

# Chapter 9

## The Teachers They are Becoming: Multiple Literacies in Teacher Pre–Service

**Lorayne Robertson**

*University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada*

**Janette Hughes**

*University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada*

### ABSTRACT

*The authors review all aspects of a Language Arts methods course for pre-service teachers, one which employs a multi-literacies pedagogy (The New London Group, 1996) and is taught at a laptop-based university. The course begins with a deliberate immersion into the complexities of multiple literacies, including digital literacy and critical literacy. The authors outline the course assignments, resources and instructional goals to determine how technology impacts pre-service teacher learning and intended future practice. The qualitative data sources include digital artifacts such as digital literacy stories, book talks that focus on social justice issues, and media literacy lessons. In addition, the researchers draw from cross-program data based on teacher candidate reflections and interviews. The data suggest that both the use of digital technology and a multi-literacies pedagogy can help pre-service teachers reflect on personal experiences to develop literacy teaching and learning practices that have transformative elements.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Our Language Arts teaching methods course focuses on multiple literacies including digital literacy, critical literacy and media literacy. Our “students” are teacher candidates engaged in this one-year teacher Pre-service program. We provide

this course at a laptop university – one with an emerging presence in the field of digital pedagogies. Each of the teacher candidates is assigned a laptop for the duration of the program. In the first section of the paper, we outline the context of the course, our instructional goals, and the theoretical framework that we have used to evaluate our instruction. Next, we describe our investigation to determine how, and to what degree technology

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has enhanced our students' ability to grasp and teach key constructs. As one of our key goals in the program is to encourage beginning teachers to think critically about their practice and become change agents, we also analyze our students' reflections and their practice teaching lessons to seek evidence of "transformative" elements. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings.

### **1.1 Literacy and Technology**

We are preparing teacher candidates to teach in a digital age; accordingly, our language and literacy course goes beyond the traditional notions of reading and writing print text. Teacher candidates engage with new digital media regularly in their out-of-school lives and we want them to be familiar with the out-of-school digital practices of their future students. We are aware that because of gaming, MSN, blogs, Face book, and the like, our teacher candidates possess skills that up to this time have been largely untapped in the classroom context. We work from an "asset model" that assumes that using new technologies can work as a benefit to literacy instead of as a deficit (Mackey, 2002). We realize also that multimedia technologies require new teacher skills and competencies if education is to remain relevant (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Garrety and Schmidt (2008) outline emergent and distinct genres of digital storytelling and see that each genre addresses a different function and purpose. They identify *reflective practice* digital stories as a genre that encourages Pre-service teachers to apply higher-order thinking such as meta-cognition in order to grasp and synthesize more difficult concepts. We consider also that digital technology has transformative possibilities – it has the potential to assist teachers and students to make positive changes to their world. Cummins (2000) proposes that the usefulness of technology in education should be judged not only by the degree to which knowledge is transmitted and skills are built but also by the "social pur-

poses to which these skills and information will be applied" (p. 536). He sees that some educators are "uncritical" in embracing technology in education, while others take the opposite stance and are dismissive of technology in education. His stance is a middle position which he explains as, "IT [Information Technology] can and should be employed to develop insight among students about human relationships at both individual and societal levels and to increase students' linguistic and intellectual power to effect positive changes in these human relationships" (p. 536). Because we agree that technology in education has this transformative potential, our Language Arts methods course begins with a focus on digital media and multiple literacies and the possibilities that they present for teaching about social justice.

### **1.2 Beginning in Complexity and Making a Difference**

We begin our Literacy Methods course by immersing our students in the complexity of multiple literacies (Bearne, 2003; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003, Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Mayer 2008). Here we include media literacy, critical literacy, computer literacy and digital literacy. Immersing our teacher candidates in complexity is a deliberative design (New London Group, 1996) and we see ourselves as designers of intentionally-complex learning processes. We ask our students at the outset to consider the study of "literacies," not "literacy" and to engage with multiple literacies while recognizing how literacies are constructed socially through our experience, culture and education. Core teaching methodology topics such as authentic assessment, lesson planning, unit planning and resource selection are learned by our teacher candidates while considering the rich context of the complexities of their own lives, the lived experiences of their peers, and the life circumstances of their future students. We were curious to see how teacher candidates would respond to the immediate immersion into the

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