

## **Disquietude: A Sonata-Form Inquiry into Multiliteracies Practices in an EAL Classroom**

**Julianne Burgess<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

---

This narrative case study describes an English as an Additional Language teacher's struggle to understand her young adult learners' apparent resistance toward multiliteracies pedagogical practices in a college setting. Multiliteracies Pedagogy (New London Group, 1996) advocates the use of digital media, and home languages and culture, to engage diverse youth in designing personally meaningful multimodal texts that can significantly impact learner identity, voice, and agency. This arts-based study uses an innovative sonata-style format to document the making of a class documentary, accompanied by teacher reflections on the video project in the form of poetry, journal excerpts, and classroom dialogue. The sonata form provides a unique methodology for teacher inquiry, allowing the teacher-researcher to explore the ways in which curriculum, pedagogy, and sociocultural influences intersect in the classroom. The study does not end with a clear resolution of the problem; instead, the process of inquiry leads to deeper understandings of what it means to teach in the complex worlds of diverse learners.

---

### **Chapter One: Theoretical Preface**

This narrative case study describes my undertaking, as an EAL (English as an Additional Language) teacher, to better understand my young adult English language learners' apparent resistance toward multiliteracies practices in my classroom. This has been a recurring issue for the 5 years that I (and my colleagues) have been teaching in this program. It is not supposed to happen; multiliteracies pedagogy, as envisioned by the New London Group (1996), should motivate, engage, and empower all students, especially diverse and marginalized learners.

---

<sup>1</sup>Department of Graduate and Undergraduate, Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario

It builds on students' proficiency with digital technology and taps their home cultures and languages through collaborative and creative project work. It is a dynamic, innovative pedagogy that is supposed to have a profound effect on English language learners. And it does—for some, but not for others. It seems there is an undercurrent of tension in our classroom, a resistance to multiliteracies practices, that is difficult to comprehend and challenging to address. This narrative inquiry involves reflection on transformative theories of language and literacy education, personal history, and living in that uncomfortable space in which pedagogy and real world application come into conflict. The study is written in a sonata-style format, a creative framework for arts-based inquiry. The sonata begins with an exposition, which introduces the primary theme: the making of a class documentary. This is followed by a contrasting secondary theme, which explores teacher reflections on classroom events and conversations. The exploration uses poetry, journal notes, and reconstructions of classroom dialogue. Through these reflections, the conflict between pedagogy and practice, between curricular imperatives and meeting broader student needs, is exposed. While the study examines the tension in the classroom, it does not attempt to resolve it; rather it is grounded in the understanding that not all teacher practical knowledge is about clear solutions to specific pedagogical problems. The case study is told from the perspective of a fictional English as an Additional Language teacher, whose story is based on my own teaching experiences. The inquiry uses arts-based representations of real classroom experiences to problematize idealistic conceptions of literacy pedagogy and to offer more complex ways of viewing English language teaching and learning. My hope is that the presentation of an alternative view of multiliteracies pedagogy will lead to further avenues for research and will facilitate more respectful, responsive, and ultimately more effective pedagogical practices.

## **Pedagogy**

The communication landscape has been dramatically altered in recent decades by the forces of globalization and rapid digitization, transforming the ways in which we communicate with each other. New media are constantly evolving, introducing new types of devices, changing the scope and speed of interactions, the nature of discourse, and moving authorship from an individual to a collaborative activity (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). In the classroom, traditional notions of literacy are being challenged by the concept of multiple literacies, raising possibilities for transforming how we understand and teach language and literacy in second language and mainstream contexts.

Contemporary researchers in the field of New Literacy Studies have argued that literacy activities such as reading and writing take place not in isolation, but in a particular context; therefore reading and writing can only make sense when studied in the context of the social and cultural practices in which they occur (Gee, 2000). As a result, literacy can no longer be framed as a set of discrete paper-based skills linked to standardized norms. Literacy is steeped in social meanings, and is evolving and changing alongside society and culture (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2004; Street, 1984). When people read and write, they do so in a situated place, with a social identity and history, making sense of what they read and write through their own particular worldview (Street, 1984). Literacy practices are associated with different domains of life, and can change, with new practices emerging from participants' informal learning (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). English language educators who employ a curriculum that focuses on discrete reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills are not keeping pace with what is happening in the world today.

In 1996, The New London Group (NLG) unveiled a new approach to literacy teaching that acknowledges the variety of ways that literacy is practiced in the digital age; the team of scholars called it "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." Their manifesto addressed the rapid changes in literacy practices due to globalization, the explosion in information and communication technologies (ICT), and growing social and cultural diversity. Whereas diverse learners' first language and culture are often viewed as an impediment to learning English in most Western classrooms, multiliteracies theory advocates utilizing home languages and culture as classroom resources. And by bringing digital technology into the learning environment, all students, especially diverse and marginalized learners, would have opportunities to build on their existing knowledge in highly engaging ways while developing multiple literacy skills by using multiple modes of communication, not limited to print alone (Kress, 2003). Multiliteracies pedagogy integrates four components that are often interdependent: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Through transformed practice, learners make use of available texts or designs and synthesize new understandings through their meaning-making activities from one context to another (Angay-Crowder, Choi, & Yi, 2013). The resulting student products may be short videos, musical or dramatic productions, photo stories, or digital storybooks; they are often deeply personal artifacts that empower students to find their own voices and speak to their social realities.

Multiliteracies pedagogy can, and often does, have a powerful and beneficial impact on diverse learners, as chronicled by numerous literacy scholars. Researchers believe the “creative apprenticeship” (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 229) in digital activities builds specific language competencies of English language learners. Diverse students receive positive affirmation of their identities through the creation of projects, or artifacts, that incorporate first language and culture, and this provides a strong foundation for academic learning (Cummins, Sayers, & Brown, 2007). In addition, using their home language as a resource, learners are able to convey the complexity of their abstract thinking across languages and cultures (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). Using multimodal forms of learning, students are called upon to switch modes, to move backwards and forwards between language, image, gesture, and spatial and tactile understandings. This process is called “synthaesia”; knowing how to represent and communicate ideas in multiple modes is a powerful way to deepen learning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 27).

This narrative study reveals a different perspective on multiliteracies; it investigates the tensions in the praxis of multiliteracies in an English as an Additional Language classroom that appear to challenge the assumptions and expectations of this transformative practice. It is a teacher’s exploration of the making of a classroom documentary, in which a surprising number of young adult English learners students seem reluctant to fully embrace the promises of multiliteracies pedagogy.

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on the reflections of a teacher-researcher (the protagonist in the narrative) and her interactions with her young adult students who demonstrate a variety of levels of engagement in multiliteracies pedagogy. The research site is an Ontario community college English-as-an-Additional-Language program for newcomers, aged 18 to 25. The data for this case study come from the writings and reflections of the teacher-researcher during the production of a class documentary and includes poetry, prose, dialogue, and journal notes, often centered on the themes of newcomer identity and belonging, the central issues explored in the documentary. The inquiry places teacher writings alongside classroom conversations, and by reflecting on those reflections, the narrative draws on arts-based research that borrows from Bright’s (2007) reflection-on-action. The practice of writing and reflecting on writing provides an artistic means to inquire about the world, in which meanings are made in collaboration and community (Kind, 2008).

However, these meanings are not necessarily clear-cut. Arts-based research is often grounded in ambiguity and uncertainty (Springgay, 2008) and such a description certainly holds true for this investigation. To that end, this sonata-form narrative inquiry will not arrive at a definitive conclusion. The intent of the narrative is to bring “competing imperatives into a conceptual tension” (Chang & Rosiek, 2003, p. 256), with the hope of sparking deeper reflection on the complex and often perplexing issues that emerge in our classrooms, and challenge our understandings and goals in the practice of English language teaching.

### **Sonata-Style Inquiry**

In the world of music, the classical sonata is usually performed in three parts (Frantz, 2014). The exposition introduces the listener to the primary theme. It is followed by a secondary theme, which stands in contrast to the primary theme, thus exposing a conflict. The second part of the sonata is termed the development. In this section, the themes are further explored, and the discord between the elements is fully exposed. The final part of the sonata is called the recapitulation, in which the piece returns to the initial theme. It is generally a repeat of the exposition. As the secondary theme returns, it is set in a new key, and the tension is understood in a new light. The sonata ends with a coda, a denouement, which brings the piece to a close. Sconiers and Rosiek (2000) introduced the sonata format as a framework for educational research, providing qualitative researchers with a structure for narrative study that is both creative and compelling. It offers an experimental approach to exploring and representing teacher practical knowledge about curriculum, and exploring the complexities, contradictions, and dilemmas that underscore the experience of teaching. One of the most interesting challenges faced by scholars in the field of contemporary educational research is developing modes of representing educators’ practical knowledge that are pertinent to the lived experience of teaching, and that allow space for voices from a variety of experiences (Dibble & Rosiek, 2002). The sonata-form case study offers an innovative means for probing difficult issues that trouble educators’ assumptions and understandings of their personal and professional knowledge in their teaching practice.

Researchers interested in exploring the human experience often utilize approaches that contain artistic qualities and characteristics that draw from the arts and humanities (Black, 2011; Dewey, 1934; Eisener, 1997; Greene, 1980).

Narrative inquiry is closely associated with arts-based research, and is perhaps the most common form of arts-based research; arts-based scholarship provides a holistic, integrated perspective for addressing research questions (Leavy, 2009). Educational research has been framed as the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, whereby students, teachers, and researchers are both storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The experience of teaching can best be understood by providing educators with opportunities to reflect on issues of personal significance: who they are, their own conceptions of teaching, and how these inform their teaching practice (Black & Halliwell, 2000). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996, 1999), a significant portion of teachers' personal practical knowledge is in narrative form, in the stories they tell. By incorporating narrative inquiry and arts-based approaches, this paper aims to recount and explore the complex realities, emotions, and perplexing issues that confront an educator in an English as an Additional Language classroom.

Sconiers and Rosiek (2000) developed the sonata-form narrative case study to document teachers' understandings of how subject matter and social and cultural influences intersect in the classroom. Their goal was to produce case study descriptions (Shulman, 1987) of the professional knowledge of the terrain that teachers navigate each day, thus enhancing practitioners' awareness and ability to be more culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in their teaching practice.

Using a sonata-styled structure provides a creative format for understanding and responding to primary source narrative data. Like the sonata musical form, it involves presenting a primary theme and responding to this theme, illuminating the development of insights through a communication pattern that allows secondary conversations or dialogue alongside the primary story (Black, 2011; Chang & Rosiek, 2003; Dibble & Rosiek, 2002, Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). In the following case study, the primary theme is the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy in the making of an English language learners' classroom documentary. The secondary theme is an exploration of the tension caused by the students' apparent ambivalence toward multimodal literacy practices. By incorporating arts-based research methods, this inquiry builds on the original sonata-form narrative developed by theorist Jerry Rosiek in collaboration with the Fresno Science Education Equity Teacher Research Project (Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). Black (2011) uses story, drawing and metaphor to investigate an early childhood educator's classroom experiences, and presented her findings in a sonata-styled format.

This study seeks to further extend the sonata-form literary style narrative by incorporating student and teacher poetry, prose, journal excerpts, and classroom dialogue as secondary conversations in the documentary making process.

Arts-based narrative methodology offers the possibility of shedding light on the complexities and dilemmas that comprise the worlds of educators (Black, 2011). Arts-informed research has been called the “creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavours” (Cole & Knowles, 2007, p. 6), with the resulting knowledge having both theoretical and transformative potential. The sonata narrative format and arts-based inquiry offer an ideal vehicle for exploring recurring issues around English language learner engagement in multiliteracies practices.

This investigation uses the structure of a sonata-form narrative case study presented by Sconiers and Rosiek, (2000), and Chang and Rosiek (2003), and further develops the framework by making the sonata’s three-part structure more explicit with the addition of chapter headings that conform with the format of the musical sonata, as follows:

### **Chapter One: Exposition**

- It opens with a classroom episode that sets a tone for the rest of the story.
- A description follows of a classroom activity that illustrates the teacher’s instructional philosophy and intentions (primary theme).
- A situation is reported upon in which those instructional intentions meet with forms of student resistance (secondary theme).
- The teacher’s intellectual and emotional response to this tension is described.
- A step back is made from the immediate situation to reflect on the teacher’s understandings of the tension encountered. This often involves biographical reflection on the sources of the teacher’s insight—or lack of insight—about students’ lives, and in this case study, learners’ classroom experiences and educational expectations. (The secondary subject is placed in the dominant key, and is given full thematic development.)

## Chapter Two: Development

- The narrative delves into the themes and then brings the reader back to the episode of teaching in which the original conflict was introduced. Its meaning is now changed by the exploration of student experiences, teacher biographies, and the sociocultural context in which the moment is nested.

## Chapter Three: Recapitulation

- The story ends, not with a resolution, but a deeper understanding of the complex issues involved in pedagogy, language teaching learning, and identity issues for newcomer youth. The paper ends with a coda—an open-ended commentary on this new understanding of the relationship between language teaching and diverse students' cultural, linguistic, and lived experience.

Following Sconier and Rosiek's (2000) lead, this narrative inquiry is written using a first-person singular, present tense voice to evoke the lived experience of teaching, foreground the emotional content of the story, and explore phenomenological possibility; as a result, sonata-form case studies are often presented as hypothetical fictions (Dibble & Rosiek, 2002). In this project, the narrative is based on real people and real experiences. The main characters, figurative imagery, some dialogue and aspects of the chronology are fictionalized. This has been done not only to protect the anonymity of the participants, but also as a means to more effectively illuminate the tension between pedagogical theory and practice as it plays out in the classroom. On the one hand, the teacher is employing multiliteracies theory to engage English language learners in exploring their multiple literacies and identities through meaningful digital media activities. On the other hand, a significant number of learners appear to be less than enthusiastic about the transformative potential of innovative western pedagogical practices. The narrative is intended to juxtapose conflicting discourses that shape teaching practice (Dibble & Rosiek, 2002).

The goal of the sonata-form case study is not to illustrate best teaching practices, but rather to interrogate our understandings of teaching, the ethical dilemmas, and the disquieting situations that are often linked to broader social and cultural issues that do not conform to neat, idealistic resolutions. The case study that follows is told in the first-person voice of a fictional teacher named Maryna Szczechanski Burgess.

The protagonist is based closely on the author, but is presented as a composite character to incorporate shared experiences and collective musings with colleagues.

## **Chapter Two: Exposition**

The best place for me is the sea because when I close to the water, I feel like I'm child. I want to play and laugh, and forget all my suffering. (Amina, LINC student)

### **Designing (Primary Theme)**

Amina is showing me a photo of herself standing alone by the shore of Lake Malawi, near Mozambique, days before her arrival in Canada. It is a gloomy photo, filled with shadows on the waves and mottled clouds over the horizon. We are chatting about which of her photos would be suitable for our latest project. Amina is one of two subjects in our student-teacher digital production: a short documentary focusing on the struggles of transnational youth adapting to a new homeland. The young adults at the heart of this video—Amina and Carlos—have lived lives of tremendous upheaval and are struggling with who they are and how they find their place in this new country, of being the outsider, the Other. Each is coming to terms with his and her migration experiences in different and fascinating ways. The making of this documentary affords these English language learners the opportunity to explore their social identities in new, multimodal ways, build language skills, and become critical thinkers in the process. Amina and Carlos have allowed their classmates and teachers the opportunity to get to know their challenges intimately. As a group, we are journeying together; while making the documentary, we all explore and share our immigration experiences using a variety of arts-based modalities.

In our classroom work, we read and respond to numerous pieces of literature, from poetry to short stories, and adapted academic texts. We listen to a moving videotaped lecture by Australian entrepreneur Tan Le (2011) about her harrowing journey to escape Vietnam on a rickety fishing boat on the China Sea. For Le, her identity as an outsider is something she welcomes. It is something to be thankful for because, she says, it allows the newcomer to see beyond the limits that the host culture can impose on its citizens.

She refers to this ability to see beyond barriers as the gift of the boat. Our group has a long, thoughtful discussion about this notion; not everyone agrees that being an outsider feels like a gift. I think of the numerous challenges these students must confront: as language learners, newcomers in a culture very different from their own, and in this classroom, as digital media artists. For me, I'm learning deeply about my students and reflecting on my own immigrant heritage, while trying to find my way in this pedagogical practice with diverse learners who come with varied educational levels, expectations, and aspirations.

It is organized chaos in the room, students in every corner engaged in different activities. I look at these young learners and I marvel at the thought that each one carries hundreds, in some cases, thousands of years of culture within them. And each language they speak contains unique ways of knowing and understanding the world. The classroom is like a rich bio system, teeming with life forms, interacting in often unseen and fascinating ways. With such immense diversity under one roof, the place would seem to have great potential for conflict. In fact, it is surprisingly peaceful. But when a problem does emerge, it can grow and spread in unexpected ways.

It is our video period, and one group of learners is huddling around a computer, searching for images of airports, scenes of planes landing, baggage carousels, and crowds waiting. They are putting together the opening montage for the documentary. Another cluster is looking for photos of Africa and Latin America that will provide background images to accompany the interview footage. A third group is editing the interview with Amina.

### **Review of Literature: English in the 21st Century**

I check the calendar to see the numerous tasks that remain and our deadlines for completing these tasks before we show our finished product at a community screening in the college theatre. It is always the same: so much to do, so little time. This project, a classroom documentary, is a unique undertaking in an adult English language program. Most English as a second language (ESL) programs—or more appropriately, English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs—are designed to teach settlement English, to prepare newcomers with a language foundation to live and work in Canada, access services, help children with homework, and obtain Canadian citizenship. Our class is more specialized.

It is located in a community college and targets young adult English learners who plan to pursue post-secondary education. The instructors use multiliteracies pedagogy as a foundation for language and literacy instruction (NLG, 1996). This pedagogy recognizes that there are multiple ways of communicating and making meaning, ways that are increasingly multimodal, including such modes as visual, audio, spatial, behavioural, and gestural (NLG, 1996). Screen-based media are replacing linear, alphabetic writing to convey literate meaning, so that we have now moved from “telling the world to showing the world” (Kress, 2003, p. 40). For English language teachers, it should be clear that the old basics of language instruction are no longer adequate in our dynamic, digitally connected world.

Watching my students with their devices, I see that English learners use innovative text languages that incorporate numerical symbols for first language alphabet, hybridized forms of English and home language, and the incorporation of English text forms (LOL, BRB) into their first language texting practices. It is fascinating to see the growth of these new forms of literacy being used in and around my classroom; multiliteracies pedagogy provides an approach that capitalizes on my students’ technological strengths, making my teaching practice more relevant and responsive to my learners’ interests and needs.

From my vantage point, it is quite clear that there is no single, authoritative standard English, something that most of my colleagues are reluctant to acknowledge.

The predominant view of language in most EAL classrooms is that it is an abstractlinguistic system, in which discrete skills development—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—is taught and assessed in decontextualized settings. But notions of literacy—what it is, and how it is used—have been re-written by literacy researchers such as Heath(1983), Street (1984), and Barton and Hamilton (1998). They and their colleagues have redefined literacy as a social practice located within social, historical, and political contexts. They argue that there are multiple literacies, and literacy practices are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices, patterned by social institutions and power relationships, changing with different domains of life, and with new learnings.

Gazing out from the front of our classrooms, EAL teachers can see that our world has changed; our students' language and literacy practices have been dramatically reshaped by digital technologies. And so must our language teaching practices. If we, as educators, want to engage meaningfully with our diverse English language students, their literacy practices in their lifeworlds, we have no choice but to infuse our teaching environment with these new conceptions of literacy and forms of technology.

In recent years, new pedagogical approaches have emerged that seek to address the constantly evolving panorama of multiple literacies and multiple modes of communication within our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society. The instructors in the youth program were inspired by the NLG's (1996) visionary pedagogical tract on multiliteracies theory, which draws on the increasing significance of multilingual and multimodal dimensions of literacy in light of globalization and technological change. The architects of this pedagogy recognize that while written language is not in danger of disappearing, it has increasingly become interwoven with other, often digital, media. They conceive of meaning-making as a form of "design"; in other words, an active remodeling of one's social world, making use of varieties of media to represent the visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and tactile dimensions of communication, alongside more traditional forms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a, 2009b). The theory recognizes education as a key to social equity, a crucial stepping-stone to better employment opportunities, active participation in community life, and personal intellectual growth. In the era of globalization, increasing diversity, and digital technologies, learners need significantly more than the traditional tenets of reading and writing the national language; they need a literacy pedagogy that promotes a culture of equity, inquiry, flexibility, creativity, and initiative (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b). The instructors in our program have sought to use multiliteracies pedagogy to develop engaging teaching practices in which our diverse learners build their English skills by being actively involved in multi-media projects that are academically challenging and relevant to their lived realities. Our classroom activities are centered on practices that tap into our diverse learners' home languages and cultures, utilize their proficiency with digital media, and involve them in interesting collaborative projects that build English, functional, and academic literacy skills, and provide a creative outlet for self-expression and empowerment.

### **Organized Chaos: Secondary Theme**

As I look around the room, I notice that half of the students are fully engaged in documentary work; they are chatting, laughing, moving between their notes and the computer screen, and reaching over each other to click the mouse or tap the keyboard. The remaining learners have their backs turned to the computer stations. Some are finishing a writing assignment; others are half-heartedly studying for a vocabulary quiz. A few students departed at the beginning of the video period: one claimed an appointment downtown, another left for work, and one other ducked out for a long cigarette break. I ask the solitary learners if anyone would like to take up an empty computer to work on the opening segment of the documentary. No one puts up a hand. I ask if someone would like to design the poster to advertise our documentary screening. No one volunteers. I ask if anyone would like to write the invitation letter to our community screening. Silence.

### **Chapter Three: Development**

Most of my English language learners are comfortable with technology, and like their North American peers, constantly check their cellphones and dedicate hours of free time to their favourite social media sites. A few are new to digital technology, but it seems their interest in technology grows as they are exposed to their classroom peers. For example, one of my students, Marie, spent almost half of her life in different refugee camps in Tanzania, with limited access to formal education and no access to technology. Within a few months of arriving in Canada, her family had obtained a computer and using her 1-hour daily allotment, Marie soon set up a Facebook account, and was connecting with friends from the camps who were in other parts of Canada, as well as relatives in the United States and Europe. Our program tries to take advantage of their tacit, naturalized understanding of digital texts. We try to generate engaging assignments using student input and interests. Our documentary speaks to the lived experiences of each student in the class. And yet, a significant number of learners exhibit ambivalence to the project work and classroom multiliteracies practices. The question is why?

## The Power of Language

At the end of the day, I flip open my attendance binder while two Spanish speakers wave as they head out the door. *See you mañana*, I call after them. A small group of students is at my desk waiting for their bus tickets. Fatima offers a big smile and says, "May... I...bus ticket?" *What's missing*, I ask, returning her smile. "Please!" *See you 'barri!*" I say, handing her the ticket. She laughs at my mash-up of Somali and English. We go through this daily routine of practicing polite requests, not because I am trying to be a stickler for proper etiquette or a grammar maven. I am trying to give them some language tools they can employ when they inevitably face an intolerant bus driver, sales clerk, or government worker. Most of these young people have had dealings with Canadians who claim not to understand their accent or their limited English, using language as a weapon to humiliate, silence, and marginalize them. For generations, Canadian institutions, such as schools, have required immigrants and refugees to suppress their cultural identities and mother tongues to adopt so-called standard English as a precondition for acceptance and advancement in the dominant society (Cummins et al., 2007).

This course combines functional and academic language acquisition with ideological understandings about language use. I think of Adrienne Rich's (1971) words, "This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you" (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 169). Those words infuse my English teaching practice. Standard English is not apolitical; it is the language of the culture of power, the ruling white upper and middle class (Delpit, 1988), and I have no desire to be complicit in teaching the language and culture of domination. I want my students to understand how the language and culture of the dominant group works to maintain unequal power relations in Canadian society. I see my job as helping newcomers to acquire the linguistic codes and values of the culture of power—ways of talking, writing, dressing, and interacting—and develop a critical analysis to understand how the culture of power operates in schools and in the wider society. I look for ways to use English to challenge standard usage, to establish a site of resistance where students can reinvent their identities and reclaim personal power (hooks, 1994). By incorporating diverse languages and cultures in our multiliteracies activities, we disrupt the boundaries of standard English, and create possibilities for sharing alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world around us. While other EAL teachers insist on English only in their classrooms, I encourage my students to use their first languages to brainstorm, and help each other out.

The walls in our classroom are decorated with colourful student-made posters, containing text in English and the home languages of the group members. Often students play with the languages of their peers, trying out phrases like “thank you very much” or “see you later” in Spanish, Swahili, or Arabic. And we talk about their experiences with English in the community to expose different Englishes and how they are used.

Once the students are gone, I tidy my papers and make notes for tomorrow’s tasks. I have the feeling we are falling behind in our work on the documentary. I feel like I alternate between being a cheerleader and a referee; some days I am encouraging learners to tackle the difficult work of logging (transcribing interviews) and editing, and other days, I am trying to sort out people and popular tasks, like camera-work, so that the jobs can be shared fairly. March 22 is the date for our community screening. The theatre has been booked. It is 3 weeks away, and Spring Break is next week. I suppress a pang of anxiety in my chest, trying not to feel overwhelmed by what we still have to finish. And I am facing this problem again, that familiar wall of silence. I had hoped this time, with this passionate group, it would not happen. But here it is.

### **Transformative Practice**

At home, I decide to go out into the garden to do some digging in the back yard. Spring has come early and there are green shoots sprouting everywhere I look. The truth is I am not a good gardener. Our plants manage to survive on benign neglect. My friends go on about the fresh aroma of the earth, getting the beds ready for planting, and so forth. The problem for me is I really do not know what is growing back there. The previous owners planted this garden and we have let it go, focusing on other projects around the house. It looks completely overgrown, a tangled mess of tall shoots and scraggly leaves that snake along the ground. It is going to take a fair bit of digging and pulling to clean it up. I will do it in fits and starts; that will give me time to think. I put the shovel in the ground, take out a handful of greenery, shake the dirt off and toss it into the big paper bag on the patio. If I try hard enough, I can screen out the constant traffic noise, the low hum from the highway in the distance. It is quiet in the yard. I listen to the stillness, and I drift back to the situation in the classroom. I feel like I am standing at the edge of a wide, flowing gulf; I am on one bank and across the way, I can see my students’ silent faces looking away, refusing to meet my gaze.

It happens every time we work on a long project, such as this documentary. Even so, the reasons for it are still a mystery to me. My husband sticks his head out of the back door to check on me. "Hey, Mare! How's it going?" I do not answer. I know he is asking about the garden, but I cannot think of anything but my frustration with our project and my students' growing ambivalence toward it. They were so enthusiastic to begin with, and I thought maybe this time, with this group, it would be different. I should not feel sorry for myself. I am truly fortunate that my teaching assignment is in a specialized program for newcomer youth. Our program is a federally funded Language Instruction Newcomers to Canada (LINC) site; our students' language skills are assessed with standardized benchmarks but our curriculum is made up of guidelines, which can be implemented with a fair degree of flexibility. We are provided with a straightforward, if not bland, assortment of resources and lesson plans in opening bank accounts, dealing with landlords, visiting the doctor, and settling into Canada's multicultural state. It is inoffensive and seems neutral. References to Canadian history omit or gloss over systemic racism and discrimination, such as the European treatment of Aboriginal peoples, the Chinese head tax of the 1880s, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, and the Komagata Maru incident.

There is no discussion of how Canada's current immigration policies continue to discriminate against immigrants and refugees, albeit in less overt ways (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2000), or what to do about it. There are no lessons on how to deal with the subtle racism and xenophobia that many newcomers encounter in Canadian society. I am able to make adaptations to meet the multiple needs of learners who hope to access post-secondary studies. With inspiration from Delpit (1988), hooks (1994), and heeding Ladson- Billings's (1995) call for a culturally relevant pedagogy, I bring an anti-racist, equity lens to language and literacy teaching, as well as an openness to multiple ways of knowing. Multiliteracies practices provide a vehicle for empowering newcomer students to discover their voices in their new homeland and to have the linguistic skills to advocate for themselves. In an ideal world, this would be easy to accomplish. While I try to help students to gain agency and voice, I recognize that, as a teacher employed by an educational institution with curricular imperatives to adhere to, I too am limited by, and complicit with, the power structures in the education system.

I have been teaching this program from its inception 5 years ago. Our course has been so successful that we now have a wait-list of young students hoping for a seat in our class. For me, this pedagogy brings to life the Freirean ideal of literacy education, in which the classroom is a welcoming, explorative space in which educators and students become co-learners and co-teachers, making curriculum choices together in a democratic environment (Freire, 1970). We use a variety of multimodal practices and our students easily adapt to a technology-friendly environment, with the assistance of an itinerant video technician. Students' cellphones are powerful devices that provide instant translation and research (and occasionally as mirrors to check hair and makeup). We often group students according to first languages so that the stronger students can help the weaker ones. We encourage learners to incorporate their home languages and cultures into projects and oral presentations. For two-thirds of the day, we focus on building reading, writing, and grammar skills, and in doing so we make use of numerous resources from digital media to traditional textbooks. We use TED Talks to help build academic listening skills. The online program offers the option of reading a translation of the lecture in multiple languages.

The themes in lectures, readings, and discussions are integrated with our multimedia projects. We devote one period a day to multiliteracies design (NLG, 1996). We make use of NLG's pedagogical framework of available designs, designing, and the redesigned; this means learners are actively engaged in creative work using existing materials (e.g., print, audio, or digital materials) and designing, which involves experimenting with and switching modes of expression, to transform the available materials into new designs. The student is a meaning maker, using his/her own subjectivity and voice in creative and dynamic ways, and is "remaking the world by representing the world afresh" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, p. 11). The learner's transformational work is the powerful core of learning in our program. Our multimedia projects require creative thinking and collaborative problem solving, and this can be an adjustment for some students from traditional learning environments. Learners are asked to work on individual oral presentations using PowerPoint, and Web 2.0 tools such as Prezi and Animoto. And they have an array of collaborative assignments that include filming their own invented stories, creating news reports, simple animated videos that retell their Reading Circle novels, and an instructional video that demonstrates a particular talent or skill. These student products have been termed "identity texts" (Schechter & Cummins, 2006, p. 59).

In other words, the artifacts provide affirmation of students' identities—their ethnic, racial, or religious identities, for example—reflecting a positive self-image back to the learner and the broader community, as the projects are shared at school, at home, and possibly among family and friends via the Internet. Identity texts capitalize on learners' existing knowledge (which may be based in their home language and culture) and their technological, creative, and intellectual talents. In addition, students develop self-expression in digital contexts. Thus, the learners invest their identities in a learning environment that welcomes creative self-expression (Norton, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton & McKinney, 2011). Because their self-affirming identity texts are so personally significant to students, these identity investments provide a crucial foundation for English language learning and academic success (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011).

### **Identity Texts: The Documentary**

During the first year of our program, I came up with the idea of making a class documentary. I saw this as a perfect opportunity to immerse our learners in a truly meaningful endeavour, permitting them to delve deeply into a social issue that affects their lives as newcomer youth, and further develop their critical thinking and linguistic abilities. The making of a classroom documentary combines multimodal and multiliteracies practices with Paolo Freire's (1970) transformational model of literacy instruction. Taking Freire's approach, learners actively use and extend their communicative repertoires through the process of inquiry into an issue related directly to their lived experiences. In our model, formal language learning plays a central role in the inquiry process. The students learn grammar structures as they generate an inquiry question, and explore their topic by reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking critically, and then propose a solution to their question. They read academic literature on the issue (adapted to their reading level), as well as short stories and poetry, and they write their own poetry and prose in response. They listen to online lectures on the topic in the computer lab, and employ critical thinking in their discussions and written reflections on their issue. With teacher scaffolding, they formulate interview questions, write scripts, and email formal invitations to community members to attend the documentary screening. They work in teams using technology to record and edit their footage.

In addition to linguistic and intellectual development, one of the aims of multiliteracies pedagogy is to create conditions of learning which support the growth of individuals as self-confident, flexible learners (and workers and citizens), who are able to collaborate with others who are different from themselves, respecting and negotiating difference and diversity as they work toward a common goal. The documentary project is an ideal vehicle for deep learning on many levels.

After some initial guidance, learners in the class seem to slide into group work, brainstorming, and problem solving around project work without too much difficulty. While it would be easiest for students to form groups along linguistic lines, I often see friendships and working relationships form around mutual interests and personalities. Cash and Mohamed enjoy editing together. Their homelands, Iran and Iraq, have longstanding animosities, which these learners have had no trouble setting aside. Amina and Fatima have become close friends and classroom collaborators. Both are from traditional religious backgrounds. Fatima wears a Muslim hijab while Amina does not practice her parents' Orthodox Christian faith. These learners truly enjoy being in a vibrant learning environment with other youth (as opposed to typical LINC classrooms, which are dominated by older adults). Our project work becomes a space that offers many possibilities for discovery, identity negotiation and personal growth.

That first year, my students and I stumbled through the documentary-making process. We had a small group of semi-committed students and a roughly edited film that explored the acculturation process from an immigrant youth perspective. Our community screening turned out to be a breathtaking event. Fellow LINC students at the college, English learners from a local high school, and members of community agencies turned out in force. Many shed tears as they saw their own life stories mirrored in the experiences of the students on the screen. And my learners simply shone in the spotlight, stepping up to answer audience questions with such strength and conviction that I could hardly speak. It was a brilliant moment—something you dream about as a teacher. And yet each year, with each group, it is there. An undercurrent of tension, a quiet but persistent resistance to video project-work, and it emerges strongly once we are into the hard work of documentary making. Now, I cannot help wondering whether this tension is always there, rippling just below the surface, and rather than confronting it, I have been averting my eyes, pretending it is not there—until it is too big to ignore.

We always begin the documentary project with full student buy-in and excitement, then struggle to make our way to the end, but we get there. Our film is shown at the screening, and it has always been well received by the audience. The students are thrilled with their achievements. We celebrate our efforts, and at the end of the day, the project is considered a success. Afterward, I spend time reflecting on what worked and what didn't, and plan ways to better organize students and the project to address this recurrent problem with resistance. But each year, it surfaces again.

I cannot say that I am shocked or completely surprised anymore when it happens, but I am frustrated and confused. And I have to admit to being filled with self-doubt about my teaching abilities. I'm sure it's natural for students' interest and enthusiasm to ebb and flow during work on a long assignment. Is it possible my expectations are unrealistic for English language learners? Am I too idealistic? Is something more at play? I do not fully understand what is at the root of the mixed engagement in the classroom or why this keeps happening. And I certainly have not found a good way to resolve the problem. I have researched the issue in academic journals, but I keep coming up with glowing reports of the multiliteracies approach in pre-schools, elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. Often, these studies are based on projects that are a one-time classroom endeavour, an add-on offered to select groups of students, or part of an after-school or summer program. I cannot seem to find anything that specifically addresses young adult English learners' resistance to multiliteracies practices. It is baffling. Multiliteracies pedagogy aims to engage all students, particularly marginalized and diverse learners. At the beginning of each term, we go over our classroom goals and the benefits of working multimodally in terms of building academic, functional, and digital literacies. Learners are also socialized into the design projects through hands-on activities, rotating through the various tasks associated with planning, filming, on-camera work and editing, and engaging in reflective activities. We give *warm and cool feedback* after watching each group's project; students are asked to critique each other's projects phrasing their remarks in positive ways, and using media literacy vocabulary to comment on specific elements of the video. An example of warm feedback would be, "I liked the way the camera zoomed in on Fabio's face after he kicked the ball." An example of cool feedback would be, "You could improve your video by using a close up of Fabio's face after he kicks the ball."

The learners are also asked to comment on their experience with collaboration, and reflect on their own learning; they are invited to discuss language learning, technology use, group dynamics, and/or the project theme in their reflections. And the project-work does engage English learners. Many students have returned after starting a college program to tell me how much they enjoyed our documentary, how proud they felt to stand before the community and speak about their lives and experiences in English. Yet, a significant number of our students seem to be disinterested in a project that affords them the unique opportunity to delve into an important issue that addresses their lived reality.

I understand that the majority of newcomers have only experienced traditional literacy practices in a teacher-fronted learning environment. For many, learner-centered teaching is not only unfamiliar; it may be disorienting and uncomfortable. My students are usually too respectful to come out and say they don't want to do this kind of work. Instead, the reluctant learners sit quietly with their eyes cast down. This is most likely a reflection of how students' notions of language learning have been shaped by different social and cultural practices. I understand that students learn best when their learning is part of a strongly motivated engagement with social practices they value (Gee, 2004).

In traditional classrooms, the teacher transmits from the front of the room and students passively acquire the standard, sanctioned conventions of meaning that make up the national language. Using a multiliteracies approach, I am imposing my understandings of what I perceive as crucial to their language learning. My teaching practices do not always resonate with those learners who have been socialized into traditional classrooms. While we may associate learning to read and write with school, acquiring literacy is fundamentally a social practice (Street, 1984) and cultural process, with which learners deeply identify (Gee, 2004). My students may feel a strong disconnect between how they learned to read, write, and communicate in their first language and how they are learning to communicate in English in my classroom. But they are dedicated learners nonetheless, and keen to learn English. They don't question me, or what I am asking them to do. But I question myself, and whether I have a right to impose my western, student-centered practices on them. And I don't have a good answer.

I stop digging and rest on the handle of my shovel, listening to the quiet in the small yard. I can feel my heart pounding from the exertion of digging. The knot in my stomach has loosened. After a few moments, I notice the chatter of a squirrel on a tree branch. There is a chickadee, the caw of a crow, the sharp cry of a blue jay. I realize there is a lot going on when you stop and listen carefully to the silence. To give you a better sense of this problem, let me take you back to the beginning of this undertaking. I will walk you through the making of our documentary using the time frame from the notes in my teacher reflexive journal.

### **January 17—Stepping Back**

We usually start the project at the beginning of the second term. The students are already familiar with multimodal assignments. During the first term, they made their own silent 3-shot videos, a white-board video re-telling the plot of an adapted English novel, and most recently, they had a great deal of fun making their own commercials, experimenting with special effects. We began this term by watching a number of student-made documentaries that I found on the Internet, plus our previous years' documentaries. We parse these videos in various ways. There is a general excitement in the room about the prospect of making our own, and the challenge of making a better video than last year's group. After 3 days of tossing around ideas and paring them down, we have our topic: "The New Me: Immigrant Youth and Identity." We will explore young newcomers' multiple, changing identities as students, family members, citizens of their homeland, and new Canadians. We'll focus on the lives of two students who have volunteered to tell their stories, and forgo talking to experts.

Amina and Carlos have agreed to be the main subjects. Carlos is a quiet, introspective young man. He was forced to flee El Salvador because of his father's involvement in politics. The family has relocated numerous times, often in the middle of the night, the kids hiding under blankets in a stranger's car. For Carlos, being a musician is his identity and his refuge; he is a talented guitarist. He announces he is going to write the soundtrack for our documentary. Amina is a petite 24-year old originally from Ethiopia. She is a voracious reader, a student of philosophy, and enjoys writing on a fan fiction website. She too is passionate about this production.

She has a friend who used to be a filmmaker in her homeland and he's coaching her on what to do: use black and white for dramatic effect, extreme close-ups on hands and eyes, make the camera follow the subject and their suffering, and try to include a positive experience that comes with searching for a new identity in a new homeland.

During this initial planning, I raise my main concern: *If our video only tells the story of a few people, is it possible most people in the class won't want to work on it?* It is quiet at first, and then a few voices reply: "We will help." Everyone nods. *This project will take a long time to finish. How will we keep everyone involved? Should we make groups for each task?* We go back and forth with different ideas, but in the end, they decide it is best to let individuals volunteer for the numerous jobs to be done. In this way, they can work with several friends, rather than being stuck with the same group of people for the duration of the project, or run into problems when group members are absent.

#### **February 4—Filming Streeters**

We have come through some long days of planning, setting deadlines for filming and editing, brainstorming locations to shoot, what questions to ask, who will do the interviews. Today we begin shooting. The students were a bit slow to volunteer, but now there is good energy in the room. We are filming what we call "street interviews"; but instead of talking to people on the street, the students are interviewing each other about their various identities. We plan to use this footage in our opening segment. Everyone, it seems, wants to be the camera operator today. We organize three crews and each will have a small hand-held digital video camera. They will take turns filming, interviewing, and doing crowd control. One of the first students to be filmed for the streeter is Amina. She looks into the camera and says: "I'm Ethiopian. But I was born in Kenya. I lived in Eritrea, Tanzania, and Malawi. Now I'm in Canada." Most students are firmly attached to their ethnic and national identities, even those few who have never stepped foot in their homelands. And there are a few, like Amina, who feel an overpowering sense of dislocation and detachment from their nationality. She says she feels rootless, without an enduring bond to any country, any place. "Everywhere I go, I try to fit in. I try to change myself again. It's so hard to learn a new language, to try to learn the accent. And you can never do it perfectly. People don't accept you. When you are a child, they bully you."

And you are alone again. No friends." From my students, I'm learning that identity issues can be extremely painful and difficult to resolve.

Before filming, we began the day by listing our multiple identities, discussing race, gender, class, religious, and sexual orientation. For a few students, this is the first time they have discussed some of these terms. Some squirm. Andre brings up athletic identities—"I'm a soccer player"—and sports affiliations. He describes how his Facebook page is mainly devoted to his favourite team, Real Madrid; his identities are projected onto a digital canvas. Later in the week, we will head down to the computer lab to make a "wordle"—a digital program that organizes lists into random lines of vertical and horizontal words in different fonts and colours. This poster will be the first page in an individual "identity scrapbook." I have decided to add a paper-based dimension to the documentary project, one that I hope will feel familiar and enjoyable—a nod to traditional literacy practices—and keep the students engaged throughout the long days of documentary project.

The scrapbook will incorporate the learners' writing and art, their creative exploration of issues of identity, home, migration and what it means to be Canadian, through poems, short stories, academic articles, YouTube videos, and TED Talks. Most of the learners seem pleased with the assignment and they get straight to work on the first page. I expected them to simply glue their wordle onto a piece of coloured construction paper. Instead, many are cutting out the individual identity words and gluing them in various directions on the construction paper. I see lots of smiles and relaxed conversation, in English and home languages. Today, this classroom is a happy place.

### **February 6—Identity Work**

An interesting discussion today on names. One of the most obvious ways in which we identify ourselves is with our names. After introducing the exercise, I ask the students to write a paragraph telling me the story of their names. They produce such vivid, moving narratives. Cash writes his name means King of Persia. Nathan, the class clown, says he is his grandmother's favourite of all her grandchildren because he was named after his beloved grandfather. Mouna describes how her father chose her name while he was a soldier fighting in the Iran-Iraq war, uncertain he would ever see his newborn daughter. He named her for the delicate white flowers he saw blooming on the hillsides as he fought amid the carnage around him.

Katie is also named after a flower in Vietnam, with gentle white petals that only open at midnight for a short time, once a year. She describes how people gather on this special occasion and drink tea, waiting for the flower to bloom, to enjoy its sweet scent. As I hand back their writing, Katie asks me for the story of my name. I pause for a second, and then head to the board to write *Szczepanski*. Then I pronounce it a few times, slowly breaking it down: *Sh-che-pan-ski*. Everyone gives it a try, with much laughter. I have to admit, it's a real tongue twister. Now that I have their attention, I explain the history of my name to the class.

### **Family History: Heritage Lost**

My father's father came from Poland at the end of the 19th century because he was running away from the Russian Tsar's police. He was involved in politics and got into a bit of trouble. I wish I knew the whole story, I'm sure it's very interesting! He met my grandmother in New York and they moved to Canada, and had five children. My grandfather died suddenly when my father was quite young, so his eldest brother had to leave school to find work. With an immigrant name like *Szczepanski*, it was not easy to find work. He Anglicized his middle name and then got a job. So everyone in the family was forced to follow his lead and take the name "Burgess."

"Do you speak Polish?" Katie asks. Without stopping to reflect on her question, I answer, No, even though both parents' first language was Polish they never taught us the language. They only spoke to each other in Polish, probably to complain about what rotten kids we were. But I know some Polish words for food and I know some swear words too.

She laughs. I look at Katie. Her identity is visible. Even though she has chosen an English name for herself, she is marked by her race and heritage, and proudly so. Paradoxically, my identity is both visible and invisible to my class. My Polish identity is hidden behind an Anglophone name. My family's culture and language are lost. Erased. This heritage didn't slip away as a result of disinterest or a lack of effort. It was a deliberate act of self-preservation in the New World. The land of opportunity turned out to be a place where intolerance, prejudice, and hardship followed many immigrants.

My parents' families were part of the working poor, the first wave of Eastern European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fleeing poverty and persecution back home. A second wave of Polish immigration occurred in the aftermath of World War II.

While Poles were officially welcomed by government policy, on the streets they encountered discrimination in the labour market, compounded by ethnic slurs and derogatory jokes that played on stereotypes of lesser intelligence. The jokes were apparently brought to North America by the first group of Eastern Europeans, along with their Old World animus based on historical social class differences. These degrading notions of ethnic inferiority were also disseminated in Nazi propaganda and survived with the next wave of immigrants (Davies, 2002). In North America, the media further perpetuated the stereotype of the "dumb Polack" in film and on TV programs. For many North American Poles, my family included, the decades of derision took a toll on their identity and ethnic pride. My parents' efforts to conceal our Polish identity were intended to spare their children the pain they suffered. With our name change, we passed as an Anglo-Saxon family in a working class neighbourhood. In class, we read Nancy Prasad's (1999) poem, "You Have Two Voices." The poem recognizes the struggle to master a new language, and it honours the beauty and comfort of home languages. For most students, this is their first attempt at writing poetry, certainly their first attempt at writing a poem in English. I am so impressed with their work; the imperfections in their writing mirror the multiple challenges these learners' face, and their tenacity. Arwan's poem describes his first efforts to use English as speaking with "dethroned" teeth. Amina's poem embraces her three languages: Amharic, Tigrinya, and Swahili. She calls English a stranger's language in which each word, each sentence, forms a barrier, but one that she is determined to break through. Katie's love for her first language is folded into the metaphor of music. For her, Vietnamese words sound as beautiful as a symphony, while English words are the broken lyrics of a song. I write my own Two

Voices poem, coaxed by the echo of Katie's question, "Do you speak Polish?"

My Two Voices

I have two voices, one strong, the other, mute.

When I speak English, my mother tongue,

The words fly easily,

Petals on the wind, full of colour and life.

And there, just behind me, I hear a warm, familiar voice,

My grandmother greeting me in Polish, "*moja dziewczyna*".  
I can't answer; my tongue is still.  
The language of my family was shrouded in shame,  
The immutable mark of the foreigner. "*D.P. Go home!*"  
A home language,  
Spoken privately by my parents  
To their parents, and in sweet nothings to me.

I have been shaped by my family's history and this ties me to my English learners. Even though I am two generations removed from the immigrant experience, it has influenced my sense of self and what I do for a living. I take the time to reinforce the need for students to retain first language and culture for themselves and their future children, not only because it is good pedagogy, but because I know how the loss leaves an empty space in our personal stories; an important piece of my identity, history, and connection to place is missing. My life history plays into the dominant discourse in Canadian society. A dominant discourse is a commonly held view that has been internalized and is reproduced by individuals in a society, which supports a set of dominant ideological beliefs (Foucault, 1982). In this case, the dominant discourse of the ideal immigrant describes a person who arrives in this country with nothing, and through unselfish hard work at poor paying jobs, the sacrifice pays off, because the children of ideal immigrants gain access to education, better employment and social status. I am an educated, middle class professional. An immigrant success story, but at what cost? My family's experience, albeit a story from a different historical period, contradicts the Canada's official multicultural policy, which promotes social integration. My history reveals the reality of assimilation in order to survive. Being of white European heritage aids in assimilation. The paradox of race is that it is impossible for racialized newcomers to assimilate. They will always remain outsiders in white mainstream society. And given the lack of employment opportunities for educated newcomers and chronically high unemployment rates for young immigrants in this country, I wonder whether my racialized students will face a future of persistent social and economic marginalization.

I have always been comfortable with my insider/outsider status; my working class immigrant roots have allowed me to develop a critical lens for understanding social justice issues.

However, in reflecting on the story of my name, my students have forced me to take a more critical view of myself, interrogating this notion of being a proud Canadian multicultural role model; instead I see my story as a cautionary tale against unquestioned assimilation. And how do I prepare these students for the xenophobia that has never been eradicated despite decades of official multiculturalism? The surprising popularity of Quebec's so-called Charter of Values reveals the true nature of Canadian tolerance; telling newcomers that to be acceptable, they must "be like us," the white majority. This raises uncomfortable questions about Canadians' lack of appetite for accepting real difference. At the heart of the matter is this country's willingness to share power with outsiders—like my students.

I notice that Richard, a self-assured, thoughtful student from China, has his hand up. He tells us he has just discovered that he will be forced to give up his Chinese citizenship when he becomes a Canadian citizen. Initially, Richard didn't think our documentary topic was particularly important or interesting. But now, as I look at the hurt and confusion on his face, I wonder whether this is the first time he has been forced to personally reflect on the meaning of his own identity. I ask him, *if you no longer have Chinese citizenship, are you still Chinese?* He answers slowly, "I don't know." *And once you get Canadian citizenship, will you be Canadian?* He considers this for what seems like a long time. "I don't think so," he responds quietly. I see the pain in his eyes.

What motivates these young adults? I believe my students are driven by hope of acceptance within Canadian society. They crave opportunities to meet and build friendships with their Canadian peers. Ironically, they do not see that the onus should be on Canadians; as members of a tolerant, pluralist society, its citizens should take on a social responsibility to be accepting, welcoming of newcomers, recognizing the social, cultural, and economic benefits immigrants bring to the country; immigration is considered a key factor in Canada's economic prosperity (OECD, 2013). We like to talk about how much we value diversity, but how many of us go out of our way to befriend the newcomers in our midst? Yet, the youth in my classroom view integration as their personal responsibility. As most said in their responses to Tan Le's (2011) TED Talk, they feel it is their job to find ways to "fit in" and gain acceptance in the wider community. I can see now that my colleagues and I can act as a bridge in this process, to seek out ways to bring these two groups together at our college.

### **February 5—B-Roll**

We need to shoot B-roll today: we will look for images of the classroom and campus that can be used to provide additional visual footage, adding interest and colour to the interview segments. We have five volunteers eager to be the camera operator. I take a deep breath. We have only one high definition camera. The only solution I can think of to keep all of them happy and involved is to have the entire group go out together with a list of locations, and they can each take a turn with the camera to share the filming. This suggestion seems to satisfy them and they head out the door. I ask for three people to edit the streeters. No one volunteers, so I pick three names. The remaining five students work on a reading activity. Katie is among them.

### **February 7—One Step Forward and One Step Back**

On the day we are supposed to shoot her interview, Amina comes into the class with a look of high anxiety. She wants to revisit our plans; she'd like each question to be shot at a different location for both Carlos and herself. She wants it to "look like a poem." This sounds like a huge amount of extra work, but I ask her to take this idea to the class and hear what they have to say. Amina does an admirable job of leading the discussion but it's apparent there is not a lot enthusiasm for returning to this issue. People want to move forward and stick with the original plan. I notice Katie sitting with her arms folded across her chest, her face is turned away from the discussion, and her eyes are shut tight. We reschedule the interviews for tomorrow and we'll film in an empty classroom down the hall.

### **February 8—Interviews**

Amina and Carlos are both absent today, no reasons given.

### **February 12—Logging**

Both interviews are now done. We had two crews for each shoot, six volunteers. We now need to log the interviews: transcribe each interview, essentially word for word, and add the time codes.

It is a good listening activity, but it is also a tedious job. Students work in teams of three: one to listen and repeat the words, one to take notes on the logging sheets, and one to control the computer mouse, rolling the video back and forth to assist the note-taker. They rotate through the positions and Jake, our video technician, and I provide lots of assistance to make it easier and faster. Other than Carlos and Amina, few students are eager to help with the logging. Each day, I have to call out names and assign roles. Jake and I spend time after school making corrections to the logging sheets and preparing for the next part, the paper edit.

### **February 20—Looking for an Opening**

I have got a list of jobs to do today, and I am looking for energetic workers. *We need to design a creative introduction and title for our documentary. Any volunteers?* I wait. Silence. I look at Jake, our video technician. He nods to me—he will do it by himself. I point out there is still a bit of editing left to do on the street interviews. No one is interested. I mention we still need to make the poster to advertise our documentary screening. Nobody takes me up on that suggestion. I let it go again. We watch the video Carlos has shot of himself playing his guitar at home in his basement apartment. Everyone agrees; this is really good. It will make excellent B-roll to accompany his interview. With the remaining 20 minutes of the day, I suggest people get started on their grammar homework or read their novels. Nathalia asks if she can take a grammar book home with her. *I'm afraid I can't let you do that—school rule*, I tell her. No problem, she says, as she takes out her computer tablet and snaps a photo of the grammar chart. I was not expecting that! They impress me with the inventive ways they use technology.

### **February 21—the Paper Edit**

I have photocopied Carlos's logging sheets on salmon-coloured paper and Amina's logging sheets on green paper. Each of the six interview questions has been written at the top of a piece of chart paper. Today's job is to cut out sections from the transcribed notes that answer each interview question and glue the answers below the questions. The video period is filled with boisterous chatter and the passing of scissors and glue sticks. Everyone in the room is involved. I take a closer look. Two students have left for their part-time jobs. A few others, including Katie, have quietly disappeared for bathroom breaks, cell phone checks, a cigarette, a visit with a friend in the hallway.

Before long, the cutting and pasting is complete and the long sheets of chart paper, covered with brightly coloured strips, are tacked up on the wall for us to scrutinize and edit out the duplication. These sheets will be blueprint for the computer editing to follow.

### **February 25—Computer Editing**

There are three pairs of students working at the computers editing the footage of Amina and Carlos's interviews according to the paper edit. It was like pulling teeth to assemble these groups. The documentary is now beginning to take shape, but we have much more to do before it is finished. The remainder of the class is happily occupied with assembling the pages of their identity scrapbooks. They are pasting their creative writing into construction paper booklets. It seems to me they are enveloped in the very satisfying sensory nature of working with paper, markers, scissors and glue sticks. It is a welcome change from the mainly intangible nature of digital media production. This is the familiar realm of print-based literacies. The traditional classroom is an unambiguous place of answers that are right or wrong, grammar rules to memorize, authoritative texts and dictatorial teachers. A student knows his or her place in the social order. As I watch the cutting and pasting, it is clear to me that students still strongly value print literacies and comfortable old school practices in spite of the multimodal learning opportunities this classroom affords.

Perhaps multiliteracies and multimodal theorists are too quick to dismiss traditional literacies when considering the language and literacy needs of diverse learners. No doubt, the question of what constitutes literacy must be asked and answered in light of the astonishing changes that have occurred in information and communications technology in the last few decades. When students, such as Richard, describe their education in their homeland, they talk of excruciatingly long classroom hours, punishing homework and state examinations. Richard says he felt like a "study machine" in the Chinese system. Some describe their fear of their teachers, instances of physical abuse, hints of sexual abuse, and extortion: demands for money in exchange for high marks. And yet, almost all of these students speak warmly about a devoted teacher who made them feel loved and nurtured in a traditional classroom.

While most progressive educators dismiss rote memory work and “drill and kill” exercises, my students fondly remember memorizing the poetry of their national icons, popular folk songs, and oral histories; this is embodied knowledge, when learning happens with and through the body, in which affect, imagination, passion, energy, and action are stimulated (Leander & Boldt, 2012). This knowledge is entwined learners’ sense of self, their cultural, religious and academic identities. For many, their hard-won successes in traditional educational environments provide a sense of pride and accomplishment in their academic abilities. These learner identities transfer to the English language classroom. They regard themselves as serious students, dedicated to the important work of mastering a new language in order to establish successful lives in their new homeland. Traditional literacies are deeply embedded in these young adult learners’ multiple identities; I realize now that this is something that deserves more consideration and respect in my teaching practice. My students have used their classroom journals to share unhappy learning incidents, but most have also shared lovely remembrances about their early literacy experiences: Natalia sitting with her grandfather, as he reads Bible stories to her in his fragrant garden in Colombia; Katie secretly writing little stories in her diary at the age of six, showing them only to her mother; Marie’s best friend, who was in a higher grade in their makeshift school at refugee camp in Tanzania, teaching her how to read a few words in English. My students’ journal writing allows me to learn more about the lived experiences and the literacy practices that have shaped their lives.

### **Benchmark Testing: Anxiety and Tears**

Journal writing will be set aside during the last week of the month, when we will be conducting benchmark testing. They already know it is coming. On any given day, each learner can rhyme off his or her current language benchmarks; the Canadian Language Benchmarks are a federally mandated set of standardized language proficiency descriptors on a 12-point scale. My students’ benchmarks range between levels 3 through 6 in the four language skills. On the testing days, they will participate in a series of assessments in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The tests are only one factor in determining whether they advance to the next level in our LINC program, which, for my learners, is an intensive college preparation class. The students perceive these assessments as a crucial hurdle that leads to college entrance. The mood in each classroom changes dramatically during the testing period. Anxiety levels run high, even though all of the teachers try to keep things in perspective.

To no avail; this is where the learners' cultural values, previous experience with high stakes examinations, traditional in-school identities, plus personal and family pressure for academic achievement, collide. Just like elementary and secondary education systems in Canada, there is a standardized testing culture in our LINC program that functions as a bulwark for traditional literacy practices. Although we live in a world that is digitized and our lifeworlds are interwoven with digital literacy practices, our institutional policies position multimodal literacy practices as subordinate to conventional teaching and assessment. I am certainly not the first person to wonder what education policy makers and administrators consider the goal of language teaching; is it to prepare students for higher education, the acquisition of multiple literacy skills for success in the technological, global workplace, and active engagement in the wider community—or is it to churn out proficient test-takers (Warriner, 2007).

I believe I am beginning to see more clearly the shape of the tension that has taken hold in this classroom; it is a space of conflicting literacies, of traditional pitted against progressive practices. And I note with irony that I am a gatekeeper in this process. While I am thoroughly uncomfortable with a role that undermines my efforts to establish an innovative and democratic teaching environment, it may be that I am the only one who is deluded into believing this is possible. Every year at this time, I have to manage the anxieties of students who put pressure on themselves, and feel pressure from family; they believe they should be able to master English in a short space of time and promptly gain admission to a college program. When this does not happen, they are shocked: some are tearful, others are visibly angry. These English skills assessments are regarded as critical events in determining students' future success. They invest the testing process and practices linked to testing—not the multiliteracies practices—with the potential to enhance their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). In other words, the learners believe a successful test result is directly connected to the skills, knowledge, educational qualifications, and other advantages that lead to academic and social success. My efforts to minimize the importance of these standardized assessments go unheard. In my students' eyes, the teacher who administers the test is the authority figure who holds the power to determine whether they advance one step closer to their aspirations of a college diploma and a bright future, or not.

## February 26—Fine-Tuning

We are now into the laborious work of fine-tuning each video clip. Andre and Cash are working with the iMovie software program on one of the 5-year old Apple iMac 21-inch desktop computers that make up our itinerant computer lab. They are watching a section of Carlos's interview as it appears on the iMovie monitor, which covers the left side of the screen. To the right of this window, there is a pane that contains two rows of "thumbnails," which are the selected video clips that have been imported from the video camera. Cash uses the cursor to drag a thumbnail image onto the pale blue timeline that transects the lower half of the computer screen. He clicks on the playback button, and they watch the chosen clip on the monitor. Going back to the paper edit, Andre reads the transcript of this clip out loud so they know just how much to keep and how much to trim away. Cash lines the cursor up at the beginning of the clip on the timeline. In this part of the interview, Carlos has two false starts as he pulls his thoughts together and talks about his first schooling experiences as a child. The editors need to tidy this up by removing those false starts. They carefully listen to the clip and stop the cursor right at the beginning of the clean sentence. Using the arrow key, they move the cursor back just a bit to isolate the section they want to remove. They need to leave a bit of space so that the edit doesn't shave off his first word. "Command T," says Andre, as Cash's fingers simultaneously press the two keys on the keyboard. The area to be edited is now divided into two sections. He clicks on the first section, the area he wants to remove. This area is now highlighted in bright blue. As Cash presses the Delete key, an animated puff of smoke appears, accompanied by a small sound effect; the highlighted segment disappears (into the trash) and the cut has been made. The editors roll back the cursor and hit play again to make sure the edit is clean. It is perfect.

I try not to hover over the editors as they work, but they often need a lot of coaching. They do not need as much assistance with the technical aspects of the job as they do with the complexities of language. Once they locate a desired quote, I encourage them to determine how they can trim it down to isolate the most significant pieces of information. This involves critical listening and thinking, and is often made more challenging by the speaker's accent and intonation. This is further complicated by the editor's proficiency in English, especially if the interview subject is a more advanced learner than the editor, or is a native speaker using a specialist variety of English, such as academic English.

We have interviewed professors, lawyers, politicians, and government workers who have used complex vocabulary to answer documentary questions. English learners need assistance to understand and work with specialized forms of language in use. I try to get the editors to work in teams of three so that they can discuss their ideas and combine their linguistic skills to get the job done. Even so, I do not think very many learners could manage this task without teacher support.

On this day, we have three students who are technically proficient editors. They gladly volunteer to do the job, and work well with each other and their classmates. The problem is they also have part-time jobs and family responsibilities. I cannot count on them to be at school every day. And I cannot rely on the other members of the class to step up to edit or take on the many other tasks that remain to be done. I do not see a way to get around this problem.

#### **Chapter Four: Recapitulation**

As I look around the room, I notice that half of the students are fully engaged in documentary work; they are chatting, laughing, moving between their notes and the computer screen, and reaching over each other to click the mouse or tap the keyboard. The remaining learners have their backs turned to the computer stations. Some are finishing a writing assignment; others are half-heartedly studying for a vocabulary quiz. A few students left at the beginning of the video period: one claiming an appointment downtown, another has left for work, and one other has ducked out for a long cigarette break. I ask the solitary learners if anyone would like to take up an empty computer to work on the opening segment of the documentary. No one puts up a hand. I ask if someone would like to design the poster to advertise our documentary screening. No one volunteers. I ask if anyone would like to write the invitation letter to our community screening. Silence.

#### **Organized Chaos Reconsidered**

I attempt to use humour, and then I cajole, trying different ways to entice them. *Do you want to edit or do this grammar worksheet?* Given the choice, who wouldn't pick the computer? But the opposite happens: a flutter of hands go up to grab the worksheets. Not the desired outcome. Again, I am forced to arbitrarily assign students to the computer terminals.

As they get up out of their chairs to go, I feel ashamed of my actions. Attempting to bribe students with worksheets. Forcing them to take on tasks that I have decided are good for them. Pushing them to work on an assignment that no longer holds their interest. I feel incompetent. When I reflect on my attempts to pressure this group of students into participating on the project, I have to wonder what kind of teacher this makes me? Can I honestly call myself a progressive professional? I've become a coercive educator, exploiting and enforcing my power in the classroom to attain an outcome that seems far more important to me than it is to my students. This is not a shining example of transformative practice I had envisioned for my classroom.

What can I do now? I want to have a better understanding of this recurring ambivalence toward the documentary, but I need an anonymous activity that will provide a comfortable space for the learners to air their concerns without having to make their opinions public, in front of their teacher and classmates. I decide to put a couple of sentence starters on a strip of paper for each student to complete. The strips say: *Some people like working on the documentary and some people don't like it very much. What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?* The learners take up the task. When I read what they have written, the answers surprise me, but there is no consensus around the likes and dislikes. Among the positive comments, they say it is a topic that all students can relate to, and they are learning about the meaning of identity, they enjoyed the group discussions, our planning conversations, organizing the project, and sharing their experiences, knowledge, and emotions. One wants Canadian people to hear and feel newcomers' experiences. The things they dislike include the planning (it is boring and messy), the project is taking too long, and the mixing of jobs—one group should do the same job for the whole documentary. Another hates working on the computer because it is a waste of time. A few complain that there are only two main interview subjects in the documentary and they feel excluded—we discussed this issue at the beginning of the project! Another does not like the fact that some people refuse to participate. One says s/he feels uncomfortable because most of the students don't like this documentary. That last one rattles me.

### **February 27—Class Meeting**

We pull our chairs around to form a circle to discuss the comments on the sentence strips. I point out my frustration with what has been happening. *Everyone agreed to work on this project. You all agreed on the topic. You agreed to only two interview subjects.*

*We discussed the jobs that would have to be done, and you decided that everyone would share them equally.* No one says a word. *What should we do about this?* Two camps emerge during our discussion. Perhaps there have always been two camps and I have not seen them as clearly as I do now. The anonymous opinion exercise has brought the divide to the surface. I wonder if they are simply weary of working on this project, bored with the tedium of editing. *How do we solve this problem?* One faction thinks everyone should be forced to participate in the video making, and I should be the arbiter. The other group suggests people should just be able to do the tasks they want to do and abstain from the rest. We put it to a vote. The class is evenly split. That is no help. Eventually, we select a team of leaders; they will be the ones to choose the workers each day. I am relieved that we appear to have found a way to move forward, but I also recognize that our team leaders are not all reliable attenders. And while our discussion was going on, I could not help but notice Anna and Katie during our meeting. Anna, on one side of the room, sitting stone-faced, and Katie on the other side, her eyes down, her hands tightly folded in her lap.

### **March 16—Viewing the Rough Cut**

It is coming together, but many tasks remain: finding more images and cultural music, adding the names of the interview subjects, the segment titles, and the credits at the end. Jake, our video technician, and I stay behind after school to review the students' work and sometimes we re-do some of the edits that have been trimmed too abruptly. I go home every night wondering whether we are doing too much. I have discussed this question this numerous times with my coordinator. She maintains it is our duty to assist our students to be the best they can be. After all, they are telling their stories, they have done the filming, the interviews, the logging. They need assistance with organizing and editing. Making a documentary is a daunting task for anyone. In spite of their familiarity with technology, it would be unfair to expect these learners to be the experts in this project. I feel better when I tell myself this, but only slightly.

On the day before our screening, Jake is working closely with three students to finish up the final edits. I work with the rest of the class to choose two presenters, write their script, and brainstorm possible audience questions and our responses. We are ready for the public screening. It's been a long and difficult process, but our final product looks good.

## March 2—Show Time

Our community screening turns out to be a marvelous event. The two student presenters do a fine job of introducing the project. The documentary unfolds perfectly: no bad edits, no technical glitches, no surprises. That alone is a victory! The audience asks good questions: Why did you choose to come to Canada? Is your life better now? Will you feel that you belong once you become a Canadian citizen? I am pleased that a good mix of students has stepped up to the microphone to tackle the answers. (Amina, who was so passionate about telling her story, is unexpectedly absent.) Carlos is completely charming; he has brought his guitar and captivates the crowd by singing one of his compositions. I could not be happier with the outcome. We head back to the classroom when it is all done for a celebration with pizza, music, and dancing. The mood is light, the music is loud, there is lots of laughter. They are calling out each other's names; some show off and some are shy, but eventually everyone gets pulled into the circle to dance. It is so much fun. At the end of the day, the students leave the room with proud smiles on their faces, Katie included.

As I step out of the classroom, I see a few people still milling about in the hallway. Katie is at her locker. I seize the opportunity to talk to her. *So how did you feel about our documentary?* "Oh, I feel very happy," she beams. "So proud of everyone. We did a good job!" *Yes, I agree with you. It was a lot of hard work, wasn't it? The editing was hard for some people.* "It was hard for me too. When you make one person, in one process ... it makes you feel very tired." *Yes, you said that in your journal. You know, some students tell me that we waste time making videos and we should spend more time learning grammar or reading. How do you feel about that?* She hesitates at first, looks quickly at me and says, "I don't think so. It's a good way to learn English too." *So, do you think making videos has improved your English?* "Hmmm," she says, and laughs nervously, "I don't know." She searches for words to explain. "I think that I can practice more, when I, uhhh, can have a chance to talk more about myself. My English." As Katie heads outside, I realize she was stating very clearly that multiliteracies practices do not easily accommodate her learning preferences; she is not invested in this teaching methodology. She is goal oriented and highly invested in learning English, but she wants to learn "her English." She is telling me there are other ways to learn English, from her experience in her homeland, and she would prefer to work traditionally and individually, rather than collaboratively. In Vietnam, her academic identity was built around being a competent postsecondary student.

In a Canadian English language classroom, she feels impotent, it is like being an infant again; she needs to learn to walk—to master English—before she can run, and resume postsecondary studies in her field. Katie certainly does not value all of the teaching practices in our classroom. It must have been such a struggle for her to sit through the long weeks of the documentary project, feeling unable to assert control over her language learning. Carlos catches up to me. He must have overheard, and tries to explain: “The people who didn’t like to do this, they didn’t want to speak out. I feel like I understand them. When they are living in their country, they just study. They didn’t form any relationships. The documentary is a good opportunity for me. I feel I can share something I want to tell people. It’s good for me. But most people don’t like it because they don’t think it’s a good thing for their future.” He stops. Then adds quietly, “I don’t want to say too much.” He smiles awkwardly at me as he backs away.

### **Reflecting on Gains and Losses**

When I get home from the screening, I have excess energy to burn. Digging in the garden should help. I open the shed and grab the shovel, then head to a shady area to try to contain the out of control lily of the valley growing beside the fence. I begin to dig and sift through my jumbled feelings; I am delighted with my students, how well they came together to finish the documentary and how well they fielded questions from the audience. Carlos loved sharing his personal story and his music with others. Amina wrote in her journal that working as a group was often challenging because students have different opinions, they come from different cultures, and different levels of education. Apparently there were conflicts in the classroom I was not even aware of. In spite of this, she said the experience of making the documentary filled her with a feeling of power and pride, to be able to share her ideas beyond the classroom and the college.

My students’ stories have opened my eyes to their struggles as they confront forces they cannot control: war, involuntary migration, loss of family, separation from close friends, lost opportunities for education. Working with these learners on documentaries has provided me with profound learning experiences that have shattered my assumptions and deepened my respect for them. Through our yearly documentary projects, I have learned that the acculturation process is different for youth than it is for their parents.

I have learned about the multiple forms of discrimination visited upon women who wear the hijab in Canada, and the multiple reasons women choose to wear the veil. I have learned what resiliency is from those students who are coping with the trauma of war and the loss of beloved family members. Quite simply, this is Freire's (1970) vision of transformative practice: students and teachers co-learning and coteaching through engagement with literacy. My students change me and challenge me; they trouble the waters. They force me to reflect on my comfortable life, my immigrant heritage, and further, my ability to meet their needs and bridge that gulf of silence in my teaching practice.

I am beginning to hear what they are saying through those periods of silence. Perhaps I am the one who has been naïve in looking at this dilemma. Instead of framing it as a conflict between traditional and western literacies, I wonder if the issue is more complex, more layered. I wonder whether student ambivalence toward documentary making is an understandable, and perhaps inevitable, response to multiliteracies practices.

It is clear to me that the learners have not rejected all of the classroom activities that are founded on multimodal and multiliteracies approaches. They wrote powerful responses to the short stories and poems we read together, they were absorbed in the TED Talks lectures and conversations, and they had fun transforming their writing and oral presentations into creative digital pieces. These are all multimodal practices, using different methods and media for meaning making. Some did not take to the paper-based identity project scrapbooks, while others fully immersed themselves in the tactile pleasures of cutting and pasting, and assembling of their books. Evidently, making the documentary—multiliteracies design—seems to be the most problematic aspect of this innovative practice. The pedagogy is intended to bring diverse and marginalized learners to voice and empower them. Multiliteracies theory recognizes the role of agency in the meaning-making process. It seeks to create individuals who are active designers of meaning, sensitive to diversity, change and innovation, engaged in a dynamic, transformative process of communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b). Paradoxically, many English language learners appear to find some practices silencing and disempowering. But is it possible that by resisting multiliteracies approaches, some students are exerting agency over their language learning and expressing personal choice and preference for certain teaching practices, just as they have been socialized to do as video game players, active users of digital media, and discerning consumers who shop in the local mall and online world in the global marketplace?

Multiliteracies advocates do not fully take into consideration the power of traditional literacies, particularly the resiliency of traditional school cultures and values that young adult learners bring to our classrooms. The multiliteracies design projects in our classroom, such as the documentary, take an integrated skills approach by incorporating critical thinking, problem-solving, independent, and collaborative skills to develop English skills. Project work is often difficult; it is made up of many complicated tasks, puzzling questions, and often no straightforward trajectory. Katie describes it as “messy” and “too much work.” She, and many of her classmates, would prefer to focus on discrete language skills—reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar lessons— what they perceive as the serious business of learning English. The democratic environment of the learner-centered classroom is not only foreign to these learners; it is deeply confounding. In a traditional setting, educators are respected not only as authority figures, but also as a source of knowledge; it is their job to disseminate the knowledge of the textbook. Handing the power of the teacher to students, asking them to determine their learning and curriculum is more than confusing; it is difficult to accept (Beckett, 2005). Working collaboratively with peers on project-work does not make sense when the source of knowledge is the teacher and text, not your seatmate. Co-operation and collaboration are not features of traditional learning environments. As Carlos pointed out, students in traditional classrooms do not form relationships with each other, their relationship is with the teacher, the expert in the room. He also explained the lack of enthusiasm for the documentary as the students’ inability to see how the project connects to the learners’ academic ambitions. Group assignments, such as video projects, may seem illogical to many English learners; how can a video help students to attain a postsecondary education?

I should not be so surprised that there is such reticence in my class toward multiliteracies practices, when traditional school cultures and values are deeply embedded in our learners’ personal histories and in-school identities. Our students, their families, and their communities are dedicated to language and literacy practices that they believe are crucial to academic success and improved life chances, so they embrace known and familiar print and test-based practices (Tan & McWilliam, 2009). What’s more, my students are fully aware that, although multiliteracies pedagogy may be an integral part of my teaching practice, educational institutions in Canada still place a high value on traditional academic literacy; at the elementary and secondary levels, success is measured by high stakes testing.

Colleges and universities mainly conduct paper-based examinations. And test taking has become a fact of life for adult English learners and citizenship applicants in this country. The federal government has mandated standardized language assessments, Canadian Language Benchmarks tests, for LINC students. And in order to obtain Canadian citizenship, applicants must now demonstrate proof of their language skills. They do this by taking a language test approved by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Traditional literacies and standardized testing still have a strong foothold in the Canadian education system.

English learners' conceptions of themselves as strong students is challenged in the multiliteracies classroom as they grapple with teaching practices that do not seem to address their immediate English literacy needs and goals. In addition to conflicting literacies, I believe the issue of conflicting identities plays a considerable role in resistance to multiliteracies pedagogy. I am just beginning to appreciate how strongly language acquisition is linked to identity issues, specifically a learner's willingness to participate in a new identity (Gee, 2004). For my English learners, this new language learner identity represents a form of loss, a disassociation from their home culture and school culture, and a loss of their sense of self as a competent individual. For some, there is a feeling of opposition between the new identity the learner is being asked to take on and the other identities the learner is already comfortable with, for example, their traditional school-based identity. Gee's theory of learner identities stems from the virtual world of video games, but it has real world applications, especially in education, and with immigrant and refugee students. He suggests the language learner actually has three identities at play in the classroom: a real-world identity (or multiple identities that can be engaged at different times). There is also a virtual identity, just like one's identity as a virtual character in video game. In an English as an Additional Language classroom, the learner is invited to assume a virtual identity as a competent English user. This virtual identity is determined by the teacher's values, norms and design work; in other words, in our classroom, my multimodal and multiliteracies practices set out what constitutes being an English user and "doing" English. Finally, there is a projective identity, in which the learner projects her or his values and desires onto the virtual character, which then becomes the student's own "project in the making" (Gee, 2004, p. 112). These three identities have significant roles to play in the learning environment.

It is evident that the active participants in our multiliteracies classroom have formed a projective identity (Gee, 2004).

They have projected their individual aspirations onto their virtual identity in their own unique project work. Their values, talents, desires, and goals are grounded in the weaving of their real world identities and their virtual identity as a competent English user in Canada. Gee (2004) says if students take on a projective identity, “magic happens” when learners begin to understand they have the capacity to take on their virtual identity as a real-world identity, and they sense new powers in themselves (p. 114). I have witnessed this magic in my students. Our documentary allowed Carlos to showcase his artistic abilities. He touched his classmates and a Canadian audience with music, as a singer and songwriter in English. Andre said it was “beautiful” to learn about everything from logging, camera work, and editing, to the meaning of identity. He is planning a career in engineering, but promised me, “One day, I think you will see my own documentary!” Amina described her experience with the documentary as a powerful way to share her ideas beyond the classroom. As a short-story writer who reads literature in three languages and posts her work on a fan fiction website, she is now dreaming of going to film school in Canada. She has found a new medium and an additional language for sharing her personal stories with a wider world. But this magic does not happen for every student.

If learners cannot—or will not—build bridges between their real world identities and the virtual identity at stake in the classroom, their learning is jeopardized (Gee, 2004). I have seen this too. I have worked with a number of students who appear to be stuck; these are bright young people, some are highly educated, yet they are unable to make any progress in learning English. Some are coping with a trauma or separation from family. Sometimes the issue is not evident and the learner is unable or unwilling to articulate the problem. For whatever reason, these learners cannot build that bridge to another identity and another language. I am quite sure Katie is fully invested in her virtual identity as a competent user of English; she does not embrace multiliteracies approaches as a way of realizing that identity. Her projective identity is tied to traditional literacy practices and standardized test taking. Her resistance toward certain multimodal practices (documentary work in particular) may indeed be tied to her losses, feeling dissociated from educational practices that feel right and make sense, from a homeland where she was a successful university student, and a competent citizen. It may be linked to the extremely complex work of negotiating multiple, sometimes contradictory tensions as a newcomer in a new land, and an English language learner in a distressing learning environment.

The authors of multiliteracies pedagogy would argue that simply by engaging in multimodal activities, students are transformed by the experience, and the process of designing “redesigns” the designer (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, p. 17). I cannot say whether Katie feels she has been transformed by her experience in my classroom. At its core, multiliteracies theory advocates respect for the learner and the promotion of learner agency. In practice, it should also allow flexibility and space for students to opt out of certain multimodal practices in favour of others, otherwise the pedagogy risks becoming essentialist and mechanistic if all students are required to take on the design–redesign framework.

It does not seem realistic for me to expect all of my students to fully embrace multiliteracies pedagogy when they have been socialized into adulthood in traditional learning practices in their homelands, their sense of self is in a complicated state of flux, and their aspirations in Canada are linked to institutional practices that continue to privilege and reward traditional print-based academic literacies.

### **Cultivating Awareness**

Standing amid the dirt and sprouts, I uproot a patch of lily of the valley. I have a love-hate relationship with this plant. I adore the little white bells and their captivating scent. They remind me of my mother; she carried lily of the valley in her wedding bouquet. At the same time, I struggle with the way the plant pops up in unwanted places: in the grass and other flowerbeds. I look around and feel conflicted. In spite of my limited gardening know-how, I recall hearing the plant’s root system referred to as a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); it is actually an underground stem that sends out roots and shoots in all directions, a disarray of knotted tubers that is impossible to contain. I feel exhausted just thinking about the number of times I have fought with this unruly plant, digging and sweating, trying to prevent it from going where I do not want it to go. But this time, just as the shovel hits another jumble of greenery, a thought strikes me; instead of constantly fighting it, maybe I should try to embrace the rhizome! My husband sticks his head out the back door to see what I have accomplished. “Hey Mare! How’s it going?” I look over my shoulder. “The problem isn’t my students,” I tell him. “It’s me.” I can see that he does not understand. “I think maybe the biggest problem with the documentary project is resistance from me.” By framing the problem as *student* antipathy, I have failed to see how deeply I am implicated, entangled, in the issue.

I have been blind to my inability to relinquish ownership and control of the documentary project; I have this intractable need to steer the production to my desired outcome, regardless of student engagement in the project. Why?

And in the process, what have I been missing?

Multiliteracies pedagogy has been challenged for being “text-centric” (Leander & Boldt, 2012, p. 25), for privileging texts (such as documentaries) as the purpose and final outcome of literacy practices, and it is mainly as a result of the pedagogical interventions of well-intentioned educators, like myself. The pedagogy also carries an assumption that all youth literacy practices, whether responding to comic book characters or sharing photos on social media, are deliberate, inherently purposeful, goal directed acts; young people, as meaning-makers, are assumed to be active “designers of (their) social futures” (NLG, 1996, p. 65). While this may be true for some, it may also be an illustration of young people using literacy practices for the sheer pleasure of it (Leander & Boldt, 2012). It may be that there are many reasons why young learners engage in literacy practices, print-based or digital.

It is entirely conceivable that resistance to the documentary project may be due to teacher control of project-work as well as the “domestication” (Leander & Boldt, 2012, p. 43) of youth literacy practices. When young people’s activities become in-class assignments that are shaped and directed by product oriented, text-driven teachers, we strip away the freedom, spontaneity and pleasure that are central to literacies in use among youth and young adults (Leander & Boldt, 2012). Is it possible for me to introduce more indeterminacy into my teaching practice, to hand over ownership to my students, and if necessary, let projects fail? I have done that with smaller projects, but the documentary seems too important to let it go, and see where it ends up. (But then, I might be surprised by the outcome.) Then I think of my students; for those learners who come from traditional educational backgrounds, who value classroom structure and print-based literacy, a more open, fluid environment with unclear outcomes may be even more troubling and alienating than it is now. However, I respect the need for student agency to shape, direct and even decline to participate in multimodal activities. And I believe that multiliteracies pedagogy offers me a critical lens for understanding literacy issues and a framework for delivering my EAL curriculum in ways that are relevant to young adult English language learners and their multilingual, multifaceted life worlds.

But this problem seems to grow and become more perplexing as I dig deeper for answers. I think that resistance itself is rhizomatic, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would say; it seems to spring up in surprising ways, in different places, for different reasons. It may be my English learners' response to the use of an unfamiliar and uncomfortable multiliteracies approach to learning English, or it may be due to the formidable interplay of language learning and identity negotiation. It might be a reaction to the school's co-opting of youth literacy practices. No doubt, it is also due to my unwillingness to sacrifice my vision and control of the project. And there may be more factors that I am not aware of. Trying to understand resistance is like following a single strand of insight, one that leads to another; soon, your hands are filled with a cluster of tightly laced knots.

### **Coda: Loose Ends**

What I do know is that there is no tidy solution to this problem of resistance to multiliteracies practices. Confronting that reality does not make me feel better, but it has led me to a more nuanced view of the issues before me. I see that I cannot continue take multiliteracies pedagogy as "empirical truth" (Leander & Boldt, 2012, p. 24)—the ideal balm for all learners' needs. Newcomer students – like Carlos, Amina, and Katie – are complicated individuals with complicated lives. Learning English involves losses as well as gains, as students work to reconcile complex, sometimes contradictory, identity issues in strange, new environment. Many of their losses are deeply painful. They need a teacher who is attuned to the problems they are dealing with, and who will take the time to hear their stories, support their values, and respect their learning preferences. They also need a teacher who is capable of revising her understandings of herself and her teaching practice (Chang & Rosiek, 2003). I understand that having an immigrant heritage does not make me an insider, able to comprehend the struggles my students are facing. I need to hear what they are telling me, even when they are silent, and to allow space for student voice and agency, to let learners opt out of classroom practices that do not resonate with them. Failing to do so would amount to imposing my curriculum on my learners; in other words, willfully exercising coercive power in the classroom. Perhaps this is what it means to teach; we have no choice but to take up the challenge to work with all learners—the real people who show up in class every day. We may need to reconsider, revise, or set aside "ideal" pedagogical practices, and our presumptions about what is best for our learners. And we must be open to the uncertainties each student brings to our classroom, understanding that there may always be forms of resistance.

That means we must learn to live with and in that uncomfortable space, accepting and appreciating difference. In short, we must welcome the tangled mess.

## Acknowledgments

*Merci mille fois*, Dr. Jennifer Rowsell and Dr. Diane Collier, for your extraordinary patience, guidance, and encouragement throughout this exciting process of discovery and self-discovery. And to my great friends, Judy Smith and Marg Heidebrecht, thank you for listening, and for so much wisdom and laughter over steaming mugs on the porch. Finally, to my wonderful family, Hugh, Madeleine, and Marielle Tye, I am extremely grateful for the many ways you have shown your unconditional love and support. *Je vous aime, tous!*

## References

- Angay-Crowder, T., Choi, J., & Yi, Y. (2013). Putting multiliteracies into practice: Digital storytelling for multilingual adolescents in a summer program. *TESLCanada Journal*, 30(2), 36-45.
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Beckett, G. (2005). Academic language and literacy socialization through project-based instruction: ESL student perspectives and issues. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 15(1), 191-206. doi:10.1075/japc.15.1.12bec
- Black, A. (2011). Making meaning with narrative shapes: What arts-based research methods offer educational practitioners and researchers. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 8(2), 67-82.
- Black, A., & Halliwell, G. (2000). Accessing practical knowledge: How? Why? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(1), 103-115. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00045-1
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. Thompson, Ed., & G. Raymond, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bright, D. (2007). Reflective practice: Dance making and image narratives. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 13, 77-89.
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (2000). *Report on systemic racism and discrimination in Canadian refugee and immigration policies*. Retrieved from <https://ccrweb.ca/en/report-systemic-racism-and-discrimination-canadian-refugeeand-immigration-policies>
- Chang, P. J., & Rosiek, J. (2003). Anti-colonialist antinomies in a biology lesson: A sonata-form case study of cultural conflict in a science classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 33(3), 252-290. doi:10.1111/1467-873X.00263
- Clandinin D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories—stories of teachers—school stories—stories of school. *Educational Researcher*, 25(3), 2-14. doi:10.3102/0013189X025003024

- Clandinin D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1999). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (2007). Arts-informed research. In J. G Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*. (pp. 55-70). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14. doi:10.3102/0013189X019005002
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009a). A grammar of multimodality. *International Journal of Learning*, 16(2), 361-425.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009b). Multiliteracies: New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(3), 164-195. doi:10.1080/15544800903076044
- Cummins, J., Sayers, K., & Brown, D. (2007). *Literacy, technology and diversity: Teaching for success in changing times*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Davies, C. (2002). *The mirth of nations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-297.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Capricorn Books.
- Dibble, N., & Rosiek, J. (2002). White out: A case study introducing a new citational format for teacher practical knowledge research. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 35, 1- 34.
- Eisener, E. W. (1997). The new frontier in qualitative research methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 259-273. doi:10.1177/107780049700300301
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (pp. 208-226). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Frantz, A. (2014). Sonata form. Retrieved from <http://www.key-notes.com/sonataform.html>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder and Herder.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99-125. doi:10.3102/0091732X025001099
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Greene, M. (1980). Breaking through the ordinary: The arts and future possibility. *Journal of Education*, 162(3), 18-26.
- Heath, S. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and works in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kalantzis, B., & Cope, M. (2012). *Literacies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kind, S. (2008). Learning to listen: Traces of loss, vulnerability, and susceptibility in art/teaching. In S. Springgay, R. L. Irwin, C. Leggo, & P. Gouzouasis (Eds.), *Being with a/r/tography* (pp. 167-178). New York, NY: Sense.
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491. doi:10.3102/00028312032003465

- Le, T. (2011). My immigration story. TEDxWomen 2011. Retrieved from [http://www.ted.com/talks/tan\\_le\\_my\\_immigration\\_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/tan_le_my_immigration_story)
- Leander, K., & Boldt, G. (2012). Rereading "A pedagogy of multiliteracies": Bodies, texts and emergence. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 45(1) 22-46. doi:10.1177/1086296X12468587
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Lotherington, H., & Jenson, J. (2011). Teaching multimodal and digital literacy in L2 settings: New literacies, new basics, new pedagogies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 226-246. doi:10.1017/S0267190511000110
- New London Group. (1996). *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures*. Harvard Educational Review, 66, 60-92.
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 409-429. doi:10.2307/3587831
- Norton, B., & McKinney. (2011). An identity approach to second language acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 73-94). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31. doi:10.2307/3587803
- OECD. (2013). *International migration outlook 2013*. doi:10.1787/migr\_outlook-2013-en
- Prasad, N. (1999). You have two voices. In B. Hehner (Ed.), *The spirit of Canada: Canada's story in legends, fiction, poems, and songs* (p. 40). Toronto, ON: Stoddart.
- Schecter, S., & Cummins, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Multilingual education in practice: Using diversity as a resource*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sconiers, Z. D., & Rosiek, J. L. (2000). Historical perspective as an important element of teachers' knowledge: A sonata-form case study of equity issues in a chemistry classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 70, 370-404.
- Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1-22.
- Springgay, S. (2008). Ethics of embodiment. In S. Springgay, R. L. Irwin, C. Leggo, & P. Gouzouasis (Eds.), *Being with a/r/tography* (pp. 153-165). New York, NY: Sense.
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Tan, J. P-L., & McWilliam, E. (2009). From literacy to multiliteracies: Diverse learners and pedagogical practice. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(3), 213-225. doi:10.1080/15544800903076119
- Warriner, D. S. (2007). "It's just the nature of the beast": Re-imagining the literacies of schooling in adult ESL education. *Linguistics and Education*, 18, 305-342. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2007.07.004