimodal literacy learning opportunities?
3. What enables and constrains these learning opportunities?

My story is not yet complete as I continue to learn how to honour students' multimodal literacy learning abilities and equip school-age students as well as teacher candidates and other educators with the knowledge and the skills needed to be literate in the 21st century. This study focused on grade six because of my affinity for having taught junior learners in my career. I also have witnessed the increased focus on reading and

writing as students move from the primary grades to the junior grades which may create a disconnect for learners who want to become *more* involved in their learning as they have more diverse interests and awareness of the world around them, and not *less* involved because of constraints that limit their literacy learning (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Williams, 2005). Thus the words of Kress (2006) are important to consider as he mentions that multimodal literacy will “have profound effects on human, cognitive/affective, cultural and bodily engagement with the world and on the forms and shapes of knowledge” (p.1), because the way students and educators engage with multimodal literacy will impact their future. Literacy *is* more than reading and writing. Being inclusive of all modes in creating and analyzing texts could help students realize worlds (Stein, 2008) not yet understood while affirming their multidimensional, creative, curious, agentive, and literate abilities.

Contextualizing the Field: Literacy in the Ontario Context

The study is situated in Ontario, Canada, where education is a provincial matter. To understand the context of the study, it is thus necessary to detail how literacy is positioned by the province. Plainly, literacy is a key focus of public education in Ontario, and the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) defines literacy as:

The ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information, to interact with others, and to make meaning. Literacy is a complex process that involves building on prior knowledge, culture, and experiences in order to develop new knowledge and deeper understanding. It connects individuals and communities, and is an essential tool for personal growth

and active participation in a democratic society. (*Literacy For Learning*, 2004, p. 5).

The OME acknowledges that literacy is at the “heart” (*The Ontario Curriculum: Language*, 2006b, p. 3) of the language curriculum which “organizes the knowledge and skills that students need to become literate” (p. 4) into four strands: Oral Communication, Reading, Writing, and Media Literacy. Literacy is such a key focus for public education in Ontario that the OME keeps track of literacy achievement scores of students across Ontario through standardized tests as administered through EQAO (2013). The OME also publishes reports giving suggestions on how to improve literacy outcomes which can be found in reports such as *The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario* (2004, henceforth cited as “*The Report*”).

As part of its recommendations, *The Report* (2004) suggests literacy instruction in a wide variety of modes and technologies and has established seven guiding principles specifically for junior literacy as a “broad framework for planning and supporting literacy learning in the junior grades” (p. 11). I have paraphrased these below:

1. Literacy learning in the junior grades can transform children’s lives: The idea that literacy learning is connected to the knowledge that they already possess while stretching them to learn new ideas is important in making authentic, personal connections that are relevant to their daily lives.
2. The goal of all literacy instruction is to enable students to make meaning from and in the wide range of texts they will encounter and produce at school and in the world: In order to make meaning from a wide variety of texts that are either read,

talked about, written, and represented visually, students must be provided with opportunities to engage with a wide variety of texts to link their previous knowledge with new knowledge, thus experiencing new perspectives that go beyond their current world-views.

3. All junior students can develop as literate learners when they receive scaffolded support that prepares them for higher learning and growing independence. Teachers have an important position in the classroom as supporters of students' learning. Teachers' knowledge of student abilities, effective teaching strategies and content knowledge can help junior students develop new skills, strategies, and interests, setting them up for success as literacy learners.
4. Students are motivated to learn when they encounter interesting and meaningful texts on topics that matter to them: Junior learners want to be engaged in authentic learning opportunities that make use of their literacy resources. As *The Report* (2004) indicates, "Effective literacy programs in the junior grades provide reading and writing opportunities based on topics that relate to the student's world and that engage students in using electronic, visual, and artistic media to gather and express new ideas and information" (p. 12).
5. Teachers continually assess the literacy learning of their students in order to design classroom activities that will promote new learning for each student: Enabling students to monitor their learning alongside teacher's various assessment tools allow constructive feedback that will help them set future goals for learning. In turn, teachers use the information gathered to become more effective educators.
6. Teachers continually develop their professional knowledge and skills, drawing on lessons from research to improve their classroom practice: With a wide variety of

options ranging from action research to engaging colleagues in constructive conversations, teachers should take the opportunities available to them to stay current on recent research that promotes literacy learning, in whatever forms it can entail – from curricular planning, best practices based in research, to assessments that improve the ways students learn to be literate.

7. Successful literacy learning in the junior grades is a team effort, requiring the support of the whole learning community – including teachers at all grade levels, school administrators, support staff, the board, parents, and community members: Even though teachers have a large responsibility for teaching literacy to each of their students, efforts need to be made to build on what is being learned throughout the community by way of mentoring, coaching, and creating parent-teacher links by way of school involvement and newsletters.

Collectively, *The Report* (2004) and other provincial guides such as *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6, Volume One: Foundations of Literacy Instruction for the Junior Learner* (2006a, henceforth cited as “A Guide”) and the provincial curriculum document *The Ontario Curriculum: Language* (2006b), serve to inform teachers about the goals for literacy teaching and learning within Ontario.

Whether or not all of these recommendations play out in relation to multimodal literacy learning opportunities in the classroom curriculum will be made clearer as I present the findings in chapter four and engage in further discussion in chapter five. For now I provide more information on the Ontario literacy curriculum used within the enactment of the classroom curriculum.

The Ontario Curriculum for Grades 1-8: Language

The Ontario Curriculum: Language (2006b) document refers to literacy development as central in importance so that students can think, communicate, and learn. The document also states in the introduction that in developing language proficiency students will “appreciate language both as an important medium for communicating ideas and information and as a source of enjoyment” (p. 3). Teachers are seen as central to this process as they have the task of developing “appropriate instructional strategies” (p. 6) as well as “appropriate methods for assessing and evaluating student learning” (p. 6). In addition, teachers are to engage students in learning activities that provide opportunities for practicing newly acquired skills while providing regular constructive feedback to promote further learning (*Language*, 1995, 1997, 2006b).

In 1995 the OME implemented a common programmatic curriculum for the province. The *Common Curriculum* (1995) was introduced across various disciplines, including literacy. By 1997, a new provincial government stayed with the idea of a common programmatic curriculum and also made the following changes: the 1997 *Language* document was further organized into the strands of writing, reading, and oral/visual communication. In contrast to the 1995 document, overall expectations and specific expectations were put forth in the 1997 document such as: “*By the end of grade X, students will ... use a variety of sentence types (e.g., questions, statements) and sentence structures (e.g., complex sentences) appropriate for their purposes*” (p. 21) (as taken from a grade 6 writing expectation). These changes have left their traces in the current edition of the *Language* (2006b) document which contains specific learning outcomes in the four strands of oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy.

Each strand is once again separated to give both general and specific expectations which represent the “mandated curriculum” (p. 8). Meant to serve as “illustrations” (p. 8), the curriculum expectations are classified and framed as a:

Progression in knowledge and skills from grade to grade through (1) the wording of the expectation itself, (2) the examples that are given in parentheses in the expectation, and/or (3) the teacher prompts that may follow the expectation. The examples and teacher prompts help to clarify the requirements specified in the expectations and suggest the intended depth and level of complexity of the expectations. They have been developed to model appropriate practice for the grade. ... Teachers can choose to use the examples and teacher prompts that are appropriate for the classrooms or they may develop their own approaches that reflect a similar level of complexity. (p. 8)

The principle outcome of the language curriculum to help all students be literate has not changed over the past revisions to the document. However, the definition of literacy has changed. For one, the curriculum strands within the latest *Language* document from 2006 (b) includes media literacy in addition to reading, writing, and oral literacy. This is a shift from the previous document where there were three curriculum strands: reading, writing, and oral and visual communication. Literacy in the 2006 (b) version of the *Language* document includes media texts that “use words, graphics, sounds, and/or images, in print, oral, visual, or electronic form, to communicate information and ideas to their audience” (p. 13). Given the multimodal nature of media literacy, at first glance it could seem as if the inclusion of Media Literacy is a move towards multimodal literacy learning and teaching; however, questions remain about how

media literacy manifests itself in the classroom curriculum. The *Language* (2006b) document seems to justify its inclusion of media literacy by suggesting that this inclusion allows it to be more up-to-date without giving an explanation on how this articulates an expanded view of literacy. The document states: “Whereas traditional literacy may be seen to focus primarily on the understanding of the word, media literacy focuses on the construction of meaning through the combination of several media ‘languages’ – images, sounds, graphics, and words” (p. 13). It may appear then that there has been a shift in defining literacy through the use of various media, but, as Bearne (2009) indicates, multimodal literacy is “often based on assumptions that multimodality necessarily involves screens” (p. 184). How the actual curriculum documents are used within the classroom curriculum is a question in the study whose response may contribute to a fuller understanding of whether there really has been a shift in the definition of literacy to include multiple modes of communication in classroom curricula, or if there needs to be a fuller understanding of what multimodal literacy entails.

The research literature illuminates the inconsistencies between multimodal literacy learning and the institutional and programmatic curriculum within Ontario (Heydon, 2012; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Multimodal literacy does not have official support within the institutional and programmatic curriculum; the Ontario *Language* (2006b) document in particular reveals a multitude of curriculum expectations and outcomes that are largely linguistically based, segregated in its organization (as seen in the different strands), and skill-focused (Benson, 2008). The classroom curriculum is also influenced by the institutional curriculum and programmatic curriculum documents

(Labbo, 2006; Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008), the results of which in many jurisdictions has been a focus on print literacy (Stein, 2008; Walsh, 2008).

Assessment and EQAO

As seen in the United States and in Ontario, the institutional curriculum (e.g., EQAO in Ontario) as it relates to literacy assessment may be contributing a protracted definition of what counts as literacy (Larson, 2006, Quigley, 2011). Print-centric assessment practices do not take into account the complexities inherent in students' multimodal texts (Ball, 2006; Jewitt, 2003; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Kress, 2001; Vander Zanden, 2011) and "inadequately represent the literacies that youth are engaging" (Quigley, 2011, p. 164). Thus, standardized test requirements are at odds with the kind of learning that students can be engaged with when creating multimodal texts. With the establishment of the EQAO in 1996 as "an arm's-length agency of the provincial government to assist in improving the quality and accountability of Ontario's public education system (EQAO, 2005, p. 3), province-wide assessments were initially set up to be administered yearly for all grade 3 and grade 11 students in reading and writing while samples were taken of grade 6 and 9 students. Currently, annual testing occurs in reading and writing for all grade 3 and 6 students, and in grade 10, students take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test which they must pass in order to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (EQAO, 2013). EQAO publishes results combined with demographic indicators and teachers can contextualize the test results with what they know of their particular school situation as a way to help them plan appropriate improvement strategies for their students (EQAO, 2013). Simultaneously, the information "can be used by decision-makers at the provincial, board and school levels

for improvement planning as they create the best possible learning environment for students” (EQA0, 2013, para. 2). The ways in which these accountability measures influence the kinds of multimodal literacy learning opportunities that are made available to students in classrooms is something the study will discern.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one introduces my story about my concerns about literacy development. I follow this story with my rationale for the study and talk about the Ontario context that surrounds this study. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature on what is known about multimodal literacy and pedagogy as it relates to literacy learning in the context of classroom instruction. In chapter three, I discuss the specifics of my case study of a grade six classroom within the Ontario context. I also elaborate on the research methods that I have selected for my case study. The specifics of my data analysis procedure is followed by an examination of the issues that are associated with the methodology such as building rapport, reflexivity, and the ethics of my research. I conclude with an explanation of how I support the trustworthiness of my data so that the results of my data can be transferable to readers of my research. In chapter four I present the research findings, and in the final chapter I discuss the findings and suggest some implications for educators as they look forward to a future where students can be multimodal literacy learners.

Chapter Two

Situating the Study in the Literature

This literature review is divided into two sections, the first of which gives more detail about multimodal literacy as the theoretical framework of the study. The second section looks at studies of students' multimodal literacy learning. I specifically look at the multimodal literacy learning opportunities that various classroom curricula have afforded students. The literature on multimodal literacy holds five common elements that are significant to the study (student identity and positioning in classrooms; as a bridging pedagogy; as a means to a print-centric end; as negotiation in print-centric times; as semiotic work) as they speak to the issues surrounding multimodal literacy enactment in the classroom. I will explain these elements in further detail below, but I start with a conceptualization of curriculum by Doyle (1992) and Deng (2009) – namely the institutional or idea curriculum, the programmatic curriculum and the classroom curriculum – as I use these different levels of curriculum as a structural framework for my study.

Literacy Pedagogy and Curriculum

The study explored literacy practices, curriculum and pedagogy as a way to help understand the kinds of multimodal literacy learning opportunities that were present within the grade six classroom. Thinking broadly of literacy pedagogy and curriculum, Deng (2009) suggests that how teachers understand curriculum has become “a central focus” (p. 585) of curricular research over the past two decades. Doyle (1992)

conceptualizes three interrelated forms of curricula which I next describe along with the questions that they raise in the study.

1. The “*institutional curriculum*” is the abstract or ideal curriculum, loosely translated to represent the idea of what the goals of education (or in this case, literacy education) *should* be. What does the current literature say about the ideal multimodal literacy curriculum? This first level (in large part) is addressed in the literature review where I present themes relative to multimodal literacy learning and practice.
2. The “*programmatic curriculum*” focuses on the curriculum documents, policies, and materials used in the classroom. The research looked at how the ideal curriculum compares to the actual Ontario curriculum documents and policies such as the Ontario *Language* (2006b) document and EQAO assessments. It is here that I asked if the policies held up to the ideals of multimodal instruction and assessment as it played out in the classroom curriculum.
3. The “*classroom curriculum*” is the enacted or lived curriculum. It is where the programmatic curriculum is translated into pedagogy. This is where the bulk of the analysis took place as I looked at what actually happened in the grade six language arts classroom, and I analyzed how the enacted curriculum compared to the institutional or ideal curriculum.

The Foundations of Multimodal Literacy

Communication in the contemporary worlds has undergone a “radical” (Jewitt, 2008a, p. 358) but necessary change in response to “the social and cultural reshaping of

the communicational landscape” (p. 358). This reshaping is reflected in the move from print literacy as the main mode of communication to more multimodal forms of communication that include the visual (Kress, 2000). One of the foundational papers responsible for fueling this reshaping of understandings of literacy was written by the New London Group (NLG) in 1996. In their *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, the NLG (1996) proposed two principles for shaping the way educators and researchers think about literacy. First, there needs to be an increased awareness of global and linguistic diversities to acknowledge the variety of texts that people are using in this new globalized world. Second, literacy pedagogy needs to account for these varieties of texts to reflect not only the modes through which communication occurs, but also to accommodate the media through which these modes can be communicated. Thus, a pedagogy of multiliteracies was born to represent “a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (p. 64). When thinking about how students make meaning within the classroom curriculum then, it is important to provide multimodal literacy learning opportunities and to situate multimodal literacy practices within meaningful learning. This understanding of literacy as suggested by the NLG (1996) is commensurate with the study’s theoretical framework as I look at the possibilities for multimodal literacy and the influencing factors that contribute to how multimodal literacy is enacted within the classroom curriculum.

Multimodal Literacy

Multimodal literacy theory is founded on the premise that definitions of literacy must take into account all modes of communication and the various ways in which these modes can be read, viewed, produced, responded to, and understood (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2011). Central to this notion of making meaning is the idea that people communicate through a range of modes that go beyond language to include image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech, and sound effect (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Jewitt (2008a) elaborates on this by explaining that a multimodal approach to communication considers language “as it is nestled and embedded within a wider social semiotic rather than a decision to ‘side-line’ language ... [which] makes more visible the relationship between the use of semiotic resources by teachers and students and the production of curriculum knowledge” (p. 357). Thus spoken and written language are communicational modes that have meaning potential, but their usage depends on how well these modes are understood with their capacity for making meaning, the context of their use, and their availability. In today’s world, being literate means being able to read and write and create a range of multimodal texts. The way modes are combined, read, and interpreted constitute an increasingly complex range of literacy practices – some of which are acknowledged in school settings, and others of which are not (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Stein, 2008; Walsh, 2007). How teachers make these modes available to students will shape the kinds of texts that are made, viewed, understood, and responded to.

At the heart of multimodal literacy learning is the notion that students are active designers of meaning. This design process reflects the students’ interest and “encourages imagination, vision, and problem solving” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 13). This idea of

being an active designer of meaning is taken from social semiotic theory (Halliday, 1978) where students can have a *social* role – an agentive role. Jewitt and Kress (2003) describe how, as active designers, “people use the resources that are available to them in the specific socio-cultural environments in which they act to create signs, and in using them, they change these resources” (p. 10). Stein (2008) describes the importance of understanding how signs (combining meaning and form) can be part of the classroom curricula by saying that:

Signs are realised in material ways which move across semiotic systems [which] has been critical to shifting our understanding of children’s meaning-making as a complex multimodal, material practice, where children draw on and transform whatever modes and materials they deem appropriate, have “to hand” or consider criterial at the time. (p. 21)

Stein (2008) advocates the inclusivity of modes within the classroom so that students are agentive in their meaning making.

Students who engage in multimodal literacy learning will try to find the best “fit” (Heydon, 2007, p. 39) between meaning and form, even though the modes and media available for doing so will never be able to communicate *exactly* what the author intends (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Being knowledgeable about the affordances of modes can help make a better fit and this is where multimodal pedagogy becomes important. The more students learn about the affordances of modes, that is, their material, or “stuff” (Kress, 1997, p. 7) that make up the physical and non-physical aspects of a mode (Stein, 2008), the more accurately they can communicate with their intended audience (Jewitt & Kress,

2003). It is up to the individual to determine which materials are most suitable for making meaning because modal affordances “can produce certain communicative effects and not others” (Stein, 2008, p. 26).

This communicational “stuff” (Kress, 1997, p. 7) that makes up a mode forms the basis of how signs are made, that is, a “fusion of meaning and form” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 10). Communicators make interrelated decisions regarding signifiers and signified. Jewitt and Kress (2003) describe the kinds of decisions that communicators make: “First, her or his interest decides what is to be signified; second, he or she decides what is the apt signifier; and third, she or he decides how the sign is made most suitable for the occasion of its communication” (p. 11). Signs are representative of the sign-maker’s communicative intent but at the same time, communicators need to be concerned with the “perception of the audience and what he or she imagines they want” (p. 12). Inherent in proficient communication is a response to the question: What modes and media are most suitable for bringing across an idea in this time and place and for this audience?

Studies of Students’ Multimodal Literacy Practices

Looking ahead to the literature on multimodal literacy learning, research shows that multimodal literacy practices have the potential to expand students’ opportunities for communication, enabling them to understand the meaning-making potential of multiple modes (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 1997; Walsh, 2011). Learning is not limited to “mastering” (Kress, 1997, p. 94) the ability to read and write. It is also about making connections, building on existing knowledge, collaborating with peers to learn from each

other, and being able to transform practice with what has been learned (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; NLG, 1996). Teachers can help students learn by themselves being knowledgeable about the affordances of different modes (Bedard & Fuhrken 2011; Edwards-Groves, 2011; Gilakjani, Ismail, & Ahmadi, 2011; Sanders & Albers, 2010; Stein, 2008) and passing this knowledge along, by, for instance, modeling the different ways texts can be read and produced (Graham & Benson, 2010; Jewitt, 2007; Sankey, Birch & Gardiner, 2011; Walsh, 2009) and integrating existing out-of-school multimodal literacy practices into the curriculum (Davidson, 2009; Walsh, 2007). These pedagogical strategies can help expand what it means to be literate, open up new worlds (Stein, 2008) for students and show them that their literacies are valued. Multimodal literacy and pedagogy are starting to enter classrooms, but there is a long way to go before their potentials are fully realised. Ultimately, multimodal literacy has the potential to create “holistic literacy and learning” (Walsh, 2009, p. 45) where students can make meaning through reading, viewing, and responding to multimodal texts.

In this section I looked at the literature concerning what is known about multimodal literacy practices. Within the literature I found five themes that are important to the study as they speak to the possibilities and constraints for multimodal literacy learning opportunities that are evident within classroom curriculum. These five themes are:

1. Multimodal literacy: students’ identity and positioning in classrooms
2. Multimodal literacy as a bridging pedagogy
3. Validation of multimodal literacy as a means to a print-centric end
4. The negotiation of multimodal literacy in print-centric times

5. Multimodal pedagogy as semiotic work

Figure 1 below illustrates how the literature describes multimodal literacy learning when multiple modes of communication are given a firm place within the classroom curriculum. Figure 1 also depicts that the classroom curriculum is mediated by a number of influences, as indicated within the research literature, that contribute to the opportunities and constraints for multimodal literacy learning. All of these influences (documents, policies, pedagogy, teacher knowledge, student knowledge) – or, as Schwab (1973) define as commonplaces – play a part at various times in what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned as students construct meaning. In Schwab's (1973) research, he specifically identified four things that influenced how the curriculum was enacted. These were: the curriculum, or what we teach, the teachers, the students, and the milieu which is the learning environment. The study will add to the understanding of these influences.

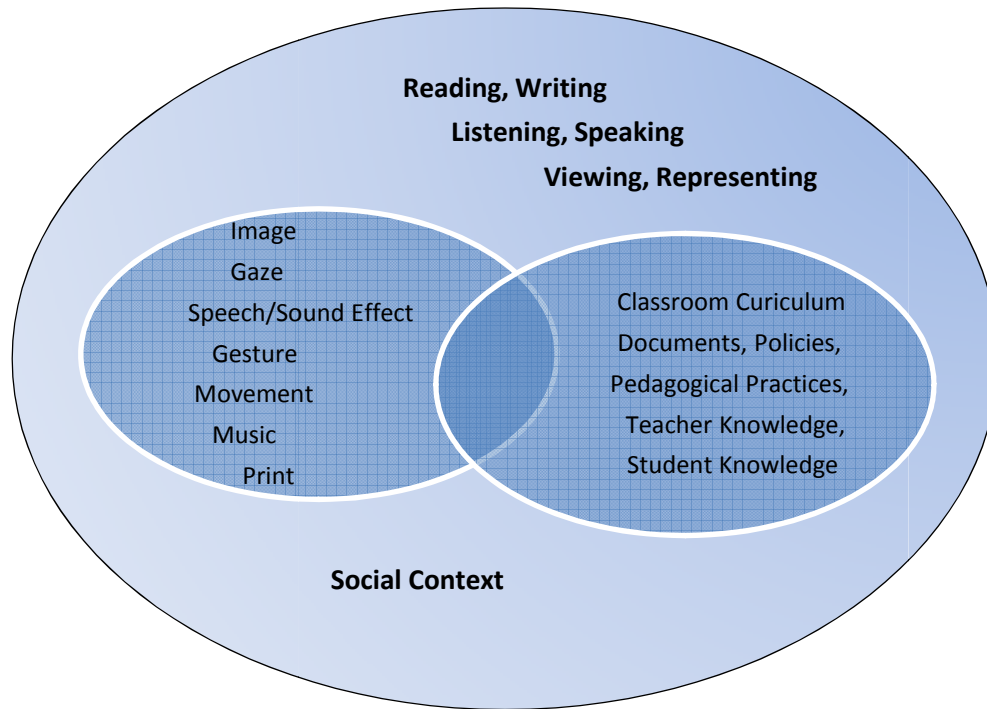


Figure 1: A Visual Representation of the Constituents in the Literature of Multimodal Literacy within Language Arts Classroom Curricula

Multimodal Literacy: Students' Identity and Positioning in Classrooms

The research on multimodal literacy learning shows possibilities and constraints for re/positioning student identities as learners engage in multimodal literacy practices. These possibilities and constraints are influenced by various commonplaces such as those described by Schwab (1973), namely the influencing factors of the teachers, learners, subject matter, and the setting – all of which determine how the curriculum is determined and enacted. The interplay of the teachers, learners, subject matter, and the setting in which learning takes place influences students' multimodal literacy learning opportunities which, in effect, are representative of their identities and what they know (Giampapa,

2010; Stein, 2008; Stille, 2011). Below I present examples in the literature that illustrate how multimodal literacy practices can affect students' identity and the way they are able to engage in such practices within the classroom curriculum.

Students engage in multimodal literacy practices before they enter school – infusing their identity into their texts as they work with the semiotic resources around them (Dyson, 1997; Stein, 2008; Vasudevan, Shultz, & Bateman, 2010). Young children engage in many different multimodal literacy practices, moving “seamlessly” (Crafton, Silvers, & Brennan, 2009, p. 37) between different modes of communication, based on their interests and their purposes for creating and/or analyzing texts. Children learn by exploring their world, engaging with multiple modes and media through which their understanding of that world can be expressed; in doing so they expand the way they think about their world, who they are, and their place in it (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011).

The research literature (e.g. Giampapa, 2010; Stille, 2011) has shown how students are able to have their identities affirmed through different multimodal literacy practices. Specifically, Giampapa (2010) and Stille (2011) have both documented how students were able to draw on their linguistic, cultural, and multimodal resources to create dual language identity texts. Both examples illustrate how the students and teachers negotiated the programmatic curriculum to include opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers to engage in curricular dialogues (Routman, 2000) as part of the classroom curriculum. By encouraging students to engage in multimodal literacy learning that was relevant and meaningful to their lives, the teachers in these research examples were able to engage students in situated practice (NLG, 1996), an essential component of a multiliteracies pedagogy – which is foundational to multimodal literacy

pedagogy. Multimodal literacy pedagogy is in a nascent stage, and there is no absolute blueprint for its practice. That being said, there is a foundation laid by key sources beginning with the New London Group's (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies. This pedagogy was developed to address a series of innovations in communication not the least of which was the need to take seriously the multimodal nature of literacy. Next I describe the four interrelated main components of this pedagogy to provide an entry for considering the potential pillars of multimodal pedagogy.

1. **Situated practice:** Teachers engage students in learning experiences that are meaningful and connect with what they already know. Teachers or other experts guide the students to expand their learning by engaging their interests.
2. **Overt instruction:** Includes all the learning activities that help students understand information by building on existing knowledge and scaffolding for new understanding. It also includes learning the “metalanguage” (p. 86) of literacy pedagogy to help students understand how to engage in multiple modes of communication.
3. **Critical framing:** Helps students understand the context of their learning by relating it to world around them so they can engage in critical thinking about what they have learned.
4. **Transformed practice:** Students take what they have learned and apply this knowledge to new contexts. Students' new understandings are incorporated into new experiences, thus providing opportunities for further situated practice – one that will continue to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world and how they make meaning within different contexts of learning.

These pedagogical components described above have been seen in the literacy research to be beneficial to students as they have been found to affirm students' linguistic and cultural diversities as the students learned how to negotiate what it meant to be literate within and across domains (i.e. the specific spaces where literacy is used – such as at school). At the same time students were “carving out interpersonal spaces” (Giampapa, 2010, p. 422) and asserting their identities, sometimes beyond what the teachers expected within the confines of schooling. Stille (2011) explains one instance where a student named Asad illustrated his written story by drawing many weapons, including an AK-47, much to the dismay of the teacher. Asad's wish to have this included was negotiated after he explained that his story was about escaping Pakistan and the violence that he saw every day which included such weapons. This reality was very much a part of Asad's identity and the teacher permitted Asad to keep his illustrations but not as a cover page. Both of the teachers within Giampapa's (2010) and Stille's (2011) research felt like they needed to assert their roles as “linguistic gatekeeper” (Giampapa, 2010, p. 418) and they both found it difficult to allow their students to negotiate their own learning beyond the traditional linguistic literacy practices that dominated the classroom. However, the teachers persisted and allowed their students to negotiate identities through various multimodal texts such as poetry, art, drawing, writing, and storytelling. These multimodal literacy learning opportunities also allowed students to position themselves as active, literate designers of meaning.

Research by Vasudevan, Schultz, and Bateman (2010) also reflect the importance of providing multimodal literacy learning opportunities as grade five students participated in authoring “new literate identities” (p. 442) in the classroom. The classroom curriculum

allowed engagement beyond traditional print-based literacy practices and students became more engaged in multimodal literacy practices. As they became more engaged, they also discussed their identities as literate individuals as they talked about their home, school, and community. For example, students were engaged in a storytelling project that consisted of creating “Where I’m From” poems, “Memoir Pockets” that contained a few items from home that represented something significant in their lives, and “Buildings Speak” photographs of structures that held personal significance to them such as their home. Through these multimodal literacy learning opportunities students created stories that were represented through various modalities and included sounds from their community, photographs and other images gathered through video, and oral representations that were captured using digital voice recorders and later transcribed. Their efforts culminated in a multimodal composition through iMovie video editing software.

Another example in the above mentioned literature that shows how students’ identities were fostered through multimodal literacy is seen in a study by Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) which featured a student named Michael. Michael was described by his teacher as “sporadically engaged in school activities and assignments” (p. 451). Over the duration of multimodal poem, memoir, and photography projects, Michael was able to “attend to his literate identities and practices” (p. 453) which previously were constrained by the interpretation of the programmatic literacy curriculum and “high stakes testing” (p. 446). Through the use of multimodal literacy practices, Michael identified himself as a storyteller and writer. The authors argue that these

multimodal literacy learning opportunities are necessary to “redefine” (p. 464) literacy engagement and pedagogical practices so that students’ identities will be affirmed.

When teachers foster the kind of classroom literacy curricula that support students to communicate through multiple modes, students become “empowered” (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011, p. 339) to think in different ways that help affirm their identities. Binder and Kotsopoulos (2011) conducted a study where young children created visual narratives that were infused with their identity as they constructed quilt squares. As Binder and Kotsopoulos’s (2011) research illustrates, the opportunities that the children had for engaging in multimodal literacy not only helped them express themselves in many modes, it also helped them “change how they think, view, and situate themselves in the world” (p. 339). Through the use of “I Am” poetry and visual representations, the teachers in this all-day kindergarten classroom provided plenty of opportunities for students to be active designers of meaning. The students learned how to make decisions about what to include on their quilt as they experimented with the affordances of certain modes. The teachers validated students’ engagement with the process of designing their quilt and slowly the students began to support each other throughout the design process as they negotiated meaning and developed their identity as literate learners.

One student, whom Binder and Kotsopoulos (2011) named *The Hero*, was particularly affirmed in his literacy abilities as he participated in multimodal literacy practices. This self-proclaimed “I can’t draw” child began his transformational journey by rushing through his representations, but eventually a “major turning point” was reached as he drew representations of his “three important things” with much patient teacher scaffolding through the design process (p. 353). When *The Hero* understood his

abilities, drawing “became his language, his visual voice” (p. 356) and served as his way of working through his understanding of why he was special.

Further opportunities for multimodal literacy learning and identity formation are illustrated through new media in Miller’s (2010) research in a grade twelve English classroom. Through new media, composition students were given an assignment where the teacher tightly controlled and framed the expectations of a project which eventually left students frustrated. The students were given a list of scenes that they needed to incorporate in a video composition, which overwhelmed the students—some of whom did not even complete the project. After reflecting on the difficulties that the students faced in their work, the teacher reconceptualised the assignment to include more social spaces for the composition process that included authentic learning goals, multimodal design, and opportunities for identity formation. The second time around, the students had more control over the design process and the semiotic resources that they wanted to use as they completed their video about something important within their lives that they were willing to share with others. Students composed narratives, poems, and songs while they created images through their digital composing that used a variety of other literary techniques such as close-ups, angles, and special effects, which were further edited to create a multimodal text. Because the assignment focused on students’ creativity and topical interests, students were engaged with the design process and eager to share their final projects with their classmates. Miller (2010) commented that the second digital video assignment gave students meaningful opportunities to connect with their lives through various multimodal literacy practices. They used resources that went beyond print-based representations, providing possibilities rather than constraints for communication.

Other research by Kendrick and Jones (2008) illustrates how students were positioned as literate learners as they engaged with multiple modes to document and discuss literacy practices within their community. The study examined Ugandan girls' literate identities by helping them investigate all of the local professions that utilized literacy practices and comparing this to their own understanding of literacy practices. The students' multimodal representations of their understandings were shown through photography, drawing, and writing. In turn, these texts were used as springboards for classroom discussion regarding the girls' "freedoms" (Stein, 1999 as quoted in Kendrick & Jones, 2008, p. 371) that were associated with these community literacy practices. Through these discussions these Ugandan girls came to understand that part of their identity included being literate, which prompted further reflection about how they would use literacy in their future. The girls' literate identities were reinforced and served as an affirmation that they could take control of their future to follow their dreams of having careers in their society which typically does not empower women.

All of these examples in the research literature about identity formation and multimodal literacy learning opportunities speak to the need to redefine how educators position students within the classroom literacy curriculum. When students are positioned as active designers of meaning, they can infuse their identities into their multimodal texts as they situate their literacy practices in meaningful learning. Communicating through different modes allows students to express their knowledge in ways that provide opportunities for understanding rather than constraints for learning. How Linda and the students in this study configure identity formation and multimodal literacy learning will be shown in the findings and subsequent discussion in chapter five.

Multimodal Literacy as a Bridging Pedagogy

In today's classrooms there is an ever-increasing challenge to create meaningful and purposeful literacy learning opportunities that incorporate the multimodal ways that students are engaged in making meaning (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Miller, 2010).

Multimodal forms of making meaning often give way to a "preference for print [that] may preclude teachers from ever noticing their students' competence with multi- and digital literacies" (King & O'Brien, 2002, p. 41). Currently, literacy practices within schools are largely linguistically based (Ajayi, 2009; Bearne, 2003; Cummins, 2006; Daiute, 1992; Dyson, 2001; Kress, 2009) and skill focused (Anderson & BenJaafar, 2006; McLean, Boling, & Rowsell, 2009; Millard, 2006), which reflects the existing curricular paradigm that "assumes that someone else decides what an individual needs to know, and arranges for an individual to learn in a fixed order and on a fixed schedule" (McLean, Boling, & Rowsell, 2009, p. 168). Thus both the institutional and programmatic curriculum at times seems to be "strongly classified and framed" into the classroom curriculum so that teachers feel like they "have little opportunity to introduce new ideas" (Millard, 2006, p. 235). Furthermore, "the imposed literacy curriculum carries with it strict regimes of national testing which also impact heavily on what gets taught" (p. 235). As a result of competing influences for how to interpret the programmatic curriculum and how to best realize this pedagogically, students are often caught in the middle because their competence with multimodal literacy practices often goes unnoticed or is not encouraged (Walsh, 2010; Williams, 2005).

The literature expresses that the semiotic resources that students have access to in their out-of-school lives have largely developed as socially situated practices that take

into account technology, friends, and cultural practices reflective of 21st century communication. Students participate in many multimodal literacy practices, such as gaming (Gee, 2007), blogging (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006), creating websites (Walsh, 2007), online story writing (Millard, 2005; Walsh, 2008), drawing (Dyson, 2001; Kendrick & McKay, 2002), e-mailing (Mavers, 2007) and multimedia music composing (Gall & Breeze, 2005), to name a few. Yet despite these possibilities for multimodal meaning-making, students have limited opportunities for multimodal literacy learning in school (Millard, 2006; Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006; Walsh, 2009; Williams, 2005).

The literature suggests that students are living in a global world that requires them to be proficient in creating and analyzing multimodal texts (Alvermann, 2002; Gee, 2007; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996). This will require changes in the way educators teach literacy. In short, it will require a “paradigm shift” (Stein, 2004, p. 105). Bridging students’ in- and out-of school literacy practices can “support more nuanced thinking” across literacy domains (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2004, p. 309) so that students will not have to feel like they are living double lives (Williams, 2005).

I now turn to a review of the literature that demonstrates students’ multimodal meaning-making in out-of-school contexts and the potential relationship between these practices and the classroom literacy curriculum.

As mentioned earlier, young children are used to making meaning in a variety of modes. Making meaning can occur through the use of multiple forms of media that offer semiotic possibilities such as paper, cardboard, markers, tape, cloth, and a host of other

materials (Kist, Doyel, Hayes & Kuzior, 2010; Kress, 1997). Many of these ways of making meaning and the materials that are used to do so are “not recognized by the adult forms of the culture” (Kress, 1997, p. 96). Educators can learn from the multimodal literacy practices of young children’s in out-of-school domains as children are motivated by their interest in creating, exploring, understanding, and communicating. Pahl (2006) studied young children’s meaning-making in the home. Looking at the literacy practices of one Turkish boy named Fatih, Pahl noticed how he designed and re-designed tissue paper birds until he was satisfied with the results. His interest in birds motivated him to experiment with the affordances of different paper to create new kinds of birds. In other research Pahl (2003) found how a child named Sam created new Pokémon by recycling his doubles, designed display cabinets for his clay Pokémon creatures, drew and made collages, and designed three-dimensional models, which he photographed and documented through writing stories. All of these multimodal textual practices were shaped by his interests—both topically and multimodally—and they helped Sam to reposition his ways of making meaning as something that was not limited to linguistic modes of representation, which resulted in valuable and complex understandings.

As young children are engaged in many different multimodal literacy practices in the home, researchers have noted their motivations for these practices. Research done by Marsh (2006) uncovered three main themes that highlight these motivations. The first theme was that children actively participated in reinforcing or extending family relationships because parents and caregivers would frequently be involved with their child’s multimodal literacy practices. Second, children liked to expand their knowledge, and online media were helpful in accessing and exploring information that was relevant

and meaningful to them. However, the most common purpose for participating in multimodal literacy practices was for pleasure and self-expression. Cook (2005) found through researching her own children's literacy practices that they were engaged and enjoyed creating and learning from multimodal literacy practices. Davidson's (2009) account of two boys' literacy engagement in their home showed how children's engagement with digital texts was purposeful and multimodal as they researched information about lizards through reading texts and viewing pictures. As they navigated websites, they were involved in many multimodal literacy practices including viewing images, reading, hyperlinking, talking, deciding which information to read, and evaluating the information to decide if they needed to keep looking for more.

When there is a bridging of multimodal literacy practices between in-school and out-of-school contexts, students become more engaged, both topically and semiotically. This was evidenced in Vasudevan's (2007) research in which she as a teacher-researcher worked closely with a student named Angel to link his multimodal literacy practices from out-of-school to in-school assignments. Angel was initially labelled as someone with inadequate literacy skills. He did not participate in written assignments and avoided work of any kind. Not until a chance interaction between Angel and the teacher did things start to turn around. Noticing a t-shirt that Angel was wearing that had the name Kawasaki on it, Vasudevan asked if he liked motorcycles. Surprised at the teacher's interest, Angel answered in the affirmative, which then led Vasudevan to show him how to find pictures of motorcycles on the internet for him to explore. Linking Angel's interest in the topic of motorcycles led him to explore diverse texts online, which led to exploring different modes for making and analyzing meaning. Angel became more proficient at reading as

he practiced his own transcribed conversations. He sketched, drew graffiti, viewed photographs that were used as prompts for written stories, and composed drafts of original stories on the computer. All of these modes of communication provided Vasudevan with opportunities to value the kinds of literacy practices and interests that Angel already possessed, which fueled further learning within the school setting. Angel created meaningful, relevant, and multimodal texts that were motivated by his interests, and his experience serves to remind educators of the importance of valuing students' multimodal literacy practices—no matter how insignificant they may seem—because these are the building blocks for further learning.

“Out-of-school schooling” (Gregory & Kenner, 2003, p. 75) is another avenue through which students have been found to be actively involved in multimodal literacy practices. Brass (2008) talks about one after-school program called the Technology and Literacy Project (TALP) and how it was designed as a place where students could hone their multimodal literacy skills and develop new repertoires of multimodal practice. A student named Horatio participated in developing a complex digital movie composition in the TALP project. For the first time in his life Horatio was able to experience success as he felt affirmed by his literacy competence, something that was lacking in his in-school experience. Labeled at risk for “school failure” (p. 464), his classroom teacher did not value or acknowledge any of Horatio's multimodal literacy practices. This example in the research literature illustrates the disengagement that students experience when their experiences with multimodal literacy are not acknowledged within the classroom.

Further evidence from research by Collins (2011) suggests that students who have opportunities to engage in multimodal literacy practices from their out-of-school

experiences are more confident in their learning. For example, Collins (2011) followed the literacy practices of Christopher, a grade two student. Christopher's teacher thought he was "shy," had "emotional issues" and a "very poor self-concept" (p. 409), and was considered "at risk" (p. 410) for school failure. However, as the teacher began asking herself questions such as, "what is this child capable of?" (p. 410), her recognition of Christopher's range of literacy practices grew to include multiple modes of communication not previously regarded as literacy as they primarily stemmed from his at-home text creations. Inviting Christopher to build on his literacy interests and multimodal meaning-making boosted Christopher's learning and self-esteem. He became known as a "real artist" (p. 415) within the classroom, using his drawings, sketches, costume design, and painting as ways to communicate.

Burke's (2006) research on students who were engaged in multimodal literacy learning through online media contributes to an expanded definition of literacy. Reflecting on a multiliteracies perspective as suggested by the NLG (1996), Burke (2006) suggests that literacy learning is "widened" (p. 16) when different modes of representation are valued. This is a "vital part of practice" (p. 15). Recognizing the context from which these multimodal texts are created also affirms students' contributions and helps develop their literate identities and literacy practices.

Walsh's (2007) research shows how he as a teacher took a pro-active approach to learning more about the multimodal literacy practices of his grade seven students as a way to bridge multimodal literacy practices from in-school and out-of school domains. As a result, the pedagogical practices that he used allowed his students to develop facility with "complex linguistic, semiotic, and digital modes" (p. 79) in their multimodal texts.

His students' literacy practices included navigating sites on the computer, creating online blogs, and designing websites. Recognizing and allowing for these practices prompted Walsh to begin integrating different modes of communication into his lessons. Walsh gave more opportunities for students to be engaged with multimodal literacy practices during a unit on the Dust Bowl as they looked at designing a website to incorporate all of their learning so they could share with others. Through multimodal practices such as photography, painting, folk music, blues, jazz, and film the students were actively involved in designing their website so that it incorporated relevant information that was easy to access and understand. The results of their work were so impressive that Walsh encouraged them to continue their re-designing process to enter a *Think Quest* contest. One group of students from his class won first prize, affirming both the students' and Walsh's commitment for engaging in multimodal literacy learning.

The ideas found in these studies suggest that educators can find ways to bridge the gap that exists between students' out-of-school and in-school literacy practices. However, merely importing multimodal literacy practices into the classroom curriculum is not representative of what multimodal literacy learning aims to achieve (Bailey, 2012). Creating opportunities for multimodal literacy learning, the NLG (1996) teaches actively engaging students through situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice, a concept used from multiliteracies pedagogy when thinking about multimodal texts. The literature also includes the potential pit-falls of failing to engage students in multimodal literacy learning. Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) point out, for instance, that students will seek other avenues through which they can express their ideas in multimodal ways if they do not feel like their literacy practices are valued.

Davidson (2009) also cautions teachers not to simply replicate out-of-school literacy practices simply because they are multimodal, insisting that, “We can learn from them” (p. 38), yes, but this will require a change in thinking. Many teachers are simply not aware of the sophisticated ways students make meaning (Alvermann, 2008; Alvermann & Moore, 2011), or, their limited knowledge of multimodal literacy learning (Walsh, 2007) and pressure from policymakers (Labbo, 2006) to meet standards limits teachers’ engagement with new ways of learning. How these constraints play out in the classroom curriculum in the study will add to this literature.

Validation of Multimodal Literacy as a Means to a Print-Centric End

Within this section I present research that illustrates how multimodal literacy learning has been validated in classrooms as a means to a print-centric end. In the examples below, multimodal literacy was used as a springboard or response to writing to enhance linguistic-based practices. The research literature that began in the 1990’s shows how multimodal literacy was used as a springboard to writing. Today many schools still value print literacy above all other modes (Dunn, 2001; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004). This perspective defines literacy in the narrowest way (Hamilton, 2012; Mavers, 2003; Millard & Marsh, 2001). Multimodal literacy’s full potential is not realized when modes are seen as a supplement or as “just ways to communicate ideas already developed through language” (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000, p. 169). So although print literacy is a valued mode from which to make meaning, it is important to remember that it is only one mode within an ensemble of modes that are valuable resources for making meaning.

In research by van Leeuwen (1998), young children's "multimodal work" (p. 275) was used as a springboard for writing in the classroom as they reflected on and then drew their favourite exhibit from a class trip to the museum before writing about it. Drawing was seen as "a more open-ended, creative medium" (p. 274) and thus more suitable for these elementary-aged students to start making meaning. Students were able to make decisions about their design by choosing the colours and layout of their drawing. However, as van Leeuwen (1998) acknowledged, the visual design was positioned as sort of a secondary task, as a complement to the "arduous and 'serious' task of answering questions in writing" (p. 275).

The idea that communicating multiple modes was used as a springboard for writing was also explored by Daiute (1992). In this research, students were afforded opportunities to work with different sources of information such as online texts, photos, and stories to create a "modern-day anthropology" (p. 255) project. As students gathered information to include in their text they created online "libraries of images and sounds" (p. 255) to later use as a stimulus for writing. In particular a student named Jamal collected "personally meaningful symbols" (p. 255) that contained images of African American males. He chose these images because the people had similar values to his own and he figured that he could write about that. For example, in his writing about rapper M. C. Hammer, Jamal expressed his dislike for the values he portrayed but he also included comments about why other people liked him because, as he acknowledged, he was a good singer. Daiute (1992) acknowledged that there were many factors that influenced Jamal's writing but in the end he wrote more for this one project than he had for the entire school

year, showing that when multimodal literacy practices were used as a support for writing, Jamal's writing improved.

In much the same way, other participants in Daiute's (1992) research became more creative when they paired their writing with multimodal literacy practices. Luis, an "impulsive," (p. 257) bilingual boy who did not like to write, found that different modes of making meaning were helpful to stimulate his writing. Luis viewed images, drew pictures, listened to music, and talked about his interests as he wrote for his anthropology project. These multimodal literacy learning opportunities allowed Luis to focus on navigating different texts, which resulted in "integrated" and "complex" (p. 257) writing as was seen through his detailed description of a picture that he found of a jade mask from a tomb of a ruler priest. As Daiute (1992) explained, Luis gave some background information about the mask along with the reason why he chose this image as being symbolic of strength and importance.

Research by Kendrick and McKay (2002) illustrates how drawing pictures could be used as a springboard to writing. In Dustin's grade five classroom, writing time was preceded by drawing. However, Dustin had trouble communicating his intended meaning through his drawing as he felt restricted because of the school's no-violence policy. Because of the content restrictions, Dustin was not engaged in the writing process—until the researchers gave him permission to draw whatever he liked. Dustin drew a picture about hunting with his father and grandfather, complete with a dead buck that had been shot in the head. This literacy learning opportunity opened up a whole new excitement for Dustin as it afforded him the opportunity to communicate within the visual mode of drawing. It also provided a springboard for writing, and Dustin's engagement with

writing was much more pronounced as he affirmed his identity through meaningful connections with his deer-hunting experiences with his family.

Photography as a visual mode of communication was used as a springboard to help students understand the writing process in Capello and Hollingsworth's (2008) research. Students were given disposable cameras to capture interesting images of what they were going to be writing about. The students were told that they could use these images as another way to express their ideas so that if any students struggled with writing the images could speak for them. The researchers had an interview protocol set up for eliciting responses from the students about their photographs. These conversations served as a stimulus for more complex ideas. Photography in this setting served as an "effective communication system for transmediation in a semiotic literacy curriculum" (p. 448) and gave students possibilities for communication that might not have been possible otherwise.

The above research illustrates how students' engagement with multiple modes served as a springboard or a response for writing activities. Opening up possibilities for communication in different modes gave students access to different ways of expressing their ideas before and after they had written about them. There are two ideas that come out of the way multimodal literacy is used in these research examples. First, using multiple modes benefitted students' writing. In being able to create and interpret texts that utilized different modes, students were able to process different understandings, which in turn either benefitted their writing or benefitted the way they communicated meaning in other modes. Second, even though the benefits of utilizing multiple modes for writing can be seen, print literacy is still positioned as the most important mode of

communication. Within multimodal theory, all modes are considered as potentially equal in importance, although not necessarily equal in representation. Given Kendrick and McKay's (2002) sense that, "each and every literacy transaction is a moment of self-definition" (as quoted in Solsken, 1993, p.8), promoting multimodal literacy learning opportunities where modes are balanced against each other may well be needed. The study will document how various modes are used and promoted in the grade six classroom curriculum and with what effects.

The Negotiation of Multimodal Literacy in Print-Centric Times

The literature provides some indication that there are opportunities and constraints that contribute to the multimodal literacy learning opportunities that are available in various classroom curricula (e.g. Benson, 2008; Britzman, 1989; Del Vecchio, 2009; Stein, 2008). As mentioned earlier, various commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) influence what happens as the programmatic curriculum is enacted. In this next section I present examples in the research literature that illustrate how multimodal literacy learning opportunities are negotiated within classroom curricula where print literacy is most highly valued.

Stein's (2008) research in South Africa illustrates the tensions between multimodal literacy and print literacy through the enactment of the Project. The goal of this project was to gather local stories that could be collected into a class booklet. During the design phase, students explored different modes through which stories could be told, but ultimately, the students' creativity with designing multimodal texts was not acknowledged. Stein noted that the students would only be evaluated on their written

texts even though the students had opportunities to be involved in drawing and oral storytelling, which included involved movement, speech, and sound effects.

One student in Stein's (2008) study named Lungile was observed as she constructed stories through a range of modes as part of the Spruitview Storytelling Project. Of particular note was that students were encouraged to "draw on the multi-semiotic communicative practices of their everyday lives" (p. 46) yet these practices were not acknowledged when it came time for assessment. Lungile was a gifted performer who drew on her cultural and social resources associated with African storytelling. As Lungile performed her narrated text about two characters named Tall Man and Madevu Mbopha, she was mindful of the affordances that movement provided through body position, space, posture, gaze and eye contact, the positioning of her arms and torso, and even with her smile. It was through movement in particular that Lungile communicated her story of two enemies, who, despite their fight with each other, are both killed by each other's respective peoples. Lungile's use of movement in her performance was also gendered and responded to the identity that was afforded to her through her culture. Further the way she used her body "as a charm" (p. 59) enabled her to make connections to her audience while telling her story.

When it came time for Lungile to translate her multimodal performance into story, Lungile experienced constraints as certain affordances of performance could not be transformed into "the permanence of writing" (Stein, 2008, p. 73). This was seen by Lungile's struggle to communicate smiling and the clicking "ayi" sounds typical in her culture's storytelling practices. What Lungile said and how she said it was a struggle, especially when taking into consideration the particular semiotic resources of her native

language, Zulu, which required a particular form of writing. Lungile positioned herself as a writer within the context of schooling, adhering to specific genres of writing. As Stein (2008) remarked, the shift that was made from movement to writing involved a “profound loss” (p. 62) for Lungile, one that did not “fit” (Rowse, 2013b, p. 110) the larger context of learning. This example illustrates the imbalance that was created when affirming only the mode of writing for what could have been a powerful multimodal ensemble.

Other research also illustrates the struggles that students have had in seeking legitimacy for modes of communication that were not predominantly print when in the classroom. Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, and Enriquez (2008) observed students in a kindergarten classroom and witnessed the tensions between traditional literacy practices that emphasize print literacy and attempts at multimodal communication. One student named Jewel tried to navigate multimodal literacy possibilities and constraints in her schoolwork. When Jewel created opportunities for multimodal literacy learning they largely went unrecognized by her teacher. Instead Jewel was labeled a struggling student as she sometimes did not follow the expectations of a successful literacy learner. This contrasted with the researchers’ observations, which saw Jewel as an active participant in creating and analyzing for meaning. For example, in one literacy event Jewel wrote and drew outside the confines of the spaces provided on a worksheet as she wanted to provide more detail in her writing and illustrations. Her teacher interpreted this as a deviation from expectations. In another literacy event Jewel was able to navigate the tools provided in a KidPix software program and even offered to help fellow classmates design their digital texts. While Jewel’s writing and drawing outside of the box was viewed from a deficit perspective, her skill with KidPix encountered no response from the teacher.

Instead Jewel's teacher ignored the literacy possibilities created through Jewel's semiotic toolkit when working with KidPix as she used multimodal forms of communication to create meaning. Siegel et al. (2008) acknowledged that Jewel "found it hard to stay within the boundaries of a literacy curriculum that privileged language over all other modes of making meaning" (p. 96) so she created other opportunities as part of the classroom curriculum.

The studies in this section suggest that "*all students* have preferred ways of knowing and representing, which usually remain unacknowledged and invisible in pedagogic settings" (Stein, 2008, p. 73, emphasis mine). In Lungile's case, multimodal representation was used as a support for linguistic practices but was not acknowledged academically as only the written story was assessed. In Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, and Enriquez's (2008) research the literacy curriculum was shown to be influenced by many different factors, including government regulations, which contributed to the mainly print-centric focus of the literacy curriculum. Creating "multidimensional curricula" (Sanders & Albers, 2010, p. 3) that is responsive to students and their capacity to be active designers of meaning is expressed in the literature as an ongoing challenge. The extent of this challenge and the realities of how it is manifest in the actualities of a grade six classroom is integral to the study.

Multimodal Pedagogy as Semiotic Work

I have selected the following studies in this section to show how multimodal literacy pedagogies can be used for students to make meaning within school. I selected studies that showcase literacy pedagogies that do not have to privilege written language to

the exclusion of other modes for literacy learning to take place. When considering multimodal literacy pedagogy, all semiotic resources are equal in importance. This view is supported by Jewitt and Kress (2003) and others (e.g., Alvermann, 2008; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Miller, Thompson, Lauricella, Boyd, & McVee, 2012; Walsh, 2011) who affirm that “a multimodal approach to learning requires us to take seriously and attend to the whole range of modes involved in representation and communication” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 1). What I highlight in this section are studies that support a multimodal approach to literacy where all modes are treated equally as resources for making meaning to give students more options from which to make meaning.

A large branch of literacy research highlights how multimodal literacy learning opportunities help students understand what they are reading and writing. Short, Kauffman, and Kahn’s (2000) research notes how a group of teachers provided opportunities for students to think more deeply about what they were reading by expressing their ideas through sketching, composing music, acting out scenes, and creating flow charts to sort ideas. Wilson (2003) examined first and second graders use of tableaux as a way of representing their understanding of the story *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes (1996) while Walsh (2011) studied second graders’ responses to fairy tales through digital photography and video.

In these examples, researchers found that as students engaged in multimodal literacy practices and learning they were able to respond to literature in deeper ways than through print-based assignments. Students were able to consider different perspectives while making “a wider range of connections in their talk about the chapters” (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000, p. 161) and they were able to further develop their “capacity to

reason” (Wilson, 2003, p. 375). The modes that the students used for responding to literature were considered “tools for thinking and exploring new ideas” (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000, p. 169) that could “transcend the customary limits of discursive language” (Wilson, 2003, p. 375). This research suggests that when students are engaged in multimodal literacy practices for reflecting on and responding to literature they have the potential to be authentic and creative designers of meaning.

In other research that supports multimodal literacy learning, Franks (2003), Jewitt (2007), and Bearne (2009) looked at students’ interpretations of story and how scaffolding the students’ understanding of the affordances of modes helped them make meaning. Franks (2003) studied the way students practiced a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* with explicit instructions from the classroom teacher. The teacher explained the affordances of various body movements and positioning and had students critique their own performances: Did their body movements communicate certain emotions? Did the audience understand the mood that was being created through movement, gesture, and speech? In similar research, Jewitt (2007) looked at how students and teachers negotiated the literacy curriculum to provide opportunities for situated practice that involved various modes of communication. Seen as important “semiotic work” (p. 288), students were given multimodal literacy learning opportunities as they engaged in discussion, looked up information about the background of *Macbeth* and viewed pictures to study characters’ appearances. All these resources helped students act out a scene from the play using whatever was available within the classroom to help bring their play to life. For example, clothing such as coats, scarves, and hooded tops served as the costumes; lights turned off and on represented lightning; banging a filing cabinet represented thunder; various pitch,

tone, and speed of speech helped define the voices of the witches; walking around an empty space in the shape of a circle gave the impression of walking around the cauldron. A seven-year-old student in Bearne's (2009) research used only variations in the pitch, pace, and timbre of his voice to make meaning as he engaged in a spoken narrative called *The Tin Soldier*. The use of pauses and emphases on certain words, as encouraged by the teacher, enabled the audience to understand when there were different characters speaking and contributed to the emotions that were being communicated in the story as well. All of these examples illustrate the kinds of meaningful multimodal literacy learning opportunities that can be created through storytelling and enactment when multiple modes are encouraged, discussed, and implemented within the classroom curriculum.

When multimodal literacy learning opportunities are fostered by situated practice, students are able to utilize their background knowledge to make connections to what they are learning. This is a valuable part of multimodal literacy pedagogy as it is "constituted by immersion in meaningful practice within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their backgrounds and experiences" (NLG, 1996, p. 85). This was especially true in the research done by Stein (2003) in the Olifantsvlei Fresh Stories Project. Students were engaged in multimodal literacy learning as they created a collection of "fresh stories" (p. 124) based on traditional African folktales from their community. After students were given some ideas to think about for inventing their stories they were instructed to develop a cast of papier mâché dolls so that they could put on plays, give oral storytelling projects, and create scripts to stimulate their meaning-making. When the mixture for papier mâché did not work the students eagerly told the teacher not to worry and that they would find their own resources from home

with which to make their dolls. Enlisting the help of different caregivers in their community, students found materials such as food containers, bottles, old stockings, gourds, grass, reeds, and various cloth materials with which to fashion their dolls. Because of the cultural knowledge these extended caregivers had (all those who helped were female), the dolls were designed and created to represent traditional African doll figures. Stein argues that these unexpected moments of creativity were the result of positioning the students as active designers of meaning and engaging in situated practice. This research by Stein speaks to the importance of valuing and utilizing cultural knowledge and resources within the classroom, which can result in multimodal literacy learning that is creative and meaningful.

Multimodal literacy learning occurred in a preschool classroom in research by Hartle and Jaruszewicz (2009) where students utilized many different resources at their disposal to learn about animals that lived near waterholes in Botswana. Through pedagogy of situated practice, students were motivated to learn about different animals by drawing pictures and making sculptures of them. Their engagement led them to inquire about replicating a real python. The students listened to a Shel Silverstein (1971) poem entitled *The Snake Problem*, after which the students worked collaboratively to figure out how long the snake needed to be. They figured out that the length needed to be 24 blocks long on their classroom floor as each block was exactly one foot in length. To paint it accurately the students emailed someone they knew who owned a python and invited him to come to their school. After taking detailed pictures of the snake that he brought they finished painting the snake and proudly hung it from the ceiling of the classroom.

Silvers, Shorey, and Crafton's (2010) research exemplifies how teachers' commitment to multimodal pedagogy can allow students to experiment with modes, which can lead to new ways of making meaning that are part of transformed practice. In their study, students took what they had learned through multimodal literacy learning opportunities and applied it to a situation where they could help others. After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, students in a grade one classroom expressed their feelings through drama, drawing, reading, and writing. They also looked up news stories, books, photos, personal stories, and videos about Katrina. The teacher engaged the students in discussion about what they were reading and viewing by asking them how the specific characteristics of the pictures and videos made them think certain ways. The students used these images as vehicles for self-expression as they wondered what it would feel like to lose everything and this concern prompted them to create a special group for those who wanted to help victims of the hurricane. Calling themselves *The Hurricane Group*, the students collected artifacts related to the aftermath of the hurricane, which were incorporated into a slide show about what they learned. This was viewed by the whole class, which encouraged more people to join the group. Through their multimodal literacy learning the students became empowered by their knowledge and sought to do something for the victims of the hurricane. They organized a book drive to send books to a grade one classroom in New Orleans that had been devastated by flooding. This research illustrates the possibilities and creativity that multimodal literacy opportunities foster so that students could be involved and more aware of the world around them. It also speaks to the teachable moments that can result when teachers are willing to take risks to foster deep understandings.

Studies that utilized multimedia technology for students to communicate with multiple modes made it possible to experiment with design processes and multimedia texts. Burn and Parker's (2003) research looked at young students' multimodal literacy practices through film design, while Whitin (2006) looked at in-service teachers' design processes using multiple modes for a multimedia *Life Box* project, and Bedard and Fuhrken (2011) looked at multimodal literacy learning opportunities through movie composition with students in an after-school program. All of these research examples positioned students as active designers of meaning throughout their lessons while their teachers focused on multimodal literacy pedagogy that gave students opportunities to use any mode that would best communicate their intended meaning.

Students in Burn and Parker's (2003) research were involved in multimodal literacy learning through various modes and media which provided the students with many resources from which to choose to create a film based on the African folk tale of Anansi, the trickster spider. This film was a collaborative project between students, their teacher, and other teachers and professionals from a media school. Focusing on what Burn and Parker (2003) call the "kineikonic mode" (p. 59), a term for "moving image" (p. 59), the researchers examined the range of semiotic resources that were used in the creation of this moving image: image (e.g., colour, position, size), sound (e.g., tonal patterns of speech, pitch, loudness, sound effects, music), spatiality (e.g., where characters were placed within the screen, positioning, horizontal and vertical alignment) and sequencing (what the order of the narrative/scenes would be). Students made the decisions about how the story would be designed (based on what they know about trickster tales, multiculturalism, and Anansi the spider), what resources would be used to

best suit their purposes (including which instruments would be used and how they would be played in their compositions for the sound-track), and how they wanted to edit their film (putting their storyboard drawings, music, voice-overs and animation all together) so that others could view their final product online.

Students and teachers benefitted from learning about the affordances of modes and the media through which they can be produced as seen in Whiting's (2006) research with graduate students. As in-service teachers, the students were positioned as active designers of meaning as they experimented with modes that were not typically used as resources within their classroom literacy practices. Through an assignment called the multimedia *Life Box* project, the graduate students experienced the kind of design processes they would be teaching their own students. In their assignment, the students composed a multimodal text about something that was personally meaningful. This project helped the students move beyond composition as "writing ... and embellishing" (p. 130). One student in particular explained that her project progressed through many edits where at first words dominated her adventures of spelunking. However, she was not satisfied with the way words communicated her challenge of conquering claustrophobia in order to participate in the adventures of exploring caves. After she engaged in dialogue with the teacher and her classmates about how to frame her text, she experimented with other modes that afforded other ways to communicate her feelings of claustrophobia. This led to a reworking of the written text. Instead she replaced it with other modes such as images and sound, the latter of which included the sound of a fast heartbeat pounding throughout one of the sections of her presentation. As the student explained, the

affordances of sound helped communicate the physicality of the situation and how she felt when she was in the dark cave.

Students in a school-based summer enrichment program attended to a range of modes and media to expand their multimodal literacy learning through film production and editing (Bedard & Fuhrken, 2011). Students were given explicit instructions in design elements, which included creating scripts in the present tense, designing sets, understanding the affordances of music and sound effects, and learning about the effects that could be created with a camera lens (such as zooming). There were many times throughout the project that students needed to re-design their text as they realized that “what they pictured in their minds had not yet been conveyed adequately” (p. 121). Ultimately students attended to the range of literacy practices needed for this project which included the complex interaction of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing. As a result the multimodal movie-making project “inspired,” “engaged,” and “motivated” (p.124) students to become more confident designers of meaning for future projects.

The following studies illustrate multimodal literacy learning opportunities that are fostered through teaching about the affordances of picture book illustrations (Hassett & Curwood, 2010), narrative and pictorial interpretation (Crafton, Silvers & Brennan, 2009) and comic book design (Benson, 2008). Focusing on the visuals within picture books as a means for multimodal learning, research by Hassett and Curwood (2010) illustrated instances of overt instruction by the teacher as she helped students attune to the affordances of colour, the placement of the pictures, the facial expressions of the characters, line, orientation, and the positioning of characters and other elements.

Particular attention was given to the way words were visually represented through typesetting. In similar research Crafton, Silvers and Brennan (2009) asked questions during read-aloud times such as “what do you think the artist/illustrator wants you to feel?” and “what tools does s/he use to achieve that?” (p. 37). These kinds of questions helped students tune in to the visual elements of both the text and pictures that the authors and illustrators used to communicate meaning. Benson (2008) researched high school students’ perceptions of multimodal pedagogy in English Language Arts. Mr. Brooks, their teacher, discussed the semiotic potentials of comic book memoirs, stories in film, photographs, music, and other multimodal texts. Benson’s (2008) research showed that students both “adopt and resist” (p. 665) multimodal literacy learning. Some students thought it was a valuable way of “expanding their literacy options” (p. 652) while others did not see the benefit. Instead they saw it as a substitute for language and a “temporary change of pace” (p. 665). In all of these examples the choice of modes that were available to the students allowed the students to be engaged in multimodal literacy learning.

While most examples in the research literature speak to the positive impact that multimodal pedagogy has on students’ engagement with multiple modes, there are still concerns that students’ multimodal practices “can easily be devalued” (Benson, 2008, p. 665) when they are not part of “an overall orientation toward thinking and communication” (p. 665). Whether multimodal literacy opportunities are used as a response to instruction (Short & Kauffman, 2000; Walsh, 2011; Wilson, 2003), integrated throughout lessons (e.g., Bedard & Fuhrken, 2011; Burn & Parker, 2003; Franks, 2003; Stein, 2003), or part of explicit instruction (Benson, 2008; Hassett & Curwood, 2010;

Crafton, Silvers & Brennan, 2009), it is evident that educators need to teach students the metalanguage necessary to describe both the *what* and *how* of multimodal literacy practices. Tensions exist when there is a lack of support for such instruction from administration, which further amplifies the rift between pedagogical reform and traditional classroom practices (Matthewman, Blight, & Davies, 2004; Tan & Guo, 2010; Walsh, 2007).

The literature is clear that the implications of allowing students to participate in multimodal literacy as semiotic work within the classroom curriculum cannot be underestimated. However, the literature is also divided along the lines of classrooms simply providing space for multimodal literacy practices and multimodal *pedagogy*. Multimodal pedagogy, as seen in the work of Stein (2008), for example, includes explicit teaching of the affordances of modes. Multimodal pedagogy also creates opportunities for multimodal practices to be situated within purposeful learning, that is, where the learning is relevant to students' "lifeworlds" (Miller, 2010, p. 200). Multimodal pedagogy also enables students to be active designers of meaning, which helps provide them with the kinds of knowledge and skills they need to "design their social futures" (NLG, 1996, p. 65).

Conclusion

As the above research illustrates, engaging students in multimodal literacy learning can be a reality when teachers and students understand that multimodal literacy learning is part of an overall orientation towards making meaning. If teachers and students see multimodal literacy learning as a temporary change of pace before returning to print-based thinking, then we have not moved beyond a print-centric mindset

(Matthewman, Blight, & Davies, 2004). Educators need to think about how multimodal thinking fits into broader communication purposes so that the literacy curriculum is relevant and meaningful (Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006) while matching the skills and knowledge that students already have (Alvermann, 2008; Williams, 2005).

This literature review illuminates the need for more studies to look at what kinds of multimodal literacy pedagogies are actually taking place with students in the junior grades from four through six. Studies currently favour multimodal literacy learning with students in early primary years or at the senior level. This study contributes to this literature by illuminating the possibilities and constraints for multimodal literacy pedagogies within classrooms so that multimodal texts can have a “firm place in the curriculum” (Bearne, 2003, p. 98). In this way, students will be given their chance to realize their “worlds” (Stein, 2008, p. 147) in multiple modes.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter I outline the methodological considerations within case study research. I begin the chapter by giving an overview of case study research followed by a more detailed explanation of the research methods I employed in the study. I conclude by addressing important considerations within case study research which include questions of building rapport with the research participants, trustworthiness, transferability, reflexivity, and ethics.

Case Study Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study. A case study is a detailed examination of what Stake (2005) calls a bounded system, or, the case, where the researcher gathers data around a research question. Various research methods are used to “understand others’ understandings” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 12). This case study was designed primarily through Dyson and Genishi (2005) who describe qualitative case study research as it relates to literacy. Case study methodology enables in-depth exploration of observable events within a specific context or domain. Case study research also provides opportunity for both the researcher and the participants to answer *how* and *why* questions (Yin, 1994). Case study utilizes a variety of data sources to provide multiple lenses through which data may be analyzed and understood. Through these multiple data collection sources, case study research gives a broad picture of what is being studied (Creswell, 2003; 2007) while focusing on explaining in-depth a relatively small piece of the picture (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

Case studies typically look at either a small group or a particular participant so that the details of a case can be focused enough to provide in-depth descriptions. As a descriptive case study (Yin, 2002; 2003), this research followed four students and their teacher as I looked at the multimodal literacy learning opportunities in one grade six classroom. In addition, Flybjerg (2011) describes the type of case study that I am engaged in as a critical case which Myers (2008) so aptly defined as “having strategic importance in relation to the general problem” (n.p.) which in my case, is whether multimodal literacy learning opportunities are afforded within a grade six classroom literacy curriculum. Researchers Stake (1995) and Yin (1994, 2002, 2003, 2012) have written extensively about case study research and suggest that as a form of qualitative research, case studies help inform the reader about phenomena observed along with multiple other sources of data only within a specific situation. My case is a grade six classroom during the literacy curriculum, or, *language arts* as it was known in the Littledale vernacular. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) suggest that the data collected “be allowed to speak for themselves” (p. 254) which is what I did as I used direct quotes, my observational notes, and artefacts to allow for the richness of the situated details to provide insights for those reading the research.

The first step in the research process was the identification of the research questions: *What, if any, multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curriculum afford and how do students engage them?* and *What enables and constrains these opportunities?* This identification occurred after I conducted a literature review to establish what, if any, research had been done previously. My intention was to

offer a new perspective on multimodal literacy learning as it takes place within the classroom curriculum.

After gaining permission from the local school board and completing the necessary ethical review procedures, I started looking for a research site and participants. I was able to meet Linda, the grade six teacher, through an acquaintance of my husband through work. They talked about my research and Linda expressed interest in the research and in meeting me. After our initial meeting where I explained the purpose of my research, Linda extended the invitation for me to do the research in her classroom. This convenience sampling of Linda and her students formed the basis of my case study. After meeting the principal and receiving permission to be a researcher in Linda's grade six class I handed out the Letter of Information and Consent to the teacher and all of the students in the class. I received permission from all 25 students to be involved in the study which turned out to be a good thing because at times some of the other students were involved in classroom literacy events that I documented. All of the students were part of the signing process in addition to their parents. If students so desired, they had the choice to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty as part of the informed consent which was mandatory for all research participants. In this way, I set up the students to feel more empowered about their participation in the study. The students, as well as their teacher were given clear explanations about what the research was about and what they would be asked to do. I indicated that their participation in the research could potentially help other students in years to come as I continued to explore the link between multimodality literacy learning and the classroom curriculum. At no time would their identities be revealed and they could select their own pseudonyms. I also made myself

available within the classroom setting to answer any questions relating to the research so that the students and the parents, as well as the classroom teacher, could be kept informed.

Out of the class, I selected focal student participants. (A more detailed description of the research participants, school, the community, and the classroom can be found on pp. 83-85). Considerations for this selection included having equal numbers of male and female students, a mix of academic abilities, and where the students sat within the classroom. My reasons for these considerations were to help make the findings of this research more relatable to other classroom contexts that also have a mix of student abilities and gender. This purposeful sampling was also important in order to eliminate the perception of gender bias or “preferential treatment” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 135) to maintain the integrity of the research. After observing the students and getting a sense of their personalities and academic abilities, I conferred with their classroom teacher who gave me some additional information about some of the students I was considering. I was also mindful of the fact that my presence would be a factor in the way the students could potentially respond to my questions or even in their interactions with each other and their teacher. I did not want to place myself in the middle of the classroom where I might become a disruption for the students so that they would behave differently than normal, thus trying to mitigate observer effect. I selected four focal students who represented mixed academic achievement and gender who sat in the back of the classroom. Their location at the back of the classroom in no way represented their ability or status as Linda changed the seating plan at least once a month to give students the opportunity to work with other students. Since the research was premised on being as

naturalistic as possible the location seemed as if it would be the least intrusive. It also gave me as a research chances to converse with the students without being too disruptive to the rest of the class. The final sampling of students included 2 boys and 2 girls who were considered by Linda to be a good mix of abilities (1 below average, 2 average, 1 above average).

Case Study Research Methods

The various research methods that I used in the case study helped provide detailed and as comprehensive as possible account of the multimodal literacy learning opportunities that occurred in the classroom curriculum. Being a participant observer allowed me the flexibility to become involved as a helper in the classroom while at the same time I remained distant enough to allow adequate opportunities for observation. This observation was supplemented by interviews. I captured observation data through the use of photographs and video and I used a data voice recorder to record participant interactions during my observations. I also collected artefacts which were analyzed for its content and form as a support for the identification of multimodal literacy learning opportunities. This detailed data collection allowed me to document and specifically depict the literacy events that took place in the classroom curriculum. Next, I describe the methods that I used in my data collection and the ways in which I captured the observational and interview data.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case study research (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009). They provide a valuable way of gathering information because of the detail that can be elicited from the participants through one-on-one or whole group interviews that may not otherwise be gathered during normal classroom observations. During classroom observations I had some opportunities to partake in some informal conversations. I benefitted from the immediacy of the responses and kept these conversations as unobtrusive as possible during break times, transition times, during individual work times, or at recess. During these conversations it was important for me to ask focused questions so that the participants could respond in a short period of time. I either took notes or used my voice recorder to record their responses. At the same time I also kept in mind that the information they gave me could lead to other questions that I had not previously considered asking. Throughout this process I was eager to hear what they had to say and was mindful of presenting myself as an interested third party.

I also participated in more semi-structured interviews where I could ask more open-ended questions. I did this so as to try and understand their insights and to give them a chance to give answers where they felt they needed to go. This gave the students the opportunity to have their voices heard as well. The insights that they provided during these times were invaluable. Using encouraging words, being friendly, and communicating positive non-verbal cues, I tried to help them feel comfortable with me as a researcher. The more the students felt at ease with my presence, the more natural the interaction was so that they freely shared information about the research and could benefit

from contributing their ideas, having a voice, and knowing that the information that they were giving would be beneficial for other students in the future. I was ever cognisant of the rapport and trust I built with the students so that they felt comfortable as they engaged in conversations that helped respond to the research questions. I used a voice recorder during the interviews which the students affectionately called “Bob,” and its presence was largely ignored while they were working. I could tell that this was the case as the students acted the same way by being extremely talkative whether the voice recorder was there or not. Having this recording device was greatly beneficial as having audio data affirmed the accuracy of my written field notes. I transcribed verbatim what was recorded and I did member checks for accuracy. I member checked with the students more informally as I would reiterate what I understood to be their responses to me and I asked them if I had correctly understood what they were saying. My experiences in my teaching career assisted this kind of member checking as I would frequently paraphrase or repeat what the students had said to affirm their responses. With Linda, I transcribed the interviews that took place and gave them to her to read so that she could confirm or clarify, all of which, she eventually affirmed as being correctly representative of what she had said. I assured the students and their teacher that their identity would remain confidential and that they could choose to assign themselves a fictitious name, which they did enthusiastically. The participants were also made aware that the information that I was collecting was password protected and the hard copies of transcripts and artifact were kept in a locked filing cabinet. In these ways, I sought to protect the identity of the participants and they in turn engaged in the interviews with confidence.

I started the interview process by interviewing the four focal students and Linda separately and then once the students were more comfortable with the research and my presence in the classroom I interviewed the students together during a focus group interview. I alternated between focus group and individual interviews throughout the study. The individual interviews were short with specific questions that I wanted to have answers to; some of the questions originated from something I had observed during the classroom curriculum and wanted to obtain further insights and some were generated because I wanted feedback on specific questions that were related to the research. I conducted three group interviews with the students, one per month starting in April, and I interviewed the four focal students either individually or as a group for a total of twelve times. Throughout the study the focus interviews were informal and encouraged natural interaction within the group during the early phase of the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Yin (2003) suggested that the questions for focus interviews be kept as open-ended as possible so they would seem “genuinely naïve ... [in order to] provide a fresh commentary” (p. 91).

One of my goals for group interviews was for me to find out if my initial hypotheses were supported by the subjective experiences of the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The subjective nature of the interview process allowed for a multiplicity of meanings rather than preconceived notions to dictate meaning (Fontana, 2003).

I also formally interviewed Linda four times throughout the research to gain insights into the kinds of literacy learning opportunities that she perceived to be part of her classroom curriculum. I asked some open-ended questions that gave Linda space to

talk about her experiences, perspectives, and opinions while at other times I asked more direct questions to gain clarification. Some of the questions that I used to generate discussion included:

1. Please describe how the content of the language arts programmatic curriculum enables and/or restricts what you teach in the classroom?
2. How do you organize your language arts program?
3. How familiar are you with multimodal literacy and have you considered multimodal literacy learning in your lesson planning?
4. What is your perception of the students' literacy learning? Do they enjoy the language arts? What are some of their areas of strength? Weakness?
5. What types of literacy resources do your students use within the classroom and in what ways are they being used?
6. What is the structure and organization of your classroom? What purpose does this serve?
7. What are your favourite materials to use when teaching language arts and why?

As these and other questions were answered, more questions arose, and sometimes the conversations that occurred took on a life of their own, and I just let Linda talk. Her insights and opinions were valued and the conversations became like pieces of a puzzle that slowly got put together as the study progressed.

Observations

Observations are also important in case study research (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Kawulich, 2005; Yin, 1994, 2011). As a research method, observations offer the potential to generate what Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) call “authentic data” (p. 396). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) see observations as a way “to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study” (p. 92). Observations provide researchers with opportunities to confirm whether what people say matches what they do. They also have the advantage of enabling the researcher to record non-verbal behaviour. The researcher is also able to be *in situ* for an expanded period of time so that “connections, causes and correlations can be observed as they occur over time” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 397). Observing in a setting for a long time also enables the researcher to collect data holistically, using the five senses, thus providing a “written photograph” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, as cited in Kawulich, 2005, para. 2) of the phenomenon being studied.

Participant observation is becoming more prevalent in the field of education (Kawulich, 2005), because it is a particularly useful way to collect information for many different reasons. First, being a participant observer helps the researcher establish a relationship with participants so that the researcher is not a stranger. Therefore, when questions are asked of the participants, they may feel more at ease with answering. Second, participants become used to the researcher’s presence so that their behaviour will remain natural, which is helpful in facilitating the research process. This is called habituation. Third, one can ask more focused questions in structured interviews based on observations. Lastly, participant observation allows the researcher to get a better feel for

how people interact and how things are organized so it gives a contextualized account of the phenomenon being researched (Yin, 1994, 2012).

While being a participant observer in the study was particularly helpful for the above stated reasons, there were limitations that I had to consider as well. As a participant observer it was important for me to negotiate how much of my time to spend on being a participant and how much time to spend on being an observer. Merriam (1998) equated this dilemma to “schizophrenic activity” (p. 103) and cautioned against spending too much time participating should this affect the actions of the participants. At the same time, Merriam (1998) acknowledged that there are simply times in which participation is needed in order to understand what is taking place. To illustrate, there were times in the research where I was very much interested in the activity that was taking place, but the students had difficulty navigating the specifics of the assignment. When they turned to me for assistance because Linda was otherwise engaged, I helped the students to the best of my ability, keeping in mind the learning objectives that the teacher had set forth. I knew that I did so with the teacher’s blessing—Linda was gracious about having me help out wherever I was needed. Out of respect for her, I kept her updated on any comments or questions that would be beneficial for her to know about as she considered further planning or assessment.

Because of my role as researcher and participant observer, I needed to be mindful of deciding times in which to collect data. Researchers in such cases are advised to “behave like rather shy friends who speak seldom and write often” (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p. 58). Doing this required me to reflect on my actions and thoughts so that when I was interacting with the students I would not impose my perspectives and my ideals on

the actions of the participants. I always tried to remember that this was Linda's classroom and whatever I did had to complement her ways of doing things and her principles. However, knowing that my subjectivity could be used to facilitate interpretation of the data, I engaged in the practice of reflexivity. This was a necessity, seeing that my experiences inevitably influenced my research. I tried being open about this as I wrote my perspectives in my observational notes, and reflected on them further as I used this information to inform the way I coded and analyzed my data. If anything, these considerations when engaging in participant observation, helped provide authenticity to my findings and respect for the participants and what they were contributing to the research.

As mentioned previously, the first observational activities that I did to get familiar with the school and the participants helped me when I started the data collection. This *casing the joint* (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) was one of the specific times in the research where my own observations, insights, and interpretations were valuable for collecting and analyzing incoming data. Dyson and Genishi give advice for casing the joint. First, I observed the layout of the school with respect to the proximity of the classroom to the bathroom and computer room in case this contributed to the overall structure and routines of learning. I also observed what kinds of material were on the walls of the classroom and hallway as this provided clues about the type of learning environment promoted by the school. Second, the daily timetable influenced what types of learning opportunities occurred throughout the day. Some aspects of the schedule were flexible while others were not. Third, I needed to become familiar with the participants. I asked questions relating to the demographics represented in the classroom and what forms of student

diversity might exist that could possibly affect the way the classroom literacy curriculum (e.g., if there were any English language learners). Fourth, it was helpful to pay attention to the kinds of interactions that took place within the classroom that went beyond the scope of my research question so that I could get an idea of the social activities that were part of the context of the study. I asked questions such as: Who participated the most in literacy events? Were certain students more silent than others? What types of conversations occurred? Were there curricular conversations? More teacher-directed learning? More student-centered learning? Did the literacy events include whole class, small group, and individual learning? Anything that was observed as seemingly out of place was also noted as possible “salient data” (Wolfinger, 2002, p. 89). Finding answers to these kinds of questions as I began my observations provided valuable context as I collected data, coded themes, and analyzed the data.

To focus the data collection I drew on the notion of literacy events as they occurred in the classroom curriculum. The idea of literacy events originates from Heath (1983) who introduced the term to describe “any action sequence involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role” (p. 386). However, as the research focused on multimodal literacy, I drew on more recent, expanded definitions of literacy events that can include print and/or other communicational modes (e.g., Moss, 2003; Pahl, 2007, Pitkänen-Huhta & Holm, 2012; Street, 2012). Specifically, I used the following definition of literacy event from Iannacci (2005) which:

Is commensurate with an understanding of literacy as “literacies,” and involves interactions with written visual, verbal, non-verbal communication (e.g.,

silencekinetics, proxemics) (Saville-Troike, 1989 in Hornberger, 2000) and mediating devices (e.g., objects such as blocks) (Wertsch, 1998 in Gee, 2001). Meaning-making is then related to involvements with or the creation of texts and in short, includes the ability to make sense of and/or produce texts using any number of modalities (visual, audio, spatial, behavioral and so forth) (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). (p. 33)

Field Notes

Field notes are central to case study research. In fact, Dyson and Genishi (2005) say that field notes are “the foundations of the case” (p. 63). My field notes were extensive as they included not only observations but ongoing reflective comments, feelings, intuitive hunches, and questions that needed to be answered during interviews and classroom observations. These considerations reflected Clifford’s (1990) belief that field notes allow researchers to *inscribe* events for later reflection, *transcribe* the exact words that were part of the participants’ engagement within classroom literacy practices, and to *describe* the literacy learning opportunities of one particular grade six classroom by putting together a “more or less coherent representation of an observed cultural reality” (p. 51).

I observed the students and their teacher during language arts time, capturing the essence of both non-verbal and verbal communications, the latter aided at times by a voice recorder. I put together handwritten field notes that described what I saw and I also wrote reflections of what I saw (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The kind of information that I

took field notes on are similar to what Lofland (1971, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) suggest are important in taking field notes and include:

1. Actions of the participants
2. The literacy events that took place and how long they took place
3. What was said (direct quotations, paraphrased conversations, feelings stated)
4. Who participated (i.e., who talked, who worked with whom, and so on)
5. The setting (including seating arrangements, curricular materials, and so on)

My jot notes, preliminary observations, and detailed observations were assembled into more comprehensive accounts the same day. They were typed out into more fully developed field notes that contained preliminary analysis and further questions that I kept in mind for further data collection.

Artifacts

Physical artifacts are another important source of data that help to corroborate other data sources and are used in case study research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2012). Case study research in particular uses artifacts as part of the triangulation process, which is integral in establishing trustworthiness in the dissemination of the data (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2012). Some of the artifacts that I collected included samples of students' work such as journal entries, drawings, computer printouts from assignments, and artwork. I also collected curriculum documents and materials that were used in Linda's teaching of language arts. All of these artifacts allowed me to further contextualize the participants' multimodal literacy learning opportunities within the classroom curriculum. The student-generated artifacts also gave me insight into the makings of particular texts that were

integral to the kinds of multimodal literacy opportunities that students were afforded within the classroom curriculum. Because all these texts were designed by the students for reading it became important to follow up with the students to ask them how and why the artifact was created. Lastly, collecting artifacts was an important part of presenting the data in a multimodal way so that representations of students' work could help communicate their engagement with the classroom curriculum.

Data Analysis

In order to prepare and organize the data for ongoing analysis I needed to comprehensively organize my sources in such a way that allowed me to see the themes and patterns, which would focus further inquiry. Maintaining what Yin (2008) calls a "chain of evidence" (p. 3) I kept extensive field notes which I organized so that I could revisit them for things such as member checking and writing up the findings. Because data collection was ongoing and reflective in nature, I was always fine-tuning components of the research to "identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81). Ever mindful of the centrality of the research questions, the case study of the classroom curriculum of this grade six classroom also focused on some of the broader questions to contextualize the research – the connections that I needed to understand through the teacher's and the students' interpretive frames to what was going on around them, the larger context of the school, district and provincial mandates, and the enactment of the programmatic curricula as it related to the research questions. Casing the joint (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) was an important initial phase to help me get familiar with the school as I prepared to collect and organize the data. I had questions about how Linda interpreted the

programmatic curriculum in relation to district and provincial mandates. I assumed data that could respond to these questions would be provided in up-coming interviews, but I needed to “slowly but deliberately amass information about the configuration of time and space, of people, and of activity in their physical sites” (p. 19). Casing the joint offered me the “luxury” (p. 39) of looking at the site, artifacts, participants, and activities that took place within the site as an initial step to getting to know the context of the research. My activities in this phase in the research provided relevant and important background information that influenced the data collection and organization of the data.

To categorize the data I used Handsfield’s (2006) Modified Constant Comparative Method. This method is built on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who used the Constant Comparative Method to categorize data. In Constant Comparative Analysis, data is looked at and categorized according to emerging similarities that help focus further data collection. This is how I initially started my data analysis. Further data collection helped me refine categories, add new ones, and create more specific ones until I reached a point that no more new categories could be made. These categories became the basis for further data analysis where I sought out relationships between the categories. Handsfield’s (2006) modified Constant Comparative Method allowed the retention of complexities in the data as this analytic tool permits data to be coded in more than one way. Handsfield states that data that fall into more than one code can be seen as an expression of the dynamism and complexity of those data and the phenomenon under investigation rather than “as a mark of a faulty classification system” where a code should be discredited (p. 7). I thus followed Handsfield’s example of allowing the “interconnected” (p.7) nature of the data to be left intact to contextualize the findings

while “preserving the complexities and contexts of practice” (p. 8). Specifically, in the coding I sought to preserve the interconnectedness of the different commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) that appeared to influence the extent and kinds of multimodal literacy learning opportunities that the classroom curriculum offered students.

To organize the data I transcribed all of what I called “audio data” – data that were recorded on a small voice-recording device during classroom observations. During times that I was a participant observer I wanted to be able to record what was said so that I could contextualize my own observations in conjunction with the recorded data. I also transcribed what I called “interview” data, which were voice recordings of interviews that I had with the participants. My written observations, or “field notes,” were another source of data that provided valuable insights.

The data analysis focused on the literacy events and considered the “action sequence” (Heath, 1983, p. 386) where people produced texts that may have included multiple modes of communication (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). I identified and focused on the literacy events that were prominent in Linda’s classroom language arts curriculum. By prominent, I mean, those literacy events that took up the majority of time in the classroom literacy curriculum.

As per Handsfield’s (2006) Modified Constant Comparative Method there were three distinctive phases in the data analysis. During the first phase I looked for patterns in the data. The notes that I made in the margins and the key-words that described particular sections of the data were very helpful for coding. Despite the appearance of making the data “messy” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 79), the initial process of coding was essential

for categorization because “the meaning of the category evolves during the analysis, as more and more decisions are made about which bits of data can or cannot be assigned to the category” (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). One of the advantages of using Modified Constant Comparative Method analysis was that in the process of categorizing, data were put into more than one category while I simultaneously kept incongruent data for further categorization at a later time if it did not neatly fit into initial categories. Eventually these incongruent data were able to become part of other categories – a distinct advantage of using the Modified Constant Comparative Method in qualitative research – so that, as in Handsfield’s (2006) data analysis, salient study data could be used later on as previously mentioned. Effectively this incongruent data “re-enters” (Suter, 2012, p. 351) to be considered as part of an “alternative explanation” (p. 351) used within the second and third stages of the data analysis.

After I organized the data until no new categories emerged, the second stage of analysis consisted of looking at the similarities between the categories. These categories became the basis for generating themes that I identified from the data in relation to the research questions. What I noticed as I continued to further refine the categories to generate themes was that there was a story beginning to unfold, which was both “exhausting” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 110) but rewarding work as the data analysis became more precise and organized. This work resulted in some unexpected findings, the specifics of which will be discussed in chapter five.

During the third stage of analysis I organized themes to begin the story of how the classroom curriculum afforded students opportunities for multimodal literacy learning. I used direct quotes from the participants’ wherever possible as it gave a way for the

participants to move their voice “from the margins into a place of centrality” (Reilly, 2010, p. 658). Honouring students’ voices was especially important because in participatory case study research I, like Hall and Rudkin (2011) did not want to “silence young voices” (p. 1); instead I wanted to “honour the many ways in which children express themselves” (p. 1). Throughout the analysis I identified specific participant quotes from the themes. These quotes will be seen in chapter four and as I present and discuss the findings and explain how the students engage in multimodal literacy learning.

Methodological Considerations

Here I discuss further methodological considerations germane to qualitative case study research I needed to address that are often identified in the methodology literature. These considerations fall into the following four areas: ethical considerations, reflexivity, trustworthiness, and transferability.

Ethics and Reflexivity

Ethical considerations must guide the whole research process from developing research procedures to being responsible to the participants (Stake, 2005). Before starting the research the university, in accordance with Tri-Council guidelines required that I complete an ethical review that outlined my procedures and protocols for both the university and the school board where I conducted the research. I was also responsible for ensuring that the participants were fully informed about the research before they consented to participate. Informed consent was sought from all of the participants, including the students and their parents. I received consent from all of the participants which made it possible to report on the interactions of any of the students in the class. I

made sure that the participants' privacy and confidentiality was maintained as well by using pseudonyms for them and keeping data confidential and under locked protection. In this way I tried to be as ethically responsible as possible both as "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others" (Cavan, 1977, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morison, 2007, p. 58) while recognizing that "while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better" (p. 58). Included in being sensitive to the rights of others was my consideration of building rapport with the participants. This was essential to ensure the participants felt comfortable sharing information that would inform the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2011). Of course, it is possible to betray confidences to get information, so it was necessary that I maintained integrity when I built rapport with participants (Merriam, 2009). Integrity was an important part of being ethical, and in doing so was a matter of honouring the students and their voices (Yin, 2011).

Issues of reflexivity were also of concern during the research. Reflexivity entails recognizing that researchers are part of the context that is being researched and therefore have biases that will affect all aspects of the study (Phillips, 1997; Watt, 2007). I was aware that I needed to watch out for bias through the analysis and writing phase of the study as "writing itself is not an innocent practice" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. x). Also, my presence in the classroom had an effect on the way the students and the teacher behaved or interacted amongst them and with me. This was unavoidable and needed to be acknowledged and dealt with through such things as collecting data from several sources (Begoray & Banister, 2010). As a participant observer, I was in a unique position where I was able to be a participant in classroom literacy activities, while at other times I took a step back and simply observed what was going on around me. I especially

wondered near the beginning of the research process how the students and teacher would perceive my presence within their space. I took numerous detailed field notes, asked questions at times, and tried to make myself friendly enough to be approachable, yet at times distant enough to be less noticeable. Moving back and forth allowed me to wear more than one hat so that I was able to collect data while observing, and reflecting on my interactions with the participants while also monitoring the participants' reactions or biases.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in case study research demonstrates that the data are comprehensive and the explanations of the findings are sound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness in case study research needs to be realized so that readers understand the findings and have confidence in the results being presented. Trustworthiness thus acts as an assurance of integrity on the part of the researcher—that the researcher has done a good job of disclosing all the procedures used in the study. In qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) have described establishing trustworthiness as a process of establishing authenticity through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility depends on “persistent observation” (p. 301), triangulation of the data, and the researcher's presence in the site for sufficient time to carry out the research.

Transferability refers to how the findings can be transferable beyond the specific study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that “transferability depends upon the degree of fittingness ... so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information

appropriate to the judgment” (p. 124). Both Firestone (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that for transferability to occur, the readers of the study must be able to infer the results of the research and apply them to their own situation. Thus the researcher has a responsibility to provide a detailed account of the research so that resonance – the ability of the research to connect to an audience – can occur (Tracy, 2010). The third criterion for establishing trustworthiness is dependability. In qualitative research dependability concerns the quality of the data collection and analysis. The researcher is responsible for describing the setting in detail so that the context is clearly understood (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, trustworthiness can be established through confirmability, which refers to how well the findings are supported by the data collected and the analysis procedures that were used to establish the findings.

Within the study there were several methods I undertook to achieve trustworthiness. I used multiple data collection methods to triangulate the data as this allowed for multiple perspectives on the data. I also prolonged engagement in the research site for four months with a total of 42 days of observation in which I took field notes, audio data, and interview data. This helped establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

In order to promote transferability, I provided enough detail in the findings that readers might discern how the findings could apply to other classrooms. In terms of dependability I provided a detailed and as accurate account of the data as possible. I conducted member checks and used the participants’ voices wherever possible. I also

included my own reflective comments as a way to address concerns of bias and to provide the reader with clues as to my thought processes throughout the collection of data. This was also a way to confirm the findings as the results of all the triangulated data contribute to the overall findings. All of these components are needed to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Value of Case Study Research

In the “messy complexity of human experience” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3) that makes up qualitative case study research in education, there is a story—sometimes even many stories. Stories about the joys and complexities of learning. Stories about why teaching and learning happens in certain ways. Stories about how people think about what they know, or thought they knew. Participants’ stories about literacy learning opportunities. These stories take place within the grade six language arts classroom curriculum – the “case” – with all of its complexities that contribute to multimodal literacy learning opportunities. As I tried to gain some insight into the many different influences that overlapped, intermingled, and shaped what was going on in the case, I realized that capturing this complexity is what is most valued in case study research. The findings of the research are dependent on the situation, and that makes the “case” unique and valuable in its own way. Understanding the classroom dynamics of teaching and learning is important for understanding the broader social events that inform teaching and learning while at the same time focusing on explaining in-depth a relatively small piece of the picture (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). This is the “grand purpose” (p. 9) of case studies. In the next section I present the findings that illustrate the complexity of the case study.

Chapter Four

Findings

In this chapter I describe instances of multimodal literacy learning opportunities within a grade six language arts classroom and in so doing respond to the research question: What, if any, multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curriculum afford and how do students engage them? And what enables and constrains them? As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a dynamic nature to the classroom curriculum, the complexities of which contribute to both possibilities and constraints for multimodal literacy learning. The findings in this chapter are organized so that each of the literacy events are assembled together to chronicle the everyday literacy learning opportunities the students engaged in – both multimodal and print-centric. Within the descriptions of the assembled literacy events I triangulated data from my observations, artifacts, and interviews to promote the trustworthiness of the data. To contextualize the findings, I begin this chapter by describing the classroom, the school, and the participants' understandings of literacy as their thoughts were able to provide insights into the kinds of literacy learning opportunities that were in the classroom. What follows for the rest of chapter four are the descriptions of what occurred in QuickWrite, Persuasive Writing, Creative Writing, EQAO Test Preparation, and Reader's Theatre. When looking at the timeline of the kinds of literacy events that took place on a daily basis, QuickWrite and Persuasive Writing took place over the longest periods of time from the start of data collection in March. Persuasive Writing was strategically placed by Linda before EQAO testing in June so that there would be enough time to cover what needed to be taught. The configuration of many different influences such as the teacher's

literacy pedagogies, the learners as well as the institutional and programmatic curriculum resulted in both possibilities and constraints for multimodal literacy learning opportunities for students. Looking ahead to chapter five, I will discuss the themes that came out of the presentation of the findings that explain these possibilities and constraints and what this means for future multimodal literacy learning.

Contextualizing the Field: The School and the Classroom

Analyzing data can never be entirely complete without taking into consideration the context of the data that were collected as I previously described in chapter three. It is as Dyson and Genishi (2005) express:

One never simply observes a classroom. The “classroom” itself is a gloss for a complex dynamic among people. A researcher adopts a position that highlights certain elements of classroom life and lets other elements become the backdrop – the context, as it were –for the characters and events starring in the unfolding case. (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p. 18)

It is with these thoughts in mind that I present a description of the school and the classroom along with the participants’ understanding of literacy to help frame the classroom curriculum through which multimodal literacy learning opportunities occurred. As will be seen in the findings there are complex ways in which the teacher, learners, milieu, and subject matter interacted (Schwab, 1973). The interplay of these commonplaces for multimodal literacy learning is unique to this classroom curriculum in the particular time and space that the study occurred, though understandings gleaned from

this interplay are surely transferable. I begin below with a description of the school and the classroom.

The School

At the time of the study Littledale Elementary Public School served students from junior kindergarten (age 4) to grade eight. The school's website promoted "life-long learning" in its mission statement and the school stated that students learned in a "nurturing environment" where individuals were supported according to their needs. The broader school community, comprising the children's parents and caregivers, were invited to share in the educational and extra-curricular pursuits of their children. This was promoted as a key element for students to become productive and compassionate members of society as stated in Littledale's school goals. According to Linda, Littledale was a nice school to work in. In the first interview we had she mentioned that "Generally Littledale is kind of a really good school" (March 3, interview) and that the principal was "very understanding and very considerate ... she's very compassionate" (March 3, interview). I frequently saw the principal talking to students in the hallways and she also assisted the younger students with their outerwear for recess while she engaged them in conversation. The staff was collegial and Linda was consistent about taking her recess breaks in the staffroom so that she enjoyed some social time with her colleagues. A lot of joking banter went on during these times, which Linda participated in, as the teachers talked about subjects – both personal and professional. Those who frequented the staffroom seemed to enjoy each other's company as they celebrated birthdays, births of children, and retirements.

The school itself was located in a small, southern Ontario community. Littledale opened in 1950 and had seen various expansions over the years. This one-story elementary school drew students who were within walking distance to the school, which was situated largely in a middle class neighbourhood. Although there was an option for students to go home for lunch with parental consent, most of the students remained at school. There was a rotating schedule for teachers to supervise lunch time and recess duties. Occasionally teachers left school during the one-hour lunch period to run errands, as I witnessed on occasion with Linda. Many of the classes needed to be split due to their large size, but the grade six class in the study was self-contained.

In my initial observations as I was “casing the joint” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 19), I noticed that the atmosphere of the school seemed particularly friendly – both in terms of students’ attitudes and the principal’s and teachers’ interactions with the students. Students’ work was prominently displayed throughout the hallways. Outside of the grade six classroom there was a bulletin board called “Our Space. Grade Six.” Rotating displays of student work graced the board and spilled over into the surrounding wall space. Coloured paper cut-outs of students’ handprints outlined the bulletin board where brochures of Olympic event advertisements eventually gave way to creative artwork displays for Valentine’s Day. This was followed by artwork from Vincent Van Gogh, then sentence strips using particular words illustrating alliteration, such as one utilizing the word “Frosty” (e.g., Every winter Frosty frantically freezes in the cold bitter air).

The school’s support of developing a positive student attitude and a caring community as reflected in the school’s mission statement was evidenced throughout the

school where posters about “character development” and “character takes courage” were prominently displayed. The window display near the entrance to the school showed the commitment to helping those affected by the 2010 Haiti earthquake through various fundraisers that were planned by the student council. In addition, a wall mural encouraged students and staff to write messages and post images or postcards that reflect national pride for those representing Canada at the winter Olympics. Entitled “Golden Moments,” this mural had pictures of individual athletes who were medal winners, along with explanations of what sport they won their medal in. By far, the greatest contributions were the quotes that students wrote as they finished off the sentence “I believe because ...” Just to cite a couple of examples, one student wrote, “I believe each of us has something to teach and something to learn from others and who we are is the sum of all those contacts with people.” Another student wrote, “I believe because Canada is amazing because I live here,” and yet others showcased ideas about equality by stating, “I believe that girls are as strong as men” and “I believe that all people big or small can make a big difference.” Another activity the students could volunteer for was the school choir, led by the school’s music teacher. I got to hear them sing the song “I Believe” as a symbol of Canadians everywhere rooting for our Olympians. They sure sang with pride! They gave me goose bumps when I listened to them!

Other evidence of a caring community showed through various displays, posters, plaques, and bulletin board announcements. The parent council had its own bulletin board area where members posted various pamphlets about homework help, crisis response and urgent care information, toll-free numbers for parental support, and school bus transportation information, just to name a few. Just inside the entrance to the school,

a Canadian flag was proudly displayed, along with a plaque about the history of the city and a welcome from the school district leaders. Directly across from the entrance to the school was the school office where a very friendly receptionist was always ready to assist. Various posters supported student involvement in the school, one of which said, “Speak up! You are the student voice!” Indeed, students’ accomplishments were obviously valued, whether academic or extra-curricular. There were plaques on the wall near the gym that displayed awards for volleyball, basketball, and cross-country. Other displays showcased student “stars” and their various accomplishments. All of these definitely promoted a spirit of community, and the school was not shy about using up wall space in the halls!

By far the most ubiquitous student artifacts displayed throughout the school focused on literacy. The range of displays varied from projects about Egypt to persuasive letters, from French signs to information about new books in the library, from illustrated posters of the human body to “Teddy Bears Are ...” writings and drawings from the lower grades. Eight posters talked specifically about literacy and were posted throughout the hallways. There were displays of what students had set out for themselves in terms of literacy goals for the year. For example, students stated ideas such as: “My goal for this year is to be able to write neater,” and “I want to use different colours, fonts, size, and spacing in my writing.” There were displays of students’ expository writing, and charts that displayed students’ improvement in their leveled writing, such as progress from writing at a level two to a level three (on a four-point scale) which corresponded to prescribed government assessment indicators. These levels correspond to Ontario

provincial curriculum exemplars where students' work is assessed according to task-specific criteria.

The Schedule

Language Arts was scheduled first thing in the morning from 9:00 a.m. until the first recess at 10:27 a.m. Table 2 is the schedule that Linda composed that shows how she intended to organize the classroom curriculum. I composed Table 1 to document how the language arts time was actually used. I organized the data according to major literacy events. The literacy events I identified as forming the bulk of the teacher initiated classroom literacy curriculum were QuickWrite, Persuasive Writing, Drama, EQAO test preparation and Reader's Theatre. Linda referred to these on a daily basis. Not all of these events happened every day (and Drama was given to Molly, the teacher candidate who was working in the classroom for 6 weeks as part of a practicum). Table 1 shows the order of the literacy events to provide a timeline in which they occurred.

Literacy Event	Started	Frequency	Ended
QuickWrite	March 2	Supposed to be daily. Frequency decreased closer to EQAO in June.	May 21
Persuasive Writing	March 22	Consistent through March, April, and May	May 26
Creative Writing	April 28	1 day	April 28
EQAO Test Prep	May 14	Almost daily	May 29
Reader's Theatre	June 14	5 days	June 22

Table 1: Literacy Events and Duration

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
9:00	Headline	Headline	Headline	Headline	Headline	Headline
9:10	Quick Write	Quick Write	Quick Write	Quick Write	Quick Write	Quick Write
9:20	Rdg. Block	Rdg. Block	Rdg. Block	Rdg. Block	Rdg. Block	Rdg. Block
9:45	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
10:27	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10:42	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:25	Math	Math	Math	P.E.	Math	P.E.
11:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:45	Read Aloud	P.E.	Read Aloud	Art	Read Aloud	Read Aloud
1:06	P.E.	Science/Socials	P.E.	Art	P.E.	Computer
1:48	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
2:03	French	French	French	French	French	French
2:45	Computer	Music	Science/Socials	Music	Science/Socials	Music
3:30	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss

Table 2: Grade Six Schedule

The Classroom

Inside the grade six classroom there were many materials that were connected to literacy events and practices that included both pedagogical materials (such as rubrics for writing) and products of literacy learning (such as student displays of writing and/or artwork). Immediately to the right of the classroom door there was an area of the bulletin board set aside for procedural tasks such as a student helper schedule for the primary grades at recess, emergency exit procedures, and the classroom schedule as seen previously.

Linda's desk, located on the north side of the classroom, held a collection of student work for marking as well as her daily planner. Directly behind her desk, against the wall, was a bookshelf that housed different teaching materials from books on how to teach writing to curricular materials such as the school district authored balanced literacy document, but the bulk of her curricular resources were kept in the storage closet in the north-west corner of the room. This storage closet also housed numerous other items from instructional materials for every subject to school supplies and snack food for students who either forgot their lunch or who did not have enough food to keep them energized throughout the day. Other bookshelves, located in the north-east corner of the room, held books of various reading levels and genres that represented a wide variety of reading interests and abilities. Newspapers and magazines were also available for students to read during reading times. Although the students had access to these resources at any time Linda said this year's class did not enjoy reading as much as some of her previous classes. Not as many students participated in library exchange where students were invited approximately once or twice a week, depending on the library schedule, to borrow materials. Library times varied throughout the week so that when

they did occur, they usually happened in the middle of teaching, which had to be interrupted. Linda took this all in stride saying it was part of what happened when teachers tried to fit everything into a day. “We work around it,” she said (May 21, interview).

The layout of the classroom was one that was conducive to group work as the students were clustered in six groups of four to five students. Ever mindful of the social nature of students, Linda still put expectations in place for when students could talk in their groups for work and when they could not. She said, “Seating plan is big” (April 29, interview) for classroom management. The layout of the classroom was such that all students could see the front of the classroom. On the west side there was a Smartboard that was used on occasion as a teaching tool. When students needed to move around to work in groups there were spaces available to use elsewhere in the classroom such as the carpeted area in the back north-east area of the room, an extra work table with five chairs, and even a nook in the very back north-east corner of the room where the heating unit was. Next to the heating unit on the north wall of the classroom were four computers that were mainly used for looking up information and for free time. Linda’s desk faced southward for a view of the entire classroom, though she rarely sat at it during school hours as she was constantly in motion around the classroom or at the front teaching.

My first impression of this grade six classroom was that it was a place where the students felt comfortable being with each other and with their teacher. Linda fostered an atmosphere where students were encouraged to offer their opinions, ideas, and answers to questions. Linda commented that her students felt pretty evenly matched this year as far as abilities went, which had not always been the case. In her 29 years of teaching Linda

said that she had a very broad range of student abilities ranging from gifted to needing significant educational assistance. Linda mentioned the difficulty that she felt at times when she struggled to differentiate instruction and give students the individual help that they needed with all of the different learning needs she had encountered in the classroom. In a comment made early on in the study, Linda remarked that she wanted to “give them [the students] the attention they deserve” (March 12, field notes) but felt “hemmed in” by what she needed to teach. At times Linda felt “inadequate to provide so much” support to the students when she felt ill-equipped to do so, especially when there were students with special needs, like Joe who had been diagnosed with a pervasive developmental disability and did not have EA (Educational Assistance) support. There were only a few times when the resource teacher would come by to see how Joe was doing. There was one option that was made available to Linda in case Joe required intensive support beyond what could be provided in the classroom and that was to send Joe out of the classroom to the resource teacher. This did not happen often as Linda was determined to work things out within the context of her own classroom and keep Joe with his classmates as much as possible. Linda also said that this grade six class was very supportive of Joe and were willing to jump in to help whenever the need arose. They included him in group work, helped him stay on task, and assisted him with transitions. Linda was quite proud of her class and felt that the care and concern the students displayed was something that was cultivated through the year and was integral to learning.

Teacher and Student Conceptions of Literacy

In this section I offer information about teacher and student conceptions of literacy. The participants' conceptions of literacy were important as they informed the data with regard to the possibilities and constraints for engaging in multimodal literacy learning as they occurred in the language arts classroom curriculum. In particular, it was important to consider the participants' conceptions of literacy learning as the classroom literacy curricula, according to Schwab (1973) are produced through the relationship between curricular commonplaces.

Over time literacy has been defined in different ways. A definition of multimodal literacy learning can be a starting point for teachers to plan authentic learning experiences (Walsh, 2011) as multimodal literacy learning integrates multiple modes of communication within literacy practices. Leland and Harste (1994) argue that "a good language arts program is one that expands the communication potential of all learners" (p. 339). In addition, Jewitt (2008b) says that teachers need to raise questions about "how [literacy] curriculum knowledge is organized, classified, represented and communicated" (p. 255) so that this organization becomes a part of the classroom curriculum. With this in mind I had conversations with the participants about their understanding of literacy learning at the beginning of the data collection. Through these conversations, participants provided information about their understanding of the kinds of opportunities that were presented for multimodal literacy learning to take place within the classroom curriculum. I also had conversations with the participants about multimodal literacy so that they were informed about what it was. They immediately made connections to what had previously been done within the classroom curriculum, which

gave me confidence that the participants would be able to point out other multimodal literacy learning opportunities that the classroom curriculum afforded. I now turn attention to the participants' conceptions of literacy learning as a starting point for contextualizing these multimodal literacy opportunities.

Teacher Conceptions of Literacy and Pedagogy

Throughout my conversations with Linda she provided explanations of her perceptions of what literacy learning entailed and she reflected on her pedagogical practices that took place within the classroom curriculum. She acknowledged how her pedagogical practices were a result of her perceptions about literacy. Overall Linda's conceptions of literacy were print-based, largely tied to the institutional and programmatic curriculum and fluid as she tried to keep abreast of new teaching strategies. Throughout the course of the study, Linda was introduced to multimodal literacy and she expressed an interest and a desire to incorporate multimodal literacy pedagogy in her curriculum planning.

When I met Linda to discuss the possibility of working with her and the students in her classroom, she expressed interest in reading more material about multimodal literacy. I passed on some readings by Stein (2003), Pahl (2003), and Walsh (2007) as well as part of Jewitt and Kress's (2003) book to give her an overview and sampling of some of the theoretical basis as well as illustrations of what multimodality looked like in a classroom.

During our first interview I spoke to Linda about her conceptions of multimodal literacy and how she saw it manifest in the classroom curriculum. Her initial response

was that “Multimodal learning is, from what I gather, it is ... using the kids’ experiences and their (like) what they know, to work your program around that” (March 3, interview). As Linda further articulated how she perceived multimodal literacy learning within her classroom, one of the first subjects she connected her ideas to was science and not language arts. She indicated that she had students represent the different types of motion that they were learning about by having them stand up and *do* each type of motion:

And all of a sudden at the end of the day, like (snapping her fingers) they could say every kind of motion and they could tell me what each motion was and I thought, “of course” like, I’ve used something besides [talking] to get them to learn that. (March 3, interview)

Linda connected the idea of using motion and gestures as a way to help the students understand the concept of motion and as a way for the students to engage in multimodal literacy learning.

The next thing Linda thought of when conceptualizing what multimodal literacy learning would look like in her classroom related to how her students were engaged with different forms of media. Linda acknowledged that visual communication is more prevalent with students today in their online practices because they participate in online computer games, surf the internet, watch movies, and make purchases online. Linda noticed throughout her teaching that the students were not only much more engaged when working with computers for different assignments, they were also more adept than she was at figuring things out when they need to look for information. Linda acknowledged that her own perceived lack of proficiency with new media and technology

contributed to how she not only taught but how the students could communicate (March 3, interview). She reflected on a specific time when she noticed the students searching for information, hyperlinking, and googling for information when putting together a pamphlet from the 2010 winter Olympics. She noted that the students did not need a lot of direction and that she had encouraged them to figure out how to navigate the computer on their own (March 3, audio data).

During our conversation Linda further articulated that at times she felt unsure of the affordances that different modes held for her students. She acknowledged that she could see how multimodal literacy learning could be part of the bigger picture of good literacy practices. She clearly wanted to promote these literacy practices so that students would understand that they were inclusive of literacy learning, as was evidenced by the time students throughout the school were asked to guess answers to clues provided by the grade six students from an assignment they had done for a QuickWrite lesson on an animal that was hatching out of its egg. These “What Am I?” clues prompted some younger students to Google the ideas on the computer, which resulted in the correct answer. When they presented their answer to the grade six representatives at lunchtime, Linda recalled how the conversation took place:

Linda: How did you figure it out?

Students: Yes, but well, we cheated.

Linda: Oh—well, did you, one person knew what it was so you told each other?

Students: No, no, no! We looked it up on the computer!

Linda: Well, that's not really cheating, that's what we wanted you to do. We wanted you to do some research and figure out y'know, well, okay, what should we look up? What should we Google to find this? (March 31, interview).

In this interaction Linda seemed to value the importance of an expanded repertoire of literacy practices for her students in particular so they could find information and use the affordances of different modes and media to enhance understanding and communication. She acknowledged in our initial conversation about multimodal literacy learning that she “did those things” (March 3, interview) and was able to work with students’ interests, but as other data suggest, sometimes enabling multimodal literacy opportunities was difficult because of Linda’s nascent understanding of multimodal literacy.

Linda’s conception of literacy was not fixed to the language arts curriculum but was seen to be cross-curricular and woven through everything, like a “ball of untangle-able yarn” (March 3, interview). Linda linked this explanation to the idea that literacy was always being taught in all subject areas in some way or another because all subjects had literacy practices that taught students how to read and comprehend. Linda was very up-front in expressing that she did not always consciously plan for integrating her literacy practices within all of the curriculum content areas even though she said that she inherently did this. She talked about reflecting after lessons and units to gauge what kinds of literacy practices she focused heavily on and made mental notes to balance out other literacy practices within upcoming units to make sure that she was covering curriculum expectations. Linda said that she kept at the forefront the specific

expectations that the students needed to learn as determined by the programmatic curriculum (April 29, interview). However, Linda said she also emphasized to her students how “interconnected” (April 29, interview) literacy practices were – from reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Linda explained how her conception of literacy learning was realized pedagogically when accounting for balanced literacy. She commented that a persuasive writing unit she taught was “a really good picture of balanced literacy” (April 29 interview) but that she had not “reached the pinnacle of success yet” (April 29 interview). Linda wanted to be more inclusive of different modes but admitted that she needed to learn more about expanding her conceptions of literacy learning.

Linda explained that as part of her teaching the language arts, she included read-aloud times so students could enhance their listening skills as well as learning to enjoy a good story. Both Linda and the students enjoyed read-aloud times that took place after lunch recess. One book that she has read to class was *Holes* (Sachar, 2000). She included this one for her students because “it’s such a fun book to read” (May 21, interview). She went on to say that “it gets kids thinking about how authors can conjure up things in your mind, and ideas, and pictures, and thoughts” (May 21, interview). The students enjoyed these read-aloud times because Linda was a good reader – to the point that when a substitute teacher would read, the students would ask Linda to re-read it “because they liked the way [I] read better” (May 21, interview). Other books that she had read include *The Cay* (Taylor, 2003), *Hamish X and the Cheese Pirates* (Cullen, 2006) and various selections that the students had voted on.

Linda's conceptions of literacy and literacy pedagogy seemed to be related to the resources that were available to her for teaching language arts. She expressed that she selected specific materials to foster student engagement and interest (March 3, interview), promote understanding of concepts to be learned (March 3, interview), and "fit the curriculum" (March 3, interview). Linda also suggested that her conception of literacy was sometimes challenged. For example, despite her preference for teaching fiction, she said that the school district was "discouraging that – we should be doing more [of] the non-fiction" (March 3, interview). Linda was particularly confused by how to teach the type of non-fiction promoted by the board: "You know where you have this page and it's got a blurb here and some little information bits here, and something else here – to me I think this is just too much ... where do I go? Where do I start? Like do I read this or do I read this?" (March 3, interview). Linda said that she felt more comfortable with linear print-based texts for teaching because they were familiar to her.

Student Conceptions of Literacy

The students provided information about their conceptions of literacy and the opportunities and constraints for multimodal literacy learning that were evident for them within the literacy curriculum. In relation to our discussions of multimodal literacy, I provided information to them about what it was. Below I present data concerning each student individually to highlight their contributions and to help introduce readers to them.

Pringles

When I asked Pringles what his conceptions were about literacy, he expressed that it was something that happened in the classroom where reading and writing occurred. He

gave some concrete examples of literacy activities such as reading and writing during novel studies and looking up information on computers. He also mentioned that literacy learning took place in lessons like QuickWrite, Journal Writing, and Reader Response. He said he didn't like Reader Response due to its detailed nature of having to write responses to something that was read, but he didn't mind the journal writing because he could pick his own topic which was more engaging for him (March 31, interview).

Pringles admitted that he had never heard of the term "multimodal literacy" when I asked him and he wondered if it had anything to do with multitasking. I asked him if he knew what the first part of the word meant to which he replied, "two or more" so I went on to explain the meaning of multimodal literacy, using a visual to assist. I had the words reading, writing, images (like drawing), music, gestures, talking, listening, gaze, sound effect, and movement (like dancing) written around the words "multimodal literacy" to explain all the different modes there were for communicating and learning. I used this visual for all the students to assist them in their understanding of multimodal literacy learning. From there Pringles was able to further articulate his understanding about what kinds of multimodal literacy practices took place within class. Pringles identified talking as the most prevalent mode of communication while music was used the least for literacy learning. Pringles was able to explain that writing, talking, viewing images, gestures, and reading print were literacy practices that took place within the classroom. As an example, Pringles talked about how Linda went on the internet to get pictures for lessons she taught to help them understand concepts that were being learned.

When asked if these kinds of literacy practices took place at home, Pringles replied that the most common way his family seemed to communicate was through the

use of gestures. “My mom sometimes does gestures when she’s like planning out something” (March 31, interview). One time in class he was so excited about doing a kind of charades game that involved gesturing that he wanted to bring the idea home. In class he expressed his excitement by saying, “Yea! I’m keeping this—doing it to my mom! No, my dad! I like charades” (April 16, field notes). Pringles said that he liked to compose his own music on the computer using GarageBand, which is a software application that allows users to create and edit their own music. Although he admitted that he did not like writing, he seemed to do a lot of writing at home on the computer, especially when he played online games such as The Impossible Mission, RuneScape, Cupang-Machi, and Aragon. He explained all the literacy practices he used for these online games:

1. Writing down the games’ instructions on a piece of paper for RuneScape to refer to when he goes to different places in the game
2. Typing words on the keyboard
3. Composing music
4. Reading printed messages and instructions
5. Interpreting the gestures from the online characters
6. Viewing and interpreting maps

Pringles expressed that school literacy learning opportunities focused mainly on reading and writing while his interest in other literacy practices that included multiple modes seemed to take place mainly at home.

Fred

Fred articulated his conception of literacy learning as reading, writing, and speaking. He knew that these modes were practiced often within language arts time. Fred, too, was unfamiliar with the term “multimodal literacy” so I explained what it was. With this new understanding, Fred was able to identify a few different examples of literacy practices that he participated in that included multiple modes such as drama with gestures, and through new media like the computer for games and Smart Board for math (March 30, interview). When asked his opinion on what modes he thought he engaged with the most and the least for literacy learning, Fred said that he definitely engaged in talking the most while using music as a way to enhance learning was virtually non-existent in the classroom curriculum. “We don’t usually listen to music” (March 30, interview) he said.

His list for his home literacy practices was slightly longer as he explained that he liked to read “when I get a book I really like” (March 30, interview) and he liked playing online computer games. He also liked to spend hours designing his own website and proceeded to explain how he did so. But by far his favourite thing to do was draw. “I’ve actually done a lot of drawings lately” (March 30, interview) he said with passion – and then in a regretful tone he added that he didn’t get to do that a lot in school – mostly drawing was relegated to art time which was not every day. Fred went on to say that he could only recall one time in class where Linda let the students represent their ideas visually through drawing and that was during a QuickWrite lesson where students could visually represent what was hatching out of an egg instead of just writing about it (March 30, interview).

Emma

When I asked Emma about her conceptions of literacy, her replies were very similar to Pringles and Fred in that she first identified reading and writing and speaking as being literacy learning opportunities that took place in school. Drawing pictures was part of her definition of literacy because, as she explained, “If you write something and like on our novel you’re supposed to write a story about it, and if you say ... each picture or each sentence or whatever has literacy in it, then it is” (March 31, interview). Emma identified visual literacy as being a support for writing and as another way to learn as the pictures also communicated meaning. Through our conversations on multimodal literacy, Emma connected with some ideas by saying:

If you’re reading a book ... if you’re reading it then it has certain ways to do that. And gestures—usually a lot of people ... if you’re looking across the room or making a feature while you’re doing your math question or something, you don’t get it you have like a scowl or something. And you’re just—and people by just looking at you can tell that you’re mad. Or ... if you’re drawing pictures, then if you’re happy you’ll probably have a smile on all those people’s faces. (March 31, interview).

Emma also thought that music was the mode that was least used in class for multimodal literacy learning while the use of gestures was a mode that she saw being used the most in helping people communicate. Emma also remembered one time where the class put together a remix of their favourite songs. They kept the tune but changed the lyrics to showcase their poetry skills. They then put their remixes together using an

online program and everyone put their music onto a CD. This was a lesson Emma had enjoyed and remembered because, “it actually [was] something that you could relate to—that it was your song, that you chose. . . . And you actually had fun doing it because you got to go on like YouTube and figure out the song” (March 31, interview).

Emma explained that remixing music was one of the kinds of literacy practices she enjoyed doing at home as well. She used a program to help her remix music that, she lamented, “our school doesn’t have” (March 31, interview). At home, she enjoyed putting together lyrics and tunes from her favourite artists and had become quite adept at doing so. Video editing was something she did as well and she explained that sometimes when there were class projects that involved video she asked if she could edit it at home, although those assignments didn’t happen often. Other literacy activities that Emma engaged in at home included writing on YouTube, MSN, and email which involved many different multimodal literacy learning opportunities that Emma said were not a regular part of the literacy practices that took place in the classroom.

December

December’s conceptualizations of literacy started out as explanations of “language and stuff” (April 7, interview) which she said were the main ways that learning took place within the classroom literacy curriculum. She also thought that literacy was something to do with writing a letter and that, “if you’re talking about something that someone else has wrote, I think that might be literacy” (April 7, interview). Journal writing was literacy learning in her opinion and it was an activity that she really enjoyed participating in because the topics were self-selected and generally open-ended which

was engaging to her. She also appreciated that Linda would write back to them in their journals to continue the conversation and to comment on what they were writing.

December expressed that “it was just kind of neat” (April 7, interview) that her teacher wrote back and December enjoyed the interaction.

When I talked with December about her conception of multimodal literacy learning opportunities with regard to visual communication, she immediately mentioned the Smartboard. Music was also something that she identified, but mostly as an enjoyable experience for listening while doing other work, not as a mode that helped students make meaning (April 7, interview). Talking, even though December did not clarify whose talking was prominent, was the mode December identified as being used the most within the classroom curriculum for learning.

December also related the following as part of her “home” literacy practices which suggest that there was a distinct difference between the kinds of literacy learning opportunities provided at school and those provided outside of school. It also suggests that there were other literacy practices that she enjoyed from her home literacy practices that were not part of the regular classroom curriculum and therefore were not reflective of her interests.

I was in, um, a play and I—a few months ago—it was called the *Comedy of Errors* and it was a pantomime. So there were only like I, a few lines, and they were recorded but then there was stuff you didn’t even say. You had to act out and the audience had to know what you were saying and it

was really hard. It took like a few months to do just to get it the way ... it was fun. (April 7, interview).

Other out-of-school literacy practices that December engaged in included watching television, listening to music on her phone, iPod, and through satellite radio in the car. She said that she used a lot of gestures when she communicated with her family and she wrote notes to herself and they had lists on their refrigerator all the time. She loved to stay up late and read both magazines and books like *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. One of her favourite things to do was to type up random information using Google Chrome as her web browser. She said she liked wombats and that she would rather use the computer to look up information than use the dictionary. Lastly, she mentioned that she loved to write.

The above provides beginning information into the teacher's and the students' conceptions of literacy and their perceptions of what kinds of literacy learning opportunities and practices were available at home and school. I now explain what occurred in different literacy events to describe what multimodal literacy learning opportunities the classroom curriculum afforded students.

Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities: Major Literacy Events within the Classroom Literacy Curriculum

In this section I present the data that illustrates the classroom curriculum during language arts time in response to the question: What, if any, multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curriculum afford and how do students practice them? Due to the dynamic nature of the classroom curriculum the data suggest that there

were many influencing factors that contributed to the possibilities for the practice of multimodal literacy. I organized the presentation of the data according to the literacy events that occurred during language arts time and I used the participants' voices as much as possible to honour their contributions. I purposefully used visual representations of their artifact and any supporting documents as a way to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and to reflect a multimodal approach in the way I presented the findings.

QuickWrite

QuickWrite was primarily a writing event, but there were opportunities for the students to engage with other modes in addition to writing. Language arts time always began with QuickWrite first thing in the morning. Linda explained that the focus of QuickWrite was to improve students' writing by helping them make connections from their background knowledge to the fundamentals of writing. Primarily, Quick write was used as a writing strategy where students would respond to a question or a topic which Linda posed and the students would write for five continuous minutes. Linda used a book by Rief (2003) about QuickWrites as a model as she planned the writing exercises to develop the students' writing fluency. Her hope was that "something spurs a thought and then you can go off on this beautiful thing" (May 21, interview). The students had the freedom to write about any topic they chose but Linda also presented them with a topic for the day if they chose to write about that. As was typical of QuickWrite, students were supposed to think of everything they possibly could about a topic within their three to five minute time frame and write their thoughts down in a notebook specifically reserved for this activity. These topics ranged from holidays and celebrations that were within the week such as St. Patrick's Day, to random words that Linda put together to challenge the

students to make a short story from, such as *eyes*, *grass*, and *smushed*. Linda commented that this activity was a good way for students to learn to write “on demand” as a way to make daily progress in their writing skills for assessment purposes (such as EQAO, formative, and summative assessments). The dominant focus by far throughout the QuickWrites was on the mode of writing.

QuickWrite took place almost daily near the beginning of data collection and followed a fairly standard pattern: Linda would present the topics of choice and let the students write. However, Linda did make it a standard policy that the students did not have to write about her suggested topic. The students were free to write about whatever they wanted to write. She did not typically wander the room to see what the students were writing and left them with their own thoughts so as to not interrupt them for their short writing time. It appeared that most of the time students were focused on writing for the short three to five minute time period, but there were also some times that it seemed as if the students did not feel like writing and were complaining about not having any ideas, even with the freedom to choose or having a topic given to them. Though the guidelines for writing had been clearly set in place since September, the students continued to complain that they were not inspired to write. At times when Linda did not have a topic picked out for them to write about and instead wanted the students to pick their own, students like Emma clearly tried to persuade her otherwise. For instance, she said, “Can you *give* us a topic?” with another try shortly thereafter, “But can you give us *something* to write about?” (May 25, field notes). Clearly this “on demand” writing was not engaging for some of the students, like Emma.

Another focus student participant, Pringles, often vocalized his displeasure about writing and tried to spend the majority of the five minutes talking rather than writing on any given day. In my field notes I indicated that his QuickWrite book did not have a lot of writing in it when compared to those of his classmates. On the day the class was meant to be creating a quick excerpt of a story to demonstrate “luck” for St. Patrick’s Day, Pringles asked for permission to write about bad luck instead which was fine with Linda, but he still wanted to tell all about his story rather than write about it. For Pringles, his frustration was evident in the limits that were placed on the activity because, he admitted, “I don’t like writing” (March 31, interview) and he was not engaged in these writing activities – hence his best efforts to either avoid writing or to talk about his ideas instead.

Linda did give the students opportunities to orally share their QuickWrite stories on most days. There were usually a few people who offered to talk about what they had written. For QuickWrite, some days Linda imposed a minimum number of words that the students needed write, otherwise the students could not share; sometimes the students were even asked to meet the minimum requirement by staying inside for recess to finish their writing. Linda tried to impress upon the students that this writing time required serious, concentrated effort. At other times Linda would ask specific students to share their writing to make sure she was keeping track of different students and the effort that they put forth. To motivate the students Linda even tried having a friendly contest where each group of students in their collaborative seating arrangements wrote as much as they could and after they were done they figured out the average number of words that they had written. The group with the highest average number of words received a treat. In

addition there was a visual reminder of the recorded class average written on the blackboard. Linda was pleased to see that the class average slowly improved over time to reach over one hundred words per student by the middle of May. Linda thought that these teaching strategies helped to motivate the students to write more which resulted in less students spending indoor recess times to finish; additionally they had more opportunities to share their writing with their classmates.

After my initial observations during QuickWrite, I began to wonder about some of the learning opportunities that were being offered. It was obvious to me, as noted above, that some of the students were frustrated with writing. From a day-to-day perspective of looking at the kinds of writing opportunities students were presented with, there was little opportunity for students to be engaged. This was mainly the result of the way Linda decided to teach QuickWrite. The literature on writing pedagogy suggests that good writing pedagogy can support student learning (Peterson & McClay, 2010); however, even with well-structured writing pedagogy, this literacy event still did not provide room for multimodal literacy learning opportunities. The predominant focus was writing, all year long. Linda's rationale for QuickWrite as good practice with "on demand" writing was closely connected with assessment as well, as seen in the data forthcoming. All in all, there is little room for multimodal literacy learning opportunities.

Further to these above insights about QuickWrite, there were times when QuickWrite was used as a springboard for other literacy activities which is what happened when the students wrote clues for a mystery creature that hatched out of an egg that they had made out of papier mâché for an art class. The next few mornings during an extended QuickWrite time students went to the computer lab and they looked up

information on their chosen animal to transform the ideas into clues for their fellow students to guess. Linda said, “Try to think of something that people aren’t going to guess. You may need to research a few facts” (March 8, field notes). The students seemed pleased at the prospect of researching facts on the computer. In addition students were instructed by Linda to “decorate” (March 8, field notes) their list of clues with pictures of eggs. They were asked to “take an image off Google” (March 8, field notes) to either decorate or use as a watermark on which they could place their list of clues. So the students began right away looking for information—they were reading, writing, hyperlinking, looking at images, and talking quietly to each other about their finds.

Throughout the process of finding information, Linda’s main concern was for the content and how well it would be written so that students would continue to learn the finer points of grammar, sentence structure, and organization of ideas. This certainly aligned with her concern of practicing “on demand” writing. Using the computer to find information was a vehicle for the final, written assignment, and Linda felt that the students did not need any explicit instruction on how to navigate websites or find information. Linda explained that, “they knew where to go, they knew how to import stuff, and I’m thinking—wow—I would’ve needed someone to [help]. ... There was no need to even say anything ’cause they were like hands down ahead of me” (March 3, interview). This belief in her students’ computer proficiency also influenced her decision to have the students complete the written portion of their assignment first and then if there was any time left they could work on their layout and “decorate” (March 8, field notes) their *What Am I?* clues. This emphasis on writing was also seen in her comment to her students: “Don’t waste the precious few minutes we have fiddling with a title. Get

the main ideas down first. *Then* if there's time you can fiddle with your title" (March 8, field notes). The students were left feeling a little frustrated at not being given enough time, and in some cases, instructions, to experiment with the layout of their page and positioning of their title as they experimented with colours and fonts because the primary task was writing. There were thus limited opportunities for students to engage in multimodal literacy learning because of Linda's perceptions of her students' abilities with media and because of her interpretation of the programmatic curriculum. What opportunities *were* being created for the students to engage in other modes in addition to writing were not acknowledged or supported by Linda because of this.

Throughout the writing of the egg clues some students were becoming increasingly frustrated with certain aspects of the writing and research process. There was also a lack of overt instruction for using the resources of the internet which seemed to hinder their ability to represent their knowledge the way that they wanted. In one instance December wanted to visually represent the design of her egg by incorporating a watermark in the background. This was difficult because she did not know how to navigate the steps involved in the design process and her teacher had not provided any instruction on how to do so when she mentioned they could decorate their list of clues. So December asked her classmates beside her if they knew how to do it. They were willing to help her and together they navigated the tool bar from the Microsoft Word program until they saw some possibilities that could work. Through trial and error they cut and pasted December's chosen image of an egg from a Google online search until she was able to copy the picture onto the page. Then she continued to work with the size and placing of the watermark so that her clues could fit inside. This required a bit of

additional work because some of the lines from her clues were too big to fit inside the watermark so she had to negotiate the design of her layout in to make all the words fit inside the watermark. Through this process December negotiated some important design decisions with her fellow classmates so that the assignment was done to her satisfaction as the watermark visually represented her ideas about what her egg would look like for her animal clues.

Pringles expressed his displeasure at having to make a list of clues about a real animal and wanted to be able to pick a fictional character hatching out of his egg because it would express both his topical and representational interest. Linda took Pringles's comment of "Does it have to be real?" and reflected on how she could have presented the assignment to students. This prompted Linda to create an opportunity for students to tell "in picture form what you *would* have picked if I let you choose anything you wanted" (March 9, field notes) for which she also commented, "I guess that could have worked" (March 9, field notes). This reflection by Linda provided students with an opportunity to utilize modes beyond print that would not have happened had Linda not taken the time to reflect on Pringles' comment.

The above literacy event illustrates moments when multimodal literacy learning opportunities were negotiated within the space of the classroom curriculum. In addition to the students' representations of what was hatching out of their egg as seen by figures 2, 3, and 4 below, they were given the opportunity to talk about their pictures and to show them to the class. There were more opportunities for multimodal literacy practices presented in this lesson than previous QuickWrite lessons I had seen and many more students shared during this QuickWrite experience than in previous ones that I had

observed so far. The students' visual representations showed a lot of detail for the limited amount of time they had to come with their ideas and draw them. Their ideas were imaginative, creative, and showed visual details that would have been hard to put in writing, although each student did put a small explanation next to each drawing. Emma was the only student who did not share a drawing. Originally she wanted to draw a figure that looked like a unicorn, but after seeing her classmates' ideas, she started over but did not finish. She did not want to share her drawing with the class in its incomplete state (March 9, fieldnotes).

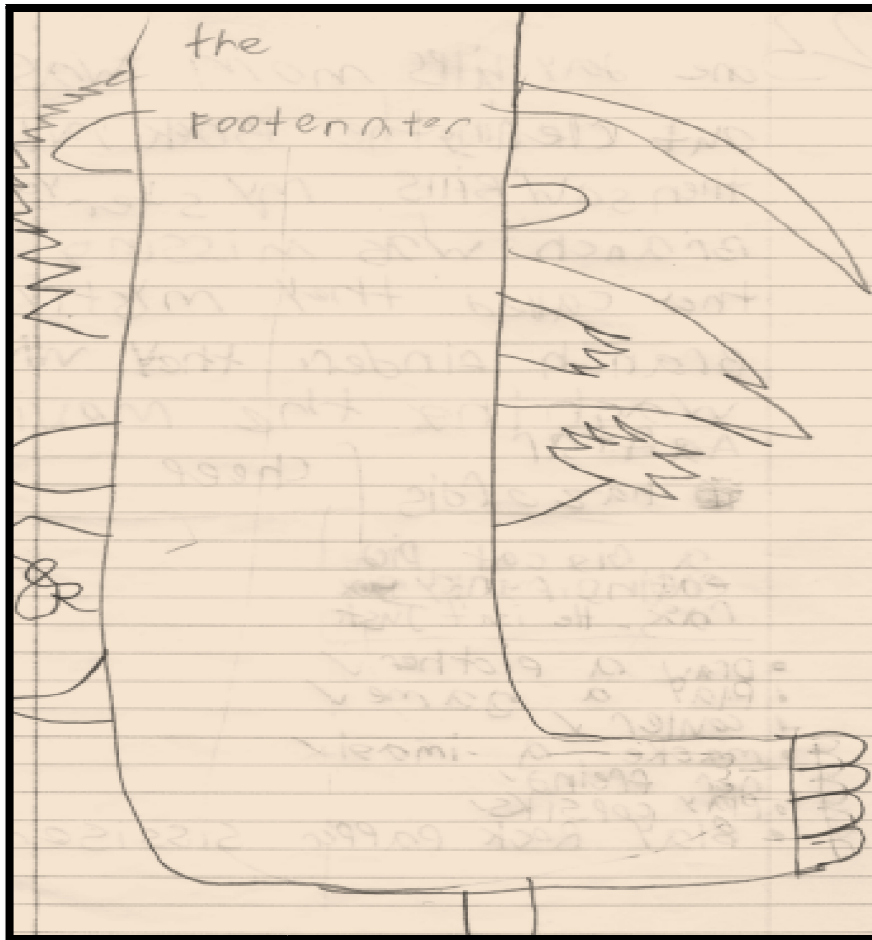


Figure 2: Pringle's Visual Representation



Figure 3: December's Visual Representation

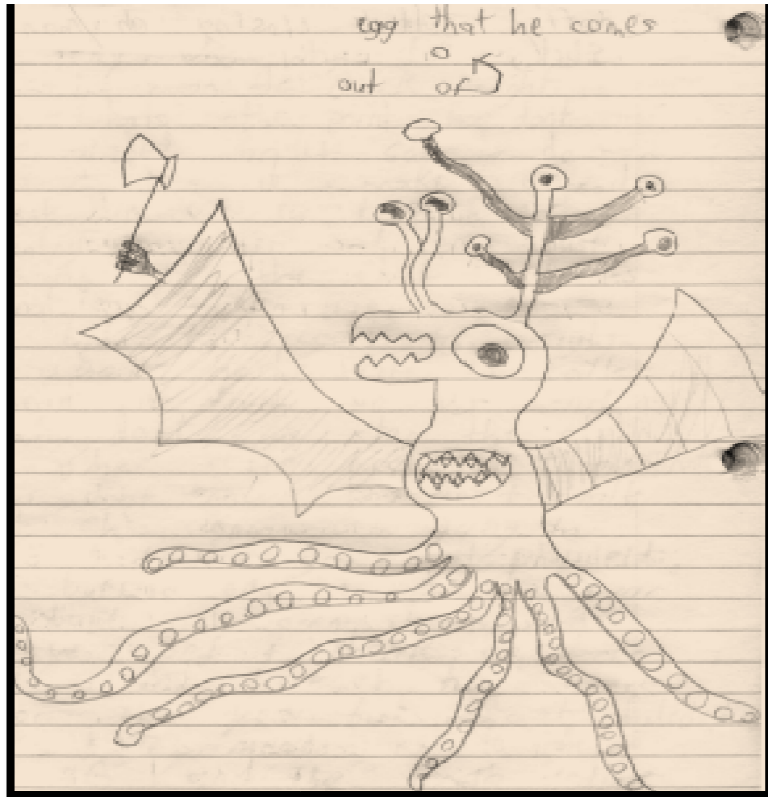


Figure 4: Fred's Visual Representation

Another way that the students were able to practice multimodal literacy during QuickWrite occurred when students were asked to interpret pictures – one was from a painting and the others were from novel book covers. For analyzing the pictures on a book cover, Linda wanted the students to give their opinion on some newly acquired Scholastic books that had arrived for their classroom library. Linda showed the class the title and covers of each book and walked around the classroom to show the students. She wanted to know which one looked the most interesting to them and why, which one they thought they would read and why, and which one had the best cover and why. They also gave their opinion on who they thought the target audience was for each of the books, based on what they were able to see and interpret from the cover picture. After writing

down one or two reasons for each of the questions, students were able to share their opinions. Fred said that he wanted to read the book *Fire Girl* by Tony Abbott because he thought the title and the picture would indicate that there would be a fire and someone could have died so the topic might be an interesting read for boys as it might contain adventures. Other students mentioned that the book *Umbrella Summer* by Lisa Graf looked like it would be for girls because of the colours and the pink rain boots. Other comments included how the book *Lawn Boy* by Gary Paulsen looked good to read because it showed a picture of a boy their age and he was mowing the lawn to possibly make some money. The picture was illustrated in a humorous way which made it seem like it would be a funny book to read.

Students were also engaged in analyzing the visual elements of a painting by Vincent Van Gogh, effectively engaging them in a multimodal literacy learning opportunity. One of the students named Joe, brought in a print of a painting entitled *The Olive Trees*. After having explained that the original was hanging in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Joe said that he really liked the picture. Linda polled the class to see what their opinion was about liking it. It was about a 50–50 split and so Linda asked what it was about the painting that they did or did not like. Emma contributed her explanation by saying,

I don't like it because it's got dark and dreary colours 'cause it's got all those dark blues which doesn't, I mean, I appreciate that this probably took a lot of work to do and it's not that I don't like it—it's just too dark of colours for me. (April 19, field notes).

Linda created space for class discussion on what aspects of the painting they did or did not like and in so doing created opportunities for students to engage in discussion regarding the elements of design and visual literacy.

Throughout QuickWrite, the majority of the lessons taught were linguistically based and teacher-directed. However, that did not prevent students from influencing the kinds of learning opportunities that they participated in. Through curricular conversations the students influenced the classroom curriculum to include opportunities to practice multimodal literacy such as was seen when Pringles made his comment about only being allowed to write clues about a real animal. The resulting opportunity of being allowed to visually represent their ideas created powerful learning opportunities that students were highly engaged in.

Persuasive Writing

In the Persuasive Writing unit, Linda taught the students to write a persuasive letter that required them to clearly state an opinion on a particular topic and to write reasons and examples that would support their opinion. There were many influencing factors that contributed to a limited amount of multimodal literacy learning opportunities within this Persuasive Writing unit. The focus was print-centric for purposes that aligned with Linda's need to cover the curriculum. Linda was looking forward to teaching a persuasive writing unit as she felt that a lot of planning went into it and it would be a nice change from writing stories. As she commented, "This persuasive [unit] I think ... we have enough to keep them, to hold their attention" (March 31, transcript). Linda's concern for keeping the students engaged was evident in this statement, although this

concern did not necessarily translate into providing frequent explicit multimodal opportunities which might have helped their engagement.

Linda began teaching the persuasive writing unit in March because it was a convenient time in the school year to do so as it was close to EQAO. As Linda explained, it was well-timed “because it is a format often found in some form or another on EQAO and this way it would still be fresh in their minds when that comes” (April 27, email). The planning that took place to organize the unit was not entirely decided on her own as she worked in conjunction with other teachers in the junior division. Linda further explained:

Basically the division decided to do persuasive—that is a format that we have to do in all of the junior grades—and then at one of meetings we made a rough plan for how we thought we should proceed and the activities we thought would work well across several grades (4–6), that’s how we came up with the letter idea. One of the expectations is that we will teach kids how to write using correct letter format so we figured we would kill 2 birds ... Much of my stuff initially came from the result of the Google I did for persuasive writing. And really, on a day to day basis, much of it just sort of comes from the archives. ... I plan one or two days in advance or I plan for an activity which may take a few days. ... The expectations are sort of planted in my mind and I rarely refer to any documents except for ideas. ... I have a rough outline of where I’m going. ... If we’ve been doing a lot of writing stuff, then I feel they need a more

hands on or creative type of activity so I guess I try to switch it up now and then. (April 27, email).

As Linda continued to elaborate on her goals for the persuasive writing unit, she mentioned that the students needed to be able to write a persuasive letter independently for assessment purposes that fulfilled the programmatic curriculum requirements as well as EQAO. In addition Linda said she wanted the students to recognize “the other forms of persuasiveness that are out there” (March 31, transcript). She went on to mention that she wanted the students to understand that persuasiveness “is like really trying to convince somebody” and that “it can be very subtle and not obvious and out there” (March 31, transcript). She seemed excited to have found a clip on YouTube that illustrated how persuasiveness could be very subtle but she was already wrestling with whether she wanted to show it because it was sixteen minutes in length and she said, “You know what—I don’t have time” (March 31, transcript). Linda’s concern for covering the curriculum was already conflicting with other multimodal literacy learning opportunities as she thought about the various lessons that she could do.

As can be seen in the explanations about the goals for the persuasive writing unit and how she planned to teach the unit there were a number of factors that influenced the way that the programmatic literacy curriculum was interpreted and organized before it was taught. Linda’s concern to align persuasive writing with what would, in her opinion, likely be on EQAO was the driving force for implementing the overall and specific expectations of the programmatic curriculum. The various examples that follow speak to the influences that Linda took into consideration as she taught her literacy curriculum and for the multimodal literacy opportunities which were able to take place.

At the beginning of the persuasive writing unit Linda wanted to connect with students' understanding of the word *persuasiveness* to help them understand what the term meant so she tried to engage the students in a rather lengthy dialogue in which students contributed their ideas and stories. After Linda had activated students' prior knowledge about persuasiveness, students were asked to think of particular school issues or rules that they had trouble agreeing with such as not being able to wear hats in school. This served the purpose of providing a topic for them to eventually make their own persuasive letter convincing the principal to change some of the current school rules. Lively discussion ensued and a list was generated that illustrated some of the topics that students wanted to address in their persuasive letters. The list included such concerns as:

1. Not moving to balanced school days (i.e., instead of having two recesses and a lunch break, the school operates with two breaks; there is no change to the amount of teaching time per day)
2. Not wearing school uniforms
3. Allowing class pets
4. Having electronics in school
5. Being allowed to wear hats
6. Making a hockey team
7. Building a swimming pool
8. Getting more outdoor equipment for activities such as hockey or skiing
9. Letting students have more freedom to express their opinions

After generating this list the students were given explicit instructions on preparing their ideas for writing their first draft of their letter which they did in the computer lab.

For the most part the students seemed to take their task seriously from the start. They seemed to be concentrating on spelling, trying to double-check the content of what they were trying to say, and formatting their letter. After a while some of the students seemed to be feeling the pressure to meet what they perceived to be the expectations of the letter. They made comments such as:

“How long does it have to be?” (Fred)

“I don’t know how to start it!” (Pringles)

“It’s so hard.” (Pringles)

“I don’t know what else to say.” (Fred)

“[I just want to] get it right.” (Emma)

“Do we have to check it with Mrs. Bee when we are done?” (Fred) (March 31, field notes).

It was not only the comments that suggested the students were getting frustrated with their writing, it was also seen in the actions of Pringles who had a hard time focusing on writing and coming up with ideas. Both the content and the form of the persuasive letter were already giving students like Pringles some concern because they wanted to get their assignment just right.

Over the course of the next few days the students continued to work on the drafts of their persuasive letter while receiving explicit instructions on how to format the letter. Linda put up a chart on the blackboard (see figures 5) on the side of the room to illustrate what persuasive letters should contain as part of the programmatic curriculum requirements and she referred to these charts throughout the remainder of this unit.

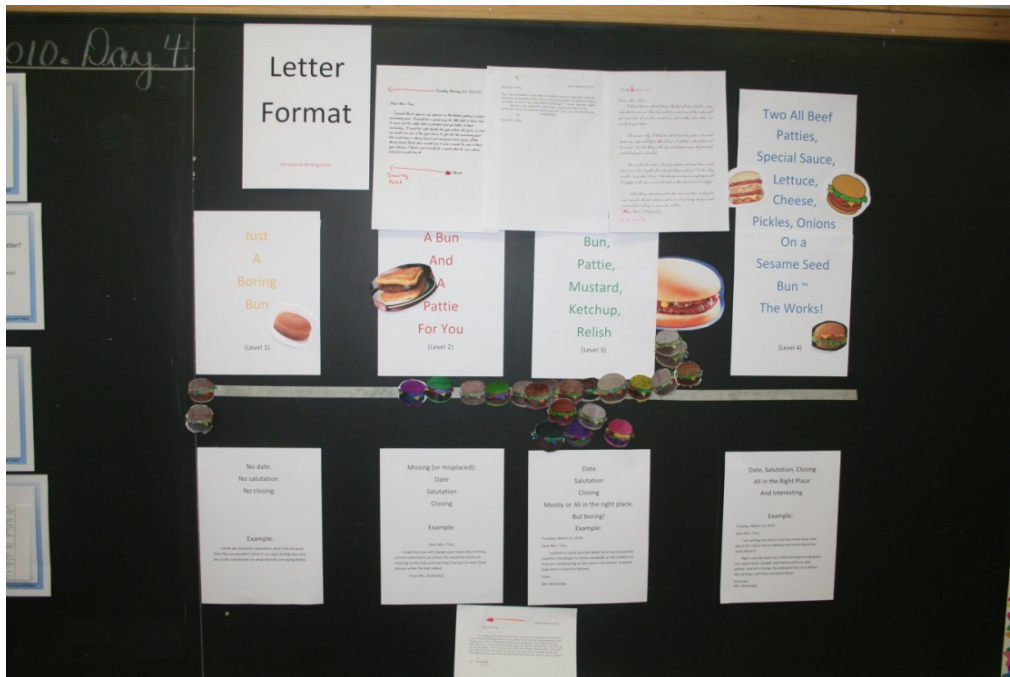


Figure 5: Chart for Persuasive Letter Writing

For a majority of these initial lessons on how to write a persuasive letter the students were listening to explicit instructions which included the rubric structure so the students knew what they were aiming for when composing their persuasive letter. One such example below highlights the kind of instructions that were given for the students that were very detailed and linguistically based.

Yesterday I had you all at the computer lab to write the first draft of your persuasive letter to Mrs. Smit (the principal). Now the *reason* I had you compose a letter without my editing it for you was so that you could look at your letters again and see what level on the rubric you are at. If everyone can look at the board for a minute—I have all the levels up there

but we are going to look at examples on the white board so that I can explain what you will do. So level one is a *booring_bun* where there is nothing added to make your letter interesting. You don't have a date, no salutation like "Dear Mrs. Smit," and no closing. The example that I give down here says: I think we should be allowed to wear hats because then the sun wouldn't shine in our eyes during class and we could concentrate on what the kids are saying better. So that's a level one. The *next* level is a bun and patty for you. This has a bit more stuff for the reader but you may still have missed or misplaced the date, salutation, or closing. For example, here the salutation is centered. Letters and salutations are never centered. ... So for the example of the letter, like I said, the salutation should be all the way over to the one side. Then I wrote an example that says: I hope that you will change your mind about letting us have electronics at school. We would be better at listening to the kids and teaching if we got to wear headphones while the kids talked. From Mrs. Bee. Now, just to show you the difference between this level and level three where you have a bun, patty, mustard, ketchup, and relish, you will have the date all the way over to the *left* hand side because that is where it is supposed to go, the salutation is also all the way over to the left hand side too, and the closing is also all the way over to the left hand side. Now you *never* finish your letter by saying *from* Mrs. Bee. That is not only boring, but it is not really the way you sign a letter. Saying something like sincerely, or kind regards, or something like that would be more

appropriate, but never *from*. Now the reason why this example is still only a level three is because you may have *most* of the things in the correct place, but the body of the letter is still boring. Here is my example:

Tuesday, March 23, 2010 (see the commas in-between the day and the date and the year and it is all the way over to the left). Dear Mrs. Smit, I wanted to write you this letter to let you know that teachers should get to throw snowballs at the students if they are misbehaving on the yard in the winter. It would help them to learn to behave. From Mrs. Bee.” See, I still used the word *from* here, so I need to change that to bump up to a level four which is a 2-all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun—the works! So what makes it the works is that the date, salutation, and closing are all in the right place AND it is interesting for the reader to read. Listen to this example:

Tuesday, March 23, 2010. Dear Mrs. Smit, I am writing this letter to let you know how I feel about the colour of our hallways and what should be done about it. (New paragraph indented.) Right now the walls are a dark and depressing green. Let’s paint them a bright and cheery white or pale yellow. And let’s change the yellow floor to a whiter tile, perhaps with blue and black flecks. Sincerely, Mrs. Bee.” So *this* is what you are aiming for. (March 24, field notes).

I offer up this excerpt from Linda to show how detailed she was in her instructions for how to design a persuasive letter because of her primary goal of getting the students to compose one on their own independently for both assessment purposes

and fulfilling programmatic curriculum requirements. Through explicit teaching and print-centric activities, the students were immersed in writing activities with not a lot of exposure to opportunities that might encourage more multimodal literacy learning. Certainly the students were not given the freedom to influence the kinds of multimodal literacy learning opportunities that they could be engaged in because everything was laid out for them. They even were given rubrics and writing samples to refer to. This would not have been problematic as far as writing pedagogy is concerned, but the fact that this entire unit focused almost exclusively on writing is problematic in the sense that opportunities for the students to practice other modes of communication for purposes of persuasiveness were not encouraged which did not promote students' interests and opportunities for literacy learning.

Linda thought it was important to display a rubric continuum so that students would be able to visually represent their progress in writing the drafts of their persuasive writing letters thereby keeping at the forefront the main purpose of writing persuasive letters – to master the content and form for assessment purposes. Affectionately known as the “persuade-a-burger” rubric as shown in figure 6, the students would track their progress with their own hamburger icons after every draft of their letter was assessed. Linda mentioned that she thought this was an effective way of monitoring the students' progress as she articulated:

The kids know exactly what they're being marked on. ... Rubrics are the thing—it's a nice leveled thing. They can see each one and it's easy to see the progression. And they can assess their own work really, I mean they could have taken that and done it themselves. It's fast, it's easy, it's

general, like it's a nice, y'know—it gives you a nice range—okay, this is a level four as opposed to a 72 percent. (May 21, interview).



Figure 6: Persuade-a-Burgers on the Rubric Continuum

The effect of being able to visually represent their persuasive letters to see where they stood on the continuum served as a reminder of where they were and what they needed to do to improve their letter, and to aim for the example that was given for a level four. When the students got their turn to put their hamburger visual on the board, Pringles put his letter in the middle of level one. Then he seemed to change his mind as seen in the following exchange:

Pringles: Well, I think I should move my hamburger. I think it should go (pause) *here* (laughs). This is like a level zero—no, way over here

(moving it even further to where the rubric starts, then beyond it to the left). It's a *minus* level. Ya, that's it.

Linda: Why do you have your hamburger way over there?

Pringles: Because it's not very good.

Linda: Don't you have anything written down?

Pringles: Ya, I do. (showing her)

Linda: Then you should at least have a level one. Move your hamburger over again, Pringles. There. Now you just have to work on improving it so that you can get a level four.

Pringles: Awwww, I'm never gonna be able to do that.

Linda: Well, you at least can try. I am going to be looking for improvements in everyone's letter. (March 24, field notes).

As Pringles mentioned previously, he perceived his writing skills to be low and did not like writing so he was feeling anxious about being able to get a level four.

Throughout the persuasive writing unit there were different contextual factors that seemed to influence the extent and kinds of multimodal literacy learning opportunities that the classroom curriculum offered students. Students frequently had a substitute teacher because Linda was gone for five of the twenty-five persuasive writing lessons that I observed for division meetings and professional development that was directed towards EQAO for improving literacy scores. Sometimes the substitute teacher did not follow Linda's plans which resulted in confusion for the students. For Linda, the most frustrating aspect of preparing lessons for the substitute teachers was knowing the inconsistencies in the way the lessons were taught which resulted in Linda having to re-

teach a lot of the lessons. I noted in my field notes that Linda was apprehensive about being out of the class. It got to the point that Linda did not leave plans for teaching persuasive writing anymore. Instead she mentioned that she would just double up on the lessons on the day she was back again so that she could keep teaching the “important things like writing” (March 30, field notes).

The students did not make the kind of progress Linda was hoping for which in turn justified in Linda’s mind her focus for more explicit instructions when teaching how to write a persuasive letter. She was “shocked” (March 30, field notes) by how few of the students had level fours on their rubrics after writing for several days. Linda gave students sample letters based on her own ideas, handed out graphic organizers for the students to organize their ideas for writing, and had students work together in topic-similar groups to generate a list of arguments for persuading the principal to consider their requests.

This was the first time in their schooling that the students were immersed in persuasive writing. While the unit obviously focused on writing, other modes were sometimes enlisted to support the writing. For example, when trying to understand some other ways that people are persuaded, Linda invited two students to do an impromptu skit to illustrate what it could be like to convince or persuade someone to do something that they really did not want to do. The two students, Pringles and Rox, got to choose their own topic. An excerpt of the skit follows:

Pringles: Ok. Um, “Whoa, what’up, Rox?”

Rox: Duuuude?

Pringles: You sh-you should smoke.

Rox: No I shouldn't.

Pringles: Ya, man. You should so smoke. It's like the new, it's like the new future.

Rox: Yah, but I'd rather not die at age—.

Pringles: Yuh, yuh, yuh won't die Rox. It's just lung cancer. I just got a cough in my lung (coughing noises). One second.

Rox: Oh, there was something I was going to say, but I forget.

Pringles: That, there-there's a smoke man, man, there's this pack.

Rox: It's—trying—to distract—me.

Pringles: No, no, no, no—I'm not taking it back.

Linda: Alright.

Pringles: I'll light it for you. There you go. Now you're on smokes. You will enjoy them. (April 14, field notes).

This excerpt is limited in the way it can communicate the students' multimodal practices, but they demonstrated some facility with communicating persuasiveness through the use of voice expression and tone, facial expression, and gestures and body movement. Pringles took on a southern drawl while Rox did mostly his normal voice, just a little higher pitched. There were not a lot of available modes to choose from in such a short time frame, so Pringles made the most out of what was "to hand" (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). He used the voice variations, gestured to Rox as if he handed him a pack of smokes, even tried to make it look like he was "forcing" Rox to stick a cigarette in his mouth. He used the gestures and sounds of coughing, shook his head back and forth

when emphasizing the “no” in the conversation at points, and overall it looked like he was enjoying himself. Throughout this short skit the students were able to draw on different modes to communicate their intended purposes. It was an opportunity for the students to communicate multimodally. Although Linda provided a space for multimodal opportunities, some constraints were still present as she was either unaware of some of the multimodal pedagogical knowledge that may have contributed to fuller multimodal literacy learning opportunities, or she chose not to acknowledge these “other forms” of persuasiveness because they were not represented on EQAO.

Linda also used music as a springboard for discussing persuasiveness. Linda had picked out some slogans to see if the students recognized them and for purposeful discussion of how the slogans worked as a way to persuade people to buy a product. Unfortunately, it turned out that the students were unfamiliar with Linda’s examples and so the effectiveness of her pedagogical strategy was not as strong as she would have liked. The lesson also included, however, opportunities for the students to describe the advertising slogans that they were familiar with, thus providing a space for learning opportunities to stem, in part, from their funds of knowledge. Among the slogans students provided were those from Home Depot and their slogan, “You can do it, we can help” and from Midas automotive, “Trust the Midas touch.” Fred came up with one from Popeye’s Gym where they sing a song with the words: Does your belly hang low? This time Linda was unfamiliar with the selection and asked, “Where do you guys hear this?” to which various members of the class answered, “From 95, Fresh FM,” a local radio station. Linda asked if Fred knew how the tune went, which he did, and Linda asked if

he would be willing to sing it. Fred was very hesitant at first, but with enough encouragement from his classmates he began singing:

Does your belly hang low, does it jiggle to and fro, can you not see your abs, can you not see your toes? Does it spill over your pants, does it jiggle when you dance, does your belly hang low? (April 22, field notes).

In this multimodal event, students negotiated the curriculum so that they could use their funds of knowledge to represent their own ideas of what persuasiveness meant (e.g., music) as a springboard for creating meaning. This was an unintended yet significant opportunity for the students to communicate their interest as I noted in my field notes:

The WHOLE, I mean the WHOLE class eventually chimed in and started singing this song with Fred!! Everyone knew this one. It was kind of neat actually that they were expressing their interest multimodally here and Linda let them sing the whole song. (April 22, field notes).

Linda too expressed her thoughts to me about this activity:

Yeah ... and I never, I didn't know that one! ... I don't listen to the radio very often. ... Y'know so it was like ... those are the things that teachers love. That I love. When they all break out into song like that and they all join—I do love that, that's my favourite. Those are my favourite moments. ... It's very bonding. (April 22, field notes).

It was interesting to hear from Linda how she interpreted this communication as one that was very bonding for the class. I had wondered if she was going to say anything about how multimodal literacy was configured in this instance of practice because the students were the ones initiating the practice of multimodal literacy, using music as a springboard to connect their understanding of persuasiveness to their own slogans that they were familiar with. But she didn't.

As the unit progressed through April and May there were times when the students and Linda both expressed frustration with the inexorable print-centric focus and explicit teaching of the persuasive writing unit. The students expressed that they wanted to be engaged in literacy practices that reflected relevant content knowledge, different modes of literacy, and something that connected with their interests – as seen in the statements that were made by the participants during the unit. Well into the persuasive writing unit, when Linda would announce that they were going to start persuasive writing, students would audibly groan. Fred made the comment “This is very boring to me” (April 13, field notes). Emma said that all she did was “sit there and write” (April 7, field notes). Other students did not believe that their letters were going to be taken seriously as seen by Pringles's comment, “She's making us do all this hard work and we're not even going to hand our letter in like, to see if we actually get what we want” (April 7, field notes). The most unmistakable frustration came from Emma who said loudly enough for many students around her to hear: “We're in prison!” (April 7, field notes). All of these comments made by the students were ways that they could voice their frustrations about the continued reading and writing practices that took up the bulk of the persuasive writing unit.

When I had a group interview with the focal students, further remarks were given that showed their frustrations with the literacy curricula that limited their engagement with multimodal literacy practices. I have highlighted their comments below.

December: I don't like it.

Emma: You just sit there and write.

Pringles: It sucks.

Emma: Why would [you write] about that—there's something you don't believe in! ... But honestly though, what's the chances she's going to be like, yeah! – You're right!

Fred: Boring.

December: Um, when she gave us that specific topic to do? Um, like I didn't actually do it because I had nothing to write about because if I don't see it as a good thing then I can only write “cons.”

Emma: I do believe like with the repetition is good, but I think she took it too far with the persuasive writing. She like before, it was fun it'd be like, yeah, we get to work on it then we get free time. But now, she just, she just took it too far so now it's not fun anymore. You're like—oh my goodness! Persuasive writing! And all you hear is “awwww?” ... but ... I think she just took it a little bit too far.

Emma: I don't get why we spent so much time on persuasive letters 'cause everybody's like, 'kay, yah, we're doing these ... persuasive letters at the beginning, but at the end as soon as she said that we're gonna do another letter, she basically, like—I don't mean to be rude but she ruined the

experience of having it—like 'cause like now every time you're—every time [there's] class everybody's like we're going to do a persuasive letter or whatever ... I'm not gonna be very happy 'cause I'm gonna remember that ... she's like, "Ok you do this, then this." And she made us do a lot of them which was basically like 'kay, now I got tired. I know what I'm supposed to do on one but you don't need to like [keep] saying, 'kay, do one now and again and again. She could have spent like more time focusing on another subject or like something else. (May 19, interview; June 14, interview).

Linda started to realize how the continued print-centric emphasis in this writing was taking a toll on the students' engagement with the persuasive writing unit. By mid-April Linda herself was "getting sick of them" and the persuasive letters were taking a lot longer than she had anticipated because of all of the influences that occurred as part of the classroom curriculum. Near the end of April Linda was getting more confident that the end of the unit was near as she expressed to the class that they would be "*finally* done with it" (April 19, field notes).

Before ending the unit, Linda did incorporate some "other forms of persuasiveness" (March 31, transcript) as part of the goals for her unit which provided the students with opportunities to be engaged in multimodal practice. One day students got to pick out a poster that was advertising something that was supposed to influence the reader to buy it. They had to look at all the different elements of the poster and decide what aspects of the poster were persuasive by looking at what the poster was advertising, figuring out what the target audience was and what the "hooks" or "characteristics" were

that would make this an “effective poster” for the target audience” (April 26, field notes).

After modeling an example with the class, Linda and the students generated a list of characteristics that made their poster persuasive which included:

1. The age and gender of the children on the poster
2. The way the words were written—short and to the point
3. More pictures than writing
4. Link to a website
5. Mix of races for the children represented
6. Children are all smiling
7. The wording is bold so it stands out
8. There are bright colours used

The students then picked out their own poster and analyzed it to see what kinds of hooks were used. Students analyzed the visual and written elements of the poster to come up with their ideas of what it could be about, and they answered the questions that were given to them on a handout about what made this poster persuasive to the reader. They presented what they had found to the class and their engagement with more of the visual elements of a poster gave them further insights as to the effectiveness of how advertising tries to persuade people to buy their product.

Linda followed up this activity by also analyzing commercials found on YouTube to see what elements enabled commercials to be persuasive, thus providing other opportunities for students to be engaged in multimodal literacy learning opportunities. It was during this lesson that Linda showed the sixteen minute video called *Validation*, in addition to the commercials, admitting it was just too valuable an example not to use it

just because of its length. After they watched the videos they generated another list of design elements, which ended up being different from those they generated with the posters. They included:

1. Funky music
2. Catchy jingle
3. Low prices
4. Buy one get one free
5. Demonstration of product
6. Someone famous will sell the product
7. Have interesting product names

Through the list the students were able to engage with the notion that communication happens through different modes and media.

To assess whether the students had understood and retained the meaning of persuasiveness and were able to write a persuasive letter, Linda gave a final assignment for students to write a letter on their own. Having already sent in their final draft of their classroom letters to the principal, Linda left instructions for a substitute teacher to facilitate the class's writing of its final persuasive letter. Before she left, Linda gave the students their instructions and a topic to write about – to write about having class trips to waterparks reinstated in the school. Right away it was evident that the instructions that Linda had left for the students were not going to be enforced by the substitute teacher which resulted in some opportunities for student-generated opportunities for multimodal literacy learning. For example, students took the opportunity to engage in conversations

with their neighbours about their ideas and questions, or even look up information on the internet about what they wanted to write in their letter. Places such as Great Wolf Lodge and Water World were topics of much discussion and research. Even December referred to a large map of the world to show Pringles where Water World was located. December and Pringles carried on a conversation about how far away it would be to go to Water World in Florida's Universal Studios, tracking with their finger the routes they could possibly take and naming the states they would have to go through in order to get there while guessing at how long that would actually take to do. These multimodal literacy learning opportunities that the students engaged in were not part of the planned literacy curriculum but none-the-less contributed in significant ways to enhance students' learning that were not originally part of the programmatic curriculum. Students used a variety of modes that included speech, sound effect, print, gestures, and visual images to communicate and make meaning.

Students had one last "fun" (May 21, interview) activity, as Linda called it, that the students could end the unit with to show their understanding of persuasiveness and that was through a multimodal media composition using video. The goal was to showcase an original product and design a commercial that would persuade someone to buy the product. Linda was purposeful about the kinds of things she wanted the students to get out of doing the commercial:

I wanted to see if they included all the hooks or at least some of them and if they were aware of the target audience (both for the product they chose and for the hooks they use). That's what I'm going to assess. ... I also wanted them to get that ads are a type of persuasive writing and that not

all persuasive writing is boring! We will be assessing them both as a group and by me as a teacher. And I guess I hope they had fun doing it too. Provide a little bit of creative opportunity for them. (May 2, email).

When it came time for assessing the commercial, Linda considered some of the other forms of persuasiveness that the students needed to include. The assessment itself included elements of multimodal design and gave space to indicate the hooks that were used. It also asked the questions:

1. Was the advertisement effective; that is, did it reach the target audience?
2. Were the hooks appropriate for the target audience?
3. What did you like and what did you dislike?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is totally ineffective and poorly planned and 10 is exceptionally effective and well planned, how would you rate this advertisement? Give reasons.

The students observing the commercials were able to critically examine the effectiveness of the commercial based on a number of different elements. They also gave their opinions on whether they thought each group did an effective job of using available tools to communicate their intended meaning. Even though the affordances of modes were not something that was explicitly taught by Linda, there was space provided within the classroom curriculum for the students to offer their own insights on this. The students were able to draw on their own experiences with any modes of communication as well as any information that Linda had taught them within the lessons.

The inclusion of the assignment became part of the classroom curriculum through a negotiation between Linda and the students to provide a way for the students to express their understanding of persuasiveness. Originally the final activity was to have the students design their own poster as that was part of the division plan, but, Linda said, “the kids asked if they could do a commercial after watching their favourite ones” (May 24, email). Linda gave the students some ideas to think about for their design and production aspects of their commercial so they had something to talk about within their designated groups right away. Linda suggested that the students discuss what kind of props they would like to have and where they would record their commercial “so that it is appropriate for what you are doing” (April 27, field notes). Things were suggested by Linda such as “Do you want to do it with the bookcase in the background? Does it need to be in the bathroom? Do you need to do it in the hall?” (April 27, field notes). Some of the students further negotiated video editing if they so choose. Linda gave them permission for that too saying “you guys are light-years ahead of me when it comes to that stuff” (April 27, field notes). The final thing that Linda instructed them to do was to plan on having their commercial last between fifteen and thirty seconds. Students were initially surprised by this but Linda commented that they should pay attention the next time they were watching television. “You’d be surprised when you are making this how long thirty seconds will be for this. It will be enough.” Armed with some instructions, the students eagerly went on their way to start putting together their commercial.

Throughout the designing of the commercial each group of students negotiated its roles, made decisions on props and materials to be used, decided which modes were most applicable, and figured out if the intended audience would be able to understand the

product that they would be selling because Linda gave them only three class periods to work on them. Fred later commented that “we didn’t have enough time” (May 25, interview) to get everything done the way they could have, but eventually their commercial came together. In this assignment the students were involved in all the dimensions of language arts (listening, talking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing). They also were active designers of meaning through reading, responding to, creating and interacting with multimodal texts. All of the ensuing learning opportunities came about because the students initiated them.

After the students were done putting together and performing their commercials they received letters from the principal in response to the persuasive letters that they had written. The students expressed pleasurable surprise at receiving the principal’s response. “What???” “Awesome!” “Cool!” “Never in a million years!” were some of the comments from the students. Pringles, who had been skeptical of the assignment from the beginning was also pleased by the response and said, “Oooo, she wrote a full letter!” Fred too said, “I’m excited” (May 25, field notes). However, elation soon turned to disappointment when they read the content of the letter:

Emma: Look what she wrote. ... Look at this! ... Ahgh! All that writing and this is it. ... I don’t like this. It has nothing to do with—[it doesn’t] change anything. It just says thank you for writing me this letter. (May 25, field notes).

December: Look at this! She’s saying thank you for saying Littledale is cool! I only said it ’cause I thought that you might consider letting us wear hats! (May 25, field notes).

Pringles: She's saying "no" or "maybe" to everybody and like she could have said "yes" to like four people and actually *tried* it, see how it went. If it didn't work take it away and then try another four people's ideas ... but no. ... We just wrote like all those letters and like we had to go *through* it *all* just for nothing. Just for a "maybe." I like answers either a "no" or a "yes." (May 26, interview).

Fred: (reads his letter out loud: Dear Fred: This is a good argument. I agree that exercise is important. If you can find an adult willing to organize and supervise your flag football game you are welcome to play). This is crap! All that writing—it's all she gives us. (May 25, field notes)

Emma: That's not something I wanted. I wanted a "yes" or a "no" (June 14, interview).

Pringles: I don't know—we did all that dumb writing for nothing. Horrible. Horrible, horrible. (May 25, field notes).

After the disappointment of seeing how the principal responded to their letters, Linda shared with me that the plan the whole time had been to give the students a trial for some of their requests, "just to make them feel like that made some impact" (May 21, interview). That is why in June when the students were writing their EQAO tests, Linda and the principal let the students wear hats, chew gum, and bring electronics to school to use during break times. They even managed to get a pair of hermit crabs to take care of for the rest of the year. This assuaged some of the students' initial disappointments, but to some, like December, she said, "It's kind-a like blackmail in a way. We let you do something that you're not allowed and you do something for me" (June 4, interview).

The feelings the students had were a result of all the work that they had put into writing the persuasive letters for which they felt little reward. The attempt of administration to allow some desired behaviours (e.g., wearing hats) was perceived by some of the students as only intending to make them more docile when in the EQAO testing period. In the end, neither EQAO nor the persuasive writing unit connected with the students' interests, allowed for multimodal communication, or, in many cases, allow students to demonstrate their literacy knowledge and practices.

Creative Writing

The previous literacy events were focused on writing as were the following creative writing events. I have included creative writing here to demonstrate how even an event that was focused on writing could provide multimodal literacy learning opportunities. Creative writing also showed the different influences of curricular commonplaces as they occurred in the classroom curriculum. For example, one influence to the classroom curriculum was the presence of Molly, the teacher candidate. During the six weeks she was in the classroom Molly was able to teach a few lessons on creative writing. Her emerging understanding of teaching pedagogy, lesson planning, and classroom management all had an impact on the way the classroom curriculum was configured. More examples of how curricular commonplaces influenced the literacy learning opportunities of the students are discussed below.

Molly's relative inexperience with teaching did not prevent her from creating opportunities for students to be immersed in multimodal literacy learning opportunities. Molly came up with the idea of having students write short stories and she used a recently

purchased portfolio edition of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg (1984) as a “stimulus for their story writing” (April 28, field notes) because the pictures had one line of text, expertly written to create a sense of mystery that the students could use as introductory sentences for their stories. Students were engaged in viewing and analyzing the pictures – imagining stories untold. Excited comments were made by the students such as “Creepy!”, “That is so freaky!”, and “That’s like the Titanic!” (April 28, field notes). The students’ engagements with the illustration were followed by explicit instruction about how they were to organize their ideas in a graphic organizer before writing the story. Molly pointed students’ attention to the directions on the bottom of their outline giving them the option to present their story in journal, poem, letter, or short story format so that they would have a choice of genres.

Students took the opportunity to communicate their interest topically as they discussed in their group what some of their ideas were. As the four students in the focal group conversed they asked a lot of “what do you think?” kinds of questions, seeking approval for their ideas before writing. Because they were talking through their ideas the students finished their outline at different times, which affected the amount of writing they were able to accomplish. Every student in the group chose to write in the short story format but none of them was able to finish writing their story in the time allotted to them. Fred in particular recognized the time limit to be able to complete the assignment before recess and asked, “How long does it have to be?” (April 28, field notes) but no limit was given, which made Fred start to concentrate more to get more written before recess.

I could feel the excitement that some of the students were experiencing when they picked their pictures as they talked amongst themselves, creating opportunities for the

linking of visual, oral, and written texts and their funds of knowledge. At times the students seemed to be trying to out-talk each other as the volume got louder and louder! The students participated in various aspects of visual literacy, from analyzing the picture to describing the visual elements that stimulated their thinking for their story. I excerpt some of these below as they answered the question, “What was it about the pictures that made you want to write a story about it?”

Pringles (picked *Captain Tory*): Yah, because it’s spooky, dark and dreary; it’s got that guy swinging his lantern and ... kids ...

December (picked *Mr. Linden’s Library*): I read the sentence (on the Smartboard) and I liked the sentence and I started my story, and Emma brought over the picture ... so I picked it without even knowing I picked it. But it is kind of mysteriously creepy because they’re all falling asleep with the book and there’s— it just looks so freaky.

Not all of the students were happy with the format of the assignment, however. Emma, for example, seemed to want more of a context or at least support for her writing as seen below.

Emma (picked *Mr. Linden’s Library*): It just seems so cool like just think of it, somebody warned her of the book so it has to have like something wrong with it or, that’s why, or ... she might be dead or something. I’ll make her come back to life into a magical land. Personally, I don’t like this—I don’t like that they give you a picture and a sentence too—I like to have a story board saying like, what happened, where it is and then I’ll go and then I’ll be good but I don’t like this. I

don't like how she gives a sentence and you have to make it up.

Terry: So by getting this picture is it helping you think of a little bit more 'cause you have something to look at? Is that why you got it?

Emma: Yeah ... I still don't like it though. (April 28, field notes).

This excerpt suggests that the opportunity for multimodal literacy practice demands multimodal pedagogy, that is, the support to understand how to engage with the practices.

After Molly was finished with the activity, she and Linda took some time to debrief. Molly reflected that she would do certain things differently the next time around. She was not happy with the way the students didn't generate very much writing so she thought that providing more time right at the beginning of the lesson for students to work together would provide more brainstorming for ideas to help them with their writing. Linda affirmed this as well adding that "talk is very good for writing" (April 28, field notes). Linda added that the lesson could have been taken more "piecemeal" if there had been more time to do it because as Linda had voiced elsewhere, "Narrative is so hard to write. I think that it is the hardest thing to teach and the hardest thing to learn for the students" (April 28, interview). Molly even acknowledged in our subsequent conversation that she had not purposefully considered "the multimodal aspect" (April 28, field notes) of different curricular materials such as the images from *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. The event suggests, again, the need for multimodal pedagogy, where students are given the support and time to engage in multimodal practice and learning.

EQAO Test Preparation

EQAO test preparation is an important event to include as it illustrates how various commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) converged to constrain the opportunities for multimodal literacy learning within the classroom curriculum. The closer it came to the EQAO test, the more Linda provided students with practice tests. EQAO test preparation mostly included students reading selected passages, answering questions, and engaging in oral discussions with Linda as to why questions were answered in certain ways. There was a lot of explicit instruction by Linda about the particulars of the test such as how to figure out exactly what a question was asking. I present the findings on this below.

Linda made it clear that the preparation she was doing with the students for EQAO was supposed to help them both with the content and the format of the test (June 14, field notes). Linda's concern was that the students could do well on the test as a reflection of all the teaching time she had done to prepare them for EQAO. Test strategies such as time management, making connections between background knowledge and the ideas within a reading selection, and re-reading their responses were some of the test taking practices Linda focused on. Linda provided several periods having the students answer questions and going over the responses to give tips on what makes a good answer and what to look for within the questions themselves. I asked Linda to explain why it was so important to have the students prepare for EQAO and to what degree did she think the test influenced her as she taught language arts. She replied:

For sure I know I've mentioned this a hundred million times before but EQAO ... the message that we're getting is—we gotta get those scores up. So one of the ways to do that is to have the kids prepare to take that style

of test. So that's always big in my head, always. How is this going to help them on EQAO? How is—am I giving them the skills that they are going to need, to recognize the vocabulary, the style of the test—so sadly, in a way I guess, yeah. I would say the balanced literacy document and EQAO are probably the driving forces. (April 29, interview).

Linda also explained that she had students share their answers with each other to generate discussion about which answers were best and why, so that it was “sort of a mix between getting all the necessary information from the text and a review of how to best format a response” (May 29, email). The combination of strategic test preparation and covering the overall expectations as laid out in the programmatic curriculum was seen by Linda as the best way to prepare her students for EQAO while fulfilling institutional curriculum requirements for literacy learning.

To maximize the amount of EQAO preparation time, Linda made pedagogical decisions that even more greatly focused the classroom literacy curriculum on linear print and constrained opportunities for multimodal literacy learning. Linda knew she was being pressured to teach to the test from the principal, the school, the district school board, and especially at the provincial level (EQAO) as witnessed by Linda's declaration that she was “getting it” from every angle (April 29, interview). She even went so far as to say that she felt the government was “throwing money at us” to attend workshops because they were considered a school in the middle, meaning that their EQAO scores were targeted as most likely and beneficial to the school district to improve. “The message that we are getting is that we aren't good enough so here is some money to attend workshops to help fix your problems” (April 29, interview), that is, problems of

student scores not being high enough on EQAO. To allot more time to test preparation, Linda eliminated some of the literacy events she usually included within the classroom curriculum (e.g., QuickWrite and Morning Headlines).

Linda was still skeptical that, all the extra meetings, workshops, and initiatives, would really “pay off” in the test results (June 14, field notes). She expressed frustration with the amount of time she was spending on preparing her students for EQAO; however, that did not keep her from trying her best to prepare them. Linda was determined more than ever to get her students’ test scores up. Linda was almost resigned to the fact that she needed to work even harder to get scores up because in the past she thought she had worked really hard and her class’s scores actually went down¹. So she said, “All this year I am teaching to the test. If I don’t think it’s gonna be on EQAO, I really spend very little time on it” (March 31, interview). As a result of this pressure, EQAO simply took precedence over the rest of her language arts curricula. So, as much as Linda expressed wanting to be responsive to her students’ interests and knowledge and her growing awareness of multimodality, she felt her responsibility to having the students do well on the test was more important. The curriculum was so tightly framed by EQAO test preparation within this literacy event that there were no significant opportunities for the students to practice multimodal literacy, nor could the students create their own opportunities due to the constraints put in place.

¹ The way EQAO works is that students in grade 3, 6, and 9 are tested so it is not an individual student whose score goes down from year to year; it’s a class one year compared to a class the next year.

The persuasive writing unit already discussed, was one way that Linda prepared her students for EQAO, and to illustrate another, which explicitly related to the skills necessary to take the test itself. I now turn to an event where students were asked to practice a sample test. The following is a description of the literacy event which provides a sense of the kinds of literacy learning opportunities the students were engaged in while preparing for the test.

During this event, the students practiced a sample test. They were asked to read a poem entitled *Mid-Term Break* and answer the questions following it. The students were assigned the practice test as homework if they did not complete it at school. The following school day Linda took up the structure of the poem and the answers. To do this, Linda read the whole poem to the class, stopping at points to ask the students if they understood what the author meant. She also asked the students why the test would include a special box highlighting details about the author of the poem and if that would be important for the test. Some of the student responses included:

Jim: Could be that the story was real so they included that?

Pedro: Maybe to show that he's a good author.

Billy: It shows that maybe after his brother's death that he could handle it (writing poetry).

December: Or maybe the poem was too small so if people would read it they'd read the author to find out who wrote it and they could look up more stuff by him. (May 14, field notes).

Linda affirmed each response's relevance to the test but wondered if December's would be purposeful for the test. "Don't know if it is really connected to this poem necessarily" (May 14, field notes) was Linda's reply. The structure of the progression through the next test samples was similar. The students worked on the sheet on their own, answered the questions, and Linda went over the answers with them after reading through the selection and highlighting any potential vocabulary or comprehension issues that she thought the students might have had. This was a transmission style of teaching that Linda hoped would help students be prepared for the structure and content of the test.

All of this preparation did little to alleviate the concerns that the students had for taking the test. Pringles, for instance, shared the following with me about how he was feeling about taking the test:

Pringles: I hate that test.

Terry: How come?

Pringles: It's so evil.

Terry: OK, how come you say it like that?

Pringles: Because this time I mean it ...

Terry: So does that stress you out or something? The way that you say that it sounds—

Pringles: YES! (sigh) I don't wanna go through it. Like the answer sheet is two sides. It's horrible, horrible stuff.

Terry: And you did just one little section this morning?

Pringles: Yeah. And that took us about a good hour.

Terry: Yeah, it was a little over an hour. If you think about what, just what you did this morning though, when you were doing it, did it seem as hard as what everybody thinks it is?

Pringles: Hmm hmm.

Terry: You want to explain that to me a little more why you think that way?

Pringles: Because there's a lot of right answers like right, the "explain your thinking" stuff. ... It's all like so BORING. Its "explain how you know."—I just DO! I READ the TEXT! And every time we go like blah, blah, blah it's always like, nope, nope, nope—it's wrong, very wrong.

Terry: What do you mean by "every time you do that it's wrong"?

Pringles: Like, half the time when ... it says "explain your thinking,"—

Terry: Oh, I see ...

Pringles: And we explain it—it's ALWAYS wrong.

Terry: So do you feel, because during class time when you get told that, that when you're writing this test you think the same thing's gonna happen?

Pringles: Yup. I already know. (June 3, interview).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Fred who also said that the test was hard because of "all the explaining you had to do for the questions. You couldn't just give an answer; you had to tell how you go to the answer too" (June 3 field notes). Fred said he was "nervous" because "this was a big test" (June 3, field notes). Perhaps ironically he acknowledged that Linda had been "really good about not stressing about the test" and

that she had given them some work to “prepare for the test and even how to take the test. But she doesn’t seem stressed about it at all” (June 3, field notes).

Overall the students were not thrilled with all of the practicing that it took to prepare for the test as it became a sort of routine – one they did not enjoy or readily engage in. Emma acknowledged that Linda was “pushing it on us because she wants us to do better” (May 19, interview) and December explained that she benefitted from some of the explicit instruction but that there were still questions she knew she did not do well on. This did not seem to bother her as she said “It’s not really like this will help me in life really that much” (June 4, interview). December even told me (almost conspiratorially) that she was not impressed with the amount of lines that the test itself had for writing down responses to questions. She said,

They give us five lines and they expect a level four answer and when we practiced them in class we got a whole double-sided sheet of lined paper so it’s kind of really difficult not. And so what I did was there was like half a page at the bottom so I wrote on the bottom of it, um, “This is way too hard—you need to give kids more lines, you are stressing us out way too much. Think about it people.” ... I don’t think I wrote those exact words, but I wrote something about how the work was too hard and it’s too hard to get a level four. You can go check my test. (June 4, interview).

The insights that the students gave about the EQAO test preparation showed how the students felt as if they did not have any control over how they demonstrated their

literacy knowledge. During this intensive time of test preparation the students did not try to introduce any suggestions for literacy activities as they had done with Linda earlier.

Linda also spoke about the effects that preparing for EQAO had on her planning. She wondered if all of the initiatives and workshops and class time that it took in preparing for the test were worth it. Linda's frustration at having spent so much time preparing for the often-present persuasive writing portion of EQAO were clearly evidenced when the day arrived and there was no persuasive writing on the test. Linda's rather vehement lament of, "All that work for nothing!" (June 4, field notes), attests to the fact that her time could have been better spent elsewhere, as seen by her comment, "Are we doing this really for the kids or are we doing it to impress other people?" (Mar 31, interview). The answer to this question had been suggested earlier where Linda talked about how she experienced the pressure from the school, the school board, and EQAO to get her students' EQAO test scores up.

Throughout the process of preparing for the test there were obvious tensions that existed between what Linda wanted her students to know and be able to do and what Linda needed her students to know and be able to do in order to do well on the test. The institutional curriculum, as it applied to EQAO policy, placed expectations upon Linda to teach particular literacy-related content in particular ways. The overemphasis on standardized testing such as EQAO, as the data illustrates, does little to resist traditional, linear print-based monomodal definitions of literacy.

Reader's Theatre

In contrast to EQAO test preparation, Reader's Theatre provided many opportunities for students to be engaged in multimodal literacy learning, both planned and improvised. Since Reader's Theatre involved the students in acting out a script that did not require students to memorize their lines, Linda planned for this literacy event to take place at the end of the year "because it gives the kids a break from the regular routine" and "it gives me easy planning!" (June 22, email). This last statement was said with much enthusiasm after having just finished EQAO testing. Linda did not want to do Reader's Theatre before the EQAO tests "because I want to leave that time for review" (June 22, email). Linda thought it was a good idea that she left Reader's Theatre for afterwards because "it did seem to provide some relief and relaxation" (June 22, email). These converging events – having just completed EQAO, Linda giving both herself and the students a break from preparing for EQAO – all of these influencing commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) set the stage for both planned and impromptu opportunities for multimodal literacy learning opportunities and practices during Reader's Theatre.

Even though Reader's Theatre was planned for giving students some "relaxation," expectations were still laid out. Linda mentioned that she wanted to "provide opportunity for creative interpretation" while students could simultaneously "familiarize and review the format of plays." Linda planned to evaluate their "oral communication and drama" and their "clarity of speaking, expression, ability to convey character and feelings, [and their] ability to be in character" (June 22, email) which are part of helping the audience understand the story so that she could connect programmatic curricular expectations to their performance. It is worth noting that it was only after the test that Linda was able to

focus on this range of programmatic curriculum expectations. On the first day Linda laid out the curricular and behavioural expectations, scripts were chosen, parts were determined, and students were eager to get started. Multimodal literacy learning opportunities were definitely on offer as soon as the students started practicing. There were possibilities for students to experiment with the affordances of different modes.

During Reader's Theatre, and again in contrast to the period during test preparation, Linda allowed the students many decision making opportunities. For instance, she invited them to make the decisions for how they were going to set up and what props they were going to use. Linda also mentioned that Reader's Theatre did not typically have props and she told the students, "When you read a play you can add props or costumes, but you don't have to" (June 14, field notes). Following up on her earlier comment about creative interpretation, she instructed the students to "make it expressive" and "engaging" (June 14, field notes). Even though there was no follow-up on what that meant or what it could look like, the students took this comment to mean that they had to put some effort into practicing as they were going to get a grade for it as well. They were being active designers of meaning to be sure! Unfortunately, despite the new opportunities created by this literacy event, assessment constrained how literacy was accounted for as is described shortly.

Opportunities to communicate multimodally were afforded by the teacher, students, the subject matter, and the setting in which it took place. For example, as the students—specifically a group of six boys—divided their parts to their script (*The Boy Who Wanted the Willies*), the group started going through their script and making comments about how they should interpret certain parts. The main character, Hans, was

never scared of anything and he goes on a quest to find the willies. He eventually meets the king as is evidenced in the script:

Narrator 1: At last he came to the King's castle and stood before the king.

Hans: Your Majesty, can *you* give me the willies?

King: Of course I can. I'm the King!

Narrator 4: The King waved his royal scepter.

King: (*waving his scepter then pointing it at HANS*) I command you to have ... the willies!

The character of Hans was played by Tom and he scanned the room for something that would serve as a royal scepter and he found a pair of cooking tongs on Linda's desk, which he picked up to use. He pronounced in a king-like voice, "This is my royal scepter!" (June 15, field notes). The King, at first played by Eddie, quickly fashioned a crown from orange construction paper by folding into a boat. Plus, as he mentioned, "this is the only hat I know how to make from construction paper" (June 15, field notes). One of Fred's characters was the part of a vampire so he cut himself some rather large white paper fangs that he taped to his upper lip. "Look" he stated, "I'm a vampire on steroids—look how big they are!" (June 15, field notes). The students were being creative in their interpretation of the play and went out of their way to look for materials that provided the best possible means of communication for the play.

In another example of how the students were engaged in multimodal literacy learning, the character of Hans tried to figure out how he was going to represent a spot in the script where he had to dance with a group of skeletons. In the script the skeleton was

trying to scare Hans, but he was not scared and instead danced with a skeleton, (played by Jim) going faster and faster until as the script indicates, “Hans gave a yank and—Pop!—the two skeletons’ arms came right off” (June 15, field notes). The boys talked about how they could represent this part of the play and eventually they figured out that they could fill Jim’s long sleeve shirt with pencil crayons in the sleeves so that when the section came when his arms popped off the pencil crayons would come clattering out as Jim fell to the floor. This was very effective and even the sound the pencil crayons made emulated the sound of bones falling to the floor.

The boys used their imagination and creativity when it came to finding objects around the classroom that could be used to represent objects and noises that needed to be made in the play as well. They also used their voices to great effect. The character of Hans spoke in a higher-pitched voice to make himself sound like the boy in the play, while other boys used their voices to mimic what they perceived to be the sounds of their character. Some of the boys had to play two characters and so they made the distinction between the characters in the pitch of their voices, having the werewolf speak lower, and having the King speak in a deep voice that sounded like he had an accent—“a Transylvanian accent” (June 15, field notes) said Eddie.

As I watched the boys practice and make decisions on what classroom objects they chose to represent props in their play, I was struck by their sense of creativity and by their understanding of the affordances of certain modes as ways to communicate in particular ways that suited their characters. I noted in my field notes:

Fred and Tom are REALLY getting into these parts—speaking in different voices, facial expressions, gesturing. They are having fun with this and because all the groups are doing their own thing, the class is noisy, so they feel like they have to be noisy too. They are being very loud and expressive with their voices, doing pitch changes and accents and everything. Impressive. (June 14, field notes).

The group's creativity waned the closer they got to their performance as they got tired of rehearsing because they did not know what else to do to make their script better. Parts were switched around so that Jim became the vampire while Fred took on the part of the King to lighten the load on Eddie. They collectively agreed that more practice time would not be beneficial and so they were glad to perform their play on the fifth day. The performance itself was organized with a flurry of activity, as students selected props from around the room that were previously unavailable. A table was needed, the teacher's chair from the front of the classroom served as the throne, a wig was acquired for the character of Hans' little sister, and Jim slicked his hair back to look more like a vampire. The food tongs had since been brought home by Linda so the blackboard pointer now served as the royal scepter. Math manipulatives in the form of fake money were borrowed to represent the gold that Hans found when he went looking for the castle treasure. This was hidden in the "dirt," which ended up being one of the paint-splattered pieces of wood that served as desk covers during art time, but that were "dirty" enough to be used as "dirt" for the purpose of the play. They found a real deck of cards to play at their table, and when everyone was in their positions, they performed their play.

During their production Fred played the part of the king well as he sat up straight on his throne, looking at the audience as well as his cast-mates as he talked in his deep voice. He tried to keep the Transylvanian accent that Eddie had originally made up, to great effect. He definitely got into character, as did many of his classmates. Although not nearly as boisterous as during practice, most of the time the boys' voices projected well, but this was one area where Linda commented that they could have improved on. As she put it, they were "difficult to understand [but] only sometimes" (June 22, artifact).

Being limited during their practice time to the exact movements that were needed as the play unfolded, the group improvised as they performed when things did not go exactly as they had talked about. With the exception of Fred, most of the other cast members forgot that they were still performing to an audience and read from their scripts and looked only at their cast-mates who sometimes had their backs to the audience. At another time the werewolf did not growl and howl as during practice and instead he meowed—possibly to be funny, or, as an indication that he did not really want to make the other sounds in front of the whole class. And sometimes one of the narrators forgot to switch his voice between characters so that it was harder to tell where one character ended and the other one began.

Despite these little performance hiccups, the overall effect was still enjoyable to Linda as indicated by her comments about the variety of voice and facial expressions that the characters did, especially Jim who played the part of the main character, Hans. As she noted in her assessment notes, "I am really enjoying this." Linda indicated that the way the students used their movements, gestures, voice expression, speech, sound effects, and props contributed to a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. It was a great

contrast to the more usual concentration on linear print-literacy when Linda acknowledged these multimodal literacy learning opportunities within Reader's Theatre. Although there was no explicit teaching about the affordances of certain modes, students were given the freedom to experiment and their results were considered as part of the final evaluation so that the programmatic curriculum expectations would be met.

Conclusion

The literacy events that structured the classroom literacy curriculum illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of the kinds of multimodal literacy opportunities that were part of this grade six classroom. For Linda, both opportunities and constraints for multimodal literacy pedagogy were a result of interpreting the programmatic curriculum while keeping local and provincial policy initiatives, time constraints, and her own knowledge of literacy practices and pedagogies in mind. For the students, opportunities and constraints that were present for multimodal literacy learning also depended on how Linda interpreted the programmatic curriculum. The contradictions between what multimodal literacy curricula promote as literacy (that is, communication in all modes) and the provincial standardized tests, which focus solely on linear reading and writing, figure prominently in the data from this grade six classroom and will be the subject of further discussion in chapter five. In chapter five I interpret the data to give further insight into the practice of multimodal literacy and the effects that the institutional and programmatic curriculum, time constraints, transmission-style pedagogy, and student-led opportunities had on the classroom curriculum.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Implications

In this chapter I discuss the study findings in relation to the main study questions: *What if any multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curriculum afford? How do students engage in these learning opportunities? And, What enables and constrains these learning opportunities?* Using a multimodal literacy framework and Doyle (1992) and Deng's (2009) conceptualization of curriculum, the study focused on what happened within the classroom curriculum. The study goals are twofold: to provide insights into the place of multimodal literacy learning opportunities in the workings of a classroom curriculum of an age group that is under-represented in the research literature on multimodal literacy and to compare the findings to the existing research literature about multimodal literacy to add to this important and growing body of work. Specifically, the research confirms, extends, and *uniquely illustrates from a Canadian and classroom-based perspective*, previous findings that classrooms are print-centric (e.g., Costello, 2012; Dunn, 2001; Mavers, 2003; Vander Zanden, 2011), that teachers experience pressures to implement institutional and programmatic curricula (e.g., Benson, 2008; Costello, 2012; Jewitt, 2005; Klinger, Maggi & D'Angiulli, 2011; Peterson, McClay & Main, 2010; Walsh, 2010), that multimodal literacy practices can be used by students as a springboard for more traditional reading and writing practices (e.g., Ajayi, 2009; Bearne, 2003; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Kress, 2009; van Leeuwen, 1998), and how, when students do participate in multimodal literacies, they are not acknowledged by the teacher as rich literacy learning (e.g., Benson, 2008; Jewitt, 2007; Stein, 2008). The study also *documents and analyzes the washback effects* (Turner,

2009) *on classroom literacy curriculum of Ontario high-stakes testing*. The results of this research have implications for literacy curriculum and pedagogy. I relate these within the context of the following discussion of each of the study research questions. Also within this discussion I address how the findings relate to the research literature. I end the chapter with a statement regarding future directions for the research.

Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities: Created and Made

To respond to the first two research questions, *What if any multimodal literacy learning opportunities does a grade six classroom curricula afford?* and *How do students engage in these multimodal literacy learning opportunities?* I looked at the grade six classroom curricula (Deng, 2009; Doyle, 1992) during language arts time. Throughout the four months that I was in the classroom it was apparent that print and overt teacher-led instruction of print literacies, particularly in preparing for EQAO, dominated. There were opportunities to engage with multimodal literacy activities in the classroom, yet there was no enactment of multimodal pedagogies to accompany these events. Highlighting the potential for student agency and peer-led learning opportunities, the data reveal that multimodal literacy learning opportunities were predominantly created by the students themselves.

The classroom literacy curriculum sometimes limited students' opportunities to engage in multimodal literacy learning though at times Linda did purposefully provide students with these opportunities. The classroom literacy curriculum was characterized by teacher-led overt instruction with a distinct emphasis on print, and the classroom curriculum was scant on multimodal pedagogies. Generally, pedagogies emphasized a

single mode which tended to be print-centric. This was clearly evident during QuickWrite and Persuasive Writing. Here the students were asked to read, write, and sometimes talk. The great time allotted to these literacy events itself suggests that multimodal literacy was not valued as much as print and verbo-centric literacy learning. For example, as referred to in chapter four, students were given opportunities to write about an animal that was hatching out of an egg in their *What Am I?* clues for QuickWrite. Throughout this literacy event the primary focus was on writing. Even when students were sharing their ideas of persuasiveness during the Persuasive Writing unit as previously described in the data, Linda's comment of, "Okay, we digress" (March 22, transcript) indicates that students' talking about the writing was seen by the teacher as taking over valuable time and needed to be curtailed. These literacy events might have been configured through multimodal pedagogy where print was seen as part of a multimodal literacy ensemble.

The research literature confirms the study findings that speak to the centrality of print and the reluctance to enact pedagogies that engendered print acquisition in relation to other modes such as the examples found in Stein's (2008) research with Lungile, and in Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, and Enriquez's (2008) research with kindergarten children. The multimodal literacy learning opportunities in these research examples show how print-centric practices were most valued and separated from other modes, either because the focus of assessment was print-centric so as to align with institutional and programmatic curriculum requirements, or, because multimodal literacy practices were unacknowledged. In these research examples as well as in the research with the

grade six participants, students missed out on valuable learning opportunities because of a limited print-centric focus.

Overt instruction in print literacy was the prevailing pedagogical practice of choice after Linda had interpreted the institutional and programmatic curriculum requirements, and this practice became even more ubiquitous as the class got closer to EQAO. For instance, Linda strategically placed the persuasive writing unit just before EQAO so that she could prepare her students for what she thought would be on the test. The classroom curriculum, during this unit, was directed towards providing learning opportunities in the genre of persuasiveness, persuasive letter writing, and what the EQAO test would be asking for with regard to persuasive writing.

At other times during the classroom curriculum Linda did invite students to engage with multiple modes and media, yet there was no explicit multimodal pedagogy being enacted. The data suggest that even when students were invited to engage in literacies that were not print-centric, such as when they students were asked to analyze the design elements of commercials on YouTube so that they might understand different forms of persuasiveness, specific pedagogies to teach the students about the modes were not enacted. In events such as these, students were invited to engage with multimodal literacy learning on their own with no overt multimodal instruction. Multimodal literacy practices were also used predominantly as a springboard for more print-centric literacy learning. Such times included when students were able to visually represent what was hatching out of their egg for QuickWrite, when students engaged in Reader's Theatre, when Molly used the pictures from *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (Chris Van Allsburg, 1984) as a "stimulus for their story writing" (April 28, field notes), or, when they

designed their own persuasive commercial and put together a video. The effect of this was that multimodal literacy learning was relegated to the status of being a springboard or a “hook” (Bailey, 2012, p. 48) to engage the students while the “real work” (p. 48) of more linguistically based literacy learning stayed central in Linda’s instruction.

The literature review in chapter two gestures towards educators who have similarly used multimodal literacy as a stepping stone to get to the “serious” (van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 275) task of writing, which, in some cases did help students improve their writing, and in others, provided students other ways to communicate, even if they were not acknowledged (Cappello & Hollingsworth, 2008; Daiute, 1992; Kendrick & McKay, 2002). Some researchers have even described the way that these multimodal literacy learning opportunities occurred as “an afterthought, or, perhaps, as a kind of reward for the more arduous and ‘serious’ task of answering questions in writing” (van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 274 -275). The result of this heavy print-centric engagement with persuasive writing was that the students resisted this dominant engagement with print literacy.

Signaling the importance of peer-led learning opportunities, some of the richer moments for multimodal literacy learning came about through the students’ involvement in the creation of classroom curricula. The complex interactions of what was being taught, combined with the students’ interests, the subject matter and the setting where the learning occurred resulted in some creative, if not sometimes subversive, multimodal literacy learning opportunities.

There were three main ways that the students introduced multimodal literacy into the classroom. The first is when they interpreted Linda's instructions to include multiple modes of literacy. An example of this, which is described in chapter four, is when the students, supervised by a substitute teacher, created opportunities to research information on the internet for their letter on convincing the principal to reinstate class trips to waterparks. In addition, December and Pringles used a world map as a visual to figure out the distance from Ontario to Florida to see if it was feasible as a class trip to Water World. These opportunities that students created for multimodal literacy learning represent moments in the classroom curriculum where spaces opened up within the configuration of commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) so that multimodal literacy could be enacted. Second, students also initiated multimodal literacy learning opportunities for themselves as in the time December asked her classmates for help in navigating Microsoft Word and images from a Google search to figure out how to create a watermark. Because Linda was busy helping other students and had not given explicit instruction on how to design and implement a watermark, December pooled her resources to figure it out for herself. Third, there were instances where students negotiated the curriculum with Linda in order to have some additional modes from which to choose when creating an assignment. Consider for instance, when Pringles persuaded Linda to allow students to draw a picture representing what would have hatched out of their egg instead of writing about it during QuickWrite.

As a result of the students interpreting, initiating, and negotiating the classroom literacy curriculum, they were able to increase their multimodal literacy learning opportunities. The findings suggest that the students recognized and reacted to the

emphasis on print literacy in the classroom literacy curriculum. This recognition sometimes prompted them to voice their opinions about the literacy work that they were expected to do and they negotiated the curriculum to create more opportunities to express themselves using multiple modes. For instance, Emma said (of her teacher), “I think she took it too far with the persuasive writing” (May 19, interview). On another occasion Emma said, “She made us do a lot of them (persuasive letters). ... But you don’t need to like [keep] saying, Okay, do one now, and again, and again. She could have spent like more time focusing on another subject or like something else” (June 14, interview).

These comments are aligned with students who are represented in the research literature who also said that they felt trapped by their school’s emphasis on print literacy, sometimes to the point where they felt as if they were leading double lives (Williams, 2005), that is – one life in school that emphasizes print literacy and the other life out-of-school where they communicate in multiple modes. Other research illuminates the extent that students will go to have their multimodal literacy interests recognized or, at the very least, practiced within the classroom curriculum (e.g., Dyson, 1999; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Marsh, 2006; Pahl, 2006). This study adds to this literature by tracing how students might enter the classroom literacy curriculum production to create multimodal literacy learning opportunities that would not otherwise be there.

Supports and Tensions: Enabling and Interrupting Multimodal Learning Opportunities in the Classroom Curriculum

In terms of the third research question, *What enables and constrains these learning opportunities?*, the study found, as just discussed, that multimodal literacy learning opportunities were enabled when the students’ knowledge and interests took

primacy and the narrowed emphasis on print literacy within the institutional curriculum was the combined effects of Linda's emerging understanding of multimodal literacy and pedagogy as well as the tensions created by the institutional curriculum's emphasis on assessment, report cards, workshop attendance, and other board-level initiatives aimed to increase students' marks such as school-wide rubrics for writing. Tensions were also evident in the way Linda engaged with the programmatic curriculum with its emphasis on standardized outcomes.

Emerging Multimodal Pedagogical Knowledge

Linda had not been supported through her school district, the Ministry, or any other part of the organization to develop multimodal pedagogical knowledge. She expressed a self-professed emerging multimodal literacy pedagogical knowledge, though her awareness was raised by participating in the research. As Linda reflected later about her persuasive writing unit, she admitted that she “put too much emphasis on writing in a very limited format” (June 21, email). She went further to say, “Although improving writing and writing scores in EQAO was our school goal, I think it could be better achieved by exposing the students to a greater variety of print and reading materials” (June 21, email). Because Linda was trying to serve many masters, it was difficult for her to juggle one more thing that she needed to do, as much as she acknowledged its value. One might also question how much of an effect a good understanding of multimodal pedagogy might have had on changing the classroom curriculum given the strength of the print focus through the institutional curriculum in particular through its demand for print-centric standardized assessment.

The Institutional Curriculum's Emphasis on Assessment

It is ironic that at a time when research and practice are starting to show the benefits of multimodal literacy learning there is mounting “pressure” by policy makers “to standardize curriculum” (Vander Zanden, 2011, p. v.) and narrow the definition of literacy (Costello, 2012; Jewitt, 2003; 2005; Kress, 2001; Main, 2011; Quigley, 2011; Unsworth & Chan, 2009; Vander Zanden, 2011). This was certainly evident in the study. The way that the institutional literacy curriculum was interpreted by Linda suggests this narrowing view of literacy which ultimately constrained students’ engagement with multimodal literacy. Linda expressed this tension through comments that she made and the kinds of literacy practices that she selected to be part of her literacy instruction.

Linda constantly negotiated what needed to be taught from the programmatic curriculum while still trying to honour student contributions and balancing the institutional curriculum requirements in the form of preparing for standardized assessments. In the decisions that she had to make, the one area that she said was “mandated” (March 3, interview) was the *Language* (2006) curriculum document from the OME and therefore needed to be followed. On several occasions she expressed how she felt both constrained and free to interpret this curriculum document. She mentioned that it was both very skill-focused while simultaneously too broad in its overall expectations. As she remarked, “The hard thing is it’s really hard to separate the two [overall/specific curricular expectations] because the curriculum is sort of general, the expectations are in general terms and so *really* you could almost tie anything into that” (March 3, interview). To complicate things, Linda also talked about how she had to align

her teaching with policies from the Ministry which meant she was constantly thinking of picking curricular materials and resources that “fit the curriculum” (March 3, interview).

The tensions that existed between the institutional curriculum’s focus on standardized assessment and the Ontario *Language* (2006) programmatic curriculum compelled Linda to enact certain literacy pedagogies that she thought would satisfy both requirements. Similar contradictory conceptions by other teacher practitioners for what counts as literacy for assessment purposes is similarly noted in the research literature (Bearne, 2003; Jewitt, 2003; Lotherington & Ronda, 2012; Unsworth & Chan, 2009). For example, the data are replete with examples of the classroom curriculum being fueled by Linda trying to prepare students for EQAO. Her reasoning for placing the persuasive writing unit before EQAO was so that her instructional time would have the greatest impact on helping her students succeed with understanding how to write a persuasive letter – a literacy practice that had a very strong possibility of being included in the test. As EQAO neared, the classroom curriculum was particularly affected by washback, referring to “the phenomenon of the influence of tests on classroom activity” (Turner, 2009, p. 104). Specific to the context of Linda’s grade six class, the curriculum that Linda taught was planned as a backwards approach, thus facilitating a “negative washback” (p. 105) effect. As Linda prepared to teach to the test she selected materials to fit the curriculum, and as Table 1 indicated in chapter 4, there were parts of the language arts curriculum that were simply abandoned in favour of preparing for EQAO. Linda placed particular emphasis on the persuasive writing unit, with all its print-centric focus which aligned with literacy practices in kind on EQAO because she was so sure it would be on the test, much to the students’ dismay which was seen in declarations such

as that made by Emma: “We’re in prison!” (April 7, field notes). Linda also focused on preparing the students for how to take the EQAO assessment by helping students understand what the test was asking for and by doing several sample tests and going over them. Despite all the work Linda (and the students) put into preparing for the assessment, the day Linda found out there was no persuasive writing on the test led her to bemoan, “All that work for nothing!” (June 4, field notes). Clearly she was disappointed over how much time she had spent on preparing her students for the possibility of persuasive writing on the assessment. In the end, her diligence in preparing the students for something she was convinced would be on EQAO was thwarted by the very test she had prepared her students for.

As seen from these tensions the driving force behind Linda’s interpretation and enactment of the programmatic curriculum was standardized assessments. Reflecting an earlier comment made by Linda in chapter four – “All this year I am teaching to the test. If I don’t think it’s gonna be on EQAO, I really spend very little time on it” (March 31, interview) – there were multimodal literacy learning opportunities that were lost, constrained, or simply abandoned. Linda realized this problem when she said, “Are we doing this really for the kids or are we doing it to impress other people?” (Mar 31, interview). Similar sentiments are found in the research literature where Quigley (2011) states,

a high-stakes test asserts quite a bit of authority over defining what are the essential literacy skills youth require [and] it is troubling that students are being evaluated through the means of a standardized test which itself restricts how literacies can be conceptualized. (p. 167)

The emphasis on standardized assessments did squander Linda's and the students' time and efforts, placed serious restrictions on multimodal literacy learning opportunities and hence students' communication options and one might ask, for what?

Standardized Report Cards

Coterminous with the idea that the institutional curriculum's emphasis on standardized assessment practices constrains multimodal literacy learning are other curricular expectations that Linda needed to accomplish that did not align with multimodal literacy learning. For one, Linda had a standardized report card to fill out that had to be done a certain way and took up a lot of time. Linda explained that everything came down to whether the students had achieved the standardized expectations. Boxing students' achievements in this way frustrated Linda because, as she said, "I just want to be blunt and honest, but you can't because we're supposed to be reporting on [whether they] have achieved the...expectations" (March 31, interview). This limited the kinds of literacy learning events that Linda could provide for her students and reduced her own opportunities to enact her professional decision-making in response to her students' interests and funds of knowledge.

Workshops and Rubrics

Attending workshops and implementing rubrics also created tensions within the classroom curriculum because, as above, these were assessment-driven practices that constrained multimodal literacy learning. With the emphasis on attending workshops to learn how to improve students' EQAO scores, Linda's earlier comment in chapter four about "getting it" from every angle (April 29, interview) frustrated her. She expressed

her frustration as she complained that no matter what she seemed to do it wasn't getting her the results that she knew the administration wanted. She said "The message that we are getting is that we aren't good enough so here is some money to attend workshops to help fix your problems" (April 29, interview).

In addition to the workshops, Linda was also involved in implementing rubrics as part of a school-wide initiative to improve writing scores as suggested by The Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2013). She said the administration was "pushing" (March 3, interview) teachers to model writing strategies, which in itself was a good thing according to Linda, but the planning and the junior division meetings took up a lot of instructional time. This further constrained the kinds of literacy learning opportunities that would engage students' multimodal literacy learning because there simply was not enough time to get everything done in the course of a day according to Linda. The phrase "bump it up" (March 31, interview) became almost a mantra within the literacy curriculum which affected the way Linda scaffolded students' persuasive writing letters as she modeled over and over again the proper form and content to align with the EQAO standardized testing. One of the most frustrating things that Linda experienced with regard to implementing rubrics came near the end of the year when she was informed that the Education Officer was coming to the school on June 23rd and the teachers had to provide evidence of improved literacy learning by posting sample rubrics in their classroom that showed what kind of growth the students achieved over the course of the year. "Are you kidding?" (June 7, field notes) was Linda's exasperated reply which expressed how she felt further constrained in what she was able to do in language arts right up to the end of the school year.

The combined effects of EQAO, standardized report cards, and professional development and administrative imperatives all directed towards improved EQAO scores were directed towards a very narrow definition of literacy, literacy pedagogy, and hence literacy learning opportunities and options for the students.

The Fragmented Nature of the Programmatic Curriculum

Even a programmatic curriculum which contained more multimodally-oriented content, mediate the focus on print, and part of this could be because of the fragmented nature of the document itself. Within Linda's planning for how to teach the programmatic curriculum, the expectations of each strand of the *Language* (2006) document were always at the forefront. There were times, due to its inherent outcomes-based standards, that Linda thought about how her lesson could be assessed according to what still needed to be given a grade. This was evidenced on a couple of occasions. Once, during Reader's Theatre, Linda remarked that she still needed a Media Literacy grade, so she was going to assess the students' performance to fill that expectation. In addition, she needed to grade for their oral communication skills and was looking for "clarity of speaking, expression, ability to convey character and feelings, [and the] ability to be in character" (June 21 email communication). Thus, Linda kept two separate strands of the *Language* (2006) document at hand for grading purposes. This constrained the possibilities for students to have their performances assessed according to the modes and media that they engaged with; instead, the students were assessed only according to the standards that were found in the programmatic curriculum. This fragmentation of the programmatic curriculum broke up the different modes of communication (oral, reading, writing, and media literacy) so that their effectiveness as holistic literacy learning was

diminished greatly. A major problem with the programmatic curriculum was that it did not acknowledge and therefore promote, holistic, connected literacy learning which are foundational to multimodal literacy. Add to this the strength of EQAO and the institutional curriculum, and decontextualized, autonomous notions of print literacy predominate.

The research literature has many examples of the difficulties teachers experience when attempting to implement multimodal literacy pedagogy in their classrooms. For example, teachers in the research literature expressed the same desire as Linda of wanting to honour the students and their interests but feeling constrained by programmatic curriculum requirements (Benson, 2008; Costello, 2012; Jewitt, 2005; Walsh, 2010) which translated into print-centric pedagogy as the most valued way to make meaning (Dunn, 2001; Mavers, 2003; Millard & Marsh, 2001).

In the literature teachers have also been documented as being concerned that instructional decisions and “situated pedagogical approaches” (Jewitt, 2008b, p. 261) are becoming less about professional judgment and more about fulfilling institutional and programmatic requirements (Costello, 2012; Main, 2011; Vander Zanden, 2011). Costello (2012) mentioned that various institutional and programmatic curricular requirements at play in his school resulted in constraints in his teaching. He said that his teaching ended up being “more connected to materials and resources and less connected to my students. ... I was operating under the premise that my practices were being watched by my school administration ... out of fear that my teaching would be questioned” (p. 52). Similar sentiments were expressed by Linda who asserted, “I want my kids to feel ... free to be who they are and not who the teacher or the principal or the

board of education determines they should be” (August, 2010, interview). These examples confirm the tensions that teachers feel when faced with competing influences of the institutional and programmatic curriculum requirements and honouring students’ multimodal literacy learning opportunities.

Elsewhere in the research literature this focus on standardized literacy assessment was seen as a standard practice that placed educators in the role of “efficiency expert” (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 1998, p. 410) rather than as a professional who, in multimodal pedagogy, negotiates meaning from the curriculum, the context, and the students to generate learning opportunities (Kress, 2001). The students themselves in these studies were perceived to have a role – to “perform” (Benson, 2008, p. 634) and master skills that were essential for literacy learning (Benson, 2008; Britzman, 1989; Del Vecchio, 2009; Perry, 2006; Stein, 2008). Del Vecchio (2009), who worked in a pullout support class, even noticed a greater number of referrals to her class the closer it came to standardized test-taking time. EQAO was an ever-present thought for Linda, and, as other research confirms, this influenced the way that teachers teach and students learn (Klinger, Maggi & D’Angiulli, 2011; Peterson, McClay & Main, 2010; Walsh, 2010; Wien & Dudley-Marling, 1998) – complete with the possibilities and constraints that multimodal literacy pedagogy entails within this assessment-driven environment. This study says that these tensions are present even in Ontario which has been heralded as an example of educational success (Luke, 2011), and it provides detailed accounts of the effect of these tensions in the actualities of students’ and teacher’s classroom curriculum.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings related to the first two questions suggest most obviously that more explicit multimodal pedagogy might have enhanced students' multimodal literacy learning opportunities. When the classroom curriculum provided opportunities for students to work with various modes and media it offered "more options for conveying messages" (Rowse, 2013a, p. 6). Expanding communication options in this way has been found to be beneficial for all students (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo & Vacca, 2004). For example, the above research literature shows that students who were engaged in reading texts that included print from various sources that included online media were taught about the affordances of modes and media. So when students were unsure of how to put a watermark on their page as seen in the research with the *What Am I?* egg clues, teachers could capitalize on this teachable moment. For example they can teach students not only the literacy practices that are involved in navigating the specific tools, but also to engage in conversation about how a watermark can enhance the opportunity for communication.

Another implication for practice is for educators (and by extension the students) to have opportunity to acquire and practice a metalanguage and more in-depth multimodal literacy knowledge. The more students and teachers understand the benefits of multimodal literacy knowledge and skill, the more they can expand "the potential of what students can say and how they can say it" (Albers, 2007, p. 6). This increases the likelihood that teachers will not miss opportunities to advance student learning if they fail to recognize the potentials of modes and media (Shanahan, 2013). At the end of the year

Linda was already recognizing the importance of understanding the various forms of communication as she reflected:

I think that I feel more justified in using various forms of communication and as seeing them as acceptable to student learning. It will be challenging to incorporate on a regular basis a variety of modes of communication. I would really like for it to come more naturally and flow more easily for me – to not be so planned and contrived, to just come naturally, but I suppose that will happen with practice! (June 21, email).

Another consideration that educators must take note of is that in developing a metalanguage and providing more resources for communication, literacy learning does not become an exercise of decontextualized skills. This would only replicate an autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1984) which is exactly what multimodal literacy pedagogy is trying to avoid. There is a danger when attempting to teach within a multimodal literacy framework without some understanding of what multimodal pedagogy entails because these literacy practices are sometimes reduced to “add-ons” (Ball, 2010, p. 117) or “embellishments” (Main, 2011). At worst it can be seen as just a “dropping” (Bailey, 2012, p. 48) of multimodal activities into lessons because the value of it is seen as temporary before the “real work” (p. 48) of language arts. While importing multimodal activities into language arts lessons does not reflect the heart of multimodal pedagogy, it is also a mistake to think that opportunities for multimodal literacy learning are just a series of methods that can be standardized (Benson, 2008; Luke, 2008). This suggests a new-wine-in-old-skins mentality where multimodal literacy is placed within an old literacy structure that does not acknowledge the choice of modes

and media from which to make meaning. Instead, researchers such as Dyson (2008) suggest that teachers make the possibilities and constraints of multimodal literacy learning part of their pedagogy so that they can learn *with* their students as Walsh (2007) did with his students.

Multimodal pedagogy can take diverse forms, but the study and the research literature have some suggestions for its enactment. First, classroom curricula must be responsive to students. Repeatedly, students asked in various implicit and explicit ways to engage in multimodal literacy and to have more choice in the modes they used. Interpreting students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) relative to multimodal literacy practices and paying attentions to their interests might have enhanced student engagement and literacy learning. Recall, for example, as I detailed in chapter four what Linda gained when she listened to Pringles. Pringles had audibly expressed his displeasure at both the content and the format of the QuickWrite assignment that called for creating clues for people to guess what animal was hatching out of their imaginary egg. Linda's insistence on the content and form of the QuickWrite assignment contradicted her teaching philosophy of trying to be student centered and capitalizing on their interests and strengths (June 21, email) which ultimately limited the students' engagement with multimodal literacy in this instance. Despite Linda's rationalization of this practice as one where she didn't want narrative writing (March 8, email), she obviously thought about this lesson. Linda came back to this lesson a couple of days later and let the students know that she had been thinking about Pringles's comments. As a result, she let the students have another opportunity to tell what they *would* have picked to hatch out of their egg – "in picture form" (March 9, field notes) as

Linda stated. As a result, students were able to engage in pictorial representations of their animal. They shared their explanations and their pictures to the rest of the class and there were lots of students willing to share – more during this time than any other time I had ever seen during QuickWrite. Also, there may be other ways for teachers to develop literacy pedagogies that promote multimodal literacy learning opportunities and help students develop a rich “semiotic toolkit” (Siegel, 2006, p. 73).

Further, educators might consider how to value multimodal literacy and not see it as just a springboard into what some teachers still consider to be “real work” (Bailey, 2012, p. 48) that is, print. Multimodal literacy needs to be an integral part of the literacy curriculum (Elliot-Johns, 2011); otherwise students will seek other ways of expressing their interests multimodally (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003), as also seen in the findings. Thus, it stands to reason that there needs to be a further rethinking of what counts as literacy within classroom curricula (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013; Cummins, 2006; Dyson, 2001; Elliott-Johns, 2011; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Millard, 2006, Walsh, 2011).

Moreover, Jewitt & Kress (2003) discuss pedagogical decisions that need to be made to better understand teaching and learning within the multimodal milieu of the classroom curriculum. To summarize, the most important aspect of engaging students in multimodal communication is to allow the students to express their interests – what do they want to communicate at a particular moment in time. Second, in order to do this, students must have access to the tools necessary to practice a range of modes and media. Third, the students need opportunities to develop facility with modes and media including understanding the affordances and materiality of each; students might be supported to

consider the intended audience and its expectations within their literacies. Jewitt and Kress (2003), Shanahan (2013), and Walsh (2011) talk about how students can make meaning that is relevant to their experiences while at the same time trying to be sensitive to the audience and their perceptions of how the intended meaning may be received. Because each audience member draws on different experiences and knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) the intended meaning may vary slightly from student to student. This process of figuring out both their “inner resource” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 13) and “representation to the outer world” (p. 13) is learning. Learning is active, never passive (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). It is socially formed (Kress, 1997; Tierney, Bond & Bresler, 2006; Wohlwend, 2009) and carries “social purposes” (Wohlwend, 2009, p. 124) that help to create meaning.

Thus, the focus is on the students’ interest – not just what the institutional and programmatic curricula want the students to learn – and the means to carry out an exploration of those interests through various multimodal forms. This shift in thinking is important as it allows teachers to ask themselves what insights he or she can gain about the student’s interests. The teacher is not the only person with knowledge; in fact Rowsell (2013a) says that making meaning is “not a solitary act, and it relies integrally on collaboration, participatory structures, and communities of practice” (p. 12). Multimodal literacy pedagogy thus is less about having all of the answers and knowledge to impart to the students than it is about utilizing students’ funds of knowledge, taking their interests into consideration, and working with what is known about the affordances of modes and media to learn about existing ways to communicate and expand communication options at the same time.

No sustainable classroom curricula can create ample multimodal literacy learning opportunities unless it is enabled by programmatic and institutional curricula. As evidenced in the findings related to the third question in particular, the opportunities for multimodal literacy learning were influenced by various curricular commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) such that there were moments where the convergence of commonplaces created opportunities for students to be engaged with multimodal literacy learning. Most of the time, however, there were many competing influences that Linda had to consider which resulted in tensions for implementing the programmatic curriculum, thus interrupting multimodal literacy learning. Linda's self-reflective comment about her teaching as sometimes: "... trial and error, and a lot for the sole purpose of survival!" (June 21, email) speaks to these tensions about honouring her students while still being accountable to the institutional curriculum (i.e., EQAO). Indeed, at times it seems like a teacher's job is more like that of an artist (Eisner, 2002) who crafts his or her work with exceptional skill while trying to belie the "cult of efficiency" (Stein, 2001, p. 1) that threatens to consume teachers.

The study findings demand an increased examination into the stultifying effects of the programmatic and institutional curricula, and I here offer the following implications of the findings as they relate to these curricula.

The first concerns the need to redress the fragmented nature of the programmatic curriculum and its emphasis on a decontextualization of skills (Heydon, 2012) so that it is more holistic in its approach to literacy and can promote multimodal literacy learning and its accompanying benefits including the expansion of students' communication options. What I am not suggesting is replacing formative writing skills. Instead, I am suggesting

that the individual strands in the current Ontario *Language* (2006) document can be seen as part of a larger ensemble of modes from which meaning can be made (Albers, 2006; Del Vecchio, 2009; Stein, 2008; Walsh, 2010). An outcomes-based programmatic curriculum also needs to be rethought as the outcomes statements necessarily fragment literacy practices into assessable skills and are therefore not seen as holistic learning. More robust learning opportunity statements and goals might provide richer support for complex and situated multimodal literacies that honour these holistic learning opportunities that are the foundation of multimodal literacy learning.

A second consideration is how the institutional curriculum's emphasis on standardized assessment practices ultimately constrains multimodal literacy learning opportunities. The findings suggest that what occurred within the classroom curriculum during different literacy events was a direct result of assessment-driven practices which contributed to a negative washback effect (Turner, 2009). It is ironic that recent research on multimodal literacy learning and pedagogy is bringing to light an expanded understanding of literacy learning while there is mounting pressure to conform assessment practices to ever-shrinking perceptions of what should count as literacy (Dunn, 2001; Gee, 2004; Heydon, 2012; Jewitt, 2003; Kress, 2001; Larson, 2006; Mavers, 2003; Millard & Marsh, 2001; Vincent, 2006; Walsh, 2010). There needs to be more of a "clear alignment between what is valued in the educational community as a whole and what is valued by a government mandated test, [and] sometimes this desired alignment is not always realized" (Slomp, 2005, p. 142). The data concerning EQAO test preparation suggest this narrowing view of literacy where the emphasis on assessing

particular literacy skills constrained multimodal literacy learning and reduced literacy to an autonomous, print-only model.

Further inquiry into the nature of these tensions between assessing what the institutional curriculum wants and what multimodal literacy needs would contribute to the literature to bring to light how current print-based assessment practices are “highly problematic” (Matthewman, Blight & Davies, 2004, p. 153) and in need of empirical study (Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2008). The study raises the importance of assessing students’ multimodal literacies – something that was not specifically addressed in the study, but could be an avenue of further inquiry. In order for this to happen there needs to be a more developed metalanguage for teaching and assessing multimodal texts (Kress, 2000; Matthewman, Blight & Davies, 2004; Ryan, 2010; Walsh, 2010). The research literature is starting to engage in this discussion (Bearne, 2009; Burke & Hammett, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; Matthewman, Blight & Davies, 2004; Vincent, 2006), but it is very recent and in need of further research. This would honour the complex multimodal literacy practices that students are engaged in which include abundant knowledge, skills, abilities, and creativity (Ball, 2010; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Newfield, Andrew, Stein & Maungedzo, 2003; Vander Zanden, 2011; Walsh, 2011).

Another area that would warrant future research would be to continue with my line of research to look at subject areas other than language arts to see if there are opportunities for multimodal literacy learning therein. It would be interesting to see if the same findings would result or if there are different influences on multimodal literacy learning opportunities because of different subject matter. This could inform teachers’ understandings of how to teach from a multimodal framework across subject areas.

Lastly, the findings suggest that there is a lack of multimodal pedagogical knowledge when it comes to understanding what multimodal literacy is and how it can be translated into pedagogical practices, as Linda attested to. Looking to the future of literacy education it stands to reason that teacher education programs could include discussions about multimodal literacy learning, multimodal literacy pedagogy that could benefit students' literacy learning, and help to establish a metalanguage for future multimodal literacy teaching and learning. Research suggests that new teachers find it difficult to switch mindsets from a print-centric view of literacy to a multimodal view of literacy (Courtland & Leslie, 2010) and recent research is starting to look into teacher candidates' understanding of multimodal literacy learning (Begoray, 2002; Courtland & Leslie, 2010; Elliott-Johns, 2011; McVee, Bailey & Shanahan, 2012; O'Neill & Geoghegan, 2011; Rosaen & Terpstra, 2012). The implications could be far reaching as there are many teacher candidates starting their teaching careers who may already be engaged in institutional discourses surrounding what counts as literacy learning. The possible future directions that this literacy research and practice could take could affect how future teachers are able to engage their students in multiple modes of representation – something that I wish I had been privy to back when I started teaching, as my introduction to this study revealed.

Conclusion

I conclude with a note of appreciation for Linda and the students in the study as they navigated the complexities of the literacy environment to engage in multimodal literacy learning. It is clear from this study that there were both opportunities and constraints for enacting multimodal literacy, the bulk of which came from the

institutional and programmatic curriculum. Literacy curriculum is not produced just by the programmatic curriculum, but it can also be produced by the students who find ways to participate in “hidden” (Giroux, 1983, p. 47), self-proclaimed meaningful (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo & Vacca, 2004) literacy practices that are otherwise ignored within school (Dyson, 2003; 2008; McTavish, 2009) as seen by various examples in the findings.

As a well-known Chinese proverb states: Every journey begins with a single step. And the creation of rich, multimodal literacy learning opportunities that can open up students’ communication options is definitely a journey – for us all. It is a needed journey that can open up students’ “worlds” (Stein, 2008, p. 147) so that both teachers and students benefit from the expected and unexpected moments of creativity (Stein, 2003) – in multiple modes.

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Appendix A



THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number: 1001-2
 Principal Investigator: Rachel Heydon
 Student Name: Terry Loerts
 Title: *Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in a Grade Six Classroom: Possibilities and Constraints*
 Expiry Date: April 30, 2010
 Type: Ph.D. Thesis
 Ethics Approval Date: January 22, 2010
 Revision #:
 Documents Reviewed &
 Approved: UWO Protocol, Letters of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

D.. Jason Brown (Chair)

2009-2010 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Jason Brown	Faculty (Chair)
Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	Faculty
Dr. Jacqueline Specht	Faculty
Dr. Farahnaz Faez	Faculty
Dr. Wayne Martino	Faculty
Dr. George Gadanidis	Faculty
Dr. Robert Macmillan	Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Research (ex officio)
Dr. Jerry Paquette	UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (ex officio)

The Faculty of Education	Karen Kueneman, Research Officer
1137 Western Rd.	Faculty of Education Building
London, ON N6G 1G7	████████████████████

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

Appendix B

Letter of Information for Parents

Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom: Possibilities and Constraints

Letter of Information For Parents

(for parents of school-aged children)

My name is Terry Loerts and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research in multimodal literacy which is concerned with the different resources that people use for communicating and making meaning. I would like to invite your child to participate in this research.

The purposes of this research are to explore the ways that the literacy curricula plays out within the classroom and to see what opportunities are created within curricula for students to communicate their interests as described by multimodality (such as using image, speech, gesture, movement, speaking, music, and sound effects to communicate). For the next 4 months I will be joining your child's classroom to be an observer during the literacy portion of the school day, which, depending on the teachers' schedule, typically occurs during the morning of each school day. During this time I will observe while lending a "helping hand" during activities, and where appropriate, I will sometimes take notes.

If you agree that your child may participate in the study, your child will be observed during literacy lessons. In addition, your child may become one of the few students that will become a focus of the study. I will focus on a group of approximately four students that will be seated closely together in the classroom to make it easier to observe and overhear relevant conversations that take place during the literacy portions of the day. These students will also participate in informal interviews with me. All observations and/or interviews will be taking place within the normal part of the school day and there

will be no time commitment beyond that of normal school hours. There will be no interruption to the required curriculum expectations. Thus, I will be observing literacy lessons as they occur without any changes to the lessons. I anticipate that the majority of the literacy observations will take place in the classroom, but other public areas of the school such as the library may have literacy opportunities that I can observe as well. I will observe things like when your child participates in discussions, what kinds of resources your child may be using to communicate (such as whether it is verbal, using gestures, and using the computer for writing), and I will also be listening to responses made to the teacher or other students in whole class and/or group settings. If additional clarification is needed about some part of the activity that took place (for example, asking them why they choose to draw instead of write), I will ask your child some questions within the classroom setting whenever possible at times that are appropriate and non-disruptive.

Additional information may be collected by means of conversations that take place during recess times in the classroom, on the playground, or in other public places such as the library. I will also be collecting your child's schoolwork from literacy lessons that may include their writing, drawing, or compositions that are made on the computer. These will be photocopied and/or photographed so that your child retains the original copy. The copies of your child's work may be used in presentations of the research. If you agree that I may use your child's work for this purpose please indicate this in the attached consent form. There may be times when audio recordings may be used in informal conversations and classroom lessons to allow for further reflection on the literacy lessons that take place in the classroom. In addition, there may be times when the students in the focus group are video recorded in order to highlight a literacy event and this may be used for purposes of further reflection by the researcher and may be shown by the researcher when presenting the results of the study in public. Please indicate on the consent form whether or not your child may be video recorded and whether or not the video recordings of your child may be used in presentations of the research.

Information for this research will be used for research purposes only and neither your name nor your child's name will be used in any publication or presentation of the study

results. Copies of your child's work may be used in presentations of the research but will not be identified as having been created by your child. If you agree that I may use your child's work for this purpose please indicate this in the attached consent form. All audio and video recordings will be downloaded onto a password protected computer and any copies of students' work will be kept in a locked drawer. Any data collected will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate or your child may refuse to participate or refuse to answer questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without any effect (for school children) on school grades. If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, any written or taped data that has been collected will not be used. If you do not consent to your child's participation in this study, no observational notes will be taken for him/her.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact Terry Loerts or Dr. Rachel Heydon (Faculty Supervisor).

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix C

Consent Form for Parent/Child

**For: Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom:
Possibilities and Constraints**

(Terry Loerts, University of Western Ontario)

Consent Form for Parent/Child

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Please choose one of each of the following options by initialing your choice:

____ Copies of my child's work **MAY** be used in presentations of the research

____ Copies of my child's work **MAY NOT** be used in presentations of the research.

____ My child **MAY** be video recorded and the recordings may be used for further reflection by the researcher (not shown to others).

____ My child **MAY NOT** be video recorded by the researcher.

____ Video recordings of my child **MAY** be shown during presentations of the research.

____ Video recordings of my child **MAY NOT** be shown during presentations of the research.

Name of student (printed): _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Letter of Information for Classroom Teacher

Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom: Possibilities and Constraints

Letter of Information for Classroom Teacher

My name is Terry Loerts and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research in multimodal literacy opportunities within a grade six classroom and would like to invite you to participate in this research.

The purposes of this research are to explore the ways that the literacy curricula plays out within the classroom and to see what opportunities are created within curricula for students to communicate their interests as described by multimodality (such as using image, speech, gesture, movement, speaking, music, and sound effects to communicate). For the next 4 months I will be joining your classroom as a participant observer during the literacy portion of the school day.

If you agree to participate in this study I will be joining your classroom for the next 4 months to be an observer during the literacy portion of the school day, which, depending on your schedule, will typically occur during the mornings of each school day. During this time I will observe while lending a “helping hand” during activities, and where appropriate, I will sometimes take notes.

Information for this research will be used for research purposes and your name or your students’ names will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. Any use of photographs or videos of student’s written work for the purposes of scholarly conferences or journals will only occur after written permission is obtained separately from you and the parents. Information will be collected by observing and speaking with you and your students. I will be observing things such as what types of multimodal

communication is occurring within lessons, and what kinds of resources the students may be using to communicate (such as whether they are drawing or using the computer, or gesturing). I will also be listening to verbal responses made within the lesson, whether through teacher-led discussions or student group interactions. I will also collect student's schoolwork from literacy lessons that may include their writing, drawing, or compositions that are made on the computer. These will be photocopied and/or photographed so that the student retains the original copy. There may be times when audio or video recordings will be used in informal conversations to allow for further reflection on the literacy lessons that take place. In addition, there may be times when the students in the focus group are video recorded in order to highlight a literacy event. This may be used for purposes of further reflection by the researcher and possibly included in public presentations of the research. At times you may be included in these video recordings. Please indicate on the consent form whether you agree that you may be video recorded.

You will be asked to participate in informal conversational interviews at various times during the research about topics including your length of time teaching, descriptions of your current literacy programs, and your understandings of the types of opportunities that are created for your students to communicate their interests. Transcripts of interviews will be given to you for additional comments or clarifications which may take up to an hour of time. There will be no interruption to the required curriculum expectations and the research will be conducted during the normal part of the school day with the exception of interviewing you and/or asking questions which may take place directly after the school day is finished. The time commitment for such interviews may take anywhere from 5-15 minutes depending on what needs to be discussed. The total time commitment for the study will be approximately 5-7 hours. Some possible beginning interview questions include:

1. How familiar are you with multimodal literacy? When did you first hear of the term?
2. Have you ever tried to determine what types of multimodal literacy practices are taking place within your classroom?
3. In what ways do you think you foster an environment that either promotes or may hinder multimodal communication?

4. Do you know of any multimodal ways of communication that are explicitly outlined in the Ontario curriculum documents? If so, what?
5. What kinds of literacy practices take place in your classroom? What do you think is particularly effective and why?
6. Do you ever let students choose ways to communicate a particular curricular objective? If so, how?
7. Do you think multimodal literacy is important? Why?

Any data that is collected will be stored on a password protected computer.

Any data that has been collected will be destroyed after five years. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without any effect on your employment status. If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, any written or taped data that has been collected will not be used for research purposes.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact Terry Loerts or Dr. Rachel Heydon (Faculty Supervisor).

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix E

Consent Form for Classroom Teacher

**For: Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom:
Possibilities and Constraints**

(Terry Loerts, University of Western Ontario)

Consent Form for Classroom Teacher

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate your choice by initialing.

___ I **AGREE** to be video recorded and the recordings may be used for further reflection by the researcher (not shown to others).

___ I **DO NOT AGREE** to be video recorded.

___ Video recordings of me **MAY** be shown during presentations of the research.

___ Video recordings of me **MAY NOT** be shown during presentations of the research.

Name: (please print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Letter of Information for Guest Student Teacher

Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom: Possibilities and Constraints

(Terry Loerts, University of Western Ontario)

Letter of Information for Guest Student Teacher

My name is Terry Loerts and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research in multimodal literacy opportunities within a grade six classroom and would like to invite you to participate in this research.

The purposes of this research are to explore the ways that the literacy curricula plays out within the classroom and to see what opportunities are created within curricula for students to communicate their interests as described by multimodality (such as using image, speech, gesture, movement, speaking, music, and sound effects to communicate). During the next three weeks while you are participating in the classroom, I will be acting as a participant observer during the language arts portion of the school day which will typically occur during the mornings. During this time I will observe while lending a “helping hand” during activities, and where appropriate, I will sometimes take notes.

Information for this research will only be used for research purposes and your name, the school’s name, the teacher’s name, and the students’ names will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. Any use of photographs or videos of student’s written work for the purposes of scholarly conferences or journals will only occur after written permission is obtained from you, the classroom teacher, and the parents. Information will be collected by observing and possibly speaking with you about your interactions with the students. I will be observing things such as what types of multimodal communication is occurring within lessons, and what kinds of resources the students may be using to communicate (such as whether they are drawing or using the

computer, or gesturing). I will also be listening to verbal responses made within the lesson, whether through teacher-led discussions or student group interactions. I will also collect student's schoolwork from literacy lessons that may include their writing, drawing, or compositions that are made on the computer. These will be photocopied and/or photographed so that the student retains the original copy. There may be times when audio or video recordings will be used in informal conversations to allow for further reflection on the literacy lessons that take place. In addition, there may be times when the students in the focus group are video recorded in order to highlight a literacy event. This may be used for purposes of further reflection by the researcher and possibly included in public presentations of the research. At times you may be included in these video recordings. Please indicate on the consent form whether you agree that you may be video recorded.

You may be asked to participate in short informal conversational interviews at various times but there will be no interruption to the required curriculum expectations and the research will be conducted during the normal part of the school day. The time commitment for such interviews may take approximately 5-10 minutes depending on what needs to be discussed. The total time commitment for the study will be less than 1 hour for the duration of your stay. Some possible interview questions may include:

1. How familiar are you with multimodal literacy? When did you first hear of the term? Have you encountered multimodal literacy discussions in any of your education courses?
2. Do you know of any multimodal ways of communication that are explicitly outlined in any curriculum documents? If so, what?
3. What kinds of literacy practices have you seen take place in a classroom? Can you describe it?
4. Do you think multimodal literacy is important to include in the curriculum? Why?

Any data that is collected will be stored on a password protected computer.

Any data that has been collected will be destroyed after five years. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, any written or taped data that has been collected will not be used for research purposes.

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact Terry Loerts or Dr. Rachel Heydon (Faculty Supervisor).

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix G

Consent Form for Guest Student Teacher

**For: Multimodal Literacy Learning Opportunities in one Grade Six Classroom:
Possibilities and Constraints**

(Terry Loerts, University of Western Ontario)

Consent Form for Guest Student Teacher

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate your choice by initialing.

____ I **AGREE** to be video recorded and the recordings may be used for further reflection by the researcher (not shown to others).

____ I **DO NOT AGREE** to be video recorded.

____ Video recordings of me **MAY** be shown during presentations of the research.

____ Video recordings of me **MAY NOT** be shown during presentations of the research.

Name: (please print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H

Potential Interview Questions for Classroom Teacher

Outline of topics to be discussed:

1. How familiar are you with multimodal literacy? When did you first hear of the term?
2. Have you ever tried to determine what types of multimodal literacy practices are taking place within your classroom?
3. In what ways do you think you foster an environment that either promotes or may hinder multimodal communication?
4. Do you know of any multimodal ways of communication that are explicitly outlined in the Ontario curriculum documents? If so, what?
5. What kinds of literacy practices take place in your classroom? What do you think is particularly effective and why?
6. Do you ever let students choose ways to communicate a particular curricular objective? If so, how?
7. Do you think multimodal literacy is important? Why?

Appendix I

Potential Interview Questions for Student Participants

Outline of topics to be discussed:

1. Have you ever heard of the term multimodal literacy? If so, when? What is it? (if they don't know, we will discuss what it is)
2. Now that you know what multimodal literacy is a bit, do you think you ever participate in any multimodal literacy events?
3. Do you think you would like to do more or less communication in different modes other than writing? Why?
4. Does your teacher ever let you pick what kinds of modes you get to do assignments in? If so, can you give an example?
5. Why did you choose to pick drawing (for eg.) over writing for this assignment?
6. Do you like communicating in different modes? What is your favourite way of doing so right now? What modes would you like to try more? Why?

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Terry Loerts

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
Doctor of Philosophy (Educational Studies, Curriculum) 2014

Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI, USA
Masters of Education (Curriculum Studies) 1995

Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI, USA
Bachelor of Education 1992

Honours and Awards: Graduate Thesis Research Award (competition)
2009-2010, 2010-2011

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011

Related Work Experience

Instructor, Education Department
Redeemer University-College
Ancaster, Ontario
2013-2014

Instructor, Education Department
Redeemer University-College
Ancaster, Ontario
2012-2013

Sessional Instructor (full time), Education Department
Redeemer University-College
Ancaster, Ontario
2011-2012

Instructor, Education Department
Redeemer University-College
Ancaster, Ontario
2010 (fall)

Research Assistant to Dr. Carol Beynon
Advancing International Interdisciplinary Research in Singing Project (a multi-year project funded by SSHRC)
Western University
London, Ontario
2010-2011

Research Assistant to Dr. Michael Kehler
Healthy Bodies, Boys and Body Image (a multi-year project funded by SSHRC)
Western University
London, Ontario
2009 (spring)

Research Assistant to Dr. Robert Macmillan
Experienced Principals and Professional Development
Western University
London, Ontario
2009 (fall)

Teacher Assistant, P-J Language Arts
Western University
London, Ontario
2008-2009

Teacher Assistant, P-J Language Arts
Western University
London, Ontario
2007-2008

Substitute Teacher (K-8)
Woodstock Christian School
Woodstock, Ontario
2005-2007

Elementary Teacher (Gr. 7/8)
Wellandport Christian School
Wellandport, Ontario
2003-2004

Sessional Instructor (full time), Education Department
Redeemer University-College
Ancaster, Ontario
2002-2003

Substitute Teacher (K-8)
Wellandport Christian School
Wellandport, Ontario
1997-2002

Substitute Teacher (K-8)
Smithville Christian School
Smithville, Ontario
1997-2002

Elementary Teacher (Gr. 4/5)
Listowel Christian School
Listowel, Ontario
1992-1993

Publications

Loerts, T. (2010). Multimodal literacy and its impact on student empowerment. *English Quarterly*, 41(3/4) 24-33.

Curriculum Development:

Education 322: New Literacies in Education. New course approved for inclusion in winter term, 2014.

Papers Presented at Academic Conferences (Refereed)

Loerts, T. (2013, June). *Classroom curricula: Looking to the future*. Paper presented at the Pre-CSSE annual conference of the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada. Annual Conference, Victoria, British Columbia.

Loerts, T. (2013, June). *Multimodal literacy learning opportunities in one grade six classroom: Possibilities and constraints*. Paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Victoria, British Columbia.

Loerts, T. (2012, May). *Defined and redefined: Literacy curricula in one grade six classroom*. Paper presented at the Pre-CSSE annual conference of the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada. Annual Conference, Waterloo, Ontario.

Loerts, T. (2012, May). *Curricula constraints and literacy learning*. Paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Waterloo, Ontario.

Beynon, C., Heydon, R., O'Neill, S., Loerts, T., & Crocker, W. (2011, May). *Intergenerational voices: Curricula to foster the learning, communication, and well-*

being of young children and elders. Paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Loerts, T. (2011, May). *Making room? Multimodality in the language arts curriculum.* Paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Loerts, T. (2011, May). *Diversity and difference: What do multimodal literacy practices contribute?* Paper presented at the Pre-CSSE annual conference of the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada. Annual Conference, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Loerts, T. (2011, April). *The curricula conundrum: Where do students contribute most?* Paper presented at the Research in Education Symposium, London, Ontario.

Loerts, T. (2011, Feb.). *Reading, writing, and multimodality: What does literacy curricula look like?* Writing Research Across Borders II conference. George Mason University, Fairfax, VA.

Loerts, T. (2010, Dec.). *Literacy as Freedom: Do elementary classrooms promote a culture where students are empowered as they participate in literacy events?* Paper accepted for presentation to the National Reading Conference. Fort Worth, Texas.

Loerts, T. (2010, Oct.). *It's a jungle out there: Navigating the "new" literacies environment.* Paper presented at the Edge conference: e-learning: The horizon and beyond. St. John's, Newfoundland.

Loerts, T. (2010, May). *Literacy events as possibilities and constraints within a grade six class.* Paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Montreal, Quebec.

Loerts, T. (2010, May). *Do multimodal literacy events contribute to student empowerment?* Paper presented at the Pre-CSSE annual conference of the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada. Annual Conference, Montreal, Quebec.

Loerts, T. (2010, April). *How do we assess multimodal literacy practices?* Paper presented at the Research in Education Symposium, Western University: London, Ontario.

Loerts, T. (2009, Nov.). *Meanings of literacy and acts of empowerment.* Paper presented at Read. Write. Act. Virtual Conference, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill-School of Education, North Carolina.

Loerts, T. (2009, May). *Questions and unfinished answers: Analyzing and evaluating multimodal writing practices of junior-aged students.* Paper presented at the Pre-CSSE annual conference of the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada. Annual Conference, Ottawa, Ontario.

Loerts, T. (2009, May). *Multimodal literacies in the grade 5 language arts class: Intersections, obstacles, possibilities*. Paper presented at the Canadian Society of the Study of Education. Annual Conference, Ottawa, Ontario.

Posters Presented at Academic Conferences (Refereed)

Beynon, C., Heydon, R., O'Neill, S., Loerts, T., Crocker, W., & Zhang, Z. (2011, March). *Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (AIRS): Intergenerational understandings*. Multi-poster presentation at the Inter-Disciplinary Research Day. Western University: London, Ontario.

Loerts, T. (2010, April). *Multimodal literacy opportunities in the grade 6 classroom*. Poster presented at the Research in Education Symposium, Western University: London, Ontario.

Refereed Conference Presentations

Loerts, T. (2011, Aug.). *How wide is wide enough? Using multiple modes of communication in today's classrooms*. Invited workshop leader for 2 – 1 hour sessions at the ABEL Summer Institute, entitled, "Connected Community Learning: the Next Decade." York University, Toronto.

Non-Refereed

Loerts, T. (2013, Mar.). *What's "mode" got to do with it? Reflections of multimodal communication and learning in the classroom*. Invited speaker for EDU 487 seminar at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, ON

Loerts, T. (2011, Feb.). *Classroom management: Rights and responsibilities*. Public lecture given at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, ON

Loerts, T. (2006, Nov.). *Reading: Making the pieces fit*. Public lecture given at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, ON

Scholarly and Professional Activities

Progressive Assessment Framework for Secondary Schools Committee: London District Christian Secondary School, London, ON (2012-2013)

Human Resources Committee: John Knox Christian School, Woodstock, ON (2009-2013)

Reviewer: ICCTE Journal (2012-present)

Reviewer: Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2013)

Reviewer: Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education (2013)

Reviewer: Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2012)

Reviewer: Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education (2012)

Reviewer: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (2012)

Year-End Faculty Review: with Dr. David Zietsma, Redeemer University College (April, 2012)

Secretary: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada Annual General Meeting (May, 2011)

Discussant: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada: Preconference (May, 2011)

Discussant: Canadian Society for the Study of Education: Graduate Roundtable Session (May, 2011)

Reviewer: Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2011)

Reviewer: Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education (2011)

Reviewer: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (2011)

Mentorship Program: Western University- for first year PhD students (2010-2011)

Reviewer: National Reading Conference (2010)

Reviewer: *Language and Literacy* journal (2010)

Reviewer: Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2010)

Reviewer: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (2010)

Reviewer: Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2009)

Reviewer: Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (2009)

Coordinator: Language Arts Forum (2008-2009). In its inaugural year, it was part of my duties as a teaching assistant to coordinate various speakers on topics of interest to the undergraduate education students that included English language learners, storytelling, a principal's view of language arts, graphic novels, reader's theatre, and multicultural picture books.

Book Endorsement: Gallant, S. (June, 2008) *Advance to adventure, Volume 1: Through the river and fire*. Tate Publishing, Mustang, OK.

Classroom Assistant: Northridge Public School (spring, 2008). Volunteer position. Role: assisting grade 6 students in the classroom with various assignments in different subject areas.

Professional Affiliations

Canadian Society for Studies in Education

Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education

Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada

Royal Conservatory of Music

International Reading Association