

LITERACY PRACTICES IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ELECTIVE: AN  
EXAMINATION OF HOW STUDENTS RESPOND TO MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

By

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To my mother, the person who introduced me to my first literacy practices. Reading, analyzing, and interpreting literature with my mom began in our living room. Without my mother's initial guidance, writing a dissertation would not have been possible.

Naurice Annette Gregory (1948-1989)

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English language arts teachers are encouraged to use culturally relevant texts, such as popular culture. Therefore, this study investigated high-school students' literacy practices in an English language arts elective class where popular culture texts were formally studied. Two research questions that guided this study were: (1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture and (2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text?

Qualitative research methods were used for this investigation of high-school students' literacy practices. Data sources included videotaped and audio-taped classroom observations, field notes and conceptual notes from classroom observations, student focus-group interviews, and a teacher interview.

The results from this study suggest that (1) students have differing experiences with popular culture that they can draw on during classroom context, (2) students can develop literacy practices similar to those that are expected with traditional texts, (3) secondary students' literacy practices vary across social contexts and classroom

activities, and (4) high-school students can learn to use visual texts to develop reading strategies.

This study will help develop understandings of how high-school students use popular culture texts in classroom contexts and how using popular culture texts can help students' literacy. It also has implications for how English educators can support pre-service teachers' understandings of their future students' literacy practices. This study will also help prepare professional development materials suitable for practicing English language arts teachers who require contemporary ways to help secondary students develop literacy.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

A literature anthology and canonical novels are typical English language arts (ELA) teachers' resources. However, literature anthologies and canonical novels do not always provide students with texts relevant to their lives. Similar to many English language arts teachers, I sought relevant ways to connect texts from the literary canon to my high-school students' lives.

The theories that initially drove my pedagogy were those that encouraged teachers to add contemporary and diverse texts to existing curricula in order to support students in critically analyzing texts. For example, Banks (1994) has suggested that textbooks implicitly espouse a monocultural view of society that does not include diverse voices or perspectives. Therefore, he encourages teachers to support students as they examine school texts, and seek additional texts written by and about diverse peoples. Freire (1998) posited that if teachers guide students in critically analyzing the texts of their lives in new and different ways, students will develop "critical consciousness" that will shape and awaken new perspectives for understanding how to use texts in their personal lives (p. 36). Ladson-Billings (1994) and Gay (2000), pioneers in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy, have added that teachers should use students' social and cultural backgrounds and pre-existing abilities to engage the students in academic activities; using varying texts is one way to achieve this.

Theoretically, these concepts seemed sensible to me; however, conjoining theory with practice proved a difficult task. While students seemed to appreciate reading more culturally relevant texts, they were sometimes disengaged in the classroom activities

centered on studying those texts. The research Fecho (2004) conducted in his own English language arts class exemplified the student disengagement some English language arts teachers face when adding culturally relevant texts. Although Fecho (2004) included Nikki Giovanni's poetry as a culturally relevant text to which his African American students could relate, they resisted engaging in classroom discussions about the text. Fecho's (2004) study revealed that using culturally relevant pedagogy was more complicated than merely using literature that matched his students' social and cultural backgrounds.

During my years as an English language arts teacher, I encountered classroom situations similar to the one Fecho (2004) described. I found it intriguing that students enjoyed reading texts that were poignant from their perspective but these students expressed little interest in engaging in classroom activities centered on those texts. My doctoral studies led me to research classroom uses of media as possibilities for providing students with both clearly pertinent and engaging texts. It is because of my background in English language arts teaching that I deemed it necessary to conduct research to examine secondary students' uses of media in classroom settings that would add to current literature and support teachers who seek ways to engage their English language arts students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are many types of media texts English language arts teachers can use in classroom instruction; however, popular culture seems to be the most relevant choice. Popular culture encompasses those cultural artifacts, such as television, film, products, and people that are "mass produced for mass consumption" and are commonly

associated with being “widely favoured” and “well-liked by many people” (Storey, 1993, pp. 7-12). Studies have revealed that adolescents’ engagement with popular culture such as film and television has increased measurably every five years (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000; 2005; 2010). These studies have supported the concept that popular culture is a pervasive form of media in adolescents’ lives. Gay (2000) and others (Banks, 1994; Cortés, 2000; Freire, 1998) have added that because popular culture also teaches about diversity, sources from popular culture should be considered socially and culturally relevant texts worthy of formal study in classroom settings.

Currently, professional organizations for English language arts teachers suggest that relevant and diverse texts should also include varied types of media and these texts should be included in the curriculum (International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, National Reading Council). Leaders of these organizations have posited that integrating media in classroom instruction is a culturally relevant way to not only support students’ developing traditional literacies, but also to support their expanding 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Policy Research Brief (2007) encouraged teachers to “include a variety of media and genres in class texts (p. 18), and NCTE (2010) defines acquiring 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies as the ability to “critique, create, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts.” NCTE has listed popular culture as one of the varied types of media texts that should be integrated in the English language arts classroom.

Contemporary literacy scholars have agreed that students should formally study popular culture in English language arts classes (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Kist, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004). These



scholars have provided pedagogy for using popular culture texts to support teachers' literacy instruction. For example, Alvermann, Moon & Hagood's (1999) seminal case studies illustrated how to use superheroes, CD covers, and female music bands to help students develop critical literacy. Other scholars examined teachers' use of popular film (Kist, 2005; Morrell, 2004), popular music (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004), and radio documentaries (Callahan, 2002) to support secondary students developing literacy. Each of these studies has been useful in supporting English language arts teachers as they prepare lessons that centralize popular culture; however, few studies have examined how high-school students formally engage with popular culture in classroom context.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine what students learn about literacy and what they learn about engaging with popular culture text in an English elective class in a public high school. This research was intended to help shape understandings of how students develop literacy when popular culture is central to instruction. The two questions that guided this study were 1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture, and 2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text?

### **Significance of Study**

Research on teachers who centralize popular culture in English language arts have been useful for teachers who require pedagogical strategies (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Kist, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade,

2004). However, these studies have not revealed high-school students' views of such pedagogy, nor do they reveal high-school students' literacy practices when popular culture texts are formally studied in a classroom context. Qualitative research centered on secondary students' literacy practices in classroom contexts should elicit how students draw on experiences with popular culture. A qualitative understanding of how students draw on experiences with popular culture may help broaden teachers' concepts of the relevance of popular culture that extends beyond research that quantifies adolescent engagement.

This qualitative study also exemplified the types of literacy practices that are indicators of literacy oftentimes expected in secondary English language arts classes. A description of high-school students' literacy practices will help advance understandings of how these students use relevant texts to acquire literacy. Each instrumental case-study students' description is a reminder that secondary students' literacy practices vary across social contexts and even within class activities. These descriptions will help English language arts teachers view popular culture as culturally relevant texts that offer students many opportunities to engage in classroom activities that meet their individual literacy needs. The details of this study also provide ways that high-school students learn to use visual texts such as popular culture still shots to embellish their understandings of reading strategies.

As more literacy scholars and professional organizations advocate for integrating popular culture texts in English language arts classes, a greater understanding of how students use popular culture when these texts are central to instruction is needed. This study will be useful for literacy educators in teacher education programs who seek to

improve English language arts methodology courses. Qualitative data provided by this study will also help prepare professional development for English language arts teachers who seek contemporary and relevant texts to engage their high-school students while simultaneously addressing district and state learning goals.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following are terms and definitions used throughout this study.

#### **Literacy**

Given the tools available to students for creating meaning, as well as the modes of texts they have to interpret, a broader concept of texts and the many ways students can construct literacy is integral. Therefore, Luke and Freebody's (2000, p. 9) definition of literacy as "the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communication technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia" is used for this study.

#### **Popular Culture**

Popular culture encompasses those cultural artifacts, such as television, film, magazines, products, and people that are "mass produced for mass consumption" and commonly associated with being "widely favoured" [*sic*] and "well-liked by many people" (Storey, 1993, pp.7-12). In this study, popular culture included cultural artifacts, such as:

- (1) Media companies that own multiple types of media;
- (2) Television networks and programming; and
- (3) Films familiar to both the students and teacher.

### **Scientific/Formal Concepts**

This term draws on Vygotsky's (1978) definition for scientific concepts as specialized vocabulary developed in academic context. In this study, scientific/formal concepts referred to media vocabulary introduced to the students by the English language arts elective teacher within classroom context. Synonymous terms used to represent scientific/formal concepts in this study included:

- (1) Media concepts
- (2) Media vocabulary
- (3) Metalanguage
- (4) Specialized vocabulary
- (5) Terminology/terms

### **Spontaneous/Everyday Concepts**

This term referred to students understandings of texts that develop as a result of social and cultural interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, spontaneous/everyday concepts refer to the initial understandings of media companies, television networks, television programming, and films that students developed prior to formally studying popular culture. Other terms used in this study that are synonymous with spontaneous/everyday concepts included:

- (1) Existing knowledge/understandings
- (2) Socially and culturally developed knowledge
- (3) Spontaneous knowledge

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Sociocultural Theories of Language and Literacy**

The purpose of this study was to understand the literacy practices of secondary students in classroom contexts. The two questions that guided this study were: 1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture, and 2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text? This study was undergirded by a sociocultural theory of language and literacy. Such a perspective provided an understanding of the socially and culturally constructed ways that children develop and use language and literacy in their homes and communities. In this section, I described the role that language and tools play in developing literacy, and then I described theories of how formal learning occurs in social and cultural settings.

### **Language and Tool Use**

Sociocultural theories of learning are undergirded by Vygotsky's (1978) research of how children use language and tools, which revealed that learning occurs first socially, and then independently, a process he called internalization. Internalization describes how children make sense of external activities. He found that an external gesture of grasping means nothing to a child until someone reacts to that gesture. The child internalizes how the person reacted, and subsequently begins to associate meanings with gestures. His finding was one of the first to recognize the importance of social interaction in learning. Vygotsky theorized that children also developed

understandings of signs, symbols and concepts through the social process of internalization.

Another central finding introduced by Vygotsky is how children use tools. He extended the definition of tools to include not only those external items society used to mediate the environment but also sign systems, such as language and writing. Vygotsky was one of the first to recognize how children use language as a tool. Vygotsky explained that children who use language to problem-solve do so in two parts; first, they verbally plan and then they execute the plan. He also suggested that if children are not able to use language to solve problems, they are sometimes unsuccessful at completing tasks. Vygotsky's research foregrounded many of the theories and concepts for sociocultural learning further described in this chapter.

Heath's (1983) seminal research in anthropology illustrated important cultural aspects that built upon concepts introduced by Vygotsky (1978) such as the use of tools. Vygotsky said that people use language and writing as tools to make sense of their environment. However, Heath (1982) theorized that literacy events, which are conversations centered on written texts can illustrate the literacy practices of a culture. Heath's findings illustrated that children's cultural worlds, such as their communities and home lives, also influence how they learn to use language and written words as tools for practicing literacy in their lives. By studying three neighboring towns, she found that each community used language to develop literacy in differing ways. The White children of "Roadville," understood language and literacy as a set of facts and moral lessons obtained from books; they equated telling fictional stories with telling lies. On the other hand, the African American children of "Trackton" understood language and

literacy as a performance derived from oral story-telling; the mainstream children of a nearby town developed language and literacy skills closely related to that which was expected at school. Heath's findings revealed that examining each community's literacy events, conversations centered on written texts (Heath, 1982) can illustrate the literacy practices of a culture.

Heath's (1983) study revealed that language use is determined by social and cultural context. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism suggested that how people use language in social contexts shapes dialogue with others. Bakhtin theorized that utterances are constantly interconnected with previous and future utterances influenced by texts and/or other speech events, and through the concept of heteroglossia, he proposed that there is not one language or one voice, but many languages and voices that always shape interpretations. Dialogism is seen as the process of the give and take enacted in dialogue, whereby a conversant determines what to say in response to another conversant.

Gee's (1996; 1999) research in social linguistics theory provided a language for discussing the differing ways that people use spoken language and other symbolic and communicative strategies to position themselves within various social groups in multiple contexts. Gee defined language in use, such as verbal words, as discourse (with a lowercase "d"), but defined Discourse as the combination of language and other non-verbal symbols, such as technologies, body movements, and behaviors. Gee (1998) referred to these discourses/Discourses as "identity kits" (p. 51), that signal the language and non-verbal symbols used to enact a particular identity within a group. Gee's concept of identity kits has supported and extended Vygotsky's theory of using

language and social interaction to develop literacy by illustrating how we co-construct and develop different literacies for varying social situations. Furthermore, his theory extended Heath's concept that literacy practices differ among various cultures to suggest that literacy practices also vary among smaller social groups within single communities.

Social interaction is the basis for how people in a society learn concepts and, through language, culturally constructed ways for understanding one another are formed. Sociocultural theorists have recognized the natural ways we acquire and use language in society to practice literacy, but they have also emphasized that formal learning is not absent from the sociocultural equation. In the following section are illustrated components of formal learning that are imbedded in social and cultural settings.

### **Formal Learning**

Gee (1998), and others (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1991; Street, 1984; 1995; Vygotsky, 1987) noted that there is a difference between language and literacy acquisition versus learning language and literacy. Gee claimed that acquisition requires full immersion in a social situation with the appropriate tools to practice the language; however, in learning an adult or more knowledgeable mentor to teach formal concepts and specialized languages of the subject matter is required. These perspectives are closely related to the work of Vygotsky (1987) who introduced everyday/spontaneous concepts, scientific/formal concepts, and scaffolding. It is also closely aligned with Lave and Wenger (1991) who described contextualized learning.



According to Vygotsky (1987), children develop everyday/spontaneous concepts as a result of natural social and cultural interactions; however, formal concepts (subject specific vocabulary) must be explicitly taught. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development suggested that social interaction remains an important component of formal learning as children negotiate understanding more formal concepts. Negotiating understanding between spontaneous concepts and more formal concepts is known as scaffolding. Scaffolding requires more knowledgeable individuals to guide children's learning by connecting familiar, spontaneous concepts with appropriate-level, unfamiliar formal concepts to establish more mature understandings. Lave and Wenger (1991) added that contextualized learning is another factor in formal teaching and learning. Contextualized learning must begin with what they describe as a "learning curriculum" (p. 97). Similar to the way Vygotsky described children's use of tools, a learning curriculum includes access to necessary resources for the subject being learned and multiple occasions for practicing how to use the resources. Lave and Wenger's (1991) examinations of different communities of practice illustrated that those learners whose practice is decontextualized often view their learning as irrelevant, as opposed to those learners who are fully immersed in contextualized practice using resources that rationalize their participation in activities.

Sociocultural theorists have advocated for teachers to contextualize students' learning to mirror the natural ways people in society use language and social interaction to acquire literacy (Gee, 1998; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). For example, Street (1984) suggested teachers value the social and cultural ways students use literacy in their personal lives as they extend understandings of literacy in classroom settings. He

suggested that if teachers do not value students' social and cultural uses of language and literacy they are implicitly only valuing school uses for language and literacy. Gee (1998) also theorized that an indicator of literacy is "control of secondary uses of language," such as school discourse, and that schools are places that should support the development of these secondary uses of language through formal teaching (p. 56). Similarly, Heath's (1983) study illustrated that teachers must formally teach secondary discourses, if they are antithetical to students' primary discourses; otherwise, the result could be school failure. For example in Heath's study (1983), Trackton students were not successful with schooled literacy practices until they learned to use language and texts in academic ways. These scholars have argued that teaching formal concepts in school settings is important and that teachers must begin with students' spontaneous concepts. In the following section rationales are provided for including the spontaneous concepts students have developed about media in classroom contexts.

### **Media Literacy Education as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is considered one method that teachers can use to recognize students' social and cultural backgrounds and pre-existing abilities in order to engage students in formal learning (Gay, 2000). Oftentimes, social and cultural backgrounds refer to students' ethnicity, race, gender, or socio-economic status (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). However, scholars have suggested that popular culture is a pervasive influence in students' lives that informs their social and cultural worldview (Buckingham, 2003; Hobbs, 2007; Morrell, 2004). Because popular culture helps shape informal (and sometimes inaccurate) understandings of society, theorists have advocated for media literacy education as culturally relevant pedagogy. In the following

section, I have defined culturally relevant pedagogy and included reasons for categorizing media as culturally relevant texts. I have also provided a summary of the New London Group's (1996) "A pedagogy of multiliteracies" to describe methods and theory that can be used to teach media texts. These methods have supported both culturally relevant pedagogy and sociocultural approaches to language and literacy learning.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is posited as teaching that can bridge the gap between students' socially and culturally acquired knowledge and the formal understandings they are expected to learn in school settings (Banks, 1994; 1995; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). There are three rationales for using popular culture texts as culturally relevant texts in classroom contexts. First, teaching about popular cultural texts is seen as culturally relevant as it provides a way for educators to contextualize students' learning as they bridge the gap between how students engage with popular cultural texts socially and how they engage with these texts academically. A second justification for teaching about popular culture is based on the fact that it is a way for teachers to acknowledge the consistent presence of popular culture in students' lives as well as to recognize these texts as an influential aspect of how students construct social and cultural understandings. Finally, teaching about popular culture is considered culturally relevant in that it provides a way for teachers to support students' critical literacy as they examine the texts that are central to their lives.

Scholars who have advocated for culturally relevant pedagogy have also indicated that teachers must shift their existing methodologies to include a more contextualized

form of teaching and learning where students' social and cultural backgrounds are valued (Banks, 1994; 1995; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Banks (1994) writes that teachers who contextualize learning "can increase the classroom participation and academic achievement of students from different ethnic groups by modifying their instruction so that it draws upon their cultural strengths" (p. 17). Banks suggested that classroom settings where students can draw upon their cultural strengths are considered those where learning is contextualized. Delpit (1995) added that leaving students' cultures out of classroom learning leads to misunderstanding or antipathy for formal concepts learned in school because the learned concepts become disconnected from students' lives. Lave and Wenger (1991) indicated that contextualized learning provides students with time to practice what they learn in context. Culturally relevant pedagogy is seen as a way to begin with students' social and cultural backgrounds before teaching or practicing unfamiliar concepts.

In addition to contextualized teaching and learning, advocates have suggested culturally relevant pedagogy allows teachers to extend existing school curricula (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). Traditionally, English language arts teachers are encouraged to extend existing curricula by including additional texts written by and about diverse peoples (Banks, 1994). Teaching media texts is considered another culturally relevant way to extend curricula (Gay, 2000). Gay (2000) provided reasons for including media as culturally relevant pedagogy. She referred to the amount of time children spend viewing television, and she referred to how the media teach about diversity. She concluded that media is culturally relevant because it is a constant presence in children's lives that informally teaches social and cultural lessons.

Gay's rationales for considering media as culturally relevant curricula were akin to those identified by others who have written about adolescents' relationship with media. For example, Gitlin (2002) quantified the pervasiveness of media in the lives of adolescents regardless of their social or cultural backgrounds. He called the constant exposure to media "supersaturation," and said that it is "an accompaniment *to* life that has become a central experience *of* life" (Gitlin, 2002, p. 17). Gitlin suggested media have shifted from an extracurricular activity to a more centrally located interwoven part of children's lives that should be recognized. Hinchey (1998) added that because media are centrally located in students' lives, they have developed "cultural capital" about such texts similar to those that they have developed about the cultural uses of language and literacy in their lives. She argued that teachers should value this form of cultural capital by adding formal study about media to the existing curricula. Cortés (2000) agreed that teachers have a responsibility to develop formal lessons centered on media because he has theorized that media teach students about cultural aspects of life, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender that may implicitly perpetuate misunderstandings of self and others.

Worth re-mentioning as one rationale for considering media literacy education as culturally relevant pedagogy is that media literacy education can support students' critical literacy. Hinchey (1998) said that critical literacy requires students to "become active and critical readers to hear what others are saying" (p. 153). In order to "hear what others are saying," critical literacy has required teachers to guide students as they deconstruct the socially and culturally relevant texts of students' lives (Freire, 1998). Included among socially and culturally relevant texts are media, such as popular culture.

According to Freire (1998), deconstructing texts will promote “critical consciousness,” (p. 17) which refers to the new perspective students develop as a result of deconstructing texts. Freire (1998) suggested that developing new perspectives of texts should help students develop a sense of empowerment as they actively change their social conditions, a process referred to as “praxis” (p. 36). Kellner and Share (2005) added that studying media formally will help students develop critical media literacy. Critical media literacy could support students as they frame new perspectives of media in formal ways.

### **Practice and Methods**

The New London Group’s (NLG) concept of “multiliteracies” encompasses the multiple modes of texts one must be able to read and interpret and the varieties of literacy practices that one must draw upon in various social settings. Multimodal texts include images, alphabetic symbols, sound, motion, and so on that require visual, linguistic, spatial, auditory, or gestural interpretations (Antsey & Bull, 2006), or multiple forms of literacy (i.e. multiliteracies). “Multiliteracies” also refer to the multiple contexts where one must be able to practice literacy. The New London Group has theorized that there should be a shift in literacy pedagogy to prepare students for literacy practices that require reading and interpreting multiple modes of texts in varied social contexts.

The New London Group’s (1996) “A Pedagogy of multiliteracies” has provided a framework for expanding students’ literacies to include the multiple texts and various social situations students may encounter. They have suggested that the process of meaning-making is an act of design during which a person creates meaning by reading and interpreting a text. Thus, they used the word design to conceptualize literacy

practices. Design describes producing, reading, and interpreting texts. Texts can refer to printed versions that use alphabetic symbols, or non-print versions, such as media. Various creators of texts use the available designs to create meaning. For example, a painter is limited by the tools that are available for his or her craft. Similar to Vygotsky's (1978) definitions of tool systems, available designs are comprised by the socially and culturally developed resources that we in society rely on to create, read, and interpret texts. Design is seen as the process of producing a text or final product, and redesigned is a new understanding of language use and text. In a media-rich classroom the concept of design has become central to understanding students' literacy practices as students draw on social and cultural resources to develop new ways to read and interpret texts.

The New London Group has proposed four overlapping aspects of pedagogy that are integrated 1) situated practice, 2) overt instruction, 3) critical framing, and 4) transformed practice to support students as they design multimodal texts. Figure 2-1 provides an overview of the interrelated components which are explained below:



Figure 2-1. The New London Group’s Four Phases of Design adapted from “A Pedagogy of multiliteracies” (1996)

### **Situated practice and overt instruction**

The first two components of the NLG’s pedagogy are stated to be situated practice and overt instruction, both of which are undergirded by a theory of sociocultural learning. The New London Group’s views of social interaction drew on the work of Vygotsky (1978; 1987) and others (Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Street, 1984) who conceptualized the interconnectedness of language and social interaction in literacy and learning. During situated practice, the first stage of the New London Group’s pedagogy, students are fully immersed in contextualized learning and appropriate tools for the learning context are available. For example, if students are learning how to create a PowerPoint presentation, then a computer with the computer program is made available for practice. These tools combined with contextual learning have created opportunities for students to understand and to produce multimodal texts in social and cultural contexts. In addition, students are supported by contextual



learning as they use available designs to acquire understandings of texts. During overt instruction, the second stage of the NLG's pedagogy, a teacher or more knowledgeable individual has subject matter related to students' lives while introducing formal concepts about the text's design.

Buckingham (2003), a media literacy education scholar, has suggested that students experience a similar process when learning about media, such as popular cultural texts. He theorized that students naturally acquire spontaneous concepts about media similar to how they acquire spontaneous concepts about language and literacy (Heath, 1983; Gee, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Through media literacy education, he has recommended that teachers use overt instruction to teach students about formal concepts, such as media vocabulary. He adds that formally learning about media allows students to analyze media as a text. Akin to the NLG's overt instruction and situated practice, Buckingham (2003) suggested that in order to extend students' understandings of media, teachers must introduce formal concepts specific to the studied text at overlapping and necessary phases during students' learning.

### **Critical framing and transformed practice**

A theory of critical literacy (Freire, 1998) undergirds critical framing and transformed practice, the third and fourth components of the New London Group's literacy pedagogy. These two phases of the pedagogy are defined as taking a critical stance and developing tenets of critical literacy theorized by Freire (1998), such as reflection, critical consciousness, and praxis. Like Freire, the New London Group has posited that literacy pedagogy should provide ways for students to reflect on texts and ways to frame new understandings of language and literacy that are situated in

“historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice” (New London Group, 1996, p. 23). Through the process of critical framing, the third element of the New London Group’s literacy pedagogy and media literacy education, teachers should support students as they develop critical consciousness and consider new ways to use media in social and cultural contexts. During the fourth phase, or transformed practice, students transfer their new language and literacy knowledge in ways that are authentic and meaningful to them. Transformed practice can occur if teachers provide opportunities for students to contextualize their learning in classroom settings (New London Group, 1996) or in other naturally contextualized and authentic social spaces, where students practice using new understandings of texts, such as in their homes or communities (Buckingham, 2003). For transformed practice, students are also required to add formal concepts of texts to their existing understandings of texts. The new concepts then have become a part of students’ available designs that they will be able to draw on when they design future texts.

The New London Group has noted that their literacy pedagogy is recursive, just as literacy practice is. Therefore, teachers and students should move through situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice fluidly as students add new understandings of how to use language and texts.

### **Classroom Research**

The studies described in this section are situated in classroom settings (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Kist, 2005; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Pace, 2009). These studies examined literacy pedagogy where multiple modes

of texts, such as popular culture are central to students' learning. These studies illustrated how formal lessons centered on understanding popular culture can extend students' existing understandings of such texts. Some studies (Callahan, 2002; Morrell, 2004; Pace, 2009) also revealed how students critically analyze popular culture texts in ways that embellish students' understandings of how learning about formal media concepts can be used in varied social settings.

**Popular culture texts and English language arts instruction.** Alvermann (1999) created lessons to support students' critical analyses of popular culture texts. The researcher's case-study investigation provided ways to bridge eighth-grade students' initial conceptions of popular culture texts with new information about the texts. As Alvermann and Xu suggested (2003), Alvermann began with popular culture texts that interested students, such as popular bands. Alvermann illustrated how teachers can develop formal lessons about popular bands to extend students' existing knowledge about such texts. In Alvermann's case-study for teaching about popular culture, she asked eighth-grade students to answer four questions about two popular female artists; two of the questions related to the texts and images of the artists and two of the questions were personal responses about the media messages.

Similar to Vygotsky's (1987) theory of concurrently using spontaneous and formal concepts, Alvermann engaged students in using language to discuss their initial understandings of the musical artists. She then guided students through a form of textual analyses centered on popular culture in order to add to students' existing media knowledge and to help them develop a more critical view of popular culture. For example, students analyzed the two female bands' song lyrics and image. As a result

of formal analysis, students learned that the two female bands had designed an image contradictory to their lyrics.

Alvermann's (1999) case study was important because it provided an illustration for how to support students as they analyzed popular culture texts differently than they would in their everyday experiences. The case revealed that using popular culture can be culturally relevant because students were able to draw on cultural understandings of popular bands that they had formed as a result of informally engaging with such media. Alvermann's study indicates that analyzing popular culture is one method teachers can use to help students develop ways for thinking about how to use texts in new ways.

Mills' (2006) study of sixth-grade students focused on how a teacher applied the New London Group's (1996) concepts for situated practice and overt instruction. The researcher observed two groups of students; one group was comprised of middle-class students, and the other group consisted of students who had low socioeconomic backgrounds. All students watched and analyzed a professional clay animation film and several student-designed films in order to understand important design elements. The researcher's observations focused on how student groups used available designs specific for creating clay animation films. Mills found that while the Anglo-Australian, middle-class students were able to use clay animation resources to complete their film, the same process was problematic for the students whose background was of lower socioeconomic status. Because the students who were of lower socioeconomic status were academically homogenous, there was no student who could act as a more knowledgeable other when the group required overt instruction to understand formal media concepts. The absence of an expert novice or support of a more knowledgeable

other hindered the group's production of a clay animation, as they did not understand the vocabulary required to complete the project. Mills' study illustrated the type of support students require as they create multimodal texts.

Kist's (2005) six case-study examinations revealed how various teachers integrated multiple modes of texts; however, one case illustrated how one teacher used popular culture texts with at-risk students. The teacher used film to develop at-risk students' reading and comprehension and to extend their views of film messages in current social and cultural contexts. The teacher initially contextualized students' learning by having students apply formal media concepts while viewing films in class. He required students to analyze and apply media vocabulary, such as camera angles, colors, and/or lighting to guide students' understandings of how analyzing these concepts affect visual interpretations of scenes or characters. Kist observed students using film vocabulary to discuss personal and technical interpretations of popular culture, and, consequently, to form written explanations of those interpretations. The teacher also used questioning techniques to support students as they analyzed critically popular culture texts. For example, he prompted students to contextualize plots and characters given today's societal and cultural frameworks. This case exemplified the importance of introducing formal concepts about media and supporting students in class as they apply those concepts to popular films.

Other studies similarly revealed how teachers drew on students' existing understandings of popular culture and introduced formal concepts about such texts (Callahan, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Morrell, 2004; Pace, 2009). These studies also examined how teachers developed lessons that provided students

opportunities to think critically about popular culture. These studies illustrated positive literacy results when students considered how they could situate new perspectives of media in social and cultural contexts and how they could use multimodal texts in meaningful ways. For example, Morrell (2004) used popular culture and traditional printed texts to support urban, English language arts high school students' understandings of social-justice issues. Morrell paired popular films, such as *The Godfather* (Ruddy & Coppola, 1972) or *A Time to Kill* (Milchan, Grisham, Nathanson, Lowry, & Shumacer, 1996) with more traditional printed texts, such as *The Odyssey* (Homer) or *Native Son* (Wright, 1940), respectively. The teacher situated student learning through peer-led discussions where students juxtaposed their personal understandings of how society deal with race and gender issues compared to popular media characters' portrayals of similar social and cultural situations. Morrell taught formal lessons that required students to apply English language arts concepts, such as characters, plot, and setting to canonical and popular culture texts. As students developed classroom presentations and wrote three narratives about films and novels, they developed new perspectives of social justice issues that deepened their understanding of their social and cultural worlds.

Because Morrell also believed hip-hop music and culture are socially and culturally relevant to high school students' lives, he and his colleague, Duncan-Andrade (2004) developed a unit, which paired popular culture rap music alongside traditional poetry. As suggested by Vygotsky (1987), Morrell & Duncan-Andrade used rap music to scaffold students' understanding of poetry. The scholars developed lessons that paralleled the formal concepts traditionally used with poetry to that of rap music.

Students used formal concepts of poetry as they thematically compared and contrasted the design of the two texts as historically situated art forms. Students applied literary terms as they researched and analyzed how poems and popular music reveal relevant social issues for both the poet's and musician's era. Student groups presented popular music related to canonical poems, an anthology of poems they analyzed, and an original poem addressing a social issue. Producing texts in this way supported students' critical literacy because they were able to apply literary concepts to popular music. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's units demonstrated how positioning popular culture texts alongside more traditional printed texts was culturally relevant to their students' lives, allowed for scaffolding to make meaning of texts, and supported understandings of how texts are socially and culturally situated.

Callahan (2002) examined how one English language arts teacher used popular culture texts, such as radio documentaries, digital tools like computer editing programs, and traditional literacy skills like writing to help secondary students understand the popular English language arts concept "narrative." Similar to other teachers (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Kist, 2005; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004) who introduced formal concepts about popular culture, the teacher in Callahan's (2002) study initially guided students through a process of listening to various radio documentaries to understand characteristics of that medium. The teacher also developed formal lessons that required students to research the social and cultural purpose of radio documentaries. Providing a framework for students to analyze how radio documentaries can connect one person's story to an audience helped them to think of authentic purposes for their own digital narratives. Similar to producers of radio

documentaries, students used available resources to write personal narratives, audio tape stories, and interview members of the community as preparation for the production. Later, they added music and used computer software to create their own digital narratives. Aside from learning how to create multimodal texts, students presented their digital narratives to school board employees. Students seemed most impressed with how their digital narratives emotionally affected their audience, as many school board employees connected with the narratives and were moved to tears. Callahan's study illustrates how teachers can develop lessons that require students to use components of critical literacy.

Pace's (2009) qualitative study was an examination of three secondary students in an English language arts elective class. Pace's research revealed that each student developed varied literacy practices as a result of formal lessons about media. The lessons required students critically analyze film vocabulary, social online network advertising, and sitcom structure in classroom context. As a result, each student reported critically analyzing media in social settings outside of the classroom. For example, one student used the process she learned in class to analyze movies with her brother at the movie theater. After engaging in a class discussion about social online networking, another student conducted her own inquiry at home. The student's personal study helped her recognize the type of advertising used in MySpace. The third student learned about sitcom structure as a result of studying popular television shows in class. This student influenced his family's dinner practices as they began eating dinner in front of the television while he taught them specific concepts to interpret sitcoms. Pace's



study revealed that students enacted transformed practices and they began interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing media in social ways.

The described studies revealed that popular culture texts are culturally relevant to students' lives. Examining varied teachers' uses of popular culture illustrated that students drew on a range of existing understandings of popular culture texts, such as the characteristics of popular bands (Alvermann, 1999) or popular film (Morrell, 2004). Pace's (2009) research also illustrated that formal media lessons can transcend classroom settings when students use classroom literacy practices in relevant ways.

Studies of how teachers centralize popular culture within literacy pedagogy have also suggested that students require more knowledgeable people, such as the teacher or other students to scaffold understandings of media concepts (Mills, 2006); however, once students' learning is scaffolded, studies indicated that students can apply media concepts to form new understandings of popular culture (Callahan, 2002; Morrell, 2004; & Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Kist, 2005). The research also has illustrated the possibility for developing students' critical literacy if teachers develop formal lessons centered on juxtaposing students' existing understandings of popular culture with media vocabulary (Callahan, 2002; Morrell, 2004; & Duncan-Andrade, 2004). The next section describes what research has revealed about student-discussions centered on texts in classroom contexts.

### **Studying Language Use in Classroom Settings**

The varied ways that a community use reading and writing in social contexts are described as literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Heath's (1983) study of differing communities exemplified the varied ways communities can develop literacy

practices. Literacy practices are oftentimes considered unobservable because the way people practice literacy also embodies societal values about reading and writing. Researchers who seek to understand classroom literacy practices typically have examined language in use during literacy events (Bloome et al., 2005). Literacy events, which are conversations centered on written texts (Heath, 1982) can illustrate the literacy practices of a culture. For this study, I examined how students participated in literacy events centered on popular culture texts in a classroom. In this section, first are described studies that examine the usefulness of observing language use in classroom contexts. Then, I have detailed the findings of similar studies that have examined how students participated in classroom literacy events. Such studies have shown how language use socializes students into classroom practices, prompts critical thinking and critical reading, and influences the interpretation of literature and other texts.

### **Language Used in Classroom Settings**

Studying language use in context has been useful for understanding how language use shapes literacy in classrooms. Hymes' (1974) systematic framework for studying language helped researchers examine the speech community, speech situation, and speech event, to understand how a community uses language in context to function. Speech communities are defined as groups of people who share common rules for speaking, such as students and a teacher in a classroom. Speech situations are defined as times when people choose to speak within the speech community. A student who chooses to answer a question would exemplify a speech situation. Speech events are defined as conversations within the speech situation that have beginnings and endings. Defining classrooms as speech communities and studying the dialogic

process (Bakhtin, 1981) of speech events within those communities has provided understandings about how teachers use language to socialize students for classroom participation. For example, Mehan's (1979) seminal research of classroom conversations revealed the initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) pattern often enacted in teacher-student interaction. His research suggested teacher-student conversation often is a sequence whereby the teacher initiates conversation, students then respond, and the teacher then evaluates students' responses.

Nystrand et al. (1997) also researched teacher-student interaction with regard to initiation-response-evaluation patterns; however, they studied variations of these patterns. The researchers examined the authenticity of teachers' questions and the amount of uptake in classroom discourse. Teachers' questions were authentic if there were no pre-set answers. Researchers also discerned authenticity by open-ended questions that elicited undetermined student answers. Researchers analyzed uptake to determine if classroom discourses were also dialogic as suggested by Bakhtin (1981). There is uptake in a conversation when a participant initiates a discussion about something another participant said in a previous conversation. A teacher following up on students' responses usually has signified uptake during classroom discourse. An analysis of uptake can reveal how participants are responding to one another during speech events. After observing over 400 eighth-grade and ninth-grade English language arts students and teachers in class, researchers found that almost all interactions were traditional initiation-response-evaluation interactions where the teacher asked questions with pre-determined answers. However, the study also showed that if the teacher's questions were authentic with no pre-set answer and if there was

significant uptake the person responded by referencing other questions or answers. In such cases, the initiation-response-evaluation pattern served to include student voice or critical thinking.

Similarly, Cazden (2001) added that initiation-response-evaluation patterns are sometimes necessary in elementary classrooms at the beginning of instruction and that these patterns can shift from questions with pre-set answers to thoughtful conversations if a teacher requires in-depth answers by asking students to support their assertions. Studying speech events often paints a broad picture of teacher-student interaction. However, in this study, I focused specifically on literacy events, episodes of language use and literacy practice that are centered on texts. Examining these events provided a more focused view than general studies of language and is more appropriate for studying language in an English language arts elective class. A study of literacy events acknowledges the central role texts and language play in developing literacy. For a study focused on students' use of popular culture in classrooms, such a perspective is warranted.

### **Literacy Event Studies in Classroom Settings**

Heath (1982) expanded Hymes' speech events to include literacy events, like conversations centered on the written word. Studying literacy events, according to Heath, can reveal how communities use the language and texts situated in their lives. Studying literacy events allowed Heath (1983) to conduct a cross-cultural examination of the differences between the language acquired in familial communities versus the language and literacy requirements of classrooms. She found that teachers who conducted self-analyses of their own language and students' language in context found

they were expecting students to use language and texts in ways that were incongruent to their home and community lives. These teachers successfully bridged the gap between literacies once they recognized the varied ways children used language and literacy in their respective homes. Heath's research also inspired others seeking to understand how students converse about text in classroom settings.

Studying literacy events has been the most appropriate way to understand how students and teachers use personal, social and cultural influences for interpreting texts and developing diverse perspectives. Results of research focused on students' literacy events demonstrated implicit social and cultural practices that may otherwise go unnoticed. For example, researchers found that social and cultural norms, which affect participation or interpretation in classroom settings, are evident when studying literacy events (Lewis, 2001; Moje & Lewis, 2007; Pace, 2006). An examination of literacy events also showed how students use personal knowledge to comprehend literature (Moje & Lewis, 2007; Morrell, 2004).

Lewis' (2001) case studies of elementary students' conversations centered on literature revealed that even a teacher's well-intentioned literature discussions can still marginalize students and reinforce social codes. As a participant-observer at a socio-economically diverse elementary school, Lewis videotaped several student literature events, wrote extensive field notes, and interviewed student participants, their parents and the teacher for one school year. Her case study focused on the teacher, who valued reading and critically interpreting literature, and three fifth-grade and two sixth-grade students as they participated in common English language arts literature events

such as read-alouds, peer-led literature discussions, teacher-led discussions and independent reading discussions created by their teacher to evoke critical thinking.

Read-alouds, during which teachers read portions of texts to students and stop for conversation, established the type of classroom culture the teacher expected and taught students the interpretive reading process that the teacher valued. By examining read-alouds as literacy events, Lewis found the teacher reinforced gender codes that marginalized boys. For example, the teacher allowed girls to brush their hair during these events, but discouraged boys from drawing pictures. Lewis also witnessed marginalized student voices in peer-led literature discussions. By analyzing uptake, the researcher found that students who belonged to similar socioeconomic social classes denied other students access to conversations. Peer-led literature discussions also gave already dominant female students positions of power because the teacher assigned them group-leader roles. Although teacher-led discussions included smaller groups and allowed students to introduce journal entry topics, the teacher remained in power as she directed critical interpretations, determined interpretive competence and often enacted initiation-response-evaluation patterns typically found in other classroom studies (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand et al., 1997).

Teacher and student interviews revealed the teacher's disdain for using popular culture texts for instructive purposes, yet these were the texts students chose for independent reading. Lewis indicated that conversations about independent readings differed because these texts were popular cultural texts, as opposed to canonical teacher-selected texts. Conversations centered on these books shifted the social power of one marginalized male student, who usually did not come prepared to discuss

canonical literature. He spoke more frequently and attempted to guide group discussions focused on popular culture texts. The student seemed more engaged because he identified with the text.

This examination of literacy events commonly found in literature classes has helped teachers and researchers understand that students and teachers participate in more than interpreting literature during discussions; they also construct and reinforce previously established social codes. The teacher's affinity for female students who enjoyed reading established social norms that marginalized male students who did not participate in class in a similar way.

Whereas Lewis' study of literacy events revealed recurrent themes of a female dominated classroom, Pace's (2006) examination of literacy events in a college course showed evidence of male-dominant ideology eventually espoused by two female students. Pace observed 41 classes, conducted 30 interviews with six student participants (two males and four women) and the teacher, and analyzed three literacy events centered on the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Gilman, 1899). Pace's analyses of three literacy events illustrated the discontinuity of the two female students' interpretations, which eventually led to a written analysis that was not only antithetical to their initial journal responses, but also coincided with the dominant ideologies voiced in class discussion.

Initial journal responses showed that two female students attribute the main character's (a woman locked in a room by her husband) strange behavior to her confinement. A class discussion where the instructor used one of the student participant's journal entries to teach how to support a thesis statement, revealed male

responses that shifted from interpreting the main character's treatment in a sociocultural and historical context to attributing the main character's strange behavior to mental illness. The two female students' interpretive essays were more closely related to the male-dominated class discussion; the two females attributed the main character's behavior to mental illness. Through Pace's examination of literacy events, teachers can view how social interactions, such as class discussions affect student interpretation.

Similarly, as part of a larger ethnographic study of classrooms and schools, Moje & Lewis (2007) analyzed the literacy events of an urban eighth-grade class's discussion of *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967). Though there were 30 students in the class, the study of this particular literacy event focused on the teacher, three Latina girls and one Latino boy. The class read, discussed, and wrote an essay about the novel over a two-week period; however, Moje & Lewis' examination focused on the discussion prior to the assigned essay, when students were learning how to develop and support opinions in writing. Similar to Pace (2006) who found that students did not use personal experiences to support their interpretations of literature, Moje & Lewis illustrated how difficult it is for students to use personal connections to initiate and sustain critical conversations about literature.

Moje & Lewis (2007) revealed that the academic setting limited which identities students could enact. While the teacher's use of open-ended questions prompted students to use personal connections to talk about larger societal issues, they also demonstrated that students felt a sense of agency and were comfortable discussing different topics in class. There were, however, limitations to how much personal knowledge students shared. For example, during the discussion about the novel, a



conversation ensued about whether gangs were good or bad. One Latina student wanted to share knowledge about her gang-affiliated identity to validate the goodness of gangs, but she could not because she seemed to know that using her gang-affiliated knowledge was inappropriate in school situations. This study illustrated how overlapping discourses can sometimes pose a problem in classroom settings. Ironically, the student enacted a student identity appropriate for academic discourse, but the more appropriate gang-affiliated identity would have positioned her as knowledgeable during the classroom discussion.

Similarly, Morrell (2004) examined how students use personal connections to discuss social justice issues centered on popular cultural and traditional texts. Morrell used ethnography and action research to reflectively analyze his teaching at an urban high school. As a teacher-participant, Morrell videotaped lessons he taught that included popular cultural films, such as *The Godfather* (Ruddy & Coppola, 1972) or *A Time to Kill* (Milchan, Grisham, Nathanson, Lowry, & Schumacer, 1996) and traditional texts, such as *The Odyssey* (Homer) or *Native Son* (Wright, 1940), respectively. He analyzed literacy events specifically centered on conversations about social justice issues. Students watched films and read and discussed novels (centered on characters, plot, setting, etc.), engaged in classroom presentations about both texts, and wrote three narratives based on the texts. Morrell noted that students gained a sense of autonomy in their own learning as they participated in student-led discussions centered on these texts; they learned to question the texts' gender and racial representations against their own lives. For example, students personally related to the racial injustice found in the film *A Time to Kill* (Milchan, Grisham, Nathanson, Lowry, &

Schumacer, 1996) and used these connections to inform critical interpretations of both the movie and the novel, *Native Son* (Wright, 1940). Likewise, a discussion about gender roles in *The Odyssey* (Homer) not only helped students relate personally, but also provided a way for students to gain understanding of the text itself.

Morrell noted that he began with relevant texts (popular culture) and used open-ended questions to evoke critical thinking and scaffold knowledge about canonical texts. He found that combining relevant texts with canonical texts supported students as they connected with one another and the texts.

The described research studies each illustrated that observing literacy events is an effective method for uncovering the ways that students practice literacy when participating in classroom discussions centered on texts. Studies revealed that students sometime enacted similar social discourse patterns found in larger social contexts, and these patterns can reinforce social codes and marginalize students during literature discussions (Lewis, 2001; Pace, 2006). By examining students' language in use, Moje & Lewis (2007) revealed that there are limitations to how students use language and cultural backgrounds during classroom conversations centered on novels. An analysis of literacy events also demonstrated how students constructed understandings of texts. For example, Pace (2006) found that female students espoused views about a text that were a part of the dominant classroom discourse, yet those views were in opposition to their own personal and cultural responses. However, Morrell (2004) found that students used their cultural backgrounds to construct understandings of popular cultural and academic texts in new ways. Through these studies, researchers established that while literacy is an abstract, unobservable concept, literacy events are concrete conversations

that can reveal understandings about classroom literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

This study was an investigation of students' literacy practices in classroom contexts. Integral to this investigation was the teacher's application of sociocultural perspectives for literacy learning and the use of culturally relevant texts, such as popular culture. Therefore, it was essential to observe students as they used popular culture texts during classroom discussions. Observing students in classroom contexts informed understandings of how students initially used new vocabulary and social interaction to develop new understandings of popular culture texts. These observations also revealed the ways students used popular culture texts to understand formal concepts introduced by the teacher. Analyzing intertextuality, the connections students make between popular culture texts and other texts and intercontextuality, the connections students make between the literacy event they are participating in to previous literacy events, helped develop researcher understandings of how students used texts to construct meaning about texts and literacy (Bloome et al., 2005; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). Other data sources such as Media Diary responses and focus-group interviews also revealed how students used schooled literacy practices in their personal lives. These data sources illustrate how and if students reported using critical literacy practices (Freire, 1998; Hinchey, 1998; NLG, 1996). More detailed information concerning research methodology is outlined in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

This study was grounded in sociocultural theories of literacy and learning established by Vygotsky (1978) and others (Gee, 1998; 1999; Heath, 1983; The New London Group, 1996) that recognize literacy as socially constructed. The purpose of this study was to understand how high-school students expanded their concepts of literacy as they participated in literacy events focused on popular culture in classroom settings. For this reason, I selected a high-school class where the teacher used methods for teaching popular culture texts.

I conducted a qualitative study that used ethnographic methods, such as audio and video-taped observations, extensive field notes, feedback diaries, and focus group and individual interviews to examine literacy events in classroom contexts (Bloome, et al., 2005; Heath, 1982; 1983; Lewis, 2001; Moje & Lewis, 2007; Morrell, 2004; Pace, 2006). Ethnographic methods, such as observations supported an understanding of how students used language centered on popular culture texts. Other data sources helped me develop an insider's view of how each student developed his or her concept of literacy.

Researchers have documented positive literacy experiences of English language arts students' in classrooms where the teacher uses popular culture texts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Pace & Garland, 2007; 2009; Hobbs, 2007; Kist, 2005; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004). This study, however, also examined how students participated in classroom literacy events. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture?
- How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers interested in people's experiences of literacy have recognized that there is no latent meaning waiting to be derived from events but that meaning is constructed as people interact with each other and objects (Crotty, 2003; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Such studies conducted in the field of education have sought to answer "how."

Berger and Luckmann (1966) provided a way of understanding how people construct knowledge. These theorists posit there is a difference between reality and knowledge. While reality is what we see before us, knowledge is what we construct as reality. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) add that "the meaning of reality is likely to be constructed differently as a function of the position or perspective taken by a culture, a social formation, or an individual person" (p. 14). The way societies construct knowledge depends on social experiences that influence our view of objects and people.

This study was grounded in a framework that helped understand the socially constructed and culturally imbedded nature of literacy by: (1) recognizing high-school students' existing views of popular culture before they formally studied it in class, (2) highlighting the ways high-school students used language and text to develop new perspectives of popular culture within a classroom context, and (3) acknowledging how

each student expanded their own unique concept of literacy that was influenced by studying popular culture in a classroom setting.

## **Qualitative Research Methods**

### **Ethnographic Methods in Education**

Anthropologists typically have used ethnography in order to study participants in cultural contexts, such as communities (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981) or homes (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Ethnographic methods often include extensive observations and interviews with participants in order to understand fully the participants' views (Merriam, 2001). Research in classrooms does not lend itself to traditional ethnographic methods initiated by anthropologists. However, researchers (Moje & Lewis, 2001; 2005; Morrell, 2004) in secondary literacy education have demonstrated that ethnographic methods, such as classroom observations, participant interviews and curricular artifacts can be used to gain understandings of students' views in classroom settings.

### **Case Study Research**

Case study research was the most appropriate method for this study because it allowed me to understand students' literacy practices within the context of the classroom. Stake (1995) defined a case as a "bounded system" (p. 2), and Merriam (2001) sees it as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). In educational research, bounded systems can be classrooms (Kist, 2006), teachers (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999), or students (Alvermann & Heron, 2001). The following section describes why students were defined as instrumental cases.

## **Instrumental Case Study**

According to Stake (1995), an instrumental case is one where the researcher examines a case to “gain understanding of something else” (p. 3). For these types of cases, there is an underlying issue that is being investigated. In this study I sought to understand the views of students about their experiences in the Literature in the Media class. For example, it was important for me as a researcher to understand how students conceptualized literacy and how they participated in literacy events within the Literature in the Media class, as opposed to understanding the students’ biographical histories. To locate themes that arose in the issues of how students understood and practiced literacy in the class, I used domain analysis as a method of “categorical aggregation,” (Stake, 1995, p. 77). Further explanation of how data were analyzed is in the data analysis section of this chapter.

### **The Setting and Participants**

#### **Westville High School**

All names used for this study are pseudonyms. The high school where the study was conducted was one of six 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools centrally situated in a rural north Florida school district. The average high school student population was usually just below 2000 and is 92% White, 4% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. The graduation rate was 66.2%. Twenty-four percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch (Florida Department of Education website).

Schools in Florida are graded by the state. Students’ literacy achievement is measured by the state’s standardized assessment, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Subsequently, schools are assigned a grade that reflects 9<sup>th</sup>

and 10<sup>th</sup> graders' literacy achievement, as well as the percentage of passing eleventh and twelfth graders who retake the test. The past two years Westville High School was assigned a "C" on the FCAT. Ninety-one percent of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students passed the state standardized writing test, and 48 % of these students demonstrated proficiency in reading (Florida Department of Education website).

### **Literature in the Media Class**

The Literature in the Media class was one-year, weighted, English language arts honors elective course offered at Westville High School. The honors English language arts elective provided an interdisciplinary media literacy education to secondary students by combining state standards in English language arts, theatre, visual arts, and music. The year this study was conducted marked the fifth year of the course's inception.

### **Participants**

Teacher-participant selection was purposive. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess specific characteristics that allow for investigation of specific phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling, for this study was theoretically motivated (Patton, 1990, p. 171), specifically the application of media literacy education (Buckingham, 2003) within the New London Group's (1996) pedagogy of Multiliteracies. Both are undergirded by theories of sociocultural learning (Gee, 1996; 1998; 1999; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). Teacher selection was based on the following criteria:

- Teacher knowledge of English language arts and media literacy education;
- The extent to which the teacher integrates both media literacy education and English language arts pedagogy; and
- Activities where students study formally and analyze critically popular culture.



## **The Teacher**

All people's names used in this study are pseudonyms. Jessie Reynolds was a veteran English language arts teacher who has taught for over 30 years. She was Nationally Board Certified and holds three degrees: a bachelor's degree in English, a master's degree in journalism, and a specialist degree in curriculum and instruction with a specialization in media literacy education. Her teaching experience included English language arts and print media classes at the secondary level. This year she taught Advanced Placement English classes and Literature in the Media, the English language arts elective examined for this study.

As part of her Specialist's program, the teacher completed classes at a major university, where contemporary theories of literacy were introduced. In these classes, teachers have learned to use various multimodal texts, such as television shows, film, and advertisements to support future secondary students' literacy practices. In addition to reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1994), Jessie's teaching is undergirded by Vygotsky's (1978; 1987) theory of sociocultural learning and pedagogy that centralizes multiple forms of texts, such as media in literacy pedagogy (Buckingham, 2003; NLG, 1996).

As partial fulfillment of her specialist degree, Jessie created Literature in the Media, a Florida Department of Education English language arts honors course. The course provided English language arts teachers with an accessible media elective that supports students' literacy and critical analyses skills. This was the fifth year Literature in the Media was offered at the high school. The class was centered on accessing, evaluating, and producing multiple types of media, such as film, music, and television.

## **The Students**

Student participants were those who had volunteered to participate in the research study, and whose parents signed the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms. One hundred percent of the students agreed to participate.

There were 21 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students enrolled in the Literature in the Media class. These students reflected the demographics of the larger population of the school. For example, there were seven males and 14 females, and two of these students identified as Caribbean and Haitian. According to Jessie, four students were not proficient in reading and had to retake the reading portion of the standardized test.

Of the 21 Literature in the Media students, four were selected as instrumental cases for this study. Case selection was based upon 90% student participation in the study. For example, I selected students who submitted at least nine of the ten media diary entries; who were present at least 36 out of the 40 class observations; and who participated in the focus group interview. Alex, Jenna, Laurie, and Adam fit these criteria, and were selected as cases. All student names are pseudonyms. A brief description of each student participant is provided below:

### **Laurie**

Laurie was a white, female senior whose self-selected seat was at the front of the class near the teacher's podium. Disney was a large part of Laurie's personal life. Disney World was where her father conducts contract work as an energy efficiency specialist; the theme park was also where her cousin plays sports tournaments and where she travelled for school-related chorus events. Because Laurie sometimes

watched the Disney channel and owned popular Disney films, she was also familiar with the people and products associated with the media company.

### **Alex**

Alex was a white, female senior who sat near Laurie. She was usually the first to enter the classroom. Alex enjoyed completing class projects that included creating visual texts because it offered her a freedom from the computer programs she was required to use in other classes. Therefore, if Ms. Reynolds provided students with either using technology to complete a project or using another tool, Alex chose the alternate. Alex was very familiar with popular films. During classroom discussions that warranted students to draw on existing popular culture knowledge, Alex was usually the first to provide relevant knowledge about movies. Additionally, each week Alex would share her most recent movie-watching experience with her peers or Ms. Reynolds.

### **Adam**

Adam was a white, male, and one of four juniors in the Literature in the Media class. Adam enjoyed engaging with different facets of popular culture. For example, he and his father usually watched the nightly news together. He was also familiar with popular action movies produced within different decades because he had an older brother who introduced him to older movies and a younger sister who requested he watch movies with her. Adam also listened to popular music that critiqued media. At one point, he even brought in a song that critiqued the media to share with Ms. Reynolds.

## **Jenna**

Jenna was a white, female senior who was generally quiet during whole-class discussions. She usually worked with Laurie on class projects. Jenna had a collection of Disney-produced DVDs that she had enjoyed watching during her years as a child. Jenna was also familiar with creating multimodal texts using the computer program, PowerPoint. She knew how to organize information and use PowerPoint shortcuts to create presentations.

### **Qualitative Research Methods**

Data collection took place from August 2009 to November 2009. Methods of data collection included the following: classroom observations (video and audio taped), extensive field notes, conceptual notes, media diaries, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and curricular artifacts (i.e., teacher's materials and students' assignments).

#### **Classroom Observations**

A primary source of data for both research questions was observations. Observations have allowed the researcher to capture the context of situations in ways that participants themselves may not be able to describe fully (Patton, 2002). Each class period lasted 50 minutes. I observed the class for 40 class sessions using multiple methods of data collection. These tools are described below in the table that follows. Numbers in cells represent the sessions during which each methodology was used:

Table 3-1. Methods Employed in Data Collection

Week	Videotape	Audio tape	Field Notes	Conceptual Notes
1	1-5	1-5	1-5	1
2	6-9	6-9	6-9	2
3	10-14	10-14	10-14	3
4		15-17	15-17	4

5	18-19	18-19	5
6	20-23	20-23	6
7	24-26	24-26	7
8	27-29	27-29	8
9	30-33	30-33	9
10	34-37	34-37	10
11	38-40	38-40	11

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**Videotaped and Audio-Taped Observations**

Videotaping and audio taping to accurately capture students’ discussions and actions was integral for future analyses of classroom literacy events (Gee, 1999; Heath & Street, 2008; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2004; Merriam, 2001). Students were aware of my presence and purpose in the class, but to maintain the presence of a passive, non-participant observer (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Patton, 2002), I arrived ten minutes early to each class. I also set up all visual and audio equipment prior to students’ arrival, sat in the back, and only greeted students if they directly addressed me.

The first 14 observations I conducted were videotaped to develop understandings of the classroom culture and to accurately record participant interactions. However, videotaping classroom observations was not always conducive or appropriate for the classroom context. For example, when students were immersed in group projects, videotaping was not ideal. Therefore, all classroom observations were audio taped. When there was student group work, five groups were randomly selected and each group was taped using separate audio recorders. Video and audio taped observations were transcribed immediately after each visit.

**Extensive Field Notes**

Written field notes allowed the researcher to record details of the classroom setting and participant interactions (see Merriam, 2001). I kept extensive handwritten

field notes during each observation for several different purposes. Initially, I used handwritten field notes to describe the classroom setting, student attendance, self-selected seating arrangements, and teacher and student interactions before, during and after class. I drew diagrams that represented the class setting to recall specific student dialogue. Sometimes handwritten field notes were useful to describe which students participated during special school events because these helped develop students as case studies. Once I became familiar with students and classroom practices, I used handwritten field notes to document partial quotes, actions or behaviors that were germane to understanding the contexts of activities or discussions. Field notes were typed after each visit.

### **Reflective and Conceptual Notes**

Upon leaving Westville High School, I audio taped observation reflection notes. Each week I added conceptual memos to record questions or themes that emerged from weekly observations. Keeping reflective and conceptual notes allowed me to bracket immediate thoughts about observations and connections to themes focused on during analysis (Heath & Street, 2008). Field, reflective and conceptual notes were typed into a three-column chart and referenced during data analysis. Appendix B provides a sample of one day's notes.

### **Media Diaries**

Media Diaries required participants to record answers to specific events (Carter & Mankoff, 2005). Each student was given a composition notebook to use as their Media Diary. I developed questions that elicited student responses centered on weekly classroom activities. Students were responsible for keeping their Media Diaries

throughout the week. Each Thursday students submitted their Media Diaries to me. All Media Diary entries were typed immediately. On Monday, students received a new typed question stapled in the Media Diary to elicit understandings of how students related the previous week's classroom activities centered on media with their own conceptions of literacy. Students recorded ten Media Diary entries. Two sample questions are provided below. A complete list of each Media Diary question and schedule is included in Appendix C.

- **Media Diary Question #1: (9/10/09)**

How do you define literacy? During the four days when you studied media conglomerations, did you do anything that helped you become more literate?

- **Media Diary Question #2: (9/17/09)**

Last week you learned some film metalanguage centered on shots and angles. Use your own definition of literacy to explain how understanding shots and angles has or has not helped you become more literate.

## **Interviews**

Interviewing participants is also a common ethnographic method used in qualitative research to capture the participants' perspectives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Merriam, 2001). One individual teacher interview and one student focus-group interview served as secondary sources of data to support observations and to augment Media Diary responses.

## **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews are commonly used with adolescents because they imitate the natural flow of conversation that they are used to; these types of interviews can also help adolescents feel comfortable (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). For two days I conducted six 15-20 minute, semi-structured focus-group interviews during the sixth week of data collection; therefore, focus-group interviews totaled 120 minutes. Six focus

groups consisted of groups that students had pre-selected for a class project. Each group had between two and four participants. Focus group interviews were conducted in the school cafeteria and audio taped to provide for accurate transcriptions (Gee, 1999; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2004; Merriam, 2001). Focus-group questions were semi-structured and reflected issues from classroom observations, Media Diaries, and curricular artifacts. However, because I was interested in understanding how students expanded their literacy, students' answers guided how sub-questions were asked in the interviews. Focus group interview questions follow:

1. Most of you discussed literacy as being able to understand what's in front of you, how has that changed?
2. How do you believe this class has helped you become more literate?
  - a. Can you name a time in class when you were using literacy?
  - b. Can you describe some activities that you've completed that have helped you become more literate?
3. Ms. Reynolds has talked a lot about metalanguage, how do you think you're doing as far as understanding it?
  - a. How do you know you understand it?
4. What types of activities have you done that help you understand metalanguage?

### **Teacher Interview**

The purpose of the teacher interview was to understand how Ms. Reynolds implicitly and explicitly enacts her theoretical perspective for using pedagogy that encompasses different types of texts. The interview was also designed to provide insight into how she developed her lesson plans and activities. Our interview was semi-



structured because, although I had an interview guide, our conversation was not bound by the guide (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1978). Typically, semi-structured interviews provide a more comfortable setting for the participant because of the partial informality. One teacher interview was conducted during the final week of data collection. The teacher interview was 50 minutes. Sample interview questions follow. A complete list of interview questions is included in Appendix D.

- What theoretical perspectives frame your teaching?
- What are your literacy goals/objectives for the class?
- Can you talk about your views of teaching media metalanguage?

### **Curricular Artifacts**

Curricular artifacts are understood as those materials generated as a result of curricular activities (Pace, 2006; 2009). A study where text is central to not only the lessons but also to ways of interpreting texts requires an understanding of such artifacts. Collecting artifacts provided a complete picture of classroom practices (Peräkylä, 2005). Three types of texts were collected: focus texts, generative texts, and popular culture texts. Focus texts were those used in class to focus instruction, such as teacher handouts, PowerPoints, or specific film. Generative texts were those created by students as a result of instruction, such as Mediated Moments, Film Genre posters, various essays, and student-created PowerPoints. Popular culture texts were images of popular films, television shows, or images the teacher used to exemplify media vocabulary. Popular culture texts were also the images of popular culture students brought to complete class projects. Focus, generative, and popular culture texts were collected to understand both the opportunities students have to expand concepts of literacy and to understand the materials students referenced as useful in supporting

their literacy construction. In appendix E and F are provided examples of focus texts, and more examples are located throughout chapters four, five, and six as they are referenced by students. Students' film genre posters represented generative texts and are located in Chapter 5.

### **Data Analysis**

The research questions for this study were 1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture and 2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text? Data collected for this study were analyzed through inductive and discourse analyses (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). I used inductive methods of analyses (Spradley, 1979; Stake, 1995) to understand the common strands found across multiple data sources. Using inductive methods of analyses also helped me develop both preliminary and final themes to answer research questions. I also used a microethnographic discourse analysis (Bloome et al., 2005) to analyze classroom conversations centered on popular cultural texts.

### **Domain Analysis**

The data collected to answer the research questions were classroom observations, media diary entries, and focus group interviews. Using an inductive analysis technique, such as Spradley's (1979) domain analysis, allowed me to develop initial categories as I made sense of how students' classroom literacy practices were related to the assignments they completed. To conduct the domain analyses I used the following process:

- Select a single semantic relationship.
- Create a domain analysis worksheet.
- Select a sample of field note entries.
- Search for possible cover terms and included terms that fit the semantic relationship.
- Repeat the search for domains using a different semantic relationship.
- Make a list of all identified domains.

A discussion of students’ literacy practices is provided in Chapter 5. A partial list of categories used for students’ literacy practices is presented in the table below (Table 3-2):

Table 3-2. Example of Final Domain Analysis Categories for Students’ Literacy Practices.

Relationship	Form	Example
Attribution	x is a characteristic of analytical practices	Applying the concept of horizontal integration to Disney is a characteristic of analytical practices
Attribution	x is a characteristic of interpretive practices	Noticing textual details is a characteristic of interpretive practices
Means to an end	x is a way to use evaluative practices	Using knowledge of Disney and Wikipedia information to judge why Kodak picture spots are at the theme park is a way to use evaluative practices
Means to an end	x is a way to use communicative practices	Organizing <i>The Matrix</i> (1999) symbols is a way to use communicative practices
Sequence	x is a step in critical literacy practices	Recognizing shots and angles while watching <i>Legally Blonde 2</i> (2003) at home is a step in critical literacy practices

### Microethnographic Discourse Analysis

The data collected to understand students’ literacy practices were classroom observations (i.e., video and audio taped observations and field notes) where students were discussing popular culture. Barton and Hamilton (2000) described literacy

practices as the unobservable ways that a society use reading and writing in social contexts. They posited that literacy practices are unobservable because the way people practice literacy also embodies societal values about reading and writing. Researchers who have sought to understand classroom literacy practices typically have examined language in use during literacy events (Bloome et al., 2005). Heath (1982) defined literacy event as conversations centered on written words; however, for this study, literacy events are defined as conversations centered on any texts, such as popular culture (Morrell, 2004). Bloome et al.'s (2005) microethnographic discourse analysis techniques were used to examine students' literacy practices. Analyzing discourse within literacy events supported an understanding of how students used language and popular culture to interpret texts and to produce texts.

Bloome et al. have suggested using four tools to analyze literacy event data: contextualization cues, boundary making, negotiating thematic coherence, and intertextuality/intercontextuality.

### **Contextualization cues**

Contextualization cues refer to language and non-language used to make meaning in conversations. Intonation patterns, gestures or posture are examples of the contextualization cues we use. Contextualization cues vary depending on the social situation. Analysis of these informed me of how students made meaning and established coherent understandings beyond verbal language. For example, I used field notes to understand how students made meaning in situations when they were producing texts collaboratively without explicitly discussing the project.

## **Boundary making**

Researchers who study language in use have tried to be aware of boundary-making (when a conversation begins and ends). Because conversation boundaries are socially constructed and not determined prior to the beginning of a conversation, I defined boundary-making *after* the conversations occurred. I analyzed conversations' interactional units. Interactional units were message units linked by subject (popular culture) and contextualization cues (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 19).

## **Negotiating thematic coherence**

Thematic coherence occurs when participants explicitly or implicitly understood the conversation's central topic. Thematic coherence was identified if one of the participants (student or teacher) explicitly announced the theme and other participants agreed by continuing a discussion about it. Thematic coherence was also identified by what topics were taken up within the literacy event. Analyzing thematic coherence provided insight into how participants used language and popular cultural texts to thematically bind conversations.

## **Intertextuality and intercontextuality**

Intertextuality is when texts are linked together through other texts or conversations centered on texts. Intertextuality is also socially constructed through proposed, acknowledged and recognized connections of texts. Similarly, intercontextuality is socially constructed through proposed, acknowledged, and recognized connections of other literacy events within a literacy event. Intertextuality and intercontextuality were analyzed to understand how students used language, popular culture and past events to participate in classroom literacy events. Table 3-3

exemplifies a classroom literacy event. During this conversation, students were engaged in finding a way to visually represent “action” as a genre of popular cultural film. In the following table is provided a sample analyzed literacy event representative of how I analyzed all literacy events for this study:

Table 3-3. Literacy Event Discourse Analysis #6, p. 12 (Adam).

Line #	Speaker	Message Units	PRO	ACK	REC	Proposed Intertextuality or Intercontextuality	Social Significance
105	Shean	I'm trying to see if I can do a Greek column that's an I	X			Intercontextuality	Shean proposes an idea for his letter
106	Adam	That's fine – isn't there a Greek movie that's an action movie	X	X	X	Intercontextuality	Adam's "that's fine" supports his role as leader as he confirms the idea, but then he proposes a film for the letter
107	Shean	300		X	X	Intercontextuality	Shean recognizes and acknowledges this connection with the answer for a film
108	Brandon	Oh yeah		X	X	Intercontextuality	Brandon also acknowledges this film as appropriate

After the event, I determined that the students' conversation was bounded by discussing a popular film to represent a letter. The interactional unit illustrates that student proposed, acknowledged, and recognized messages centered on the film and the letter. Further analysis reveals that Sean made an intertextual connection that demonstrates knowledge of Greek structures *and* how they can serve as a visual representation for "I." Adam proposed making an intercontextual connection between the Greek structure and a popular film. Sean recognizes this request and draws on his spontaneous concepts of films, and proposes a specific popular film.

### **Establishing Validity**

Qualitative research involves invading and examining social spaces where people engage with one another; establishing validity strengthens the credibility of such studies. Validity was established through persistent observation, data triangulation, peer review and researcher subjectivity (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995).

#### **Persistent Observation**

One way to strengthen qualitative research is by conducting observations over an extended period of time (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2001). I conducted this study for 11 weeks and observed 40 of the 52 classes in which the teacher and students had conversations centered on media concepts.

#### **Data Triangulation**

Researchers also suggest collecting multiple data sources to triangulate data for qualitative research (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995). Primary sources of data for this study included student Media Diaries and classroom observations;



however, I triangulated these data by video and audio taping observations, maintaining multiple notes (i.e., field, conceptual and reflective), conducting interviews and collecting focus and generative curricular artifacts. Triangulation allowed me to compare patterns across data sets to confirm interpretations.

### **Peer Review**

Validity was also established through weekly conferences with my doctoral chair. During data collection she reviewed data as an external observer and we discussed emerging patterns (Merriam, 2001). After data collection, she provided objective and alternate interpretations of data that challenged and extended my interpretations (Glesne, 2006).

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

Another way to establish validity in qualitative studies is by acknowledging any researcher biases (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2001). Therefore, it is important to note three researcher assumptions during this study: my relationship with Jessie, my public school teaching experience, and my experience with pre-service and in-service teachers.

### **My relationship with Jessie**

I met Jessie Reynolds five years ago in a graduate course centered on understanding how to use media in classroom contexts. When we first met, Jessie had just developed the Literature in the Media course that was adopted by Florida's Department of Education. Because we both sought to understand best practices for integrating media texts and English language arts instruction, Jessie welcomed me and others to study her class. During the second year of the class's inception, I was a

member of a larger research team that investigated how students' social uses of media were related to their academic uses of media (Pace & Garland, 2007). Further research was also conducted in this class to understand how students responded to studying sitcoms (Garland, 2009; Pace, 2009). These two examinations of students' participation influenced the topics of research for the present study.

### **Public school teaching experiences**

My ten years as a secondary English language arts teacher encompasses diverse classroom contexts in both rural and urban school districts. These teaching experiences influenced my perspective as a researcher in how I observed classroom practices, such as teaching methodology and student interaction.

Theories that undergirded both my undergraduate and graduate studies guided my teaching practice. Those theories encouraged teachers to add relevant and diverse texts to existing curricula in order to support students in critically analyzing texts (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). Like other teachers, I had experimented with teaching *with* media texts as Trier (2006) describes by discussing how persuasive appeals were used in print media. At that time I did not have the background to either teach *about* media (Trier, 2006) or to integrate such texts in traditional ELA instruction. In many ways, this study provides insights into issues of ELA curriculum with which I personally struggled.

My teacher identity also provided intuition about student behavior during classroom activities; however, I was careful not to enact this identity as I observed student interactions for this study. Conversely, my years of teaching also helped as I developed relationships with students that allowed them to feel comfortable as they

discussed their feelings of class activities during focus group interviews and in their Media Diaries.

### **Observing pre-service and in-service teachers**

My experience also includes supervising pre-service teachers' field experiences and coaching in-service teachers' practices. Both of these require observing, evaluating, and discussing teachers' performances. I was careful not to allow these experiences to influence observations of Jessie's teaching. Classroom observations were not evaluative, but rather instrumental for understanding classroom practices from a perspective as one of her students. Chapter 4 describes the classroom context and Ms. Reynolds practical applications of sociocultural teaching with culturally relevant texts, such as popular culture.

## CHAPTER 4 A SOCIOCULTURAL CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Don't just mouth that there are different intelligences; recognize that your kids have different learning styles and adapt.

–Jessie Reynolds, *Interview*

Central to examining how students practiced literacy within classroom settings is a need for understanding the classroom learning environment. In the first section of this chapter is provided a description of the physical setting for the Literature in the Media class. In the second section, I have illustrated the above quote that embodies Ms. Reynolds' philosophy of education, as well as provided examples of how Ms. Reynolds used culturally relevant texts, such as popular culture (Banks, 1994; Buckingham, 2003; Gay, 2000; Morrell, 2004), and integrated Vygotskian (1978; 1987) theories of formal literacy teaching that recognize the social and cultural ways her students construct knowledge (Buckingham, 2003; New London Group, 1996).

The described assignments were those that students cited as shifting their concepts of literacy, plus those where student and teacher conversations were centered on popular culture texts. In this chapter, I have presented only a partial description of several activities in which students participated.

### **The Literature in the Media Classroom**

Ms. Reynolds could usually be found standing at the door laughing and talking with students or giving another teacher advice for lesson plans. Twenty-three posters adorned the walls of her classroom. Some posters encouraged students to read literature, while others suggested students should question what they read. To the left was a white board, and in the front corner there was a podium. On the wall to the right was a chalkboard. Student desks were aligned in rows, and there was a teacher desk

in the back. Ms. Reynolds' desk was in between a small table set up for an ELMO and a bookcase with dictionaries and canonical texts. Next to the bookcase was a closet that Ms. Reynolds used as an office. In the office was a Macintosh desktop computer, paper of all sizes, and other supplies that students were free to use during group projects. Recently the school had been outfitted with technology, so there was also an electronic screen on one wall of the room. When the screen was in use, it covered the dry erase board. There was also an LCD projector mounted to the ceiling that can either project the image from the ELMO or from the teacher's laptop. The physical layout of the room is shown in Figure 4-1.

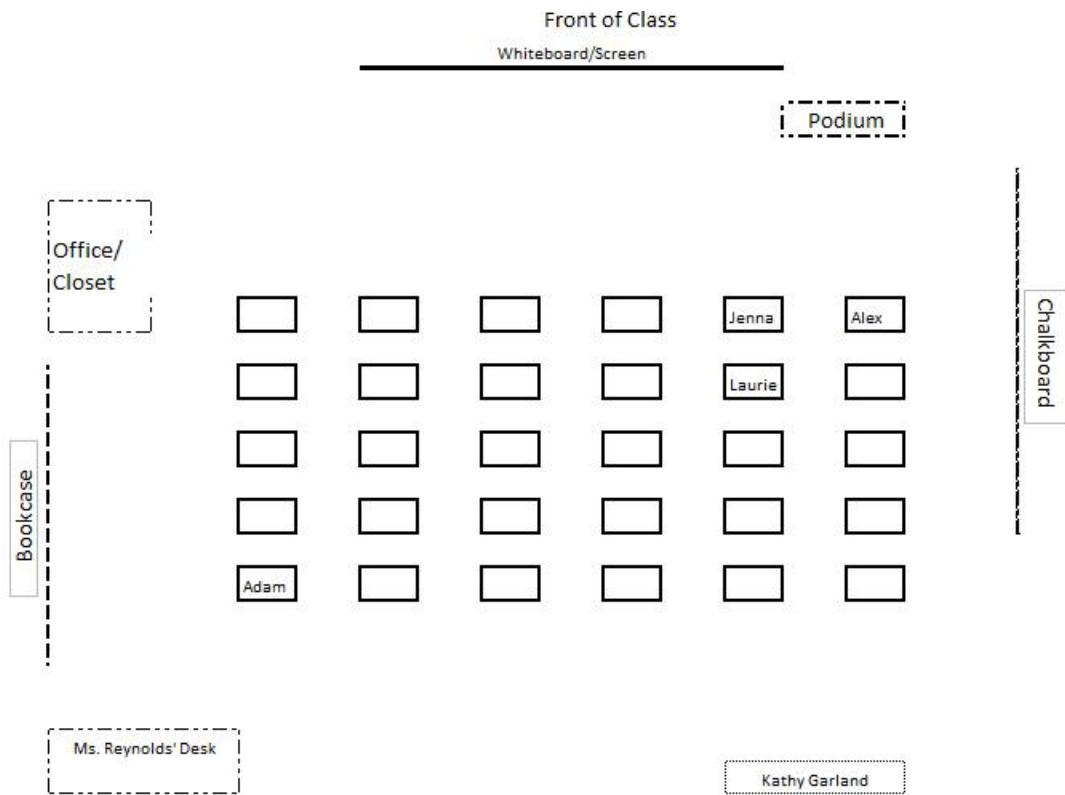


Figure 4-1. Literature in the Media Classroom Layout

## **Formal Learning Undergirded by Sociocultural Theories**

Sociocultural theorists have agreed that the following are components of formal learning in social settings, and that classrooms should mirror the ways that children learn (Buckingham, 2003; Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996; Vygotsky, 1987):

- Students' spontaneous concepts are recognized; however, more formal concepts are introduced to produce mature concepts;
- Students learning is contextualized through adequate amounts of situated practice where they use formal concepts;
- Students are given the resources or tools necessary to produce understandings of formal concepts; and
- A more knowledgeable person scaffolds students' understandings of how to use formal concepts.

For the remainder of this chapter, I have illustrated how Ms. Reynolds enacted theories of sociocultural learning as she applied the teaching of popular culture concepts.

### **Recognizing Spontaneous Concepts**

Central to learning undergirded by sociocultural theories is that students' spontaneous concepts are valued and recognized in classroom contexts. Ms. Reynolds valued students' existing knowledge about popular culture. Students were able to draw on existing knowledge through writing activities, such as the weekly "Mediated Moments." The weekly "Mediated Moments" were quotes Ms. Reynolds used to provoke individual student thought about media. They closely resembled reader-response writing activities suggested by others who have advocated for a transactional theory of reading (Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1981; Wilhelm, 2008). These quotes included mainstream opinions about various aspects of media and usually complimented the week's focus. For example, a Mediated Moment for the Comedy Unit asked students to consider a specific comedic genre, i.e., tragic comedy (Mediated

Moment #10, 11/19/09). Students written responses to these quotes were due every Thursday. Further examples of Mediated Moments are located in Appendix E.

Ms. Reynolds agreed with scholars who have suggested including comedy in literacy pedagogy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Newkirk, 2002). Therefore, Ms. Reynolds formally taught the genre because students had never had the opportunity to study it in academic context (Interview, 11/13/09, pp. 4-5, ll. 29-30). Another way students' spontaneous concepts were recognized was when Ms. Reynolds asked students to draw on their existing popular culture knowledge during the Comedy Unit. While teaching new media concepts, sometimes Ms. Reynolds asked students to use a popular culture text to exemplify a formal concept. Here, how she elicited spontaneous concepts is illustrated by a brief literacy event:

Reynolds: If you watch or have ever seen any of the Jane Austen stuff on *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility*. Those are Comedies of Manners. What I want you to do is cast back in your brains, are there, is there a recent--in the past ten years--comedy that you can think of that pokes fun at social classes? That pokes fun at rich people? Or pokes fun at poor people? Or pokes fun at a class of people?

Jenna: What about *Liar Liar*?

Reynolds: Okay.

Jenna: How they make fun of the homeless guy.

(Audio taped Observation, 11/03/09, p. 1-2, ll. 9-12)

This event between Jenna and Ms. Reynolds typified how Ms. Reynolds elicited students' spontaneous concepts about popular culture, and how students readily responded with examples.

A third way that Ms. Reynolds recognized students' spontaneous concepts about popular culture was through her choice of popular culture texts. Sometimes Ms.

Reynolds used early twentieth century movies so students could understand the universality of genres (Interview, 11/13/09, p. 5). Other times Ms. Reynolds used films with which students might be familiar, such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Showtime* (2002), *Lord of the Rings* (2003), and *Life or Something Like It* (2002). She also gave assignments that required students to compare familiar, recent films with older films often unfamiliar to them. The Movie Trailer essay was an example of this type of assignment. The directions are summarized below (Full directions are in Appendix F):

#### Movie Trailers Study

Assignment: On or before Monday, September 5, 2009 turn in an essay of between 300-500 words comparing and contrasting two movie trailers. One must be from a movie that came out between 1965 and 2009; the second from a movie that came out before 1960. Your final paragraph should be a personal reflection on what you've learned about movie trailers and how they are manufactured for a specific reason.

(Movie Trailer Handout, 09/29/09)

The ways that students are asked to draw on their spontaneous concepts centered on popular culture are varied. Sometimes students viewed popular culture still shots or partial clips of film, but oftentimes, students drew on their popular culture knowledge in brief moments interspersed throughout their learning about formal concepts about popular culture. In the next section are illustrated ways that students' learning of formal concepts was contextualized.

#### **Formal Media Concepts and Contextualized Learning**

Scholars have argued that formal learning in school settings requires teachers to extend students' spontaneous concepts of texts by introducing new and formal concepts (Buckingham, 2003; New London Group, 1996). Ms. Reynolds' formal lessons that were centered on identifying, defining, and interpreting formal concepts exemplified how



she achieved this literacy goal. Sometimes her methods included introducing concepts via PowerPoint that included still shots and definitions of terms, such as “cuts,” “framing,” “shots,” and “angles” (Videotaped Observations, 9/9/09-9/11/09).

After introducing the abovementioned media vocabulary, Ms. Reynolds contextualized students’ learning by providing ample time for students to apply the formal concepts to still shots of popular film. One method Ms. Reynolds used was similar to close reading strategies suggested in reader response theories (Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1981). Ms. Reynolds modeled how to analyze, interpret and evaluate popular film still shots in order to help students develop the “confidence in themselves to be able to have an opinion that isn’t just based on because I said so” (Interview, 11/13/09, pp. 1-3, ll. 11-13). Students were also provided ample time to study the formal concepts with their peers. After teaching students about shots and angles, students produced an “Illustrated Glossary” of the concepts. Students completed the project in pairs. This Illustrated Glossary required students to use their personal digital cameras to take pictures that were examples of varied types of shots and angles. Then the student partners created a digital slideshow that illustrated their shots/angles, the definitions, and the justification for the definitions. Scholars suggest that embedded classroom activities like these help students consider and develop new ways to use formal concepts as they negotiate between understanding spontaneous and formal ways for interpreting texts (Buckingham, 2003; NLG, 1996).

### **A More Knowledgeable Person and Scaffolding Knowledge**

The role of the more knowledgeable person has been central to formal learning undergirded by sociocultural theories; however, a more knowledgeable person is not

limited to the classroom teacher, but can be someone who knows more about the subject matter (Buckingham, 1996; NLG, 1996; Vygotsky, 1987). In the Literature in the Media class, sometimes Ms. Reynolds was the more knowledgeable other. Other times, group projects were contextualized so that students emerged as more knowledgeable people. The following literacy event centered on understanding framing illustrated how Ms. Reynolds scaffolded knowledge centered on understanding the formal concept “cuts.”

Reynolds: So once the director sits there and decides as a film maker that he’s going to cut this and take out this one shot because it didn’t work right, once he cut that piece of film, it’s gone, especially if it’s on the cutting room floor and the janitor’s on time and sweeps it up.

Reynolds: What do you think digital has done?

Alex: They can change their mind.

Reynolds: Yeah, they can change their mind.

This brief excerpt exemplified the way the teacher invited students to use their spontaneous concepts about media to help them relate to formal concepts. Up until this point, the teacher possessed all of the knowledge on the history of the word “cuts.” The teacher’s question, “What do you think digital has done?” allowed her to connect “cuts” to something relevant to their lives--digital media. Students’ knowledge is scaffolded because they are able to draw on spontaneous concepts.

In this literacy event, Ms. Reynolds served as a more knowledgeable person to scaffold knowledge, but specific cases found in Chapter 5 have detailed how students became more knowledgeable others as activities were contextualized.

## **Access to Resources and Tools**

Access to resources and tools for how to use new formal concepts is an integral component of literacy learning undergirded by sociocultural theories. As previously mentioned, the Literature in the Media classroom included an electronic screen, LCD projector mounted to the ceiling, ELMO in the back of the room, and a desktop computer in Ms. Reynolds' office. Students understood that they possessed the freedom to use these resources as tools in their everyday learning. For example, when students needed images for projects, they used the computer in Ms. Reynolds' office.

Other school resources that proved useful were the 15 desktop computers housed in the school's media center and the 15 laptop computers available for teacher checkout. The Literature in the Media students used these computers to research media companies during their first project, and Ms. Reynolds checked out the laptop computers so students could produce their Power Point presentations to report on each of the media companies they had studied. Ms. Reynolds also kept art supplies, such as paint, markers, and glitter in her office. These tools were helpful when students recreated images of popular film for their Film Genre projects.

Whenever Ms. Reynolds or the school did not have a tool that the students required for a group project, they bought them from the store or brought them from home. For example, students brought digital cameras from home for the "Illustrated Glossary" project. Similarly, students who needed more art supplies for the Film Genre project brought colored pencils from their homes. If students felt they needed something that was neither at home nor at school, they bought props from the store. For

example, Alex and her partner bought an eyeball from the store to embellish their “horror” genre poster.

### **Summary**

Ms. Reynolds prepared a variety of culturally relevant activities to draw upon students’ spontaneous concepts about popular culture. Students used these existing understandings when they applied formal concepts that Ms. Reynolds introduced in the Comedy Unit, for example Ms. Reynolds also used popular culture texts, such as current films that she believed students could relate to. Ms. Reynolds also taught formal lessons about popular culture that introduced students to formal concepts in order to extend their thinking about such texts. Many of the classroom activities provided students with an appropriate amount of time for formal study. Chapters 5-8 illustrate the types of literacy practices students used as a result of formally studying popular culture in classroom context.

## CHAPTER 5 LAURIE

Looking up different things about media help me see a broader picture of media conglomerates.

–Laurie, *Media Diary*

The purpose of this study was to understand how students practice literacy in a class where popular culture was central to instruction. The two research questions that guided this study were 1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture and 2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text? The actions and thoughts of the four students described in this chapter represent instrumental cases that answer the research questions. Ethnographic methods of research were used, such as classroom observations, focus-group interviews, and Media-diary responses. A combination of inductive (Stake, 1995; Spradley, 1979) and discourse analysis (Bloome, et al., 2005) were used to uncover both macro and micro patterns found in classroom context.

### **Laurie**

Laurie began this project with a wealth of existing knowledge about the popular culture icon Disney. Her cousin played sports at Florida's Disney World; her dad completed contract work for a restaurant on the park's premises; and as a school chorus member, she regularly attended the annual choral competition hosted by the theme park. She also initially understood that Disney was a media company with one television network and popular musicians (Audio taped Observation, 09/02/09, pp. 14-21). These combined experiences helped Laurie develop spontaneous knowledge about the popular theme park. However, as Laurie participated in formal lessons

centered on Disney's media ownership, her concept of literacy expanded. Laurie initially defined literacy as "understanding and forming your own opinion (based on your knowledge) about a subject and/or event" (MD #1, 09/10/09, p. 1). The quote that prefaces this chapter captures the way that one media project, the Media Conglomerate Study influenced how Laurie understood media and developed a different concept of literacy.

### **Literacy Practices**

The analytical categories employed were based upon media literacy education theory (Hobbs, 1996) and research (Pace, 2009) and critical theory (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). Media literacy has been defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993 as qtd in Hobbs, 1996, p. 166). Media literacy educators have suggested that media literacy education can support students' use of analytical, interpretive, evaluative, and communicative literacy practices (Hobbs, 1996; Pace, 2009). Critical theorists have added that students who develop new perspectives for how to use texts in social and cultural settings can develop critical literacy (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). Critical literacy is a process that includes developing critical consciousness, an awareness for how new perspectives for using texts shapes existing understandings. Critical literacy also includes praxis, whereby students use their new perspectives of texts to understand how to change their communities. A description of what constitutes each literacy practice is presented below:

### Analytical Practices

- Students apply formal concepts to texts.
- Students use formal concepts to examine texts.

### Interpretive Practices

- Students develop a process for responding to texts.
- Students construct meaning from texts.

### Evaluative Practices

- Students value and judge the meaning of texts within existing understandings.
- Students value and judge the meaning of texts as they participate in formal study of such texts.

### Communicative Practices

- Students use available designs (socially and culturally developed resources) to create multimodal messages.
- Students create multimodal messages for a specific audience.
- Students sequence and organize ideas to convey messages.

### Critical Literacy Practices

- Students develop an awareness of the constructed nature of texts.
- Students develop the ability to question the power of texts in shaping social and cultural views.
- Students' new perspectives of texts empower them to actively engage with such texts.

Spradley's (1979) method for domain analysis was used to categorize students' literacy practices. The process is described in Chapter 3. These categories of literacy practices are used to describe the case-study students in Chapters 5-8.

### **Laurie's Literacy Practices**

Observations of Laurie during several literacy events reveal how she developed analytical, evaluative, communicative and critical literacy practices during the Media Conglomeration study. These observations reveal how Laurie began with a spontaneous understanding of Disney developed through social and cultural interaction,

but then expanded her concept of literacy by studying it as a media company. This chapter has provided descriptions of how Laurie shifted her concept of literacy and a description of how she practiced literacy during classroom literacy events. Other data sources, such as focus-group interviews and Media-diary responses also illustrated Laurie's expanding concept of literacy.

### **Analytical Practices**

Observational data in the analytical practices category illustrates how students use media vocabulary to examine texts. The Media Conglomeration study the first project illustrates how students used specialized vocabulary as a way of understanding media companies that own and distribute popular culture. For this assignment students were introduced to the following scientific concepts of media ownership:

**Vertical integration:** a corporation owns not only a percentage of the end product but also a percentage of the materials used to make the end product.

**Horizontal integration:** a corporation owns stock across multiple similar industries.

(Videotaped Observation, 09/01/10, pp. 1-17)

This assignment required students to research media companies to define and apply the above terminology. Defining media companies as either *vertically* or *horizontally* integrated in addition to researching the media company's assets was a way to develop students' understandings of these companies as media conglomerates that manufacture and distribute popular culture. The following is a description of how Laurie initially used analytical practices to understand the Disney Company as more than a theme park she frequents but as a media conglomerate.



Laurie and her group were to identify Disney as either *vertically* or *horizontally* integrated. As Laurie accessed information via the Internet to research Disney, the other group members, Devina and D.J. sat on either side of her and watched. Laurie and her group used analytical practices to classify information about Disney's assets. The group categorized anything media related as a "media asset," and anything non-media related as a "non-media asset." The group discovered that Disney's non-media assets include a football league, theme parks, and Hess gas stations (Audio taped Observation, 09/02/09, pp. 11-16). However, Internet research also revealed that Disney owns Sony, magazines, DreamWorks, Pixar, and the Disney Channel (Audio taped Observation, 09/02, p. 17). The first day ended with these initial understandings of Disney's media ownership. Categorizing information in this way proved useful as Laurie and her group tried to determine if Disney was *vertically* or *horizontally integrated*.

Wikipedia information that Laurie accessed were also used for her and her group as they continued to examine Disney's media ownership the next day. The information revealed that Disney not only owns DreamWorks and Pixar, but also multiple media companies that Laurie claimed to engage with, such as a comic book series called *Witch*, as well as the television stations *Soapnet*, *Lifetime*, and the *History Channel*. Laurie discovered that Disney also owns ABC (Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, pp. 6-11). Analytical practices, such as collecting and categorizing information supported Laurie and Devina's conclusion that Disney is *horizontally integrated*:

Laurie:           Okay, so now we just have to decide on whether it's horizontal or vertical.

Devina:           I think it's more horizontal.

Laurie: Yeah, I think it leans more towards horizontal.

Devina: Cause it has more things that are

Laurie: With media

(Audio taped Observations, 09/03/09, p. 8, ll. 20-24)

Laurie and Devina applied the terms *vertical* and *horizontal integration* by examining how much of Disney's assets were media related. If Disney's ownership included many non-media assets, they considered the company *vertically integrated*; however, because Disney owned multiple media assets, the students classified the company as *horizontally integrated*. Using analytical practices supported Laurie as she applied the concept, *horizontal integration* to describe Disney. These analytical practices provided Laurie with initial understandings of what it means for a media company to be a media conglomerate. In the next section Laurie's evaluative practices within the same project are described.

### **Evaluative Practices**

Data in the evaluative practices category represent the ways students compared existing understandings of texts with new information about texts. Students began to make value judgments about texts as they juxtaposed their existing understandings with scientific concepts. In the Literature in the Media class, students began with spontaneous understandings about popular culture texts and through analytical practices developed deeper understandings of those texts. As students conducted formal study of media, they compared existing and new understandings of popular culture texts that helped them develop values and judgments about popular culture.

Laurie and her group used the Internet to research Disney and to apply *horizontal integration* as they considered what kind of conglomerate Disney was. An extension of

the assignment required each group to create a PowerPoint presentation in which students justified the application of *horizontal integration* to describe their assigned media company. The following literacy event on the second day of this project revealed how Laurie began to use her social and cultural knowledge of Disney and the concepts related to media ownership to develop her thinking about Disney.

After the group researched Disney via the Internet in the school's media center, Laurie continued to independently use the Internet at home to locate more information about Disney. The following day, Laurie brought the additional Wikipedia material she had researched at home. In the dialogue below, Laurie is sharing her Wikipedia information while creating the PowerPoint with Devina. She began to develop judgments about Disney's media ownership as she compared new Internet information about Disney with her initial spontaneous understandings of Disney:

Laurie: They have Kodak, like partnerships with Kodak, Nike and Coca-Cola.

Laurie: I was like I could see that. I'm not a bit surprised cause duh they have a thing with Kodak. That's why they have those little Kodak picture spots at Disney, know what I'm talking about?

Devina: Yeah.

(Audio taped Observation, 9/4/09, p. 10, ll.53-55)

Laurie used evaluative practices to make a judgment about Disney and its media ownership. She knew that Disney World used Kodak picture spots because she had seen them during social visits to the park. The Wikipedia information about Kodak provided her with more information to support the group's claim that Disney is a conglomerate because of this ownership. However, this information became more salient as Laurie shifted from using analytical practices for applying learned vocabulary

to using evaluative practices to judge what it meant for Disney to own Kodak. The vocabulary she applied, *horizontal integration* in conjunction with her existing knowledge of Disney became meaningful as she developed a new perspective of Disney.

The evaluative practices Laurie used to judge the purpose of Disney World's Kodak picture spots exemplified Bloome et al.'s (2005) theory that "if student knowledge and experience are solicited for use as validation of academic knowledge; an inverse of the relationship of the two locations of knowledge, then there might be a substantive change in the nature of classroom literacy practices" (pp. 91-92). Laurie's literacy practices became more than just a way to support the group's understanding of Disney as a media conglomerate. Laurie's learning became meaningful because she created intertextual connections based on the understanding of Disney World she had developed as a result of visits with her family and friends. The next section provides a description of how Laurie used communicative practices to convey her new perspective to classmates.

### **Communicative Practices**

In the data, student actions that exemplified communicative practices were evident when students were creating generative texts, such as the PowerPoint for the Media Conglomeration study. The following description characterized Laurie's communicative practices. For this study, Laurie and her group had to use the available designs of PowerPoint to inform their classmates (a specific audience) of why Disney is a horizontally integrated media conglomerate (organized message). The event illustrated how Laurie used language, her group member Devina's help, and the group's notes about Disney to create a PowerPoint that conveyed information.

Media-diary entries revealed that Laurie was inexperienced with how to use the available designs of PowerPoint to communicate messages, while Devina used it frequently for school assignments (MD #4, 10/01/09, pp. 10-12). Added to these experiences is that the teacher did not provide formal instruction for using PowerPoint. The following literacy event highlighted how Laurie's inexperience with PowerPoint became a problem for Laurie and Devina to solve and consequently how it was that Laurie learned to use the computer program with her group member's scaffolded support.

Laurie: Okay. I've never really done a Power Point by myself. Like had to do the you know like backgrounds and stuff. Everyone else has always done it, and I just say like I think this should go on it, but I've never really just done it.

Devina: Now's your chance.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, p. 11, ll. 57-58)

Through this brief interaction, the two students established their roles in producing a PowerPoint; Laurie took on the role of a student who had little to no understanding of the program and because Devina was familiar with PowerPoint she took on the role of a more knowledgeable student who would guide Laurie as she learned to use it.

As the class period progressed, Laurie and Devina maintained their roles. Laurie used language in ways Vygotsky (1978) theorized. For example, she began to use language in order to develop a plan for solving her novice understandings of the program.

Laurie: So now I gotta figure this out I guess. I'm gonna put at least a color on the background cause right now it's just white.

Devina: Well do you wanna go through and just put all the information on it and then go through and make it all pretty like?

Laurie: I'm just trying to make it one color though cause right now it's just white, kinda hard to see.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, p. 11, ll. 60-62)

This event also elucidated how Devina began to show Laurie that there was a specific way to organize a PowerPoint. Laurie wanted to use the available designs of PowerPoint, such as adding color. Devina acknowledged Laurie's proposition to add color, but then suggested that a better way for organizing the information would be to use their notes. Devina wanted to show Laurie how to create meaning prior to using multimodal texts, such as color. This prompted Laurie's justification for changing the background, and eventually they did begin to type the information from their notes on the presentation.

The two students continued to use communicative practices while enacting their respective roles. Laurie proposed ideas as questions, and Devina continued her role as a more knowledgeable student as she answered the questions and proposed how they could organize meaning using their notes.

Laurie: So for the first slide we just put our names and all that stuff?

Devina: Yeah and like the title.

Laurie: So we can just do Disney Conglomerate Study?

Devina: Okay. That would be the appropriate one to use.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, pp. 11-12, ll. 66-69)

Laurie asked a question, yet she also proposed an action. Devina did more than acknowledge her proposal when she added another idea, "Yeah and like the title." Laurie continued to use a question format to seek Devina's advice for how to use communicative practices to organize ideas for the PowerPoint.

Laurie continued to elicit Devina's support throughout this process. Devina continued to scaffold Laurie's developing communicative practices by teaching her how to insert a new slide:

Laurie: Okay, the next slide. The first two slides we just put whatever we have to put. Now how do I go to a new slide?

Devina: You can just go over here and press enter.

Laurie: Okay.

Devina: Or press slide show, insert.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, p. 12, ll. 83-86)

And the support continued as Devina showed Laurie another way to organize their ideas for the PowerPoint. Devina demonstrated other communicative practices, such as how to use the teacher's questions and their group's answers to convey meaning (Disney is a media conglomerate because):

Laurie: Should I write the question and the answer?

Devina: Um.

Laurie: Like our explanation?

Devina: You should write the question like as the heading and the answer can be that part.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, p. 13, ll. 88-91)

Laurie developed communicative practices that helped her understand a new way to communicate messages. This literacy event illustrated how Laurie learned to use the available designs of PowerPoint, such as adding color and inserting slides. It also indicated that Laurie added communicative practices such as how to sequence and organize ideas to convey messages via PowerPoint. For example, she learned that

teacher questions can be used as headings, while student answers can be used as the “body” in order to sequence and convey an overall message.

Laurie’s Media-diary entry after the Media Conglomerate study confirmed her initial inexperience with PowerPoint and also served as a reflection of her own shifting literacy practices. She wrote, “before this class other people did the PowerPoint for me. Now I actually have to know how to do it.” She also said that she has learned “useful ways to format the PowerPoint” (MD #5, 10/01/09, p. 12). This classroom activity was beneficial because Laurie not only learned how to use the available designs of PowerPoint, but she also learned how to create messages using the program that the group used and presented to their peers. Laurie’s communicative practices changed.

### **Critical Literacy Practices**

Data reveal that Laurie developed critical literacy practices as a result of the literacy practices she used during the Media Conglomerate study. Laurie’s critical literacy practices are imbedded in Media-diary responses and focus-group interviews. She reflected on her growing sense of empowerment as she described her ability to question Disney’s motives and to evaluate television shows in her home. Laurie also associated her ability to evaluate television shows with becoming more literate.

Laurie’s sense of empowerment began with the Disney Conglomerate study where she used evaluative practices to judge why there were Kodak picture spots at Disney World. As she developed an understanding of the business rationale for Disney’s use of Kodak picture spots, she began to view Disney as a media conglomerate. Viewing Disney as a media conglomerate helped Laurie develop a sense of the media as a pervasive influence in her life. In her first Media-diary entry, she wrote “Looking up



different things about media help me see a broader picture of media conglomerates. Watching other students' presentations helped me to realize how much these eight companies control my life" (MD#1, 09/10/09, pp. 1-3). Developing new perspectives of media such as this helped Laurie develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). Critical consciousness helped Laurie to question the power of Disney in shaping social and cultural views. She began to question Disney's use of Kodak at the theme park.

Laurie's critical understandings of Disney extended beyond the seven days of the project. Laurie continued to reflect on Disney's influence six weeks later during a focus-group interview:

KG: How do you think learning about media has helped you become more literate or has it?

Laurie: That's like the media conglomerate study. You can tell a lot about the company by what they put on the T.V., like MTV versus Disney and like the Family Channel. Like MTV promotes certain things and Disney tells you if you do this you're gonna have certain consequences and I can pick that out better.

(FG, 10/13/09, p. 13, l. 33)

Laurie's response exemplified how she continued to question Disney in her personal life. Her answer revealed that she has extended evaluative practices to her home. This answer was further evidence that Laurie was also developing critical consciousness as she began to develop new ways for actively viewing the media. No longer was Laurie viewing the Family Channel, MTV, or Disney as a consumer. Laurie was engaged as she continued to question how Disney programs influenced social and cultural ideas.

Furthermore, Laurie equated her ability to evaluate Disney and similar media companies with becoming more literate. Laurie's case illustrates the beginning stages of using critical literacy practices as she has the ability to view Disney with a newer perspective than she initially constructed. Laurie developed a critical view of Disney. The final section illustrates how the Media Conglomerate study was indicative of culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **The Media Conglomerate Study as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Analyzing Laurie's participation in classroom literacy events as well as her Media-diary and focus-group responses illustrated how she expanded her concept of literacy. The way Laurie expanded her concept of literacy is imbedded in the way she was able to practice literacy during the Media Conglomerate study. Examining the literacy practices described above also revealed how the characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy can support learning. One characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy is that it is a way to recognize students' social and cultural uses of texts. Disney was a culturally relevant topic for Laurie because she had social and cultural experiences with this aspect of popular culture. Another characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy is that it is one of two ways to contextualize students' learning. Laurie's learning was contextualized because (1) she was able to draw on existing understandings about Disney while learning new concepts to describe the media company; (2) she was given ample time to work with other group members as she learned to communicate via PowerPoint. A final characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy is that it can help students' develop critical literacy practices. Laurie

illustrated this as she began to use the concepts learned in class to question Disney's societal and cultural influence.

Studying Disney was a culturally relevant topic for Laurie because she possessed cultural capital about Disney that others in her group did not orally express. She was able to draw on the experiences she had as a result of travelling to Disney. These experiences included her cousin who played a sporting event at the park, her dad who completed contract work for a restaurant at the park, and her chorus membership. Through each of these experiences, Laurie developed an understanding of Disney as a theme park that provides entertainment. Theme park visits also provided Laurie with a familiarity with the setting that her group members did not share.

Another way this project was culturally relevant is that Laurie's learning was contextualized. She experienced contextualized learning because she could draw on her existing Disney knowledge while she examined it as a profit-seeking media conglomerate. Drawing on cultural information about Disney helped Laurie as she used evaluative practices. Had Laurie not been familiar with the Kodak picture spots housed at Disney World, she may have never correlated Disney's ownership of Kodak with the types of picture spots they use. Another way Laurie's learning was contextualized is that she and Devina had ample time to complete a PowerPoint intended to teach the other students in the class. Laurie was able to develop communicative practices as a result of this type of contextualized learning. Her work with Devina helped her develop an understanding of how to use the available designs of the computer program while also understanding how to sequence and organize the PowerPoint presentation.

The third way this project was culturally relevant was that Laurie reported a shift in the way she practiced literacy in her home. According to Laurie, she had the capability to watch different networks and discern the values each one espouses, something she attributed to her shifting literacy. She also attributed the Media Conglomerate study to better understanding how interwoven the eight media companies were in her life. Laurie not only views Disney as a media conglomerate, but she also had a new perspective of various networks and media companies as companies that collaborate to generate revenue. Viewing media companies as profit-seeking has helped Laurie develop critical consciousness that allows her to use critical literacy practices in her personal life.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation revealed that the activities required for the Media Conglomerate study influenced Laurie's literacy practices, and ultimately, her concept of literacy. While each case-study student formally studied a media company during the Media Conglomerate study, each student's media company was not as socially or culturally relevant as Laurie's. Laurie's experience with Disney World included multiple visits beyond personal entertainment. She knew Disney owned more than just the theme park because her father was contracted by the company. Laurie also knew Disney owned a sports complex because her cousin played a tournament there. However, Laurie did not know the extent of Disney's media ownership and dissemination of popular culture.

The analytical practices that Laurie used required she do more than understand the Disney Company from her personal perspective. Laurie researched Disney's media

ownership and applied the formal concept *horizontal integration*. The described analytical practices helped Laurie begin to associate Disney with a media conglomerate. The Media Conglomerate study did not overtly require Laurie to juxtapose her existing understanding of Disney with her new perception of its media ownership and horizontal integration; however, she did begin to compare the two concepts. Laurie used evaluative practices to develop a judgment about Disney and a company they owned, Kodak. Laurie began to judge why Disney used Kodak picture spots at their theme parks. Initially, Laurie associated literacy with the ability to “understand a subject,” but this project helped Laurie to do more than “understand” Disney. The Disney study helped Laurie gain a sense of the amount and variety of media Disney owned. This classroom activity also helped Laurie develop an idea of the power Disney held in creating and selling popular culture texts.

The Media Conglomerate study also required Laurie to use communicative practices to create a PowerPoint for her peers. Prior to this classroom project, Laurie had never created a PowerPoint. The data revealed that she developed communicative practices by learning when to use multimodal texts, such as color and font. Observations of Laurie also illustrated that she developed an awareness of how to organize and communicate messages via PowerPoint.

Laurie reported using classroom literacy practices at home. She said that analyzing the Disney Company and other media companies it owned had become common practice. For example, she began comparing the values implicitly espoused by each media company. Towards the end of this study, she equated her ability to use classroom literacy practices, such as analyzing media values with becoming more

literate. These new ways for analyzing the media in her life and new perspectives of media companies suggested Laurie began to develop critical literacy that she viewed as integral.

## CHAPTER 6 ALEX

I always thought that literacy was the ability to read.

–Alex, *Focus Group*

### **Alex**

Alex was very familiar with popular films of different genres. Her engagement in classroom activities revealed the extent of her knowledge of popular films. For example, during a discussion centered on “Halloween” movies, Alex was able to name several with fluency (Video-taped Observation, 10/30/09). In addition to this, when Ms. Reynolds requested students brainstorm the names of comedy movies, Alex was one of the first to reference movies, such as *Lemony Snicket’s a Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) and *The Waterboy* (1998). Furthermore, when Ms. Reynolds elicited students’ prior knowledge about *Star Wars* (1977) for one of her lessons, Alex was one of the few students who could explain the movie’s plot. Even with what appears to be extensive engagement with popular film, Alex’s initial concept of literacy was similar to definitions of traditional literacy centered on reading alphabetic symbols. At the beginning of the Literature in the Media class, Alex defined literacy strictly as the ability to “read or retain information from text” (MD #1, 09/10/09, p. 1). This chapter illustrates how the “Shots and Angles” activities helped Alex develop a different concept of literacy that included “reading” the popular films she seemed to enjoy in her personal life.

### **Literacy Practices**

As explained in the previous chapter, the literacy practices described in this study are based on the expectations of media literacy educators (Hobbs, 1996, Pace, 2009) and critical literacy theorists (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). The results have

suggested that each case-study student developed one or more of the literacy practices listed here:

#### Analytical Practices

- Students apply formal concepts to texts.
- Students use formal concepts to examine texts.

#### Interpretive Practices

- Students develop a process for responding to texts.
- Students construct meaning from texts.

#### Evaluative Practices

- Students value and judge the meaning of texts within existing understandings.
- Students value and judge the meaning of texts as they participate in formal study of such texts.

#### Communicative Practices

- Students use available designs (socially and culturally developed resources) to create multimodal messages.
- Students create multimodal messages for a specific audience.
- Students sequence and organize ideas to convey messages.

#### Critical Literacy Practices

- Students develop an awareness of the constructed nature of texts.
- Students develop the ability to question the power of texts in shaping social and cultural views.
- Students' new perspectives of texts empower them to actively engage with such texts.

### **Alex's Literacy Practices**

Observations of Alex during several literacy events revealed how she developed a concept of literacy as the ability to interpret visual media, such as popular culture texts. As Alex used analytical, interpretive, and evaluative practices within lessons centered on understanding scientific concepts, such as *frame*, *shots*, and *angles* she began to understand that popular culture texts could be interpreted. Because Alex enjoyed



viewing film and television programs with her friends and family, she was able to practice immediately the literacy practices she developed in class. These classroom literacy practices for viewing and interpreting popular culture led to critical literacy practices that Alex reported using at home. Focus group interviews also illustrated how Alex began to expand her concept of literacy.

### **Analytical Practices**

Analytical practices are best described as activities during which students apply scientific concepts to texts. Whereas the Media Conglomeration study required students independently use terms, such as *horizontal* and *vertical integration* to examine media companies, students' initial analytical practices for understanding concepts, such as *frame*, *shots* and *angles* were used in Ms. Reynolds' whole group discussions. In addition to the major media categories *shots* and *angles*, students were introduced to the following subcategories:

#### **Shots**

Close-up  
Extreme close-up  
Medium  
Long  
Two-Shot  
Over the Shoulder  
Point of View

#### **Angles**

High  
Low  
Dutch  
Bird's Eye

During whole group discussions, Ms. Reynolds provided one of the above categories or sub-categories, focal texts that included an example of a popular image that illustrated the concept, and the definition for the concept. Alex and her peers wrote notes as Ms. Reynolds demonstrated how to use analytical practices to identify aspects of popular culture texts.

Ms. Reynolds introduced the above concepts as a way to identify popular culture texts. Students' hand-written notes supported their understandings of *shots* and *angles* and how to use analytical practices. A classroom assignment illustrated how students used analytical practices to apply their understandings of *frame*, *shots*, and *angles* to popular culture texts; however, students were also required to simultaneously use interpretive practices to make meaning of texts and evaluative practices to judge meanings of texts. The next two sections illustrate how Alex used interpretive and evaluative practices that helped her develop another method for viewing popular culture texts.

### **Interpretive Practices**

Interpretive practices refer to both the process students use to respond to texts, and their ability to construct meaning from texts. One process students have used to respond to texts is a "close reading" (Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1978). Close readings require students recognize specific details in order to interpret the meaning of a text. This process is common in English language arts classes where teachers require students to recognize the literary devices employed in literature. Reading literature with attention to how authors use literary devices is a method that can support students' interpretations of texts. A close reading process can help students develop the ability to construct meaning from texts. Students can develop similar interpretive practices to construct meaning of visual texts. Through the process of close reading, students can develop interpretive practices that support them as they make sense of visual texts.

Alex developed a process for conducting a close reading during whole class discussions. The close reading was centered on identifying the visual details of a

popular culture text. By participating in a close reading of how one text is framed, Alex began to notice the elements of the image. A close reading of how one visual image was framed helped Alex begin to develop interpretive practices. Observations of Alex during a close reading of three different frames revealed how Alex began to make additional meaning of a visual image.

Students were introduced to the following definition for frame:

Frame: what the camera, what the director, and what the viewer sees

(Videotaped Observation, 09/09/09, p. 11, l. 220).

Learning the word *frame* is the foundation for being able to interpret visual images. As the above definition suggests, a frame is literally what the viewer sees and what the director wants the viewer to see. Alex participated in a close reading of the same popular culture text framed three different ways. The first frame revealed a close-up shot of a man wearing a hat. The second frame showed the man holding a cup and revealed more of his surroundings. The third frame revealed the man leaning on a fence with many people behind him. Figures 6-1, 6-2, and 6-3 show the visual texts used for this activity. Viewing different frames of the same text helped Alex become attentive to how visual details can be framed.



Figure 6-1. Frame 1, Literature in the Media PowerPoint



Figure 6-2. Frame 2, Literature in the Media PowerPoint



Figure 6-3. Frame 3, Literature in the Media PowerPoint

Ms. Reynolds showed the first frame and expected students to interpret the text by noticing all of the image's details. This expectation was clear in her exchanges with students. She encouraged them to take risks and prompted students to do so. For example, she suggested that they "Take a shot" at interpreting the image. She prompted them to look closely and make use of visual clues to account for the details of the text by asking, "What do you think he does for a living?" The students suggested that the man is homeless because he doesn't have teeth.

When students saw the second frame, a detailed conversation centered on the man's hat ensued. Alex participated by recognizing visual details that suggest the hat

has a certain style after another student suggested that the hat seemed to be the kind that “people wear with a suit.”

Ms. R: Okay, how can you tell that?

Alex: Well it was a Fedora is the type of hat. It’s nasty, but it doesn’t look like a hobo hat.

Ms. R: Would you think this would be dirt or sweat?

Ryan: It might be sweat.

Alex: Looks like sweat ‘cause it’s right there on the ring.

Ms. R: Yeah, it’s right there on the ring.

(Videotaped Observation, 09/09/09, p. 14, l. 237-242)

This process of close reading directed students’ attention to visual details based on the way the image is framed. Once Alex could see more of the man’s hat, Ms. Reynolds asked, “Would you think this would be dirt or sweat?” Alex used elements of the image that indicated a ring around a hat would be interpreted as sweat, not dirt. The visual frame provided clues that Alex used to build an understanding of how the frame provided information about the character and how one’s interpretation is contingent upon the details of the framed text. Other students added that the man needed a new hat and was wearing the hat in a way that suggested he didn’t want to be seen. However, the level of detail that Alex used to discuss the frame indicated that she began to develop interpretive practices that helped her use visual details to construct greater meaning of a visual text.

Students continued the process of close reading with the third frame. Students noticed that the man’s shoulders are hunched and he is wearing a “nice” jacket. Ms. Reynolds continued to model the close reading process as she directed students’

attention to visual characteristics of the full frame by asking, “What didn’t you expect?” This question suggested that each frame should have provided different visual details. It also suggested that students should have developed different interpretations because of the details. The next literacy event illustrated how Alex used visual details to construct another interpretation of the image.

Ms. R: This is the entire picture. Okay, what didn’t you expect once you saw the full frame?

Ryan: I didn’t expect that many people to be behind him.

Alex: I thought he was walking.

Ms. R: Okay.

Phoebe: I think the people behind him are wearing the same hat.

(Videotaped Observation, 09/09/09, p. 14, l. 257-261)

A close reading of this third frame revealed that the man was not alone, he was standing near a fence, and there were others who were wearing similar hats. After Ms. Reynolds showed the full frame, the new question, “What didn’t you expect?” suggested students should use a close reading process to recognize other visual details. Each student’s response supported the fact that students noticed something more because of the frame. Ryan was surprised by the amount of people in the frame; Alex did not expect that the man was standing still; and Phoebe noticed that other people wore the same hats. Alex developed a process for reading visual images similar to the close reading enacted with reading literature in English language arts classes. Alex learned that framing an image causes the viewer to only focus on the details that the director wants the person to see. She recognized these details can affect one’s interpretation of the visual image.

Bloome, et al. (2005) have suggested that locating knowledge in literacy events is a difficult task; however, they also offered that “knowledge may have originated in the experience of a particular student, but once that experience is made public the knowledge ceases to be located solely in that individual student. It can then be viewed as publicly or jointly held” (p. 91). Although Alex only spoke twice during this literacy event, when she spoke illustrates how she began to use interpretive practices to recognize the visual characteristics of a popular culture text. By using a close reading process for reading a visual image, Alex noticed details about the man’s hat the other students had not noticed. She recognized how framing can affect what the viewer sees, and ultimately affect the viewer’s interpretation of the text. The next section reveals how Alex used evaluative practices that also helped her develop a different method for viewing visual images, such as popular culture texts.

### **Evaluative Practices**

Evaluative practices illustrated how students compare existing understandings of texts with scientific concepts about texts. Students began to make value judgments about texts as they compared the textual understandings they had developed with new information about texts. Through formal study about popular culture texts, whereby students used evaluative practices, students developed higher-level understandings of those texts. Developing higher-level understandings of texts offered students new perspectives that embellish their initial views of texts. In the Literature in the Media class, still shots of popular films that were familiar to students were used to teach them how to interpret and evaluate popular culture texts. Alex had a wealth of experience as a media consumer; she watched popular movies with friends and family every weekend

during this study. The following classroom activity required Alex to draw on her culturally developed knowledge of popular movies. By juxtaposing her existing knowledge of film with media language, such as *shots* and *angles*, Alex developed evaluative practices that helped her judge why directors would use specific shots and angles.

Alex participated in a close reading process the first day where students were expected to interpret the text by noticing all of the image's details. For the next assignments, students were expected to use the close reading process in conjunction with analytical practices to identify shots of popular culture texts, and evaluative practices to judge the director's purpose for using each shot. Observations revealed that while many students used analytical practices to identify *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) still shot as a medium-shot or two-shot, they did not use evaluative practices as Ms. Reynolds expected (Figure 6-4). Follow-up questions, such as "Why?" were used to prompt students' use of evaluative practices. Another strategy Ms. Reynolds used was to challenge students' original answers by asking "Is this a two-shot?" in hopes of eliciting evaluative practices. The following literacy event illustrated how Alex used two types of literacy practices. She used analytical practices to identify the shot as well as evaluative practices to judge a director's purpose.





Figure 6-4. Shot 3, *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* (2003)

Alex: I thought it was a two shot because the camera is really on both of them. He's like really sad, and he's like the main character, and he's like making sure that he's okay.

Ms. R: Mmmhmmm. It could be either a medium shot or a two shot. It's definitely not a long shot 'cause you can't see enough background in back of them, okay?

(Videotaped Observation, 09/11/09, p. 3, ll. 59-60)

Alex's answer reveals how she used both analytical and evaluative practices as she read the popular culture text. Alex used analytical practices as she applied the term *two-shot* to the image. She used the definition for *two-shot* students were introduced to the previous day when she said, "the camera is really on both of them." Alex not only applied the scientific concept, *two-shot* to the image, but she also used her existing understandings about the film to judge why the director used this shot. Her comment "and he's like the main character" revealed that Alex possessed existing knowledge of this film that she was able to draw on as she described why the image is a *two-shot*. She added, "He's like really sad, and he's like the main character, and he's like making

sure that he's okay" to provide more details about her existing understanding. Alex's use of evaluative practices is implied by how she answered the question. By identifying the image as a *two-shot* and comparing her existing knowledge about the characters, she was able to judge why the director would choose this particular shot. Alex's answer suggested that a two shot is used to emphasize these characters' feelings.

Evaluative practices provided another way for students to use new and formal concepts about texts as they judged meanings within existing understandings of such texts. The conversation specifically centered on understanding a still shot of *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) illustrated how initially Alex understood who the main character was and who was comforting the main character. However, analytical and evaluative practices helped her develop a sense of how and why a director would use a two-shot to convey feelings in this image. Using evaluative practices can help students shape new perspectives of texts as they begin to compare new scientific concepts with the understandings of popular culture they have already developed. Alex reported developing new perspectives of popular culture texts that led to critical literacy practices. The critical literacy practices that Alex reported using with friends and family are described in the next section.

### **Critical Literacy Practices**

Alex reflected on how she developed critical literacy practices during our focus-group interview. Alex's descriptions revealed her awareness of the constructed nature of texts. She reported how the literacy practices she used in school contexts changed her ability to view popular culture texts in social settings, such as at home or with her friends. The new ways she developed for understanding popular culture texts

empowered Alex as she shifted from merely consuming film for entertainment to interpreting and evaluating media in her life.

The literacy practices described in this chapter remained an integral part of how Alex engaged with visual images, such as popular film. Part of my focus-group interview with Alex and her friend, Sam revealed Alex's thoughts about what this means for her concept of literacy:

Alex: I always thought that literacy was the ability to read.

Sam: That's what I thought.

KG: Initially.

Sam: Yeah, but it has definitely changed now.

KG: Okay, so how so?

Sam: In this class it has helped me to see that literature [sic] isn't always just about words on a page in a book; it's just everything around you.

Alex: I pretty much think it's trying to find the meaning of things cause I know in a lot of my classes I have to like find the secret meaning of what texts means in like the *Scarlet Letter* or something like that and that's basically what you're doing in the media trying to find why the director put the lighting this way it's what you're doing with books too.

(FG, 10/12/09, p. 7, ll. 4-10)

During our focus-group conversation, Alex reiterated the narrow view of literacy she initially espoused, but then she began to explain how this view had shifted. At the time of our interview, she began to define literacy as the ability to interpret popular culture texts. Alex equated locating the "secret meaning" of popular culture texts with the way others use interpretive practices with novels, such as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

Alex's description of literacy indicated that she has been developing a new perspective of how to view popular culture texts.

More of the same conversation revealed that using interpretive literacy practices changed the way she viewed film and other visual media independently in social situations. Alex described how using literacy practices affected how she views popular film.

Alex: I even noticed in the second *Legally Blonde* the lighting it's pink to make her glow pink.

KG: Hmmm

Alex: So like I thought that was interesting. So I know that I point out things a lot more in text and in watching commercials.

(FG, 10/12/09, p. 8, ll. 30-32)

Alex reported developing critical literacy practices that are built upon the literacy practices she used in the Literature in the Media class. Initially, Alex referenced interpretive and evaluative literacy practices illustrated earlier in this chapter. She also provided an example of her ability to use these literacy practices independently while watching *Legally Blonde* (2003), a popular film. Alex also indicated that she used similar literacy practices while viewing commercials. A follow-up question to how using these literacy practices affected Alex's experience for viewing popular culture further illustrated her developing critical literacy practices.

KG: Does that affect how you view it or?

Alex: Sometimes yeah. Sometimes you take the literal meaning of what the character's trying to say in the movie and you see like a facial expression and the person in the background and you're like uh-oh maybe that's not exactly what they mean there.

(FG, 10/12/09, p. 8, ll. 30-37)

As Alex explained the affect of using these literacy practices while she viewed popular culture texts, her explanation exemplified the literacy practices observed during classroom literacy events. For example, she said, “sometimes you take the literal meaning,” similar to a process of simply viewing the visual image. She also noticed that close reading processes may reveal “a facial expression” or “person in the background.” Close readings of a film could have indicated she needed to use analytical and interpretive practices to make sense of the film. Alex’s comment, “uh-oh maybe that’s not exactly what they mean there” illustrated that she may also need to use evaluative practices to judge interpretations. Furthermore, Alex associated her ability to interpret visual images, such as popular culture texts in varied ways with becoming more literate. Her initial concept of literacy as “the ability to read or retain information from texts” was centered on reading printed texts. However, Alex’s concept of literacy is different as she has learned to use varied literacy practices with visual texts, such as popular culture.

Alex developed critical literacy practices that supported her understanding of popular culture texts as constructed. Close reading helped her develop a way for deconstructing popular culture texts she transferred to her personal life. Using close reading in her personal life revealed that she began to question directors’ motives for using specific shots and angles. Alex is empowered through the ability to use critical literacy practices with popular culture. She has become a critical media consumer who can “read” the visual characteristics of film to develop new perspectives. Now, she viewed popular film with a critical perspective. The final section illustrates how using

literacy practices to interpret popular culture texts was also indicative of culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **“Reading” Popular Culture Texts as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Analyzing Alex’s participation in classroom literacy events as well as discussing her concept of literacy in our focus-group interview revealed how she began to expand her concept of literacy. Alex expanded her concept of literacy by using literacy practices that offered her new ways for viewing popular culture texts. Examining Alex’s literacy practices described in this section also revealed characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Using still shots from popular culture film was culturally relevant for Alex because she was able to readily identify with those types of texts. She recognized *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) as a film with which she was familiar; however, she also was able to draw on her existing knowledge as she participated in classroom conversations centered on applying media vocabulary. Alex’s learning was contextualized as a result of her ability to draw on her existing knowledge about *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) while applying a term like *two-shot* to the still shot. Drawing on cultural capital about the film helped Alex as she used evaluative practices. Alex was able to draw on her familiarity with the film to make judgments about why the director would use a *two-shot* for that particular scene. Another way Alex’s learning was contextualized was through extensive situated practice with multiple media vocabulary. Alex participated in literacy events centered on studying concepts specific to “reading” visual images for several days. Each day students were introduced to a different way for interpreting visual

images. Alex developed varied literacy practices as a result of participating in these classroom discussions centered on reading popular culture texts.

The third way this project was culturally relevant was that Alex changed the way she independently read popular culture film by using the literacy practices from class. According to Alex, she used the literacy practices while she watched films and commercials in order to determine director's purpose. Prior to learning concepts associated with filmmaking, Alex only viewed films as a source of entertainment. Alex's examples suggested that she used varied literacy practices in social situations to interpret the constructed nature of popular culture texts. Using the literacy practices she developed in class helped Alex develop a new perspective for engaging with popular culture texts that included using media vocabulary. This new perspective is an indicator of critical consciousness that illustrates how Alex began to use critical literacy practices in her personal life.

### **Conclusion**

Observational data of Alex during the Shots and Angles lessons revealed that the activities required for the whole group discussions of viewing images influenced Alex's literacy practices, and consequently, her concept of literacy. Each case-study student was present during the Shots and Angles classroom activity; however, observations show Alex's involvement extended beyond applying the terminology to popular film still shots. Alex illustrated her advanced knowledge of popular film when she participated during other classroom activities that required specific popular culture information. The knowledge that Alex possessed as a result of engaging with popular film served as cultural capital during the Shots and Angles lessons.

Alex's popular film knowledge helped her to shift from using analytical practices to higher-level practices, such as interpretive and evaluative. Sometimes Alex was expected to use the three literacy practices simultaneously. Analytical practices helped Alex develop a specialized vocabulary for discussing media. She used formal concepts, such as *shots*, *angles*, and *lighting* in our focus-group interview. Interpretive practices helped Alex develop an awareness of how directors use shots, angles, and lighting in popular culture texts to convey messages. Interpretive practices also helped Alex concentrate on the details of visual images. For example, she learned that a visual text's details can reveal clues about the overall image. Observations of Alex in classroom context revealed that she also began to compare her existing understanding of popular film with the visual details of popular film to judge what message a director wanted to convey.

Initially, Alex conceptualized literacy as the ability to read using only alphabetic symbols. However, the lessons developed for interpreting images required Alex use analytical, interpretive, and evaluative practices. Alex began to view literacy as the ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate visual images, such as popular culture texts. The classroom literacy practices helped expand Alex's view of literacy because she began to use the observed classroom literacy practices in her personal life. Alex reported viewing popular film and commercials with attention to shots, angles and lighting. She indicated that analyzing visual texts has helped her critically view media. Alex noticed visual details, and she further compared those details with the events to evaluate if the director was conveying a message. Alex's use of analytical, interpretive, and evaluative literacy practices in social settings suggested she began to develop



critical literacy. Alex had developed new perspectives of visual images as texts that could be interpreted, and she used literacy practices observed in class to interpret media in social settings.

## CHAPTER 7 ADAM

I define literacy as being able to at least comprehend the media world if not truly understand its complexity and simplicities.

–Adam, *Media Diary*

### **Adam**

When Adam began the Literature in the Media class, he was very eager to learn more about the media. This drive to learn about the media was evinced in several ways. For example, Adam and his father often watched and discussed the importance of the nightly news. Another example of Adam's quest for media knowledge was when he borrowed Ms. Reynolds book called, *UnSpun: Finding facts in a world of misinformation* (2007). After reading it, he and Ms. Reynolds discussed the details of the book briefly after class (Extensive Field Notes, 09/04/09, pp. 8-9). Adam also brought a popular song, "There's a war going on for your mind" (2008); the central theme was that media was controlling society. He downloaded the song onto Ms. Reynolds' laptop computer at the end of a class period (Extensive Field Notes, 09/18/09, p. 11). The informal research that Adam conducted seemed to have influenced his definition of literacy stated at the beginning of this chapter.

### **Literacy Practices**

As detailed in Chapter 5, the literacy practices described in this study are based on the expectations of media literacy educators (Hobbs, 1996, Pace, 2009) and critical literacy theorists (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). The results suggested that each case-study student developed one or more of the literacy practices listed:

#### Analytical Practices

- Students apply formal concepts to texts.
- Students use formal concepts to examine texts.

### Interpretive Practices

- Students develop a process for responding to texts.
- Students construct meaning from texts.

### Evaluative Practices

- Students value and judge the meaning of texts within existing understandings.
- Students value and judge the meaning of texts as they participate in formal study of such texts.

### Communicative Practices

- Students use available designs (socially and culturally developed resources) to create multimodal messages.
- Students create multimodal messages for a specific audience.
- Students sequence and organize ideas to convey messages.

### Critical Literacy Practices

- Students develop an awareness of the constructed nature of texts.
- Students develop the ability to question the power of texts in shaping social and cultural views.
- Students' new perspectives of texts empower them to actively engage with such texts.

## **Adam's Literacy Practices**

Adam's initial concept of literacy was broader than other case-study students because he mentioned media. However, his concept of literacy was still narrowly centered on comprehension of media. Observations of Adam during several literacy events revealed how he developed a concept of literacy as the ability to communicate with multimodal messages, such as visual images or printed texts. As Adam used analytical and communicative practices within the Film Genre Project, a class project centered on using only visual images to convey a message, he began to understand that visual images could be organized for an audience to interpret. Consequently, Adam developed a concept of literacy as the ability to communicate with multimodal



## Figure 7-1. “Action” Film Genre Poster

This case-study has described the ways Alex developed interpretive practices in order to make sense of visual images. The Film Genre project was an assignment that developed students’ sense of how to convey a message using only images. Data revealed how Adam used analytical and interpretive practices and how he developed communicative practices while producing the Film Genre poster. The following section illustrates how Adam and Shean used analytical practices while drawing on existing understandings of popular film.

### **Analytical Practices**

For this classroom activity, data in the analytical practices category illustrates how students used the scientific concept *genre* to examine visual texts. Unlike other classroom activities, such as the close reading of visual texts, where students were introduced to formal concepts by the teacher, the Film Genre project required Adam and his group to develop their own concept of what constitutes an *action* movie.

Observations of this group has revealed that Adam and other members developed a definition of *action* film as, “a movie whose plot or storyline is based on the actions of the actors” (Film Genre essay, 10/28/09, p.1). In discussions, they seemed to implicitly agree that the popular film Adam suggested exemplified their definition for the genre and could be used as examples for their poster. However, sometimes group members had to use analytical practices by drawing on their existing understandings of action movies in order to be sure that examples matched the definition. The following exchange was representative of how students began to think of movies that could be used on the poster.

Shean: I'm trying to see if I can do a Greek column that's an "I."

Adam: That's fine. Isn't there a Greek movie that's an action movie?

Shean: 300.

Brandon: Yeah.

(Audio taped Observation, 10/12/09, p. 4, ll. 105-108)

Initially, Shean drew on his existing understandings of Greek architecture to describe how he would visually represent the letter "I" in the word "action" that would be a part of the poster. Adam acknowledged Shean's connection as a good idea. Then he attempted to think of a movie that fit the idea of an *action* movie developed by the group and he asked, "Isn't there a Greek movie that's an action movie?" Shean recognized and acknowledged Adam's question, and Shean drew on his existing concepts of popular culture to propose the popular film *300* (2007). In this exchange, the students used their existing understandings of movies to find a movie that fit the criteria of the genre that the group had conceptualized and that would fit in with the use of a Greek column for the letter "I" in the visual. In the following section is data that describes how Adam used communicative practices within the same project.

### **Communicative Practices**

In the data, student actions that exemplified communicative practices were evident when students were creating generative texts, such as the Film Genre poster. The Film Genre project required students follow two general rules to convey their visual message:

- The only printed letters allowed on the poster was the title of the genre.
- Popular culture texts had to be recognizable film.

Students were limited to using only visual images, and these visual images had to derive from recognizable film. The poster was created with a wider audience in mind, Westville High School students. Therefore, the films had to be recognizable. Creating a poster for a wider audience posed a problem because this meant Adam and his group had to re-create accurate visual images if they were to be recognizable by a general population. The following has described the communicative practices that Adam and his group members drew on in order to meet the requirements for their Film Genre poster.

Three ways of developing communicative practices were identified as a result of observing Adam and his group during this project: (1) students drew on practical available designs, and they drew on new available designs specific to creating the Film Genre poster; (2) students created multimodal messages that only consisted of recognizable visual images intended for Westville High School students to interpret; and (3) students developed ways for organizing visual images.

Available designs are the socially and culturally developed resources used to create multimodal messages. Socially and culturally developed resources are specific for creating a type of message. For example, Laurie learned to use the available designs of PowerPoint, such as inserting a new slide and adding color. The Film Genre project differed in that students could use available designs for creating visual images, such as paint, paintbrushes, and colored pencils; however, they were not limited to these materials. Adam and his group members drew on available designs that were practical for creating visual images, but the group members' lack of artistic ability rendered these available designs insufficient. The group required hand-drawn images of popular film that the general student body would be able to interpret.

The solution to creating hand-drawn, recognizable images was to use the Opaque machine located in the media center. Adam's group was unique because they were the first to suggest using the machine to create images. An Opaque machine is used to reflect printed images onto a wall. The reflected printout is then traced, so that relatively precise portrayals are re-created. The Opaque machine was the answer for this group's accuracy dilemma. Adam and his group members each participated in Ms. Reynolds' mini-lesson of how to use the machine. Observation data revealed that this lesson was useful to the group because Adam, Brandon, and Devina used the machine to trace the images of popular culture film for two days (Extended Field Notes, 10/13/09 and 10/14/09, pp. 1-4). The mini-lessons helped Adam and his group members develop communicative practices as the Opaque machine became a part of the design process, and consequently, a new available design that they could add to their communicative practices.

Access to design tools, such as the Opaque machine helped Adam and his group re-create accurate visual images, but the project also required that the multimodal messages they created would be interpreted by Westville students as *action* films. Students also needed to be able to read the printed word, "ACTION"; therefore, the letters of the title had to be identifiable as both letters and popular film images.

Adam used communicative practices to support the group in creating accurate images and printed letters to convey their group's definition of "action." On the first day of production Adam and Brandon conceptualized using a "007" image to visually represent the dot for the "i." The next day, Adam was skeptical about using the image because Westville High School students could misinterpret the letter as a capital "E."



Adam had a valid concern. Misinterpreting the letter could lead to a misinterpretation of the word “ACTION” because it would be read as “ACTEON” and a misconception of the overall message. The following day, Adam expressed his concern for how the audience would interpret the image and the letter, “i.” Adam asked Shean, “What’s a movie we can use the dot for?” (Audio taped Observation, 10/13/09, p. 9, ll. 79). Although Shean recognized the dilemma, he did not immediately acknowledge the film connection. Shean realized that using “007” re-presented an inaccurate image; their lowercase “i” looked more like a capital “E.”

Shean: Ah. The Mortal Kombat sign for the I. We can use the Mortal Kombat sign.

Adam: We’re gonna do the Mortal Kombat sign for the I. (referring to the dot over the “i”)

(Audio taped Observation, 10/13/09, p. 9, ll. 86-87)

Shean made the film connection that Adam proposed when he drew on his existing understandings of film to suggest the symbol for the popular action film, *Mortal Kombat* (1995). This symbol was appropriate for two reasons; it was one circle or “dot” that Adam was searching for to accurately represent a lowercase “i,” and it was an action movie that accurately represented the way they defined the action genre.

Adam’s final statement was one of recognition and acknowledgement. The group used the *Mortal Kombat* (1995) image as an accurate representation of both a dot for a lowercase “i” and a popular culture film that supported the group’s concept of *action*.

The Opaque machine helped Adam and his group to develop precise visual images of both popular culture and printed letters; however, another important aspect of communicative practices is that ideas are organized to convey a message. The printed

letters and visual images for the Film Genre poster had to be organized in a way that was familiar to Westville students. Observational data reveal that Adam also used communicative practices to develop a way for organizing the group's visual images. The organization Adam provided helped support a visual image that exemplified their concept for the "action" genre.

The group used many of Adam's ideas for organizing the images of popular film. Adam's ideas originated with his familiarity with popular culture films. For example, Adam proposed that one popular culture image would represent one letter. Consequently, an image of Spiderman represented the letter "N" (Audio taped Observation, 10/12/09, p. 2, ll. 52-54). Adam also suggested the group draw several popular culture images within one letter, so among other images, they used two *Batman* (1989) images to fill the space of their capital "C" (*Action Film Genre Poster*). However, when Brandon suggested the group re-create the symbols from the popular film, *The Matrix* (1999), developing a plan for organizing those popular culture symbols became problematic.

Using the popular film *The Matrix* (1999) was problematic because the group had conflicted interpretations of the symbols that represent the film. Observations from the first day revealed that Brandon interpreted the symbols as letters and numbers, while Shean interpreted them as Japanese characters. Although the group could not decide on one interpretation, Adam suggested they "do the entire page in Matrix letters behind it" (Audio taped Observation, 10/12/09, p. 2, ll. 30). Adam's suggestion was a proposal that the group discuss organization as opposed to interpretation. This suggestion indicated how important visual organization was to Adam as opposed to interpreting the

symbols. Two days later, Adam used communicative practices to suggest another method for organizing the symbols for the group's poster.

Devina: Wait. What are we doing for the background?

Adam: The Matrix, but we have to paint it black first.

(Audio taped Observation, 10/14/09, p.11, ll. 22-23)

Devina's question, "Wait. What are we doing for the background?" elicited a response from Adam. Adam continued to use communicative practices to organize how *The Matrix* symbols would be illustrated for the poster. Adam was familiar with how the symbols were represented for the film; therefore, he suggested they "paint it black first" because their white 3' x 6' paper would inadequately portray the popular film's image. His suggestion to paint the poster's background was an addition to his initial concept for drawing the symbols behind the word, *action*. Adam's suggestions proved influential because the group did paint the background black prior to creating the symbols (Extensive Field Notes, 10/19/09, p. 2).

By the 11<sup>th</sup> day of production, there was still an issue of interpretation. For example, Brandon reiterated that the symbols were letters and numbers, and Shean decided "They are not even letters" (Audio taped Observation, 10/26/09, p. 2, ll. 32-33). Brandon and Shean used interpretive practices to make sense of the symbols. A separate conversation ensued of how to visually represent the letters. Devina and Brandon suggested visually representing the letters using white and green paint. After discussing how to interpret and visually represent the symbols, Adam and his group were prepared to organize how they would visually represent them.

- Devina: So how are we doing this?
- Brandon: I have absolutely no clue.
- Shean: Draw random letters slash numbers?
- Adam: Take this and do lines. Like lines down here and paint it black and make it look like letters.

(Audio taped Observation, 10/26/09, p. 2, ll. 32-35)

Devina's question, "So how are we going to do this?" focused the conversation on how to organize the symbols. Although Brandon recognized and acknowledged Devina's question, he did not have an answer. Adam provided a solution for both the problem of interpretation and of organization. "Take this and do lines," he said, referring to a yardstick. Adam added, "paint it black and make it *look* like letters," suggesting the group can organize the multimodal texts to resemble *The Matrix* symbols. This organization served as a guide for the audience to match the group's interpretation. Adam also connected an idea that he proposed several days earlier by implying that it was more important for the group to organize *The Matrix* symbols in a way that appeared like symbols an audience would interpret rather than the group actually interpret the symbols.

Adam's communicative practices began on the first day and continued to develop throughout the project. He used communicative practices to suggest ways to organize and sequence images from popular culture texts. Using communicative practices helped Adam conceptualize how to re-create images of popular film, and subsequently helped the group visually define the *action* genre.

Intertextuality was also an important factor that supported Adam as he made sense of how popular film could symbolize the letters of the word *action* and the *action*

genre itself. Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993) suggest that intertextuality is a taken for granted action that is usually in the background of an activity. They add that “intertextuality can become part of the foreground in many ways. For example, a teacher may want students to use a textbook to respond to questions and thus foreground a specific set of intertextual relationships and processes” (1993, p. 311). This case illustrated how intertextuality became part of the foreground in the Film Genre project because Adam was required to draw on several different textual relationships. To complete the project, Adam applied his existing understanding of popular culture texts to the group’s formal concept of *action*. Intertextuality was also a part of the foreground because Adam used communicative practices to re-present the images of popular film to convey the concept and word “ACTION.” It is important for intertextuality to be a part of the foreground because it is an overt method for helping students develop connections between different types of texts. The following section describes how Adam developed critical literacy practices as a result of using the literacy practices described in this chapter.

### **Critically Literacy Practices**

The Film Genre project is an example of an activity that required Adam to develop a new perspective of the way visual texts are constructed. Unlike the activities centered on interpreting and evaluating popular film still shots, the Film Genre project required Adam construct visual texts to convey meaning. As a result of the literacy practices described in this section, Adam developed an awareness of how cultural views can be shaped.

Adam's Media-diary responses provided a reflection of how he used literacy practices in the Film Genre project. How Adam used literacy practices helped develop his own concept of literacy. The sixth Media-diary response illustrated how Adam described the Film Genre project. Adam related his shifting concept of literacy to the description of the project:

The current project: A mural that captures a film genre using images and the word of the genre. – It is helping me understand media by putting our notes/handouts on genres into affect. Forcing us to analyze the movies to see if they fit our mural. – by forcing me to analyze movies it is helping me see movies in a different light. Helping me be more literate.

(MD# 6, 10/22/09, p. 18)

Adam's response revealed an understanding of the value of using analytical practices. He described how he used analytical practices when he wrote about the purpose of the Film Genre project which was "to analyze the movies to see if they fit our mural." Adam understood that he applied their concept of *action* to popular films. Adam also described how using analytical practices have helped him develop critical literacy practices when he explained how analyzing movie genres helped him "see movies in a different light." Seeing movies in a different light represented critical consciousness where students begin to view texts from a new perspective. Furthermore, he associated using these literacy practices with becoming "more literate."

Other Media-diary responses illustrated the connection Adam made between using analytical practices to convey messages and his concept of literacy. After completing the Film Genre project, Adam wrote that literacy was the ability to "comprehend what is in front of you whether it's [sic] words or images" (MD# 7, 10/29/09, p. 20). Adam's definition of literacy during this eighth week was similar to

what he wrote the first week of class because he still used the word *comprehension*. The word *comprehension* indicated that he defined literacy as understanding some “thing.” However, this response also revealed a new perspective of literacy because he recognized that being literate required one to read different types of texts that may include visual images. Adam recognized the power of using visual images to convey messages.

Students were also required to submit a written explanation of the popular films they selected for the Film Genre project. Adam’s eighth Media-diary response was a comparison of the two assignments. This response further illustrated that Adam recognized he was using analytical practices with multimodal texts, such as popular film and with written words. He wrote:

The two assignments are similar because they both force us to apply our knowledge. To analyze our genre. They both are based on our definition of our genre, and therefore our knowledge. However, while the poster tested on analytical skill forcing us to find what fit the rational paper tested our ability to back up our answer and explain our reasons for why it fit.

(MD# 8, 11/4/09, p. 23)

Analytical practices required students apply scientific concepts to texts, and this is an idea that Adam developed as a result of using such practices with both visual and printed texts. Adam also expressed an understanding of the different ways these analytical practices can be enacted based on the type of texts one uses. For example, he suggested that the Film Genre project required that he use popular culture texts to define the genre, and to write a paper that would support his answer. The literacy practices required for this project supported Adam as he developed a new perspective for how texts can be used.

Adam developed critical literacy practices as a result of the Film Genre project. Instead of deconstructing texts as Alex did with close reading, Adam constructed visual images to convey messages. Constructing visual images supported his understanding of how visual texts could convey messages. Constructing visual images, such as painting texts that resembled a movie's symbols also helped Adam develop the ability to shape others' interpretations. Using communicative practices during this project helped Adam develop an awareness of how multimodal texts can be used to shape society's views.

### **Creating Multimodal Messages as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Analyzing observational data as well as Adam's Media-diary entries revealed how his initial concept of literacy shifted. Adam expanded his concept of literacy by using literacy practices that offered him new ways for conveying messages. Creating multimodal messages that derive from popular films provided Adam with culturally relevant pedagogy.

This project was culturally relevant because Adam was able to draw on his existing knowledge of popular culture film by suggesting several ideas for his group. He brought images of popular film, such as *Watchmen* (2009), *Spiderman* (2002) and *Quantum of Solace* (2008) for his group to re-create. Adam drew on his existing knowledge of popular film in order to bring several of the images that the group used to define their genre.

Using communicative practices to convey a visual message was culturally relevant because Adam's learning was contextualized to include the cultural capital he had developed about popular film. He experienced contextualized learning because the



assignment required him to apply his existing knowledge about popular films to the scientific concept of genre he and his group members constructed. Drawing on cultural capital about popular film helped Adam convey a message that defined the *action* genre. Another way Adam's learning was contextualized was through extensive situated practice used to visually convey his message. Adam participated in literacy events centered on creating the poster for 14 days. Each day, Adam used available designs to re-create popular films to visually convey the *action* genre. As a result of this situated practice and a follow-up written assignment, Adam developed a sense of literacy as being able to use analytical practices with multimodal texts.

The third way this project was culturally relevant was that Adam reported shifting the way he viewed popular film. According to Adam, using analytical practices in the classroom supported his understanding of film genre. His Media-diary entries suggested that he has developed an understanding that one can use similar literacy practices to understand multiple modes of texts. Adam's new perspective was an indicator of critical consciousness described as part of the process for developing critical literacy practices.

### **Conclusion**

Each case-study student completed the Film Genre project for a genre they selected. Some students expanded their concept of what media texts constitute a particular genre (See Chapter 8, Jenna). However, this study revealed that the activities required for the Film Genre project influenced Adam's literacy practices and shifted his concept of literacy to include more than just understanding media. Initially, Adam conceptualized literacy as comprehending media. During the first couple of

weeks of this study, Adam conducted informal research that included separate conversations with his father and Ms. Reynolds centered on understanding media. He also read and listened to different criticisms of how media influence society. These events supported Adam in his quest of “comprehending media.” The Film Genre project required Adam to not only comprehend media, but also to use analytical and communicative practices in order to convey a message using only popular culture images.

Initially, Adam was able to comprehend media by using analytical practices. After reflecting on his use of classroom literacy practices, Adam recognized his ability to analyze popular culture and he reported being able to use analytical practices to categorize popular films as genres. Analytical practices helped Adam categorize action movies and develop a concept for an *action* genre, while applying existing knowledge about popular action films. The communicative practices Adam used to create accurate, recognizable images were what contributed to Adam’s shifting concept of literacy. The Film Genre project helped Adam expand his concept of literacy because he began to view literacy as the ability to not only analyze media, but also the ability to communicate with visual images. Adam learned to draw on the available designs of an Opaque machine as he developed ways to organize the images on a 3’ x 6’ sheet of paper. He also began to develop a process for using movie symbols as identifiable visual messages to convey his group’s concept of *action* movies. Adam reported that he had developed a new perspective of texts as multimodal, and he associated this perspective with literacy.

## CHAPTER 8 JENNA

I define literacy as being able to understand what you are reading.

–Jenna, *Media Diary*

### **Jenna**

As a “Computing for College and Career” student, Jenna was well-versed in computer program functions. She demonstrated this knowledge of multimedia during group projects that required students use PowerPoint. For example, Jenna once taught one of her peers how to use PowerPoint shortcuts (Videotaped Observation, 09/04/09, p. 29, ll. 27-29). This background with computer technology was useful because while other students used class time to learn PowerPoint functions, Jenna focused on gaining a deeper understanding of media concepts. Jenna’s popular culture knowledge included cable-network channels, such as Lifetime and familiar popular film. What differentiated Jenna from the other case-study students was the wide-range of Disney movies she possessed. The quote at the beginning of this chapter provided an example of Jenna’s concept of literacy, which is similar to Alex’s--both students defined literacy as reading alphabetic symbols.

### **Literacy Practices**

As explained in the previous chapters, the literacy practices described in this study are supported by the expectations of media literacy educators (Hobbs, 1996, Pace, 2009) and critical literacy theorists (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). Data analyses suggested that each case-study student developed one or more of the literacy practices listed:

### Analytical Practices

- Students apply formal concepts to texts.
- Students use formal concepts to examine texts.

### Interpretive Practices

- Students develop a process for responding to texts.
- Students construct meaning from texts.

### Evaluative Practices

- Students value and judge the meaning of texts within existing understandings.
- Students value and judge the meaning of texts as they participate in formal study of such texts.

### Communicative Practices

- Students use available designs (socially and culturally developed resources) to create multimodal messages.
- Students create multimodal messages for a specific audience.
- Students sequence and organize ideas to convey messages.

### Critical Literacy Practices

- Students develop an awareness of the constructed nature of texts.
- Students develop the ability to question the power of texts in shaping social and cultural views.
- Students' new perspectives of texts empower them to actively engage with such texts.

## **Jenna's Literacy Practices**

Observations of Jenna during two different projects reveal how she developed a different concept of literacy compared to her prior concept, one that subsequently included analyzing media texts. One class project, the Illustrated Glossary illustrated how social interaction with a peer helped Jenna learn to use analytical practices to apply the concepts *shots* and *angles*. For another class assignment, the Film Genre project Jenna used evaluative and communicative practices to develop characteristics of the *musical* genre. As Jenna used analytical, evaluative, and communicative

practices within the class projects, she began to view the media that she previously used for entertainment as a part of a category of films. These classroom literacy practices for analyzing and evaluating media texts also led to critical literacy practices. Media-diary responses revealed the types of critical literacy practices Jenna developed as a result of these projects.

### **Illustrated Glossary**

Many of the students who participated in formal lessons centered on close readings of visual images were prepared to create an Illustrated Glossary that demonstrated how they applied the scientific concepts *shots* and *angles*. However, Jenna admitted that “whenever I just listen to a lecture, I usually don’t retain the information that I was just “taught” (MD#5, 10/8/09). She required the social interaction of the Illustrated Glossary to develop a clearer understanding of how to apply media terms to digital images. The Illustrated Glossary required students to:

- Capture digital images that represent the shots and angles learned in class;
- Create a PowerPoint presentation that displays each image and the associated shot or angle; and
- Present the PowerPoint presentation to the class.

Jenna brought her digital camera to school. For two days, Jenna and her partner, Laurie chose school locations and captured digital images of themselves and their peers that represented the different types of shots and angles. The following section describes the process of how Jenna learned to use media terminology to analyze images within the Illustrated Glossary project.

### **Analytical Practices**

Integral to analytical practices is how students use media vocabulary to examine texts. Data in this category illustrates how Jenna learned to apply the terms *shots* and

*angles* to the digital images she and her partner had captured. Observational data illustrates that with Laurie's support, Jenna learned to apply the concepts *shots* and *angles* to the images. The following is a description of Jenna's analytical practices.

Jenna and Laurie organized their PowerPoint using a method that Laurie had learned during the Media Conglomerate study; they created headings for each slide and then selected the visual image that would exemplify a shot or angle. The event begins with Jenna who is unsure about how to identify an image.

Jenna: Is this one high angle?

Laurie: No, you were above it when you took it.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/18/09, p. 12, ll.81-82)

Analysis of this brief message unit revealed that Jenna's question "Is this one high angle?" was Jenna's attempt at applying a type of shot to their image. Laurie acknowledged Jenna's response as inaccurate, and she provided a rationale to illustrate why this image was not a high angle. During this event, Jenna established herself as the less knowledgeable mentee, and Laurie enacted the role of more knowledgeable mentor. The two students continued their conversation centered on identifying images with Jenna asking similar questions, such as "What about this one?" and Laurie evaluating Jenna's answer as incorrect. Jenna continued to inaccurately apply the terms to images until the end of the second day for this project.

Towards the end of the second day of the project, Laurie realized that the class period was nearing an end, but she and Jenna had to finish the project that day. Limited time caused Laurie to provide Jenna with a more formal mini-lesson for applying

a shot to an image. Laurie's "lesson" imitated one of Ms. Reynolds' whole group discussions where she provided an image, the directions, and a rationale for each shot.

Laurie: Don't forget it's not a high angle; it's a point of view shot.

Jenna: What's the definition?

Laurie: Shows a view from the person's perspective.

Jenna: Perspective?

Laurie: Yeah, and it's a shot, not an angle.

Laurie: Um point of view cause it shows the view of the person playing the piano.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/22/09, p. 14, ll.166-171)

Laurie referenced a prior conversation where Jenna inaccurately identified the image they identified as a high angle. As Jenna asked, "What's the definition?" she wrote notes as a student learning from a teacher. Laurie provided the definition for the concept, "Shows a view from the person's perspective," and then reminded Jenna, "it's a shot, not an angle." Then, Laurie provided the explanation of why it was a point of view shot, "it shows the point of view of the piano player." This event illustrates how the two students participated as "teacher" and "student." Laurie provided information about point of view shot in an educative way. Jenna's notes included the concept, image, definition, and explanation similar to the notes students wrote during Ms. Reynolds' lesson several days earlier.

Jenna attempts to apply the shots and angles until the end of the class period.

Jenna: That's a bird's eye.

Laurie: Yeah.

(Audio taped Observation, 09/22/09, p. 14, ll.183-184)

This conversation occurred towards the end of class after Jenna had inaccurately applied media terms to four images. Although it was brief, it was the first time Jenna accurately applied a scientific concept to one of the images. After she offered that the image was “a bird’s eye,” Laurie’s “Yeah,” validated Jenna’s proposal as correct. Jenna successfully applied an angle to one of their images.

Jenna’s candid writing in her Media-diary supported my observations of her participation during the Illustrated Glossary. She wrote, “the activity that helps me the most is interacting in groups,” she added, “this helps me the most because if you think that something is a certain angle for example but you are not sure you can ask someone in your group and then understand it better” (MD#5, 10/8/09). Collaboration during the Illustrated Glossary activity supported Jenna as Laurie helped her learn to use analytical practices to apply scientific concepts to visual images. These literacy events illustrate how Jenna began to develop methods for applying the media terms *shots* and *angles* to images. These methods include comparing the definition to the image, comparing images, and examining the image. The informal lessons Jenna participated in influenced the accuracy with which she applied concepts to the image. The following section describes a different project where Jenna used evaluative and communicative practices.

### **The Film genre project**

The Film Genre project was the third major class assignment. The project required students to:

- Choose a genre to define;
- Define the genre;
- Create recognizable visual images of popular film that exemplify the definition; and



- Use no printed letters other than the title of the genre.

Jenna and her group members, Laurie, Anne, and Ryan chose to visually define the *musical* genre. The group developed a concept of *musical* as “a movie that has at least one song” (Film Genre essay, 10/28/09, p.1). For 14 days, each group member brought printed images of popular culture texts or drew on existing understandings of popular film to create recognizable visual images for the Film Genre poster. Figure 8-1 illustrates this group’s Film Genre poster.



Figure 8-1. “Musical” Film Genre Poster

The remainder of Jenna’s case provides a description of how she used evaluative and communicative practices within this project.

### **Evaluative Practices**

Jenna expressed that she enjoyed watching Disney movies as a child and still had a collection of the popular films at home. Observational data illustrate how Jenna began to compare her existing understanding of Disney films with new, scientific concepts about musicals. Data revealed that Jenna used evaluative practices to judge musicals. Judgments were based on Jenna’s existing popular culture knowledge. This

conversation represents early group work where students had neither established a clear concept of musical, nor had they determined the images that would visually represent the genre. The literacy event illustrated how Jenna compared popular film to develop a judgment about the genre.

Jenna: You know almost every Disney movie is considered a musical?

Laurie: It is. I looked it up on Wikipedia. I have a whole list.

Jenna: Yeah, cause like I looked up *Bambi*, and it has like one song in it, but it's considered a musical.

Jenna: Yeah, *Bambi*, *AristoCat*, *Lion King*

(Audio taped Observation, 10/13/09, p. 6, ll. 8-11)

Jenna began the conversation with a judgment she made about Disney movies, "every Disney movie is considered a musical." This judgment was developed as a result of the research she conducted at home. Informal research began with her Disney collection that included *Bambi* (1942), *AristoCats* (1970), and *The Lion King* (1994). Then, Jenna located the same films online. Locating these popular films helped Jenna conceptualize one characteristic of a musical; it can only have one song, but still be "considered a musical." A prior conversation revealed that Jenna categorized *High School Musical* (2006) and *Fantasia* (1940), two more Disney films as musicals. Each of the five movies Jenna mentioned are produced by Disney. Jenna created intertextual connections as she compared the online information about musicals to her existing knowledge about Disney films to evaluate validity of the claim that one characteristic of a musical is that it only requires one song. After juxtaposing the two sources of information, Jenna concluded that "almost every Disney movie is considered a musical."

The evaluative practices Jenna used in this literacy event were useful for three reasons. Thirteen days later, when Ryan wrote the group's follow-up essay that defined their genre, he wrote that a musical is "a movie that has at least one song." Similarly, Jenna's judgment that "almost every Disney movie is considered a musical" also helped the group develop recognizable visual images for their Film Genre poster. The group implied that Disney films are musicals by visually representing 23 Disney produced popular films for their poster. Jenna's conversation also proved influential because four of the five films she mentioned were re-created for the poster ("Musical" Film genre poster). The following section illustrates how Jenna drew on existing understandings of Disney film as she used communicative practices to convey the group's understanding of how the Disney film *AristoCats* (1970) might be represented on the genre poster.

### **Communicative Practices**

The data suggested that Jenna illustrated communicative practices while she created the Film Genre poster. The Film Genre project required students follow two general rules to convey their visual message:

- The only printed letters allowed on the poster was the title of the genre.
- Popular culture texts had to be recognizable film.

It was not difficult for Jenna to use communicative practices to follow the rules for the Film Genre project. Analysis of the data showed that Jenna drew on available designs, such as paint and paintbrushes to convey visual messages. Jenna also developed ways for organizing visual images, and she created multimodal messages that only consisted of visual images intended for Westville High School students to interpret.

The previous section illustrates how important Jenna's existing understandings of Disney films were for supporting the group as they developed a concept for *musical*. Jenna's spontaneous knowledge was also influential in developing ideas for how to organize accurate images of Disney films for the poster. The following event illustrated how Jenna and Laurie employed communicative practices to develop an idea for re-creating the popular Disney film, *AristoCats* (1970).

Jenna: We can do *AristoCats*.

Laurie: A kitty cat.

Jenna: I'm trying to figure out where we can do it. Maybe the C?

Laurie: You know that part when they're on the piano? It'd be really cool to put a piano right here and have a cat running up and down it.

Jenna: We could like put a cat crawling up there.

Laurie: Yeah. Like crawling up high and then we could have one on top of it.

Jenna: Yeah, Yeah.

Laurie: I don't know how to draw a piano.

Jenna: Well the whole thing could be keys.

Laurie: Yeah.

(Audio taped Observation, 10/13/09, p. 7, ll. 42-51)

Jenna began by proposing they use the popular Disney film that she had conceptualized as an accurate example of a musical. Laurie's response, "a kitty cat" indicated her familiarity with the film. Jenna's next question was a proposal for how to organize a visual image from the popular film. Laurie's question, "you know that part when they're on the piano?" was a way for Laurie to not only acknowledge Jenna's proposal, but also to draw on Jenna's existing understandings of the film. Laurie's

follow-up sentence was an idea for how to organize the image. Jenna drew on her culturally developed understandings of *AristoCats* (1970), and proposed, “We could like put a cat crawling up there” adding another idea for organizing the film. Laurie added to Jenna’s suggestion, but then later the idea became problematic because of her inability to draw a piano. Jenna solved the problem by suggesting they only draw keys, not an entire piano.

Jenna drew on spontaneous concepts from Disney films that helped her offer ideas that would develop the group’s final concept of *musical*. Jenna’s existing knowledge of the popular film, *AristoCats* (1970) helped her develop ways for organizing the visual images for the poster. Discussing ideas with Laurie, who also was able to draw on existing understandings of the same film, helped Jenna conceptualize a way to visually re-create the image within the confines of the assignment.

### **Critical Literacy Practices**

Similar to Alex, Jenna developed an awareness of the constructed nature of popular culture texts. Observational data at the beginning of Jenna’s case description illustrated the beginning process for critical literacy practices as she developed analytical practices with Laurie’s assistance. The analytical practices described in this chapter remained an integral part of how Jenna engaged with visual images, such as popular film. Part of my focus-group interview with Jenna revealed her thoughts about what this meant for her concept of literacy:

KG: So how has this class helped you become more literate or has it?

Jenna: I never really noticed all the different shots and angles before and that they’re used to emphasize things.

(FG, 10/13/09, p. 12, ll. 12, 31)

During our focus-group interview, Jenna attributed her literacy to the ability to identify “the different shots and angles.” Jenna evinced the beginning stages for critical literacy as she developed the ability to question the power of popular culture texts in “emphasizing things.” Jenna also reiterated using analytical practices in social contexts outside of class when she watched movies with her boyfriend and “points out different shots, lighting, and angles” (MD# 10, 11/19/09, p. 26). Jenna developed a new way to view film that is directly attributed to the analytical practices she learned in class. These new ways for viewing popular film were empowering as Jenna shifted from a student who only viewed media as a source of entertainment to a person who analyzed and evaluated media.

More Media-diary responses reveal how Jenna began to develop a new perspective of musicals during the Film Genre project. The sixth Media-diary response supports the observational data described in the evaluative practices section. Jenna writes:

I’ve learned that all Disney movies are considered musicals. I didn’t know this before but once I thought about it, I realized every Disney movie I’ve seen did in fact have music in it. It is helping me to become more literate because it is helping me understand the standards of musicals. Musical just have to have some type of music in them, it can be instrumental or vocal. Either way, it is considered a musical.

(MD#6, 10/22/09, pp. 17-18)

Jenna’s response reveals how evaluative practices have helped her develop a different concept of musicals and Disney. Jenna described how she juxtaposed the “standards of musicals” with her existing knowledge of Disney films. The evaluative practices observed in literacy events are exemplified when she wrote “I realized every Disney movie I’ve seen did in fact have music in it.” Her statement “I didn’t know this before but

once I thought about it, I realized every Disney movie I've seen did in fact have music in it" revealed the new perspective of Disney that she had developed. In addition to viewing Disney films differently, Jenna also said she was more literate because she understood the criteria of musicals. Musical "can be instrumental or vocal." Jenna's use of evaluative practices supported her new perspective of both Disney films and musicals.

Jenna's seventh Media-diary response illustrated how she connected the idea of conveying messages using only visual images with her concept of literacy. Jenna wrote:

This is an example of literacy because people will be able to understand what are genre is without any words. You don't need words to be able to understand media. All you need is pictures and symbols and you'll be able to understand the media.

(MD#7, 10/29/09, p. 20)

Initially, Jenna defined literacy as the ability to "understand what you are reading"; however, the initial definition referred to reading printed words. Jenna used similar words, such as "understand" to define literacy; however, she recognized that understanding was not limited to printed texts. Literacy is the ability to "understand" multimodal texts, such as pictures and symbols. By constructing visual images to convey a message, Jenna added to her concept of literacy. According to Jenna, one only needs to be able to understand pictures and symbols "to understand the media." As a result of two activities, Jenna developed an understanding of the constructed nature of texts.

## **Creating Multimodal Messages as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Analyzing observational data as well as Jenna's Media-diary entries revealed how her initial concept of literacy shifted. Jenna expanded her concept of literacy by using literacy practices to add to existing knowledge about popular culture texts and also using literacy practices that offered her new ways for conveying messages. Similar to other cases, examining Jenna's literacy practices also evidenced characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy. However, the activity was culturally relevant for Jenna in a different way.

The Film Genre project was culturally relevant for Jenna because she drew on her existing knowledge of popular Disney film and suggested films for her group to use. Jenna suggested popular films, such as *Bambi* (1942), *AristoCats* (1970), *Hairspray* (2007), *The Lion King* (1994), and *High School Musical* (2006), all images the group agreed to use for their final poster.

Using other literacy practices during this project was culturally relevant because Jenna's learning was contextualized to include the cultural capital she had developed about popular film. She experienced contextualized learning because the assignment required her to compare the knowledge she had developed culturally about popular films such as those produced by Disney to the scientific concept of *musical* she and her group constructed. Evaluative practices supported Jenna as she developed a judgment about Disney films that supported the group's concept of *musical* and that she reported affected her literacy. Another way Jenna's learning was contextualized was through extensive situated practice used to visually convey the group's message. Jenna participated in literacy events centered on creating the poster for 14 days. Each day,



Jenna used available designs to re-create popular culture films to visually convey the musical genre.

The third way this project was culturally relevant was that Jenna reported developing a new perspective for understanding musicals. According to Jenna, she subsequently realized most Disney produced films are musicals.

### **Conclusion**

Observational data of the whole-group discussion about shots and angles show Jenna taking notes and viewing Ms. Reynolds' PowerPoint presentations, but data also illustrated that she was visibly quiet during these class discussions (Video-taped Observations, 09/9/09, 09/10/09, 09/11/09, and 09/15/09). The follow-up activity, the Illustrated Glossary was intended to provide evidence that students understood how to apply the media vocabulary *shots* and *angles*. Instead, the Illustrated Glossary provided Jenna with the social interaction she required to learn the media concepts. This investigation revealed that although Jenna took notes and appeared to understand how to apply *shots* and *angles* with the whole class, the activities required for the Illustrated Glossary proved she required more support. Consequently, Jenna learned to use analytical practices to apply the media terminology as a result of her peer, Laurie guiding her through the process.

The Illustrated Glossary project helped Jenna begin to define literacy in broader terms. Initially, Jenna conceptualized literacy as the ability to understand alphabetic symbols. However, the Illustrated Glossary project required Jenna to not only understand alphabetic symbols, but to also learn and apply media vocabulary to visual images. Jenna learned to apply concepts, such as *shots* and *angles* to visual images,

thus shifting her concept of what constitutes literacy. Weeks after the Illustrated Glossary, Jenna reported viewing movies and television differently in social situations. She said that she identified media concepts, such as *shots* and *angles* with her friends. Jenna also began to define literacy as the ability to use the media concepts she learned in her personal life.

Another classroom activity, the Film Genre project, required Jenna to use evaluative and communicative practices. Jenna used evaluative practices to compare her existing understandings of popular Disney musicals with Internet information. She found that a musical requires only one song, whether instrumental or sung. Jenna conducted online research and concluded that all Disney films are musicals because they fit this concept. Jenna's conclusion helped her to suggest images and ways for organizing those images. Additionally, Jenna's conclusion proved useful to her group because most of the images for their Film Genre poster consisted of recognizable Disney films, and she also provided the group with their final written concept of *musical*. Jenna's concept of literacy expanded because she began to view visual images as texts that could be analyzed, and she conceptualized a new view of Disney films and musicals.

Jenna also indicated that she had a new perspective of both Disney films and musicals because of the research she conducted during the Film Genre project. The use of evaluative practices helped Jenna develop a wider concept of *musical* and then offered her new ways for viewing the popular films. Jenna's use of analytical practices in social settings and her new perspective of Disney films and musicals suggest she is developing critical literacy practices.

## CHAPTER 9 DISCUSSION

Media literacy was about understanding how things got on television, and trying to spot bias in newspaper articles. Neither of those definitions is big enough anymore.

–Kevin Anderson, *Media Literacy*

### **Overview**

The overall purpose of this study was to examine students' literacy practices in classroom context. The two research questions that guided this study were 1) How do high-school students in an English language arts elective class participate in literacy events centered on popular culture and 2) How do high-school students expand their concept of literacy in an English language arts elective class where popular culture is the central text? Similar studies examined how students used language and canonical texts within classroom settings (Heath, 1983; Lewis, 2001; Nystrand et al., 1997; Moje & Lewis, 2001; Pace, 2006). Other studies also examined teachers' use of popular culture texts in formal lessons (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Kist, 2005; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Pace, 2009). Some of these studies illustrated how students can analyze critically popular culture texts in academic contexts (Callahan, 2002; Morrell, 2004) and in social and cultural contexts (Pace, 2009). However, this study examined students' classroom literacy practices as they developed conversations centered on studying popular culture texts.

Case-study students were identified based on 90% participation in the study. Four students were identified as instrumental cases to answer the two research questions. I used a microethnographic discourse analysis (Bloome, et al., 2005) to examine

students' literacy events. Inductive analysis was used to uncover emerging categories for literacy practices (Spradley, 1979).

The classroom teacher Ms. Reynolds developed lessons focused on the formal study of popular culture texts. These lessons are described within a description of the overall classroom context in Chapter 4. The four case-study students' literacy practices are illustrated in Chapters 5-8. Chapters 5-8 also revealed each student's report of how they expanded their concept of literacy within the classroom activities and in their personal lives. In this chapter, the results of this study are discussed, as are the implications for teaching and considerations for future research.

### **Summaries of Students' Literacy Practices**

The literacy practices illustrated in this study were consistent with how media literacy educators have suggested students should use popular culture texts in classroom contexts (Hobbs, 1996; Pace, 2009). Likewise, the critical literacy practices students reported exemplified the ways that critical literacy theorists believe students should think about texts that are relevant to their lives (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). These scholars have noted that media literacy education and critical literacy will help students develop the following literacy practices:

- Analytical
- Interpretive
- Evaluative
- Communicative
- Critical Literacy

The research illustrated that students used similar literacy practices within varied activities the type of activity determined how they used literacy practices.

## Analytical Practices

Analytical practices refer to students' ability to apply scientific concepts to texts (Hobbs, 1996; Pace, 2009). Literature suggested that teaching students to analyze media in formal ways is a common method for media literacy education that offers students new ways for viewing popular culture (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Kist, 2005; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004). The results of this study also revealed that students can learn specialized vocabulary about media and then apply those concepts to popular culture texts. Though each classroom activity differed, Laurie and Alex participated in formal lessons designed to introduce them to concepts centered on understanding media, and then they each applied the media concepts, such as *horizontal integration*, *frame*, *shots*, and *angles* to a variety of popular culture texts.

The results of this study differed from other studies because the data here revealed that (1) social interaction with peers was integral to some students' literacy construction, and (2) allowing students to construct their own justification of scientific concepts helped them develop their concept of literacy. Jenna's and Adam's participation in the Literature in the Media class exemplified these two results. Jenna learned similar concepts for identifying visual media as Alex; however, she learned to apply these concepts as a result of interacting with her peer Laurie as they collaborated to produce their Illustrated Glossary. The whole-class discussion centered on identifying *shots* and *angles* did not help Jenna use analytical practices. Instead, Jenna developed analytical practices when she was able to collaborate with her peer. Mills' (2006) study implied that a more knowledgeable person was integral for scaffolding understandings

of scientific concepts during class group work, but this study illustrates how peers can enact a more knowledgeable role to support one another in understanding media concepts. This study shows the important role that peers played in helping one another develop formal knowledge about texts.

This examination also found that students can use analytical practices to develop their own definitions for scientific concepts. Unlike other studies where the teacher is the primary person who introduces scientific media concepts and then expects students to apply them, this study emphasized an activity that illustrated the inverse practice. During the Film Genre project, neither Adam, nor Jenna was given formal definitions for their genres. Instead, they developed their own concepts for *action* and *musical* based upon their existing understanding of action films and independent research. Adam's participation in the Film Genre project illustrated how he drew on existing knowledge of popular film to conceptualize the term *action* film; whereas, Jenna's involvement in the same project revealed the process of Internet research she used to develop a concept for *musical*. Developing their own concepts for their respective genres supported Adam and Jenna in constructing understandings of popular culture they each found useful in their personal lives.

### **Interpretive Practices**

Interpretive practices refer to the process students use to notice the details of texts in order to make sense of texts (Hobbs, 1996; Pace, 2009). The literature highlighted the difficulty students have with interpreting texts in classroom contexts (Lewis, 2001; Pace, 2006). By examining secondary students' literature events, Lewis (2001) found that sometimes in modeling how to interpret texts, the teacher subconsciously leads

students to his or her pre-determined interpretation. Pace (2006) also discovered that how other students make sense of texts can influence students to abandon their own independent interpretations. This examination of students' literacy practices revealed that students "read" popular culture independent of the teacher's or other students' interpretations. Alex participated in several classroom activities centered on performing a close reading of visual texts. During these classroom activities, Alex's attention was focused on using the details of the visual texts and the media concepts *shots* and *angles* to understand how to make sense of the texts. All of the clues that Alex needed to interpret visual texts were contained in the frame that the director provided. Learning to only focus on the details of the frame helped Alex develop an independent method for interpreting texts that did not rely on her teacher's or peers interpretations.

### **Evaluative Practices**

Evaluative practices illustrated how students compare spontaneous knowledge of texts with scientific concepts about texts (Hobbs, 1996; Pace, 2009). Students began to make value judgments about texts as they compared their social and cultural understandings with concepts learned in school settings. While some studies have revealed that it is difficult for students to use their social and cultural backgrounds to develop judgments of literature (Moje & Lewis, 2007; Pace, 2006), research suggested that students could draw on their social and cultural backgrounds to evaluate popular culture texts (Callahan, 2002; Morrell, 2004), but students in these investigations did so to either create similar texts (Callahan, 2002), or to judge the validity of social and cultural representations in film (Morrell, 2004).

Data from this study's investigation revealed that when relevant popular culture is central to instruction, students juxtapose their socially and culturally developed knowledge of popular culture with scientific concepts in order to create understandings of popular culture that are personally meaningful to them. Through formal study about popular culture texts, whereby students used evaluative practices, students developed deeper and salient understandings of those texts. Laurie, Alex, and Jenna used evaluative practices to examine popular culture they felt was integral to their lives. The Media Conglomerate study offered Laurie the opportunity to judge Disney as a media company. As a result of formally studying the important role that Disney shares in disseminating popular culture, Laurie learned that Disney owns shares of Kodak. She drew on her socially developed knowledge of Disney World where she had seen Kodak picture spots. These two pieces of information--Disney owns Kodak shares, and Disney World has Kodak picture spots--helped her develop a judgment about Disney as a profit-seeking company.

The discussion centered on understanding shots and angles helped Alex to develop ways to evaluate popular film. Alex used evaluative practices in ways similar to Laurie. Alex learned to notice visual details of *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) still shot. She learned that the film's image was a two-shot. She drew on her spontaneous knowledge of *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) to describe the main characters as sad and comforting. These two pieces of information: The film was a two-shot, and the film's characters were sad and one was comforting the other helped her judge the director's use of the two-shot. Alex developed evaluative practices that she began to use to judge other popular films in her personal life.



Jenna's experience with evaluative practices was observed during the Film Genre project. During this project, Jenna began to judge the online information she discovered about musicals. Jenna learned that a musical only had to have one song, and that song could include words or be an instrumental. After researching the technical concept of *musical*, she conducted an online search of musicals from a Disney video collection she possessed. Jenna found that, based on the criteria, almost all of the Disney movies she owned were classified as musicals. Evaluating Disney movies helped Jenna not only evaluate those films that she had once viewed as a child, but also to construct a new understanding of those films and the concept of *musical*.

### **Communicative Practices**

Communicative practices refer to students' ability to use available and appropriate resources in order to organize and convey multimodal messages (Hobbs, 1996). Studies revealed how students learn to use available and appropriate resources, such as technology (Callahan, 2002) or clay animation (Mills, 2006) to produce multimodal texts. Some students in this study also had to learn to use appropriate resources to convey their messages. For example, Adam learned to use the Opaque machine as a way to re-create accurate images, and Laurie learned how to organize a PowerPoint to prepare information about Disney. While, requiring students to produce multimodal messages for varied audiences is a common activity for teaching about popular culture texts, studies showed that students usually produce texts that are imitations of the popular culture texts they formally studied (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Callahan, 2002; Mills, 2006; Morrell, 2004). The literature insisted that students rarely have the opportunity to create new forms of texts.

This study, however, illustrated that students used communicative practices to (1) convey a message that described a genre and (2) communicate their unique message using only popular culture images. The Film Genre project is an example of a project that required Jenna and Adam to develop and use communicative practices in the previously stated two ways. The two students both used communicative practices to express their respective concepts of the *musical* and *action* genre. Jenna helped her group describe a *musical* as a movie that has only one song. Drawing on her existing knowledge of Disney films helped Jenna suggest that the group use these films because many of Disney's movies only have one song, yet are categorized as musicals. She also conceptualized ways to organize the images on their 3' x 6' poster that would be visually recognizable. Likewise, many of Adam's popular film ideas were used to define *action* movies. Adam also found ways for his group to visually organize popular films categorized as *action* movies. For example, he helped his group organize *The Matrix* (1999) symbols and the letters for the group's poster in a way that their high school peers would recognize. These two students provided new ways for their peers to "read" popular films as genres. Adam and Jenna constructed new understandings of genres that their peers could visually interpret.

### **Critical Literacy Practices**

Critical literacy practices refer to the new perspectives students develop as a result of studying how texts are constructed to shape societal and cultural views; these practices also describe the ways that students are empowered as they develop new perspectives for using texts in their lives (Freire, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005). While other studies have demonstrated how teachers can prepare lessons using popular

culture that foreground critical literacy, students' voices are oftentimes absent from the results (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Morrell, 2004). Therefore, scholars cannot determine how and if students are using critical literacy practices with popular culture in their personal lives. This study investigated the literacy practices that students report transferring from classroom context to other social settings. Students' descriptions of how they used literacy practices to engage with popular culture illustrated their critical literacy practices, growing sense of empowerment and shifting concept of literacy.

Laurie, Alex, Adam and Jenna each reported developing new perspectives of texts. Laurie viewed Disney-owned television networks differently because she began to understand the television shows on the network each "teach" a different value. For example, Laurie reported easily identifying lessons the Disney channel teaches children. Laurie also understood the role that Disney and the other seven media companies shared in not only providing entertainment, but also controlling the distribution of popular culture through media ownership. Laurie associated her ability to discern media motives with becoming more literate.

Alex viewed popular culture as a text that is similar to canonical texts found in English language arts classes; she believed popular culture texts could be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated. This ability to compare popular culture texts with canonical texts helped Alex develop a broader concept of texts. Alex reported using analytical, interpretive and evaluative practices while independently viewing movies with friends. Furthermore, Alex associated the ability to use literacy practices she learned in school with becoming more literate, and she felt proud that she could deconstruct popular films to uncover hidden meanings.

Adam understood that visual images, such as popular culture texts could be re-created and organized to communicate a message. He also began to understand that each type of text (e.g., visual or printed) could be constructed for different purposes. Adam once narrowly defined literacy as the ability to understand media; however, he reported becoming more literate after learning that he could communicate messages via popular visual images.

Jenna viewed Disney films differently than she did when she began the Film Genre project. She developed a language for describing all Disney movies that now includes the genre, *musical*. Jenna also reported her growing understanding of media through the formal study of media vocabulary, such as *shots* and *angles*. She felt empowered because she developed a new set of terminology to describe her Disney movie collection and the films that she watched with her friends. The next section provides a discussion of students' literacy practices as they related to sociocultural learning theories.

### **Implication of Theory**

Sociocultural theorists have agreed that formal learning in classroom contexts should mirror the ways that children naturally learn in social settings (Buckingham, 2003; Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996; Vygotsky, 1987). Some ways to replicate the learning process included recognizing students' spontaneous concepts, introducing students to scientific concepts then providing situated practice for students to use new concepts, and scaffolding students' understandings of scientific concepts with the guidance of a more knowledgeable person. This section applies components

of sociocultural learning theory to the ways that the case-study students' developed literacy practices.

### **Spontaneous Concepts and Literacy Learning**

Spontaneous concepts describe the social and cultural understandings of texts that students develop in their homes and communities (Vygotsky, 1987). Vygotsky and sociocultural theorists whose work is grounded in literacy (Buckingham, 2003; Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996) have agreed that literacy learning should begin with students' spontaneous concepts about texts. Scholars (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have suggested that one way teachers can recognize students' spontaneous concepts about texts is to use culturally relevant texts that are closely aligned with students' sociocultural backgrounds. Culturally relevant texts are one way to ensure that students have spontaneous concepts to draw upon in classroom contexts. However, Bloome et al. (2005) theorized that "merely soliciting student knowledge does not in itself suggest a change in "established" classroom literacy practices" (p. 91) because the teacher oftentimes remains the authority of knowledge. A teacher who uses culturally relevant texts may remain the authority of knowledge by judging students' existing knowledge about such texts. These researchers explained that classroom literacy practices may shift "if student knowledge and experience are solicited for use as validation of academic knowledge" (Bloome et al., p. 92). In other words, if students' knowledge is not only recognized, but also used as integral for developing formal understandings of texts, then classroom literacy practices have changed. As a result of reversing the location of knowledge, students may begin to have the power to shape their own literacy practices.

This study illustrated that popular culture texts can help develop a shift in the location of knowledge from the teacher to the students. A shift in the location of knowledge was evinced in two case-study students, Adam and Jenna. The Film Genre project in which these two students participated revealed how Adam and Jenna initially drew on their spontaneous concepts about popular culture texts. However, the location of knowledge was inverted from Ms. Reynolds to them as Adam and Jenna both used their existing understandings about popular films to generate new knowledge about genres. Neither Adam nor Jenna relied on Ms. Reynolds' expertise to develop judgments or communicate their concepts of genre. Instead, observations of the two students revealed that their existing knowledge about popular film helped their group use evaluative and communicative practices to develop characteristics of genre. Adam compiled his existing knowledge about popular film to develop a concept of the *action* genre. Likewise, Jenna began with her Disney movie collection and information about musicals to develop her group's concept of the *musical* genre. Shifting the location of knowledge to recognize Adam's and Jenna's spontaneous concepts about popular culture allowed them to shape their own literacy practices in classroom contexts.

### **Situated Practice and Literacy Learning**

Vygotsky (1987) theorized that students should be introduced to scientific concepts if formal learning is to occur. Literacy theorists (Buckingham, 2003; Gee, 1998; Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984) have agreed and added that as students develop understandings of scientific concepts, their learning should be contextualized to reflect the way that people in society naturally acquire literacy. One way to contextualize students' learning in classroom context is to provide them with

situated practice (Buckingham, 2003; NLG, 1996). When students are given situated practice, they are given adequate classroom time to practice ways to use new language for understanding texts in authentic settings. These scholars have theorized that an integral factor in understanding the scientific concepts relies on how much situated practice students are given.

This investigation revealed that the type of situated practice students participated in were useful because they closely resembled literacy events that they may have participated in their personal lives. The classroom literacy activities required students learn to use media language to analyze culturally relevant texts, such as popular films. Observations of each literacy event revealed that students were introduced to media concepts, and they were given classroom time to practice using media language with Ms. Reynolds and with their peers in authentic settings that mirrored watching movies. Varied types of situated practice offered students the opportunity to develop literacy practices that students could transfer from classroom contexts back to social contexts because of the relevancy.

Observations of Alex exemplified the importance of situated practice as it related to the literacy practices she developed. Situated practice helped Alex learn to use analytical, interpretive, and evaluative literacy practices to understand the film language that directors use to produce popular films. Alex was introduced to the media concepts, *shots* and *angles* during one classroom literacy event. For the second classroom event, Alex was able to practice using the media language by applying the terminology to familiar popular film still shots, such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2003) and *Life or Something Like It* (2002). The third time Alex practiced applying, questioning, and

judging media concepts by watching the beginning of a *Star Wars* (1977) sequence to identify and evaluate why the director used specific shots and angles. Alex was introduced to media concepts for one day; however, she was offered the opportunity to apply the vocabulary over two class periods that mirrored authentic social contexts for viewing movies. Using literacy practices in classroom contexts that imitated authentic social contexts helped Alex to view ways she could actually use literacy practices when she viewed movies with her family and friends (FG, 10/12/09, p. 8). Providing students with adequate time to practice scientific language in ways that they could in natural settings helped students develop ways to transfer schooled literacy practices to their homes and communities.

### **Social Interaction and Literacy Learning**

Vygotsky's (1987) theory of the zone of proximal development has been influential in understanding how classroom learning should mirror the natural social and cultural ways that learning occurs. The zone of proximal development is best described as the time between when a student understands spontaneous concepts about texts and is introduced to scientific concepts about texts. In order for the student to fully comprehend the new scientific concept, his or her knowledge must be scaffolded. Scaffolding requires that a more knowledgeable person guide the student's learning by helping him or her bridge spontaneous concepts about texts with more formal scientific concepts.

Scholars (NLG, 1999; Street, 1984; Gee, 1998; Heath, 1983) noted that the social interaction provided by a more knowledgeable person is an integral part of literacy learning. The more knowledgeable person served as a guide for the student as he or



she scaffolded learning about texts. Oftentimes the classroom teacher is automatically assumed to be the more knowledgeable other; however, theories of sociocultural learning suggested that a more knowledgeable person is one who knows enough about the subject to guide someone else (NLG, 1996). Therefore, students could also assume the role of a more knowledgeable person capable of scaffolding formal scientific knowledge in classroom contexts.

This examination revealed the process that more knowledgeable students used in order to help case-study students develop literacy practices that supported their literacy learning. In order for a high-school student to assume the role of a more knowledgeable person during a literacy event, the less knowledgeable student had to express that she was less knowledgeable, and the more knowledgeable student had to reveal her expertise given the classroom context. These two factors allowed both students to position themselves within the literacy event and proceed to either participate in the event as a “student-protégé” or “student-mentor,” respectively.

Two separate classroom observations exemplified the process of a more knowledgeable student supporting case-study students’ literacy practices. At the beginning of a literacy event, Laurie said, “Okay. I’ve never really done a PowerPoint by myself” (Audio taped Observation, 09/03/09, p. 11, l. 57). This admission immediately determined the two students’ roles. Laurie assumed the role of a less knowledgeable student and Devina served as a more knowledgeable student. Devina used her prior knowledge and experience with PowerPoint to scaffold Laurie’s understanding of how to communicate via the computer program. Devina scaffolded Laurie’s understanding by showing her how the teacher’s questions could represent

PowerPoint headings, and how their notes could be used as information they would convey to their peers. Laurie learned to use communicative practices to convey the group's overall message about Disney. Laurie transferred these communicative practices when she suggested similar strategies for a different group project that required PowerPoint.

A different literacy event illustrated how Jenna and Laurie assumed "student" and "teacher" roles, respectively. Similar to Laurie in the previous literacy event, Jenna announced, "I don't understand the difference between this one and this one" (Audio taped Observation, 09/22/09, p. 12, l. 87) referring to how to identify their digital images. Jenna admitted that she did not fully understand the media concepts that Ms. Reynolds had introduced in class. Conversely, Jenna's admission shifted their roles from collaborative to instructive. Jenna became someone who was less knowledgeable about media concepts and Laurie, a student who understood how to identify the terms, *shots* and *angles*. During their Illustrated Glossary project, Laurie assumed the role as more knowledgeable student and successfully taught Jenna how to identify and apply the scientific concepts to the digital images they had captured. Laurie's "lessons" mirrored the ways that Ms. Reynolds had taught the whole group. She scaffolded Jenna's understanding of the scientific concepts by providing Jenna with the term, an example from their digital image, and a definition. This event illustrated how Jenna successfully learned to use analytical practices in order to apply *concepts*, such as shots and angles to images.

Gee (1998) referred to discourse as language in use, and differentiates Discourse as the combination of language and other non-verbal symbols. Gee (1998)

also described discourses/Discourses as “identity kits” (p. 51), and suggested that these verbal and non-verbal symbols indicate a particular identity within a group. Laurie and Jenna demonstrated an inverse operation. These students announced that they did not possess the discourses/Discourse required to collaborate and practice literacy during these classroom literacy events. As a result, roles shifted from collaborative to instructive allowing the students to learn from more knowledgeable students and develop literacy practices they did not initially possess.

### **Implications for English Language Arts**

This research was unique in that it examined students’ literacy practices in classroom context. Understanding how students practice literacy in classroom contexts is beneficial because it reveals ways that students use language and relevant texts to construct literacy socially. Knowing how students construct literacy in classroom contexts can influence teacher education programs and provide professional development opportunities for practicing teachers. This study will benefit teacher education programs by introducing constructivist methods that support English language arts students’ literacy practices in classroom contexts. The results of this research will also provide professional development for teachers who wish to use culturally relevant texts in current classroom contexts.

### **Teacher Education**

The term “literacy practices” is a new concept to the field of English education. The case-study students presented in this study can provide illustrations of the varied types of literacy practices to clarify the concept. These illustrations of literacy practices can serve as models for pre-service teachers at various phases of their fieldwork

experiences. For example, before, during, and after their fieldwork experiences, pre-service teachers can compare existing literacy practices they observe with the case-study students' literacy practices. Juxtaposing observations with these students' literacy practices can inform pre-service teachers' own teaching as they strive to implement relevant pedagogy.

The findings in this study suggested that students develop literacy practices as the result of engaging in several classroom activities. The varied types of activities presented in this research can provide resources for pre-service teachers as they help future students construct their own understandings of texts. Activities similar to “reading” visual images provided an example of an activity that supported students' developing literacy practices. For example, pre-service teachers could study the way Alex developed analytical, interpretive, and evaluative practices to “read” visual images. Studying Alex's developing literacy practices would be useful for understanding the types of teaching methods that offer students opportunities to construct literacy.

### **Practicing Teachers**

Currently, literacy organizations encourage English language arts teachers to use culturally relevant texts, such as from popular culture. Oftentimes, using popular culture texts requires practicing teachers to expand their concepts of text, literacy and literacy pedagogy. This study could provide professional development that will support practicing teachers as they prepare classroom activities that require re-conceptualizations of text, literacy, and literacy pedagogy.

English language arts teachers often define “text” as the canonical novel or literature anthology that they are expected to teach. However, the results of this study

indicated that students use and develop similar literacy practices with popular culture texts that are oftentimes required with traditional English language arts texts. This study implied that texts should also include media, such as from popular culture. The case-study descriptions in this study could exemplify how popular culture texts are similar to printed texts found in English language arts classes. For example, Alex's case illustrated how students could use close reading processes to develop strategies for analyzing, interpreting and evaluating visual images. These literacy practices helped students construct understandings of visual texts in ways that are often expected with novels.

The results of this study could also provide professional development to support English language arts teachers as they expand their concepts of literacy. Traditionally, literacy is defined as a skill-set that includes the ability to read and write using alphabetic symbols. However, if English language arts teachers are expected to use popular culture texts, they must also define literacy as “the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communication technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia” (Luke & Freebody, 2000, p. 9). The literacy practices typified by the instrumental cases of this study exemplified this definition of literacy. Practicing teachers could examine each case-study student as a reminder that literacy practices vary across social contexts and classroom activities. For example, each student used or developed analytical practices within each activity, but oftentimes, students used analytical practices in ways that were salient to them. These cases could support practicing teachers as they expand concepts of literacy that more closely resemble the social and cultural ways society practice literacy.

The results of this study could also provide practicing teachers with literacy pedagogy that recognizes the socially and culturally relevant ways students practice literacy. Formal ways for teaching literacy included contextualizing students' learning. Contextualized learning referred to the amount of situated practice students had with applying formal concepts in authentic ways. Each case-study provided descriptions of students who had multiple opportunities to practice using the formal concepts in classroom contexts. Students were given ample classroom time to learn, apply, and practice the formal concepts they were introduced to. Some of the activities Ms. Reynolds developed could be revised to provide professional development for how to contextualize learning in traditional English language arts instruction. For example, the Film Genre project could be used to introduce students to new ways of conceptualizing "genre."

Contextualized learning also referred to creating engaging and meaningful activities that students valued. The instrumental cases presented in this research could also be used to help practicing teachers develop meaningful activities. Many of the activities the students attributed to expanding their literacy were ones that shifted their interpretations of popular culture they found relevant to their lives. These activities could be modified for use in a more traditional English language arts setting. Studying these descriptions will help teachers as they develop their own ideas for varying classroom activities that offer their students opportunities to use literacy practices in different ways.

## Considerations for Future Research

This study revealed six possible directions for researchers interested in studying students' literacy practices in classroom contexts. The first topic is related to structural issues that could reveal understandings about students' literacy, and the remaining five are related to understanding how students practice literacy in classroom settings.

The setting of this study, an English language arts elective, and the teacher participant, a National Board Certified, veteran teacher were ideal. Similar research where media texts are central to instruction should consider traditional English language arts settings, and teachers who may not possess graduate training in using media texts in instruction. Such a study would reveal implications for students' literacy practices in classroom contexts that closely resemble many ELA teachers' current situations.

This study and similar research revealed that students are adept at drawing on the social and cultural ways they use media within academic settings. Further research should examine if students transfer literacy practices used with popular culture texts to printed texts. For example, it would be an important extension of this study to research if a student like Alex used similar literacy practices to interpret canonical novels.

Research should also be conducted to understand how students are transferring academic ways for interacting with media in social settings, such as with friends and family. Pace (2009) found that studying media formally affected how students interact as they watch television with their families or use social networking sites with friends. Though the focus of this research was not students' out of school practices, students in this study report similar anecdotes of transferring classroom literacy practices in social situations. More studies should be conducted to understand how students transfer new

knowledge about media as these may add validity for including more relevant texts in ELA instruction.

The type of literacy instruction Ms. Reynolds provided is comparable to what the literature suggests will benefit boys (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wilhelm, 2008). For example, students use technology, participate in group work and projects, and study relevant popular culture texts. Adam even praised the teacher's use of liberating guidelines for constructing PowerPoints. While there are studies that indicate digital technologies support elementary school boys' writing (Ergle, 2008; Jacobs, 2009), and Wilhelm (2008) illustrated strategies for increasing adolescent boys' reading engagement, further research that describes secondary boys' literacy practices in media-rich classrooms would benefit the field.

A final area for further research included literacy and identity. This growing area in the literacy field is centered on understanding how students use literacy to develop their identities (Alvermann & Heron, 2001; Finders, 1996; Lewis & Fabos, 2005). This study was designed to understand students' conversations centered on popular culture, but a different research question may develop understandings of how students use conversations and other non-verbal cues to enact specific identities (Bloom et al., 2005). Future research that examines students' classroom literacy practices should also seek to uncover ways students enact both individual and group identities as they study relevant media texts.

### **Summary**

This study sought to uncover students' literacy practices in a media-rich class. Four case-study students illustrated the ways that students used literacy practices and



expanded their concept of literacy. Though teacher instruction was not the central focus of this study, examples of pedagogy underpinned by theory will benefit teachers who seek ways for integrating popular culture texts in traditional ELA instruction.

Descriptions of how students practiced literacy in varied classroom activities will be useful for future and current literacy educators who require rationale for using popular culture texts. English language arts teachers could also use descriptions of students' literacy practices as examples of how students can draw on social and cultural uses of media for literacy learning.

Six areas of further study emerged as a result of this study. This study suggests that studies should be conducted in traditional ELA classrooms where teachers integrate media texts in instruction; research could reveal how students use similar literacy practices with canonical texts; an examination of how students transfer knowledge from in-school practices to out of school practices is necessary; attention to how boys respond to teachers who use media at the secondary level will be beneficial; and further studies should seek to understand what types of individual and group identities students enact when media is central to instruction. These studies will strengthen the ways we as educators support students' literacy in classroom contexts as they continue using literacy in a variety of ways outside of school.

# APPENDIX A IRB CONSENT FORMS

## Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida. I am researching how students respond to studying media in school. The purpose of this study is to understand how students talk about media. The results may help me develop teaching strategies for high school English teachers. With your permission, I would like to ask your son or daughter to volunteer to participate in this research.

All of the students who participate will be observed in the classroom as students complete assigned class work on analyzing media, such as film and advertising. With your permission, I will use a video tape so that data collection is accurate. Students will respond to questions about media study in a diary. Students will also participate in two small-group discussions in their class. The discussion leader will be me or another graduate student. The 10-15 minute discussions will be part of a regularly planned school day. Students will not miss any class time. Data will not be collected from students who prefer not to participate. Finally, your child's class work will be photocopied and analyzed to understand how students understand media.

Students will be asked to write their names on any work they complete in class, but their name will be replaced with a pseudonym and their identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. The list connecting your child's name to the pseudonym will be kept in a locked file in my faculty supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed, the diaries will be destroyed and the video will be destroyed. Your child's name will not be used in any report. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your son or daughter's grade or placement in any programs.

You and your son or daughter has the right to withdraw consent for participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in April 2010 upon request. If you have any questions, please contact me at (904) 887-8243 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Barbara Pace at (352) 392-9191 x276. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 11250, Gainesville, FL 32611; (352) 392-0433.

Katherin Garland

*I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in Katherin Garland's study of media literacy. I have received a copy of this description.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian                      Date                      2<sup>nd</sup> Parent/Witness                      Date

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2008-U-1162  
For Use Through 1/15/2010

**Student Assent Form**

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida. I am researching how students respond to studying media in school. The purpose of this study is to understand how students talk about media. The results may help me develop teaching strategies for high school English teachers. I would like you to volunteer to participate in this research.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to observe your English class approximately 40 times as you complete assigned class work on analyzing media, such as film and advertising. With your permission, I will use a video tape so that data collection is accurate. I will also ask you to participate in a 10-15 minute small-group discussion in English class. You will not miss any class time. I will also ask you to respond to some questions about studying media in a diary. Finally, your class work will be photocopied and analyzed to understand how you are studying media.

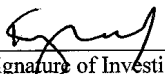
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can ask questions at any time that you might have about this study. Also, if you decide at any time not to finish, you may stop whenever you want. If you do not participate in this study, it will not affect your placement at your school, nor will it affect your grades. Remember, these questions are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

There is no more than minimal risk. There is no direct benefit to you as the participant in this research, and there is no compensation. However, this study will help me and others understand media study in classrooms better. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. You will be assigned a fictitious name. The list connecting your name to this fictitious name will be kept in a locked file in my faculty supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed, the diaries will be destroyed, and the video will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the paper. Remember, being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you don't sign this paper or even if you change your mind later.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

8/24/09  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2008-U-1162  
For Use Through 1/15/2010

Informed Assent Document for Participants

**Informed Consent Document for Adult Participants**

Dear Teacher,

I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida. I am researching how students respond to studying media in school. The purpose of this study is to understand how students talk about media. The results may help me develop teaching strategies for high school English teachers. I would like you to volunteer to participate in this research.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to observe you approximately 40 times as you use media, such as film, music, and advertising. With your permission, I will use a video tape so that data collection is accurate. I will also ask you to participate in one 20-30 minute interview. Finally, your lesson plans and other teaching materials (i.e. Power Points, assignments, etc.) used to teach media will be photocopied and analyzed to understand how you are teaching media.

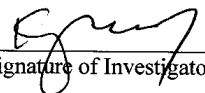
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this study at anytime without consequence.

There is no more than minimal risk. There is no direct benefit to you as the participant in this research, and there is no compensation. However, this study will help me and others understand media study in classrooms better. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. You will be assigned a fictitious name. The list connecting your name to this fictitious name will be kept in a locked file in my faculty supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed, and the video will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
Signature of Investigator

8/24/09  
Date

Informed Consent Document for Participants

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2008-U-1162  
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APPENDIX B  
EXTENSIVE FIELD NOTES, REFLECTIVE NOTES, AND CONCEPTUAL NOTES

DATE	Field Notes	Reflections	Conceptual Memos
8/31/09	<p>Ryan walked in and asked the student who sits in front of him if they had any homework. They had an assignment last week to think about different media. This is written on five different pieces of chart paper (and Jessie asked me if I wanted to keep these before I left today). Today's assignment includes: looking at all five lists, finding five things that crosslines, explaining why these things cross lines, writing the top 16 media they engage with daily, estimating how many hours they approximately interact with media, and then ranking their media choices. Students have 25 minutes to complete this assignment. Once the assignment begins, students are not very loud considering Connie told them she expects conversation. Joseph is done looking at the chart in three minutes. Then slowly, five more students are done. Hunter is the last to finish the first part of</p>	<p>Jessie seems to weave critical framing into the lessons, but doesn't formally critically frame information. She also has students think about several different aspects of media simultaneously. Also, before she conducted the Nielsen Report lesson, she led them through a mini-study to help them understand how they use media in their own lives, then she compared their results to Nielsen's. This seems to have been done in order to demonstrate the invalidity of the results, and again to critically frame their understandings of such studies. For example, Nielsen claims more students are watching television; however, this seems unrealistic given the Internet, social online sites, and cell phone usage. Students were given 25 minutes to complete the assignment; however, I'm not sure that this assignment required 25 minutes because students were done at least ten</p>	<p><b>Metalanguage is important:</b></p> <p>"Ephebiphobia" is a word that Nielsen used in the report, and Jessie made a point of showing this to students and explaining how they could use it at home.</p> <p>Jessie told students that they would be learning about vertical and horizontal integration on the following day (9/1/09). She knew that it didn't make sense to them today; however, she wanted them to be aware that they would be learning this metalanguage tomorrow.</p> <p><b>Interesting students:</b></p> <p>Adam, Joseph, and Anne seem the most orally involved. They answer questions posed by Jessie, and attempt to make sense of their new information.</p> <p>Adam and Joseph were two students who went over to Jessie's desk once class was done. They looked over her shoulder at what she was doing online and</p>

	<p>the assignment. It took students five minutes tops to complete the first part. Three students sitting closest to the chart paper never got out of their seats; this includes Ryan. Students seem very quiet but perhaps it is because this is a writing assignment. Jessie is working on her laptop while students are completing the remainder of the sections. Student G finishes and begins talking to Student D for approximately 15 minutes. Gregg gets up and begins talking to Student O, who sits across the room. Gregg remains by Student O as Jessie begins the lecture part of the lesson, but he eventually gets up because she's asking him specific questions located on the paper. Jessie announces that this is information from the 2009 Nielsen Report "How Teens use Media." Jessie explains "Mediated Moments" to help student think about how they use media in their lives. She encourages students to discuss assignments with their family at home, she</p>	<p>minutes prior.</p>	<p>stood and chatted with her about it while other students were in groups talking to one another.</p> <p>Ryan's body language for most of the class seems to illustrate disinterest. For example, his head was in his hand and he situated his backpack on his desk, so he could rest his head and look at the screen simultaneously.</p> <p>Ryan is also the student who walked in and asked if they had any assignments due.</p>
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	<p>says, "You can go home and talk bout this if you want..." Class ends about ten minutes early even after Jessie asks about "weird media" viewing this past weekend. After D.J. asks for a syllabus, she talks to him because he is new and requires new student information. Students have various side conversations in groups of 3-4 as they wait for the bell to ring. Adam is explaining past assignments to D.J. Then he goes over and looks at what Joseph and Jessie are doing. A few students stand up and continue talking. D.J. is talking to no one.</p>		
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APPENDIX C  
MEDIA DIARY QUESTIONS AND DATES

MEDIA Diary Question #1: (9/10/09)

How do you define literacy? During the four days when you studied media conglomerations, did you do anything that helped you become more literate?

MEDIA Diary Question #2: (9/17/09)

Last week you learned some film metalanguage centered on shots and angles. Use your own definition of literacy to explain how understanding shots and angles has or has not helped you become more literate.

MEDIA Diary Question #2: (9/17/09)

Last week you learned some film metalanguage centered on shots and angles. Use your own definition of literacy to explain how understanding shots and angles has or has not helped you become more literate.

MEDIA Diary Question #3: (9/24/09)

Describe the process you went through during the beginning of the Illustrated Glossary project (i.e. how did you decide whether to take digital pictures or look through magazines; how did you decide what location would be best for the pictures; how did you determine who would take the pictures, etc.)?

MEDIA Diary Question #4 (Due 10/01/09):

1. Describe your experience with using Power Point prior to this class.
2. How have you added to your pre-existing knowledge of using Power Point?
3. How has using Power Point in this class different than how you've used it before?

MEDIA Diary Question # 5 (Due: 10/8/09):

In this class you do the following:

- Study film metalanguage (vocabulary)
  - Interact with other students in group projects
  - Use technology to demonstrate what you've learned
  - Present Power Points to the class
  - Listen to lectures
1. Describe which of these activities **most** help you understand media (you can choose as many as you'd like) and help you become more literate.
  2. Describe which of these activities **least** help you understand media (you can choose as many as you'd like) and do not help you become more literate.

MEDIA Diary Question # 6 (Due: 10/22/09):

Describe the current project you are working on; how is it helping you understand media? How is it helping you to become more literate?

Media Diary #7 (Due: Thursday, October 29, 2009):

Aside from the title of your genre, you cannot use any words to represent the genre. If there are no words, how is this an example of literacy?

MEDIA Diary Question # 8 – (Due Thursday, November 5, 2009)



On Thursday, you had an assignment where you had to write a 300 word rationale that explains how your group defined the genre that you drew for the poster. How are the two assignments similar? How are the two assignments different? Please explain beyond one is written and one is visual.

Media Diary Question # 9 (Due Friday, November 13, 2009)

How has your growing media knowledge influenced how you engage with media?

Media Diary Question # 10 (Due Thursday, November 19, 2009)

Can you describe a time when you applied what you learned in this class to what you were watching at home or with friends?

## APPENDIX D TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I'm completing a study about your Literature in the Media class, what I'm hoping I can do is find out how students expand their concepts of literacies in this class, and how students participate in these discussion centered on media texts. An interview with you is important in framing how you've planned lessons that are centered on different types of texts. Let me first thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

1. What theoretical perspectives frame your teaching?
2. What are your literacy goals/objectives for the class?
3. Can you talk about your views of teaching media metalanguage?
4. What do you consider important when you are planning a lesson that includes different types of texts?
  - a. What was the purpose for the Media Conglomerate study?
  - b. What was the purpose for the Film Genre Project?
    - i. How do you prepare students for the film genre project?
  - c. Why did you decide to show the comedies that you did?
5. Why do you use group projects?
6. With so much emphasis on digital literacy, why do you choose to teach about popular culture?
7. What do you see as the major difference between how you teach Literature in the Media and your traditional ELA classes?
8. Some teachers do not feel they have the time, resources, or knowledge to use popular culture in traditional English language arts instruction. What advice would you give to those teachers?

## APPENDIX E

### MEDIATED MOMENT SAMPLES (#1 AND #10)

**Mediated Moment #1**                      **Due before the beginning of class September 3, 2009**                      **Name:**  
In the spaces provided, comment on the significance of each of the quotes below. If you need more room, use the back of the paper. Do not just re-phrase each quote, talk about how it does or does not have an application in your life. **Use specific examples from your experience. The assignment value is 40 points.**

“Renowned comic-book author Gerard Jones argues that bloody videogames, gun-glorifying gangsta rap and other forms of ‘creative violence’ help far more children than they hurt, by giving kids a tool to master their rage.”

by Gerard Jones for Mother Jones

“MySpace, with 70 million visitors, has become the digital equivalent of hanging out at the mall for today’s teens, who load the site with photos, news about music groups and detailed profiles of their likes and dislikes.”

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1463>

11/16/09

**Mediated Moment #10**      **Due before the beginning of class on Thursday, November 19**    **Name:**

**Read the article below. Then on the back of the paper, explain how two movies you have seen present the same dilemma: it was neither a comedy nor a tragedy but a bit of both: a tragic-comedy. Give examples from each to support each film's tragic-comedy nature. Remember to cite the film correctly by following the guidelines in your planner. Use IMDB for missing information in the citations. Value: 40 points.**

"Latest Coen brothers movie at Rome fest"

By ALESSANDRA RIZZO (AP) – October 23, 2009

ROME — The Coen brothers aren't sure whether their latest movie is a comedy or a tragedy — that is for the viewers to figure out. "We don't even think about it in those terms," Ethan Coen said Thursday, as he and his brother Joel were presenting A Serious Man at the Rome Film Festival.

The Coen brothers have a history of making quirky, genre-defying movies, from the acclaimed surreal Hollywood tale Barton Fink to the darkly funny Fargo. Their latest release is a look back at their own roots. The film follows physics professor Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg) as his life in a predominately Jewish suburb of Minneapolis unravels, both at home and professionally.

"Once you get past a certain point you're just thinking how to be true to the story," Ethan Coen said, "what seems appropriate for the story as opposed to what will make people laugh or whether people will take it as a tragedy or a comedy."

"I'm kind of pleased that there are different reactions in terms of people laughing or not," he said. "What they sort of make of it is up to them."

The setting — a Midwest Jewish community in the 1960s — is familiar to the Coen brothers, who most recently had directed the Oscar-winning crime thriller No Country for Old Men and the spy comedy Burn After Reading. But the movie is not an autobiography. Events are made up, the filmmakers say, and the characters are combinations of people they knew growing up in Minnesota.

The Coen brothers also said they were pleasantly surprised at the positive reaction of Jews when "A Serious Man" opened in the United States earlier this month. "They're very sensitive (as) to how they're portrayed in the media," Joel Coen said, referring especially to American Jews. There was concern "that some of those sensitivities may be rubbed the wrong way."

"But we were actually pleasantly surprised. Most of the reaction in the United States from the Jewish community was very positive," he said, though he added the positive reception was not "monolithic."

Source: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gEUIGisS7bPn9ZPi9skjULHhF0cwD9BGAC380>

## APPENDIX F MOVIE TRAILER ASSIGNMENT

IMDb.com Assignment - Due October 5<sup>th</sup>

IMDb.com

### Movie Trailers Study

Movie Trailer: A series of selected shots from the film in order to attract an audience to the film

#### Old-time Movie Trailer Components

1. All created by National Screen Service
2. Showed various key scenes from the film being advertised
3. Included large, purposefully-fonted text relating to the story
4. Stars emphasized
5. Feature emotional moments
6. Used a musical underscore generally pulled from studio music libraries
7. Had some form of narration usually given by featured stentorian voices

#### Modern Movie Trailer Components

1. Almost no voice-overs
2. Stars emphasized
3. Feature emotional moments
4. Use sound to maximum effect
5. Entice audiences through empathy
6. Emotional roller coasters
7. Genre reflective elements:
  - Horror and Action normally have a loud soundtrack and rapid cutaways to make the audience feel they are missing something.
  - Romance uses a lot of in-and-out close ups mixed with scenic shots in a montage of images suggesting this is a feel good movie.
  - Comedies are generally face-recognition driven. If you like the comedian, this movie's for you.
8. Use set-up lines
  - Yes Man: "No - it's the first word we learn - and some people never grow out of it."
  - The Soloist: "A journalist lost for words and a life that's lost its way."

**Assignment:** On or before Monday, ~~September~~ <sup>October</sup> 5, 2009 turn in an essay of between 300-500 words comparing and contrasting two movie trailers. One must be from a movie that came out between 1965; the second from a movie that came out before 1960. The analysis should demonstrate how each movie reflects the components listed above. Your final paragraph should be a personal reflection on what you've learned about movie trailers and how they are manufactured for a specific reason.

Remember to use MLA formatting and to cite each movie trailer correctly. Here's a sample:

Dare trailer. Viewed on September 20, 2009 from <http://www.apple.com/trailers/independent/dare/>

Go to one of the following websites to view movie trailers:

Current and Recent movie trailers:

<http://www.moviefone.com/movie-trailers>

<http://www.youtube.com/trailers>

<http://www.apple.com/trailers/>

Classic movie trailers:

<http://www.warnerbros.com/#/page=wb-library/>

<http://www.tcm.com/multimedia/trailers.jsp?cid=17&scid=a&start=0&end=30>

<http://www.movie-list.com/classics.php>

#### Resources:

"Film Trailer." Viewed on September 20, 2009 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film\\_trailer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_trailer)

Newell, Graeme. "What Movie Trailers Can Teach Us about Promo Writing." *602 Communications*. Viewed on September 20, 2009 from

[http://www.602communications.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=79:october-2008&layout=blog&Itemid=99](http://www.602communications.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=79:october-2008&layout=blog&Itemid=99)

"What makes a good movie trailer?" Viewed on September 20, 2009 from

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070924160204AAv21sl>

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherin E. Garland was born in Chicago, Illinois to Walter and Naurice Gregory. She attended Skinner Elementary School and Whitney M. Young High School. She completed her senior year of high school at Covert High School in Covert, Michigan. Katherin attended Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan where she earned her bachelor's degree in secondary English education in 1995. In 1996, Katherin began her high-school teaching career at Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior High School in Detroit, Michigan. From 1997 to 2006, she continued teaching secondary English language arts for Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida. During her years of service in Florida, Katherin served as department chair and taught a range of English language arts courses, such as Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, and Advanced Placement Language and Composition. Katherin received her Master of Arts in teaching English from Jacksonville University in 2000.

Katherin began her doctoral studies in English education at the University of Florida in 2004. As a Holmes Scholar, she conducted research at a Title I school in 2006. Additionally, she was the member of a research team that investigated the results of a course that integrated media literacy education with traditional English language arts strategies. She has presented this research at national conferences, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Association of Media Literacy Educators.

She received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the summer of 2010. Katherin is an assistant professor at Georgia College and State University. She

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