**Multiliteracies in the secondary English classroom:
Becoming literate in the 21st century**

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> *ABSTRACT: Conceptions of literacy in the secondary English language arts classroom today have expanded in multiple directions, moving far beyond former emphases on reading comprehension and writing ability. This article presents the efforts of two secondary English language arts teachers in the Midwestern United States to expand the meaning of literacy in their own classrooms. Using a case study approach, the authors examine each teacher's understanding of literacy, views on enacting literacy in the classroom and efforts to engage students in multiliteracies. The authors then discuss the implications of the teachers' literacy work, focusing on the teachers' individual classrooms and the preparation of secondary English teachers.*
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Adolescent literacy is an increasingly complex issue in the secondary English language arts classroom. In classrooms around the world, teachers still address the expected foci of reading and writing but, within those areas, they also work with alternative texts, modern media, popular images and instructional technology. Conceptions of literacy continue to expand in multiple directions, moving far beyond former emphases on reading comprehension and writing ability. Rethinking the concept of literacy as one of multiliteracies focuses teaching on "modes of representation much broader than language alone…[that] differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5).

This article presents the efforts of two secondary English language arts teachers in the Midwestern United States to expand the meaning of literacy in their own classrooms. Helen and Scott are typical English teachers in many ways; their students read novels, write research papers, discuss character development, address journal prompts – normal activities in a classroom focused on developing adolescent literacy. These two teachers have made a conscious effort to move beyond the definition of a single literacy, however, to acknowledge, work with and support students' understanding of multiliteracies.

In this article, we follow the teachers Helen and Scott, observing their efforts to expand literacy in their classrooms and move beyond a traditional view of the text. Using a case study approach, we present each teacher's understanding of literacy,

views on enacting literacy in the classroom and efforts to engage students in multiliteracies. We then examine the implications of the teachers' literacy work, focusing on their individual classroom and the preparation of secondary English teachers.

LITERACY IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

First, we must consider the meaning of literacy in the U.S. secondary English classroom. As Helen noted, "the reading and the writing and the ability to comprehend text and the ability to interpret text is important…but I don't think that that's all there is to it." The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2006) agrees, explaining that adolescent literacy

> involves purposeful social and cognitive processes…helps individuals discover ideas and make meaning…enables functions such as analysis, synthesis, organization, and evaluation…fosters the expression of ideas and opinions and extends to understanding how texts are created and how meanings are conveyed by various media, brought together in productive ways. (p. 5)

Research shows, however, that while conceptions of literacy have expanded, traditional print literacy is most commonly found in the U.S. classroom (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Beck, 2005; Jetton & Dole, 2004; Leu, Donald, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004). As Bruce (2007) reminds us, the modern world no longer relies on print literacy alone and "literacy today cannot be understood separately from the increasingly interconnected world in which we live and work" (p. 8). That interconnectedness leads to evolving technological, social and political influences on reading, writing, speaking and listening, encouraging a "reframing" (Andrews, 2010) of literacy.

The English classroom of the 21st Century requires an extended understanding and enactment of adolescent literacy. Rather than an encompassing single literacy, English teachers must accept the changing and flexible nature of literacies that address areas as diverse as technology, multimedia, relationships and culture (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, 2008). As Beers, Probst and Rief (2007) explain, 21st-century learning is dependent on students' achievement in four areas: inventive thinking, effective communication, high productivity and digital-age literacy. This requires teachers to address the "increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial [and] the behavioural" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Students, in turn, are allowed to make meaning in multimodal ways, using basic, scientific, and technological literacies; visual, gestural and spatial literacies; information and multicultural literacies and global awareness (Beers, Probst & Rief, 2007; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). This requires students to "learn to use symbol systems, including images, sound and music, as a means of self-expression and communication, as these are now an integral part of contemporary life" (Hobbs, 2006, p. 15). The notion of *being* literate necessarily changes to one of *becoming* literate, as views on literacies continue to evolve (Unsworth, 2001).

This calls for an acceptance of multiple types of texts, as well as multiple ways of reading and understanding those texts, creating a multimodal classroom that draws on

linguistic, visual, spatial and digital texts to support visual, media, technological and critical literacies (Albers & Harste, 2007; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Hobbs, 2006; Unsworth, 2006). Bringing the arts into the English classroom engages students in multiliteracies and expands the meaning of text to include paintings, ceramics, photographs, films, plays, storytelling and concerts (Albers & Harste, 2007). Technology offers numerous digital texts for the English classroom, including online newspapers, magazine articles, audio programs, narrative films, television documentaries, blogs and other visual, electronic and digital media (Hobbs, 2006). Working with these multimodal texts offers students the opportunity to compose their own digital texts, drawing on multiliteracies to "think about which media and modality best represent their ideas and how to format their pages in ways that invite their readers to select those links leading readers to relevant information" (Doering, Beach, & O'Brien, 2007, p. 43). This might involve a new conception of the English curriculum through which literature is presented to students in different forms in the English classroom (Kress et al., 2005).

The development of multiliteracies also calls for an understanding of multiple Englishes, as linguistic and cultural differences create communication patterns that incorporate specialist and situational language (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The literacies necessary for the 21st century provide students with different ways to represent knowledge and communicate that knowledge to others (Bruce, 2007), supporting the development of collaborative and communicative skills. By integrating these skills into the classroom, English teachers also support the development of students' social literacies, while engaging them in other literate activities. Through engagement with multiliteracies in the secondary English classroom, students may extend their understanding of the world's "culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies…[as well as] the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 9).

THE STUDY

This study focused on two secondary English teachers, Helen and Scott. Both teachers taught at public high schools in the Midwestern United States; both were graduates of the same large university in the Midwestern United States. These teachers were invited to participate in a study examining their use of specific instructional strategies with diverse student populations during the 2009-2010 school year. This open-ended research soon narrowed to examine their efforts to create and support a multimodal classroom to engage students with multiliteracies.

In the fall of 2009, Helen was in her third year of teaching English language arts. She had previously taught two years at a middle school in the Midwest while completing a Master's degree in English education. Upon graduation, she took a new position at a suburban high school near the university. Helen taught 9th and 10th-grade English classes to students from lower-middle to upper socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. We focused our observations on two of Helen's classes: an upper-level 9th grade and a lower-level 10th grade.

Scott was starting his second year of teaching in the fall of 2009 at a rural high school roughly 30 minutes from the university. Prior to entering the classroom, he graduated

from the university with a Master's degree in American Studies and teacher certification in secondary English. Scott's classroom included students from a wide variety of SES backgrounds, with lower SES students and upper SES students often in the same class. We focused our observations on two of Scott's classes: a 10th-grade English class focused on speech and communication and a general Film as Literature class described as "a film survey course".

Observations occurred over a period of 28 weeks during the 2009-2010 school year, focusing on the teachers' instructional strategies, their use of specific assignments in the classroom and their teaching of diverse students. Interviews were conducted in November 2009, February 2010 and May 2010. The first two interviews focused on the teachers' use of specific instructional strategies with their students, addressing specific observations from the teachers' classrooms. The last interview focused on the teachers' conceptions of literacy and their use of different assignments to address multiliteracies.

The data collected during the study consisted of 10-12 classroom observations and three interviews for each teacher. Throughout the study, we reviewed the field notes and interview transcripts, developing preliminary categories and themes. Preliminary data analysis, for example, identified the teachers' use of various assignments and activities that focused on 21st century literacies and multimodal strategies.

A case study approach was used to examine the two teachers' practices in detail (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative content analysis, informed by Wilkinson's (2004) content and ethnographic analysis procedures, was the main analysis used in the study. Through content analysis, the data set as a whole is examined and themes and categories are identified, which are then grouped according to a coding system (Patton, 1990). In this instance, the teachers' use of 21st-century literacies emerged through examination of the data set when categories such as "visual literacy" and "student literacy" were coded and grouped. Following Wilkinson's (2004) presentation of ethnographic analysis, we then selected specific categories for deeper and more detailed examination. Specifically, we focused our examination on the categories that addressed multimodality, multiliteracies, teachers' views of literacy and students' enactment of literacy. Following case study research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), data analysis was recursive and ongoing. To inform this analysis, we also used the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to analyse the teachers' literacy practices. Accordingly, we portray specific patterns and illustrate key themes by balancing summary and quotation (Morgan, 1988) of the teachers' language.

HELEN'S CONCEPTION OF LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM

Helen's conception of literacy acknowledged the breadth and depth of the issue, for herself and her students. As she explained during an interview, "If I defined literacy as reading and writing, and that's it, then I would be devaluing every other literacy that I think exists and is important and that I happen to think is important to [the students]." As such, she defined literacy as "the ability to see a message and interpret a message – be it visual or text based," admitting that she had a very "broad perspective about what that means." That perspective extended to students' conceptions of literacy. In Helen's view, her students' literacies had a place in the classroom and it was important to honour those differences in order to support their

literacy development. As an example, Helen explained her views on text language in the English classroom, stating that it was wrong to tell students "that texting and the way that they text is simply 'wrong English,' that [it's] not a valuable form of writing…not a valuable form of communication and it's just useless." She believed that "if I tell them that, then they absorb that…if I think their form of literacy is ridiculous and pointless and useless and not literacy, then they're going to think my definition of literacy is not important and useless."

As an English teacher, Helen acknowledged the broad range of literacies available to her and sought to integrate multiliteracies into her students' learning. In this way, she could avoid a static view of literacy and a static classroom. Helen often used visual images with her students, supporting multiple interpretations of the visual text and "communicating to the kids that composition doesn't necessarily always mean writing." She asked higher-level questions when students were working with texts rather than using the lower-level questions often found in the textbook, seeing the emphasis on comprehension and recall as "insulting" to students. In keeping with critical literacy, Helen consistently addressed "issues related to gender" with the texts read in class; she made an effort to point out "the strong females in a text, and ask the students to identify gender roles in the text and what the different genders are doing, and what the text is saying about different gender roles." She also supported students' technological literacy, engaging them academically with different forms of common technology "that engross them so much of the time."

Helen's view of literacies in the plural was also evident in the activities and assignments used with students. While teaching Elie Wiesel's *Night*, for example, Helen provided numerous examples of her acceptance of and belief in multiliteracies, specifically visual and media literacies. She began by connecting familiar literacy concepts to similar, yet unfamiliar, concepts in art:

> We talked about how symbolism in literature and symbolism in art can go hand in hand… the same way you would analyse symbolism in literature, you can analyse symbolism in art. And so we looked at a few abstract art pieces…before we did this I tried to…give them a little spiel about alignment, proximity, repetition and contrast in art.

Having introduced visual literacy, Helen moved to a visual interpretation paper. This required students to analyse an image of their choice, revise the image in Photoshop and write "a reflective paper about what they changed and how it changes the message of the image." From this writing assignment, students moved to creating their own abstract art pieces. Helen's request that they be "creative with material" was founded on a desire for students to "experiment with different types of media." As she explained, "I didn't want them to just draw a picture…I wanted them to create something." One student's project was, in Helen's words, "a distorted Jewish star" that the student had burned into a piece of wood, representing the crematories, Wiesel's persona in *Night* and his distorted view of religion following his experiences during the Holocaust.

Supporting students' literacies

Helen was very conscious that the students in her classroom brought strengths and abilities to their learning that could easily differ from her own. This belief is

succinctly captured in a reflective writing Helen shared with us concerning her teaching of Laurie Halse Anderson's (1999) novel *Speak*. Helen's students were not connecting to the main character, Melinda, or her situation; either the novel was "unfunny to them or it was simply too difficult of a text for them to grasp its underlying meaning." As this book was one of her personal favourites, Helen was disheartened at their reaction (or lack of), since she expected "these kids to light up when we read this text. It's such a good book, it makes fun of teachers and students alike, and (I think) it portrays the realities of high school so well!" Upon reflection, however, Helen made an important realization:

> I find this book brilliant, funny, and inspiring. Me. My mom came home every night from work. I could read fluently without difficulty. I went home to a parent who cared whether I got my homework done, what my grades were, what I ate for dinner, when I went to bed, and what I did with all the time in-between. As such, my high school experience (minus the rape) was a lot like Melinda's, and so *of course* I'm going to find her amusing! But my [basic students]…what if this isn't their high school experience? What if the jokes she makes about school spirit, classes and goofy teachers just doesn't echo with them because they actually *are* the kids who get picked on by teachers, so it's not all that funny? Basically, I'm wondering: Is *ability* or *content* getting in the way of them enjoying these first few pages of text?

Helen's understanding that her students brought a different viewpoint to their reading reflected her approach to students' literacies. Valuing difference among her students, she echoed that difference through a variety of texts and activities that addressed and required multiliteracies.

Helen often read aloud to students. She preferred to read herself, rather than using books on tape, "because I stop a lot and ask questions in the middle of reading something." She asked students to voluntarily read aloud, rather than requiring them to do so, recounting a story of a student's humiliation after being forced to read in class. She noted that many of her students "don't want to read out loud because they feel they're not good enough to read out loud" and she was content to have them listen to her or read silently. Still, Helen focused on providing verbal cues to her students, especially when they were reading as a class. As she explained, "I give a lot of cues, like: 'This is important; write this down.' I stop them when I'm reading a lot in order to explain and make sure that I'm reinforcing what they're hearing."

Students were also supported in Helen's classroom through her use of images and artwork. The visual interpretation project, mentioned above, offered students a different way of reading, one that Helen believed they were not "taught how to do" in other classes. Students' work with an image, both the revision and the reflection, provided them with "another outlet for learning". Helen noted their enjoyment of the project and saw it as a positive learning experience in her classroom:

> When some of them realize they're really good at it…they can see where these lines are going and what we're supposed to focus on and what certain things represent visually with colour, with darkness, with light – they get really excited about it.

Students were also excited to work with technology when the opportunity arose. As one example, Helen often used an online game (freerice.com) to support her 10th-grade students' vocabulary development. In the game, students choose the definition of a word from four possible choices; the difficulty of the following word is

determined by whether the students answer correctly or incorrectly. As Helen noted, "They love it because they can watch their level [of difficulty] go up." When she asked her students what they had learned by playing the game, she reported enthusiastic responses: "I'm smarter than I think I am" and "I learned that I know more words than I thought I knew!" Helen saw her students' interaction with the online interface supporting her own teaching of vocabulary as well as developing their digital literacy

> They were able to figure out words based on parts of the word, because I had taught them how to divide up parts of the word and look for words you know within the word. And so that – building their literacy skills with literacies that are inherently interactive – works very well for my 10th-graders.

Helen understood the importance of student engagement with the material and often adapted assignments to suit the learner's needs. Her research paper assignment, for example, involved students in action research, requiring them to make surveys and conduct interviews. She admitted that she needed students to "buy into this idea" so she allowed them to "pick issues that they were interested in, that they were passionate about." One student chose to research the controversial music group Insane Clown Posse and determine whether the music was gang-related. Helen was understandably concerned about the suitability of the topic and had emailed the assistant principal for permission but she supported her student's choice to "get opinions about [the music] and prove that indeed it's not gang-related." As she explained, "I've told him, 'I might have to change your topic,' but when it comes down to it, if I get approval for that, I'm going to let him do it because…he cares about it and he's excited about it."

Helen's adaptability extended to how students engaged with the material during class. She often used activities that got students up out of their seats, in the classroom or moving to the library or computer lab. She encouraged kinaesthetic learning with her students, where "they get up and act some things out, especially in my 9th-grade classes." Helen also favoured collaborative work and frequently used group activities with her 10th-graders rather than "work on this by yourself activities," allowing students to work with a partner of their choosing as long as they stayed on task.

SCOTT'S CONCEPTION OF LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM

Like Helen, Scott broadened his definition of literacy beyond that of traditional print-based conceptions, explaining, "We usually associate literacy with the idea of reading, and traditionally, reading text…I don't necessarily like to subscribe to text as existing solely as ink on a page." Instead, he believed that

> text is just as available in a film, or in a song, or in a posture or in a position – you know, a seating position – what you choose to wear, how you choose to wear it, that sort of thing. That's just as textual as a paragraph on a piece of paper to me.

Taking such an expanded view of text allowed Scott to, in turn, construct an expanded view of literacy: "Literacy refers to the idea of being able to look at that text, whatever it is, and extract some sort of meaning from it…some sort of meaning, to me, is literacy."

In his classroom, Scott sought to engage his students in multiliteracies. Rather than relying solely on traditional forms, such as text and speech, Scott chose to incorporate "some sort of technological component, whether it's a short clip, a short song, a short painting analysis or something." Even in his speech class – a course that would, as its name suggests, typically focus on the spoken word – Scott broadened the focus to many forms of communication. As he explained,

> Because I know that a lot of kids don't like to get up in front of a classroom and speak, I really try to veer away from just strictly public speaking and focus more instead on the communication aspect. So, yes, public speaking but also emailing and informal communication and more interpersonal dialogue and whatnot to, sort of, broaden it out.

Additionally, he mentioned that during classroom time, "we've looked at speeches, we've read articles, we've read short stories, we've analysed paintings, we've analysed songs, we've watched film trailers." One assignment series was a song or poem analysis followed by a speech. For this assignment, students were asked to analyse a song or poem of their choice and give a short presentation of their written interpretation. To present their interpretation, students stood in front of the class, behind a podium, and read their written analysis.

Scott both engaged and honoured his students' literacies by allowing choice in the assignment described above, in this case, by choosing a song or poem that was personally relevant to them. While students' choice of text speaks to Scott's integration of new literacies, students' completion of the assignment does not. Scott frequently addressed visual and technological literacy through his use of media as text but he relied on students' traditional literacy skills to show their understanding of those texts. With this approach, the students in Scott's class were exposed to new literacies but not *participating* in new literacies.

Like Helen, Scott's personal working definition of literacy guided his decisions about literacy activities in the classroom. Their applications of that definition differed, however. While Helen used new literacies to develop students' traditional literacy, Scott used traditional literacy to engage students with new literacies. For example, Helen used technology with her students to support more traditional literacy, such as using an online game for vocabulary development. Scott used technology as a 21st-century literacy, extending students' understanding of a text. He believed it was important for students to

> have a teacher…an authority figure validate their interests and recognize that the text message that they sent, and the Facebook page that they look at, and the blogs they read could potentially have some value. Now my job is to not validate those different texts, necessarily, but rather to equip the students with the skills to get some meaning from them. That's what I do, and that's what I try to do.

Scott noted that it was important to explicitly make connections for his students in order to link their classroom activities to the activities' importance. Initially, he believed that students would make the necessary connections; following his experience in the classroom as a student teacher, however, he concluded that it was teacher's responsibility to make these connections for students. As a teacher, he had "gotten a lot better at saying at the beginning, "Here's what we're going to do," and at the end, "Here's why we did all this.""

Scott also tried to support multiliteracies in his classroom, specifically interpersonal skills. He often used activities that got students out of their seats and moving around the classroom. Scott found group work challenging because of class size, noting that it was "tough with 28 kids, when you get groups of too many people and then it sort of loses its purpose. " He still engaged students in collaborative interactions, however, because he believed the positives outweighed the negatives.

> The benefit of group work is I can then go around and make sure everyone is on task and get more one on one with students, and I've found that that's when the best instruction occurs, when four or five people can sit and we can have a conversation and I can explain things a little better.

In Scott's view, group work proved most beneficial by supporting additional teacher instruction.

Lastly, Scott frequently integrated different media into his classroom instruction as texts worthy of study. In his conception of literacy, "It's always about the transfer of a message…across different media, and whatever that media is." Scott was quick to explain that he did not choose to use media because his students struggled with traditional print texts; rather, his incorporation of media rested on his belief in the transferability of his students' literate practices. He was aware that his students often dismissed reading as "boring" but he chose to combat that belief by confronting that belief and engaging them in multiliteracies. In his view,

> The book is not boring because it's a book. The book may be boring, but it's not because there's ink on a page. That's not what makes it boring. It's boring because the writer is boring, or you're boring for not being able to interpret it or for not giving it a chance….I'm not denying the boredom, I'm simply denying the cause of it. And I think that's important. And people get that, because we'll watch movies in my class that people think are boring, and when they realize, "Oh, wait, movies can be boring?"…yeah, anything can be boring. Songs can be boring; clothes can be boring; all these different texts can be boring. The trick, however, is to not shun them and make harsh generalizations about…books, but, rather, to see if, as a literate reader, you can extrapolate some meaning and form an opinion based on that. And that's what I try to do.

Supporting students' literacies

In planning his classroom activities, Scott was aware of the various learning needs of his students and chose to incorporate technological components, such as "a short clip, a short song, a short painting analysis" to "tap into" the different literacies his students possessed. Scott planned his class using groupings of 10-minute activities; he believed this structure afforded him the flexibility to incorporate different types of literacy activities.

Students differ greatly in their literacy abilities in terms of proficiency and types of literacies they bring with them to school. In his choice of classroom instruction, Scott sought to value this diversity among his students and plan his lessons accordingly. One example was Scott's use of the Camus' short story "The Guest". Rather than handing out the story and assigning it as in-class silent reading, Scott read it aloud in front of the class, letting students listen and, if they chose, follow along on the page. To increase student engagement and, consequently, support comprehension during the reading, Scott read the story in a loud, passionate British accent. His students found

the accent amusing, but it did hold their attention. When Scott stopped during his reading to ask comprehension questions, his students were able to engage in a discussion about the story's content.

During the same reading, Scott asked a question about a particular aspect of the short story; to provide time for his students to formulate their answer, he proceeded to act out the scene at the front of the classroom. Although this type of theatrical teaching style might prove distracting to some students, many were highly engaged by Scott's approach. Scott saw engagement in the learning process as absolutely crucial to his students' ability to make and receive meaning in his classroom since "a lot of students can barely read. They function on a very low literacy level – first, second grade." For these students, engagement was extremely important, especially when the class was exploring a text as complex as Camus' "The Guest".

Students' media literacies were consistently supported in Scott's classroom. They often started the class by watching a video clip or looking at an image. During one lesson focusing on persuasion, Scott began the period by showing a popular YouTube clip called "Lost Generation". The students visibly enjoyed the clip before moving on to a discussion of the film's creator, audience and message as related to persuasion. Another example of Scott's media use was an assignment based on the National Public Radio's (NPR) sponsored project "This I Believe". This project allows individuals to submit a short essay about what they believe to a program website. These essays are then published on the site, with the potential to be included in a radio show or podcast. Scott explained the project to his class and then assigned the essay as a class project. In order to support his students during this literacy project, he began by looking at the webpage with the class, both reading and listening to various published examples of essays. The students were then taken to the school computer lab, where they were allowed to use the Internet to gather ideas for their own writing. Through such a project, Scott was able to address students' media literacies while simultaneously supporting his socio-economically disadvantaged students, many of whom did not have a computer or Internet access at home.

ENACTING LITERACIES IN HELEN'S CLASSROOM

Traditional literacies were certainly not the sole emphasis in Helen's teaching. She incorporated a range of literacies in both classrooms, integrating the "new" with the "old" to support student engagement with multiliteracies. As she explained, "If I believed that all of English could be taught with a textbook and an overhead, then I would not be valuing video communication. I would not be valuing hypertext communication or [the] Internet."

Several examples support Helen's view of the multi-literate classroom. Helen used journal writing with both 9th and 10th-grade classes, although she was well aware that the 10th-graders disliked the activity; few responded to the daily prompts despite having class time to do so. However, when she asked the prompts aloud, "they'll all have some sort of answer for it," so she often gave students both options to complete the journals. Helen saw a great deal of resistance to writing in her 10th-grade class and modified her instruction, and her literate expectations of students, accordingly. With students who frequently refused to write, she asked them to speak their responses instead, and she or the classroom assistant would write down their answers. As she

explained, "That tends to work really well with some of the kids...and I like that as an instructional strategy." Helen mentioned reading aloud as a modification for her (few) ESL students, where she would read aloud and allow them to respond orally when possible. Rather than force her students to conform to one view of literacy, Helen looked for opportunities to expand her literate activities.

Often, Helen allowed her approach to literacy to respond to the needs of specific students. With some students, Helen incorporated more auditory strategies; with others, she returned to traditional literacy. As she explained:

> One of my students got frustrated with me the other day because…they had to pick a quote out of *Of Mice and Men* and illustrate it on a piece of paper. […] this kid was like, "We draw in here *so* often," and...he got frustrated with me because he is not a visual learner...He's auditory, he listens well and he writes *very* well. So I said, "Okay, how about for you, you pick a quote and write me a paragraph explaining the significance of that quote for the story." And he was like, "Thank goodness, I'm so sick of drawing!" Fine, he didn't like my drawing strategy.

Helen's efforts showed her understanding and acceptance of broadly enacted and diverse literacies. In her eyes, "As long as whatever goal I've set for them that day [is met], I don't really particularly care how they get there."

ENACTING LITERACIES IN SCOTT'S CLASSROOM

In Scott's classroom, anything that can convey meaning is a text, providing him with a variety of literacy activities. Many of Scott's activities depended on altering the classroom environment, by rearranging the desks, for example, or repositioning himself in relation to his students. Scott shared that, by purposefully changing factors in his classroom, he was able to control "how I want to enact the literacy and what literacy I'm choosing and wanting to bring out in them." In order to foster discussion in his film course, for example, Scott had his students sit in a circle, believing that changes to the traditional class environment allowed him to "enact different degrees of film literacy."

Another way that Scott expanded the practice of literacy in his classroom was through the use of various media: news stories, movies, television shows, songs, photos and paintings. For Scott, using such a wide variety of materials was necessary in order

> to promote different styles of interpretation, and to all the while remind them, daily, that what we read on the page is not inherently different than what this guy painted in 1947 or the movie this guy made in 1990. It's always about the transfer of a message.

This concept of finding the message in something is the overarching goal of Scott's classes. For example, Scott created an assignment for his speech class on urban legends; students were to explore several urban legends from popular culture in order to discover what they might teach about the culture itself. This lesson started off quite traditionally with Scott beginning a discussion about urban legends and then distributing a handout listing a number of popular ones. At this point in his lesson, Scott showed his class various photographs inspired by urban legends. Rather than just telling the students which photo corresponded to which legend, he asked them to write a paragraph addressing which urban legend connected to each photo based on

what they saw. In other words, the students were asked to engage their visual literacy to read each photo as a text and extract meaning. Again, it is worth noting that students were presented with new literacies in the classroom but rarely participated in them, as they were asked to use traditional literacies to interpret the new literacy activities occurring in their classroom.

The focus in Scott's class, then, was on content – the actual sound clip, movie trailer, photo or song – and it was the content that drove the enactment of literacy in his classroom. Rather than making a decision about literacy based on his perception of his students' needs, he let the nature of the content itself guide how he structured a literacy event. Scott considered his students in his decisions about enacting literacies in his classroom, but they were secondary to the nature of the content that he wanted to disseminate to them. Placing his own desires in the foreground of his classroom interactions fitted with his belief that "a certain amount of instruction needs to be teacher-centered."

HELEN'S AND SCOTT'S APPROACHES TO LITERACY

As detailed above, Helen and Scott had different approaches to literacy in the English classroom based on their personal conception of literacies and their individual enactment of those literacies with their students. Helen embraced the concept of student-centered learning and worked to incorporate her students' literacies into the classroom. She diversified her instruction, integrating art, music and technology and collaboration on a fairly regular basis. Yet she struggled against the typically teacher-centered classroom. As she explained,

> I would rather do group activities and read things that get the kids involved, especially in this class of struggling students – a good thing to keep in mind for future lessons, I guess. What I find the most difficult about teaching these classes on days like this is that because the kids struggle so much with school, and because keeping them caught up is, in itself, a challenge, a lot of my creative project ideas wind up getting ditched in lieu of worksheets. While I have seen many a documentary, article, or other media depicting teachers who do incredible projects with students who others "wrote off" as incapable, I still find myself [reverting] to the strategies most teachers of those students employ – I read a story, ask some questions, give them a worksheet to do, and call it a day. It's tragic. It's not how I like to teach. It's not who I am as a teacher. We've done our share of projects – the action research project was fun – but I wish I could do more.

Helen's frustration with the basic instruction and traditional literacy described above came from her belief that the students' learning needs were not being met. She understood the need for "more" in the classroom, such as diverse instruction and multiliteracies, yet struggled to incorporate such with her students.

Scott clearly valued the content of the English classroom – not to the exclusion of his students but certainly more so than Helen. He saw himself as a facilitator in the classroom, providing students' access to multiple texts and guiding their understanding of these texts. Constructivism in the classroom, to Scott, was a "diminishment" of the teacher yet he did not totally reject the concept:

> Of course my instruction is student-centered. I resist that phrase because, to me, it sets up this binary that I don't necessarily agree with, that student-centered is good and teacher-centered is bad. I don't agree with that. I think, ideally, they should conflate and mesh positively. I think a certain amount of instruction needs to be teacher-centered and I think being too student-centered is producing the problem that we've seen [in education]. That's just me. So of course it's student-centered. Of course it's always geared toward their success. Always.

Helen viewed traditional print literacy as one of many literacies available to her students, integrating a range of texts, activities and instruction into her classroom to broaden students' understanding and respond to their learning needs. Scott valued multiliteracies but focused students' learning with traditional print literacy; while he used media and technology with his students, he did so as a way to diversify classroom texts rather than a means to support multiliteracies.

MEANING FOR ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION

In order to effectively prepare secondary English language arts teachers for the 21st Century, English teacher educators will need to broaden their conceptions and teaching of literacy. Helen and Scott's classrooms provide insight into different conceptions of literacy today. As explored in this article, they address the multiliteracies necessary for the 21st Century; they also address different forms of collaboration and communication. As these teachers have expanded their approaches to literacy, English teacher educators may also expand their notions of literacy and engage pre-service English teachers with multiliteracies while they are in teacher education programs. This engagement with multiliteracies should continue into professional development, supporting English teachers' preparation to use and enact multiliteracies in their future classrooms. Supporting the notion of *becoming* literate instead of *being* literate (Unsworth, 2001), English teacher educators have the opportunity to teach differently to support pre-service and in-service English teachers' conceptualization and enactment of evolving multiliteracies.

Teacher educators preparing English teachers to work in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms learn from practising teachers to understand how they enact literacies in their classrooms. As Helen's and Scott's experiences show, students have multiple understandings of literacies, encouraging teachers to incorporate the varied literate strengths of students into the English classroom. This is especially important when working with a diverse student population, generally, and English language learners, in particular, since their home language and social literacies must be understood as asset rather than deficit (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Valdes, 2001).

It is important to remember that both English teachers did their best in today's demanding educational atmosphere. As Helen explains, English teachers are quite aware of their perceived failure in the classroom:

> I really took to heart all of the stuff that they told me good teachers do when I was an undergrad. Things like, "keep every kid's needs in mind," "make adjustments when needed," "differentiate instruction to meet the learning needs of every child," "cater to the different learning styles in your classroom," "use students' interests to motivate their learning," and "treat students with respect when disciplining." Since these things are so ingrained in my conscience, I absolutely can't stand it when I see these things

slipping in my teaching. I get mad at myself, frustrated with the fact that, no matter how hard I try, I just can't do it all and still make sure that I stay sane. I find I struggle with this self-consciousness about my teaching frequently, since I am at heart a "good student" and want to do all of the things I have learned are "best" in the classroom.

It is our intention with this article to offer a detailed view of literacy as enacted in today's secondary English classroom, encouraging English teacher educators to support a better understanding of one facet of the English classroom – multiliteracies – so that English teachers experience more success than failure with their students.

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