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Research Result Summaries

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### Multiliteracies for Adolescents and Adults: Teaching and Learning Literacy in the 21st Century

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## **Research Summary for REB and Scholarship One**

### **Multiliteracies for Adolescents and Adults: Teaching and Learning Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

This research drew upon the theory of multiliteracies first developed by the New London Group (NLG, 1996) to explore teaching and learning in Windsor and Essex County, Ontario and Halifax and the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia. Community-based learning sites in both provinces engaged in the research as well as a local school board in southern Ontario. This study was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight grant. Research in the field of multiliteracies has been mostly focused on younger children in classrooms. This study contributes to the broader research field through its investigation of the role of multiliteracies in teaching and learning amongst adolescents and adults.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Multiliteracies contends that teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must take into account cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD); multimodality; social justice perspectives; and technological advances.

Firstly, one of the new areas currently coming into the spotlight in multiliteracies is a greater understanding of the connections between what multiliteracies has to offer in relation to cognitive and sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition theory and practice. Multiliteracies argues that CLD needs to be seen from an asset perspective and that CLD must be incorporated into every class.

Secondly, Kress (2010) posits that multimodality has always been with us – the ability to express our ideas through a range of modes including spatial, linguistic, gestural, visual, and oral. The linguistic modes tend to be privileged in current western societies. Multimodality, when incorporated into teaching, allows learners to convey their meaning in a variety of ways in which they must think through the affordances and limitations of combining modes to create meaning. It is important to note that multimodality recognizes that all modalities also reflect cultural context (ie the architecture of a building may speak to cultural norms).

Thirdly, multiliteracies also has a strong interest in thinking through what it means to create an equitable, plural world, which is why a social justice focus has always undergirded this theory (Kalantzis et al. 2016). Language is social, relationship based, and always power laden according to theorists of multiliteracies.

Lastly, technological advances have from the inception of this theory been seen as key to shaping the direction of new kinds of expanded literacies within multiliteracies (Mills, 2015). However, the research interest is about the disposition and attitudes of learners as well as how they actually interact with technology and develop their own digital literacies rather than about the technical aspects of new technology or online environments. The theory of multiliteracies continues to develop. This theory has helped offer insight into the pedagogy of the sites studied in this research.

## Methodology and Methods

This research used multiple case studies (Stake, 2005) in both Ontario and Nova Scotia. Sites included secondary school classrooms, a multicultural centre teaching English as an Additional Language; a community-based music organization; a French language institute teaching French as an Additional Language; a museum; an art gallery; an arts-based organization; and a dance studio.

The methodology was grounded constructivist theory (Charmaz, 2014) which argues that researchers must always be conscious of their own bias and positionality. This methodology involved coding the data.

There were 41 participants in total in the study across the following categories: secondary school teachers; secondary school students; adult educators; adult learners; administrators; and policy makers. Policy makers were included in the study to provide greater insight into the systemic supports and barriers within education.

Participants could choose from the four methods in the study: 1. Face-to-face one-hour interviews; 2. Learning space or classroom observations (pen to paper field notes taken for 3-4 hours usually around 4-5 times over the course of two months); 3. Document analysis (of lesson plans, exemplars, policy documents); 4. Secondary data analysis of original film footage shot at these sites. For example, a participant could choose to be observed but not be interviewed. They also had the option to be identified publicly or have their identities kept confidential. The school board REB requested that all teachers' identities for research publications be kept confidential. In practice, participants did choose a wide variety of ways to participate in the study.

## Outcomes

This study helped advance knowledge in the area of multiliteracies theory in relation to adolescent and adult sites of teaching and learning. The publications have focused on themes that emerged from the data that explored all facets of multiliteracies in relation to older learners. As a form of public education outreach, a web platform was also created called The Multiliteracies Project found at [www.multiliteraciesproject.com](http://www.multiliteraciesproject.com) to engage educators in this work.

## List of References

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