MULTIPLE TRANSACTIONS, MULTIPLE EXPRESSIONS: USING PROCESS DRAMA TO CREATE AUTHENTIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

Both social interactions with others and physical experiences with the environment shape learning. Children communicate naturally through multimodal means and need authentic multimodal learning experiences to enrich their insight and understanding. Guided through multimodal experiences, process drama encourages children to explore various perspectives and challenge preconceived assumptions and perceptions. The disconnect between home and school environments, transmediation, and the connection between process drama and literacy are explored in the literature review. A process drama focusing on water consumption will challenge students to explore different perspectives and create multimodal texts to display their awareness and insight of the larger theme, global citizenship.
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George’s practical class encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone, as I have always been extremely uncomfortable with drama related activities. He taught me that process drama is not about acting; it is a conduit to explore ideas and perspectives.
Providing an opportunity to work collaboratively with other teachers, student teachers, and
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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this paper to my dad; his spirit continues to inspire me to take
risks and strive to accomplish my goals.
SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Frustrated, Arthur\textsuperscript{1} broke his pencil in half and threw it on the floor. “I’m lost! I don’t know what to write. I can’t write,” he exclaimed as he buried his redden face behind his hands.

Arthur’s painful journey through the writing process has been etched in my mind. He was a very popular and confident boy who was able to tell vivid tales about his hockey adventures, impersonate cartoon characters, and draw animated manga characters. Despite being able to communicate using other modes effectively, he found writing very difficult. On the first day of class, he was asked to write about his most memorable hockey experience. Although he was able to describe in rich detail how proud he was to score three goals for his team, he was lost when faced with a notebook and a pencil. At that point, I realized that although I gave my students ample opportunity to write and had seen noticeable improvement in their writing, I was failing the struggling learners. According to the BC Ministry Performance Standards, half of my students were able to exceed expectations in writing by the end of the year. However, every year I continue to have students at the other end of the spectrum, the ones who are verbally articulate, but find it incredibly challenging to communicate through writing.

When I first started my masters, I found it an inspiring, but humbling, experience. In the past, I have always been very proud of the progress of my students, especially the ones who are able to use vivid imagery and descriptive details. However, upon reflection, I realized that I had a very narrow perspective on literacy and let my biases

\textsuperscript{1} A pseudonym
dictate my teaching style. As I am an avid reader of fiction and fantasy, many of my writing assignments involved narrative and descriptive story writing. One of the first classes that I took as part of my Master's of Education degree discussed introducing informational text to the writing classroom, after completing the class, I realized that I had allocated a disproportionate amount of time to fiction. Additionally, I learned that many of those children in my class who were more comfortable with informational texts were also more comfortable with informational writing and were often visual learners.

Often, it seems that as teachers, we are so focused on getting through the mandated curriculum that we forget to reflect on our teaching practices. However, my master's programme has provided me with the opportunity to reflect, ponder, and question the strategies and practices in my own teaching. Through this process, I am starting to take more risks and trying different approaches.

My class with Dr. Jim Anderson provided the cornerstone to this paper. In his class, we explored the disconnect that exists between family and school literacies, and examined the sociocultural influences of our students. The major assignment for this course required me to conduct a case study on a family and analyze a child's literacy practices and influences. I chose an Indo-Canadian joint family with fifteen members living in one household. Studying this particular family was intriguing. In this household there were four nuclear families including two grandparents, and three nannies. The parents, grandparents, shared child-rearing responsibilities with the aunts and uncles. The responsibility was also shared with the Filipino nannies both of which found English difficult, and acted like older siblings to the seven children who lived in this joint home. Despite struggling to learn English, these nannies also engaged in rich literacy
experiences with the children. Studying this family made me realize the rift between home and school literacies. These 2-to-14 year-old children and their twenty-year-old nannies often engaged in some form of sociodramatic play. However, although the children were engaged in rich multi-modal meaning making activities at home, their literacy experiences at school did not reflect the home experiences.

What can educators do to bridge the gap between home and school literacies? If children learn through their social interactions with others and their experiences in their physical environment, why is there such a huge emphasis, especially in the intermediate grades, on learning through reading?

Sociodramatic play and the visual and performing arts seem to be disappearing from the curriculum as children start to engage in the formal, more privileged literacy of print. However, while taking a course with Dr. George Belliveau I was introduced to a strategy that embraced different modes of communication: process drama. Initially, I was apprehensive about taking a drama class. As an introvert, I never enjoyed drama activities, but Dr. Belliveau assured us that process drama is not about acting, but about taking multiple perspectives. Process drama is a medium for children to explore different ideas, take different viewpoints, and think critically and reflectively. The process, and not the end product, is emphasized.

On a trip to the neighbourhood grocery store, for example, children may encounter colourful flyers, bold posters, and eye-catching advertisements. All of these examples of environmental print are print rich but they also contain pictures, symbols, logos, diagrams, and photographs-other modes of communication. Furthermore, as members of the technological era, more and more children see their parents composing
email and chatting on MSN instead of writing letters, looking for directions on Mapquest instead of reading a map, and purchasing merchandise on eBay instead of walking into an actual store. Children not only witness their parents and other adults engaged in multiliteracies, they too are active participants; many primary students have a virtual Webkinz pet while intermediate students update and communicate through a Facebook account. Maintaining these types of accounts involve various types of literacy skills. For example, young children are encouraged to read news articles, compose stories and skits, purchase pet supplies, converse with other pet owners, and play interactive educational games on the Webkinz website. Facebook members, similarly, need a variety of literacy skills to maintain their accounts. In short, children are bombarded not just with print, but also with multiple symbol systems and visual forms of literacy.

Adults, not just children, naturally use multiple sign systems to convey meaning and express themselves. School settings; however, tend to focus only on print literacies. Other types of literacies, such as music, drama, art, and dance, are only electives in secondary schools and are taught out of context from the core curriculum and in the elementary grades, these elusive, “lesser literacies” are only sporadically found in the syllabus. Schools need to include authentic examples of literacy and encourage students to convey their knowledge through multiple sign systems.

**Research Questions**

1) What could educators, especially those who teach the intermediate grades, do to bridge the gap between home and school literacies?

2) How can incorporating process drama in the classroom encourage different modes of expression and communication, and facilitate multiple perspectives?
Theoretical Framework

This paper examines literacy issues through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective. Interactions, both social and physical shape and construct learning. Before formal schooling, children are already experienced language learners; they have had many opportunities to communicate with others through a variety of modes. Through their social interactions, they learn the nuances of language and appropriate culturally specific tools to negotiate meaning with their environment. Learning is a complex, active process that draws upon interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue, culturally specific experiences, and physical interactions.

Literacy embodies many forms, as there are many ways to communicate with others and make meaning (Siegal, 2006). Certain mediums are essential to language development. Sociodramatic play, in particular, offers children a safe way to negotiate meaning, solve problems critically and creatively, and externalize thought. Process drama creates a social context that allows children to explore different perspectives, communicate ideas verbally and visually, and construct knowledge using a variety of mediums (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985; Bolton, 1985). As knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by our interactions with others and our environment, it is important to allow children to safely explore their surroundings using a multimodal approach. Each transaction with a different semiotic system adds another layer of understanding and meaning to the learner.
SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before children begin formal education, they are immersed in a literacy rich home environment. Through their interactions with others, and with their physical setting, they very soon realize the importance of communication through the use of symbols to represent their thoughts. Although children are exposed to multiple sign systems, and use various semiotic systems to convey and express meaning during these early childhood years, when they start school, they soon realize that there is a hierarchy among these literacies: print is highly prized while other literacies are seen as after thoughts.

Researchers and educators have long recognized the impact the home environment has on literacy. Children from different sociocultural backgrounds engage in culturally specific types of literacies such as singing and oral storytelling, and hold different literacy beliefs and values (Auerbach, 1989; Heath, 1982; Purcell-Gates, 2000).

As different cultures use different types of literacy tools, children adopt the tools that they feel most familiar with from their culture (Edwards & Willis, 2000). Because these children from non-mainstream families have conflicting views on literacy practices and beliefs, when they attend school run by another sociocultural group, they need to adjust their paradigms to fit the dominant discourse. Unfortunately, though, not all students are able to adapt and adopt these new paradigms. The ones who are left behind have difficulties in school, not because they are not as intelligent as other children, but because are they are exposed to opposing literacy attitudes and beliefs. Before young
children attend school and learn to read and write in a formal setting, they have an awareness of symbol systems and have had many experiences with literacy.

Even children from low SES families live in homes flooded with environmental print (Purcell-Gates, 2000); however, the types of literacy they experience in their everyday lives are very different from the literacy they encounter in schools. In Language Stories and Literacy Lessons, Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1977) challenge perceptions of children’s literacy knowledge and practices. Their study involved examining the literacy experiences and conceptions of sixty-eight 3 to 6-year-olds in four different research settings: reading environmental print; dictating, reading, and rereading a language story; name and free writing; and drawing a self-portrait and name writing. Using these children as informants, the authors show us that even 3-year-olds from unprivileged backgrounds are active language consumers. Before young children begin formal schooling, they have already formed an awareness of sign systems and have had, to varying degrees, many experiences with various types of literacy. Children are very practical users of language, and will use multiple semiotic systems to communicate their understanding and their interpretation of the environment around them. Preschoolers, despite receiving no formal educational training, understand the generative nature of language and will transfer among various semiotic systems to convey meaning.

When children attend school, their literacy perspective quickly narrows. Although the literacies found in our schools reflect the general beliefs of the dominant discourse, there are still huge differences between home and school literacies. The literacies at school provide only a narrow snippet of the huge range of literacies found in our society.
Transmediation

Young children, being active members of a literate society, have the innate desire to communicate and acknowledge that there are many forms of communication. When they communicate, they prefer to use multiple modes to express themselves (Edwards & Willis, 2000); it is natural for them and for adults to use gestures and facial expressions when speaking, talk while writing, or dance while singing. By taking a multimodal approach, children enhance and synthesize their understanding because they are able to conceptualize and represent ideas, and express meaning using different communication systems. These representational approaches do not work separately, but in conjunction with each other, and should not be seen as inferior to print literacy (Kendrick & McKay, 2004).

As these young, but experienced, language users flow through different semiotic systems, concepts and ideas transform in the new context. Transmediation, the process of reconstructing the knowledge gained from one sign system to another sign system, demonstrates the generative, open nature of language. Language is dynamic and active, generating new meanings and ideas in new contexts (Harste et al., 1978). Movement among sign system is, thus, an organic process. Each experience with a new sign system creates a new milieu and offers another perspective and interpretation. Each move breeds a more elaborate and complex understanding, building upon prior knowledge. Transmediation is a seamless, naturally occurring process that children engage in; children interact with their environment and communicate with others using a multimodal approach. Indeed, by restricting students to just a monomodal approach, educators are
redefining literacy and placing limitations on who can be members of this elitist literate community (Siegal, 2006).

Pahl’s (2003) two-year case study of Sam, a second grade student, demonstrated how he was able to engage in deeper meaning making experiences through the transformation of different modes. The freedom to choose his modes and transmediate among modes contributed to Sam’s self-identity. Sam used various semiotic systems to represent his knowledge. Whether through drawing, writing, modeling, photographing, or speaking, each mode contributed to both his self-identity and his understanding of his environment. Pahl claims that the multimodal approach facilitates the meaning making process and makes it easier for children to interact in their environment.

When children are encouraged to engage in a multimodal approach in response to literature, they are given the opportunity to fill in the gaps in their understanding and to build upon their existing knowledge; thereby, constructing multiple layers of meaning through each transaction. A dialogue among different sign systems is created as they grapple with constructing new interpretations using information collected from previous explored semiotic forms (Sipe, 1998). When a reader reads a picture book, for example, she needs to pay attention to both the text and the illustrations as the words and the drawings provide meaning and clues for her. The text and illustrations provide two different perspectives on the same story. As the reader draws meaning from both encounters simultaneously, she uses the knowledge and understanding gained from both systems to enrich this transactional experience; a synergy is created between the text and the pictures (Sipe, 1998).
Kahn, Kauffman, and Short (2000) looked at the process of transmediation in read-alouds in two sixth grade student centred classrooms. They found that traditional forms of reading instruction stifle children’s ability to think beyond the text. After reading a particular text, children are often asked impersonal questions that require them to extract information from the story. To foster more personal, evocative experiences with the text, they introduced various unconventional, less restraining approaches to respond to literature. After a class read-aloud, they asked students to either re-enact certain scenes, draw, or create music in response to the story. When children were encouraged to use multiple sign systems to express their understanding of the literature, the experience became personal transactions with the text and not an extraction of meaningless facts or regurgitation of plot summaries. They were able to use literature to explore their thoughts and feelings and develop different perspectives.

Different sign systems allow for distinct ways to create meaning, and when children transfer the meaning they gained through one sign system to another sign system, new ideas develop because the context is changed. Their understandings of the text are not just limited to intertextuality, connections with previous texts, but also with other types of literacies such as plays, musicals, and art. Multiple sign systems allow for multiple ways of thinking (Short et al., 2000), giving the children a broader appreciation of literature.

Cowan and Albers (2006) used an integrated arts approach in a grade 4 classroom and found that by blending drama, art, and writing together, students formed a deeper understanding of the text. The students made masks that displayed a particular emotion, wrote expressive poems about a specific feeling, and re-enacted their composition. Each
time the children moved from one sign system to another, they were able to transfer the knowledge gained from the previous sign system to the next sign system, thus, creating a deeper understanding and more meaningful message. The children connected with their poems and were able to write descriptively and use vivid imagery to convey their theme and message. When designing their masks, for example, they were exposed to the terms hue and texture. They learned that different colours and textures convey different meanings and when they wrote their poems, they used this knowledge to express their feelings. During the last activity where they acted their poems, they were able to manipulate their voice and gestures to create a multisensory approach, deepening the meaning they wanted to convey to their audience.

Unfortunately, though, children, especially in the intermediate grades, have few opportunities at school to express themselves using a multimodal approach (Millard & Marsh, 2001). Since learning is individualistic, students need to use multiple approaches to represent their knowledge (Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000). Teachers who do value a multimodal approach have few resources to draw upon when assessing multimodal texts (Vincent, 2006). Vincent's study on his own class of 9- and 10-year-old children from a relatively high socioeconomic background showed that although the students were able to produce multimodal texts, assessment was elusive. He claims that there is a plethora of ways to assess print literacy, but if students produce multimodal texts, educators need to examine each type of semiotic system individually. This is an interesting argument; however, multimodal texts are designed to display a deeper understanding of the themes and messages and should be studied holistically. Teachers, therefore, should not look at each mode individually, as each system contributes to the whole and works integrally
with the other semiotic systems, enriching the communication between the language user and the audience. Despite experiencing frustration in assessing multimodal text, Vincent does strongly value and advocate the multimodal approach to literacy as it fosters creativity and multiple perspectives (Vincent, 2006). Schools need to address our students learning styles and interests. We are doing our students a disservice by advocating a monomodal approach as opposed to a multimodal approach and by ignoring the technological advances and popular culture influences that our children bring into the classroom (Millard, 2003).

**Sociodramatic Play and Literacy Connections**

Young preschool children have a tacit knowledge of literacy, and recognize that the purpose behind symbol making, whether through drawing or writing, is to communicate thoughts and ideas (Harste et al., 1984). They approach literacy activities systematically and with intentionality.

Children use sociodramatic play to deepen their awareness of their environment, social interactions, and processes that they observe. Dramatic play is an interactive, social process that involves much mediation and negotiation with the young actors themselves and with others. Through purposefully dramatic play, students are able to use a variety of semiotic systems, such as visual, auditory, and kinetic, to convey meaning and to interact with their peers. Hence, not all types of play promote literacy development. Roskos and Neumer (1990) conducted a study on 37 preschool children from ethnically diverse backgrounds. In their study, they manipulated the physical environment of the children’s play centres and observed literacy activities in two types of settings: unstructured play centres and purposeful, literacy rich play centres. They noted
that the physical environment does dictate literacy behaviours. Compared to unstructured play centres, children, when provided with literacy resources and tools, engaged in a variety of literacy activities.

Marsh (1999), similarly, examined the effects of creating a literacy rich play centre for fifty-seven, six and seven-year-olds in a multicultural school setting. Focusing on popular culture, she and the classroom teacher set up a Batman and Batwoman Headquarters rich with literacy tools. Children, with varying degrees of cultural capital all participated in literacy activities when given the right environment. Students should be given ample time to participate in literacy rich dramatic play settings (Christie, 1990; Dyson, 2008; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993). There has been much research on sociodramatic play and literacy in the primary grades when children are learning how to read. As these children move from the lower primary grades to the upper primary and lower intermediate grades, they are expected to read to learn. This dramatic shift has influenced the way teachers approach the curriculum in that there is less emphasis on using a multimodal approach to teach literacy. Reading should not be the only way to learn.

**Process Drama and Literacy**

Although there is an interweaving relationship between dramatic play and literacy, play, especially in the intermediate grades, is perceived as a non-academic, filler activity. Drama, stemming from sociodramatic play, is an elective at some schools and non-existent in others. A particular type of performative inquiry, process drama, allows students to use a multimodal approach to examine the curriculum. Instead of dictating learning through a top down approach where the teacher simply feeds knowledge to the students, process drama allows for mediation and creates social contexts for children to
explore creatively and critically; learning is open-ended, evolving from the students' interests and discussions (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985). Process drama, thus, creates authentic learning experiences where both the teacher and the students are active, collaborative learners.

Jackson and Schneider (2000), through their observation of twenty-five second and third grade students from diverse backgrounds and needs, showed that using process drama to build literacy skills created a more tangible experience for children. Process drama provided a "lived through" experience for these students and presented the curriculum using a multisensory approach. Jackson and Schneider advocate using drama as a learning medium. Through visualization and role-play, students are able to experience multiple perspectives and use multiple intelligences to solve problems critically and creatively.

Meaning making through drama is very similar to our everyday lives, as people do communicate multimodally through gestures, facial expressions, intonation, eye contact, and body language (Franks, 2003). Drama, similar to sociodramatic play in younger children, allow our students to experience different situations, feelings, and perspectives that otherwise would not be possible through just print literacy alone. Process drama, in particular, offers a well-rounded approach to literacy as students are encouraged to go in and out of role, visualize, draw, dance, and create multimodal texts and tableaux.

As print is the dominant discourse in our society, what can educators do to bridge the gap between the multimodal, real world and the exclusive, monomodal educational world? By incorporating the visual and performing arts in our Language Arts curriculum,
educators create more authentic learning experiences for students. The use of process drama, in particular, expands students’ connections and creates complex transactions that otherwise would not be possible with just print based interactions (Crumpler & Schneider, 2002; McMaster, 1998; Tarlington, 1985). Crumpler and Schneider (2002) assert that process drama extend and enhance students’ engagement and literacy skills, particularly in writing. They examined the data from five interpretive studies on 6- to 9-year-old children, and concluded that incorporating process drama in the writing classroom allows children to explore different genres and facilitates imaginative, thoughtful responses. Significantly, the students view these writing tasks as part of a process and not meaningless activities. Through process drama, these students experienced authentic, learning encounters with literacy, as they were encouraged to explore various semiotic systems to help with their writing process.

Overall, process drama is often misunderstood. The intent is not to create a dramatic, elaborate play, but to create imaginary social contexts for students to explore problems and engage in active learning. Students are not expected to be professional actors, but to immerse in a role and think and act using a different perspective (Bolton, 1985).

Discussion

Children are social learners and learn through their interactions with others and through their engagement with their environment (Vygotsky, 1976). As learning is situated, teachers need to create authentic learning environments that stimulate discussion and encourage multiple mediums of expression. Very young children are experienced language learners and have had many opportunities to appropriate culturally specific
literacy tools; communication does not have borders and involve multiple sign systems (Harste et al., 1976). When children attend school, they are placed in a foreign environment where only print literacy is valued. In today's changing society, we are bombarded with multimodal texts and media. By restricting children to just one form of literacy, we are narrowing their perspective. Allowing children to experience multiple modes helps them expand and enrich their conceptual understanding.

Through purposeful sociodramatic play, children are able to safely explore their environment and experiment with different social contexts (Pelligrini & Galda, 1983). Process drama, in particular, encourages children to take different roles and solve problems critically and creatively in stimulated environments (Bolton, 1985; Heathcote & Herbert, 1985). As process drama is different from acting, educators should use it as a medium to explore complex questions and encourage active engagement.
SECTION THREE: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

This is my first year teaching grade six Language Arts. Compared to the past grade six teachers, I have a very different pedagogical philosophy on how the Language Arts curriculum should be taught. In previous years, there had been a strong emphasis on reading to learn. Instruction on reading and writing skills, grammar and vocabulary was basically taught from three workbooks, I am strongly opposed to this fragmented approach to the teaching of Language Arts. As a primary teacher who taught grade 4 for many years, I am accustomed to a more holistic approach to the teaching of Language Arts and believe that children need authentic learning experiences and multiple ways of expressing themselves. To that end (providing authentic learning experiences that provide opportunities for multiple ways of representing), I decided to use role-drama as a vehicle for engaging students in the topic of Global Citizenship. More specifically, this topic would engage students in understanding the ways in which they impact the ecological world particularly with regards to water consumption. Through this unit plan I too am stepping out of my comfort zone, as I have little experience with role-play. However, through role-play I would like to engage students in complex problems and problem solving. Many of today’s issues that students encounter are highly complex and require understanding of perspective. Using process drama as a medium to create realistic social contexts, the students will have an opportunity to discuss, confer, problem solve, and express themselves in multimodal ways.

Context

The independent school where I teach at is situated in a high socioeconomic, urban area in Western Canada. Because this institution receives funding from substantial
tuition fees, generous donations, and subsidies from the government, there is a plethora of easily accessible materials and resources. The school population consists of children from affluent middle class families and diverse multicultural backgrounds. Our school offers an enriched academic curriculum.

In my social studies class, there are twenty-four children. None of these children need remedial support (i.e., none has an Individualized Educational Plan, or, needs assistance with English as a second language). There is a wide range of abilities and learning profiles. There is a skills and resource centre in the school to support children with learning disabilities and language difficulties, so this particular class is unusual.

Background

Recently, I started a sub unit on the environment, as a part of a bigger theme: global citizenship. After conducting a lesson on the ecological footprint, a calculation that measures the impact an individual has on the earth’s ecosystems, I was stunned to discover the drastic, ecologically unfriendly habits of my students. Most of them had a very narrow, egocentric perspective of the earth and had difficulty comprehending why they had such huge footprints compared to the average Canadian. It is disturbing to note that the average Canadian’s ecological footprint is just over nine hectares, which means that it would take nine hectares of the Earth’s resources to sustain the current lifestyle of just one Canadian. In other words, if every human being on the Earth consumed resources like the average Canadian, it would take four Earths to sustain everybody’s lifestyle. Our class average was more than double the average Canadian’s ecological footprint. It is difficult for children to comprehend certain global issues if they do not truly understand the difference between basic needs and wants. Although my initial goal
was to expose the students to a variety of modes of communication, my underlying goal was to create informed, responsible global citizens by allowing them opportunities to experience multiple perspectives. This process drama on water is part of a bigger environmental unit comprised of three sections: water conservation, waste reduction, and efficient energy consumption.

**Rationale**

Children, being members of the larger community of *global earth* have the responsibility of protecting their home (i.e., global earth) from further ecological damage. To make responsible decisions, children need to develop critical thinking skills and problem solving strategies. By creating young global citizens who are aware of the impact of their actions and choices, we hope to encourage responsible behaviour and foster dependable, ecologically conscious future leaders. Through this process drama, students will be exposed to multiple perspectives and encouraged to form connections with their personal experiences and, as a result, make informed judgments and decisions. As children have different learning abilities and styles, a multimodal approach through process drama will address a wider spectrum of learning styles as opposed to a text based unit plan. Furthermore, children are social learners and learn through their environment. Through process drama, imaginary scenarios will be created and children will be encouraged to problem solve and think critical in these particular social contexts. This process drama will explore both various types of writing and other forms of representation and communication; students will create multimodal texts to display their comprehension.
Unit Overview

While incorporating process drama and multimodal activities, three specific issues will be explored in this unit: water conservation, waste reduction, and efficient energy consumption. Although this particular teaching resource provides lessons on just water conservation, it serves as a starting point to launch into the other interrelated issues. The water drama begins in an imaginary, rural setting, moves to a local water plant, and ends back in Africa. Through experiencing multiple roles such as a water-deprived child, a bottled company employee and stockholder, and a parent fundraiser, children will learn the complexity of the water situation. As with most issues, problems and solutions are not black or white, but consist of many hues of grey. By the end of the unit, students will gain a complex understanding of water conservation, and hopefully, be conscious consumers of fresh water.

All the lessons are designed as scenes. Children will be given ample opportunities to search for information using a variety of means, discuss and confer with their peers, and create multimodal texts.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes: Language Arts 6

It is expected that students will

- Use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of contributing to group success; discussing and comparing ideas and opinions; improving and deepening comprehension; discussing concerns and resolving problems
- Use speaking to explore, express, and present a range of ideas, information, and feeling for different purposes and audiences by using prior knowledge and other sources of evidence, and explaining and effectively supporting a viewpoint
- Listen purposefully to understand and analyse ideas and information
- Use speaking and listening to improve and extend thinking by questioning, analysing, and problem solving
- Respond to selections they read by expressing opinions and making judgments supported by explanations and evidence and explaining connections
Create meaningful representations and different types of writing for a variety of purposes and audiences that communicate personal response, information, and ideas relevant to the topic.

**Prescribed Learning Outcomes: Social Studies 6**

*It is expected that students will*

- Apply critical thinking skills – including comparing, classifying, inferring, imagining, verifying, identifying relationships, summarizing, and drawing conclusions – to a range of problems and issues
- Interpret graphs and tables
- Implement a plan of action to address a selected local or global problem or issue
- Deliver a presentation
- Compare Canadian society with another country
- Compare individual and collective rights and responsibilities of Canadians with those of other countries
- Assess the relationship between cultures and their environments
- Evaluate effects of technologies on lifestyle and environments

*Water Conservation Process Drama*

**Scene 1: creating belief and building background knowledge**

Objective: to understand the different uses of water and that everyone has a different agenda.

**Materials:**

One 10-litre bucket per group of four students (put a 10 kilogram weight in each bucket)

1. Divide the class into groups of 4 and place a bucket in the middle of each group.
2. Display a scene of the blazing desert on the interactive SMART board.
3. Ask the children to take off their shoes and socks and lift up the bucket and set it on the desk to get a sense of how much 10 kilograms weighs.
4. Explain to the students that they will be going through a visualization of life in the desert.
Visualization script:

Close your eyes. Imagine that you are transported to a small farming community in Africa. Water is a scarce and a precious resource. Every morning, your job is to carry an empty bucket to the community well to fetch water. As you are trudging through the barren landscape, you feel the dry sand tickling your bare toes and the unforgiving sun beating down on your parched, unprotected skin. Vexatious, tenacious mosquitoes attack you through your difficult 5-kilometre trek. Sweat trickles profusely down your forehead. When you arrive at the well, there are fifteen people waiting impatiently in front of you.

After an agonizing 15 minutes, it is your turn to fetch your precious water. After you have filled your bucket, you try to lug it back home. The trek back is even more difficult; each step becomes increasingly more challenging, as you try to balance the weight of the bucket on your head and wearily plod through the scorching desert. This water that you have fetched is for all your needs. Open your eyes.

5. Explain that the 1 litre of water weighs 1 kilogram, and often in rural parts of African people trek for several kilometres for water.

6. Ask the students to brainstorm a list of purposes for fresh water.

7. Assign each person in the group, a family member role (eldest is the father; the youngest is the mother; the others are children).

8. Tell the class that they are a self-sustaining community. Each family is responsible for growing and harvesting their own food.

9. Decide as a family, how to distribute 40 litres of water.

10. Re-group and discuss as a class the difficulties with the distribution of water.
Scene 2: Teacher in-role as a teacher in an African community (tableau, reflection)

Background knowledge

- 97% of the water on the earth is salt water
- 3% of the water is fresh, but 2% of it is inaccessible (frozen in glaciers, icebergs, ice caps)
- 6 billion people, animals, and plants (all the living organisms) share the 1% of fresh water
- Canadians use an average of 326 litres of water DAILY
- North Americans make up only 8% of the world’s population, but consume 50% of the world’s fresh water supply
- 20% of all the fresh water in the world is found in Canada (10% of this water is used for cooking, drinking, and washing; the other 90% is used for flushing the toilet, washing laundry, and bathing)
- 20% of the world’s population do not have access to fresh, clean water (1.1 billion people)
- If everybody lived like the average Canadian, we would need 4 earths to sustain our lifestyle; we only have one earth
(Information from www.resourceconservation.mb.ca)

1. Set the scene: Explain to the class that they are all children in an African community. They are one of the privileged children in that they are allowed to go to school.

Sample script:

Good morning, class. Today we will be learning about another country – Canada. In this heavenly place, water is a plentiful resource. 20% of the world’s fresh water is found in Canada. Water comes magically from shiny metal devices called taps. There is no need to endure a difficult journey to fetch water every day. Instead, the water comes to them. Each day, instead of using 10 litres of water, Canadians use an average of 326 litres of water. Did you know that North Americans make up only 8% of the world’s population, but they consume 50% of the world’s fresh water supply?

Let’s look at the Earth. What do you notice? Yes, there is a lot of water. 97% of the water we have on the earth is salt water. There is only 3% fresh water. Of the 3%, 2% is frozen in glaciers and ice caps. That means that there is only 1% fresh water for 6 BILLION people and all the plants and animals to share. How does it make you feel that Canadians and Americans waste all that water?

2. Show the video clip from a miniature earth: www.miniature-earth.com
3. Have the students discuss in groups what they think of Canadians use of water. Create a tableau, a still image, displaying their reaction or discussion.

4. Present the tableaux of their discussion. Explain that you are going to tap them on the shoulder. When the student is tapped, s/he will tell the group what s/he is feeling or saying at that particular moment.

5. Write or illustrate a reflection on the activity.

**Scene 3: Role switch (Bottled water company scene)**

Materials:

- Envelopes for each group
- Instructions with different target audiences (seniors, athletes, girls, boys, parents)
- Paper, writing and drawing tools
- Empty water bottles
- Plain labels

Background knowledge:

- ¼ all bottled water is actually just purified tap water (spring water)
- Canadians consumed 1.9 billion litres of bottled water in 2005
- Tap water testing is recorded daily, weekly, and monthly
- Bottled water is tested once every three years
- 1 kilogram of plastic requires 17 kilograms of water to manufacture it
- An average Canadian consumes 60 litres of bottled water a year
- Bottled water industry-22 billion a year
- 1.5 million tons of water bottles end up in landfills every year

1. Divide the class into groups of four.

2. Take the role of the CEO of Wonder Water Company

*Sample script:*

Welcome to our annual meeting. As CEO of Wonder Water, I would like to let you know that our revenue sales have increased 20% in the past quarter. We are excited that more and more people are trusting our water and choosing bottled water over plain tap water. Last year, Canadians have consumed nearly 2 billion litres of bottled water. As we have many competitors, I’d like to see more and more people drink Wonder Water.

As chosen members of our special marketing campaign, I’d like you to create a commercial, print, audio, or screen advertisement, targeting a specific audience. Each team will receive an envelope with further instructions. Although all of you will have a different target audience, your goals are the same:
• Illustrates the benefits of Wonder Water
• Explain why people should drink Wonder Water instead of tap water
• Persuade consumers to choose our product instead of our competitors

3. Hand out envelopes with the target audience written on the sheet.

4. Discuss, create, and present an advertisement.

Scene 4: News Conference

1. Divide the class into the following special interest groups:
   • Student council
   • Wonder Water shareholders
   • Funding committee (parents and administrators)
   • Environmentalists: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Club

2. Explain as teacher-in-role (CEO of Wonder Water) at a press conference that Wonder Water is excited to announce a new collaboration with our school. Our school has decided to carry Wonder Water exclusively. As a bonus, if our school is able to convince other schools to exclusively carry Wonder Water in their vending machines at the next elementary school conference held tomorrow, we will receive an extra $1000 for every deal.

3. Pretend to receive a call. Explain that at the end of the elementary school conference, there will be an opportunity for groups to voice their support for Wonder Water. Interested parties will be given 5 minutes for a power point presentation.

4. Let students discuss, research, and create power point presentations.

5. Give a confidential envelope to each group to stimulate conversation.

Behind the scenes confidential information:

a. Student council
   • Wonder Water will donate 2 laptop computers to the student council.

b. Wonder Water shareholders
   • Wonder Water will generate $50,000 in gross revenue for each school’s exclusive rights.

c. Funding committee (parents and administrators)
   • Wonder Water will give the school $5,000 each year as a signing bonus.
d. Environmentalists: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Club
   - Bottled water facts
     1. 88% of plastic bottles end up in landfills.
     3. Canadians drink an average of 60 litres of bottled water per person.
     4. Wonder Water, like many large bottled water producers, use filtered tap water with added minerals.
     5. Local water supplies are inspected daily while bottled water plants are inspected once every 3 years.

6. Research, create, and share power point presentations.

Scene 5: Overstocked water

1. Divide the class into special interest groups:
   - Wonder Water shareholders (sale will generate $100,000 for the company)
   - African children in the rural village (water got contaminated; facing a major shortage of water)
   - American public (looking for a new source of fresh water)
   - Wonder Water marketing department (sees donation as free advertising for Wonder Water)

2. Explain as CEO that Wonder Water has an excess of 100,000 litres of water taking up space in its warehouse. There are a couple of options: sell to our neighbours who are the world’s largest water consumers and able to afford fresh water; donate to a rural community in Africa as they are faced with another water crisis.

3. Divide into special interest groups to discuss the situation.

4. Write an editorial, in role, either supporting or opposing the sale to the Americans.

5. Teacher, in-role as a reporter, asks different groups to share their opinion on the matter.

Scene 6: Wonder Water’s decision

Objective: let students experience different points of view, including those they do not agree with.

1. Students, all in-role as shareholders, decide whether to sell the water.

2. CEO announces decision.
3. Students, out-of-role, create editorial cartoons on Wonder Water's decision.

4. Students write or illustrate a reflection on the activity.

**Scene 7: Closing activity**

1. Teacher-in-role as African teacher announces to the class that Wonder Water has decided to invest in a well building project.

2. Form a debriefing circle to reflect on this new piece of news. Are the students grateful or upset that this is only a very tiny gesture compared to what can be done to help them?

3. Have the students reflect on own water use and set 3 goals to reduce water usage, and choose one goal to share.

4. Write the goal on a piece of paper and stick it into a class water bottle.

5. Create posters or pamphlets on water conservation awareness for the school community.

**Extension activity:**

- Fundraise for a deep-water well that can provide up to 11,000 litres of fresh water for a community in need.

**Practical resources for an environmental unit:**

**Websites:**

www.worldvision.ca

- Offers a wide range of educational resources geared toward developing a global citizen, including a unit on safe water and water conservation
- Provides practical unit plans that include thorough learning outcomes, activities, explanations, and assessment strategies
- Contains reproducible masters, but they need to be adapted for clarity and purpose (some of them use vague language and contain too many steps)

www.miniature-earth.com
• Shows the distribution of the earth’s resources if the population were reduced to 100 people
• Gives a concise, realistic portrayal of the stark discrepancies between developed and developing countries in a couple of minutes

www.green.cbc.ca

• Records the number of green acts completed by an individual and groups
• Shows the collected green acts completed by registered participants, creating a common goal for Canadians to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
• Offers practical suggestions for Canadians to reduce their ecological footprint
• Gives straightforward instructions on reducing energy in our homes, supported by facts and advice
• Includes a list of Canadian environmental websites

http://www.davidsuzuki.org/naturechallenge/

• Includes information on a variety of environment concerns
• Includes a kid friendly section with practical advice on earth friendly acts and interactive games
• Links to a teacher resource ordering page (comprehensive free resource with fun, practical activities; specific links to the BC IRP prescribed learning outcomes)

www.kids.nationalgeographic.com

• Includes interactive games and activities
• Includes information, videos, charts, maps on animals and countries

www.zerofootprintkids.com http://www.earthlink.org/

• Calculates your ecological footprint based on your lifestyle and compares it to citizens from other parts of the world
• Asks simple questions using easy to understand language (most are Yes/No or multiple choice questions)
• Includes resources for teachers and parents

www.ecokids.ca

• Includes activities and practical advice on conservation of water and energy and waste management
• Offers interactive games that focus on habitat and wildlife conservation
• Is easy to navigate and visually pleasing

Professional Drama Activities Resources


• Includes specific examples of tested process dramas for upper intermediate and secondary students
• Is reader friendly, as it includes much dialogue between the authors
• Includes Canadian content and process dramas that are relevant to Canadians (fish farming, Acadians)
• Offers specific advice on designing role dramas
• Supports practice with research
• Includes a drama toolkit for teachers and teacher resources
• Reiterates and assures educators that process drama is for all teachers, not just drama teachers
• Incorporates authentic writing tasks for students that are relevant to what they are learning
• Includes a brief summary of all the process dramas mentioned
• Is reflective and encourages critical thinking and multiple perspectives


• Incorporates theory and practice
• Includes a variety of strategies that encourage students to form connections, think critically, and display their understanding visually and orally
• Focuses on intermediate to secondary level students
• Gives specific step-by-step instructions for the reading passages in the book
• Supports strategies with specific literary excerpts (ie. The Fan Club)
• Includes both fiction and non-fiction examples
• Gives examples of writing-in-role assignments

www.mantleoftheexpert.com

• Provides a thorough overview of the mantle of the expert approach
• Includes books, articles, and list of resources for teachers
• Explains the philosophy behind the mantle of the expert approach
• Offers many links to other websites
• Includes ways of assessment

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SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Before formal school encounters, children learn through observation and interactions with their environment and with others, many ways of expressing themselves using cultural specific literacy tools. As they flow through different sign systems, these young language consumers and generators create and re-create meaning. Each sign system enriches their previous understandings. Often naturally using multiple literacies to reconstruct meaning with print, children enter a constricting, artificial world when they start school. Outside of this structured institution, though, they are flooded with multiple sign systems and multiple ways of communication. They learn through their interactions with their environment that there are many visual and written genres, and that under certain circumstances; certain modes of communication are more effective than others. Often, though, they recognize that multiple means of representation are used to improve communication. Rarely is environmental print, such as flyers, posters, and cereal boxes, covered with just plain letters because this is an ineffective way of communication. Instead of imposing constricting forms of written and visual literacy, children, who all have unique learning styles, should be encouraged to explore and illustrate their understanding using multiple sign systems.

Schools need to create authentic learning environments for children to help connect home and school literacies, especially since our children come from various different sociocultural backgrounds and bring culture specific experiences to our classrooms. Educators need to also learn more about the sociocultural dynamics of our students, and work with families and communities to create more continuity between home and school environments.
Our society outside of the school system demonstrates that the definition of literacy is continuously evolving. Literacy is not just writing, but encompasses various forms of representation. All these literacies serve the same goals: to create meaning and communicate our thoughts, ideas, concepts, and understandings. We need to work towards an integrated curriculum and create safe, authentic classroom experiences that allow our children to freely express, learn, and explore their environment and their interactions with others. Process drama, an often misunderstood and under used strategy, needs to be demystified and made accessible to all educators; the goal of process drama is to explore multiple perspectives in a critical, creative way. Through this framework, children are encouraged to take multiple perspectives, use multiple ways to express their thoughts, thus, deepening their understanding through each transaction as they move fluidly through different sign systems, and create more meaningful interactions with the text, their peers, and their environment. Through awareness and communication, children will hopefully be able to learn through interactions with their peers and through a variety of means that reflect how they learn outside of the school setting not just in the primary grades, but also through the intermediate and secondary years. Process drama, in short, can be used to bridge the gap between the home and the school environment, as it encourages students to think, reflect, and communicate multimodally. Through role-play, visualization, and other building belief activities, children have the opportunity to explore other standpoints, views, and attitudes that sometimes may challenge their personal beliefs and biases. Furthermore, process drama encompasses many ways of communicating, similar to what students are familiar with in their own everyday interactions with others. By incorporating process drama not just in the Language Arts
classroom, but also in cross-curricular activities, children from different backgrounds are given ample opportunities to communicate their knowledge and understanding through various literacies, not just through print. As educators, we sometimes need to step out of our comfort zone and explore and learn with our students.
REFERENCES


