

**IN SCHOOL AND OUT: A CLOSER LOOK AT NEW LITERACIES**

by

**Teri M. Lindquist**

B.Ed The University of Lethbridge, AB, 2001

B.A. The University of Alberta, Augustana Campus, 1998

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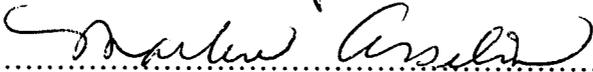
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## Abstract

Educational literacy has traditionally been viewed as the development of students' basic reading and writing skills. As such, our education system and evaluation system have been developed around this definition of literacy. However, an increasing number of individuals are suggesting that other "out-of-school" or "new" literacies hold value and need to be integrated into our educational system rather than continuing to be ignored. A review of the research on traditional and new literacies reveals themes of social practice, mindsets, identity, agency, and authentic learning. Specifically, this review examines three key questions: What does it mean to be literate? Why do new literacies challenge the conventional school systems? Are non-traditional literacies important to the development of in school literacies and student learning? Drawing on the literature, the author provides a discussion and understanding of the importance of integrating new literacies with traditional literacies in order to help students become "fully literate".

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## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Theoretical framework**

Traditionally reading and writing have been the determiners of who is literate. Institutions such as schools provided people with specific steps, which were deemed necessary in order to learn literacy skills. Individuals who did not have access to these services were generally unable to read or write and as such deemed illiterate (Purcell-Gates, 2007). These reading and writing “skills” were exclusively taught and learned within school experiences (Luke, 1990). As a result these institutions (generally schools) had complete control over who was considered literate (i.e. only students of schools had the potential to be literate). In contrast, current literacy theory and research focuses on discrediting this simplistic notion of literacy (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 1995; Gee, 1990, 2003; Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2007; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004).

These authors are generally skeptical of the perception that “language, literacy and discourse can be taught and learned as a set of individuated rules or knowledges independent of due consideration of social and cultural issues, questions and contexts” (Luke 1990, vii). Instead of the basic skills, the focus is on individual and group “everyday”, “new”, “local” and “vernacular” literacies (hereafter referred to as new literacies) practiced not in schools, but in homes and communities. These literacies have ever changing rolls, social contexts and are utilized in people’s daily lives beyond the traditional educational system (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). We therefore find ourselves in a situation where our school system was designed with a certain definition of what literacies are and yet we are teaching in a world where that narrow view may no longer hold.

In this literature review, the general questions that need to be addressed are first, what are the implications of these situations and second, if we need to change from our traditional understandings of literacy, how do we make this transition successfully? A sociocultural framework can help to answer these inquiries. Three main questions are examined and will guide the focus of this paper:

1. What does it mean to be fully literate?
2. Why do new literacies challenge the conventional school system?
3. Are non-traditional literacies important to the development of in-school literacies and student learning?

### **Locating Myself**

Before proceeding to my research journey, a reflection of my personal and professional history is essential in order to contextualize my concerns and understandings and how they might influence my pursuit of the topic of new literacies learning.

#### *As a family member*

I come from a supportive middle class family of which both my mother and father came from rural farming backgrounds. My parents were the first in their families to attend university. I, their daughter and first born, came along quite unexpectedly during their secondary education and before they were ready to “jump into” their adult lives. They became professionals in their fields and worked hard to supply our family with what we needed for a nurturing environment. My grandparents (of Swedish, German, English and Metis descent) were all born in Alberta but seven of eight great grandparents were immigrants to Canada. After extensively researching my family’s lineage and

personal stories, I have come to appreciate personal historical contexts as well as obstacles and opportunities learning can bring.

*As a student/community member*

Schooling and life long learning have always been important. I started my formal education as an English student in an Albertan city's Mandarin immersion elementary school. Here, I was exposed to many Asian cultures but, as a young student, never fully realized the importance this cultural sharing would have on my life. Forever after, I have been drawn to individuals with cultures differing from my own. Because my family moved around the province, I ended up in a different school each year from grade six through grade 10. I was forced to make new friends and assume my new communities' ways of life. In high school, we resided in a Caucasian dominant community and I was drawn to the exchange students, who were my closest friends and my link to the world outside this Christian farming community's values and beliefs.

The expectation my parents impressed upon me to attend university was a driving force throughout my life. I put myself through a Liberal Arts degree in Economics at a small Albertan University College. It was here I met my future husband. Together, we decided to enroll in a Rural Development exchange between an Albertan and a Mexican university which focused on participatory action research. I became a lead manager on a community development project in the isolated aboriginal Mexican community of San Juan Tlacotenco. By observing and working with local neighbourhoods, we developed and implemented a community-based educational framework focusing on obtainable and sustainable literacy and development goals. My love for travel, culture and learning collaboratively grew from this experience. After returning from my exchange, I fulfilled

my childhood dream of becoming a teacher by attaining my Education Degree in Social Studies from a large Albertan University.

Moving, schooling and work have resulted in me calling fifteen rural and urban communities home over the past thirty-two years. This experience has resulted in the realization that differences in individuals and contexts of locations and culture need to be considered when developing purpose. What is learned in the traditional curriculum as “authoritative facts” need to be supplemented with a greater knowledge of how these facts fit into the larger context of everyday literacy experiences in the attainment of knowledge.

*As a teacher*

My experiences teaching are presupposed by hegemonic structures surrounding rural, Christian, Albertan, Western Canadian and North American ideals of education. These “norms” have a great influence on way I interact with students and curriculum and personal assumptions of best practice are nested within these traditional beliefs.

My professional interest in studying new literacies learning and teaching began to develop while participating in a pilot project designed around inquiry-based learning using the Alberta Galileo Educational Network. This network supports teachers in designing projects where students use new technologies to facilitate their own learning. Engagement, collaboration and enthusiasm produce students who take responsibility for their own literacies learning and expose them to meaningful learning.

A child’s ability to contextually read, comprehend, and communicate what she has learned with others in and out of school forms the foundation upon which the rest of her learning is built. Whether teaching in an urban centre, a high security prison’s

bedroom community, or a small rural farming town, my experience as a teacher has impressed upon me the value of improved literacy skills on both the learning and the lives of students. Despite this, many Alberta school classroom activities are not well integrated into meaningful student learning, and remain underutilized.

After spending time teaching in classrooms full of diverse needs and values, the necessity for further developing student as well as teacher skills related to contextual literacies became evident. I have come to realize there has been growing divide between the literacy expectations of learning at school and how some students actually learn best. For four years I struggled with how I could deliver the curriculum to my students so they would be more interested in learning the content. What I didn't realize is there is a difference between how students are learning at home and how they are learning at school. Until I decided to do my graduate studies, I was unable to understand why, when I included types such as visual literacies, auditory literacies, digital literacies, etc, students were more engaged and were increasingly able to retain the content. Given these alternative literacies seem as important to learning as the traditional reading and writing literacies, I have decided to review the literature to determine whether these non-traditional literacies should be embedded into the traditional learning institution of the school.

#### *As a researcher*

I am taking my first steps in the role of researcher and therefore face a steep learning curve in terms of my ability to critique literature. A literature review will allow me to begin the process of developing a methodology that can be efficiently utilized within the school system.

My graduate and professional goals are to expand my own knowledge of new literacies skills, examine the role of teachers in the enhancement of student literacies learning, develop an understanding of how to better utilize new literacies theories and methods and through this, become a teacher-leader who helps coworkers efficiently integrate new literacies methods into their own curriculum delivery without putting heavy educational demands of the curriculum on hold. The curriculum-connected and networked nature of the classroom makes it the perfect place for a teacher to introduce and facilitate new literacies goals.

Within new literacies theories, the themes of social practice (Street, 1995; Gee, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2007), differing mindsets (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995; Knobel & Lankshear, 2006), individual identity (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Gee, 2007), agency (Lankshear, 1997; Hammer, 2007) and authentic learning (Street, 2001; Perry, 2007) need to be carefully addressed as a new teaching methodology is developed and implemented. In the future, I can see widespread implementation of this theory will necessitate converting this premise into practical tools, requiring increased awareness of new literacies benefits. This is a significant point as criticism of this technique has been grounded in concern over its conflict with traditional ways of thinking about literacy. Despite this assertion, the evidence indicates that students learn the traditional literacies of reading and writing with the support of the everyday literacies students bring from home (Purcell-Gates 2007). Until more research has been done and curriculum has been re-developed, it is up to the teacher to facilitate increased student responsibility for learning and applying important contextual new literacies skills. When we support students in meaningful literacies events, instead of providing out of context activities,

they will become better able to effectively apply their skills across both home and school literacies situations.

## SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last few decades, there has been a movement to re-defining the meaning of literacy and to look at how literacies effect the learning of students. This review looks at relevant theory and discusses the five themes of social practice, mindsets, identity, agency and authentic learning as the following three questions are investigated:

1. What does it mean to be fully literate?
2. Why do new literacies challenge the conventional school system?
3. Are non-traditional literacies important to the development of in-school literacies and student learning?

### Defining Literacy

The realization that literacies are being developed both within the school system and apart from it raises important questions about what this means for the literate nature of our students. What should and should not be considered valuable literacies? Is one type a more valid literacy than another? Should we as a society be focussing on teaching our children and all members of society the “right” type of literacy? Purcell-Gates (2007) argues that school-based literacies and new literacies cannot be isolated practices, instead, “a complete literacy (or what one might presumably mean when using the term *fully literate*) would include vernacular literacies (however these play out in the different lives of different people and groups) plus academic literacy” (2007, p. 7, emphasis in the original). The purpose of this paper is to examine both types of literacies to help determine the best way to move forward from the position we find ourselves today.

One important question to ask ourselves when determining whether we need to change our understanding of literacies and literacy education is: Has the student of today

changed from the student of 75 years ago? If so, is it the latter being for whom our school system was designed? An examination of this time period reveals that the lives of students have changed more in the previous half century than in any other time on record (Prensky, 2001). If our students have, in fact, changed in how they learn and if being literate today means competency with both traditional and new literacies, then the key question for this literature research is to determine whether out-of-school literacies are important to the development of in-school literacies and student learning?

### **Methodology**

The time-frame emphasis for this literary review is focused on 1990 to present. In order to help set a basis for this research I have included a few key written works from before this time period which current literature builds on. The focus is theoretical- and case study-based writings on literacy practices of children and students within the contexts of home, school and community. My literature search involved two university library collections (The University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University) as well as literature searches on the ERIC database. The focus was on finding publications that attempted to clarify the place in-school and out-of-school literacies have in students' lives. To conduct these searches, I used a combination of keyword descriptors: "literacies", "new literacies", "literac\* and theory", "print literac\*", "digital literac\*", "school literac\*", and "local literac\*". Next, I used the "snowball method" to examine the reference lists within the books and articles for relevant material. This search resulted in numerous titles that I examined to determine the best theoretical- and case study-based works to address my question.

Upon establishing the best books, chapters and articles for addressing my research inquiry, I systematically read through and determined quotes and ideas that addressed and would help resolve my focus questions. A full reference list was kept up-to-date as each citation was utilized within the text of the paper. Finally, the contents of the best quotes and ideas were rearranged to fall under the emerged topics of social practice, mindsets, identity, agency, authentic learning as well as new/everyday/vernacular/ local and school-based literacies.

## **Themes**

### ***Social Practice***

The sociocultural theory of literacy perspective sees literacy practices influenced by social, cultural, historical and material contexts (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2003). These literacy practices include both print-based and digital message forms (Lankshear, 1997; Dobson and Willinsky, in press) as well as those taking place in and out of the school setting (Heath, 1983). New literacies are more “participatory, collaborative and distributed in nature” and are less “published, individuated, author-centric” and “expert dominated than conventional literacies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 9). This new understanding of literacy practices means that literacies cannot be contained within or controlled by the educational system. Literacy practices are ever changing in response to numerous sociocultural factors.

The core contribution of a sociocultural approach to literacy is the acknowledgment of the relationship between a text and the context in which the text is developed and used (Halliday, 1978). There is little meaning in the text without an understanding of the sociocultural situation within which the material was developed.

Meanings are shaped by various social relationships, cultural traditions, ideological values, economic changes, political changes and material conditions (Gee, 2003, p.8). They also involve “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2004) or communities of common interests or endeavors and are the base of interaction between people during literacy events and help individuals learn expertise and gain knowledge. A simple example of this is the “a-ok” hand gesture formed with the thumb and index finger. The meaning of this symbol is very different in Canada as compared to South America. The symbol itself looks exactly the same but one must understand the background of the individual making the symbol in order to understand the symbol’s (positive or derogatory) meaning (Sguizzardi, personal communication, 2007). Heath (1983) and Street (1995) illustrate the literacy practice of reading a bedtime story and Black (2007) illustrates the literacy practice of writing fan fiction as encompassing interactions that go beyond the simple skills of just reading or writing a text. Underlying purposes such as rules of participation in “question and answer routines” (Heath, 1983, p. 252) are preparation for reading comprehension at school. As far as literacy learning is concerned, the context in which a visual symbol is understood, a book is read or fan fiction on a website is created cannot be removed from the basic text or symbol of the production itself.

The sociocultural approach to literacy is seen as occurring across many contexts and as a result, studying everyday literacies have become problematic in the conventional sense of school-based notions of literacy. Traditionally, reading and writing are seen as “specific (cognitive) abilities or sets of skills based on an identifiable technology (e.g. alphabet script)” (Lankshear, 1997, p. 2). The proprietors of the sociocultural approach therefore argue that in school, literacy skills have previously been taught without context.

Learning is separated into subject areas and knowledge is made to be precise and evaluated (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 152). The same skills are taught to students in the same manner and order with the same purpose in mind (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). The traditional assumption is that knowledge is separate from the society of the individual and therefore we need only give each individual this full set of information for him or her to be able to learn and understand reading and writing. Once these skills are acquired, students are expected to be able to apply them to different social contexts. Has this traditional perspective ever captured the complexity of what “literacy” is and how teachers can best facilitate the learning of our students?

Many experts currently argue that literacy has implications beyond cognitive reading and writing (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; New London Group, 2000; Gee, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2007). To take a piece of writing out of the context in which it is written or read does the learner an injustice; it is akin to deleting the first half of a novel and then giving it to the students to read with the expectation of full comprehension. In a sociocultural theory of literacy, being literate is recognized as going beyond school literacies and includes the out-of-school literacies of a learner. The literacy world of a student includes all the written texts, literacy practices and literacy events they experience individually and with the members in her/his home and community (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Reading and writing are done purposefully to learn to read and write (such as in worksheets) and are different from “*functional* literacy” which uses print for authentic communicative purposes for real-life situations (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004, p. 94). These out-of-school literacy practices are done as part of our

everyday lives. If this is the case, why is it these new literacies challenge the conventional school system?

### ***Mindsets***

Society, schools and other formal organizations often value and support these “new” types of literacies less than traditional academic reading and writing literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004, p. 66). One likely reason for this is due to the conflict people with different mindsets can elicit when regarding the assorted literacies.

A person’s mindset will dictate how they assess various literacies due to their primary set of beliefs, values and assumptions. This will affect how that person understands and responds to literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006). Two mindsets are key to understanding how traditional literacies and new literacies have been valued up until present time. Both mindsets will be described through the introduction of digital technology to literacies as technology is becoming more significant in the larger world today.

Generally, the mindset of a “digital immigrant” holds a more traditional way of thinking (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995) as they have grown up in a pre-digital world. Mastery of the physical world is valued (Lankshear & Bigum, 1999) and a clear understanding of how time and space are used tangibly is evident to these individuals. Since a digital immigrant has not experienced full immersion in new technologies since birth, they usually do not understand how to fully participate in digital spaces. Instead, they commonly place the value of authority and expertise of “individual intelligence” in

physical texts (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006) such as published books. Technology is seen as another tool to accomplish contemporary goals.

The mindset of a “digital native” (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995), on the other hand, is generally held by those who have experienced digital technology all their lives. A person with this mindset views the world as having been changed significantly after digital technologies appeared and new ways of thinking are being developed due to this change (Castells, 2000). They believe virtual space and time are free from the confines of the physical space and time. Here, authority and expertise of knowledge are distributed among numerous participating individuals, resulting in a collaborative or “collective intelligence” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) of everyday literacy engagements. Technology is seen to change the way we accomplish our goals, communicate with others and learn in a totally different way than traditional mindset methods.

The mindsets of “digital immigrants” and “digital natives” are fundamentally distinct and each mindset leads individuals to understand the world in different ways. In-school literacies respected by the first mindset have formal purposes reflecting the institution where experts access and control the knowledge (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 151). Out-of-school literacies usage and literacy learning of those possessing the second mindset are often integrated and cannot be separated from the changing literacy purposes of the individual and community where roles of expert and learner are shared. This results in literacy practices that are diverse, overlap, are hybridized, are in constant flux and fall into multiple categories (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.152) as a result of the choices and actions of the individual and community. With such different values and

understandings of learning between the two mindsets, the objectives of literacy learning can be lost.

“It seems likely that schools, with their established grounding in a mindset associated with status and value attaching to scarcity, ...will increasingly face a challenge to maintain student engagement in conventional literacies conceived and implemented from the perspective of the [“immigrant”] mindset” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 62). Consequently, traditional literacies and new literacies activities approached from the second mindset will likely be successful in maintaining student interest and improve learning as students navigate between the two types of literacies at school and in their out of school lives. In order for this to occur, “digital immigrant” teachers need to realize and understand their own identity and how it differs from that of “digital natives.”

### ***Identity***

One of the keystone building blocks of social practice is an individual’s identity. The Oxford English Dictionary (2007) defines identity as “the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.” How we see ourselves within the wider world dictates how we choose to think about, act on, and value the literacies surrounding us. In view of the fact that schools and other institutions focus on the similarities of people as a group, the primary domains for developing individual sense of identity within a person’s literacy life falls to the home and community (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.9). In these environments, making meaningful connections to individuals’ lives are key. Reading and writing are not deconstructed as step-by-step skills; they are part of the process in everyday life. The focus is on the journey, not the destination. Examples of these include, but are not limited to: reading and signing

consent forms for children's activities, creating party announcement fliers, reading while searching for and printing off song lyrics from the Internet, reading brand name clothing logos, reading price tags for clothing and food items at the store, reading and writing personal communications emails, and reading labels on cleaning agents (Collins, 2007, p. 123-127). In other words, we are surrounded by literacy in our everyday lives. Each literacy event an individual experiences helps to form the manner in which they see and position themselves as a member in various communities. Barton and Hamilton's (1998) study of an English neighbourhood notes that in order to create a sense of identity, people were interested in documenting their lives by situating themselves within the families, groups, communities, and history of a wider context beyond their own lives (p. 241). Self identity through literacy practices are deeply integrated with self-worth and drive literacy events. Through acts of literacy, we can find meaning in self.

Interestingly, the opposite also holds true. Gee (2007) notes individuals acting in certain ways for certain purposes are identifying with, and relating to, literacies in a virtual world and in the real world. He mentions identities such as "sensitive male," "hip, young adult," "caring teacher," "needy friend," "nationalist African-American" and so forth to "enhance a fit or mesh among ourselves, our goals, and the world" (p. 100). It is in these identities of self, outside of the school space, we are able to find meaning in literacy and that meaning will be different for each individual depending on their identity formation.

Individual identities further develop when literacy practices are shared within social networks. Here, I define a social network as a web of connected individuals with similar interests or purposes interacting together with the potential of influencing beliefs,

values, and behaviour of individual members. Taking on specific rolls within a social network of people provides opportunities to exercise a variety of identities while participating in various literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 16). This is generally thought of as occurring in face to face contexts such as the oral literacy tradition of “talking junk” in Heath’s (1983) study of the community of Trackton. In this community stories are told, listened to, and participated in as individuals learn to follow certain roles and rules with various community members (pp.166-189). However, this exercising of identities can also be recognized in situations where interactions with literacy practices occur without this tradition “face-to-face” meeting.

The notion of Gee’s (2003) “affinity groups” encompasses a social network of people who “can recognize certain ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, and believing as well as the typical sorts of social practices associated with a given semiotic domain” (p.27) or mode of interrelations across literacies. This can take place with family members, community recreation groups, or over the Internet with various individuals through a plethora of technology such as blogs (Davis & Merchant, 2007), video games (Gee, 2003, 2007), pop culture fan sites (Thomas, 2007; Black, 2007), and posting and tagging digital and scanned pictures to community websites to name just a few. The literacy support garnered from these networks of practice is important in the formation of each member’s identity and does not require a traditional situation with individuals being physically in the same place.

Through performativity of literacy practices, “individual and group identities are constructed through repeated performances of self and in anticipation of the expectation, social codes and discourses available within a given context” (Lewis, 2007, p. 231). In

Lewis's case study, fan fiction writers use writing as role-play rehearsals to portray an adaptation of the self while constructing connections with broader social literacy networks. A "fusion of identity" happens between the self and fictional character where the writer rehearses their ideal self thus "empowering" their own life through their writing (Thomas, 2001, p. 157-158). Through the literacy events taking place in a virtual world within a supportive network, a writer can safely develop and practice their identity before it is projected into the real world.

Davis and Merchant (2007) examine the literacy event of blogging and note that making a decision in how one writes is crucial to one's identity. "Identity is produced through action and performance" and "[a person's] perception of an actual or imagined audience prompts [them] to think about what [they] wish to show...[in] presenting a particular narrative (or narratives) of the self" (p. 178). Performativity in these realms force individuals to critically think about whom they are and, through the use of literacy, what messages they want to convey to the broader world.

Just as in real life, members of these virtual networked groups move back and forth from reading and writing the texts they use to situated embodied experiences (Gee, 2003, p. 209) in order to learn. Identity forming within a network of people in- and out-of-school provides literacy practice as individual roles and literacy events change to meet the abilities and needs of the group members. Through this participation and communication, individuals increase their literacies knowledge and move toward becoming fully literate.

### *Hegemony vs. Agency*

Where identity focuses on the level of the individual, hegemony can be used to describe how “language is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining arrangements of power which are unequal” (Lankshear, 1997, p. 46). Hegemony is defined (Oxford English Dictionary, 2007) as “leadership, predominance, preponderance; especially the leadership or predominant authority of one state or a confederacy or union over the others.” In an educational setting, Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) see a traditional hegemonic structuralistic viewpoint where social practice and cultural reproduction influence the mainstream domination of academic literacy by holding it higher in value than other out-of-school literacies. Content being taught, who is teaching it, and the manner in which concepts are delivered are carefully chosen to shape the creation and dissemination of literacy curriculum. Holding a certain type of literacy in higher esteem than another will dictate which students will be successful in this power domination model (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). For example, in school, a research assignment using published encyclopedias and books is viewed as utilizing valuable information for the development of a report. On the other hand, research done on the Internet or from opinion pieces in various forms such as oral or visual literacies is seen as utilizing less valuable material. The key point being that in a traditional viewpoint one does not need to evaluate the information contained within a given source to determine that the information in a book is more “legitimate” and valuable than the information contained in an opinion piece.

In the traditional view of literacies, students with savvy oral interview or visual symbol skills are at a disadvantage compared to students proficient in researching traditional authoritative texts. Furthermore, the meanings communicated by texts are ideological as they provide more than basic literacy functions (Lankshear, 1997, p. 46). “The dominant literacy through development programmes [such as in schools] attempts to assert its superiority over (and even to deny the existence of) other forms of literacy” (Rogers, 2001, p. 210). Unequal distribution of power and knowledge persist as literacy replicates the production of maintaining this influential disparity (Lankshear, 1997; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Students who are competent at literacies other than school-based literacy are at a deficit under this hegemonic model. Under the structuralistic tradition, authoritative print literacy is revered and enforced. However, in today’s educational system there is mounting evidence that there is value in a variety of literacies and brings about the question: are non-traditional literacies important to the development of in-school literacies and student learning?

A poststructuralist perspective moves away from the concerns over literacies being hegemonic and, instead, refocuses efforts on understanding individual and group “agency” (Purcell-Gates, 2007). Anstey (2005) defines agency as the ability of a person to take action within meaning making and the responses made to any given situation (p. 5). Hammer (2007) offers four literacy interpretations for individual agency within role-playing games that can also be associated with other literacy events, practices and contexts and are as follows:

*Textual agency* is how much control one has over the actual text in question, such as the text of the book or the shot sequence of the movie. *Narrative agency* refers to how much control one has over the story (or Bal's *fibula*); this includes both an author's capacity to have their characters act in certain ways within a narrative text, and a reader's capacity to interpret and understand those actions (Anstey, 2005). *Psychological agency* describes how much control individuals feel that they have (Mateas, 2003). Of course, a person's sense of their capacities may not match their actual abilities. Finally, *cultural agency* consists of the degree to which one's agentic behavior is culturally recognized by others. (p. 73, emphasis in the original)

Individuals can choose to change their literacy practice when they believe it is in their best interest and, at times, adopt as much of the dominant literacy as needed for the means to achieve a particular purpose (Rogers, 2001) within a particular context. This may mean some students adopt a "refashioned" view to what it means to be literate and achieve school success to reflect their control in out-of-school valuations of literacy (Collins, 2007, p. 131). Students finding themselves in schools where literacies practices are very different from those experienced at home have to navigate between "their home habits of handling knowledge and their ways of talking about knowledge. They [need] to integrate new content from school into a reformulated organizational pattern. The tightly interwoven nature of language and context [make] it especially necessary for teachers to tease apart and make as specific as possible aspects of the language and context of both home and school domains." (Heath, 1983, p. 355) To help students develop a sense of

agency and make literacies connections, teachers need to facilitate authentic literacy events which integrating new literacies learning with traditional literacies learning.

### ***Authentic Literacy Activity***

In order to engage students in literacy practices which are *authentic*, teachers must build on past real-life experiences of the students which are situated not in the schools, but within the students' homes and community. These new literacies must be acknowledged, responded to and combined with school literacies while facilitating students to form their own critical literacy learning (Street, 2001). To be authentic, texts used in schools must be closely related to those found outside of school and purposefully utilized in ways that reflect how the texts are being used in students' daily lives (Perry, 2007). These are different from the purposes of texts used to learn reading and writing skills, strategies, values, and attitudes of traditional academic literacies. It is important to note that "authentic texts can be read or written with school-only purposes, rendering the literacy activity less authentic...the degree to which a literacy activity within instructional contexts is authentic is based on both text type and purpose for reading/writing specific texts" (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 202). For example, writing a spelling test of individual difficult words would be less authentic than having students collect words they find difficult and using them in a community-type communication technology discussing topics of the student's interest. In short, opportunities to connect students to their literacies life experiences outside of school will strengthen the academic learning of literacies in school.

## **Summary**

New literacies are an integral part of students' in-school functional literate lives. Currently, educational values and methods run contrary to the belief that these out-of-school literacies are important in the academic foundations of school. As was previously discussed, newer understandings of literacies reveal these as misguided notions as new literacies help students make sense of the meaningful connections between literacies as they are situated within different contexts. If this is indeed true, they cannot be ignored and it forces us to address the question of how these new types of literacies can actually be utilized within our school system.

## **SECTION 3: MAKING CONNECTIONS**

### **What I've learned**

The theory of New Literacies has been an eye opener for me. In my own teaching practice, I have come to realize the comfortable and long established “how it’s always been done” attitude by mimicking lesson plans and time-honoured teaching styles.

Within the scope of literacy, the school setting has been set up to be traditional and resists change. New ideas take time and effort to implement and the reality of a teacher’s week is that there are only so many hours in a day to plan, teach and live life. Traditional ways of teaching can be seen as keeping a handle on the workload and implementation of new theories can upset this carefully created safety net. This said, teaching is not about the teacher, teaching is about student learning.

In the past few decades our students have changed radically in the way they view and understand our world. The result is that students of today are no longer similar to the students for whom our educational system was originally designed (Prensky, 2001). As educators, this leaves us at a crossroads. On the one hand, we have school-based literacies, such as traditional reading and writing, embedded in our curriculum values, our teachers’ mindsets and therefore our libraries and classrooms. On the other hand, we find new literacies, such as those to do with other visual, auditory, kinesthetic, social understandings and technology, emerging in our students’ everyday lives outside of school and holding increasing importance for their future. Traditional literacies and out of school literacies hold very different mindsets and are increasingly at odds with each other as students navigate between the two worlds. Some students have successfully utilized these different literacies while others struggle and are being left behind. My

question, “How do we help all students become literate within school and beyond?” has become increasingly important in my mind. This is the notion I strive to improve within my own school among students and teachers.

### *New literacies*

The merging of traditional literacies and everyday out of school literacies can provide meaningful learning opportunities for students as well as teachers. Since the beginning of modern schooling, concerns have been raised over the student’s “inability to utilize the experience [s]he gets outside” and “apply in daily life what [s]he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school--its isolation from life” (Dewey, 1916). It is interesting that almost a hundred years later educators are still grappling with this same issue. Learning new literacies does not need to be seen as aggressively challenging the traditional school setting. On the contrary, a balanced combination of literacies can be seen as supporting improved student learning.

In order to make school literacies applicable to students’ everyday lives and everyday literacies applicable to school curricula, we can look toward “new literacies.” New literacies are made up of multiple literacies that make up the literate lives of people. They go beyond reading and writing as a task and are embedded in sociocultural practices of thinking and acting (Gee, 1999). New literacies can have technological contexts and are mediated through media forms appropriate to the needs of the user (Leu, n.d.). In these applications: a person’s identity is built through networking and participation, individuals can explore agency as they take action and respond to contextual meaning making, and authentic learning can take place as academic and new literacies are connected in meaningful ways. As we enter this new world, some practical questions

spring to mind. What kind of applications can new literacies be supported in? Where can a teacher go to provide their students authentic learning opportunities linking in and out of school literacies?

The literature on this topic has led me through an exploration of the applications of new literacies. The new literacies Web 2.0 embraces have the potential to mediate the two worlds and provide meaningful literacy learning for all students.

### *Mindsets*

Before we delve into Web 2.0, we need to understand the two different mindsets of individuals using new technologies and how this relates to literacy learning. A mindset refers to a set of beliefs and values which contain an underlying set of assumptions, thereby characterizing how we understand and respond to our world (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006). The following discussion briefly reviews the world of literacy learning through these two mindsets.

One mindset is that of “digital immigrants” who hold a traditional way of thinking (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995). Generally aged 35 and older, these individuals grew up in a pre-digital world. Literacy authority is revered as the conventional reading and writing activities taught in schools. These individuals usually have difficulty fully understanding and taking action in digital spaces (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

A teacher holding this first mindset can be described as a “knowledge keeper.” Their goal is generally to direct students to specific texts in order for them to learn and memorize the knowledge of others. In an assignment, students might be expected to research and report on animal information such as food, habitat and young. Teachers direct students to proper books, library materials and prescreened websites knowing

beforehand that this is where reliable information can be found. Giving assignments, which look toward the Internet as a secondary source (Prensky, 2001) and to authoritative texts such as books as a primary source is an example of teaching and learning through a digital immigrant mindset.

The other mindset is held by “digital natives” (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995) who have been immersed in digital technology since birth. This group develops understanding and meaning from the everyday literacies they use outside and beyond school reading and writing activities. Literacy authority is developed through networked individuals who share information and expertise (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

A teacher embracing this second mindset facilitates a community of learners where students have different experiences, are experts in different areas and share their own knowledge to improve the learning of their classmates. An assignment developed through this mindset might be a comparative look at different viewpoints on seal hunting. Information gathered from a variety of sources on different viewpoints of government officials, hunters, environmental activists and locals help facilitate the formation of critical understanding. Students use this understanding to help develop their own position on the topic. In this situation books are simply one of a wide array of resources used by the students. Media coverage via internet, print, video, interviews, government documents, among others are needed to account for and appreciate the many points of view available in a given topic. This perceived loss of control for the teacher can be difficult for those in the first mindset and requires careful consideration on how to allow students to explore the Internet and its valuable information without visiting “inappropriate sites.” Like all new ideas, the learning of new information and developing

new methods are a part of the process for the instructor to move toward a classroom based on this second mindset where new literacies are supported.

The differences between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” are fundamentally distinct and each mindset leads individuals to understand the world in different manners. Even with the best of intentions, the goals of literacy learning can be lost when the teacher and student unknowingly develop meaning through different values and understandings. However, this gap is not necessary; these two worlds can be brought together for a rich variety of literacies learning. Once teachers are more familiar with the two mindsets and their implications, the applications of new literacies through technology tools can be better understood. Web 2.0 can be used as one of these tools to effectively implement new literacies in the classroom.

#### *Web 2.0: a technology tool*

The term “Web 2.0” applies to user based services available via the World Wide Web. It embodies the second mindset of collective participation and distributed expertise. This is not a product to be consumed; instead it mediates services between users to promote participation, networking and agency (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Individuals contribute to “shared knowledge” and therefore the more the service is used by a variety of individuals, the better and more informative the service becomes (O’Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 is more about the attitude toward the technology than the actual technology itself.

Web 1.0 revolves around a focus on the technology. It includes the applications represented and developed by the first mindset. For example, Kodak Gallery lets you share and organize your uploaded digital photos without adding to the collective

knowledge. The company's goal is to have their users buy the variety of products they offer via their website. This is a one-way relationship, you put up the picture and someone else can look at the picture. Flickr.com, on the other hand, is a Web 2.0 photo *service*, providing users with connections to other users. An individual can "tag" an uploaded photo with words they generate to describe or label the content. An environmentalist takes a picture of orca whale pods migrating up the West Coast of Canada, uploads the results to Flickr, and adds "tags" or keywords meaningful to her: orca, pod, migration, ecology, Canada. This provides a massive database of categories, which users can search using keywords to find photos related to a specific topic of interest. Tagging is one way to support a participatory way of sharing, consuming and making meaning of digital resources (Alexander, 2006). These Web 2.0 services engender new social practices that can help our students gain a wide variety of skills in their literacy learning while making them applicable in and out of school.

In the spirit of new literacies, Web 2.0 can be utilized to facilitate authentic learning opportunities and help students to become fully literate. In the following section, I explain a presentation to give to teachers which gives background to new literacies theories while introducing practical ways of using Web 2.0 and new literacies within the classroom.

### **My project: a mashup presentation**

The knowledge of new literacies and technology services invites me to address the need to bridge the divide between digital natives and digital immigrants by supporting the latter, particularly my teacher-coworkers. Their journey to developing a better understanding of new literacies and how they can be implemented into their own

classrooms for improved student learning will need to be assisted. To do this, I will start with a presentation (included partially in the appendix and in full on burned CD) to my own school staff to initiate them into the importance of new literacies theories.

Because teachers often look for practical uses of ideas, I have come up with a stand-alone presentation that includes a sampling of different technology services (wikis, slidecasting, blogs and networking), via Web 2.0, to show some resources to help promote new literacies learning. The idea is that teachers don't have to fully immerse themselves at once, they can take a service, get to know it, use it in their classroom, improve upon it, then when they are comfortable, move onto learning another service. My presentation gives some background of why it is important to use new literacies in their classroom and also gives teachers some simple ways to begin exploring implementation. I have chosen this stand-alone format for the following reasons:

- It is very visual and more exciting than just listening to me speak.
- The presentation itself models some of the literacies I am promoting.
- I am able to post the presentation online for the teachers so they can conveniently access this information both at school and home.

The presentation supplies teachers with suggestions for themselves and/or their students as a place to present a voice for real audiences while a variety of literacies are practiced. Becoming learning partners with students in the quest to understand meaning through literacies is important within a community of learners. After all, any one student may know more about a theme or technology than their teacher at any given time. Some teachers may find this fact a little unnerving at first, but this is an important and rewarding situation to be embraced by us as teachers. By sharing, experimenting,

creating, and innovating, teachers realize that the conventional literacies of reading and writing remain important, but there are also other literacies that require students to become fully literate. Traditional in-school literacy activities can be made more authentic by the opportunities multiple literacies bring from students' out-of-school lives. These new literacies require the attention of teachers in our quest to help students navigate and become literate within the ever-changing print and digital world. These worlds do not need to remain isolated; they can work together to build experienced students who are prepared for their future as lifelong learners.

### **Looking toward the future**

Even though most of our students are digital natives, we cannot assume students are technology savvy in their out-of-school lives. There are still students with limited access to the digital world. Even the Internet savvy student may be not be proficient at utilizing digital tools and few examine the “consumer nature” of these digital forums with a critical eye. Literacy is a meaning-making practice. It cannot be understood when removed from its larger sociocultural contexts. I believe it is important to strive to help students and teacher-coworkers develop new and informed meanings from practicing new literacies activities using tools like those accessed on Web 2.0 to facilitate participation, contribute to authentic learning, develop identity and improve literacy learning.

Classrooms are the obvious place to merge traditional and new literacies in order to move education forward and provide students with the critical foundation for being knowledgeable and conscientious citizens. This implementation needs to be done not because out-of-school literacies have been ignored in the past, but because their implementation will improve the literacy learning of our students. The next obvious

question becomes who needs to be responsible for this transition? In my view, teachers should break down some of the traditional walls as it is no longer appropriate for teachers to remain the exclusive traditional keepers of knowledge. They must be willing to move from hegemonic roles of teacher-student to an identity and agency supporting community of learners. Teacher involvement will mean that they will be able to witness the value and implications of this new way of learning themselves. This primary involvement will also mean teachers will be much more likely to become further involved in new literacies education than if they were simply told to do it by their superiors.

Facilitating purposeful and authentic literacy events within a school setting help students to develop their sense of identity and, in turn, provide a deeper connection and meaning to the literacies practiced. The implications of this may be that within school, students will only take from literacy events what they feel they have control over. Teachers can offer students choices and move to facilitate meaningful literacy events whereby individual agency is acknowledged. If the goal is to prepare students for the future, teaching literacies in a manner which brings what students know into traditional reading and writing will be of the utmost importance. Teachers must be open minded to finding out which literacies students bring into the classroom in order to make integration effective in strengthening academic literacies. In this new way of thinking, teachers are partially giving up control over the nature of past literacy notions. When you empower the student, you give them the ability to determine what information and ideas are important to them. Therefore it becomes important not just to teach the students traditional concepts, but also to address the issue of how these ideas and concepts may be accessible and applicable within their world through other literacies formats.

As we move forward, literacies will continue to change; therefore the focus must not be on the tools, but on the mediation of constructing literacies meaning in context. Teaching our students to be critically thoughtful in both the in- and out-of-school worlds can be done by incorporating the types of learning to which students are accustomed. In short, educators need to start paying attention to our students' everyday literacy experiences alongside academic literacies in order to accomplish effective new literacies learning which will be valuable to students' literate futures. Through the integration of these two literacies we can find far more value than simply choosing one or the other. The classroom is not positioned in an "either/or" situation. It is possible to balance both literacies' forms; however, we need to understand that the integration process will not be automatic. Teachers will need to adjust their traditional views on these literacy issues. Throughout this process of change, we need to realize that it may not be effortless but it will be extremely valuable and in the end will aid in the education of our students. The monitoring of this continuing process will also help to identify and highlight these benefits as well identify any areas of concern.

Although teachers are a key component in the implementation of new literacies, this task cannot be left to them alone. Without changes at other levels of the educational system, teachers may come to look upon this as a burden rather than as an effective way of teaching. Governments, school boards and administration will need to be on board with this new consideration of literacies learning. This is not a quick-fix; this is an alteration to our basic understanding of literacy. If the current "No Child Left Behind" program in the United States is an example of which values constitutes the norm, clearly, governments have not gone beyond the lock-step decontextualized notion of literacy

learning. In this case, no matter the beliefs and values of teachers, traditional curriculum will continue to dictate the way in which literacy in the classroom is taught and learned. However, this does not mean that it has to continue to function in this way.

Methods of instruction for literacy learning were developed for the traditional educational system and curriculum. It will become increasingly important to understand this fact as we attempt to make changes to our educational system. We as teachers need to be the ones to break down traditional walls; we can no longer simply be the knowledge keepers. If we want to prepare our students for the future, teaching literacy beyond traditional reading and writing will be of the utmost importance. Mindsets valuing the support both traditional and new literacies lend to each other as social practices, identity forming instruments, agency conduits, and a means for authentic learning, will benefit students in their home, community and during their schooling and adult careers. Educational applications will continue to change; therefore the focus must not be on the tools, but on the mediation of constructing meaning in context. Teaching our students to be critically thoughtful in both the physical and virtual worlds can be done by incorporating the types of learning to which students' digital mindsets are accustomed. The goal as a teacher is not to produce students who know what we know; the goal is to have students that vastly surpass our accomplishments and abilities; students who can improve our world.

## SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper is to work towards answering, what I believe are the three most important questions in order for teachers to support the literacy learning of students:

1. What does it mean to be literate?
2. Why do new literacies challenge the conventional school system?
3. Are non-traditional literacies important to the development of in-school literacies?

Each question and the pursuit for their answers help those involved in educating students better understand and incorporate well rounded literacies learning within classrooms.

The literature related to what it means to be literate suggests it is necessary to readdress the issue and further define our current classification of the term. Students have changed since the initiation of traditional schools yet the literacy values of those providing and teaching the curriculum are generally stagnant. Being literate in today's world of widely distributed communications and technologies means an individual is situated in their identity and sociocultural contexts while practicing and navigating the various literacies activities both in and out of school. In order to have successful students, teachers must understand their own mindset regarding the value they give each type of literacy and look towards balancing traditional and new literacies learning within a classroom. The goal is not to abandon old literacies but to integrate new ones into the educational system.

The second question regarding why new literacies challenge the traditional school system finds its answers in unequal distributions of power. Traditional school authorities look at students as a single group. They value mainstream academic reproductions of literacies and consider students who are good with these types of literacy activities as

successful. Those who value new literacies, on the other hand, see authority in group agency and place power in individual identity while situating themselves in different contexts to participate in literacy activities. Although one set of literacies seems to be at odds with the other, this is not the case. Teachers do not need to view participating in new literacies as a loss of traditional academic control; instead, a balance of both literacies styles supports meaningful learning of traditional reading and writing literacies. New literacies are enhancing traditional education, not replacing it.

Research indicates the third question, on how new literacies are important in the development of students' learning traditional reading and writing literacies, is indeed noteworthy. Authentic learning literacy practices build on students' personal experiences and are used in ways that reflect their daily literacies activities. When done in this way, it generates meaningful in-school literacies activities that help motivate students to learn. Successful literacy learners, under these circumstances, will be individuals who are able to easily negotiate and find associations between traditional and everyday literacy activities and apply each to appropriate situations.

With the assistance of my literature review, I have developed a presentation in order to aid teachers and administrators in connecting their understandings of what new literacies are and how important it is to incorporate them into curriculum learning. The presentation begins with a background of the literature walking the audience through the scope of new literacies and the two mindsets that can help or hinder new literacies implementation. During the second half of the presentation, I address practical suggestions of new literacies activities teachers might try in their own classrooms. Carefully integrated technology tools are used in order to model and promote the use of

new literacies. With increased awareness of the importance of new literacies, teachers will more likely take the time to learn the methods that will improve the literacies understandings of their students. Removing the fear of the unknown and giving teachers the knowledge, and therefore power, to change and evolve the educational program are key steps in the development of new literacies education.

### **Implications for further research**

Current research focuses on out-of-school or in-school literacies learning completely separately. Studies amalgamating both are the key to providing a deeper understanding of how these two interact in regards to student learning. Regardless of what we do, both types of literacies exist. However, research has demonstrated the great synergistic potential through the integration of both in- and out-of-school literacies into our education system. One of the first steps to demonstrate these benefits is utilizing the fact that there are teachers out there who have already integrated and effectively amalgamated both literacies in their classroom. Case studies can be conducted in these classrooms where both literacies are present and students are taught to identify how literacies are being used to effectively support their learning. The combined benefits are not hypothetical; they can be seen in classrooms that have already intergraded literacies.

Although research goals tend to focus on students, we also need to examine and work with individual teachers, administrators, board members and governments. This information will help reveal how to best advocate giving new literacies worth as a foundational support to traditional literacies. In connection to this, a critical look into curriculum development may assess where changes can be made toward a dual and

integrated focus. We need to work with all the different groups involved because this type of fundamental shift requires total involvement of the entire education system.

It is important to continue researching the effects traditional and new literacies have on students as the nature of literacies continues to change and develop. We need to keep in mind that students' learning has changed over the years and will likely continue to change into the future. This is not about finding "the answer"; it is about finding the answers within the context of today. This is obviously an important and possibly contentious point. Governments may be willing to spend money to help "fix" a system but if you tell them that this will be an ongoing process the potential for government assistance and support may disappear. This is one of many important issues we need to keep in mind as we move forward. Part of the solution may lie in developing a methodology that will allow us to continue to change in the future and not simply establish a new system which then remains static into the future. We cannot merely focus on a single concern; our approach needs to address all the issues related to valuing both types of literacies within a school setting.

Research from the perspective of the teacher is also vital to this process. Demands from the curriculum, school board, administration, coworkers, parents and students make for a very full teaching schedule. Any changes in instruction, especially due to a mindset shift resulting in a new viewpoint on literacies, require support and time. There are many great educational ideas in the works, but continued research is needed to assess which approach is both effective and will convince governments, school boards, administrators and teachers to begin the process of change.

Making these changes using a top-down approach would force the teachers to learn this new understanding of literacies but would also devalue individual agency. A grassroots approach may be problematic in that after convincing teachers of the benefits a new way of looking at literacies would bring, the “powers that be” may continue to hold traditional viewpoints in literacies learning. Research in both areas will help to discover which approach would be more beneficial to take in changing how students are learning literacies in the classroom. The slow boring of hard wood has been one explanation of how change occurs within the traditional system but, on the same point, persistence and dedication are what makes change happen. As Margret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, once said, “Never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the world...it’s the only thing that ever has.” Whenever we are trying to change the structure of how something is done there is going to be resistance, but this can actually motivate us to make the importance of that change even more obvious to all those involved. This process will not only help convince others but improve our own abilities and understandings on how to make change occur.

As research is being conducted, it is important to consider the influence new literacies have on traditional literacies and vice versa. Issues of social practice, differing mindsets, identity, agency and authenticity need to be addressed and explored further to make this new way of viewing literacies a reality in our schools. This is a comprehensive approach to literacy education and the implementation will require research and an integrated effort from all those involved.

The world of literacy will continue to change as we move into the future. Our educational system is based on hard and fast rules of traditional literacies, but we live in a

world where numerous types of literacies are becoming more and more sophisticated and important to our daily lives. Our educational system needs to admit the relevance of these new literacies and begin their integration into the system. Previous research as to the importance and value of out-of-school literacies is both an indication of the importance of making this change and a demonstration that further research needs to be carried out on this topic. Our education system cannot ignore issues and wait for a problem to become obvious before we take action. We need to be constantly asking how we can improve the system and therefore improve the literate futures of our students.

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**Oral narration for powerpoint presentation**

*Slide 1: Title Page*

In Our Schools: Literacy Worlds Merge through Web 2.0

*Slide 2: Table of Contents (Overview)*

In this presentation we will:

- Discuss why school based literacies are at odds with everyday literacies
- Give you a description of what new literacies entail
- Take a look at how literacies are located in two different mindsets
- Introduce you to “What is Web 2.0?”
- Give you some examples of some successful web 2.0 activities
- And we will wrap up with why it is important to include a variety of new literacies in your classroom

*Slide 3: Introduction: School Based Literacies vs. Everyday Literacies*

In the past few decades our students have changed radically in the way they view and understand our world. The result is that students of today are no longer similar to the students for whom our educational system was originally designed (Prensky, 2001). As educators, this leaves us at a crossroads. On the one hand, we have school-based literacies, such as traditional reading and writing, embedded in our curriculum values, our teachers’ mindsets and therefore our libraries and classrooms. On the other hand, we find new literacies, such as those to do with other visual, auditory, kinesthetic and social understandings, emerging in our students’ everyday lives outside of school and holding increasing importance for their future. The two hold very different mindsets and are becoming at odds with each other as students navigate between the two worlds. Some students have successfully utilized these different literacies while others struggle and are being left behind. How do we help all students become literate within school and beyond?

*Slide 4: New Literacies*

The merging of traditional literacies and everyday out of school literacies can provide meaningful learning opportunities for students as well as teachers. Since the beginning of modern schooling and specifically from educational reformer John Dewey in 1916, concerns have been raised over the student’s “inability to utilize the experience he gets outside” and “applies in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school—it’s isolation from life.” It is interesting that almost a hundred years later, we as educators are still grappling with this same issue. It is time we did something about it.

### *Slide 5: New Literacies*

In order to make school literacies applicable to students' everyday lives and everyday literacies applicable to school curricula, we can look toward "new literacies". New literacies are made up of multiple literacies that contain the literate lives of people. They go beyond reading and writing as a task and are embedded in sociocultural practices of thinking and acting (Gee, 1999). New literacies have technological contexts and are mediated through media forms appropriate to the needs of the user. (Leu, n.d.) In these applications a person's identity is built through networking and participation. As we enter this new world, many questions spring to mind. What kind of applications can new literacies be supported in? Where can a teacher go to provide their students with authentic learning opportunities linking in and out of school literacies? Web 2.0 has the potential to mediate the two worlds and provide meaningful literacy learning for all students.

### *Slide 6: Literacies Located in Mindsets*

Before we delve into what Web 2.0 is, we need to understand the two different mindsets of individuals using new technologies and how this relates to literacy learning. According to Knobel and Lankshear (2006), a mindset refers to a set of beliefs and values which contain an underlying set of assumptions, thereby characterizing how we understand and respond to our world. It is important to examine the world of literacy learning through these two mindsets.

### *Slide 7: Literacies Located in Mindsets – Digital Immigrants*

One mindset is that of "digital immigrants" who hold a traditional way of thinking (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995). These individuals grew up in a pre-digital world and their focus centres on the value of authority and expertise of "individual intelligence" generally found in physical texts (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006) such as published books. Technology is seen as a tool to accomplish contemporary goals and as an addition to the long list of curriculum expectations.

As a knowledge keeper, a teacher's goal would be generally to direct students to specific texts in order for them to learn and memorize the knowledge of authorities. Teachers may direct students to proper books, library materials and prescreened websites knowing beforehand that this is where reliable information can be found. Giving assignments which look toward the internet as a secondary source (Prensky, 2001) and to authoritative texts such as books as a primary source is an example of teaching and learning through a digital immigrant mindset.

### *Slide 8: Literacies Located in Mindsets – Digital Natives*

The second mindset is held by "digital natives" (Tunbridge & Barlow, 1995) who have been immersed in digital technology since birth. This group develops understanding and meaning from the everyday literacies they use outside and beyond school reading and writing activities. Here, authority and expertise of knowledge are distributed among

numerous individuals, resulting in a “collective intelligence” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006). Technology is seen to change the way we accomplish our goals in a totally different way than “traditional” mindset methods. For example, a blog is not only a place to write a personal journal entry, but offers a space for conversation and discourse while individuals develop networks of people with similar values and interests to make connections with other viewpoints.

A teacher would facilitate a community of learners where students have different experiences, are experts in different areas and are able to share their own knowledge to improve the learning of their classmates. Students may be asked to compare their understandings of different viewpoints to help develop their own position on the topic. Here, books make up just one of the many resources used. Media coverage via internet, print, video, interviews, government documents, among others would be needed to account for and appreciate the many points of view available in this digital native mindset classroom.

*Slide 9: Literacies Located in Mindsets*

The differences between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” are fundamentally distinct and each mindset leads individuals to understand the world in different manners. Even with the best of intentions, the goals of literacy learning can be lost when the teacher and student unknowingly develop meaning through different values and understandings. However, this gap is not necessary; these two worlds can be brought together for a rich variety of literacies learning. Web 2.0 may help us to bridge this gap between the literacies.

*Slide 10: Web 2.0*

Now that the mindsets are better understood, we can look at how Web 2.0 can be used as a tool for new literacies learning. The term “Web 2.0” applies to user based services available via the World Wide Web. It embodies the second mindset of collective participation and distributed expertise. This is not a product to be consumed; instead it mediates services between users to promote participation, networking and agency (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Individuals contribute to shared knowledge and therefore the more the service is used by a variety of individuals, the better and more informative the service becomes (O’Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 is more about the attitude toward the technology than the actual technology itself.

*Slide 11: Web 2.0*

To better understand Web 2.0, we need to look at the technology tools that were present before it existed. Web 1.0 revolves around a focus on the technology. It includes the applications represented and developed by the first mindset. For example, Kodak Gallery lets you share and organize your uploaded digital photos without adding to the collective knowledge. The company’s goal is to have their users buy the variety of products they offer via their website. Flickr.com, on the other hand, is a Web 2.0 photo

service which provides users with connections to other users. An individual can “tag” an uploaded photo with words they generate to describe or label the content.

*Slide 12: Web 2.0 Example*

For example, an environmentalist takes a picture of orca whale pods migrating up the West Coast of Canada, uploads the results to Flickr, and adds “tags” or keywords meaningful to her. (Examples on slide include: orca, pod, migration, ecology and Canada.)

This provides a huge data base of categories where users can search a term and come up with many photos relating to the term. Tagging is one way to support a participatory way of sharing, consuming and making meaning of digital resources (Alexander, 2006). These Web 2.0 services engender new social practices which can help our students gain a wide variety of skills in their literacy learning while making new literacies applicable in and out of school.

*Slide 13: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

If you have not had much experience with Web 2.0, the task of starting can be daunting. With a multitude of services available to choose from, a teacher can easily get lost and overwhelmed. This is exactly why we need to jumpstart our own learning to help our students become successful literacy learners within a variety of media. A commitment to lifelong learning begins now. The following suggestions aim to get you started using technology to mediate literacy learning at school. The activities cover learning in traditional reading and writing literacies as well as visual, social and other everyday literacies. This is a learning process for us as teachers as well, so do not worry if you are not sure how to use these technology mediums to begin with. Students will likely be able to lead the way with the technical uses of web 2.0 as you, the teacher, shape web 2.0 to learning purposes. Help your class to become a true community of learners and challenge your students to assist each other as you learn together.

*Slide 14: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

1. For vocabulary building in any curricular area, have students form small groups to write scripts and then video themselves enacting a situation to teach others the meaning of the word. Upload the videos to TeacherTube or another video casting application to share vocabulary building with students in other classes or schools. It is important that this last step is carried out with the permission of the student’s parents who have been notified of your intentions.

*Slide 15: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

2. ask older students to design and upload an online slidecast (which are PowerPoint™ type slides with voice over similar to this presentation). Here they can identify and describe popular advertisements. The goal is to develop counter

advertisements (adbusters.org has some good examples) to help others think about underlying messages the media puts forth in our everyday lives.

*Slide 16: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

3. Why not consider placing Wikipedia on your school library or classroom homepage? This may seem a little daring as some teachers have claimed to struggle with students using incorrect information from Wikipedia to write assignments. Is it really all that daring, though? A study was done and published in *Nature*, an influential scientific journal, stating Wikipedia scientific entries are comparable to those found in the Encyclopedia Britannica. It was noted that some areas of Wikipedia are stronger than others due to the combined collective expertise. This is a very good reason to stress to students that Wikipedia can be used but not as a sole source for their information gathering. Take the opportunity to explore the authority of texts and the need to provide further evidence with students, as they will continue to use tools like Wikipedia outside of school whether or not it is taught in school. This will broaden their understanding of a topic as they learn to use a variety of resources critically.

*Slide 17: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

4. Get involved in a digital network of your own to develop a better understanding of where your students are coming from. There are many social networking systems which let you build a profile and join groups of people with similar interests. You can join the professional group Librarians and Web 2.0 on Facebook. Librarians and teachers alike are forming networked groups of users with the goal of providing support and assistance to one another. Taking the opportunity to connect with new people can alleviate the isolation teachers often feel in smaller schools or less than ideal staff situations. Not only does this give you access to a whole new world of associates and their new ideas, but you are provided an opportunity to share your own expertise.

*Slide 18: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities*

5. You and your students can sample a smorgasbord of free Web 2.0 services and applications in the directories found at: Go2Web20.net and Shambles.net. In either place you will find sites for social networking, file sharing, image sharing, mind- and concept-mapping, group note taking and a variety of other services. CommonCraft.com offers quick “plain English” instructional videos to get you and your class started in various Web 2.0 applications like social bookmarking and wikis. Choose any of these services to get you and your students making literacies meaning through multiple media sources.

*Slide 19: Successful Web 2.0 Literacies Activities - Summary of examples*

Each of these suggestions can supply you and your students a place to present a voice for real audiences as a variety of literacies are practiced. Become learning partners with your students in the quest to understand meaning through new literacies. Share, experiment, create, innovate, and remember that conventional literacies of reading and writing will remain important, but there are other literacies to consider in order for our students to become fully literate. Traditional in school literacy activities can be made more authentic by the opportunities multiple literacies bring from students' out of school lives. These new literacies require the attention of teachers in our quest to help students navigate and become literate within the ever-changing print and digital world. These worlds do not need to remain in isolation; they can work together to build experienced students who are prepared for their future as lifelong learners.

*Slide 20: Moving Forward*

Even though most of our students are digital natives, we cannot assume students are technology savvy in their out of school lives. There are still students with limited access to the digital world. Even the internet savvy student may be not be proficient at utilizing digital tools and few examine the “consumer nature” of these digital forums with a critical eye. Literacy is a meaning-making practice. It cannot be understood when removed from its larger sociocultural contexts. Help your students develop new and informed meanings from practicing Web 2.0 new literacies activities to facilitate participation, contribute to authentic learning, and develop identity.

*Slide 21: Moving Forward*

School can be a place to merge traditional and new literacies in order to move education forward and provide students with the critical foundation for being responsible citizens. We as teachers need to be the ones to break down some of the traditional walls; we can no longer simply be the knowledge keepers. If we want to prepare our students for the future, teaching literacy beyond traditional reading and writing will be of the utmost importance. Educational applications will continue to change; therefore the focus must not be on the tools, but on the mediation of constructing meaning in context. Teaching our students to be critically thoughtful in both the physical and virtual worlds can be done by incorporating the types of learning to which students' digital mindsets are accustomed.

*Slide 22: New Literacies Matter*

Play “Have you been paying attention” video from [teachertube.com](http://teachertube.com) by [hypatiajones](http://hypatiajones.com).

*Slide 23: New Literacies are the Future*

In short, educators need to start paying attention to our students' everyday literacy experiences in order to help them accomplish effective literacies learning which will be valuable to their futures.

*Slide 24: Resources*

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