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A multiliteracies project in the middle school: Parents as coteachers

Linda-Dianne Willis

Queensland University of Technology

Author's copy

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Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of one middle years' English and Studies of Society and Environment (SoSE) teacher who adopted a multiliteracies project-based orientation to a unit on War and Refugees. It details the multiliteracies teaching and learning cycle, which is based on four non-hierarchical, pedagogical orientations: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice (New London Group, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2005a). Following the work of Kalantzis and Cope (2005a), it draws out the knowledge processes exacted in each of these four phases: experiencing the known and the new; conceptualising by naming and theorising; analysing functionally and critically; and, applying appropriately and creatively. Two parents were invited to enter the study as coteachers with the teacher and researcher. Using Bourdieu's (1992) construct of capital, the findings report on how the multiliteracies approach enabled them to engage in school-based literacy practices differently than they had done previously in classrooms. An unexpected finding concerns the teacher's altered view about how his role and status were perceived by the parents.

Multiliteracies

Multiliteracies is a term that connotes the multiplicity of ways individuals in contemporary society may acquire literacy knowledge and practices. It largely is a response to changes in society arising from the revolution in digital technology over the last two decades. These changes have led to the recognition that individuals need new literacy practices and behaviours beyond those required by past generations, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening. The multimodality of communications environments alone highlights the interplay of meaning modes with which today's learners are confronted. These modes encompass five *design elements*: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial that learners must now understand and be able to use (New London Group, 1996).

Kalantzis and Cope's (2005a) *Learning by Design* model seeks to equip students with a tool kit for tackling any current or future literacy situations. It focuses jointly on active ways of knowing and text design. Four *knowledge processes* are pinpointed as essential to acting and meaning: experiencing the *known* and the *new*; conceptualising by *naming* and *theorising*; analysing *functionally* and *critically*; and, applying *appropriately* and *creatively*. These knowledge processes map generally to the curriculum orientations of the multiliteracies pedagogy: *situated practice*, *overt instruction*, *critical framing* and *transformed practice*, as displayed in Table 1 (cited in Kalantzis & Cope, 2005a, p. 73).

Considerable cycling back and forth among the phases is anticipated throughout the life of a multiliteracies project.

Table 1: *Learning by Design* and multiliteracies equivalences

<u><i>Learning by Design</i>: Knowledge processes</u>	<u>Multiliteracies curriculum orientations</u>
<i>Experiencing</i> the known and the new	Situated practice
<i>Conceptualising</i> by naming and theorising	Overt instruction
<i>Analysing</i> functionally and critically	Critical framing
<i>Applying</i> appropriately and creatively	Transformed practice

The *Learning by Design* model acknowledges student differences, interests, prior knowledge and skills as valuable resources for teaching and encourages teachers to plan learning experiences accordingly. Teachers and students are called to cast themselves in new collaborative roles within communities of learners that transcend the classroom to include professional peers, outside experts and members of the broader community (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005a). Multiliteracies projects entail long-term learning goals, the collapse of traditional curriculum divisions and the construction of complex text types commensurate with community text practices. They seek to promote substantive learning by engaging students as active investigators within authentic learning contexts. These enterprises are designed with specific purposes and target audiences in mind.

Brief background of study

The broader investigation from which this paper arose speaks to the ongoing debate about how best to involve parents in schools. Given the plethora of research evidence that positively links parent engagement in students' learning and students' academic performance and success at school (e.g., Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), the need for parent engagement in schools now appears universally accepted by educators and governments the world over (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, ways of involving parents in schools that further student learning while building positive relationships among all stakeholders, specifically students, teachers and parents, remain less clear. It is rare to find non-deficit accounts of parent-school engagement where parents, for example, are invited to participate in schools as curriculum partners and decision-makers (Barton, Drake, Perez, St Louis, & George, 2004). Most studies of parent-school engagement fail to consider the networks of individuals and resources that surround the scope, focus and purpose of participation or the unique experiences that frame parents' beliefs leading to further investment in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Against such a backdrop, this paper examines the experiences of one English and Study of Society and the Environment (SoSE) teacher who endeavoured to enhance the literacy learning of his middle years' students by adopting multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2005a) in the context of a coteaching project involving parents.

Description of study

The research site was a single Year 8 classroom (age = 13 years) in a co-educational, Queensland state secondary school with a student population of over 1400. The participants included John¹, an

experienced middle-school teacher of English and SoSE, Dale and Ruth, two of the students' parents who agreed to participate, the students (n = 27) and the author (i.e., Linda Willis who is a qualified teacher). The class of students had been selected by the school based upon their academic achievement in mathematics and science at their respective primary schools. Continued placement in the class was contingent on students' high achievement in all subjects. John reported that across the class student achievement in subject English was "above average". Generally, the class presented with few learning difficulties or behavioural challenges.

Dale and Ruth were invited to enter the study as coteachers with John and Linda. The term *coteaching* describes when two or more individuals agree to teach collaboratively in one classroom in order to improve their teaching and enhance opportunities for student learning (Roth & Tobin, 2002). Coteachers assume co-responsibility for all aspects of teaching including planning, teaching, reflection and assessment. Integral to coteaching are the debriefing sessions known as Cogenerative Dialogues or *Cogens* that are conducted as closely as possible after each teaching episode. During these times the coteachers discuss the teaching and learning process in which they have participated. LaVan (2004) suggests that these meetings afford participants opportunities to talk, listen and learn from one another. There is considerable alignment between coteaching and the tenets of a multiliteracies approach.

The investigation spanned eight months. This paper focuses on the phase of the study when parent coteachers first became involved, a thirteen week period in second semester. English and SoSE were timetabled each week for five, thirty-five minute teaching episodes. This translated to two, seventy minute blocks plus one of thirty-five minutes for both subjects. John and Linda cotaught three, seventy minute blocks each week. In the last of these sessions, they were joined by Dale and Ruth. All participants convened directly after this episode for a Cogen that lasted up to ninety minutes.

The Cogens allowed the coteachers to develop a shared understanding about multiliteracies teaching and learning. They provided time for them to:

- share ideas;
- explore alternatives thoroughly;
- clarify (mis)understandings;
- make decisions for classroom enactment;
- discuss practices for literacy teaching and learning;
- reflect on group and individual progress (coteachers and students);
- share successes and disappointments;
- offer timely feedback and encouragement;
- review aspects of the unit and its implementation; and,
- adjust time frames, sequencing and goals if necessary.

In between Cogens the coteachers engaged in dialogic exchange virtually via e-mail. In this way, the parent coteachers kept informed about, and contributed to, teaching and learning in the classroom

when they could not be present physically. Human experts, people who brought particular experiences, skills or specialised knowledge about aspects of the topic to the classroom (e.g., a Federal Member of Parliament [MP] with knowledge of government immigration policies), were audio- and/or video-recorded with copies given to the parents if such visits occurred outside their coteaching sessions.

Method

The inquiry represented case study research (Stake, 1995). An interpretive approach (Bassegy, 1999) was adopted to provide a narrative that described and explained the coteachers' experiences while taking into account the factors that influenced their particular situation. Linda, as researcher, collected and analysed the data throughout the study. As coteacher, she also worked alongside the study's participants as part of a community of learners.

A variety of data were generated. Video recordings of the Cogens and classroom lessons comprised the chief data source. Video data were backed-up by audio recordings (each coteacher was assigned a personal audio device) together with transcriptions (Cogens were transcribed in-full while lessons were partially transcribed on the basis of aspects considered salient to the research). Transcriptions were compiled as soon as possible after each session to facilitate ongoing analysis. Data also included: semi-structured interviews of John and the parent participants upon entry and exit from the study; the e-mail correspondence, referred to previously, that circulated among the coteachers; observational field notes; and, artefacts the coteachers produced such as lesson plans and teaching materials. Regarding the students, data comprised journal entries made from time to time throughout the project, and photographs and electronic copies of work samples.

Data analysis was undertaken using the techniques of discourse and conversation analyses (see Roth, 2007). By analysing what the coteachers said and did it was possible to shed light on their particular views and behaviours. Of specific interest was how the coteachers interacted with one another and the students and how and why these interactions may have been seen to change throughout the investigation. As part of preliminary analysis, the data was coded. Initial codes were derived from the available literature (e.g., 'capital') while others emerged from the data (e.g., 'collective conscience'). Such codes were used to label the text to form broad themes in the data. This enabled recurrent themes to be identified from which tentative assertions were constructed. A search of the data for evidence to confirm or disconfirm tentative assertions was conducted. From this process, adjustments to original propositions occurred and final assertions were assembled.

Crucial to ensuring research quality was the practice of 'member checking'. Guba and Lincoln (1989) indicate that member checks involve testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories and interpretations with the participants themselves from whom the original constructions were derived. As a matter of course, the study's participants regularly were asked to verify the researcher's recollections and assessments by way of: reading and commenting on the transcripts; responding to Linda's reconstructions during Cogen and e-mail conversations; and, discussing possibilities during audio-taped informal conversations in the classroom or after Cogens.

The *War and Refugees* Unit

The *War and Refugees* unit ran for nine weeks and was prescribed learning by the Head of Department (HoD) in SoSE for all Year 8 students. It aligned with the school's aim of providing students with an education that prepared them for life as global citizens. However, unlike other SoSE units, teachers were given considerable rein over the design of student assessment items and could exercise their professional discretion in using the school's prepared unit outline. In adopting a multiliteracies orientation, John used this flexibility along with the fluidity afforded by his dual role as the students' English/SoSE teacher. The latter gave rise to considerable opportunities for cross-curricular fertilisation and freed up available time-frames for teaching, particularly coteaching, that ordinarily might not be available when teaching and learning are structured along discrete subject lines. John satisfied the English HoD's requirements for Year 8 by choosing *Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman (2004), a story of how two refugee children survive being smuggled from Afghanistan to Australia, as the class's major novel study.

Consistent with a multiliteracies approach, a key research question underpinned the unit: *What problems and impacts does the refugee situation create?* Students were positioned as workers for a non-government aid organisation (NGO) during wartime. As happens in real life, students applied for a position in one of four smaller project groups: Project Officers, Promotions Officers, Education Officers and Public Awareness Officers. Each group developed an outcome text that responded to the research question from a particular perspective. For example:

- Project Officers compiled a *Grant Application* using PowerPoint to inform the school's parents about the NGO and secure funding from them for its future operations;
- Promotions Officers designed a community *Advertising Campaign* using various media including posters and a television and radio advertisement to promote the NGO's work and recruit overseas workers;
- Education Officers developed an *Education Pack* for NGO workers in Nigeria to inform them of infectious diseases, landmines and first aid; and,
- Public Awareness Officers formed a *Panel of Experts* to present a parliamentary-style debate to a television audience about the moral dilemmas surrounding the refugee issue in Australia.

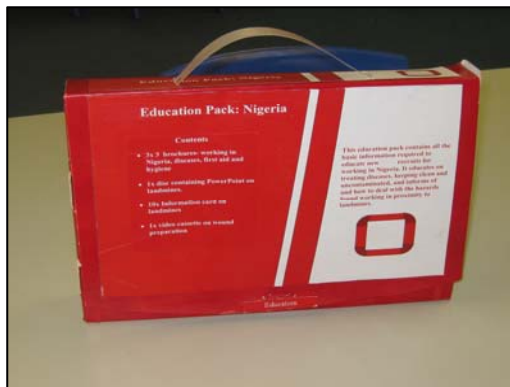
Pedagogic foci included: promoting sharing opportunities among students, both within and between groups; solving problems creatively; managing group processes to ensure the timely and satisfactory completion of student outcome texts; incorporating a range of digital technologies; and, developing hybridised texts that exploited the five design elements, and their interrelatedness, to maximise meaning-making. The unit culminated with students' parents being invited to a showcase evening of the students' learning.

Analysis of one group's multiliteracies experience

The multiple literacies involved in the unit may be revealed by analysing one group's experience. The Education Officers comprised seven students who, as indicated earlier, were tasked with developing

an Education Pack for NGO workers in Nigeria (see student work examples 1 and 2). The Pack contained:

- three different information brochures
 - working in Nigeria and general hygiene advice
 - infectious diseases likely to be encountered in refugee camps
 - first aid;
- a compact disk (CD) with customised label and dust jacket containing a PowerPoint about landmines
 - explanation
 - various types
 - common locations
 - warnings
 - statistics
 - common injuries;
- ten business-sized information cards about landmines for workers to carry on their person for quick and ready reference; and,
- a commercially produced video cassette on wound preparation and first aid with customised case.



Example 1: Education Pack



Example 2: Contents of Pack on display

In addition, the design and construction of the actual Pack needed to be tailored specifically to accommodate the various contents the students developed.

Table 2 explicates how the coteachers enacted the curriculum by drawing on the theorisation of the knowledge processes in relation to the four multiliteracies curriculum orientations. As indicated previously, the linear table format is used for ease of representation, but the process is more cyclic with considerable toing and froing among the phases throughout the life of the unit.

Table 2: Pedagogy in action: The Education Officers

<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Situated practice phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● whole class discussion topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ war and refugees ➤ infectious diseases ➤ five design elements ➤ digital text production ● through discussion, ascertained and evaluated students' knowledge and understanding of topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● asked students to recount personal stories of immigration to Australia ● used <i>Boy Overboard</i> by Morris Gleitzman (2004) to springboard into investigation ● prompted students to recall information from digital texts, e.g., <i>The Seven Wonders of the Industrial World: The Sewer King</i> (Evans, Bazalgette, & Bazalgette, 2003) about transmission modes for certain diseases and past misconceptions about science ● discussed five design elements and brainstormed with students how these enhance meaning-making visually and verbally ● asked students to describe general features and applications of Microsoft Office suite comprising Word, PowerPoint, Publisher and Excel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● students <i>experienced the known</i> by sharing existing knowledge and understanding of classroom topics such that a foundation was laid for future teaching and learning
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Situated practice phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● actual and community experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ immersed students in topic ➤ expanded their knowledge and understanding ➤ heightened motivation and interest ➤ fostered sense of belonging and community of learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● arranged classroom visits by human experts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Federal MP to share specialised knowledge about immigration policies under past and present governments ➤ microbiologist (Dale) to provide laboratory perspective on infectious diseases common among refugees ➤ refugee advocate and teenage refugee from Afghanistan, to discuss refugees' first-hand experiences and present contrasting perspectives to MP's ● organised excursion to <i>Refugee Camp in Your City</i> hosted by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Australia to tour simulated refugee camp and its facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● students <i>experienced the new</i> through learning opportunities that connected their prior and new knowledge and understanding about topic

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organised Internet research activities involving refugees' accounts, current conflict areas and NGOs to increase students' exposure to evidence, facts and data about these sub-topics encouraged students to gather information about unfolding conflicts and refugee situations from community texts e.g., newspapers, television and radio news items and advertisements 	
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Overt instruction phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new vocabulary and key terms introduced in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ war and refugees ➤ diseases ➤ five design elements <p>created shared metalanguage for class discussions and text construction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listed new vocabulary and defined key terms and concepts e.g., asylum seeker, immigration detention, civil war helped students categorise diseases based on causative agents, patient symptoms, transmission modes, preventative measures and treatments unpacked specific aspects of design elements that included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>linguistic</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>modality</i> to connect message and target audience - <i>transitivity</i> e.g., notated genre (lead-in sentences, parallel construction, imperative mood) to aid economy of expression and readability ➤ <i>visual</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>colour</i> to create mood; sense of time and place - <i>different fonts, text effects</i> (e.g., bolding, <u>underlining</u>, indenting) for specialised purposes - <i>lines and borders</i> to delineate important information ➤ <i>audio</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>music</i> to evoke particular emotions, moods, feelings and responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students demonstrated <i>conceptualising by naming</i> by utilising new terminology and concepts to facilitate accurate and knowledgeable expression during tasks and activities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>gestural</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>semiotics</i> to: communicate visual and verbal information easily; promote positive actions and behaviours; and, minimise cross-cultural confusion and misunderstandings ➤ <u>spatial</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>distribution and organisation of information</i> to reinforce visual and verbal messages 	
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Overt instruction phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • built students' impressions about problems and impacts of war using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ refugees ➤ local people ➤ NGO workers ➤ communal diseases ➤ environment as terms of reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • led students in discussions and activities about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ cost of war (human, environmental) ➤ 'push' and 'pull' factors of refugees ➤ simple hygiene and first aid routines • developed graphic organisers for students to compare and contrast different NGOs (e.g., Oxfam, MSF, World Vision) based on their goals, history, charter, workers, funding and specific types of assistance provided • provided statistical information on war and refugees for students' interpretation and explanation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in <i>conceptualising by theorising</i> students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ developed appreciation that anyone in identical circumstances would experience similar problems as refugees ➤ postulated about war's short and long-term effects
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Critical framing phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students positioned as project managers which activated their agency and promoted task ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asked students to plan overall task by deciding on Pack's contents and its construction • had students sub-divide tasks to match particular students' preferences and abilities and ensure reasonable workload distribution • demonstrated how a timeline and chart for back-mapping could visually record students' targets and allow them to organise resources, monitor progress, modify plans and deliver project on time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students undertook <i>functional analysis</i> by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ sub-dividing overall task into manageable parts ➤ assigning roles and responsibilities according to interests, skills, tasks for completion ➤ creating a timeline

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gave students commercially produced packs to scrutinise: shape, size, design purposes, typical contents, construction materials, special features (e.g., tabs, joins, openings, handle) • allowed students to disassemble packs to discover relationships between: 2-D templates (nets) and 3-D products; contents and compartments • provided various brochures, posters and business cards for students to determine suitability for Pack and analyse different uses of design elements 	and using back-mapping techniques to meet short and long-term goals
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Critical framing phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students positioned as critical thinkers which built their decision-making competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asked students to rank, with justification, problems faced by refugees, local people and NGO workers to aid decision-making about information to include in Pack provoked students to think critically about information presented by human experts and contained in Internet sources by isolating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> particular points of view underlying motives, agendas, interests marginalised or fore-grounded groups or individuals information included or omitted encouraged students to cross-check texts to ensure information accuracy and reliability questioned students about how designs and presentation formats met users' needs had students assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengths and weaknesses of different design materials e.g., cardboard over plastic effectiveness of different design elements and their combinations challenged students to match structural features of texts with specific purposes e.g., when and why to arrange language in a sentence not a paragraph or to use a symbol not a picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students <i>analysed critically</i> when deciding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> why certain information or perspectives were included or excluded from Pack appropriateness and relevance of different presentation formats suitability of materials for Pack's construction which design elements to use and why whether structural features of texts matched specific purposes
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Transformed practice phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> created contexts for students to solve problems of producing Pack by applying their existing and newly acquired knowledge and skills in conventional ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> set high expectations for students in spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence and paragraph construction by modelling correct use and instigating system of self and peer editing encouraged students to select pictures that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> portrayed information about Nigeria, infectious diseases, personal hygiene and first aid accurately and clearly evoked appropriate feelings and emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In <i>applying appropriately</i> students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> produced professional results within designated timeframe made appropriate decisions about textural information with regard for

	<p>of text users and reinforced intended messages while remaining culturally sensitive e.g., landmine victims, malnourished children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helped students make appropriate visual and verbal text decisions e.g., why a description of a cholera sufferer may be more suitable than a picture of one • encouraged students to use and share digital knowledge and skills • had students check local and global coherence within and between texts (e.g., tense, logo, colour scheme) for maximum impact 	<p>purpose, context and audience/s (NGO workers and their parents at showcase event)</p>
<u>Curriculum orientation</u>	<u>Practical application</u>	<u>Learning theory</u>
<i>Transformed practice phase</i>	<i>Learning designed by the coteachers</i>	<i>Knowledge processes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • created contexts for students to combine and recombine existing and newly acquired knowledge and skills to achieve transformed practices and innovative results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extolled students' innovative solutions to problems of Pack design and construction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ different materials to strengthen handle ➢ design of inside compartments to ensure safe, intuitive storage of contents • through ongoing class discussion and sharing of insights and problems, encouraged students to utilise knowledge and skills of others but for new purposes • challenged students to exploit functionality of different Microsoft applications and interrelatedness of design elements for maximum effectiveness • supported students' spontaneous action at showcase evening to collect money for NGO • discussed with students future creative actions to promote global citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in <i>applying creatively</i> students produced hybridised text, the Education Pack, to represent information originally and innovatively while being aesthetically attractive, factually accurate, culturally sensitive and user-friendly

Capital, parent coteachers and student learning

By detailing the approach used to enact the curriculum for the unit, it is now possible to explicate how adopting a multiliteracies orientation enabled the parent coteachers to engage in literacy practices that contrasted with their previous experiences of working in classrooms. Here Bourdieu's (1992) construct

of capital is employed to explicate the process. *Capital* refers to an individual's knowledge of practices and schemas (e.g., social rules, procedures, values or beliefs) within a certain field, for example, education. It may take various forms including cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1992). Teachers become imbued with *cultural capital* in education by engaging in and with the culture of schools and classrooms. They manifest this capital through: practices such as their tone of voice or physical demeanour; the relationships they establish between themselves and actual material objects including books and computers; and, incarnated forms linked to specific institutions (e.g., university professors or school principals). Cultural capital is always relative and only possesses value to the extent that it is legitimised within a particular field (Grenfell, 2007). Importantly, cultural products that pass as holding legitimate value are known and recognised although it is possible for individuals within a field to recognise cultural capital in others but not to hold it themselves (Grenfell, 2007).

As the name implies, *social capital* emphasises *who* rather than *what* a person knows. A person accrues social capital by virtue of possessing durable networks of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1992). This capital is summed up as the value of a person's contacts with others (Grenfell, 2007). Social capital may thus enable individuals to access the cultural capital of others with whom they interact.

Two ways that using a multiliteracies orientation expanded the ways for meaningful engagement on the part of Dale and Ruth are salient. Firstly, harnessing the cultural capital already at their disposal and secondly, accessing that which they built as a result of their involvement in the study. One of John's aims during the situated practice phase was to immerse the students in the topic to help them make as many connections between their existing and new knowledge as possible. During the first Cogen (conducted four weeks prior to the unit's formal commencement), Dale, a medical scientist by profession, recognised that she could provide the students with a microbiologist's perspective on diseases. Subsequently, she co-planned and led a coteaching session in the science laboratory on cholera, malaria and tuberculosis. These three diseases are common among individuals, like refugees, who are forced to live communally in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. Throughout the episode, oral and hands-on activities were scaffolded to focus students on the peculiar literacy demands of texts on diseases, in particular: scientific terminology; laboratory techniques and procedures; and, the relationship between clinical notes and correct diagnoses. Dale also prepared comprehensive, one-page summaries on each of the diseases for future reference by the students and coteachers.

Had John followed the school-based unit outline, it is unlikely that Dale would have had the opportunity to contribute to the students' learning in the way that she did. The outline comprised a teacher resource booklet set out with weekly lesson guidelines, activities and resources and a companion work booklet for students to complete. Adopting a multiliteracies approach meant that Dale was able to access cultural capital available to her from the field of microscopy for use in the classroom. This was evident via her: knowledge of diseases and laboratory techniques; interaction with laboratory equipment such as microscopes and testing mediums; and tertiary qualifications as a medical scientist.

During the first Cogen, Ruth also became aware of the cultural capital available to her for coteaching and student learning in the unit. Her role for five years as President of the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) at her children's previous primary school meant that she frequently had liaised with MPs about issues of import in the running and organisation of the school. This led her to enquire at the local Federal MP's office about information on immigration and refugees as well as the MP's availability for a class visit. She also contacted another parent in the class whose cousin she knew was a refugee advocate to arrange a class visit by him. She wondered whether the activist could bring a refugee with him to talk about his/her first-hand experiences.

Ruth informed the coteachers at the second Cogen of her undertakings. Subsequently, she arranged for the MP to open the unit and emailed ahead a set of questions, co-constructed by the students and coteachers, for him to answer on his visit. The MP covered a wealth of relevant information in his session. He contrasted the treatment of refugees by various Federal Governments and explained how different political philosophies led to changes in policy decisions and associated practices. His presentation challenged the students to think critically about the moral dilemmas surrounding refugee issues in Australia. He also included an interesting recount of his experiences as a young medical doctor of disarming landmines in Afghanistan.

Following Ruth's initial contact, she and John worked together to organise for the refugee activist and a teenage refugee from Afghanistan to visit the classroom in week three of the unit. Both activist and refugee accounts provided the students with insights about the physical and emotional suffering endured. These hardships included: fleeing their homelands under threat of persecution; encountering landmines, kidnappers and people smugglers; seeking refuge and acceptance in foreign lands; and, being separated indefinitely from friends and family. In particular, the students asked the refugee directly about questions from their reading of *Boy Overboard* (Gleitzman, 2004). Doing so enabled them to evaluate critically the accuracy and authority of the text for themselves. Not surprisingly, the activist was openly critical about the treatment of refugees by various Federal Governments. This point was not lost on the students who later commented about the difference between his approach and that of the diplomacy displayed by the MP.

Like Dale, Ruth contributed to the refugee unit in ways that would not have been open to her had John followed the pre-planned school-based unit. Her work as P&C president meant that she had contacts who had assisted her previously. In calling upon some of these, she activated her social capital to appropriate the cultural capital of others to provide resources from beyond the education field for use by the coteachers and class. Nevertheless, her cultural capital was evident when it came to networking with others. Doing so required particular knowledge and skills, notably connecting what certain individuals could offer with what was needed to further student learning in the unit. In previous research, Roth and Tobin (2002) identify how coteaching affords teachers more resources for teaching and learning than one teacher can supply on their own. In this study, the multiliteracies framework expanded the resources available for coteaching literacy by creating more avenues for the parents to access and use their available capital.

Apart from being able to activate their existing capital, the multiliteracies orientation allowed the parents to build capital. This was evident in terms of their knowledge and understanding about *War*

and Refugees and multiliteracies practices. Coteachers typically learn at one another's elbows (Roth & Tobin, 2002). While Dale and Ruth learnt in situ from John, their experience of a multiliteracies pedagogical approach broadened the knowledge base from which they operated in their subsequent interactions with students. Their knowledge base expanded, for example, during the situated practice phase as a result of visits from human experts and the excursion (see Table 2). Similarly, they learnt the metalanguage associated with the five design elements during the overt instruction phase when John, as lead coteacher, taught explicitly on these.

What is of further significance is that the teaching strategies Dale and Ruth demonstrated when working with the students appeared to change as the unit unfolded. To illustrate how the *types* and *quality* of interactions between the parent coteachers and students altered, Table 3 compares Dale's laboratory lesson and a session four weeks later when she worked with the Education Officers.

Table 3: Dale's pedagogy under the microscope

Whole class laboratory session (week 2)	Small group session with Education Officers (week 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● teacher-centred and orchestrated ● highly structured ● one-way dialogue ● students as passive listeners, quiet classroom ● heavy information load ● teacher positioned at front of room; during hands-on activities, interactions restricted to front row ● questioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ limited number of questions of any type ➤ questions not planned for as integral to curriculum delivery ➤ questions mostly reflective of question-answer-response cycle e.g., <i>Can anybody tell me what faeces is?</i> <i>Poo.</i> <i>Exactly right. Well done. Go to the top of the class.</i> ➤ open-ended questions that were broad e.g., <i>How did you go?</i> ➤ rhetorical questions featured where a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● student-centred ● teaching and learning conducted as continuous dialogue between teacher and student/s or student and student ● students encouraged to share ideas and communicate with one another ● information contextualised within unit's content and emphases ● teacher circulated among students, listening and talking with individuals or sub-groups about their specific areas of knowledge or expertise ● questioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ multiple questions, pivotal to curriculum delivery, emphasis on open-endedness ➤ questions reflected multiliteracies metalanguage and foci e.g., <i>Is that an image that you want to present on your PowerPoint? Is that relevant to the target audience?</i> ➤ clarifying questions about managing group processes (to delineate group roles and promote self-regulation) e.g.,

<p>response was not invited e.g., <i>It's harder than it looks, isn't it?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ answers to student questions were truncated ● resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ teacher-prepared resources that supported didactic instruction of factual knowledge 	<p><i>What decisions do you have to make?</i> <i>How have you distributed the workload?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ questions to provoke students to ask themselves or others subsequent questions in order to clarify meanings and reach collective decisions ➤ lines of questioning pursued to: scaffold students' decision-making; generate substantive conversation; and, allow students to exert their agency regarding their learning ➤ wait time lengthened to provide space for reflective thinking by students and teacher ● resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ teacher-sourced resources from home and library for students to consider Pack's construction, its contents and creative use of design elements
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Dale's laboratory lesson occurred at the beginning of the unit before the parent coteachers had engaged in formal discussions and planning with John and Linda about multiliteracies teaching and learning (up until this time the focus of the Cogens had been on establishing coteaching). Dale's lesson reflected a traditional curriculum approach in that her role as teacher was central to planning, organising and delivering the students' learning. Cuban (1984) describes traditional pedagogy as when:

Teacher talk exceeds student talk during instruction so chairs and desks are arranged in rows facing the blackboard. The teacher interacts with the whole class rather than groups and determines the use of classroom time (p.3).

Dale's choice of pedagogy here is neither unusual nor necessarily ineffective. Indeed, Cuban's (1984) study of American classrooms over a ninety year period concluded that, despite reform efforts to move school instruction toward being more student-centred, the practice of teacher-centred classrooms had remained relatively stable up until the end of the twentieth century, particularly in secondary schools. Kalantzis and Cope (2005b) however point out that there are certain weaknesses with traditional teaching namely limiting student expression and excluding different representations of knowing.

Dale's session with the Education Officers occurred a month after her laboratory lesson. During the intervening time, multiliteracies pedagogy, particularly the component of critical framing, had been

discussed at length in the Cogens. John also indicated that he was careful to model critical framing whenever possible in his interactions with students.

In juxtaposing Dale's two sessions, there are several notable differences namely the number and style of questioning and the way in which Dale moved among and interacted with the students. It could be argued that the purposes of the two lessons were different, hence the need for different pedagogies. However, Dale revealed in the Cogen immediately after the session with the Education Officers that she had come to the classroom that day "like a woman on a mission". She was aware that, of all the groups, the Education Officers had made the least progress on their outcome task. When asked in the Cogen how the session had transpired she indicated:

I'm very pleased. I feel like I've galvanised the group a bit more. I don't know why they just/I think they're losing grasp of something but I feel that they're on track today. They've separated into little sub-groups on who/you know they voted on who were the best ones to do the PowerPoint and then they've already done some work on the brochures so that's good. And Kent's going to make the actual physical construction of the box, and he thinks that that's going to be a simple job, but that's going to be bigger than he thinks (Dale, Cogen 9).

During the lesson, the coteachers already had observed that Dale seemed to have made progress with the group. As they listened in the Cogen, they expressed relief that she had been able to assist the students in the ways she described. She added:

But having said that I did plan to do that. I thought, "I'm going to show them the brochures. I'm going to give them the format of the brochures" and I showed them the three different types that I had. So that/because they know the content, I said, "You might want to think about the format, how you want to present it" and so I came with a plan today (Dale, Cogen 9).

As it happened, Dale had scoured her home to find appropriate examples of brochures and business cards to show and discuss with the students. In the lesson, she drew their attention particularly to the use of the design elements. She also brought several commercially produced packs with her from the library for the students to scrutinise. Dale's description of what she did, in conjunction with the analysis of the video recording of her interactions with the students in the session (as set out in Table 3), depict her playing the role of a learning designer or manager. In this role, her work with the students was purposeful and she provided particular artefacts to exemplify and support her teaching but she worked in negotiation *with* the students. Importantly, she used the information exchange within the group as a resource to build capital among the students. They subsequently became more agential in making creative decisions about text designs for the Education Pack on the basis of each student's interests and strengths. In adopting a multiliteracies approach, Dale's

pedagogy seemed to shift from a traditional style to being more transformational. Kalantzis and Cope (2005b) explain that: "Transformation occurs when a learner's engagement is such that it broadens their horizons of knowledge and capability" (p. 37). Accordingly, this model of teaching and learning "values learner differences and stresses the importance of providing time for students to work from their own knowledge platforms, take risks, and be creative problem solvers, but within a supported community" (Exley, 2008, p. 130).

Prior to the research investigation, Dale and Ruth's involvement in schools had followed conventional lines. Carreón, Drake and Barton (2005) describe this as being when schools offer activities and parents disposed to participate respond. They had played auxiliary roles like tuckshop assistants, excursion chaperones and fund raisers. In their individual interviews, both parents expressed similar comments about past participation in their children's classrooms. Typical of their comments was Dale's observation: "You just come in and go." Ruth stated: "Normally when you go and help children in classrooms the teacher will just give you what it is they want you to do." However, as a multiliteracies coteacher, Dale demonstrated that she was more than a visitor or helper in the classroom. She had become a knowledge worker, able to integrate information from across the unit. She planned for learning and enacted teaching strategies that assisted the students to become knowledge producers as opposed to just knowledge consumers. As such, the students made connections and appropriate and relevant decisions about text production and their own learning. Consequently, adopting a multiliteracies approach allowed Dale to build cultural capital that included knowledge of the curriculum and the ability to scaffold instruction using student-centred pedagogy.

Using a multiliteracies orientation to coteach the unit also built social capital among the participants. One way this occurred was through the shared, common experiences of the parent coteachers as co-learners with the students in the learning community. Another way was through the number and range of opportunities afforded to Dale and Ruth for planning and decision-making. In preparation for the situated practice phase, for example, they each advanced multiple ideas and suggestions, many of which were ultimately not enacted, but all of which took time to discuss, explore and evaluate. During this time more interactions occurred among the coteachers than would have been possible under the school's suggested outline where planning decisions resembled a 'fait accompli'. In her final interview, Dale observed that: "In the planning process, we never had any ideas that weren't discussed or dismissed without any consideration." Ruth, also in her final interview, commented that she felt comfortable to ask: "What about this? And what about that?" She elaborated: "And then it would come out into the conversation as to whether it would work in the classroom or whether it wouldn't work in the classroom." Time spent deliberating about ideas and decisions helped the parent coteachers to feel that their contributions were valued and appreciated. Social capital generated in this way was reinvested in the group by way of their ongoing contributions for members' consideration.

Significance

In adopting a multiliteracies approach, opportunities to verify parents' existing roles in different contexts were expanded. While the examples of Dale as 'medical scientist' and Ruth as 'organiser extraordinaire' are obvious, John commented in his final interview about the parent coteachers that:

It was certainly much more constructive I would have thought than anything they could have done as a helper in a classroom because it acknowledges their parenting skills. What we did acknowledges their parenting skills and their common sense and even just their level of knowledge about the world and literacy and numeracy and anything else and also their ability to look at something, understand it and explain it to others and all that sort of thing (John, Interview 2).

As multiliteracies coteachers, Dale and Ruth verified their specific roles (e.g., qualified professional, parent) and general roles (e.g., community member, global citizen) while simultaneously casting themselves in *new* roles, especially that of 'parent coteacher'. In his work on interpersonal behaviour, Turner (2002) theorises that when individuals can make a role for themselves and verify their own and others' roles that successful interactions among individuals result. By adopting multiliteracies as a pedagogical orientation, Dale and Ruth's knowledge about roles was acknowledged and respected more than if their coteaching experience had been circumscribed by a traditional approach. Their various roles were foregrounded as strengths on which the coteaching team could build. Dale, for example, remarked when the coteachers were planning for the situated practice phase:

I bring other things. Like we don't have the teacher training so we feel like we're (sorry, I shouldn't speak for Ruth); like I feel like I'm/we're outside of the loop sort of thing but we do bring other skills (Dale, Cogen 2).

Ruth commented in her final interview:

So to see people learn from the skills that we have, if they can take something from that also, and we learn along the way as well, it's not just about the children learning in the classroom, it's what we took out of it (Ruth, Interview 2).

Research evidence suggests that parents' feelings about their capacity to contribute appear to influence their engagement in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This study showed how using multiliteracies as a pedagogical platform elevated the degree to which Dale and Ruth felt they were able to make a difference in the classroom by the ways they could bring their different roles to bear.

An unexpected finding of the research investigation was that John reported a higher sense of personal efficacy than he had anticipated from having parents in the classroom. Initially, he indicated that, like most high school teachers, he was usually suspicious of parents whom he described as "the natural enemy of the teacher". In the first weeks he reported it was a case of "him watching them watching him." However, in his final interview he commented that:

It's been a very positive experience for me to have two parents who have been there and worked alongside me and still think that I'm a good guy, doing a good job. So, from the point of view of doing the study, it's a bit of a confidence boost I guess and also, I'm much more open to the idea of having parents involved and [to them] seeing what's going on (John, Interview 2).

In response to a question in her final interview about John's pedagogy, Ruth commented that:

I think John's an exceptional teacher and I love to see that he goes outside the square. I really like teachers who do that because I feel the children learn more. It's just not so structured: this is the curriculum, this is the book, this is what we're going to do. He will have children interested. If it's boring, it's the book, they just do it and they don't enjoy it and I don't think they learn as much. Whereas you're doing the refugees, you have so much happening in the classroom, that and outside, that they got excited and they were interested in what was actually happening (Ruth, Interview 2).

Here Ruth describes the exemplary teaching and learning that John showcased using multiliteracies practices. His work and its multi-faceted nature became more visible for the parents whose subsequent comments and actions supported John. In this way his role and status as 'teacher' were verified. Of significance is how John's views about parents changed from those he expressed originally. He realised that *these* parents were 'on his side' and were prepared to work alongside him and be constructive rather than critical. Previous survey research by Rice (2005) identified a discrepancy between teachers' negative beliefs about their status and the good opinion of teachers expressed by the Australian public. In this study, the parents and teacher demonstrated reciprocity by recognising and affirming each other's roles. Adopting a multiliteracies orientation facilitated what was achieved in this regard.

Using a multiliteracies approach enabled the parents to contribute to student literacy learning in ways usually unavailable to them. Their input was clearly evident in the different outcome texts the students produced during the transformed practice phase (e.g., brochures on diseases, the Panel's presentation on moral dilemmas surrounding the refugee issue). Both parents reported feeling proud at the level of student achievement and their involvement in the study. In her final interview, Dale indicated that her relationship with the school had improved. She stated this was because: "I feel that I've had the opportunity to contribute a lot more in a different way. I guess it's a different way because you're planning the class. It's a different structure to what I've had in the past" (Dale, Interview 2). Adopting a multiliteracies orientation worked together with coteaching and the Cogens to enhance what could be achieved by engaging parents in the classroom using a traditional approach. All

coteachers indicated that they would be willing to participate in similar fashion should the opportunity arise at the school in the future.

Conclusion

This study throws traditional approaches toward parents working in schools into sharp relief. All participants' voices were foregrounded to highlight how working in a collaborative classroom using a multiliteracies approach contributed to student learning while simultaneously affording the parents and teacher a rewarding experience. Adopting a multiliteracies orientation enabled the coteaching team to access and build on existing cultural and social capital, especially that of the parents' from beyond the field of education. It also provided a means by which participants' roles were acknowledged and valued. The two-way respect and appreciation that resulted contributed to the breakdown of barriers between the participants, particularly on the teacher's part. There was meaningful engagement among all the participants in this study. Their willingness to reinvest accrued cultural and social capital in future parent-school relationships should be of interest to educators.

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¹ Apart from the author, all names are pseudonyms.