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## University Professors' Perceptions on Blogging as Course Assignments in Southwestern Ontario: A Multiliteracies Framework

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' PERCEPTIONS ON BLOGGING AS COURSE

ASSIGNMENTS IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO: A MULTILITERACIES

FRAMEWORK

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

Annie Tran

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

In light of contemporary trends and practices, namely the impact of globalization and the integration of new technologies being promoted in the field of applied linguistics (Byrd Clark, 2012; Kern, 2006; Malinowski & Kramsch, 2014), this exploratory qualitative case study explores professors in education and their perceptions of the impact and adaptation new technologies have on their pedagogy; namely the use of blogging as an educational activity. This research is based on a multiliteracies theoretical framework and analyzes the traditional or innovative pedagogical practice of today's graduate professors. This study seeks to make an important contribution to both the field of research and to practice with its emphasis on the integration of new technologies in graduate language and literacy education. Many graduate programs highlight the importance of originality, creativity and thoroughness (in other words, alternatives to traditional approaches) however there appear to be few multiliteracy options available in graduate courses. Through the implementation of a survey (N=5) and semi-structured interviews (N=2), perceptions of graduate professors of blogging as an educational activity were investigated. Participants revealed the innovative pedagogical practice of today's graduate professors. However, there are still various issues in practicality that need to be addressed.

**Keywords:** Blogging, Multiliteracies, Graduate Education, Professors' Perceptions, Higher Education, Multimodality, Multilingualism, Pedagogy

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents. They have been my inspiration to being the best I can be. They work so hard, and I will continuously strive to make them proud.

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# Chapter 1

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

With the rise of new technologies, and students' complex identities, trajectories and learning styles, professors can no longer continue to draw exclusively upon traditional pedagogical approaches. Traditional pedagogical approaches in higher education consist of prescriptive, formalist ways of teaching academic reading and writing, as if there exists only one cognitive, neutral, singular "correct" way to use or represent language in academia (namely print literacy). As a consequence of globalization and the growing range of technologies for communication, the *digital turn*<sup>1</sup> has brought about new polysemic language and literacy practices. Such innovation has certainly been making its way to the field of higher education and research in Canada where, for example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) has recently identified six challenge areas of the future, one of them being: "What new ways of learning, particularly in higher education, will Canadians need to thrive in an evolving society and labour market?" (Government of Canada, 2015)

As the province of Ontario has the largest number of graduate students and graduate programs, and with the government's emphasis on harnessing "Canada's strength and innovation in the arts, digital media and cultural industries" (Government of Canada, 2015), I was curious to see how this recent surge within the last ten years concerning new technologies and literacy practices actually played out on a local level, particularly with professors' perceptions and their pedagogical practices. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine whether today's graduate professors in the field of Education are incorporating these new practices brought about by this digital turn. In a few years time, graduate students' technological knowledge, skills and experience have changed significantly (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Will students, however, continue to be bound to the traditional mode of learning in graduate education? Again, this traditional mode would consist of reading or writing the traditional academic

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<sup>1</sup> "increased attention to new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts, such as workplaces, educational, economic and recreational sites" (Mills, 2010, p. 246-247).

research paper, where the central mode is exclusively text (print-based). As Kress (2005) explains that it is the “long domination in the West of writing as the culturally most valued form of representation: and more the long association of the mode of writing with the equally dominant, valued and powerful medium, namely the book” (p. 5). Kress (2005) describes this as “order is firmly coded” (p. 7) and follows the “logic of a traditional written page” (p. 9). What about today’s “digital natives”, students “who spend a lot of time using digital technologies, who have a tendency to multitask and express themselves in a diversity of ways, who at the same time, access and use information to create new knowledge and art forms” (Palfrey & Gasser, 2013, p. 4)? Are different pedagogical approaches available to them instead of traditional ones?<sup>2</sup>

Rapid technological advancement is continually changing the ways in which we communicate, and this communication becomes more complicated when we take into account that many of today’s students are multilingual, or come into classes with diverse learning experiences, heterogeneous identities and linguistic practices (Byrd Clark, 2012; Weber & Horner, 2012; Dervin, 2011). Often traditional pedagogical approaches do not seem to capture, reflect or capitalize on the social realities of today’s youth (Byrd Clark, 2012; Byrd Clark, Mady, & Vanthuyne, 2014). In addition, Cummins (2005) has argued that students tend to be more successful if their multiple identities and home languages are brought into a program that accepts and respects the diversities of its students, and at the same time, empowers them to feel confident enough to risk getting involved in the learning process, which includes making mistakes. Further to this, Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007) have equally posited that classroom diversity and technology represent “catalysts for deeper learning”, and that a narrow or traditional focus on language and literacy yields superficial results (p. 3).

Therefore, in order to investigate the technological changes being brought about by globalization and the digital turn, my exploratory qualitative case study seeks to

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<sup>2</sup> Cope & Kalantzis (2012) describe old literacy learning as privileging, “a particular form of speech and writing in the national language that was held up as the unquestioned ‘standard’ or ‘educated’ form... Reading meant ‘comprehension’ of meanings that were thought, in a straightforward way, to be intrinsic to texts and as intended by their authors (p. 3). This would be considered traditional literacy, which is described as “too narrowly focused. At worst, it seems decontextualized, abstract, rule-bound and fragmented...this kind of literacy produced compliant learners” (p. 3).

understand the perceptions of graduate professors in a faculty of Education on blogging as an education activity. Blogging is a multi-faceted process of “synthesizing information, formulating additional questions, contrasting and making sense of differing viewpoints and identifying patterns and trends” (Karrer, 2007, p. 20). Blogging can draw upon one’s multiple resources and at the same time create space(s) for a more fluid communication or expression. I provide a more in-depth and detailed explanation of blogs, bloggers and blogging in my rationale (please see upcoming section, entitled Rationale).

In order to gain an understanding of such perceptions, my research will draw upon a multiliteracies framework/approach.

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. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 1)

I find this approach pertinent as it complements my purpose for the inclusion of alternative approaches to both learning and teaching. To date, there does not seem to be a clear understanding of how multiliteracies theory can support blogging as a learning tool. Multiliteracies theory captures “the enormous shifts in the ways in which people made and participated in meanings” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 1). Blogs have become one way people can participate in meaning making, although meaning making has not been used in the literature of blogging thus far. A majority of studies have investigated student perceptions of blogging (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Londe, 2009; Simon, Acosta, & Houtman, 2013; Williams & Jacob, 2004), but there is not a clear understanding of what professors think of blogs and whether they would be willing to implement blogging into their courses. Through my own experiences and readings, I began to wonder whether professors are taking into consideration the learning expectations or content of the course when making decisions to implement blogs as part of their course assignments. As Ellison & Wu (2008) found, “the social and technical affordances of weblogs suggest that this medium can be utilized to support learning goals. However, more research is needed to determine how these new technologies can be incorporated into the classroom as pedagogically sound practices” (p. 100). What do

professors think of blogging as a pedagogically feasible practice? As a result, I sought to investigate the reasons why professors may (or may not) include blogging as course requirement because “determining the extent in which a particular technology contributes to educational goals is challenging” (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 102).

## **1.2 Research Questions**

As such, my main research questions are as follows:

- (1) What is the perceived usefulness, ease of use, attitudes and actual use of blogs from graduate professors?
- (2) What is the pedagogical viewpoint towards blogging of graduate professors?
- (3) What are the pedagogical practices of professors who use blogs?
- (4) How or in what ways do graduate professors incorporate blogging into their instruction?

These research questions contribute to my field of inquiry because although blogging has been recognized as a learning tool in research (see the following studies: Abas, 2011; Boyd, 2006; Buffington, 2007; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Epstein & Ray, 2014; Estes, 2012; Gregg, 2009; Jimoyiannis, Tsiotakis, & Roussinos, 2013; Kirkup, 2010; Karrer, 2007; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Londe, 2009; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2009a; Maitzen, 2012; Muwanga-Zake, Parkes, & Gregory, 2010; McGrath, 2010; Mortensen, 2002; Paiva & Braga, 2014; Simon, Acosta, & Houtman, 2013; Sun & Chang, 2012; Waely & Aburezeq, 2013; Wang, Lin, & Liao, 2012; Weller, 2012, Williams & Jacob, 2004, Yang & Chang, 2012), the theoretical framework of multiliteracies could perhaps justify or validate its pedagogical approach in higher education.

The pedagogy of multiliteracies consists of designs of meaning:

Available Designs: Found and findable resources of meaning: culture, context and purpose-specific patterns and conventions of meaning making. Designing: The act of meaning: work performed on/with Available Designs in representing the world or other’s representations of it, to oneself or others. The Redesigned: The world transformed, in the form of new Available Designs, or the meaning designer who,

through the very act of Designing, has transformed themselves (learning). (Kalanztis & Cope, 2009)

Multiliteracies can also consist of four components:

Situated Practice, which draws on the experience of meaning-making in lifeworlds, the public realm and workplaces; Overt Instruction, through which students develop an explicit metalanguage of Design; Critical Framing, which interprets the social context and purpose of Designs of meaning; and Transformed Practice, in which students, as meaning-makers become Designers of social futures (New London Group, 1996, p. 65)

This pedagogy supports blogging as a learning tool because situated practice would mean that graduate students with technological experience and skills would be acknowledged—in other words, graduate students' technological skills, diverse life experiences, multiple identities and complex linguistic practices would be given value. It would mean that professors have the skills and experiences with technology and blogging to provide support to students to develop different metalanguages and/or metalinguistic awareness. There would be a crucial interaction between the student and professor in the interpretation of social contexts and purposes of designs of meaning. Finally, there would be graduate students who are highly competent meaning-makers through the practice of blogging.

In this exploratory case study, I selected 4 different universities in Southwestern Ontario, Canada, that are widely recognized and distinguished for their multiliteracies and new technologies graduate programs. I sent an online survey and ended up surveying 5 professors online, using a system called SurveyMonkey. From the survey data, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 2 professors to gain a more in-depth understanding of their perceptions. This thesis contributes to exploring the changes of the digital turn within today's graduate education programs, particularly concerning professors and their perceptions towards a pedagogical approach to blogging. It also could further contribute to facilitating new ways of learning in higher education, that allow more opportunities for future Canadians to thrive in an evolving society and labour market. In the next section, I will further outline my rationale and provide some contemporary definitions of blogging.

### 1.3 Rationale

As mentioned in the section above, “little is known about professors’ perceptions of blogging as an educational activity or faculty development efforts to help college teachers align blog usage and pedagogy” (Ramsey, Aman, & Pursel, 2014, p. 427). The role of the educator is important because “it is often claimed that all young people are highly adept with digital technologies that infuse their lives and that the way they think and behave has created a new gap between them and their teachers” (Bennett, Maton & Carrington, 2011, p. 63). Faculty educators are “increasingly being asked to incorporate online components into their courses as a way to stimulate student engagement, to better connect with today’s “Millennial” generation” (Ramsey et. al., 2014, p. 427). Waely & Aburezeq (2013) state that, the increasing use of Web 2.0 applications in teaching and learning seems to suggest, “teaching the millennial generation may be fundamentally different from traditional approaches” (p. 975). These technologies challenge the conventional conception of pedagogical practices, social space, social practices (Brewer & Klein, 2006; Ajayi, 2009) and schedules.

Educators are called upon to understand “how and why they are using blogging” (Epstein & Ray, 2014, p. 38). As a result, “many faculty find it difficult to set aside time to explore the ever-changing array of new technologies, determine which to implement, and to consider how to do so in ways that make good practical and pedagogical sense” (Ramsey et al., 2014, p. 425-426). Hibbert (2015), in the Salty Chip Blog states,

one of the overwhelming themes that arose in the research is that many teachers are either unfamiliar with using new technologies that would allow them to engage in new literacies’ practices or they are unsure of how to integrate them into their curriculum in meaningful and purposeful ways.

Gee stresses that “educators must determine the new learning styles of students and develop educational methodology and teaching strategies to meet learning needs” (Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010, p. 3). Kim (2013) states that with “continuing globalization, it is becoming increasingly important for educators to develop effective methods of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners” (p. 221). This study seeks to explore whether there is agreement or disagreement among today’s graduate professors using blogs as a learning tool. There is research on the acceptance

and appreciation of blogs by graduate students (Buffington, 2007; Kashini, Mahmud, & Kalajahi, 2013; Simon, Acosta, & Houtman, 2013; Wang, Lin, & Liao, 2012), however, there is little research about how, what and why professors perceive of blogging as an educational literacy activity.

As such, I explore how and why university professors who teach graduate education may (or may not) align blog usage with their pedagogy. This is important because it could perhaps lead to research that further supports a stronger pedagogical understanding of blogging as an alternative pedagogy linked directly to the field of Education. Graduate education, in particular, has been experiencing an increased demand in outcomes and mandatory requirements in their programs for professional online course delivery. As per the evaluation policies of Western University, certain requirements must be met to receive the highest grade,

A: Reserved for those students whose work is excellent. Their work will contain an element of originality, creativity, or thoroughness. It will be well organized and expressed, and will reflect a particularly clear command of techniques and principles, incisive judgments, sound critical evaluations, and so on. (Western University, 2015)

It is important to investigate how and what professors are doing to ensure that course assignments evaluate originality, creativity and thoroughness. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2009) wants “faculty to move towards a more active and collaborative approach to learning” (p. 9). Their research looks at what faculty members are currently doing:

When faculty teach in traditional ways, students tend to adopt surface-learning strategies. When faculty teach in non-traditional ways, students tend to adopt deep learning strategies. Deep learning strategies result in better short-term retention, improved understanding, and more expert approaches to learning. There is much that faculty can do in support of deep learning through enhanced lectures and effective assessment practices. Yet the majority of faculty teach in traditional ways, resulting in system-wide learning deficits. (HEQCO, 2009, p. 9-10)

It can be generalized that all Ontario universities want original, creative and thorough work from its graduate students, and the Government of Canada wants faculty to teach in



innovative ways. I want to know whether professors perceive blogging as a means to help accomplish these goals. Since a myriad of research has looked at students' perceptions of blogging and the impact of blogging in relationship to their learning, I am interested in investigating faculty's perceptions of blogging on teaching and learning.

As Ontario universities and the Government of Canada strive to meet these requirements and outcomes, it is important to take a look at the state of multilingualism due to globalization<sup>3</sup> and the current student population in graduate studies. Firstly, the term multilingualism can be defined as:

Multilingualism... should not be seen as a collection of 'languages' that a speaker controls, but rather as a complex of *specific* semiotic resources, some of which belong to a conventionally defined 'language', while others belong to another 'language'. The resources are concrete accents, language varieties, registers, genres, modalities such as writing – ways of using language in particular communicative settings and spheres of life, including the ideas people have about such ways of using, their language ideologies. (Blommaert, 2010, p. 102)

If students have some degree of multilingualism, then their relevant background will influence the way they produce meaning. "Multilingualism is a matter of degree, a continuum, and since we all use different linguistic varieties, registers, styles, genres and accents, we are all to a greater or lesser degree multilingual" (Weber & Horner, 2012, p. 3). If students have knowledge of additional languages, the way they choose to communicate can differ from others. "We can see that meaning is not fixed or contained within individual words, but needs to be constructed by the hearer or reader, who links the text with relevant background in order to make sense of it" (Weber & Horner, 2012, p. 12). Blogs would provide an environment where students can link what they learn in graduate studies with their relevant background depending on how they choose to communicate their ideas. Further, students who have knowledge of different linguistic

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<sup>3</sup> Globalization is "most commonly used as shorthand for the intensified flows of capital, goods, people, images and discourses around the globe, driven by technological innovations mainly in the field of media and information and communication technology, and resulting in new patterns of global activity, community organization and culture" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 13).

varieties may find that their digital literacy skills<sup>4</sup> would allow for different productions of meaning and communication. If this were the case, blogs would allow for multidimensional information to be created and communicated through the use of technology.

With the notion that all students are multilingual, a multiliteracies and multimodal pedagogy may work to not only further develop but strengthen such multifaceted repertoires and practices. In Multiliteracies theory, language use has two major aspects. First, meaning making is dependent on the social context such as life experience or identities (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 1). Second, meaning making is dependent on the modes used. In other words: “In Multiliteracies theory, we identify six modes of meaning: *oral, written, visual, gestural, tactile, and spatial*. *Multimodality* is the theory of how these modes of meaning are interconnected in our practices of representation and communication” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 191). This has a few implications. If a student has a multilingual identity, then multiliteracies will take this social context into consideration. Further, the availability of different modes could allow multilinguals to represent and communicate ideas in alternative ways. With this in mind, in order to achieve originality, creativeness, and thoroughness and to achieve a more active and collaborative approach to learning, Cope & Kalantzis (2012) argue that we need learning environments that “supplement traditional reading and writing skills with multimodal communications, particularly those typical of new, digital media” (p. 2). In which case, blogging is one aspect of digital media that has the capability to facilitate these various goals in representation and communication and to invite multilingual identities to be expressed.

Before going further, I will provide a more detailed definition of terms as well as demonstrate how they are significant and connected in this thesis with blogging as an educational activity along with the varied conceptualizations of blogs and their purposes.

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<sup>4</sup> Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills (Vissar, 2012).

#### **1.4 Definitions of Blogs**

A blog (also called a weblog or web log) is a website consisting of entries (also called posts). The earliest blogs started in the late 1990s and were looked upon as online diaries. For example, individuals posted information on a daily basis about their lives, opinions and activities. The daily posts were listed in reverse data order, so readers viewed the most recent post first and scrolled through previous posts. Today, blogs, bloggers and the act of blogging have become much more expansive and diverse. “Blogs are multimodal” (Davies & Merchant, 2009, p. 88) because one blog entry can incorporate several different modes, such as written meaning (text), visual meaning (images), audio meaning and oral meaning (videos, sound clip, voice recordings). A blog is multiliterate because it takes traditional reading and writing and supplements with communications typical of new digital media. A blog is multilingual because the person writing may have many different linguistic repertoires (or ways of using language) and have different ways of expressing representation and communication.

Common definition:

Blogs can exist on virtually every topic, and have similar characteristics such as: automatic formatting of content in the form of headlines, entries or stories; time and date stamp of entries; archiving of past entries; a search function to search through all entries; a blogroll – a list of other blogs read by the author of the current blog; a second associated with each entry where readers can post comments on the entry. (Buffington, 2007, p. 21)

They are easy to use because “the user does not need sophisticated technical knowledge (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003) to maintain them” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 3). Blogs are primarily “personal journal and opinion entries, which enhance a feeling of social interaction” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 3). Blogs share some “characteristics of paper-based texts (typographical, conventions, spelling, paragraph and layout), but with new affordances such as making textual connections, comments, hyperlinking to information sources, monitoring visits, embedding audio podcasts and videos” (Davies & Merchant, 2007, p. 168). The practice of blogging involves “producing digital content with the intention of sharing it asynchronously with a conceptualized audience” (Boyd,

2006, para 28). Blogs differ from static webpages because “they capture ongoing expressions, not the edits of a static creation” (Boyd, 2006, para 30).

#### **1.4.1 What is an academic blog?**

A common theme in the literature describes academic blogs that are written for the purposes of research dissemination, academic authorship, and academic publication. McGrath (2010) describes blogs as the dissemination of knowledge in the context of academic discourse (p. 6). It allows for a conversational scholarship (McGrath, 2010, p. 3) through blog posts and comments. This allows for research to be popularized (Kirkup, 2010, p. 77), but also changing academic writing as Yancey (2004) questions what is writing and how is it changing in relation to blogging (p. 298). Simon, Acosta, & Houtman (2013) explore academic authorship in online spaces in a collaborative analysis and derived audiotaped conversations. One implication of this journal article is that authorship in blogging is now more distributed, interactive and participatory. However, a challenge with academic blogging is that there is immediate publication with a lack of peer review (Davies & Merchant, 2009, p.168).

#### **1.4.2 Pedagogical use for blogging.**

One type of academic blog is the research log, “an online version of the traditional notebook or record-book (Jill Walker, 2006) which keeps track of relevant references as well as thoughts or experiments in progress” (Gregg, 2009, p. 472). There is pedagogical potential to academic blogging such as enriching learning experiences that lead to deeper learning and analytical thinking that is ongoing. Blogging is a practice that involves:

exchanging insights and information; collaboration between diverse communities; hosting student publications; reflective or journal writings as an alternative to traditional forums; group work; learning portals; assignment submission; sharing course-related resources. (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p.3)

In graduate education, academic reading can be fairly dense and hard to understand at times. In order to reflect and organize thoughts, blogs can work as part of “meaning making” (Davies & Merchant, 2007, p. 82), but also provide an “analytical record of learning” (Davies & Merchant, 2007, p. 88). Mortensen (2002) contends, “blogs can track a constant flow of thought as they are published bit by bit” (p. 267). These reflections enabled associative thinking as “students linked concepts taught in the subject

with current issues and events in the wider social context (Framer et al., 2007)” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 4).

Educational characteristics of blogs include being “open, interactive, creative and easy to use environments, and justify why they are widely promoted as collaborative learning environments” (Jimoyiannis, Tsiotakis, Roussinos, 2013, p. 16). As blogging fosters an interactive environment, “knowledge construction is discursive, relational and conversational in nature (Ferdig & Trammel, 2004)” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 4). These discussions are much more open and also more “permanent than discussions in a seminar room or at a conference” (Mortensen, 2002, p. 269).

There is a role for blogging in graduate education because, “from a junior scholar’s point of view, blogging can be an excellent method for developing and sustaining a confident and clear voice of one’s own and ability to formulate and stand by opinions” (Mortensen, 2002, p. 268). Blogging is an emerging academic practice, and a “new genre of scholarly writing, which could be an important activity for a professional academic” (Kirkup, 2010, p. 82). Furthermore, Waely & Aburezeq (2013) state that:

Blogs can be used in teaching and learning for writing reflections on lectures and presentations given in class; as a continuation of classroom discussion; case study discussion, raising questions and answers about processes, procedures, assignments, activities, and topics not addressed during class sessions; and a resource center for sharing teaching and learning aids. (p. 975-976)

In addition, “blog activity not only encourages students to actively and reflectively engage in knowledge sharing, knowledge generation, and the development of numerous strategies to cope with difficulties encountered in the learning process” (Sun & Chang, 2012, p. 43). Sun & Chang (2012) go on to state that,

in pedagogical settings, the effective use of blogs enables knowledge sharing through connecting learners to contexts beyond the classroom. In turn, this facilitates the development of individual and critical voices (Du & Wagner, 2007) and prompts individual accountability in learning. (p. 43)

### **1.4.3 Advantages of blogging in education.**

In many different instances, blogs are seen as advantageous in education. Ellison & Wu (2008) discuss that,

blogs are well-suited to the learning environment for a number of reasons. Primarily, the critical skill of writing is central to the act of blogging. Because the blogging format encourages students to engage with positions divergent from their own, blogging can potentially enhance analytic and critical thinking skills. Students may be more invested in their writing if they know they are writing for an Internet audience and their peers, as opposed to only an instructor. (p. 105-106)

Oravec argued, “developing a weblog could enable students to develop a unique writing voice and to become more analytical and critical” (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 106). Will Richardson in his experience with high school students supported blogging as an educational activity because it allowed students to

reflect on what they are writing and thinking as they write and think it, b) carry on writing about a topic over a sustained period of time, maybe a lifetime, c) engage readers and audience in a sustained conversation that then leads to further writing and thinking and d) synthesize disparate learning experiences and understand their collective relationship and relevance. (Ellison & Wu, 2008, p. 106)

Williams and Jacob (2004) draw upon the research on the educational theories of Vygostky in assessing the educational value of blogs.

They observe that there will be a natural tendency for reflection and analysis on the part of the student, given feedback systems are integral to the blogging interface, but also note that the contextualization of learning through hypertext links to other materials encourages revisiting and revising of learned concepts, enriching the learning experience. (p. 236)

An account by Maitzen (2012) supports blogging as a “potentially transformative medium” (p. 349) that would make “conventional forms of academic research and writing feel constricting” (p. 348). He advocates that, “our institutions benefit, and so do we, from the innovation, openness, collaboration and outreach that blogs provide. That seems reason enough to credit them as academic practice” (Maitzen, 2012, p. 354).

#### **1.4.4 Conceptions of blogs in academia.**

Scholars argue that there are main differences between academic writing and blogging. Academic writing is structured by the rules of the causal argument; there is academically accepted logic; there is lengthy, sustained argumentation; articles are drafted, revised,

rewritten, edited, proofread, finalized and the notes forgotten, made irrelevant by the more polished product” (Mortensen, 2002, p. 261-268). On the other hand, blogging is structured by time and the impulses of the day, documenting the trail of thought; there is personal logic; collections of briefly formulated thoughts and ideas; there is a focus on connections and on brief nuggets of thoughts; blogs are a way to trace a flight of thought (Mortensen, 2002, p. 261-268).

Those against blogging as academic practice state, “for most academics, blogs are irrelevant (Lovink, 2008) because they don’t count as publications” (Kirkup, 2010, p. 76). Another wariness of academic blogging is the “subjective style of many blogs, a style which seems in opposition to traditional forms of academic text which value an ‘objective’ authorial (Hyland, 2002) voice” (Kirkup, 2010, p. 76). Maitzen (2012) asserts “I do not think every academic should blog, and I certainly do not think blogging should replace all the other ways in which we carry on our work as intellectuals and educators” (p. 348). Blogging will “neither suit nor serve every academic nor every academic practice” (Maitzen, 2012, p. 348). Often, the lack of peer review is the first objection rallied “against taking any self-published work, including blogging, seriously as academic practice” (Maitzen, 2012, p. 352). One researcher argues, “blogs lack rigorous scholarly work (Glenn, 2005)” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 5). One study reports a “complaint that blogs end up being “forced writing” (O’Donnell (2005) as lecturers try to make blogs pedagogically useful” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010, p. 5). Other concerns include the possibility for “racially insensitive and outdated language” (Buffington, 2007, p. 25), which does not promote a safe and effective learning environment. Also, Internet trolls can cause trouble in comment sections of blogs, which hinders effective discussion and security (The Current, 2014).

Those that support blogging believe that blogging provides a “forum for quick feedback and for conversation with a more diverse audience than traditional academic publishing venues and can enrich and extend academic discourse” (Estes, 2012, p. 974). While blogs could encourage the freedom of expression as an important element of reflection, “the failure to provide clearly defined blog objectives is a concern” (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010). Attitudes have been “contingent on discipline” (Gregg, 2009, p. 472). This study is important because it will evaluate whether there are positive

or negative perceptions towards academic blogging but also what the attitudes are in the field of Education.

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

My research bears significance because unlike some of the other studies mentioned above, my study not only explores the perceptions of professors towards blogging, but also, opens up space that considers some of the important implications between blogging as an educational activity as concerns multimodality, multilingualism and multiliteracies. Multiliteracies allows for alternative starting points for learning, engagement, different conceptual bents, different analytical perspectives, divergent learning orientations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 188). The importance of multimodality through blogging is that something in words may make more powerful sense to a student as an image or diagram (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 195). This allows students to demonstrate how, why and what they know in an original and creative way of expression and not just in a unidimensional, one way of representing. Further, students who are multilingual use language in various ways. Blogging can allow such individuals to become aware of their complex identities and language practices through reflection and reading comments from others who may also relate to them. Finally, multiliteracies take into consideration new learning, new learners and new teachers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 12). This demonstrates an important shift in graduate education that should be further analyzed in a Canadian context.

Today's "digital natives" in graduate education could benefit immensely from alternative pedagogical approaches by professors reflective of contemporary times. Otherwise, graduate students with complex identities and diverse learning styles may miss out on their full learning potential (Byrd Clark, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013). In my own experience, I had struggled in a graduate course that stressed the importance of academic writing, whereas I soared in graduate courses that made available multiliteracy options, such as blogging and video submissions for assignments. In more objective terms, I received a B- in academic writing, and an A+ in blogging. I felt that I struggled to learn the code of academic writing and I was bounded by traditional writing logic when it came to evaluation of my work and abilities. Whereas when I blogged, I



incorporated my multilingual skills as well as my interests in technology and art to demonstrate my knowledge and understanding in several different multimodal modes. This is how learning came alive for me. But what if all of my courses only allowed me to write traditional academic papers? I would not have the opportunity to demonstrate that I can be an A+ student. This introspection allowed me to question if many other graduate students encountered similar experiences.

Upon reading several scholars' research (Taylor & Cummins, 2011), I learned that my difficulties entering graduate education have been shared by others, such as one student who expressed in her blog that, "I've been told that it is so vital that graduate students need to know how to read and think critically, but I know clearly that I myself am very weak in this skill" (Sun & Chang, 2012, p. 51). Is critical thinking evident only in text? Or can other modes (such as blogging) help demonstrate this skill? Also, it is important to keep in mind that students from diverse international settings (e.g. Taiwan), might be able to relate to this situation: "the importance of critical thinking skills is not impressed upon students until they enter university or, in most cases, graduate programs" (Sun & Chang, 2012, p. 51). What if there are other students who have not developed such skills and must only demonstrate it through rigorous academic writing? How does or will this affect a "learner's construction of "self-worth and legitimacy"?" (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 9). Is academic language seen as a "symbolic investment, as a highly valued commodity in neoliberal times?" (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 10). Finally, how do professors perceive the use of blogs as a new technology for their students?

I chose blogs as a new technology, because it was new to me in my own experience. I did not have any school experiences using a blog until my graduate courses at Western University in the Fall 2013. I also found that my classmates didn't have experience with blogging in an academic setting. In this case, it was new, because it wasn't something I had personally considered as a learning tool. It was only through understanding multilingualism and multiliteracies pedagogy, that I understood that graduate education could support blogging as a learning tool in terms of multimodality. I found that I was a visual learner, who needed mind maps, colours and pictures to make learning more cohesive and memorable for me. I also enjoyed the technological aspect of hands on learning, through learning different software, but also applying connections

easily through my different readings and research. Having reflected on my own personal experiences on blogging, I was inspired to read studies about blogging, and to see if there were studies that supported my experiences. I will outline some of these studies in my upcoming literature review.

The significance of this study then, will be to investigate the pedagogical basis for blogging in a Canadian context, to support Ontario's vision that "universities will drive research. They will put students first by providing the best possible experience for all qualified learners" (Ontario Government, 2012). As many graduate programs highlight the importance of originality, creativity and thoroughness (in other words, alternatives to traditional approaches) there nonetheless appear to be few multiliteracy options available when it actually comes to graduate courses. For ethical reasons, I am protecting the privacy of the university I currently attend, but this information can be generalized to universities in Southwestern Ontario who have similar assignment requirements. I have looked into 15 different syllabi of courses in graduate education, and a majority of assignments would include, participation, presentations, weekly discussions, book reviews, case briefs, position papers, article analysis, practice critiques, quizzes, proposals, inquiry papers, literature reviews and final research papers. Four courses allowed for multiliteracy options: One course allowed a Prezi presentation as a final assignment; another allowed a digital portfolio; one wanted you to create your own blog; another with a voice journal. Nonetheless, it appears that, graduate students have been dealing with a top-down monolithic authoritative approach, such as being solely evaluated on one's academic writing, for example, one graduate course had a final research paper worth 50% of the final grade. Furthermore, students must demonstrate the ability to write clearly and correctly (Western University, 2015).

On the other hand, according to Bryan & Clegg (2006), there are many innovations in higher education, and there are alternatives to traditional assessment practices that were once dominated by... the standard essay (p. xvii). There are professors who use many innovative approaches, so this study seeks to understand the perceptions of university professors toward blogging as a valid educational activity. This research is equally important because it represents an issue of equity and accessibility for students. For example, students may have technological or artistic skills that would be

repressed or unnoticed if they only wrote a standard essay. This is to keep in mind that students without these skills can still flourish with the standard essay. But it is important to have options. Educators ought to use a variety of pedagogical approaches and permit students to bring in their multiple identities and multiliteracy skills to the classroom, so that learning can be a more deeper engagement for all concerned (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007). This would and could open up spaces for the possibility of different forms of expression and communication that may otherwise be missed in a traditional classroom.

Anderson, Varnahagen & Campbell (1998) stressed that,

Despite the potential for change and improvement to higher education through the application of learning technologies, adoption and effective use by faculty has been inconsistent and, in many cases, not effective. (p. 72)

Thus, this research has personal relevance for me (which I will expound upon in the upcoming section, My Own Positionings) because I have had direct experience with professors who have only evaluated my work using traditional literacy approaches. Certainly, I am not alone. In today's globalized and internationalized world, graduate students are expected to be original, creative and thorough but oftentimes evaluated and expected to operate through only one traditional mode for assignments where a standard variety of language is not only ideologically valued but upheld and legitimated (Heller, 1999). Therefore, I would like to contribute to the knowledge base by investigating why and how professors make decisions to use blogs (or not) to support originality, creativity and thoroughness that can help graduate students with multiple meaning making in their academic work. This study does not suggest "the direct replacement of one form of scholarly activity with another but rather the addition of alternatives to existing forms" (Weller, 2012, para 5). The reasoning behind understanding the pedagogical practice of today's graduate professors is that it is a commonly held belief that "the pedagogical objectives of a blog should be clarified to students before they start to blog" (Muwanga-Zake et al., 2010). This means that students need to be aware how exactly blogging can facilitate their learning and understanding, and what constitutes the main objectives. This is the responsibility of the professor to believe in or value the pedagogical advantages of blogging as an educational activity.

## **1.6 Coming to the Research: My Own Positioning**

I am a Vietnamese-Canadian and my story as a multilingual is diverse and complex. I needed a medium to allow me to process and make meaning of the concepts of literacy, language and culture. Blogging allowed me to become self-aware of my learning, as well as express myself in a way that I could not in the classroom.

There is a difference between traditional literacy and media literacy. “Whereas traditional literacy may be seen to focus primarily on the understanding of the world, media literacy focuses on the construction of meaning through the combination of several media “languages” – images, sounds, graphics, and words” (Ministry of Education, 2006). Traditional literacy has many types of language, such as formal, narrative, figurative and technical. But I found media literacy, in particular through blogging, was a combination of language types or use. I combined all types of traditional languages in my postings online. I used formal language while reflecting on multilingual concepts such as chameleons, mother tongue, and heritage language. Meanwhile, I used colloquial language when I was commenting or replying back to comments. Also, I used narrative language such as writing about my language-learning journey. Blogging has allowed me to use formal, narrative and colloquial language simultaneously. This example speaks to the multimodality of blogging as well as the creation of new literacy practices.

In addition, blogging permitted me to use my own images, sounds, graphics and words to make meaning of concepts such as language-learning journey, monolingualism, linguistic landscape and code-switching. This was an opportunity for me to use my skills with photos and videos to express myself. I became aware of the true meaning of code-switching through my experience with recording a phone conversation between my father and me. This was an authentic learning opportunity because I saw how I personally struggled with translation, mixing Vietnamese and English words in sentences, or listening to Vietnamese but speaking in English. But it also gave me a new found appreciation for my own multilingualism and heterogeneous language practices, in ways that I had never seen, valued or been made aware of before. For the first time, when discussing the use of blogs as an educational activity in my graduate course, I could see myself as a multilingual with a multidimensional ability to switch between languages,

genres, different styles, and registers. As such, blogging has allowed me to further appreciate the nature and value of a diverse multicultural society.

From my own experiences, an online camaraderie can be created through blogging as we (students in this case) try to understand various different concepts. As an online class, we form a constructivist environment where we can help each other form deeper meaning of these terms and concepts. By commenting and replying to our classmates, it is a feedback loop that improves our understanding. In this case, learning becomes students teaching students. This was beneficial to me because I had no prior knowledge of concepts. The building of an online community, where I could express my thoughts and receive feedback, allowed me to feel less intimidated or incorrect.

If attention were paid to media literacy through blogging, it could be greatly advantageous to students' learning because it appears to apply to many different kinds of people. Imagine the Canadian citizen or the Permanent Resident—they all have their story and I would argue that we all want our stories to be heard. For everyone, it can take time to process information from the classroom and in our readings and then formulate the words that make the most sense. Blogging, for me, appears to allow learners to explore their own meanings of language(s), identity/ies and culture(s) in a much less constrained sense.

I think blogging is a tool that can make literacy creative. Blogging can be used as a form of free writing, where writers can reflect and gather everything they have learned. Then they may add in their random thoughts or examples that help them make sense of the information and ask related questions. In this case, blogging represents a tool for brainstorming and allows for deep processing.

In my opinion, the most important reason why blogging has potential for learners in today's globalized world is because it has allowed me to engage in reflexivity (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014). Reflexivity can be described as the "willingness to go and sit with the uncomfortableness and messiness of one's own ideological attachments, ways of representing, and... at the same time, to flexibly engage and negotiate meanings with one another" (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 25). It is through talking about my experiences that I have come to understand contemporary research in multilingualism. I have collaborated and co-constructed meaning and knowledge and am continuously attempting

to achieve a sense of clarity. I believe blogging reflects “Exposing one’s own mistakes, conflicts, confusions and dilemmas to the public through writing this critical reflexive account is not only an intellectual task, but also a political action, full of psychological and social risks (Lin, 2004)” (Byrd Clark, 2009). The public sphere of blogging can possibly represent be a safe intellectual environment for students who may be confused about the concepts in class.

As a student who is new to multilingualism through multiliteracies, I had no prior knowledge of the different terms and concepts. By using blogging as a form of language, or languaging, I feel emancipated. My ascribed identity is a shy and quiet girl but my online achieved identity was a person with a desire to share all of my experiences and thoughts. Through communicating online, I was able to make sense of what we learned in the course readings. Through learning about these different concepts, I practiced the different uses of literacy through formal, narrative and colloquial language. I began to formulate my identity as a multilingual code-switcher and I felt a sense of camaraderie and support for my learning. I don’t think I would have engaged in this level of thinking without the use of a blog or OWL Sakai. I advocate for literacy as a multimodal practice because I personally experienced the benefits to my learning and self-awareness. I believe that many other students can relate to how I feel about blogging as a multiliterate and multimodal practice.

A second identity that I relate to is of a multiliteracies graduate student in my first year of my master’s program in Education and using blogs for course assignments. I became curious why some professors incorporated blogs into their courses and some did not. A multiliterate graduate student is, “a problem solver and strategic thinker, that is an active and informed citizen” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 23). Through my experiences in blogging in my graduate courses, I became “an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to differences, change and innovation” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p 175). This means that I became open to different interpretations of meanings, while experimenting further with different modes to express innovative ideas. I see myself as a meaning maker who believes in the “moment of transformation of remaking the world by representing the world afresh. Creativity, innovation, dynamism and divergence of normal semiotic states” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 177). In [www.multiliterate](http://www.multiliterate)

graduatestudent.com, I shared my experiences with blogging in an academic context. Over the course of my first year, I have designed and created three blogs: [memerationthoughts.wordpress.com](http://memerationthoughts.wordpress.com); [iBlogAcademics.wordpress.com](http://iBlogAcademics.wordpress.com) and [annielikesthisclass.blogspot.com](http://annielikesthisclass.blogspot.com) for two courses: Multiliteracies; and Multilingualism through Multiliteracies. These assignments were designed to further my understanding of course materials but also to submit for course assignments. In the process of academic blogging, I've cited course readings, used visual and written modes as well as exploring different tools such as an Infographic, Moovly and an iMovie to demonstrate my understanding and learning.

In my experiences with [memerationthoughts.wordpress.com](http://memerationthoughts.wordpress.com), I began to understand multiliteracies in a deeper way. For example, in this blog, I decided to start my learning process by reading a journal article by Simon, Acosta & Houtman (2013) titled, "Memeration': Exploring academic authorship in online spaces." I decided this was worth learning more about and became engaged with the authors directly by contacting Alicia Acosta through her YouTube channel and then communicating through e-mail. I was able to understand the experiences of Acosta and her views of blogging as an academic practice. When I brought forth this journal article to my class, I began to interpret this journal article in several different perspectives that would be more applicable in practice for higher education. I explored divergent learning orientations from my PhD and Masters' classmates. I used a visual modality by creating my own comics, to help support the journal article and its own rationale and justifications. I experimented with new technology as well by incorporating a cell phone poll. Afterwards, I was supported to disseminate my presentation in a creative way through a blog format. This is where I was able to engage in useful discussions with my peers and receive comments.

This experience allowed me to believe in the components Gee discusses about the term multiliteracies: "flexibility, multiple forms of knowledge and the relationships between literate practices, contexts and social, cultural, behavioural aspects of literacy" (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 21). I feel as though I started off as an alternative starting point for learning and developed an engagement with the social and behavioral aspects of

multiliteracies through my contact with the authors, my peers and the blogging community.

Cope & Kalantzis (2009) explains: that a pedagogy of multiliteracies, allows alternative starting points for learning (what the learner perceives to be worth learning, what engages the particularities of their identity). It allows for alternative forms of engagement, such as the varied experiences that need to be brought to bear on the learning, the different conceptual bents of learners, the different analytical perspectives the learners may have on the nature of cause, effect and human interest, and the different settings in which they may apply or enact their knowledge. It allows for divergent learning orientations... different modalities for meaning making, embracing alternative expressive potentials for different learners...each meaning maker designs the world afresh in a way that is uniquely transformative of found meanings. (p. 188)

This is a common theme in many studies about the affordances of blogging as an academic practice.

Another rationale for investigating what it means to be a multiliterate graduate student through blogging began when I had the question why our in and out of school experiences don't count as graduate education. As Dewey says,

From the standpoint of the child, he observed, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. (Street, 2003, p. 83)

A majority of today's generation use technology at home and a lot of multiliteracies research has been conducted at the elementary levels (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Lotherington, 2011; Mills, 2007). With the changing generation, will traditional academic perceptions shift? This idea also coincides with funds of knowledge by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992), which illuminate that a student's lifeworld is rarely drawn upon in the traditional classroom. Funds of knowledge refer to historically "accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). This is theoretically relevant to Anstey & Bull's (2006) explanation that a "student's *literacy*



*identity* is the combination of a student's life world as well as their school-based world" (p. 34)

All this to say that my experiences in graduate education combined with my passion for alternative ways of learning have inspired me to investigate professors' points of views on blogging. I feel that it would be interesting to see whether the professors have had personal experience themselves with blogs, or if they have a solid pedagogical approach and understanding of when and why to use blogs as a learning tool. Although my research participants did discuss their students' reactions to blogging, I did not focus on student perceptions on blogging as a majority of literature already exists in this area of inquiry (Chong, 2010; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2009; Simon, Acosta, & Houtman, 2013; Williams & Jacobs, 2004; Yang & Chang, 2012).

## **1.7 Thesis Organization**

The remaining chapters of this thesis are presented in the following order. Chapter Two will begin with an overview of the relevant theoretical framework regarding Multiliteracies, social constructivism, social theory and postmodernist approaches to language and literacy. After, I look at the literature of studies that investigate the perceptions of blogging in higher education. Chapter Three, I will introduce my research methodology by outlining the context, participants and research procedures. Chapter Four will be the results from surveys and interviews, addressing each survey question and its answers and related reflection. Chapter Five will be themes, similarities, pros and cons of the perceptions of the two participants who were interviewed. Chapter Six, will be the discussion of the results and its relation to the theoretical framework as well as the study's limitations. I will then conclude the discussion section by putting forward suggestions for future research in the field.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2 Theoretical Framework/Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that guides my thesis as well as the ways in which my results are analyzed. To complement my research stance and positionings, which I outlined in Chapter One, I have chosen to draw upon theories from social theory, postmodernist approaches, social constructivism, and multiliteracies. I feel that such theories complement and support my inquiry about seeing language (and thus literacy) as a dynamic construct through which we come to understand, represent, assign, contest and negotiate meanings. In order to demonstrate my affinity for a multiliteracies framework as regards blogging, it is imperative that I situate some of the main theories responsible for shaping multiliteracies, as multiliteracies has been highly influenced by social constructivist approaches to language and literacy. Following this, I review the literature in the area of perceptions of blogs used in higher education.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.3 Social Theory and Postmodernism Approaches**

For this study I draw upon a multiliteracies approach, which for me, combines social constructivism, social theory, and to a certain degree, postmodernist approaches to language and literacy. Multiliteracies get at the relationship of language through literacies (and literacies through language) in different instructional environments as well as issues of social justice as it relates to multilingualism and cultural and linguistic diversity. Social theory can be conceptualized as a site of struggle because representations of language and social identity are “multiple and contradictory” (Pierce, 1995, p. 15). Because multiliteracies takes into account the social contexts and the conditions of language and literacy, I find that social theory and postmodern approaches to language and literacy work complement my research stance. Multiliteracies can offer transformative emancipation in education but one cannot overlook the relations of power nor individuals’ ideological attachments surrounding the value and conceptualizations of language, literacy, and identity/ies in such contexts (e.g. graduate education). I thus draw upon social theory to discuss some of the dominant ways of thinking as regards the use of

language through literacy in graduate education, particularly when exploring graduate education professors' perceptions toward blogging.

First and foremost, "language can come to mean different things to people and invoke multiple interpretations and representations" (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 6). In this regard, students come from many different backgrounds and have multiple identities. We all do not have the same language capabilities. For "Bakhtin (1981), it is significant to understand language as particular to individuals' social, political, and cultural contexts" (Byrd-Clark, 2009, p. 21).

All utterances, then, have a history and an anticipated future. Bakhtin saw that what we talk about most are the words of others, such that our speech is overflowing with other people's words. In doing so, we weight, evaluate, refute, repudiate, celebrate, affirm, and so on not only the words of others but also the political/ideological position represented by those words. Bakhtin argued that the object has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways, and various views and trends cross, converge, and diverge within it. Any utterance, in addition to its own themes, always responds in one form or another to the views, trends and theories encounter each other. (Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 10)

Language is a collaboration of many different factors and circumstances. Saint-Georges & Weber (2013) state that

This must be kept in mind: the 'language' we know is never finished, so to speak, and learning language as a linguistic and sociolinguistic system is not a cumulative process; it is rather a process of growth, of sequential learning of certain registers, styles, genres, and linguistic varieties while shedding or altering previously existing ones. (p. 15)

For "Norton (2000), words are not neutral, but express cognitive predispositions and value systems" (as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 21). For "Bakhtin (1984), the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation" (as cited in Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 10). As such, Cummins (2011) has argued

that multiliteracy options can accommodate differences in language and identity for students.

However, when trying to understand ideologies of academic language, there appears to be a “value attached to speaking the “right” forms of language (Bourdieu, 1991), the standard, legitimate language, with correct usage and pronunciation” (as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 23). In universities, it is plausible that different professors will “attach different sets of value to the linguistic products in the classroom setting, and through such a differentiation, construct “failed” or “successful” (Roberts & Sarangi, 2001) learners” (as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 23). Language learning and teaching, for example, have been dominated for a long time by cognitive psychological approaches, positing language as a system rather than viewing language as a social practice (see Byrd Clark, 2012; Pennycook, 2010).

A central trope for Bakhtin (1981) in his description of the social tensions in language is that of the opposing pull of ‘centrifugal’ and ‘centripetal’ forces. Whereas the centripetal force constitute the pull towards the ‘unitary language’, homogeneity, standardization, and correctness, the centrifugal force pulls toward the heteroglossic disunification and decentralization. These forces are rarely free of each other, however as the centripetal forces of language operate in the midst of heteroglossia and coexist with centrifugal forces which carry on their uninterrupted work: “every utterance participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).” (as cited in Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 7)

In other words, Bakhtin argues that language includes centrifugal and centripetal forces. This illustrates the tension between the value towards unification and dis-unification of language. In graduate education, this can lead to students to “believe that they do not possess the valued linguistic and cultural capital (Corson, 2001) within a market” (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 25). This would influence a learner’s investment because they want to acquire symbolic (honor) and material (money) resources to “increase their value of cultural capital (knowledge)” (Norton, 1995 as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 26). Can

academic language include multiliteracy options and likewise, provide the same valued linguistic and cultural capital?

Academia has become a social space where one identity is commonly held, which is one that is traditional, logical, and rule abiding to essays and academic papers. In this view, there is one static, fixed identity to the ‘academic.’ The New London Group (1996) contends, “Literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (pg. 61-62). It is often that this is the type of literacy pedagogy found in higher education. It is argued that,

language learning is much more eclectic and piecemeal than is often assumed and that individuals, especially those with complex track records of mobility, have in general larger and richer linguistic repertoires than is commonly thought.

Assessment instruments however often fail to take into account these diverse repertoires, which may not be distributed homogeneously and do not necessarily coincide with the repertoires valued by the assessing authorities. (Saint-Georges & Weber, 2013, p. 2-3)

Furthermore, according to Byrd Clark (2009), “we live in an ever-changing, evolving, constantly shifting world, where socially construed boundaries are becoming more obscured while simultaneously making visible the spaces, dimensions, and strategies of being and becoming multiple people in multiple places” (p. 1). Saint-Georges and Weber (2013) equally contend, “we tend to underestimate the degree to which our lives develop along trajectories of mobility, in which we encounter, leave, learn and unlearn social and cultural forms of knowledge (such as languages)” (p. 29). Blommaert (2005) argues, “the performance of an identity is not a matter of articulating one identity, but the mobilization of a whole repertoire of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment to moment speaking positions” (p. 232). Finally, Saint-Georges and Weber (2013) describe the conditions of ‘superdiversity’:

more people moving to more places, with more complex social formations ensuing meaning that in educational institutions, varied practices, linguistic repertoires and symbolic and economic resources come into contact, posing

questions about how these institutions deal with this diversity and how digital technologies transform the classroom. (p. 2)

In this regard, graduate students must navigate their multiple identities in academia and everyday life, and by understanding the relationship between social theory and a multiliteracies framework, we may allow academically construed boundaries of what constitutes knowledge (language and literacy) to become more obscured and less fixed.

Following Byrd Clark (2009), I move away from “an essentialist view of identities as static, unitary, and fixed, shifting toward a more post-structuralist and interdisciplinary understanding of identities as fluid, multiple, and a site of struggle constructed in linguistic interaction” (pg. 1). Indeed, “Hall (1990) has framed the Self as fragmented, incomplete, and understood as multiple selves ever changing, always in process, tempered by a sociohistorical memory juxtaposed by the social worlds in which one lives” (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 30).

There may be much to learn from adopting a heteroglossic lens through which to examine language practices, to ensure what we bring into play, both in practice and pedagogy, voices which index students’ localities, social histories, circumstances and identities. (Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 18)

In this case, graduate students appear more complex now because of their localities, social histories, circumstances and identities. This complexity paired with the shift in globalization and technology demand that spaces ought to be made available to enrich the multiple identities of all.

#### **2.4 Social Constructivism**

A multiliteracies framework also invokes social constructivism precisely because of its focus and emphasis on the co-construction of meaning making. Social constructivism “focuses on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge” (Palinscar, 1998, p. 345). More specifically, Vygotsky proposed “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers” (Palinscar, 1998, p. 352).

There is a need to create socially constructed spaces because:

In the pursuit of social transformation rather than reproduction, teachers and researchers therefore need to reconsider how to provide learners with opportunities for negotiating the nature of joint enterprise and the mutual engagement to become more open and diverse while keeping in mind co-constructing and co-creating their shared identities and established discourses – what Wenger (1998) called *reifications*—through *participating* in authentic and meaningful contexts (Kim, 2013, p. 226-227).

This means that as much as we understand the needs of students, we need to evaluate whether or not these needs are being met through reifications. This is why I believe it is important to investigate the current perceptions and pedagogical practice of graduate professors and whether authentic and meaningful contexts (such as blogs) are being provided to students. It is important to discuss that knowledge is constructed in socially constructed activities (Kim, 2011; 2014). Students have “formally and informally learned language and literacy resources merged into repertoires, and such repertoires reflect the polycentricity of the learning environments in which the speaker dwells” (Saint-Georges & Weber, 2013, p. 20). Blackledge & Creese (2014) refer to the words of Bakhtin: “dialogic discourse as the meaning-making process by which the historical, present and the future come together in an utterance” (p. 10). Dialogue is important because everyone will have a different historical and present perspective. Gee (2015) also believes in the importance of learning from others: “We cannot escape the reality that any form of reading, whether reading texts or the world, is social. We share interpretations with others who have worked to form them, support them, and nourish them” (p. 45). Engagement with others is advantageous because “Learning involves an active engagement (Friere, 1970) with the world, with words and with other people” (as cited in Gee, 2015, p. 47).

Lamy (2009) states

the sociocultural model of learning as represented in the work of these authors, stresses the role of interaction. Human learning is shaped within interactions involving mediation all tools such as: other people, language, cultural

assumptions, social institutions, technology, and the spatial and temporal characteristics within the learning situation is played out. (p. 385)

In which case, I would employ a Vygotskian perspective because as Kim (2013) explains, Vygotskian-based social constructivist perspectives view learning as a highly dynamic, complex process in which learners' higher psychological processes arise and undergo changes. Essentially this supports learning as participating in meaningful and authentic activities. (p. 224)

I believe blogs are a space where there are certain elements of social constructivism. I share the same sentiment as Byrd Clark (2009) as she states,

I see knowledge as a social construction as being socially constructed and co-constructed, as a non-monolithic, ever-evolving exchange that is transmitted received and appropriated by/through discourses of language (whether written, spoken, gestured, or signed), capable of both reproducing and transforming relations of power through, across, between, and within different contexts and diverse interactions. (p. 5)

This would mean that blogs have the potential to create an environment that allows a community of learners from all walks of life to exchange thoughts and ideas, links or videos, and comments and concerns that are ongoing and creative.

Other researchers support this notion:

The theory of blogging instruction is based on constructivism, where instruction is designed to be learner-centered that motivates students to learn, provide variety of active learning opportunities, enhance interaction between students and the instructor and among students themselves, and adopt interactive instruction and multiple assessments. (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013, p. 976)

Sun & Chang (2012) state that “blogs may be regarded as constructivist learning environments, for they provide their users with opportunities to reflect on their experiences, posing contradictions, addressing misconceptions, and negotiating ideas with their readers” (p. 45).



## 2.5 Multiliteracies

Multiliteracies, according to New London Group (1996), is overcoming the “limitations of traditional approaches by emphasizing how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic and private lives of students” (pg. 60). This literacy pedagogy takes into account “culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies” (pg. 61) as well as the “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (New London Group, 1996, pg. 62). Multiliteracies focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone (New London Group, 1996, pg. 64). In line with this position, the literature on multiliteracies advocates literacy as a social practice and a process of meaning making. The New London Group (1996) describes the social practice as: “Multiliteracies creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users” (pg. 64). Gunther Kress proposes that, “if one is to fully recognize the semiotic work learners do when learning, the new circumstances require new thinking about learner agency, pedagogical tools and pedagogical relations” (Saint-Georges & Weber, 2013, p. 3). As mentioned in my earlier section on social theory, understanding language as a dynamic construct can adapt well to ever changing and evolving identities.

In line with the social aspects of multiliteracies, there is importance of meaning making and agency<sup>5</sup>. Cope and Kalantzis (2012) stresses that an emancipatory pedagogy can be developed when we accept that

Literacy teaching is not only about skills and competence; it is also aimed at creating a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to differences, problem solving, change and innovation. The logic of Multiliteracies recognizes that meaning making is an active, transformative process. Pedagogy based on that recognition is more appropriate for today’s world of change and diversity. (p. 188)

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<sup>5</sup> “Agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act...all action is socioculturally mediated, both in its production and interpretation” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112).

Cope & Kalantzis (2009) believes the goal of multiliteracies is “aimed at creating a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to differences, change and innovation” (p. 175). This goal means the acceptance of students who view language differently and have different representations of ideas and knowledge. This creates a type of person also known as a meaning maker who does “not simply use what they have been given, they are fully makers and remakers of signs and transformers of meaning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 175). Again this ties in with Bakhtin’s notion of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language, in other words how we appropriate words and meanings from one another, and then expropriate them for ourselves (see Byrd Clark, 2009). This is one of the key propositions of Multiliteracies theory: “that a theory of meaning as transformation or redesign is also the basis for a theory of learning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 186). A meaning maker can also be known as a multiliterate person, insofar as “a student must first recognize that a context requires different literate practices and then be able to modify known literate practices or use them in new and different ways” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 21). This aligns with the idea that interpretation is constantly evolving depending on the context. The characteristics of a multiliterate person can interpret, use and produce electronic, live and paper texts that employ linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial semiotic systems for social, cultural, political, civic, and economic purposes in socially and culturally diverse contexts. (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 41)

My theoretical framework explains that people have socially and culturally diverse identities. Multiliteracies pedagogy explains that contexts are socially and culturally diverse that needs different interpretation. Taken together, identities can be fostered and flourished when taking consideration that contexts are so diverse.

To grow as a multiliterate person, different modes and semiotic systems should be explored. The reason for this is that “a pedagogy which restricts learning to one artificially segregated mode will favour some types of learners over others” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 180). This means that the multiple identities of students aren’t being nurtured in an academic environment that only values one type of literacy pedagogy. When students are able to use different modes, “conscious mode switching makes for more powerful learning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 181). Saint-Georges & Weber

(2013) also state that, “visual and multimodal texts for example redefine what counts as knowledge, how it can be presented, engaged with and produced. With these transformations, the meaning of teaching, learning, interpreting and assessing demands reconsideration” (p. 2). New London Group (1996) state, “when learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (p. 69). Again, this relates to social theory and the idea that identities are fluid, and language has many different interpretations and representations.

Finally, a multiliterate person “must have mastery of all five semiotic systems and understanding how they work together in a text to convey meaning” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 26). These semiotic systems include: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, spatial systems” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 25). This semiotic activity is considered a Design involving three elements: “Available Designs, Designing and The Redesigned. Together these three elements emphasize the fact that meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules” (New London Group, 1996, p. 74). Blogs have expanded the realm for language, making literacies and identities multiple, fluid and complex. The use of different modes offers creative language practices, and divergent communication. Multiliteracies and multimodality offers many possibilities for language and literacy.

## **2.6 Professors’ Perceptions of Blogging**

A majority of studies looks at student perceptions of blogging (Chong, 2010; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup, & Conole, 2009; Simon, Acosta, & Houtman, 2013; Williams & Jacobs, 2004; Yang & Chang, 2012). A gap in the literature surrounds professor perceptions of blogging. There are a few studies that are similar to what I would like to investigate but there lacks a study that has done what I want to do.

Kirkup (2010) performed a small-scale study in the UK, at the university he works at, which investigates the role of blogging in professional academic practice in higher education. It draws on interviews with a sample of academics (scholars, researchers, and teachers) that have blogs. He wanted to know why some academics

produced blogs and the perceived value of this activity to their academic practice and academic identity. He drew upon postmodernist approaches to identity. The results of this study was that blogging offers “the potential of a new genre of accessible academic production which could contribute to the creation of a new twenty-first century academic identity with more involvement as a public intellectual” (p.75). Drawing upon the research of Kirkup (2010), this study will be investigated in a Canadian context. One condition that I will not use is whether professors maintain a blog themselves; rather I am interested in their experiences with them. Further, I am more interested of the academic practices of blogging, rather than how blogging affects academic identity.

There has been a study by Paiva and Braga (2014), which looked at teachers and their blogging practice with a discussion of agency, mindset and literacy. They wanted to know if formal teaching of digital technologies ‘disturbed’ the traditional literacy behavior of teachers and changed their mindsets. For their theoretical framework, they used complexity theory. These researchers wanted to see if blogging practices continued after the end of the course, and emailed a questionnaire to participants to learn about their experiences and to collect opinions about blogging. The results of this study found that a few blogs were relatively active but a majority of teachers had not incorporated this new literacy practice into their teaching practices. The implications of this study may be that there is possibly an inappropriate expectation for teachers to change their mindsets towards blogging. There could be a great chance these teachers may be producing, transforming and reproducing meaning in other digital contexts and using different tools (p. 96). One interesting concept of the research of Paiva & Braga (2014) is that there was overt instruction through formal teaching of digital technologies, in particular about how to use a blog. This means that once teachers were educated on this tool, there was a possibility that their perceptions or practices may have changed. However, the present study will not change the behavior of professors through overt instruction but rather investigate the attitudes of what professors have done to date. One of this study’s research questions is “how do these teachers react to the new digital affordances? (p. 87), which is similar to my study, although I am interested in blogging in particular as a digital affordance. In other words, I want to investigate how blogging influences learning in an academic setting.

Another study that is similar to my research questions is by Waely and Aburezeq (2013), who investigated pre-service Arabic language teachers' perceptions of using the blog as a learning tool. In addition, these researchers investigated the defects of collaborating via the blog and how to modify the use of blogs to facilitate more effective learning. This is an important theme that is similar with my study, because I would like to know what professors think the advantages and disadvantages of blogging is, and to understand the pedagogical practice of those who can effectively implement blogging into their practice. This study used semi-structured interviews, which I also intend on using. The results of this study found that

participants perceived the course blog as a powerful application to enhance their learning through facilitating active interaction with the instructor, peers and course content. However, the results also indicated a number of challenges and defects associated with the blog use for instructional purposes. (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013, p. 975).

I found this study to be interesting because it factors in language learning from Arabic teachers' point of view, "it is crucial to explore the applications of new technological tools to find practical pedagogical solutions to language learning problems and to enhance teaching and learning of language in general" (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013, p. 976) This is important because it reveals how blogging can affect second-language learning acquisition. However, it is important to make the distinction that these pre-service teachers are also students. I would like to focus primarily on the role of the professor who may or may not use blogs themselves. These researchers state that

There is a need for further studies to support many of the opinions made about the benefits of blogs use in promoting more active and interactive learning in blended courses. More specifically, researchers and educators need to seriously comprehend how teachers and students perceive and respond to blog applications applied to enhance teaching and learning in traditional classes. Moreover, focused efforts are needed on how to best integrate blogs, which can effectively enhance learning and improve achievement. (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013, p. 976)

There seems to be a gap when this study mentioned that teachers and students both need to be taken into consideration. There seems to be more data related to the students'

perceptions of blogging, rather than the teachers. My study seeks to focus on just the teachers. It is important to note that perceptions of blogging can be related to perceptions of technology (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013, p. 977). I am interested whether professors of 2015 remain up to date with technology on a broad level, and specifically through blogs. Similar to Paiva & Braga (2014), Waely and Aburezeq (2013), found that “utilizing blogs in education has its defects... participants raised several concerns including: extra workload, nature of students’ responses, need for high level of technological skills, lack of immediate feedback, and lack of security and privacy” (p. 980). I wish to investigate whether this is a dominant or subservient perception with Canadian professors. Also, if these are the issues, what would graduate educators suggest to improve this?

Similar to Waely & Aburezeq (2013), Sun & Chang (2012) investigated how blogs and their “interactive and collaborative features help academically-advanced graduate students process academic writing knowledge and make sense of their writer identity” (p. 43). This study had graduate students in their Master’s level of study in TESOL and Linguistics. Although this study focuses on perceptions of students, I found this to be important to my study because it demonstrates how blogging can help students situate their identities in academia, particularly through blogging. This is an important perception of blogging, which I am interested in whether professors would agree or disagree with this. Most importantly, it focuses on students who are studying TESOL and Linguistics in Taiwan, which means that it is a different culture than what I want to investigate in Canada. This study concluded that,

the blog activity not only encourages students to actively and reflectively engage in knowledge sharing, knowledge generation, and the development of numerous strategies to cope with difficulties encountered in the learning process. Blogs also endow students with a sense of authorship as the writers of the blog entries, and at the same time, provide a space for them to sort out what being an author entails, their purposes of writing, and their authority in writing. (Sun & Chang, 2012, p. 43)

There is one interesting study by Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell (1998) who contrasted mainstream faculty “who has been slower to adopt or not adopt at all the use of teaching and learning technology” (p. 72) and earlier adopters, “earlier to adopt the use

of technology” (p. 72). This is an interesting distinction with my study, because it is a more broad and general study about technology, but focuses on university faculty and their attitudes, skills and behaviours towards technology. Most importantly, it recognizes that in 1998, faculty in the Education department had 83.3% mainstream faculty and 16.7% earlier adopters (p. 83). My study looks only at the faculty of Education and evaluated attitudes towards blogging in 2015. Another important aspect of this study was that it was done at a large Canadian research university. My study is also in a Canadian context, but in South-western Ontario. I enjoyed this study because it stresses that the “adoption of teaching and learning technologies is an innovation that challenges the structure, culture and practice of modern research universities” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 71). I am interested in whether blogging has changed the structure, culture and practice of South-western Ontario universities. They also give a good basis for the term instructional technologies, which is “the tools, media and methods developed to facilitate the teaching or learning processes” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 73). This is why I think it is important that my study focuses on one teaching and learning tool such as blogs. What is similar to my study is that one of their research questions was “what are the barriers to increased adoption?” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 73). Similar to Waely and Aburezeq (2012), it is a “common interest in technology itself rather than its educational application is the critical component” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 82). It will be interesting to see in my study, whether there is a connection between interest and perception of technology itself, and in particular to blogging. The results of Anderson et al. (1988) study were similar to Paiva & Braga (2014), where professors expressed concerns over expense, demand, lack of funding, and time-consuming. In fact, “some faculty are actively hostile towards technology which they seem neither to understand nor appreciate, and certainly not aware of any potential relative advantage that the technologies may provide” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 85). However, “generally faculty believe that the technologies have some potential to aide in the teaching/learning process, but many are deeply suspicious of the way in which this change is being implemented and supported” (Anderson, Varnahagen, & Campbell, 1998, p. 91). This is important to my study because I want to know whether there is confusion or suspicion around blogging and how

it is implemented and supported. Since this is an older study, it will be interesting to investigate what the current situation is in South-western Ontario related primarily to blogging.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented my theoretical positionings and situated my epistemology and ontology. In particular, I drew upon social theory and postmodernist approaches in my understandings of language, identity, social constructivism and multiliteracies. In addition, I provided a literature review related to blogs and what perceptions currently exist about blogs. In general, language is multiple, fluid and complex (Byrd Clark, 2009; Blackledge & Creese, 2014). In graduate education, creative language practices and divergent communication are skills that students need to possess in today's generation. There are many possibilities for language and literacy with multiple literacies and modalities. In the next chapter, I will outline my methodology for this study.



## Chapter 3

### 3 The Study

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline my methodological approach, which complements my theoretical positioning for this thesis. I then provide a description of my data collection, instruments, participants, and the ways in which I organized and analyzed my findings. For the purposes of this investigation, my study is an exploratory case study (Yin, 2014), as I seek to understand how and why professors perceive blogs (or alternative ways of teaching language and literacy) in the ways that they do as well as the conditions that might need to be in place and supported for the use of blogging as an educational activity. Because not a lot of research has been conducted on this particular topic and because I would additionally like to gain more insight and understanding as well as familiarity with this topic, an exploratory case study is best suited for the purposes of this thesis. For my data collection, I used a survey instrument and conducted two semi-structured interviews. My research was conducted in a Southwestern Ontario context, in the field of Education in graduate programs.

#### 3.2 Methodology

As mentioned in the above section, I have incorporated a critically interpretative and qualitative exploratory case study. This methodology complements a multiliteracies framework because multiliteracies tries to explain what still matters in traditional approaches to language and literacy meanwhile supplementing with knowledge about what is new and distinctive about the ways people make meaning. An exploratory case study can create discussion into answering what is still traditional and what is new about meaning making. Further, multiliteracies theory is based on a social phenomenon; there are major shifts in the ways people have participated in meanings. An exploratory case study needs would investigate how and why this shift in meaning making has occurred. The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a *decision* or set of decisions (Schramm, 1971): why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result” (Yin, 2014, p. 15). My case study illuminates the current pedagogical viewpoints and practices of professors in the field of

Education. My research questions seek to “explain some present circumstance (e.g., “how” and “why” some social phenomenon works)” (Yin, 2014, p. 4) which makes exploratory case study research more relevant in this case. In my case, I want to know *how* and *why* professors may or may not be incorporating blogging into their instruction. My questions require an “extensive and “in depth” description” (Yin, 2014, p. 4) of the social phenomenon of blogging. I am interested in what viewpoints; practices and attitudes professors have towards blogging. I am interested in a small group, in which case I want to contribute to knowledge mobilization of professors in the field of Education. Blogging is a fairly contemporary event and I do not have direct control over behaviours, which makes a case study helpful and appropriate. My survey enabled me to get results of how many professors agree or disagree with blogging as an educational activity. These questions were exploratory, broad, and simplistic in nature, as I needed a starting point to begin my investigation. I first needed to have a general idea of what professors thought about blogging. Then I drew upon a case study methodology within the survey by having volunteer participants help me answer *how and why* they have incorporated blogging into their instruction. My research goal has been to describe the “incidence or prevalence of a phenomenon” (Yin, 2014, p. 10), which my results have helped to describe how common or frequently that professors have used blogging as a learning tool. In analyzing data, it is important to note that, “case study research can excel in accommodating a *relativist* perspective – acknowledging multiple realities having multiple meanings” (Yin, 2014, p. 17). By taking a relativist perspective, my theory of designing a case study has concerned the way I have gone about capturing the perspectives of different participants, and how and why I believe their different meanings may illuminate the topic of my study (Yin, 2014, p. 17). In order to analyze my data, I “search for promising patterns, insights and concepts – the goal being to define [my] priorities for what to analyze and why (Yin, 2014, p. 132).

My focus is on the “overriding importance of meaning making (Mishler, 1979) and context in human experiencing” (Lather, 1992, p. 91). In other words, I am interested in the relationship of the professor and student in terms of providing the best alternatives for meaning making. My methodology is meant to “generate and refine more interactive, contextualized methods rather than for prediction and control” (Lather, 1992,

p. 92). I explored current pedagogy for blogs in the specific case of graduate programs in the field of Education. I wish to maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter” (Lather, 1992, p. 92). While my data results are not generalizable, they do provide some insight into a given situation. In my upcoming data analysis, I link the participants’ meanings back to some of the main points in the literature on multiliteracies.

### **3.3 Context/Sites for the Study**

This study investigates the current Canadian context regarding professors from the field of Education. These professors were recruited from universities with large departments of Education, with extensive multiliteracy and technology programs. These university sites are all found in Southwestern Ontario because there is no current evaluation of an Ontario context regarding professors’ perceptions of blogging. A Canada-wide investigation would not be appropriate for a Masters’ study, considering the breadth and depth of the multitude of high education institutions. This study did not include colleges because they do not offer Masters of Education programs/degrees, which I wanted to focus on because of the extent of academic rigorous reading and writing that is required. The Education field was chosen because multiliteracies is a teaching and learning pedagogy, which professors in the department of Education have some familiarity with. This may facilitate greater discussion and depth in the interviews.

### **3.4 Participants**

All participants are professors teaching graduate courses in a Faculty of Education. Due to ethical recommendations regarding gathering personal information about what a professors’ title was (tenured, associate, assistant), there were concerns that the participant may be identified. For this reason, information was not gathered.

Furthermore, information regarding age, socio-economic background, male or female, and ethnicity were not gathered to protect the participants’ identity. In addition, since this study only wanted to look at perceptions, these various variables did not seem to be relevant to the study because I wasn’t looking at any causal relationships or inferences. I recruited all participants through e-mails found on faculty lists on various university

websites. I did not recruit anyone outside of the Education department. I received survey and interview data separately from each participant. I did not seek survey or interview data from my own Faculty of Education for ethical reasons.

**3.4.1 Background of Survey Participants.** Only two survey questions looked at personal information of participants. The first question asked: How many years have you held this position? The numbers of years that the participants have been in their position were 5, 8, 16, 4, and 5 years. The median is 7.6 years. The second question inquired about how many years have you been at your current institution. The number of years professors were working at their current institution were 5, 7, 16, 11, 2 years. The median was 8.2 years. The assumption behind gathering this information was to discern whether the amount of experience in their position or at their institution had a bearing on their perceptions on blogging as an academic activity.

**3.4.2 Background of Interview Participants.**

From the survey, I was able to interview two university professors of graduate education from the same university, Gilda and Zak. Gilda<sup>6</sup> has been teaching university courses since 2003. She has been working full time since 2007. She has been teaching in the Faculty of Education, beginning with pre-service courses. She teaches the general BA program in Education, as well as courses in the Masters of Education program. She teaches courses that are fully online that require video conferencing. She is a multilingual and can speak Lithuanian fluently, while reading and writing everyday language. She has been in her position for 5 years, with 2 years at her current institution. Zak<sup>7</sup> has 18 years of teaching in private and public schools in three provinces in Canada. He has been a science teacher, department head and has even had experience teaching vocal music. He has been the curriculum coordinator for a well-known school board in Ontario. He began as an assistant professor in 2003 and is now an associate professor with the Bachelor of Education program. He is also a multilingual and can speak Dutch. Both participants come from East University.

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<sup>6</sup> A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the participant.

<sup>7</sup> A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the participant.

### **3.5 Method**

#### **3.5 Research Procedure**

**3.5.1 Survey.** I used a survey because it is considered an instrument to accumulate information to explain and evaluate a specified group of people's behavior, thinking and opinion on any uprising phenomena in the society. They can survey a large population of subjects, allows researchers to establish a broad impression of the population's experiences and views and seeks to create generalizations from the data (Cohen, 2007). This method surveys a "population of subjects, with little or no personal interaction and with the aim of establishing a broad impression of their experiences or views (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 159). The purpose of my survey is to gain a broad understanding of participants' views or experiences with blogging. Surveys have several advantages for my study. They allow participants to respond anonymously, inexpensive to administer, easy to compare and analyze, and can get lots of data. However, some challenges include the possibility that the researcher might not get detailed and thoughtful responses; the wording can bias client's responses; they are impersonal; and one doesn't often have the full story (Stooke, 4 March 2014, Lecture). As authors of research texts put it, it is "an unsophistication and limited scope of the data that are collected" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 158-159). Finally, a limitation is that the "levels of literacy may be an issue, the understanding of the participants may affect the questions asked or the way they are expressed (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 162).

My data collection spanned two months in total. I emailed a script including the survey link and letter of information it to three universities: North University (57), South University (43) and West University (32). I chose these three universities because these are a few of the largest faculty of education in Southwestern Ontario, and widely known for their multiliteracies programs. I wanted to choose universities specifically and not colleges because I wanted professors who teach graduate education courses. I got the emails from the public faculty profiles on the public faculty of education websites. In total, 152 professors were recruited from 4 universities in southwestern Ontario. It took me two months to get 5 survey results. The survey was self-administered without the researcher and over the Internet. This allowed participants some extra time to think about and complete the questionnaire.

I used a qualitative survey with three 6-point Likert scale questions and three open ended questions. Two questions were to help identify the participant and their role in graduate education (see appendix A). I wanted to ask this because I wondered if the perceptions of professors were influenced by how many years they have been a professor. I was curious whether those who were newer in the profession had a more positive attitude towards blogs than those who have been in the field longer. I was curious about the number of years at the institution because I wondered if those who were newer could possibly have more institutional demands, which would influence the pedagogical practices of professors.

There were 3 questions with a 6-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree/nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, no answer). These questions helped to address my research questions. Overall, I wanted to understand the pedagogical viewpoint of graduate professors. This also helps me to understand the question of the professors' attitudes towards blogs and whether they can be legitimized in the field of education. The last question was an open-ended question. I asked this question because I specifically wanted to know the pedagogical viewpoint towards blogging for graduate professors.

**3.5.2 Interviews.** The purpose of the interview was meant to be more in-depth because the survey only had a few questions. My rationale for interviews is to fully understand the impressions and experiences of graduate educators with blogging and to explore more deeply with them about their answers to the survey. This method is “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 141). Some advantages of interviews are getting a full range of information, developing relationships with the client and the researcher can be flexible with the client. Some disadvantages are taking too much time, interviews can be hard to analyze, it can be costly, and the interviewer can bias client's responses (Stooke, 4 March 2014, Lecture).

I did two semi-structured interviews. There were 15 open-ended questions. Both participants had originally answered the survey first and volunteered their time to do the interviews. I conducted the first interview on April 1, 2015 with Gilda from the East University. It was an hour and 15 minutes on the phone. It was recorded and consent

form was signed and returned. The second interview was on April 13, 2015 with Zak from East University. It was an hour long and there was implicit consent because he had agreed to the interview. Both interviews were audio-recorded.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

I analyzed data through a multiliteracies framework. There were different emerging themes from the data, which I could relate to the four components of multiliteracies pedagogy: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. All perceptions could be analyzed objectively through these four components. The situated practice of professors draws on data such as what experience or practices professors have had with blogging. As I analyze for overt instruction, the data is analyzed through the perceived usefulness of blogging and ease of use. Through critical framing, I look towards the pedagogical viewpoint of blogging. Finally, through transformed practice, I analyze how and in what ways graduate professors incorporate blogging into their instruction.

My literature review (Kirkup, 2010; Paiva & Braga, 2014; Waely & Aburezeq, 2013; Sun & Chang, 2012; and Anderson et al., 1998) also assisted me in analyzing data because I looked for common themes or results that confirmed or disconfirmed what I had found. Additionally, my theoretical framework based on social theory and social constructivism helped me interpret results in a reflexive manner.

The analysis was done using transcriptions of the audio files of the interviews. A majority of the parts of the interview were used and organized to represent themes, and succinct ideas and concepts. The initial analysis used the survey and interview questions as themes around to group the data. A second analysis was done to identify emergent themes coming out of responses.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

With both approaches, there are issues of informed consent, safety, protection, well being, confidentiality, anonymity, and faithfulness in interpretation and reporting (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 142-143). Since I will look at various Internet communication methods, there is potential for misuse depending on the nature of the data to be collected,

the integrity of the researcher and the scrupulous protection of those who use the internet to communicate is all the more important (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 143). In the interviews, the participants were made aware of my own blogging practices and perspectives when it was related to something they had just said. This was for the sake of building a natural conversation to gather more in-depth information during the interview. This may have impacted my participants' answers to be more in agreement; however, the member checking allowed them to change anything that was said. This ensured there was no bias.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness of Data**

I defined clear participant data criteria and developed a set of questions that were thoughtful, and unbiased. I adapted the survey questions from another study and built upon these for the interview. I collected data in both a survey and 2 interviews to have multiple perspective points, and to gather as much information as possible.

This approach supports trustworthiness because I used triangulation, which is using more than one source of information to confirm a concept or idea (Boudah, 2010) and in my study, I have triangulated data from a survey, interviews and my literature review. This means that I have used at least two qualitative research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. In other words, I have examined the consistency and overlapping of different data sources. I gathered results at different points in time, the survey came first, and then the interviews. In addition, the literature by Kirkup (2010) and Waely & Aburezeq (2013), these studies confirmed that my research method of doing interviews to gather perceptions was appropriate meanwhile the literature by Paiva & Braga (2014) confirmed the need to email a questionnaire/survey to collect opinions about blogging as well as gathering baseline data (Anderson et al., 1998). My results confirmed similar results as my literature review. Kirkup (2010) confirms the idea that blogging is a new medium to articulate ideas. Paiva & Braga (2014) confirms that teachers will choose to transform and reproduce meaning in other digital contexts and using different tools. Waely & Aburezeq (2013) confirms that the blog is a powerful application to enhance learning however there are several advantages as well as disadvantages. Sun & Chang (2012) confirms the conduciveness of collaborative



interaction on blogs in facilitating learners' meaning-making process. I also compared people with different viewpoints. I have also done member checking, which is asking participants in the study to review conclusions and observations of the interviews (Boudah, 2010). I shared both the results and discussion section with each interview participant to give them an opportunity to validate my findings and to elicit further clarification of my results. This validates my interpretation of data and that I was really listening to when respondents spoke and if I had communicated their ideas correctly. I made sure I included all information to the most accurate transcription available and did not leave anything out. I made sure to represent all of their main points regardless of how it might affect data analysis. Gilda wanted to represent her thoughts on multiliteracies in a more clarified way, with minor adjustments. But we mutually agreed upon the interpretation.

### **3.9 Summary**

In this chapter, I have explained my methodology and the methods used in this study. I have also explained my rationale for this methodology as well as the ethical considerations. Triangulation has been used because I have my survey, interview and literature review. Paiva & Braga (2014) used a questionnaire in their study in order to gather opinions about blogging, which confirms the idea of using a survey method prior to my interviews. Kirkup (2010) and Waely & Aburezeq (2013) used interviews to gather perceptions about blogging, which confirm the idea of using semi-structured interviews in my own study. The literature review confirms similar results to my study: blogs are a powerful application to enhance learning; it is a new medium to articulate ideas; there is collaborative interaction on blogs in facilitating learners' meaning-making processes. However, there are many other digital contexts and different tools that teachers can use to transform and reproduce meaning, and there are still several disadvantages. The next chapter will introduce the results from my study.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Data from Survey and Interviews

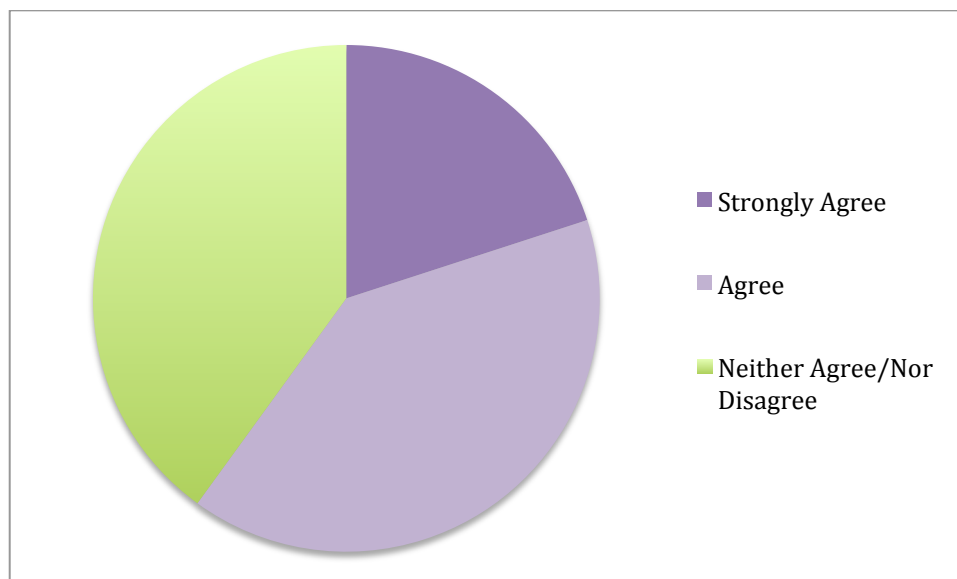
#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the results from the survey. I will present the results related to each 6-point Likert scale question. There will be a discussion of the comments that were provided during the open-ended question about blogs and scholarship.

#### 4.2 Blogging as a medium of facilitating learning

One participant strongly agreed, two participants agreed and two participants neither agreed/nor disagreed that the blog is a medium of facilitating learning.

Figure 1. *The blog is a medium for facilitating learning.*



One participant who was in agreement with this, stated that regarding students' learning, "it can have value." This person went on to say, "however, especially at the Masters level – many students are teachers – therefore time is precious to complete course readings, assignments, and attend class. Blogging adds another layer of time." This suggests an issue that learning can be compromised because of the multiple identities of students and the responsibilities that they have to devote to certain aspects of a master's program. With my own experience, I have received 3-4 journal articles a week to read, with 25 pages each as the norm. In one term, there will be about 3 different assignments. There is also 80% participation rate in class that needs to be followed.

With demands such as these, this participant has brought up an important practical issue of time management for the student regarding blogs. The high demands of a master's program with the addition of blogging can affect learning in a negative way according to this point. Another participant spoke to the responsibilities of professors teaching masters programs,

Given the competing demands (e.g. research, service, etc.) on top of teaching, I may re-think my use of blogging and other student-driven technologies because even though I like to think I subscribe to the ideal of "best interest of the student," work/life balance also matters.

Although both participants contend to agreeing that the blog can be a medium for facilitating learning, adding a blogging aspect is time consuming for both the student and teacher. There could be potential for blogging to facilitate learning, but in reality and practicality, it may not be as feasible as hoped. Students need to develop a blog, maintain it and most times high production value takes precedent for them. Another participant speaks to this issue further,

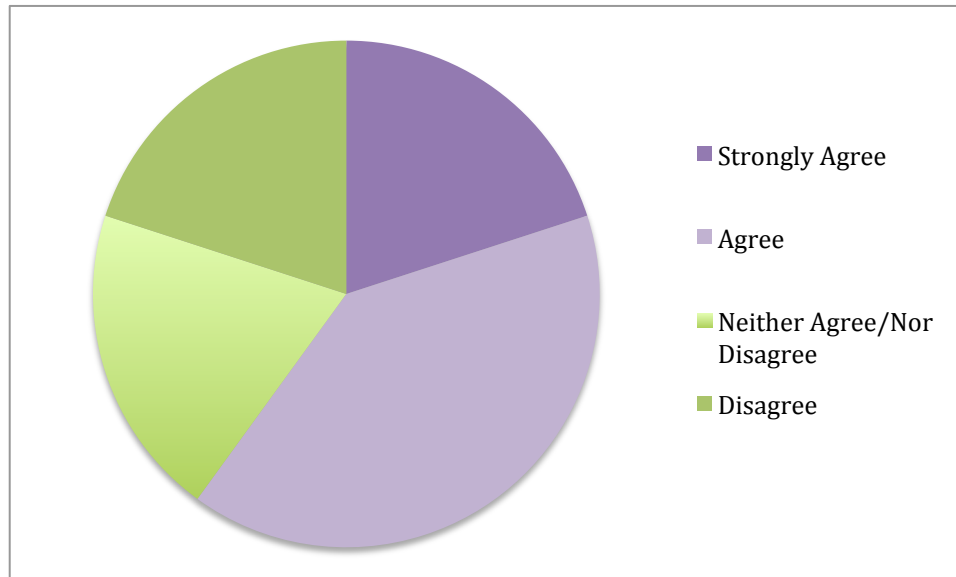
I find the challenge is for [students] to maintain certain ways of thinking (e.g. having structure to thoughts, providing reasons for their conclusions, claims, assertions). Some (not all) students seem to toss those things out of the window, and I think that high production value or time spent on production can somehow replace the thinking behind digital production.

This participant speaks to the issue that thinking and learning is lost because students focus on unrelated aspects such as aesthetics and making it visually appealing. There are practical issues in producing a blog that will get in the way of learning itself such as a username, theme, set up, widgets, titles, etc. Therefore, there is potential that a blog can facilitate learning, only if students pay less attention to high production value. If this were the case, a blog can facilitate learning by encouraging students to create structure in their thoughts and provide reasons for their conclusions, claims and assertions.

### 4.3 Blogging as a medium for student interactivity

One participant strongly agreed, two participants agreed, one participant neither agreed/nor disagreed and one participant disagreed that the blog is a medium for student interactivity.

Figure 2. *The blog is a medium for student interactivity.*

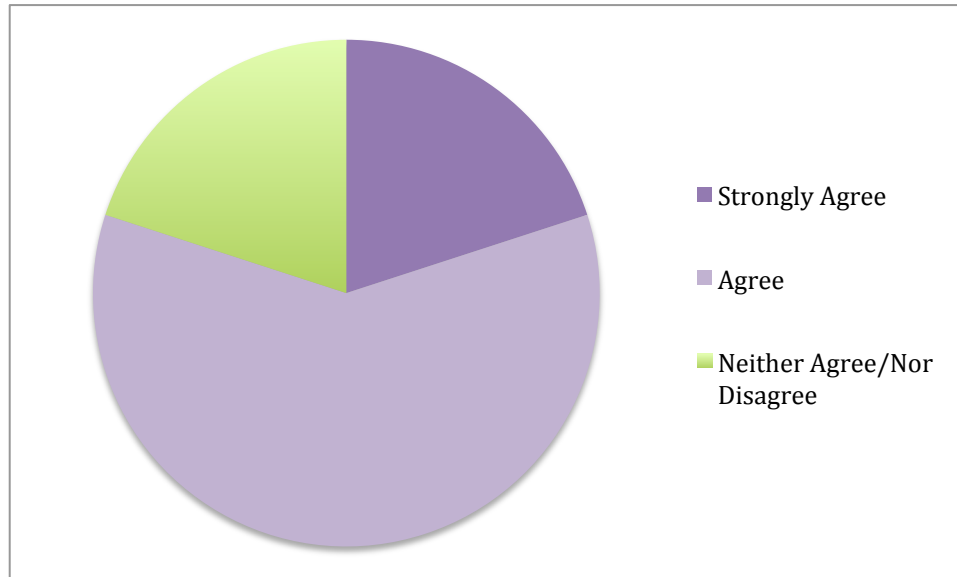


One comment related to the uncertainty or disagreement that blogs are a medium for student interactivity was the point that “people don’t read the blogs.” This means that students are not actively visiting their colleague’s blogs in order to interact with the ideas presented in their blog posts. In regards to the interactivity between the teacher and student, one participant noted, “face-to-face has an immediate response.” This suggests that blogs do not provide immediate responses that could facilitate student interactivity most efficiently and effectively. Another participant who agreed with this statement said, “One thing I liked about blogging was that it results in a dialogic process, where I can offer feedback.” There are conflicting perceptions regarding whether blogs can support student and teacher interactivity.

### 4.4 Blogging as a medium for reflection/ transferability as a learning tool

One participant strongly agreed, three participants agreed, and one participant neither agreed/nor disagreed that blogging is a medium for reflection and there is transferability of blogs as a learning tool.

Figure 3. *The blog is a medium for reflection and there is transferability of blogging as a learning tool.*



One participant who was in agreement with this statement stated that, “I just see them as newsletters and they are only as good as the writing and usefulness of the content.” This suggests an important role that the professor has in choosing readings that facilitate reflexivity and learning. In this way, reflexivity is a “multifaceted, complex, and ongoing dialogical process that is continually evolving” (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 2). Also, this person equates blogs with newsletters, suggesting that there are aspects of blogs that could be transferable as a learning tool. A second participant who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement states that “there are a number of tools currently available that provide affordances to facilitate learning, allow for student interactivity and can function as a tool for metacognition and reflection.” Thus, although blogs can have the potential of several affordances, it is still one out of many other tools that can be utilized.

#### **4.5 Other Considerations**

There are a lot of mixed perceptions of blogs. One comment was that one participant mentioned, “I encourage the use of a lot of technology (blogs, animation, video production) among students.” But they also said, “from a student learning/pedagogy perspective, I have found it a challenge to guide learners in using blogs well!” This

participant wants to use blogging with students, but finds it challenging. On the other hand, another participant commented, “I wouldn’t use blogging for assessment or evaluation of students’ assignments, [it is] too public.” Most students don’t want to have their blogs or work public, which is an issue that professors have to think about.

Time management is an issue shared between participants. One participant said that “I’ve found that weekly blogging requires disproportionately more time on my part than things like weekly reflections in more standard formats, such as e-mail.” Another said that,

Students repeat what others say, or write huge amounts without critical reflection, where quantity trumps quality... as an instructor this takes too much management time. Blogging is also a media that appears to reduce the amount of scholarly reference to one’s statements—it becomes mostly opinion—again, a time intensive management issue for an instructor.

There are also many platforms for blogging and “this creates a learning curve for students every time they take a course—often a slow curve and productivity suffers because they can’t become fluent with the platform fast enough.” There are also shared opinions, blogs are “one of many tools” and “there are a number of tools currently available.”

#### **4.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the results of the survey and the related comments that would help explain the perceptions of the five participants. The results show that there are many different perceptions regarding blogging, and that there is debate regarding the acceptance of blogs as a learning tool, a medium for learning, student interactivity and reflection. These baseline data results indicate a need to explore ideas such as professors and students who have identities that are multiple and contradictory (Pierce, 1995, p. 15), which relates to the time intensive issue of blogging. Secondly, blogs facilitate dialogic processes, which relate to social constructivism and social theory about how knowledge is created through negotiating between ideas of others and engaging in mutual engagement (Kim, 2013, p. 227). In the next chapter, I will discuss the results from the two interviews where we spoke more in depth about blogging in graduate education.

## **Chapter 5**

### **5 Participant's Interview Data**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences between the two research participants. I have organized the interview results in terms of their answers to my 4 research questions. Both participants, Gilda and Zak, address each question in varied ways. Then, I will discuss the disadvantages of blogging as stated by the participants. Finally, I will provide a reflection on the results from the interview.

#### **5.2 Similarities**

Both participants are multilingual and spoke at least one more language other than English. Both have a familiarity with multiliteracies theory, but not an in-depth understanding. Both believe that the most important skill students should possess is developing analytical skills, which would include summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing and applying critique. The two spoke to using other similar tools other than blogs, that they would much rather use than a traditional blog platform. Both are very proficient with digital technologies. Gilda and Zak have been in their current position for approximately 4.5 years.

#### **5.3 Differences**

Zak had a science background, which he contended had influenced how he responded to questions. His original degree is in marine biology. He also wasn't a believer in multiliteracies theory, where Gilda didn't have a strong opinion with it. In the survey, Zak said neither agree/nor disagree to all three questions: (1) The blog is a medium for facilitating learning; (2) The blog as a medium for student interactivity; (3) The blog is a medium for reflection and there is transferability of blogging as a learning tool. Gilda said agree to all three questions. At East University, Zak has been at this institution in various roles for 11 years, whereas Gilda has been at this institution for 2 years.

### **5.3.1 Participants and Social Theory**

Upon interviewing these two participants and identifying a little bit more of their teaching background, it becomes evident that I begin to analyze them through social theory. First and foremost, both these participants identities are multiple and contradictory (Pierce, 1995, p. 15), considering what additional languages they speak, or what they studied in post secondary. As they spoke about their multilingual practices, it was evident that language is a process of growth for them (Saint-Georges & Weber, 2013, p. 15), as they described themselves as not as fluent as they would want to be. These two participants were multiple people in multiple places (Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 1), as they have held a different number of years at their current institution. With this being said, it was very important that data would be analyzed considering that different things to different people can invoke multiple representations, which will all be discussed.

### **5.4 Research Question 1: What is the perceived usefulness, ease of use, attitudes and actual use of blogs from graduate professors?**

Gilda found that the usefulness of blogs was often clouded by the challenges she faced. First, she thought her students would have had a better understanding of what a blog was as a medium, but they didn't. A blog can only be useful, if they had a better understanding of blogs. She explains that a blog is not an essay, and to get her students to express their ideas that are not necessarily textual has been real challenge. I infer that a blog can be useful when it's not entirely text-based. Gilda has found that students require remedial teaching of the different ways to effectively express ideas in a blog. She wants her students to interact with theoretical content and evaluate the research that they're being asked to look at. She wants them to seek out interesting research and expand on it. But all of that becomes clouded, because she has to teach them "how to blog, or help them acquire the basics of blogging". My interpretation is that teaching time is allocated more towards instructing students how to use a blog instead of dealing with ideas and substantive course content. Perhaps there is an unclear definition of blogs. These results relate to the multitude of definitions regarding a blog and distinguishing it between an academic blog, which was discussed earlier in this study. In addition, perhaps students do not possess the skill that is one component of multiliteracies



pedagogy, which is critical framing and understanding which context and purpose is appropriate for different modes of meaning. Finally, Gilda offers overt instruction, another component of multiliteracies pedagogy, which seems to be critical in her practice of using blogging as academic activity with her students.

The usefulness of a blogging activity in the beginning of her course was described as, “I would say the first three weeks of content from 80% of the students was just terrible.” She feels in order to maximize the utility of blogging as a medium, it requires both commitment from the student and professor. She would like to see students use blogs, but has found that is up to the professor to teach the basics of blogging, and requires most students to learn and use the technology. She prefers that graduate courses emphasize students’ critical interaction with course content, not learning how to use software. She wants to have conversations about ideas and not about how do you login to this? How do I retrieve my password? I understand this, as the usefulness of blogs can be lost because of the technical issues of the technology. This is an interesting result because it expands the results of Waely & Aburezeq (2013). In their study, they described the negative component of blogging was that there was a need for high level of technological skills. In this study, as a starting point, the first technological skill students should possess is to remember their passwords and be able to retrieve it on their own if need be. This speaks to the different capabilities of students and the need to assume different identities, which may or may not include technology in their lives.

Gilda has found that adding a blogging component to her course has created “clunkiness”. This means that students are now logging into a new platform, with a new login, and often a unique platform in addition to those provided by the school, “We have all these extra technologies and the students are frustrated because it is yet another click and password and interface.” This relates to multiliteracies theory, as there are a “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (New London Group, 1996, p. 62). She is waiting for blogging platforms that are more functional to her purposes. Huge chunks of time degenerate into “How do I work a blogging platform?” She has found that her students become easily distracted with the mechanics of using the technology. Rather, she wants her students to work through content and develop really high-end Blooms taxonomy skills. This would

include, “whole analytical thinking and understanding of what epistemology really means, instead of being able to set up a really cool blog.” She describes the process as being a grade 9-technology teacher to help her students who have difficulty using a blogging platform.

Another issue is security. Gilda wants her students to be honest in their work, but that requires setting up a secure place for them, which makes the process uneasy to use. For example, when using Blogger, the Google platform, Gilda’s own blogs became mixed up amongst her students’ blogs, which makes locating content or updating extremely difficult.

For a professor, evaluating blogs is difficult because she constantly needs the URL of her students’ blogs and her students often neglect instructions such as such as putting their name into their blog title. She has found herself attempting to evaluate numerous blogs with identical names like “Reflections on education.” This makes the process of identifying what to evaluate extremely difficult (in her words, a “nightmare”). This is a new result from the study of Waely & Aburezeq (2013) who broadly discussed negative comments from teachers. This result, neglecting instructions, gives an in-depth and specific issue that is important to consider when discussing the ease of use of blogging. Some students may not be comfortable identifying their blog with their real name, and usernames can be ambiguous that make it difficult for the professor to identify. Overall, Gilda finds the process of blogging difficult on students because many lack a fundamental understanding of blogs as a medium; as an instructor she has to allot time to teaching the basics of blogging and feels like a grade 9 technology teacher.

Zak understands that ease of use is dependent on whether “people are familiar and comfortable with digital technologies and how they can actually be used and what they can be used for in particular ways.” This result is important to multiliteracies theory because it speaks to the need that students need to be able to critically frame different modes of meaning to communicate their ideas when using a digital technology tool. His perception is similar to Gilda’s. Essentially, students need a better understanding of blogs as a medium. They need to be comfortable and familiar with login processes and retrieving passwords so that it doesn’t get in the way of their learning.

### **5.5 Research Question 2 & 3: What are the pedagogical practices of professors who use blogs? How or in what ways do graduate professors incorporate blogging into their instruction?**

Gilda maintains four blogs on her own time. She finds it to be a good way to work through ideas. She takes her research that is written in academic papers and puts it into plain language or other forms which she think is really powerful. As this was not a condition for participants in the inclusion of this study, it was interesting that Gilda was an academic who maintained blogs on her own. This result relates to Kirkup (2010), as his study only looked at academics with blogs. Gilda's perceptions of a blog being a powerful tool falls in line with what other academics have said about blogs being a medium to articulate ideas. In her teaching, she has used "bi-weekly blogs—every two weeks, students have a theme that is related to the course readings. There is a choice of themes and they have to blog about it." Gilda has "always used technology as a vehicle of learning." She integrates technologies as performance tasks so that it replaces a traditional paper presentation. In particular, she has "incorporated and used blogging as a master's assignment."

However, Gilda does use an alternative form of blogging of technology-mediated communication, which she describes as e-mail based correspondence assignments. She asks students to e-mail their thoughts about the course topics for that week. They respond to the readings and make connections. This becomes a one on one correspondence that she particularly enjoys. She looks forward to reading those emails because it's intimate and gives them a chance for students to tell her their thinking. She has found that the first few interchanges are typically awkward but then it becomes very organic like a regular conversation. She says, "It's a really great way to build trust. It is like providing office hours. Toward the end, they are being very honest about what they understand and what they don't understand." She is able to say, "three weeks ago you said you were interested in...Have you thought about how this new thing connects to this thing?" She is an advocate of this method instead of blogging. She thought blogging could have done this but in a bigger way. She has tried using blogs twice and suggests that "maybe I'm not instructing them well... but I really feel it was a disaster on so many levels." Another way Gilda uses technology in her pedagogy, is that she had students

“who were dealing with controversial topics in the readings produce video rants, just like Rick Mercer.” Although Gilda does believe in the potential of blogs, there are still other tools that are better suited to the needs of her students.

Likewise, Zak believes there are various tools of blogging and “you can stretch the definition of a blog”. He can see aspects of blogging in Google Docs, Knowledge Forum and Voice Thread. He gives the example of Google Docs, which by itself, might not seem like a blog tool. But because of the “incorporation of Pirate Pad that happened 3 years ago into Google Docs, it has now turned into a communication tool. Now you can chat with each other as you are collaboratively creating a document together. So you can stretch the definition.” This result confirms what Paiva & Braga (2014) found in their study that although some professors may not continue to use blogging as an academic activity, they could be using other alternatives to transforming and reproducing ideas with different tools.

In one professional example, Zak shares one link that is produced on WordPress, which is a fairly traditional blogging platform. However, he has expanded on it to create an

academic record of the activities of researcher. And if you take a look at the formats, it’s text, it’s video, and it’s graphics. There are a lot of PowerPoint presentations because of our conference presentations and etc. So it’s mixed media, in terms of the kinds of formats we are actually using. So this is an example of what you would probably call a traditional blog, however, it isn’t one individual putting down their opinions. It’s a group of academics that are working in a particular area and recording their research endeavors.

Zak has discussed the constituent parts of a blog, which could be related to multimodality in terms of text, video and graphics. This would be the inclusion of visual, auditory and textual modes all in one setting.

However, he doesn’t engage in blogging on a personal level. He explains that,

writing is actually hard work, so if I am going to do hard work, I’m going to get some reward for it, i.e. it is going to be published somewhere. I will only choose conferences that have proceedings, I will only go to journals that actually have a fairly high impact factor, etc.

Zak does value writing, which relates to words having value systems (Norton, 2000, as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 21). This is important because it takes into consideration the social, political and cultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1981 as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 21) of the reality of academic professors.

In his teaching practice, he has “asked students for a reflection on learning” in blogging practices. Zak “always uses some kind of reflexive activity using some kind of format”. He wants his assignments to be a reflective activity that is using some kind of technology to record their particular thoughts about their metacognitive activity. Both graduate professors have incorporate blogging into their instruction for the pedagogical practice of facilitating metacognition. Zak speaks to wanting his students to engage in what Byrd Clark & Dervin (2014) refer to as reflexivity, ““willingness to go and sit with the uncomfortableness and messiness of one’s own ideological attachments, ways of representing, and... at the same time, to flexibly engage and negotiate meanings with one another” (p. 25).

#### **5.6 Research Question 4: What is the pedagogical viewpoint towards blogging of graduate professors?**

Gilda has been using technology in education and has done a mixture of online and face-to-face courses. She says that everywhere she has worked, technology seemed to be a huge priority. She constructs assignments that students can make connections between practice, research and theory. She tries to scaffold her courses, beginning with a theoretical framework or epistemological positions to create a foundation. Gilda’s perception of technology confirms what Waely & Aburezeq (2013) speak to as a possible relationship between the perception of technology and perceptions of blogging.

Gilda really conceptually likes the idea of blogging. She strongly feels like “blogging has immense potential.” She wants to “keep assignments open so that students can express themselves in different ways.” She believes it can be a great means of expression because it’s not a place where you can put an essay, “It’s a completely different mode of expression; a place where you can use humour, pictures and videos. It is a bonus to make it less text-based because when blogs are overly text-based, it defeats

the purpose of blogging.” Essentially, Gilda speaks to the different modes that are available to communicate ideas, a central component to multiliteracies theory.

In her experience with using blogs however, she spent a lot of time responding to her students. This process, she found, was dull in conversations about technology. She wasn’t getting the dialogic process that she had wanted and couldn’t see the value of continuing to blog as course assignment. Instead she would rather have email correspondence with her students. Finally, Gilda believes that “Universities should be a place of personal growth, where we are trying to support students achieve a level of wisdom”.

Despite technical issues and other tools, Gilda does state a few positives about blogging. She believes,

Blogging is its own unique literacy in the sense that you are participating as a consumer of blogs or producer of blogs. It’s a different way of self-expression. It requires modes of communication and perhaps even different modes of analyzing and evaluating.

The main point here is that blogs allows students to understand literacy in a different way than the traditional. She describes, “The ultimate empowerment is being able to express yourself and write. Blogging has the potential to give everyone a voice. I think blogs have the potential to essentially self-publish digital content and that can be really empowering”. Gilda confirms the results of Sun & Chang, 2012) that “blogs endow students with a sense of authorship as writers of blog entries and provide a space for them to sort out what being an author entails, purposes of writing and authority in writing” (p. 43).

Zak expressed, “Yes, blogging is an appropriate educational activity for graduate education.” Since Zak spends all of his teaching time online, he asserts that something like a blog should be a requirement. However, he stresses there should be a mix of synchronous and asynchronous communication: “Asynchronous communication is insufficient for the development of a community of learners. A synchronous tool is required for the critical interactions that are necessary for community development.” He says, “I am very much interested in pushing the boundaries of what technologies can allow us to do. I try to incorporate technology so they can be used to the best extent for

what they are good at.” He describes himself as “proficient in and an aficionado of trying to mix mechanisms.”

Zak speaks to the variety of tools similar to blogs. These tools are useful when students “can actually make use of digital technologies to allow for better learning to occur.” Zak believes that “the real benefit of using some kind of blogging technology or going through the practice itself is reaching the metacognitive level so you’re actually thinking about your own thinking.” He explains, “If you have a blog and you are using as a means of being able to track and trace your conceptual development, then good.” When using knowledge forum, which can be stretched to mean a blog, Zak explains, “You have the opportunity to see the linkages between your own ideas and the ideas of somebody else.” Students are able to arrive at a “meta-level, i.e., being able to think about your own thinking. That’s where I think blogging or some kind of reflective practice works.” A tool that is similar to blogs, i.e., Knowledge Forum engages in this process as Zak explains,

You had the opportunity to see the linkages between your own ideas and the ideas of somebody else so again, students are able to arrive at a meta-level i.e. being able to think about your own thinking. That’s where I think blogging or some kind of reflective practice works. However, there are a number of technologies that allows you do that kind of thing either individually or collaboratively with others.

Blogs can be really valuable because they allow you to think back on your own ideas, trace the ontological roots of the ideas and be able to actually formulate them in a coherent way.

Zak advocates rich, authentic situations and contexts and describes himself as: an aficionado of social constructivism as a means of developing new ideas or building new concepts. I believe that new understandings of concepts can only arise through the exchange of information or ideas between individuals. So any technology that allows us to do that, particularly across distance and time, is something I’m very much in support of.

He is interested in cognitive psychology and the changes that occur within your brain structure as you are going through the learning process, so it just makes sense that, “I

would be interested in anything that allows this process to be visible.” He wants to “concentrate on tasks that allow individuals to practice their thinking”.

Zak speaks to many components of social constructivism and multiliteracies theory. Firstly, he is an advocate of authentic and meaningful learning contexts (Kim, 2013, p. 226-227), as well as co-construction of meaning (Palinscar, 1998, p. 345) by interacting with peers. He speaks to “meaning making as an active, transformative process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012, p. 188).

### **5.7 Attitudes towards Multiliteracies**

I asked both participants what they knew about multiliteracies. Gilda described multiliteracies as communication (delivering and receiving) ideas, analysis, synthesis, etc. in various forms. There are intersections of literacy through a variety of different ways. This includes critical literacies from people’s conceptions, to being able to use all different media to express themselves. This allows students to gather information and construct knowledge of the world around them.

Zak states that he is not particularly conversant in multiple literacies or a strong believer in it. But one thought he has is that “there are different ways you can approach information. The only piece I do believe is that the conceptual ideas and theories you deal with should be documented in some shape or way.” As mentioned before, Zak has scientific roots, which influence his conception of multiliteracies. He questions whether the format changes the way we understand, “The only thing I can think about is that if you are particularly competent in the use of digital technologies, it doesn’t take any difficulty at all to change a particular set of information from one kind of format to another format. So does the meaning change?” He believes that it has more to do with the individual rather than the actual content or format of information. Expanding on this point, Zak states that the “understanding of information and applicability of knowledge is of a particular person. It is the domain of the individual, so knowledge is in the mind of the knower”. He suggests, “we need to be conversant in all kinds of formats—all kinds of literacies so that we can do our best in terms of communicating with others. He concludes, “I believe that we need to change the educational system from the ground up



so that we are looking at integrated kinds of perspectives that allows for a variety of different formats to be used, i.e., multiple literacies, by all means, let's do that!"

## **5.8 Assessment**

On a practical level, Gilda expects her students to be descriptive and demonstrate analytic ability in various ways. She always has a discussion with her class about

having a point to what you're doing. Whether it is about your own critical incident, reflection, or research, you have to have an analytic synthesis. You need to be able to take it a step further and explain, here is what people said, and here is what it means. I want students to make a claim and back up the claim with reasoning and evidence such as a quote and citation from another source. I am sure that in writing, this is hard enough. Many graduate students do need help with how to organize their thinking and how to formulate a topic sentence, use of paragraphs and clarity of expression.

Ideally, the competencies she looks for in her students is that they have the ability to read, evaluate, summarize, analyze, see similarities among ideas and forces and different theorists and people and synthesize. "I hope that they are able to apply critique, and identify some kind of theoretical framework and move to applying criteria to that theoretical framework to critique work." Zak shares similar perspectives as Gilda. He stresses the importance of analysis, synthesis and creativity.

If we take a look at Bloom's taxonomy, I don't think memory is the be all and end all. It's the starting point. Memory, or remembering something, being able to understand it, and conceiving it, such as being able to actually get at the meaning of the text is important as well. What about analysis? What about synthesis? What about evaluation? What about creativity? Those are the places where you are using a blog: you are going to expand on those kinds of pieces. So you're going to be talking about a particular kind of learning that is going to be enhanced by blogs.

Gilda uses a common rubric, and the assessment includes: Did you use the medium appropriately? Is there clear expression? Are claims made and structured? What is the

technical confidence? We spend a lot of time talking about what good communication can amount to. For Zak, he evaluates on:

How well can you actually make use of digital interfaces when you're actually dealing with a variety of different devices? How well do you actually make use of devices as a communication tool as a social platform for discourse? How well do you use the digital technologies as a means of aggregating concepts, information to each other and other people? How well do you actually make use of digital technologies as a procedural tool, a cognitive tool that allows us to do better thinking and all of those pieces become really important in the study of digital technologies.

These two professors look for the same competencies in their students, which fall in line with what university policies are and what the Ontario Government expects out of faculty. It is important to note that digital technologies and assessment relates to creating a strong pedagogical foundation for blogging. As these two professors indicated evaluating, synthesizing and analyzing are key components when dealing with digital technologies such as blogging.

### **5.10 Disadvantages**

Gilda states several disadvantages to blogging. The first issue is the navigation to find what you are looking for,

When you set up students in triads to look at each other's blogs and comment back, it becomes really challenging because of the amount of clicks to find what you need. It is an unpleasant experience and waste of time. But that's the technology and the process.

The second issue is lack of meaningful exchange between students. When asked, "Do you believe blogs increase the level of meaningful exchange between students?" Gilda replied,

No because I found it impossible to go to each other's blog because it became really difficult from an ethical perspective. You can't ask them to put their blogs on public because people don't feel comfortable to express views so this has to be

password protected, or you have to give a person access and it becomes extremely clunky.

Technically, student interactivity becomes deterred by the technology. The third issue is time intensive because of the learning curve.

Blogging is a different means of expression, something that you have to learn to do, and it's still a literacy that a blogger has to acquire and it does take time to wrap your head around blogging and my thing is the graduate program a place where you learn to actually write for a blog or produce content for a blog? My answer would be no.

In a high paced learning environment of a graduate program, students may need explicit instruction on blogs, which a professor may or may not be able to provide in addition to other teaching and learning responsibilities. The fourth issue is the blogging culture of graduate studies. She feels that one major issue is that

Students don't seem to be following people's blogs outside of school. They don't seem to be part of that culture and I think that this is a disadvantage in terms of being a blog content producer because they haven't been consumers, so they don't have much of a sense of blogging.

A fifth issue is that a lot of students forget their password to log into their blog. The sixth issue is too much management time that results in the intensification of work for the student and instructor. "How much can I redesign this course? How much time am I willing to put into remedial stuff for students and how much time am I willing be tech support for a technology that's not otherwise supported?" She states, "I do think there is a barrier of a learning curve, if you're not a tech person, then you don't find new technologies fun, then it's really intensification but really an added on unpleasant task with new technologies as faculty." Finally, the last issue is the demands on faculty: "as tenured faculty there is huge pressure to publish." Gilda mentions seven issues to blogging: difficulty in navigating, lack of student interactivity, time intensive, lack of blogging culture, forgetting passwords, too much management time, intensification of work, and huge pressure to publish.

To summarize, the various issues Gilda commented on include: difficulty navigating what a professor is looking for; lack of meaningful exchange between

students; student interactivity becomes deterred by the technology; time intensive because of the learning curve; current blogging culture of graduate studies; forgetting passwords; and demands on faculty. Gilda mentions several disadvantages that were also listed in Waely & Aburezeq (2013): lack of immediate feedback, extra workload, and nature of students' responses. Further, she mentions other factors listed in Anderson et al. (1998) regarding the demands on faculty.

### **5.11 Reflection**

One common theme about the pedagogical practice of graduate professors is that they tend to use tools similar to blogs, but not necessarily a traditional blogging platform. This confirms that there are many other digital tools that educators may be open to using (Paiva & Braga, 2014) and that they are not closed off to other digital means. Another theme is that their pedagogical viewpoint of blogs is similar. They describe it as a different mode of expression; a unique literacy; tracking conceptual development, and achieving a meta-level where you are able to think about your thinking. This is connected to social theory and the value systems of language (Norton 2000 as cited in Byrd Clark, 2009, p. 21) as well as social constructivism and participating in authentic and meaningful contexts. Finally, these results confirm aspects of multiliteracies theory and reflexivity regarding meaning-making and the willingness to achieve deeper awareness. Also, it is apparent that despite these advantages, the usefulness of blogs are clouded by their challenges (Waely & Aburezeq, 2013; Anderson et al., 1998).

## Chapter 6

### 6 Discussion

#### 6.1 Introduction

This study's aim was to investigate the perceived usefulness, ease of blogs, attitudes and actual use of blogs from graduate professors. This was accomplished through the implementation of a purposefully designed survey instrument and semi-structured interview. In this chapter, I will discuss the study by addressing each research question and referring back to my theoretical framework to analyze the results. I will conclude with limitations, implications, and future directions for my study.

#### 6.2. Discussion

##### 6.2.1 What is the perceived usefulness, ease of use, attitudes and actual use of blogs from graduate professors?

Blogs are not easy to use for both the student and teacher. Only when there is a level of experience and comfort using digital technologies, can both the teacher and learner reap the rewards of blogging. There are misconceptions of blogging, where students engage in text-based practices entirely instead of adding their own multimodal style and interpretation to a post. Oftentimes, the instructor has to instruct students on the logistics of blogging, rather than engaging in meaningful, authentic learning. There are technical issues such as forgetting passwords, not following instructions or production value that gets in the way.

Although students have multiple identities and language capabilities, the current generation of graduate students may not have the technological skills to assist them when using blogs. This is an unexpected result, where I had expected the roles to be reversed and that professors may not have the technological skills to use blogs. In regards to the attitudes toward multiliteracies and blogging, one participant explained that it is the process of using different media as a form of expression. One participant suggests that we should be conversant in all kinds of formats to integrate all sorts of perspectives. But multiliteracies would not be a pedagogy that these instructors would have considered when using blogging as course assignment. Both participants did not speak to the meaning-making processes that multiliteracies encourage. This would encourage a

discussion for their epistemological views on meaning-making, or whether they would be using different terms to describe this learning process.

### **6.2.2 What are the pedagogical practices of professors who use blogs? How or in what ways do graduate professors incorporate blogging into their instruction?**

Gilda uses blogs in her personal and academic life, which she finds to be very powerful with immense potential for learning. But by choice, she will opt not to utilize blogs as course assignment when she can use another format (e-mail-based correspondence) that offers better results. This is important because there are always going to be a better tool for specific students, courses and instructors. However, she is very encouraging of incorporating technology into her practice. Zak uses blogs in a professional example where he keeps a record of the activities of researchers and incorporates many different formats. One interesting point was that he would not engage in blogging without getting a reward for it, i.e. publishing for his writing. This is an important point that instructors do have responsibilities outside of their teaching practice to consider. Oftentimes, Zak would use other tools that would be similar to the processes of blogging in his teaching practice. These results could be interpreted as instructors being open to new technologies in their pedagogical practice. This supports the argument that “teachers need to acknowledge and appropriate for themselves the demands of new literacy practices” (Abas, 2011, p. 19).

Both instructors expect their students to be able to read, evaluate, summarize, analyze and synthesize. Most importantly, they should be creative. Both have their rubrics and evaluation criteria for using technology as course assessment. This result deserves further inquiry, as assessment in multiliteracies and multimodality can be a challenge in the pedagogical practice of professors. According to Vincent (2006), a tool is required to monitor the achievements of students who have adopted these alternative pathways to literacy. Arguably, it could be challenging to create such rubrics, which takes into account the multimodal aspects of language because “each mode has its own grammar and syntax (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Therefore, to develop indicators, which succinctly demonstrate a child’s multimodal progression, teachers have to understand the grammar behind each semiotic mode thoroughly” (Abas, 2011, p. 19).

This brings important insight as Abas (2011) describes,

In rethinking literacy pedagogy, it is necessary to consider how children can be taught to make semiotic choices that best fit their intended message. To begin with, the affordances of different modes and how they could work together or separately in meaning making should be made explicit to them. (p. 19)

It is quite possible that providing blogs as a course assignment requires a backward design where students are made specifically aware of the learning goal. There is importance that the success of blogging is dependent on the exact guidelines that professors are looking for.

### **6.2.3 What is the pedagogical viewpoint towards blogging of graduate professors?**

Technology is important to both instructors. Blogging is its own unique literacy for self-expression and gives students the potential to self-publish their work. Blogging is an appropriate educational activity for graduate education. Blogging allows a level of metacognition. This result is important because it distinguishes the potential for language to be ever changing and evolving for graduate students.

One professor is an aficionado of social constructivism as a means of developing new ideas and building new concepts. It is important that one participant is a social constructivist aficionado because it suggests the relation between the pedagogical viewpoint of blogging and technology and the advantages in learning and knowledge creation that is available. This means that professors are actively creating authentic and meaningful learning environments, with the inclusion of blogging or similar to it.

### **6.3 Limitations**

The survey was very short and the sample size was very small. Despite contacting 152 professors from 4 universities, it speaks volumes to the responsibilities of professors, whether they are checking their e-mails, or whether they are able to respond to a quick survey. There was no way to contact participants in the survey because it was completely anonymous unless they volunteered to do an interview with me. There was an issue with the clarity of one survey question. One participant was confused with the survey

question: “transferability of blogging as a learning tool.” Some questions in the survey and interview were very similar. There was no relationship of how long professors have been in the field and their views of traditional and alternative pedagogies.

#### **6.4 Implications**

Blogs can offer advantages conceptually in terms of providing social constructivist environments through dialogic processes and synchronous communication and nurturing meta-cognition and meaning making. But in practicality (and from what the participants in this study shared), blogs are lacking the technical prowess to accommodate beginners. The tool itself is technically complicated which gets in the way of instructional time and learning. There is lack of understanding of the blog as a medium. Seven disadvantages would include: navigation to find what you are looking for; lack of meaningful exchange between students; time intensive; culture of blogging; forgetting passwords, and too much management time. There are several complications that were a reoccurring theme such as the intensification for the instructor and student, the culture of blogging, and time management. The perceptions of graduate professors are mixed in terms of understanding blogs in a conceptual way and using them in a practical way. It seems like there are other tools, other than blogs, that can provide similar results (metacognition and meaning-making) but in a more functional and productive way.

#### **6.5 Future Directions**

Gilda puts forth a suggestion that writing centers that are available at any post-secondary institution should incorporate teaching the mechanics of blogging, or provide technical support in navigating and creating a blog. It is very beneficial to teach writing using technologies. She even suggests that as a component of the master’s program, that students should take a non-credit course to acquaint themselves with the basics of technology integration. This would be helpful to learn the mechanics of technology and how to use a blog to express yourself. In addition, there needs to be blogging platforms that are less clunky and easier to use as she describes, “I don’t think the technology has caught up to what we are doing.”



I think there ought to be support for working with professors to assist them with blogging or offering alternative approaches to academic writing because it is a matter of professional development and life long learning. It would be helpful for professors to have the most up to date options available to them regarding technology. It would be better if seminars or workshops were available to professors to gather information about blogging and its pedagogical approach. Further, I believe conference presentations regarding this study would open up discussion and create an interest in investigating whether blogs can be a sound pedagogical tool for a professor for their particular context.

It would be interesting to see whether future generations of graduate students will be aware and able to participate in the practice of blogging. It would be interesting to investigate the various ways students can apply their learning with different technological tools, for example whether they are capable to create multimedia to incorporate into a blog post. One possible study could be to gather blogs created for academic purposes and investigate common themes, for example, to investigate what blogs professors have graded as an A. Also, I think it would be important to investigate how professors who do use blogs as course assignment, assess these multiliteracies assignments. This would ensure a stronger pedagogical background if there were criteria that blogs should meet in order to be academically valued. I would like to investigate on a larger level, perhaps Canada-wide what the perceptions of blogging are and how it relates to multiliteracies to gather a more generalizable result. Also I would like to investigate whether graduate students 10 years from now have the skills and background to be understand the contexts for different designs of meaning. I want to know whether students in 2025 could use the available modalities and technology and understand the context and purposes of each. I am curious to see the transformed practices of graduate students throughout the years.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This thesis contributes to the field of graduate language and literacy education. Blogging is the integration of new technology into the field of applied linguistics and moving away from prescriptive, formalist ways of teaching academic reading and writing. This study reveals how blogging is a new way of learning, particularly in higher education, and gives insight into how Canada will need to thrive in an evolving societal labor market.

Further, as blogging incorporates multimodality, blogs can harness the arts, digital media and cultural industries. Through in-depth interviews, the results formulate what still matters in traditional approaches in reading and writing but supplementing with knowledge about what is new and distinctive about the ways professors and students make meanings. Further, this study looked into the situated practice of professors and blogging and what sort of overt instruction is provided. The findings reveal how professors critically frame and design the context and purpose of course assignments when including blogging or not. Finally, this study reveals what transformed practices and attitudes professors have towards blogging.

The findings are similar to the literature in terms of confirming that blogging can be a powerful application to enhance learning, but there are a number of challenges. What is new is that professors would rather use a different technology other than blogging, but that a lot of other alternative options have similar characteristics to blogging. It is important to note that the concept and theoretical ideas behind blogging can be transferable to other technological options. This study is new because it confirms a small group phenomenon, in this case what professors in the field of Education, in the graduate program, think about blogging.

I have personally benefited from using blogs as part of meaning making in graduate studies. However, it seems like I may be of the minority. But the minority should still be considered. In an ideal situation, students will have had previous blogging experience in elementary or secondary school and move into postsecondary and graduate studies with knowledge of how to utilize and maximize blogs to their advantage and learning. In future generations, there is a possibility that our technology skills will be more diverse and honed and technical issues will be avoided. For now, in 2015, professors are open to encouraging new formats as graduate level assignments, which is the most promising part of this thesis. But, even in this day and age, a blogging platform should be stretched to include various different blogging-like platforms, which encourage dialogue, knowledge creation and multimodality. A future direction of this study should include following up on whether graduate students from the millennial generation are more capable of achieving some kind of reflexivity or deeper awareness in their personal and research-selves through technology. Finally, perhaps this study could serve as a

starting point for a discussion of moving away from the traditional writing of a thesis, leading to alternative, heteroglossic, multiliterate forms of demonstrating one's mastery of a subject.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey

(adapted from Williams & Jacobs, 2004 and Hendricks, 2010)

How many years have you held this position?

How many years have you been at your current institution?

The blog is a medium for facilitating learning.

- a) strongly agree
- b) agree
- c) neither agree/nor disagree
- d) disagree
- e) strongly disagree
- f) no answer

The blog is a medium for student interactivity.

- a) strongly agree
- b) agree
- c) neither agree/nor disagree
- d) disagree
- e) strongly disagree
- f) no answer

The blog as a medium for reflection and the transferability of blogging as a learning tool.

- a) strongly agree
- b) agree
- c) neither agree/nor disagree
- d) disagree
- e) strongly disagree
- f) no answer

Any thoughts about blogs and scholarship?

## **Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me a little about your teaching background?
2. Do you speak or use another language besides English? Which ones? How do you use them?
3. How do you feel about using new technologies such as blogging, in your teaching?
4. Have you had a chance to use blogging?
5. Can you tell me about your experiences with blogging?
6. What do you think of blogging as an educational activity for graduate education?  
(Do you think it's appropriate?)
7. Would you like to see blogging used more widely in the Masters of Education program as a learning tool?
8. Do you believe blogs increase the level of meaningful intellectual exchange between students more broadly?
9. How about your thoughts on blogging in relation to multiliteracies theory?
10. Are you familiar with multiliteracies theory?
11. What do you know about multiliteracies theory?
12. What would be some reasons you would or would not use blogs as course assignments?

13. What are some competencies that you expect graduate students to have and in what ways do you measure how these competencies have been acquired?
  
14. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers or roadblocks to innovation and productivity today?
  
15. In your opinion, how can we further strengthen a culture of innovation in graduate education to enhance quality and productivity?

## Appendix C: Letter of Information



### University Professors' Perceptions on Blogging as Course Assignments in Southwestern Ontario: A Multiliteracies Framework

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

##### Introduction

My name is Annie Tran and I am a Master's student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting a research study on the perceptions of professors on blogging, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

##### Purpose of the study

The aims of this study are to put forth new ways of thinking about the impact and adaptation of new technologies; namely the use of blogging as an educational activity from professors, who teach graduate courses in Education.

##### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study, you are providing consent for:

1. **A questionnaire.** You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that will take about 20-30 minutes. The questionnaire will be conducted through a survey link included in an e-mail. There will be a total of 5-10 participants.
2. **An interview.** You will be asked to meet with me at a convenient time and place to answer some questions about this topic. The interview would take about an hour. The interview will happen in a Skype or online format. I will ask you questions regarding your own professional and educational background, pedagogical viewpoint, thoughts and opinions towards blogging. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into written format. There may be some direct quotes used in my research report, but these quotes WILL NOT include identifying (i.e. names or locations) information. The interview will be conducted in English.

## Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information, which could identify you, will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. You will choose a pseudonym (an alias) and I will use this pseudonym throughout any and all of my analyses. No real names or names of locations will be used or identifiable in the report or future publications.

To protect your privacy, all digital data will be stored on a password protected USB in the researcher's office. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet with all names removed from the data (replaced with a pseudonym). Five years after completion of the study, all data will be shredded and destroyed.

## Risks & Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

## Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

## Questions

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Julie Byrd Clark or Annie Tran the Student Researcher.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Dr. Julie Byrd Clark

Annie Tran

Associate Professor

Student Researcher



University Professors on Blogging as Course Assignments in Southwestern Ontario: A  
Multiliteracies Framework

*Dr. Julie Byrd Clark & Annie Tran, Western University*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please choose ONE option by using your INITIALS to indicate your choice:

\_\_\_\_ YES, the researcher MAY use portions of my audio-recordings in presentations of the research.

\_\_\_\_ NO, the researcher MAY NOT use my audio-recordings in presentations of the research.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

## Email Script for Recruitment

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Annie Tran and Dr. Julie Byrd Clark are conducting. Briefly, the study involves a questionnaire and voluntary semi-structured interviews about the perceptions of professors, who teach graduate courses in Education on the impact and adaptation of new technologies on their pedagogy; namely the use of blogging as an educational activity. The time commitment is about 20 minutes for the questionnaire. If you want to volunteer for an interview, the time commitment will be 1-2 hours through Skype or e-mail.

If you would like to participate in this study, please click on the link below to access the survey and the letter of information is attached to this e-mail.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KZNQ3RB>

Thank you,

Dr Julie Byrd Clark and Annie Tran

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Annie Tran

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** Lakehead University  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
2012-2013 B.A.

University of Toronto at St. George  
Toronto, Ontario  
2007-2011 H.B.Sc.

**Additional Qualifications:** University of Toronto, OISE  
2015 ESL Part 1