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Finding Wisdom in Practice: The Genesis of the Salty Chip, A Canadian Multiliteracies Collaborative

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Abstract

Using a narrative approach of ‘scenario building’, this paper documents the author’s quest to *find her own wisdom* in her professional practice and considers that quest in light of recent theorizing in the area of New Literacies research. Through the telling of four critical incidents and a subsequent analysis drawing on theories of cultural studies, critical literacy, critical pedagogy and critical disabilities studies, the author explores the process that led to the development of the Salty Chip: A Canadian Multiliteracies Collaborative. The network challenges outdated institutional frameworks that privilege developmentalism and practices rooted in intellectual measurement and standardization, and considers how new forms of participation that include digital spaces mediate our evolving subjectivities and cultural practices.

Introduction

It is safe to assume that any individual or group you wish to influence has access to more wisdom than they currently use. It is also safe to assume that they also have considerably more facts than they can process effectively. Giving them even more facts adds to the wrong pile. They don't need more facts. They need help finding their wisdom. Contrary to popular belief, bad decisions are rarely made because people don't have all the facts.

Simmons, A. (2006, np)

This paper aims to do two things; first, it documents the quest to *find my own wisdom* (Rich & McLaughlin, 2009) in my professional practice and second, it considers that quest in light of recent theorizing in the area of New Literacies research that will help me ‘add it to the right pile’ for readers interested in the genesis of *The Salty Chip: A collaborative multiliteracies network*. Healy (2007) has argued that “...as society shifts, so do its texts in the ways they are constructed and communicated” (p. 5). The shifting communicational landscape must prompt a reconsideration of pedagogy along with a reconsideration of the traditional educational roles of both teachers and students. To that end, I engage in a shared examination of my own curricular life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), believing that we cannot imagine a new way of being in education if we cannot first acknowledge, reflect upon, and critique our own experiences.

To document my curricular journey, I employ a narrative methodology of scenario building (De Jovenel, 2000). The scenarios capture critical incidents from my own experience that both situate and stimulate critical reflection and are unified by offering a glimpse into some of the experiences that have led to my current thinking and, in particular, to my appreciation for and affinity with the work of New Literacies' scholars. Scenario building, although future oriented, aims not to *predict*, but to help *shape* the future: enabling us “to consider tomorrow’s world as something that we create, rather than something already decided” (p. 37). De Jovenel contends

that “the human race has always been preoccupied by its future” (p. 37) and that the “anxiety caused in times of significant change”, prompt many “to search for ‘invariables’, hang on to the old order and its reproduction, and look for reassurance everywhere” (p. 38). In this paper, the scenarios serve as a contextual backdrop for theoretical discussions in literacy education, illustrations of the desire to hold on to the ‘old order’ and collectively, how the stories underpinning the scenarios led me to create *The Salty Chip* – a digital space in which new forms of participation with multiple literacies are enacted, and teacher and student subjectivities and practices are expanded.

A scenario building methodology aims to do three things: “shed light on the path”, take note of “major zones of uncertainty” and consider “strategies that could be adopted” (De Jouvenel, 2000, p. 46) as we work together toward an unknowable future. A reconsideration of culture, place, and identity within the affordances of contemporary theories allow a re-imagined project of literacy. The three scenarios presented first are *hindsight scenarios*; that is, they look back at *what has been*. My analysis of the critical incidents shared draw on theories from critical pedagogy, critical literacy, critical disabilities studies, and cultural theories as a way of excavating and unpacking the events of my past. The final scenario is forward looking in a way that may help us reconcile some of the tensions as we navigate a changing landscape and consider *what might be*.

Scenario One: Learning is Child's Play

I grew up in rural Ontario, Canada; the second of four children. My introduction to formal 'schooling' occurred when I attended a small, two room schoolhouse, (S.S. #9, Downie) about a half a mile down our road. The class was a small mix of neighbours, family and friends. By March of my first grade year, all of the small township schools were closed, and we were moved into a new, much larger, eight room school. As the smaller schools closed, my father attended the auctions and brought home boxes of books, a full-size blackboard and some desks. My uncle built floor to ceiling bookshelves and called it our library. "Playing school" in my house was serious business! A slightly older brother was not at all interested in this play or having me as his teacher, and a younger sister was too close in age - we spent more time fighting about who got to hold the coveted chalk. However, a younger brother was just the right age for to soak up all of the individual attention.

The two of us "played" with the books and the chalkboard as they interested us. We were too young to recognize or understand the grade levels indicated on some of the spines. Instead, we chose books because they were new (to us) or unique in some way, or we liked the pictures or maps in them. Often, I taught him whatever I was learning in school at the time. This worked out just fine until he entered kindergarten. Then, for the first time, I found myself in trouble at school; summoned to the kindergarten room by both the principal and the teacher! In a kind but firm tone, they requested that I stop teaching him at home. You see, I was creating a problem for the teacher. The rest of the children were just learning their colours and how to make balls and sticks in preparation for printing. My brother was well beyond that; I had taught him cursive writing as I learned it in grade three the year before. What was the teacher to do?

This scenario represents my abrupt introduction to developmental theories and the institutional desire for linear sequence, synchrony and reproduction. Proceeding

in this way works well for institutions, and allows for some reasonable attempts to group students based on what studies have shown that (other) children have been observed to do at particular ages (Piaget & Inhelder, 1966). While I am quite certain that in teaching my younger brother, I would have reproduced some approaches and even emulated some of the language of my teachers, I am equally certain that I didn't have a firm grasp on any rules of order or sequence. My desire to decide what we learned each day would have been tempered by my one young student's willingness to 'play'. It was organic to our mutual interests and would have involved some degree of negotiation. However, "schools" I learned that day, have been conceptualized as "places where we sort people by their manufacturing date" (Stager via @davidwees, 2010, np). An industrial model of schooling dependent on linearity, 'standardization' and conformity, has led Robinson (2010) to announce the emergence of a crisis of *human resources*. Education under an industrial model, he argues, "dislocates many people from their natural talents" (2010, np). My early experiences taught me that learning *in school* is associated with many rules that I had not applied when learning *outside of school*. I understood and internalized that to mean that I must adopt the rules in order to 'learn' what counts, and to subvert a process of learning driven by a child's curiosity as s/he interacts with the world. Concern about the dis-association from a child's 'natural talents' and ways of learning become a recurring theme in both my academic and professional practice.

Scenario Two: Learning to Read 'the World'

In the mid 1970s, after the fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War, my parents, along with two other couples in our community, made a decision that has profoundly altered many lives, my own included. Aware of the mass exodus of people from Vietnam (often referred to as 'boat people' at the time) they sponsored a family of refugees to aid in their resettlement. Our 'family' included a young married couple, their friend, a cousin and a young nephew. The youngest, only 8 years old at the time, had been tossed on the boat at the last minute by his desperate parents. He quickly became my new little brother, and I was thrilled at the chance to 'play teacher' again. In my life up to that point, I had experienced little in the way of visible diversity so there was much to learn about this new family. We were challenged, for example, in our rural little corner of the world, to provide the quantities of fresh fish, seafood and rice that would bring them some of the comforts of a home that they had fled. We knew nothing of their culture, and very little of the conflict that brought them to Canada outside of media reports.

In true Freireian fashion however, as I began to teach my new brother and his family how to read and write 'the word', once we shared a language, they taught me a great deal more about 'reading the world'. As we were eventually able to share stories, I came to better understand how foreign and inadequate my little library of books was to them. The stories that our adopted family were eventually able to tell detailed the powerful, political and often tragic experiences that they had endured in their young lifetime. I continue to process the lessons learned from them to this date. As I moved into my professional teaching life in the early 1980s, the system I entered appeared starkly disconnected from the increasing social, cultural, ethnic or gender diversity we were meeting in the classroom. I could see it and feel it, but at the time, didn't really understand how to address it. It seemed that my job was to ensure that assimilation occurred. I don't know that I could articulate at the time what bothered

me about the way our schools dealt with our immigrant students. I know that many of our culturally and linguistically diverse students ended up in special needs classrooms and I know that we had virtually no meaningful resources to teach with. I could not help thinking about how my very bright little Vietnamese brother must have felt about school.

Like my adopted brother, educator and researcher Luigi Iannacci entered school in Canada as a culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student. In his research on the topic (Iannacci, 2005; 2006), he observed that CLD students cope by quickly learning

'procedural display'; a learner's need to 'pass' by echoing, mirroring and complying with peer and teacher accepted responses and behaviors. This need to pass can limit CLD students' academic achievement and cause them to suppress their backgrounds in order to facilitate their classroom social identity as "the good student" (Rymes & Pash, 2001). Procedural display is often unquestioned and has even been constructed as a universal and desirable trait... (2006, p. 58)

As much as I appreciate Iannacci's clarification here, I am deeply unsettled by his words - not only because I recognize what he is describing in my CLD students; it goes well beyond that. He has drawn my attention to something else: in my own quest to be a 'good student' and a 'good teacher' I too have learned procedural display. Over the years, I have 'echoed', 'mirrored' and 'complied with' peer and Ministry accepted responses and behaviours and I begin to realize that I too am assimilating into a culture of industrial schooling.

Scenario Three: Constructing and Enacting Ever-Shifting Discursive Identities

...I am in fourth grade in a four-five split. After receiving some 'testing' results, my teacher invites me and two others to join the fifth grade students when she is teaching them. We don't 'skip', but we have her for grade 4, 5 and 6, so we don't repeat any topics. She and her husband travel a lot and she brings her travels into our classroom. She is always smiling and it is obvious she loves to teach. I really like this class.

...I am in 9th grade at a high school in a neighbouring town. School boundary lines send most of my elementary classmates to another high school in a different city and I know only one girl from my bus. In the second week of school, my principal sends a form letter home to my parents. The letter says something to the effect of,

'Dear Parent/Guardian: Your son/daughter has completed diagnostic testing conducted annually at the beginning of in his/her mathematics class and based on these results, it is recommended that he/she drop down to the four-year program in Mathematics'.

I recall feeling deeply ashamed. I can barely recall the test, but vividly remember the teacher handing our papers back in order; first distributing those with the highest marks and ending with those who achieved the lowest marks. The highest and lowest scores were also recorded on the blackboard. After an agonizing and very public wait, I receive my paper last. I had no idea that one test would carry such long-term implications when writing it. I am confused, but at the same time convinced that this

test is some sort of proof that I must not be smart enough to be in that class. My 'unschooled' father, however, feels differently. Outraged that the school would use a single test so early in the school year and ignore achievement and placement recommendations from my elementary school, he refuses the request to have me 'drop down'. My confidence as a learner significantly altered, I struggle through academic math until Grade 13. The teacher in that class is kind and encouraging. He sits with me and explains things in different ways until they become clear. He pairs me with a classmate to work out problems together. I earn an A+ on my final exam in mathematics that year.

...I am in about my third year of teaching. I have been assigned to work as a Learning Resource Teacher because I have additional qualifications in Special Education. As part of the board's preparation for that role, I am asked to participate in the testing that students referred to my resource program will experience, so that I am better able to liaise with parents as their results and recommendations come in. I am completely unprepared, however, when my own results are returned. I am told that the testing revealed 'dual exceptionalities'; both Gifted and Learning Disabled. There is no further discussion of the results aside from a joke about my memory. I am unsure of what to do with this information or what it means for someone who is no longer a student 'in school'. For years, I do nothing. I tell absolutely no one. In an educational context that privileges practice based on developmentalism and Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores, my 'results' inflame earlier feelings of confusion, shame and embarrassment. Although I am unable to articulate why at the time, I understand that my own professional environment is not a safe place to share this information. Instead, I dis-associate from my embodied knowing, in order to function within the institutional frames of knowledge and learning. As I work with my 'special needs' students and review their test results, I have a gnawing sense of unease about what these tests really mean and the purpose(s) they serve. I become disillusioned and dissatisfied in my work, while receiving institutional praise for my teaching.

Major Zones of Uncertainty

Educator and researcher Geraldine VandeKleut (2009) recently asserted that the “practice of pedagogy has been, traditionally and historically, to maintain power and authority over knowledge” (p. 20). In so doing, it would be possible I suppose, to have some semblance of confidence or ‘certainty’ over topics such as what counts as knowledge, how we measure knowledge and how we organize our educational systems. As I began teaching, I did not question the systems of authority that operated around me as I navigated them.

In an article aptly titled *The Necessity of Uncertainty*, Susan Kidd Villaume (2000) argues that progress in teaching comes from an on-going search for discrepancies between our beliefs and our practices. The scenarios that I have shared have contributed to my belief system in powerful ways, deeply rooted within my own experiences; many operating at a tacit or embodied level. Our cultural norms were established in very insular ways as we did not yet have easy access to ‘other ways of knowing’ afforded by modern technologies. The process of addressing discrepancies happened slowly; first as I began to question official knowledge as it concerned my students and then much later, as it concerned me.

To illustrate, consider the case of 'Jake'.¹ A sweet young boy that I met in his fourth grade year, Jake was referred to the Learning Resource Centre because he was experiencing some difficulty in reading. The jump from the primary division to the junior division was proving to be a significant transition for him. Using the tools provided by my school district, Jake was assessed and found to be reading at a grade one level; a fact that shocked the classroom teacher who referred him. Nevertheless, he had met an assessment threshold that required him to undergo further testing. Jake was found to have significant learning disabilities that painted a very challenging academic future for him. Contemporary discourse would have certainly labelled him 'at risk'. And yet the results simply did not match the performance levels that led to his referral. Jake and I met several times per week. I found him to be delightfully engaging and quite able to read and discuss anything about his hockey hero, Mats Sundin. Like many teachers, I scrambled to find resources that I could use that were relevant to his areas of interest to build on his natural interest. We made some progress, but I lost track of him when I began a new job the following year. We met up again years later, at a university awards ceremony at which he received the highest medal of achievement in his program. It seems that in education, some of the 'data' we gather is incomplete, focused on discrete kinds of decontextualized skills that when fit together over time can offer us meaningfully different kinds of lessons as a bigger picture emerges.

The book, *Educational Reform: A Self-Scrutinizing Memoir* written by psychologist Seymour Sarason (2002) provided both insight and inspiration into Jake's story for me. In his memoir, Sarason, retired and in his 80's, explores what he refers to as his 'conceptual baggage'; the professional training that inhibited his ability to practice in more responsive ways. He describes his earlier work to be much like artists sketches; each one dealing with one or two problems, but only as they are brought together does the artist get a sense of the overall picture emerging. Retrospectively, as a larger and layered picture unfolded through his writing, Sarason began to challenge a number of institutional practices and assumptions that had gone largely unquestioned as they had become a part of the very fabric of the system he practiced within. He recounts how he had performed his role in schools (e.g., prescribing practices for teachers to follow based on ascribing unjustified significance to the pseudo-scientific labels associated with IQ measurements) in ways that met the criteria expected of his professional association - while silently wondering to himself *how on earth* the teacher managed the behaviours of the high needs students in her daily care. It seems that he too, had learned procedural display.

I began to wonder about the extent to which professional 'conceptual baggage' is tied to procedural display. For example, during my professional practice in a school system, we initiated the under-theorized move in the Special Education field toward 'inclusive classrooms'; a practice that saw 'exceptional' students served within their own classrooms rather than being withdrawn or assigned full-time to segregated placements. The superficial and problematic 'shift' occurred in the physical world; it was only a matter of moving bodies, scheduling resources and collaborating with classroom teachers. The necessary and complex epistemological shift has proven much more challenging. Calling the project of inclusion an 'ethical' one, Julie Allen (2005) argues for "a fundamental shift away from the deficit-oriented thinking that

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

has for so long driven educational practices” (p. 282). To move from a universal approach to practice that focuses on optics, to a differentiated response designed around students’ needs, abilities and resources, requires a sophisticated shift in thinking.

Complex and significant change does not happen quickly or easily in schools. As Bernadette Baker (2002) observes, special educators

demonstrate a remarkable resilience through linguistic dexterity. While they use a contemporary lexicon of inclusion, the cosmetic amendments to practice and procedure reflect assumptions about pathological defect and normality based upon a disposition of calibration and exclusion. (p. 167)

The institutional context within which we practiced contributed to this phenomenon. One could argue that the move to inclusion was largely a superficial rhetorical one. Despite physically locating students in 'regular' classrooms, practices governing 'identification' and 'placement' of students with special needs remained bound up in the segregating discourses of deficit and difference necessary to first justify and then secure the very funding tied to the desired resources. Although students were served in a classroom setting, teachers were required to continue assessing, documenting and reporting using practices from a previous and largely incommensurate model. The conditions of our professional practice, often reduced to non-differentiated 'teacher training,' inculcated us into a culture that did not ask us to engage in the reflective practice that might grow professional discernment, but rather to "hear and adhere" (Ware, 2003, p. 130). For me, the 'official rhetoric' did not always align well with ethical and authentic practice.

Eventually I began to question institutional decisions or directives. For example, I elected to abandon the assigned basal texts provided for 'weak' students in favour of using authentic literature based on their interests and abilities. In my experience, the prescribed programs were a form of 'impoverished pedagogy' (L. Iannacci, personal communication, November 10, 2000) that served to further dull the interest and achievement of my students. Despite a culture of fear that underpinned my colleagues' advice to the contrary, I never experienced negative repercussions when I voiced concerns or raised questions – or even when I altered my teaching. I don't wish to suggest that I always knew better, but perhaps because of my own experiences (of unintentionally transgressing school practices and discourses, working with students who did not conform to norms, questioning my own capacity as a learner), I desperately wanted to engage *differently* to ensure that my students had opportunities to see themselves as capable learners.

Stephen Downes (2012), Senior Researcher for the National Research Council of Canada, claims that when an individual *knows* something, there is "a feeling of recognition" (p. 16). My experiences taught me that learners do not all learn in the same way or at the same speed, and that teachers are also learners. Downes argues that we learn "not by acquiring knowledge as though it were so many bricks or puzzle pieces, but by becoming the sort of person we want to be" (p. 29). He challenges critics to show "why a linear, orderly process is the only way to learn, [and] to show why learners should be compelled, and then motivated, to follow a particular program of studies" (p. 94). With the significant advances in technology that have been changing our access to, and participation in our own learning – the linear 'sorted by age' approach to education may have passed its expiry date. Sefton-Green (2006)

argues that the advances in technologies have blurred the boundaries between formal and informal learning, raising significant challenges to traditional conceptualizations of power, control and the development of subjectivities as they are mediated through the culturally diverse digital world.

New approaches bring new challenges and too often new orthodoxies. Simons and Masschelein (2005) claim that,

a new governmentality appears in the production of a new kind of human nature—a human nature no longer referenced to a norm of corporeal ability achieved through compensation, but to a norm of rational-economic choice based on an *ability to participate* [emphasis added]. In these terms, disability differs from normality only by degree of need—that is, the same kind of choosing entrepreneurial identity is germane to the disabled subject, only he/she requires more from the school to construct/fulfill this identity—rather than kind (e.g., abnormal, deviant, etc.). (p. 220)

The narratives that I have shared challenge developmentalism, the privileging of IQ and particular ways of knowing and foreground the ‘discursive power’ (Zemmels, 2012) of this new exchange. I would suggest that rather than simply asking that schools do ‘more’, we acknowledge collectively that education is a complex (and messy) practice and plan accordingly. Its complexity demands significant differentiation – an initiative that is currently promoted in educational practice. The numerous technological advances experienced in this past decade alone, have provided multiple avenues that allow us all to participate differently and where “the construction of the self is a cycle whereby culture constitutes our identity, but we in turn create that identity through our social practices” (Foucault cf Zemmels, 2012, p.13). Engaging in new forms of participation must coincide with a recasting of teachers as professional discerners (Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005) so that participation is enacted as critically sophisticated citizens collaborating in the ethical project of learning. It is this agenda that led me to the work of New Literacies scholars and to multiliteracies theories in particular.

Strategies that could be Adopted

The term 'multiliteracies' was coined by the New London Group (NLG) in a manifesto: *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures* (1996). More than a decade later, much has been debated about the approach, and two of the NLG in particular, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope (2012), have continued to refine and describe their original ideas. In their most recent book, simply titled *Literacies*, they write:

The Multiliteracies approach attempts to explain what still matters in traditional approaches to reading and writing, and to supplement this with knowledge of what is new and distinctive about the ways in which people make meanings in the contemporary communications environment. The term 'Multiliteracies' refers to two major aspects of meaning-making today. The first is social diversity, or the variability of conventions of meaning in different cultural, social or domain-specific situations. Texts vary enormously depending on social context - life experience, subject matter, disciplinary domain, area of employment, specialist knowledge, cultural setting or gender identity to name just a few of the key

differences...The second aspect of meaning-making highlighted by the idea of Multiliteracies is multimodality. This is a particularly significant issue today, in part as a result of the new information and communications media. Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal - in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning. ...This means that we need to extend the range of literacy pedagogy beyond alphabetical communication. It also means that, in today's learning environment, we need to supplement traditional reading and writing skills with multimodal communications, particularly those typical of the new, digital media." (p.1-2)

As I reflect upon this definition, I wonder if the ways in which people make meaning are really so 'new', or if it is our increasing awareness and articulation of different ways to come to literacy that is 'new'. Perhaps our own changing participation has led us to be more intolerant of institutional forms of schooling. Perhaps it is an example of the influence the new 'networked spaces' are having on our professional identities. Either way, the increasing *access* to meaning-making tools and information outside of 'schools', swells like a tidal wave that will not be resisted or ignored. Rather, as educators, changing our own perspectives may allow us to see our students as capable and literate in ways that traditional views of literacy obfuscate (Luke & Elkins, 1998; O'Brien, 2001).

Rich (2010) imagines a future where new forms of participation are possible, but suggests that it will require adaptations on the part of us all:

Today the questions that should be asked about schools and schooling are those that take into account the social context in which we live. We need to attend to the world outside of the closed context of the "system" and recognize the ways in which the world is interrelated. We need to understand that each and every student comes to the classroom with a biography and a way of being in the world... A key challenge for educators is to adapt the institutions in which they work to meet the emerging reality of the connected environment... At the heart of any change in education will be the re-drafting, re-creation of a new story for education—a story that recognizes the ways in which people are interrelated and responsible for each other. (p. 129-132)

Rather than conforming to the system, Rich's vision imagines the system adapting to learners and the learning environment. Imaging this different future requires a willingness to share the power and authority over knowledge. It asks us to create the conditions under which learners, together, will flourish, customize and personalize their learning, and create solutions to problems they care about; nothing short of a revolution of our education system (Robinson, 2010).

Scenario Four: The Salty Chip - a 'new story' of educational possibility

In 2004, I began working on a 'financial literacy' project. In the beginning, my colleagues and I digitized content and inserted it into online courses for teachers. At the same time, we were conducting research to determine the effectiveness of the interactive digital content on learning (Hibbert & Coulson, 2009). Over time, we began to study the context within which teachers and students were engaging with

digital content. By including students and teachers in the research process and positioning them as co-researchers, we learned much more about their multiliteracies practices – both in and out of school. A recurring theme mentioned by the teachers in our group was a lack of time required to stay abreast of continuous technological change. At the same time, the students in our group expressed frustration with the dearth of technology available, accessible or permissible in many of their classes. Exasperated, one student, Ali, shrugged and said, ‘You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make ‘em drink’.

Having worked as a teacher and consultant within a school system for sixteen years, I was more than familiar with technological challenges: firewalls, the lag time between new software training and receipt of the software, outdated hardware and limited access to sufficient computers, to name a few. It would be easy to join Ali in her resignation. However, schools are finding it increasingly challenging to control activity on the mobile devices students bring to school - and some are wondering if they should. While it is true that we cannot make a horse drink, what we can do is arouse thirst. I began to ask myself what would lead to a ‘thirst’ for working with multiliteracies in schools? Our research had indicated that we needed to build something that wasn’t dependent upon particular software, and that drew on teachers’ and students’ strengths. And so, *The Salty Chip* (<http://www.saltychip.com/>) was born.

The Salty Chip is a network that brings teachers and students together as collaborators navigating a changing communicational landscape together. It mimics many of the web applications that wired young people use, and points to educational uses that help teachers better understand classroom applications. It is designed to support teachers and students as they plan together, gather feedback and build upon each other’s ideas in ways that reflect the participatory culture of learning in the 21st century. It creates an ‘audience’ for our work that allows us to learn more about our unique cultural identities and ways of engaging with all forms of text. Importantly, its fundamental structure challenges the reductionist limitations of theories rooted in age, stage and IQ by allowing participants to demonstrate multiple ‘ways of knowing’, responsive to the needs of both teachers and students.

The Salty Chip allows us to do what all teachers do naturally – begin with an idea, (or be inspired by an existing one) try it out, modify it, share it, update it, and use it purposefully in our particular context. The learning is in the ‘doing’! One of the overwhelming themes that has arisen in my research with students and teachers, is that many teachers are either unfamiliar with using new technologies that would allow them to engage in new literacies’ practices, unsure of how to integrate them into their curriculum in meaningful and purposeful ways, or fearful of the implications of engaging with ‘networked publics’. This is one of the strengths that working collaboratively offers the educational community. As teachers, we recognize the power of working from our students’ strengths and building on their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Armanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). We need to apply this thinking to our community of educators. Submitting a ‘chip’ that reflects an individual’s current strengths and watching how others redesign it in ways that engage their particular knowledge, culture and experiences to suit their learning context, can be highly instructive. As our knowledge and experience of ‘multiliteracies-in-use’ grows, so too will our collective abilities to design relevant, engaging experiences with and for our students (Hibbert, 2009).

Working Toward a Different Future

It seems that society has been so preoccupied with accountability mechanisms in a period that fetishizes 'efficiency' (Stein, 2002) that we ignore the toll it has taken on our collective imagination. Imagining and enacting a different future requires a re-negotiation of 'what counts'; it requires educators and researchers to develop a "range of pedagogical moves that teachers can make as they work with learners to develop their capacities to mean and to communicate" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p 14). However, as my scenarios among others have articulated, teachers have traditionally worked within a culture that seems to reproduce itself rather than re-imagine itself.

For Sefton-Green (2011), a cultural studies framework offered a means of examining "how curriculum, and especially an attention to the hidden or less obvious processes of schooling in the form of pedagogy, construct forms of inclusion and exclusion especially organized around gender, ethnicity and class" (p. 56). Cultural studies

opened up ways to understand at the individual level how schooling might work on individuals both in terms of how negotiating the processes of enculturation offered an agentic way for self-constitution; and how/if it offered forms of structuration for identity work. (p. 56)

In other words, it provided a means to challenge assumptions about learning that over time, become normalized and therefore, unquestioned. It allows us to begin to "disenthrall" ourselves from the ways we have always done things (Robinson, 2010) and understand the futility of attempting to hold on to power and authority over knowledge in this changing context.

Sorting out what counts as learning (in-school, out-of-school, informal, formal) has been the subject of much research (e.g., Bekerman, Burbules, Keller, & Silberman-Keller, 2005). For an example of how pervasive the state’s desire for authority over learning can be, consider the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2005)

program, *Helping Ontario Children Arrive At School, Ready To Learn*. What image of the child outside of schools does this title suggest? How do the vast majority of young children learn to walk, talk, feed and dress themselves, ride a bike - *before* they have a program that *gets them ready* to learn? The distinction that is made here of course, underlines the Ministry's emphasis on learning *for school*. The activities of learning in school are privileged, organized and measured in particular ways and in the process, maintain power and authority over knowledge. Teaching my younger brother *out of order* caused a problem for his Kindergarten teacher, as she had developed a curriculum that progressed along a sequential path, at a predefined speed. My grade 4 teacher created a flexible curriculum to ensure that her students were able to participate in fluid ways, based on their individual needs. My grade 9-12 math teachers taught math in ways that mirrored the institutional expectations of the time; my grade 13 math teacher taught *me* – and by doing so, ensured we were both successful.

This more humanistic approach is where I think that a multiliteracies approach can be particularly instructive. Its very name signals that we have moved beyond singular notions of literacy. I appreciate its inclusive attention to language and communication across cultures, not only texts. Beyond teaching 'English', for example, I was ill-equipped to help my new Vietnamese family with my limited understanding and resources during the time that they were in our home; nor did I have access to meaningful resources when teaching in the school system. Since then however, resources that support cultural and linguistic diversity have grown significantly (see for example, www.iteachilearn.org). When we combine developments such as these, with technological tools that offer ways for all students in our classrooms to engage more meaningfully, and a future that helps students 'participate fully' looks more promising. What we *do* with the affordances of technology is what becomes interesting, and can inspire new ways of participating in and engaging with learning -- and with colleagues and students around the world. What a difference this access would make for new immigrant students!

The participatory shift has implications for teachers and students as it puts us into a state of learning together. For some, it generates a level of fear and apprehension associated with the unknown wired world, especially for adults who bear responsibility for minors interacting with the digital information. Too often, the response is to either ban technology or limit access. When we shut down access to technology, Jenkins (2009) argues, our children are 'deskilled', widening the participation gap between home and school. I wonder if technology hasn't simply made an age old problem more visible and perhaps more urgent. The need to demystify the unknown is real, and the *Salty Chip* was designed in part, to accomplish this by bring learners' needs, interests and knowledge in this emerging area, together with those of their teachers.

Consider the following example: the wired world we occupy gives rise to what Bruns (2007) refers to as a hybridized user-producer position; one he calls a '*producer*'. Considered within the educational context, it redefines the traditional teacher-student power relationships, and is characterised as follows:

Community-Based - produsage proceeds from the assumption that the community as a whole, if sufficiently large and varied, can contribute more than a closed team of producers, however qualified they may be.

Fluid Roles - producers participate as is appropriate to their personal skills, interests, and knowledges; this changes as the produsage project proceeds, ***Unfinished Artefacts*** - content artefacts in produsage projects are continually under development, and therefore always unfinished; their development follows evolutionary, iterative, palimpsestic paths.

Common Property, Individual Merit - contributors permit (non-commercial) community use, adaptation, and further development of their intellectual property, and are rewarded by the status capital they gain through this process. (Bruns, 2007, p. 4, cf Kress & Packler)

The Salty Chip was designed as a project that could help teachers and students come together in that state of learning where they bring their unique biographies, their knowledge, their experiences and skills to bear on relevant tasks that reflect both the goals of a curriculum as well as the interests and needs of learners. We are early in this process. As we grow, it is necessary to continue to explore the educational practices relevant to a digital age within educational settings struggling make the cultural shift from an industrial age to a globalized conceptual age (Tan & McWilliam, 2009). *What does teaching and learning look like in a participatory culture?* Does participation in a multiliteracies' collaborative foster students' and teachers' critical understanding of literacy abilities more broadly, and if so, how? In what ways do students and teachers engage with one another, with multiple texts, and to what purposeful end? How do users create meaning in the context of using multiliteracies' practices? What innovative teaching approaches, curricular modifications, assessment tools and social networking redesigns are enabled by a multiliteracies approach? How does the structure of the network shape our subjectivities and cultural practices? In other words, *how does accessing and using students' and teachers funds' of knowledge in this digital context challenge and disrupt outdated understandings of development, learning and knowledge?*

Sir Kenneth Robinson (2010) makes that case that "life is not linear, it's organic" and that we "create our lives symbiotically as we explore our talents in relation to the circumstances they help to create for us". In many ways, this is how my own curricular experiences coalesced into a vision that became the Salty Chip. Learning is negotiated, it is relevant and customizable. It honours and respects the learning of others. It creates conditions that foster interdependency while allowing for independence. Through his work in Africa, Mastin Prinsloo (2005) suggests that new literacies function as artefacts; "as signs that are embedded in local relations which are themselves shaped by larger social dynamics of power, status, access to resources and social mobility" (p. 96).

Recently, researchers have been calling for new approaches to teaching and learning to attend to the ways in which the affordances of technology have disrupted the dynamics of the pedagogical relationship (see for example, Ashton & Newman, 2006). As we collectively find our wisdom in this ever-changing context, Kenyon and Hase (2001) propose an approach:

Education has traditionally been seen as a pedagogic relationship between the teacher and the learner. It was always the teacher who decided what the learner needed to know, and indeed how the knowledge and skills should be taught. ...andragogy ... has connotations of a teacher-learner relationship. ...[W]e should now be looking at an educational approach where it is the learner

him/herself who determines what and how learning should take place. Heutagogy, the study of self-determined learning, may be viewed as a natural progression from earlier educational methodologies... and may well provide the optimal approach to learning in the twenty-first century. (p.1)

While I like the ideas proposed around heutagogy, I would argue that its evolution springs from static and institutionalized understandings of pedagogy. 'Traditional' definitions of pedagogy were indeed teacher-centric, but pedagogical understandings and practices have not remained static. If we are to change the system, we need to change more than the terminology we use in search of new models and paradigms. Rather, we must engage in a culture of professional inquiry; seeking both individual and collective *wisdom in practice*, and then making it visible to others so that we can engage in a critical dialogue that may move us beyond 'procedural display'.

Pat Kane (2011) offers some ideas about how this might be achieved. In his book *The Play Ethic*, he argues that

education needs a new narrative of purpose... to recover its own original play ethic. We need a new way to look at the complexity of the educational experience -- one that regards the apparent 'messiness' and 'imprecision' of play as a deep resource for understanding, rather than something which has to be squeezed out of curricula tailored to deliver better performance statistics for short term politicians. I suggest that scholars might unite around a new notion of literacy - a 'multi-literacy' that ties together the deep humanism of the teaching profession with the ludic realities that face their pupils in a new century. (p. 13)

As an educator and as a learner, Kane's words resonate deeply with me. In my on-going quest to find my own wisdom, I have learned that in order to 'let go' of the old order and its reproductive nature, it is necessary to free oneself up to play. To achieve any measure of systematic growth, engagement and change, organizational leaders must foster a culture of 'play' within their institutions. As we participate in the conceptual age, we must be free to imagine and enact new possibilities for the future.

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