Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy: An autoethnographic narrative of the inclusion of art across the elementary classroom curriculum

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education
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REFLECTING ON MULTIMODAL PEDAGOGY:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE OF THE INCLUSION OF
ART ACROSS THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

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

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the inclusion of art and visual modes of literacy across the elementary classroom curriculum in Ontario. Positioned within social semiotics, multimodal literacy and multimodal pedagogy, it situates art as a literacy practice. I use autoethnographic narratives to share stories of classroom experiences teaching multimodal literacy, and reflect on the following questions: What were my experiences using art as a multimodal literacy? What resources enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my practice? and What were the affordances and limitations of the modes and multimodal pedagogies for my students and for myself as a teacher? Reflections suggest that multimodal pedagogies include common elements (i.e., overt instruction on grammars of multiple modes); relies on human (i.e., teachers) and non-human (i.e., curriculum) resources; and fosters facility in multimodal communication for diverse purposes. This thesis is part of the conversation on multimodal pedagogies for 21st century literacy.

Keywords:
art, modes, multimodal literacy, visual literacy, multimodal pedagogy, curriculum, classroom curriculum, autoethnography, narrative, reflection, Ontario
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Chapter One

Introduction

A Pre-Narrative: Learning the Many Modes of Communication

From a very young age, I came to learn that words were not always necessary to communicate. When I was six, I climbed up onto the kitchen counter and reached for a cookie slightly before dinner-time. A sudden intentional clearing of the throat startled me from behind – my mom walking into the kitchen and catching me red-handed. The simple sound alone was enough to make me blush, smile, return the cookie box to the shelf, and return to my colouring book while my real dinner was prepared. That sound represented any number of words from ‘I see you’ to ‘don’t even think about it’ to ‘you know a cookie will spoil your appetite’.

Later, at age 12, still fearing public speaking and giving school presentations, I stood at the front of my grade 6 class with my persuasive speech in my hand ready to read aloud. My teacher, sensing my fear, gave me an encouraging smile, a nod, and a thumbs-up. This visual cue was enough to let me know that she understood how I felt, that she would be patient, and that she had confidence I could get through my speech. I was finally able to take a deep breath and start.

Throughout my childhood and into my adulthood, my Bubby (Jewish for grandmother) always taught me of the power of a good hug. Her hugs could say ‘hello’, ‘I love you’, ‘great job’, ‘thank you’, ‘I’ve missed you’, or ‘don’t worry, it’s all going to be okay’ and ‘I’m here for you’. The different meanings were apparent either through the context of the hug or through slight variations: quick hugs, longer hugs, tighter hugs, rocking hugs, hugs with accompanied back rubs. I have transferred this secret knowledge of the power of a hug to my husband, whom I now rely on for all these types of hugs. This gesture speaks louder than words and stands for so many.

These moments, and many others like them, have reinforced the idea that words are great and can often quite quickly get to the point, but they are not always necessary or
even the best way to communicate a message. Each mode of communication has its own connotations and denotations that communicate a message in a way that no other mode can. My experiences with these various modes of communication, and my subsequent journey as a teacher and Master’s of Education student focusing on art and literacy education, have sparked an interest in the subject of multimodal literacy.

**Introduction and Overview**

This thesis is about art, multimodal literacy – the use or integration of two or more modes to communicate and understand messages (e.g. Granger, 2011; Albers, 2007; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010; Esiner, 2002; Bainbridge & Heydon 2013), and about multimodal pedagogy – the ways in which teachers engage their students in developing facility in a variety of modes so that they can effectively choose appropriate modes in which to communicate (e.g. Jewitt, 2008; Walsh, 2011; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Richards & Gipe, 2000). Specifically, this thesis is primarily about visual modes of literacy and communication that exist within multimodal literacy and multimodal pedagogy – such as when students communicate understanding of curricular knowledge through drawing a picture, using body gestures, or other visually communicative modes (e.g. Albers, 2007; Lee, 2009; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010). Finally, as an autoethnographic narrative, this thesis is about my personal use, and my memories of former elementary students’ uses, of multimodal literacy, and the evolution of the multimodal pedagogy I have developed through my teaching practice and educational history.
I would like to introduce the notion that people communicate ideas and emotions in a variety of ways, or, more precisely in the scope of this study, through a variety of modes. Multimodal communication may include one of, or a combination of, written, oral, visual, or gestural expressions (e.g. Albers, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Walsh, 2011; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For example, in the context of elementary classroom education, a student may communicate his or her understanding of a concept through a written paragraph, an oral explanation, a drawing or diagram, a performance of a song or dramatic enactment, or through a combination of several of these modes into a multimodal media work. Each of these communicative representations can be considered a text – “an articulation of discourse” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), or something purposely created by an individual and read by a viewer or receiver. This notion of what comprises a text is further explored in Chapter Two.

While the term visual modes usually conjures ideas surrounding drawings, sculptures, diagrams, and other artistically created artworks, this study expands the boundaries to include a wider array of visual texts within the scope of multimodal literacy. With the exclusion of oral modes of communication, where ears do much of the information intake, most other communicative modes consist of visual representations where eyes are the primary readers. When people write or type a story, for instance, they consider how this writing looks on the page. The choice of font, size, punctuation, spacing, colour, and the inclusion of capitalized, bold, or italicized words all impact the message that is being communicated (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010). Similarly, when using gestures, body movement and facial expressions, one offers visual cues to a reader of that visual message. For example, people who do not share a common language can often
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make sense of each other “by creating symbolic representations with their hands” (Streeck, 1993) such as pointing to directions, moving to represent actions, and forming shapes to represent objects. These communicative actions, in addition to visual drawings, diagrams, charts, and works of art, all embody elements of visual texts. Within this study, the place of artworks as visual texts in curricula is the primary foci. However, as multimodal literacy suggests, other visual texts, such as gestures in dramatic works, are also explored.

Arriving at a concise description of a visual text has been one of the most difficult paths on my journey of writing this thesis. Coming from a visual arts background and choosing to focus on literacy, I have had to realign my thought processes around visual works of art and visual literacy texts: expanding my own understanding of visual literacy to include more than creating, reading, and understanding the traditional physical art creations, and to include written, dramatic, and gestural texts that include visual elements to read and interpret as well. This has been a significant learning process for me – while reflecting on my own pedagogy of multimodal literacy instruction, I have had to refine and redefine my understanding of what it was that I was reflecting on in the first place.

**Intentions of this Autoethnographic Narrative**

*An inter-narrative: Telling Stories*

A few months ago, I was sitting at my dining room table surrounded by seven other dinner-party guests for the evening. We were sharing stories of our recent travels. My husband started to share a story about our kayak trip around the northern coast of Kauai, Hawaii and was relating the size of the ocean waves surrounding us. “They were
about 5 feet tall”, he started. “No!”, I interrupted, “They were like 10 foot swells and as much as I knew that we would continue to roll over them as we had for the past few hours, each time I looked behind me, my stomach dropped in fear!” “They weren’t that big” he said, and continued to tell the story. He stopped at the part where we saw a group of fins off in the distance coming towards our kayak, and turned to me to say “Go on, you tell this part better”. I smiled, and with a build up of anticipation, I related that there were about 10 fins coming straight for us! We were sitting in the kayak very still thinking ‘Big or little? Big or little? Shark or dolphin? Shark or dolphin?’, when finally, the fins shot out of the water and became a leaping pod of dolphins so close we could practically touch them! It was magical.

Since undertaking this thesis, I have started to pay more attention to the stories that get told at our dinner parties. Who tells them? How often does another person contradict the events related? Who tells the more interesting story? And what makes them better storytellers? Stories are a funny thing. They almost always have two sides, and sometimes even three or more. They are told from the perspective of one person, at one point in time, and as such are based on the memory of the particular individual telling the story.

Memories, I have come to learn, as “a reconstruction of past experiences … for present understanding” (Keifer-Boyd, 2007) are even funnier – painted and skewed by so many factors, it is impossible to know what the truth of the story is at times. That is, until someone whips out his or her iPhone, and shows a picture in an attempt to prove their version is true to their word – that their memories are at least corroborated by a more concrete representation of a time remembered.

Everyone has stories to tell. This thesis is, in part, one of my stories. In it, I offer an autoethnographic case study, using narratives and textual artifacts from my teaching
and practice-teaching experiences: what I refer to as my autoethnographic narrative. Similar to the *proof* that exists in a vacation photograph, my narrative is corroborated by a series of images that display curriculum documents, unit plans, lesson plans, assignment handouts and samples of visual texts that are communicative works of art.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) define *autoethnography* as “the study of a culture, cultural group, community, or institution, such as education, by a ‘full insider’” (p.739). As its name might suggest, an *autoethnographic narrative*, such as this one, is the study of a culture conducted primarily through the recollection and reflection of stories. As an insider to the culture and institution of elementary education, I have access to stories (especially my own) about pedagogical practices related to multimodal literacy and visual texts.

As I have gestured towards, stories are constructed and influenced by a wide range of entities. The purpose of telling these stories is not to present an absolute set of facts, but rather, to create an image of the possible that is based on the interpretation of my recollected realities. Granger (2011) points out that

> While it is crucial to recognize that this story…is not the only story that can be told, the point bears making that sometimes one person’s remembered story, or interpretations of that story, can inform and even nourish another’s memory, story, or interpretation, even if on the surface they are quite distinct. (p.11)

Similar to the intention of Granger’s (2011) narrative dissertation, it is my hope that

> The moments I recall, narrate and interpret may open up possibilities for others to think in similar ways about different moments in education, or in different ways about similar moments, or even about different moments in different ways – because sometimes there are surprises. (p.11)
Ideally, readers will reflect on and think a little bit differently about how my stories of multimodal literacy relate to their own understandings of literacy, the arts, and curriculum. My stories are by no means complete, and are definitely not the only stories that can be told. This thesis is part of a conversation about multimodal literacy and pedagogy. If all goes well, perhaps it will invite other conversations that hold the potential to move education in new and innovative directions.

**Autoethnography and Narratives: Issues of Remembering and Interpreting**

Personal narratives are always partial. They are interpretations of recalled moments in time, and “in the act of remembering, we come face-to-face with at least two sides of ourselves: the self writing and the self who is remembered” (Chalmers, 1998, p.14). This duality is amplified as the time between the recalled event and the act of recollection increases. For me, the act of remembering has been filtered through many screens: the three to six years that have passed since the classroom practices took place, the transformation of these memories into part of this project where I am using them for a specific purpose, and the reading and learning I have done in preparation for interpreting them. In addition to these different parts of myself, and the filters that my stories go through, my own “beliefs and desires subjectively frame [my] memories” (Keifer-Boyd, 2007). In other words, my own history has a large impact on the way I recall stories, understand and interpret them, and in the ways in which I tell them.
Who am I?

So who am I? – This person who is studying the pedagogy of multimodal literacy, the person who is narrating stories about the creation and use of visual texts in elementary classroom practice? Allow me to introduce myself.

The moments I remember, the ways I remember them, and my theorizations and interpretations of them are all informed by multiple elements of my social positioning and experiences (Granger, 2011):

- My socio-cultural position as a white, heterosexual, married, dominant-language speaking, Jewish woman who grew up in an upper-middle class home with one younger sister and two supportive parents (who enrolled me in dance, gymnastics, skating, and art classes as a child, and public elementary and high schools; and expected me to earn high grades – which I succeeded in doing throughout my educational career thus far).

- My childhood experiences with literacy (being read to every night; teaching my sister how to read; writing short stories and poems in my spare time; and creating elaborate research projects with creative visual Bristol boards and sculptures).

- My childhood experiences with visual art (taking art classes; emulating my very creative and artistic father as he decorated birthday cakes and invented and designed a series of business ideas; and watching my Bubby do needle point rug art, knitting and ceramic pottery).

- My artistic and literacy education (taking seven English courses over four years of high school including ones in media literacy, philosophy and creative writing; taking five Visual Art courses in high school including ones in animation (where I
won an award) and digital media; and more recently my elective continued education college courses in children’s literature, art history, acrylic painting, and pottery).

- My teaching experience (hosting children’s birthday parties in my family-owned bakery where I taught children to make pizzas and decorate cupcakes in an environment filled with humour; learning in a concurrent bachelor of education program that provided me with three full years of practicum-teaching experience in both primary, junior and intermediate classrooms; teaching a variety of elementary grades in my own classrooms over the next three years; developing and implementing a variety of extra-curricular sessions in remedial literacy, visual arts and crafts, and athletics which enabled me to learn about students in settings other than the classroom; and most recently seizing opportunities to deliver guest lectures to pre-service education students in the areas of cross-curricular unit planning, and creative and multimodal responses to reading).

- My history as an adult learner, specifically in education at the Bachelor and Master’s levels, that has grounded me in qualitative inquiry and particular frameworks and values (taking courses in research methods, curriculum and pedagogy, literacy, and visual art; developing my knowledge on the many benefits of visual modes of creation and communication, and the importance of multimodal texts which incorporate several modes at once; and adopting a strong stance on the current situation in literacy education and the changing ways that literacy is playing a role in 21st century Western society).
The combination of these details about my background have allowed me to not only develop a passion for the visual arts, literacy, and teaching and learning in general, but have also fostered an academic inclination to understanding how these entities work together in classroom settings. Growing up in a supportive and creative environment has cultivated a great respect and value for the visual arts, and this, coupled with my educational history, has motivated me to explore the communicational affordances of such visual modes. These things about myself are where I am choosing to begin my story. As is the case with all stories (as interpreted events), there is more than one beginning, and more than one set of ‘facts’.

**Writers and Readers as Interpreters**

Granger (2011) claims that there is an additional layer of interpretation once a narrative is read by a reader, as readers bring with them their own set of personal histories, backgrounds and remembered events; after all, “to read is to interpret, deliberately or otherwise” (p.56). It is my intention that through the act of reading this thesis, readers will bring their thoughts, connections, and stories to transpose the story into a larger conversation.

By involving the reader, and everything that an individual brings to a reading … an autoethnographic narrative is not only a field for the re-creation and re-enactment of past moments in the writer’s and reader’s worlds, but a potentially rich breeding ground for ideas and questions: a place from which we begin to think ideas and theorize issues. (p.56)

This relates to my initial goal of offering this thesis as a conversation starter for improved classroom practices – a place where ideas are generated and reflected on
surrounding multimodal literacy and pedagogy – it would seem that both the reader and I are on this journey of discovery together.

**Introducing My Research Questions**

There are three overarching study questions:

1. *Within my practice as an elementary teacher, what were my experiences using visual art as a multimodal literacy across the elementary curriculum?*

2. *What did the process look like? What resources enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my practice?*

3. *What were my understandings of the affordances and limitations of the modes and multimodal pedagogies for students? What were the affordances and limitations for myself as a teacher?*

Identifying possible responses to these research questions involves critical analysis of the visual texts and related multimodal products that were visible in my past classroom experiences. According to Albers (2007), the study of these visual texts is “worthy of significant study, both as immediate responses to literature and/or language study, and as ongoing understanding of learners’ literacy practices” (p.xiii). Positioning these literacy practices within the framework of a multimodal pedagogy is further justified by an abundance of research on the affordances of the various modes that
comprise multimodal literacy events (see Chapter Two). Specifically, visual modes of communication are explored in this study, and as the research demonstrates a wealth of benefits to learning through these visual modes (again, see Chapter Two), it becomes important to understand the resources and contextual entities that enable the enactment of such pedagogical practices.

**Lived Teaching Practice: Situating My Research**

There are two background issues that have led me to ask these research questions. The first issue is the current reputation of the visual arts (and the arts in general) in education. The research presented in Chapter Two highlights that the value awarded to the visual arts is considerably lower than that awarded to other modes such as written and oral communication. These findings are in direct contrast with the multitude of research on the benefits of learning with and through visual modes, such as art, and with research on the new roles that literacy skills play in our visually-rich contemporary Western society. As such, my research seeks to reflect on my experiences using visual modes in the elementary classroom and argues for a renewed outlook on the arts and visual modes as part of multimodal literacy.

The second issue is one that I bring attention to through my reflections of my past teaching experiences: That of the language used in the Ontario curriculum documents that are produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In Chapter Four, I explain how teachers in Ontario use the curriculum documents to guide the educational opportunities that comprise their classroom activities and to influence their pedagogical practices. Set against the background of the benefits of adopting a multimodal pedagogy for literacy
instruction in our visually-rich society, I demonstrate that the Ontario curriculum does not readily influence teachers to foster a multimodal pedagogy as the curricular expectations written within each of the subject areas are biased towards awarding students opportunities to communicate through written and oral modes. While other modes, such as the visual, are present in the documents, they are illustrated to play minor supporting roles rather than to be their own entities in the literacy landscape. My research seeks to be part of the conversation on multimodal pedagogy and therefore responds to the lack of multimodal direction in the curriculum documents by adding to the repertoire of possible classroom activities that can be created by reading the documents through a lens of multimodal pedagogy.

During my early years of classroom teaching and practicum teaching, I was not consciously aware of, or focused on, multimodal pedagogy, nor did I overly reflect on each decision that I made in regards to my practice. It is only through my newly adopted reflexive lens that I can look back on my experiences and try to make sense of the complex mess that is education.

Through examining specific visual literacy events in my own classroom practice, I am able to more fully understand not only what these instances can look like and how they are produced, but also how various entities and resources encourage or challenge the inclusion of art and other multimodal literacy practices across the curriculum. Drawing on research highlighted earlier in this chapter, I also reflect on and analyze the affordances and constraints noted by other researchers, in regards to the use of visual literacy practices, to the specific events I recall from my own teaching experience.
I was inspired by Flood (1997) when he stated,

Human beings change beliefs, attitudes, and theories most easily after participating in a set of personal experiences… Teachers and students who already know and use the visual arts … represent the vanguard of a new paradigm. They can bring colleagues and students into action with visual arts, so that changes in beliefs and motivation can follow. (p.344)

To revisit the aims of this study as a conversation starter for more stories to be told, it is my hope that other educational practitioners will be able to reflect on their own practices, experiences and beliefs through the portrayal of my own stories, and use this study as a *vicarious* experience from which to spark a shift in attitude and motivation for change.

In the same way that there now exists a large body of work which investigates the use and semiotic potential of language in classrooms, we need to develop a body of work which examines, in detailed ways, the different ways in which teachers and learners work with multimodality. This is essential if we are to develop our understanding of the potential of multimodal pedagogies to improve learning. (Stein, 2008, p.143)

It is the voice of the teacher that is now needed to show how multimodal literacy can be used to its potential in classrooms. It is this voice that is missing from the mass of research on the importance of semiotics, on the benefits of the visual arts, and on the day-to-day teaching experience. It is this voice in which my study intends to contribute.

**Shaping This Thesis: An Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I offer an in-depth literature review on the current issues in 21st century literacy education and the functions of language, as well as on the theories of semiotics and multimodal literacy. These topics provide the motivation for investigating multimodal literacy and the pedagogical practices that enable students to develop facility
in a variety of modes. Chapter Two also introduces literature pertaining to background issues to the research associated with visual literacy instruction in schools. This includes the current perceptions and misperceptions of visual art in education, research on the visual mode of communication and its place within literacy, and the benefits of learning with, through, and about the visual arts (and the arts in general – where other types of visual texts are produced). Through this literature review and background to the study, visual art is formally linked with the production and use of visual texts (and similarly, the use of drama and music can be appreciated as gestural and oral texts). Finally, Chapter Two explores the multiple conceptions of curriculum as they relate to pedagogy, highlights previous studies on multimodal pedagogy, and situates a need for this particular type of autoethnographic narrative in the conversation surrounding literacy instruction.

Chapter Three expands on the methodology and methods used in this study. Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography are elaborated upon. The specific procedures for data collection and analysis and dissemination are identified. And a continued discussion on the limitations and affordance of autoethnographic narratives (and qualitative research in general) ensue.

Chapter Four begins with a reflection on the language of the Ontario curriculum documents. This introduction is followed by my classroom narratives. Four stories are told that form the beginning of a response to my first and second research questions: What were my experiences teaching multimodal literacy, and what did this look like in the context of my classroom? Each story focuses on a different grade and subject area and involves the creation of multimodal literacy texts by my students. These texts are
primarily visual, but as ‘multi’-modal literacy theory suggests, include a variety of other modes to complement and add to the messages being communicated in the work.

Chapter Five concludes the study with an analysis and interpretation of my narratives and offers a more critical response to my research questions, and relates the research back to foundational theories surrounding multimodal pedagogy. Commonalities between each of the stories (events) are explored, as is a reflection on the resources that enabled or constrained such events, and my understanding of the affordances and limitations of teaching multimodal literacy. Finally, a word on the advantages and challenges of conducting and offering an autoethnographic narrative are discussed along with implications of the study’s findings on multimodal literacy, multimodal pedagogy, and the culture of classroom practices in elementary education.
Chapter Two

Literature Review & Background to the Study

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on literacy and the functions of language, semiotic theory, multimodal literacy, and multimodal pedagogy, with a focus on visual modes of communication and the affordances of using such modes in education. Emphasizing the changing definitions and uses of literacy in contemporary Western society, I use this literature to analyze and interpret the multimodal and visually-rich literacy experiences of my own teaching practice that I reflect on in the narrative portions of the study.

At the base of this study are the theories of literacy and the functions of language, semiotics, and multimodal literacy. These theories have implications for what is taken as literacy, including responding to questions such as: What is literacy? What does it mean to be literate? In what ways can literacy be practiced and to what ends? In what ways are modes of communication valued across domains? and What are the affordances of these different modes? All of these questions motivate research on multimodal literacy.

Within these larger underlying theories, this study primarily explores visual modes of communication and the use and creation of visual texts in elementary classrooms. I introduce literature on one of the issues that may limit the use of art as a visual mode in the classroom: The current perception of visual art in education as being less valuable than other academic subjects and visual modes as less valuable than reading and writing.

In response to this problem, I highlight the literature on the many benefits to learning with and through the visual arts, and argue that visual texts can be a form of
literacy and a valuable communicative resource within multimodal literacy education. My research focuses on the incorporation of visual art into literacy practices across various subjects that comprise the Ontario Curriculum. I identify the link in the literature between visual art and literacy and report on literature that finds that viewing and producing visual art is in itself a literacy practice that serves many of the functions of language. In addition to visual art, other visual communication modes, such as dramatic gestures and the intersection of the visual with other modes of literacy, are explored. Lastly, I situate this study within theories of multimodal pedagogy – the how-to of teaching practice – and offer literature that provides further instruction to educators that may assist them in increasing the number and quality of visual text creations in the classroom.

**Literacy and the Functions of Language**

Language and literacy is purposeful. It has many functions. Social semiotician, Michael Halliday (1969), teaches that language, for example, has 7 functions. Halliday (1975) maintained, “Children know what language is because they know what language can do for them” (as cited in Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013, p.138), and identified seven functions of language:

- **Instrumental**: as a means of getting something we want (i.e. asking for help, writing a letter to government, or making a product look beautiful in an advertisement so that consumers will want to buy it);
• **Regulatory**: as a means of controlling the behaviour, attitudes, or feelings of others (i.e. a no smoking sign or a handbook for how to build a kite);

• **Interactional**: as a means of maintaining relationships (i.e. an argument or a friendly conversation, or a group of teens creating a graffiti wall);

• **Personal**: as a means to express individuality (i.e. talking about how we are feeling, expressing pride in our work, or drawing a heart to symbolize love);

• **Heuristic**: as a means of seeking knowledge (i.e. asking questions or wondering about things, or creating a graph to see which colour is the most popular among classmates);

• **Imaginative**: as a means of creating new worlds (i.e. writing poems or a wish list, daydreaming or telling jokes, or painting a picture of the sky a dramatic or perfect shade of blue);

• **Representational**: as a means of communicating information (i.e. creating reports, delivering a lecture, or taking a photograph to share with others).

(sources: Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013, p.139-140; Stooke, 2013).

Contemporary definitions of literacy have expanded but these functions of literacy may in fact remain. Until recently, defining literacy was relatively easy: “literacy was reading and writing print” (Stooke, 2010, p.8). Walsh (2011) notes that, even today, “literacy is mostly associated with reading ability” (p.35). Since the advent of The New London Group, however, many literacy researchers have argued that there is much more to being literate than simply reading and writing traditional texts (i.e. printed books). In accordance with Halliday’s notion that children acquire language (or literacies) in order
to fulfill their needs, and to make sense of or control their world, this study maintains that contemporary functions of literacy go well beyond the traditional roles of reading and writing printed text. The New London Group (1996) argues that changes in the workplace, personal, and social lives of contemporary Western society call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. As the examples embedded within Halliday’s functions of language (above) suggest, literacy can be seen as a meaning making practice that allows people to communicate their needs, desires, emotions, and knowledge to others through a variety of modes or communicational resources. Researchers are starting to discuss literacy less in terms of the rote grammar that has been traditionally taught for reading (decoding) and writing, and more in terms of the phenomenon of social and cultural communication and understanding (e.g. Albers, 2007; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; The New London Group, 1996). Albers (2007) captures this new viewpoint when she defines literacy as “the process of creating or interpreting the signs of one or more semiotic systems” (p.6).

**Semiotic Theory and Multimodal Literacy**

At the basic level, semiotics is the study of signs: signs can be words, images, sounds, gestures, or objects. Each of these sign systems has a grammar – a set of rules or culturally agreed upon practices – that shape the meanings that can be evoked from its use, and that can provide a set of choices for designing communications for specific functions (e.g. Jewitt, 2008; The New London Group, 1996). This study defines literacy as a meaning making practice, and as such, assumes that meaning can be made through a number of different modes such as: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and
multimodal (e.g. The New London Group, 1996). Each of these modes can be thought of as a semiotic sign system. According to Bainbridge & Heydon (2013), “theories of social semiotics are particularly useful to help us think about multimodality … [because they] offer a way of thinking about meaning and text that does not privilege language over all other sign systems” (p.498).

As there are many different semiotic systems, or modes of making meaning, literacy can encompass more than just the written word: “Humans communicate not only through written and oral language but, as semioticians suggest, through languages such as: art, music, math, dance, and written/oral language” (Albers, 2007, p.5). This notion of multiple languages is highlighted within theories of multimodal literacy. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) note that meanings are made (as well as distributed, interpreted, and remade) through many representational and communicational resources (or modes).

Kress & Jewitt (2003) note that within multimodal semiotic theory communication involves three interrelated decisions: what people want to signify, what they can use to signify it, and what ways to communicate are most suitable given the context of the communication (as cited in Heydon, 2008). Eisner (2002) argues, “not everything knowable can be articulated in one particular form. Written language, for example, is not always the most apt form of representation” (as quoted in Albers, 2007).

Multimodal literacy can be defined as “the use or integration of two or more modes of communication” (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013, p. 498). Jewitt (2008) contends that all modes are partial. That is, no single mode, including the linguistic modes of writing and speaking, “stands alone in the process of meaning making; rather, each mode
reflecting on multimodal pedagogy

plays a discrete part in the whole” (p.247). Similarly, The New London Group (1996) suggests that multimodal is a mode on its own as it represents patterns of interconnection among other modes. The authors further argue that “in a profound sense, all meaning-making is multimodal. All written text is also visually designed … [and likewise] spoken language is a matter of audio design as much as it is a matter of linguistic design understood as grammatical relationships” (p.81). These notions contribute to a growing understanding that multimodal literacy needs to be an essential part of literacy education in schools.

Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) maintain that “although [written] text remains a central, even a privileged, mode of communication, text-only is no longer sufficient in today’s digitally rich world; being literate across multiple modes is expected for successful contemporary communication” (p.10). Semiotic theory, including theories of multimodal literacy, can lead educators to (re)consider how schools define literacy as the turn towards semiotics has “opened up textual formats to include the multiple modes we naturally invoke as we communicate in our everyday, as exemplified when people use gestures or draw pictures when they talk through a story” (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010, p.8). This study works within this semiotic framework to explore the ways in which multiple modes can work together in within elementary classrooms.

Multimodal literacy is premised on semiotic theory, and much of the research in the vein is concerned with signs and meaning making in the context of literacy education in schools. Multimodal literacy considers the multifaceted ways in which languages (art, drama, music, movement, written/oral, math, etc.) can be studied in school contexts, and holds that “children (and adults) learn best when engaged in complex, socially
constructed, personally relevant, creative composition and interpretation of texts that incorporate a variety of meaningful communicative modes or symbol systems” (Albers & Sanders, 2010, p.4).

Many educational researchers have emphasized the importance of multimodal literacy instruction in schools. Walsh (2011), for instance, focuses on elementary classrooms and describes the multimodal literacy therein as involving meaning making through the reading, viewing, understanding, responding to, producing, and interacting with a variety of texts and across different modes. Albers (2007) believes that moving within, across, and between sign systems revitalizes teaching, more accurately reflects the multimodal nature of literacy events happening outside of the classroom and enhances learning by making learning more relevant to learners. This study explores the movement between, and collaboration of, the modes present in my classroom teaching experiences – a process that Albers (e.g., 2007) and Eisner (i.e., 2002) express is vital to literacy education and education in general. Above all, literacy is about meaning. This seems obvious and yet is sometimes lost in the plethora of spelling tests and standardized testing (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

**Visual Art, Visual Literacy, and Visual Texts**

The discussion surrounding multimodal literacy and multimodal pedagogy in this study focuses on the visual modes of communication that are part of multimodal text productions in the elementary classroom. According to Albers (2007), an understanding of the potential of the visual arts is significant to literacy learning, as is the distinction between artworks (works created by drawing upon knowledge of art as a discipline of
aesthetics) and visual texts (works created as a literacy-rich form of expression and communication). It is therefore important to survey the literature’s definitions of visual art, visual literacy, and visual texts as they relate to the understandings gathered from this study.

Visual Art is commonly understood as the creation of visual works of art through traditional methods of painting, sculpting, drawing, sketching, and other crafts. In schools, visual art courses focus on either art history, traditions, and appreciation (learning about the renaissance or the movement towards impressionism), or on the instruction of the elements and principles of design that help an artist to speak and communicate through their works of art (colour, line, texture, space, form, etc) (e.g. Albers & Murphy, 2000; Eisner, 2002). It is through these elements and principles of design that various educational and literacy researchers position the visual arts as a meaning-making practice (e.g. Albers, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). According to Eisner & Day (2004), for instance, “Researchers in education are [increasingly] coming to recognize that there are many ways the world can be represented; all of the arts [visual, dramatic, dance, and musical] are among the ways people experience and know the world” (p.3). Goldberg (2012) further adds to this argument by noting that limiting knowledge expression to a logo-mathematical manner (as is dominant in most school settings), places many children at a disadvantage as their creative modes of expression are not being validated.

Both Albers (2007) and Eisner (2002; 2003) express that the visual arts are a form of meaning making (interpreting, understanding, and representing) that complements written and oral communication in a way that is essential to both human and personal
development, and preparation for participation in society outside of school.

According to Albers (2007) visual art can be either a subject area in its own right, or a semiotic tool for representing and understanding (such as when art is integrated across the curriculum into other subject areas). Taking a strong influence from Albers’ position, my research is interested in art as a semiotic literacy practice and explores where and how art as a visual mode enters the classroom curriculum.

The literature on multimodal literacy that advocates for the inclusion of explicit instruction on the elements and principles of design expresses that this instruction fosters an understanding of the communicative affordances that the elements of this visual mode possess (e.g. Albers, 2007; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). According to Jewitt (2008), “how a mode has been used, what it is repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social conventions that inform its use in context shape its affordance” (p.247). For example, the use of different colours and lines can be used to communicate emotion and evoke those feelings in the viewer of the visual text (Bang, 2000). The meanings attached to these modes are socially and culturally constructed (for example, in Western cultures, red can symbolize danger, diagonal lines can create feelings of uneasiness, and round-edged shapes are more calming than jagged-edged shapes (Bang, 2000). Learning about the affordances of visual modes (and all modes) has been claimed in the literature to allow opportunities for the development of facility in the use of these modes to effectively communicate a message to an intended audience (Albers, 2007; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).
This facility in visual modes of communication is referred to as *Visual Literacy*. Johnson (2008) defines *visual literacy* as “the ability to create visual messages and to “read” messages contained in visual communications; to perceive, understand, interpret, and ultimately evaluate one’s visual environment” (p.74). Johnson also encourages talking about artwork and other visual texts created by students in classrooms, noting, “a picture may be worth a thousand words, but these words can remain unsaid or misunderstood when adults do not attend to their development” (p.79). By critically focusing on visual texts, like any other literacy cultivation practice, teachers can assist students in “building vocabulary; deepening perceptions; reflecting on the effects of media, process, and image; and communicate the meanings and ideas they discover” (p.79), thereby treating visual art, or visual texts, as the semiotic tool that Albers (2007) says they are.

The literature on multimodal literacy has created a distinction between artwork in general and visual texts that are composed of artworks and other visual modes of expression. Albers (2007) notes that artworks draw upon the knowledge of the visual arts and often demand a level of artistic skill, whereas visual texts draw upon the communicative and representational understandings of semiotic systems. A *visual text* is a text that is composed using visual sign systems and can be understood as something read by an interpreting viewer or receiver. For example, a student creating a drawing of an elephant to demonstrate his understanding that the animal is large with four legs, a small tail, a large head, big ears, and a trunk can be considered a visual text full of communicative potential (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). In contrast to the abstract statement ‘this is an elephant’, the language of the visual representation of an elephant
has the potential to communicate more concrete details of the child’s understanding (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

The literature on multimodal literacy emphasizes that visual modes, while the primary focus of this study, are only one mode in the communication landscape of the classroom, and that these multiple modes are most naturally (and most effectively) used in combination with each other. For example, the student who drew an elephant may accompany his visual text with a written text (sentences or word labels on his drawing), or an oral text (verbally describing the elements of his drawing). The use, facility, and affordances of these multiple modes used in the context of the elementary classroom are studied through the narrative portions of this research. While this study focuses primarily on visual art and the image as a mode of communication, other visual modes, such as drama and gestures, are included in the classroom production of these visual texts and multimodal expressions. Positioning this study of multimodal literacy and pedagogy inside the elementary classroom, I return to Halliday’s (1969) functions of language to situate multimodal visual text creations as a literacy practice that allows students to communicate in ways that are instrumental, regulatory, personal, interactional, heuristic, imaginative, and representational. Learning to communicate in a variety of modes for a variety of purposes is essential to the literacy-related demands of contemporary society (e.g. The New London Group, 1996; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010; Albers, 2007).

In the next section of this chapter, I address the current perception (or misperception) of the visual arts in education, and counter this issue with an abundance of literature that supports the visual arts in education.
Literature on the Current Reputation of Visual Art in Education

The literature identifies three main challenges facing the arts in Ontario’s public schools: The first is a lack of funding for art in schools. The second is a gross misunderstanding of the value of art (and the arts in general) in education. The third challenge is how the arts are used in many elementary school classrooms – often in superficial ways that contribute to the lack of value felt for the arts, and subsequently, funding awarded to this important modality.

The arts are underfunded in Ontario when compared with other provinces across Canada (Pagliaro, 2012). Research has been conducted on the lack of funding and value felt for the arts and why this exists at the government level (Barrett, 1997; Briggs, 2002). Some politicians suggest that the arts are not important to learning (Steiner, 2005) and that when “funding difficulties arise, the arts are easy to cut” (Miller, 2006, p.2). Despite vast amounts of research on the benefits of the arts, there continues to be evidence of lower priority given to art programs at the school level when compared to other subject areas (Hanna, 1994).

This lack of value awarded to the visual arts, and the arts in general, may stem from the third problem: that of how the arts are used in many educational settings. In many schools, visual art is regarded with apathy by administration and is seen as functionless and meaningless to the academic project (Albers & Murphy, 2000). Another problem “has been the perception that [the role of art education] is to train artists rather than to educate all students visually (Lee, 2009, p.218). At the elementary level, the arts are often seen as a frill subject, used in superficial decorative ways (Amorino, 2008) or offered as “fun” rewards for good behaviour (Albers & Murphy, 2000). Albers (2007)
argues that the time has come to create change, stating:

At a time in which federal funding for the arts in schools is being cut, and teachers and administrators face the daunting challenge of meeting standards, the visual arts are in jeopardy of losing visibility in public schools. However, with the discovery that the arts present something else, something that demonstrates students’ learning and achievement, teachers can be assured that making art in language arts classes is indeed worthwhile and informative. (p.xiii)

Taking the lead from Albers, I believe a response to the above three difficulties involves a renovation to the image of the arts through showcasing the benefits of learning in, with, and through the arts (Hanna, 1994) and demonstrating the link between visual art and literacy.

**Situating the Visual Arts Within Literacy**

A number of researchers in the literature identify art as literacy. Stevens and Walkup (2001) identify several commonalities between literacy and art. Both the visual arts and language arts are chiefly concerned with communicating via seeing, hearing, and speaking. Much like the skills taught through language arts, visual art encourages students to observe, analyze, interpret, and make reasoned judgments about the world and life. Writing about art also allows students to use descriptive language that enriches and clarifies communication.

As a visual mode of communication, Harste (2000) says visual art needs to be understood as an academic and cognitive activity and as a fundamental literacy practice that offers a unique way to communicate and create knowledge. Situating art as a literacy practice may lead to an improved perception of the arts as a unique and essential part of
education. This would require a new approach to the definitions of literacy that more explicitly include visual and other modes of communication in the literacy instruction landscape. However, accepting the visual arts into language and literacy instruction, says Harste, continues to be an uphill battle.

As introduced earlier in this chapter, some researchers distinguish between art as subject and art as a mode of communication (e.g. Albers, 2007). Visual Arts most often connotes ideas of the subject or discipline dealing with the principles and elements of design and the creation and analysis of visual works of art. When educators position the visual arts inside definitions of literacy, they are chiefly interested in the communicative affordances of the art: that is, meanings, ideas, and messages that are conveyed in and through the mode. Revisiting definitions of literacy, Walsh (2011) notes that literacy involves reading, viewing, understanding, responding to, producing, and interacting with a variety of texts and across different modes. As one of the many modes Walsh (2011) and Albers (2007) discuss is the visual mode, it is not only reasonable, but necessary, to see viewing, understanding, responding to, producing, and interacting with visual art as part of literacy practice – a practice that involves the creation and interpretation of visual texts.

Lee (2009) describes the positioning of visual art as literacy as Visuacy in efforts to align this process with the literacy and numeracy practices that dominate educational thought and practice. He contends that visuacy is complimentary to literacy and numeracy, and equally important. Flood (1997) contends that the designation of high status rewarded to verbal and linguistic modes increasingly contrasts with the practical roles that visual art plays in everyday social and workplace interactions. Likewise, Kress
(1997), Jewitt (2008), and Ulbricht (2001) argue that the ‘visual’ is replacing ‘linguistic’ as contemporary Western society’s primary means of communication in this digital era, and that visual forms of knowledge are surpassing the written word. Kress (1997) suggests that one reason for this shift may be because

The visual [is a] new and more effective medium of communication. [For example], “a graph or a bar chart can display vast quantities of information, and complexities of relations between them at one glance, which it would take pages of written language to transmit and explain. (p.4)

Figure 2.1 provides an example of this shift from linguistic to visual in the changing logo of Starbucks Coffee, an international coffee chain, where words have been supplanted by a logo. This visual text has been designed to convey a message that this company sends to its customers and the world.

Figure 2.1. Changes to the Starbucks Coffee’s logo from 1971 to 2011.¹

¹ Starbucks.com states that when designing the new logo, they “broke down the four main parts of the mark: colour, shape, typeface, and the [iconic] Siren”. The new design choice aimed for “simplicity” – with a “more sophisticated stroke width and spacing, and a smoother line flow” – and a sense that the “energy” of the Siren (“the mythical figure who represents romance and creativity”) has been “unleashed”. (Source: www.starbucks.com/preview retrieved on May 22, 2013).
I turn now to literature on the many affordances of the visual arts in efforts to highlight literature that claims the need to not only see art as valuable, but also to position art as a visual literacy practice full of academic potential that prepares students for the increasingly visual world they live in.

The Benefits of Learning About, With, and Through Visual Art

A great deal has been published about the benefits of deep engagement with the visual arts in efforts to highlight the usefulness of art in schools, both for students’ personal growth and for the cultivation of skills that will lead one to be a creative, productive and literate members of contemporary society.

Research conducted by Caughlan (2008) has organized the benefits of learning through the visual arts into three types: Arts-based benefits (such as techniques to creating meaningful visual works of art, or understanding the elements and principles of design); art-related benefits (such as the cognitive abilities, habits of mind, and habits of work that students attain through involvement in the arts); and ancillary benefits (those further removed from the discipline of art, such as improvement in the areas of literacy and mathematics, higher academic achievement in general, and lower drop-out rates).

Further research has extended these benefits into four other categories: aesthetic benefits, social benefits, identity and emotional benefits, and cognitive benefits. While the first three categories are often associated with art, it is the cognitive benefits that need to be more widely understood in order to see visual art experiences as valuable.
components of literacy practice (e.g. Caughlan, 2008; Barrett, 1997; Hanna, 1994; Lee, 2009).

The literature notes that the most commonly associated benefits of visual art come in the form of aesthetics. Art can be seen as a work of beauty and complexity. As a visual mode of expression, the visual arts promote creativity and intuitive and sensory-oriented learning (Hanna, 1994). As students create works of art and come to understand the artwork of others, they learn to pay attention to subtle details and meanings that are often missed at first glance (Albers, 2007).

The arts have also been noted in the literature for their social benefits. Nakamura (2009) argues that art education is capable of enhancing human relationships and personalities in ways that improve human life on a global scale. Through art making, children learn to understand and appreciate not only their own ideas and ways of doing things, but also take interest in the work and perceptions of others (Amorino, 2008; Drew & Rankin, 2004; Heydon & Daly, 2008).

Art can be both personal and interpersonal, and much literature suggests that the arts can foster a sense of identity among other emotional benefits. The visual arts offer opportunities for students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their identities (Hanna, 1994). As these identities are embraced and accepted by others, the possibility to develop positive-self concept and a sense of personal importance is present (Caughlan, 2008; Heydon & Daly, 2008). The personal nature of artwork creation also requires acts of courage and risk-taking, which builds resiliency, immediacy, a sense of presence, and focus (Drew & Rankin, 2004; Hanna, 1994). The process of art making can
also instill an appreciation for perseverance and deferred gratification (Hanna, 1994), something often lacking in contemporary Western’s society of fast-pace and instant-gratification.

The arts have long been regarded for their aesthetic and social contributions, and for developing the affective, or emotional, side of learners. However, the arts are also identified in the literature for their cognitive contributions as well (Harste, 2007, p.xv). Eisner (2002) notes that both the arts and language help people to learn to notice the world, engage the imagination to explore new possibilities, and are tools to enable people to inspect their ideas more carefully. Eisner (2003) has also championed the arts as developing different forms of thinking – including an ability to see qualitative relationships within and among texts, an understanding that forms and content are inextricably linked, and an understanding that how something is expresses is only part of what is meant.

The visual arts cultivate problem solving skills and complex thinking (Albers, 2007), can be seen as an extension of thinking and communicating (Drew & Rankin, 2004), and have been found to help students learn effective planning, organization, and publishing techniques which often require higher-order thinking skills (Hanna, 1994). In addition, Heydon & Daly (2008) show how art programs provide “opportunities to develop language and literacy skills” (p.81) and connected to this, others have noted art’s specific contribution to the development of descriptive language for clearer communication (Stevens & Walkup, 2001).
Amorino’s (2008) study found that rich, meaningful interaction with the visual arts increases student ability in the areas of original idea formation, flexible thinking, ability to use metaphorical language to represent ideas, ability to transcend traditional thinking and problem solving methods, and a greater capacity to understand visual images and ideas.

Perhaps the strongest argument for visual art being a cognitive activity would be to situate it within multimodal literacy practice. As Albers (2007) explains, art is one of many semiotic tools for representing, understanding, and communicating.

Tackling the belief that the visual arts hold the single purpose of educating artists, Hanna (1994) argues that an education in the arts prepares people for arts careers, art-related careers, and careers that draw upon the skills and knowledge acquired through arts education. Ulbricht (2001) clarifies this list to include those who produce art (painters, sculptors, illustrators), those who support arts (art teachers, art historians, art administrators, museum educators), and those who use art for a variety of purposes (art therapists, architects, city planners, computer artists, landscape artists and designers).

The above mentioned research points toward reasons to understand how the arts can be infused into classrooms. Consequently, my research explores the contextual conditions that facilitated my own ability to infuse art across the curriculum as well as to reflect upon the affordances and challenges of situating the use of the visual arts (and dramatic arts as they include visual modes of communication) as a literacy practice. According to Albers (2007), including art as literacy in classrooms allows “to produce learners who know how to use art…to reposition themselves, gather information, change
perspectives, re-theorize issues, and take thoughtful new action” (p.ix). I extend Albers’ notion of understanding how to use art, to using a variety of visual communication modes in order to increase facility in multimodal communication. Adding to the literature on pedagogies of multimodal literacy, this study offers an intimate perspective on what this teaching might entail.

**Defining multiple conceptions of curriculum**

Curriculum (the what to teach) is directly related to pedagogy (the how to teach) and the literature on curriculum posits that there are several different conceptions of curriculum that may influence pedagogical practices. Eisner (2002) argues that “two of the most important factors affecting students’ experiences in classrooms are the quality of teaching they encounter and the quality of the curriculum provided” (p.46). He expands on this notion when he defines curriculum as “the array of activities that give direction to and develop the cognitive capacities of individuals” (p.149).

Doyle (1996) describes three levels of curriculum: the *ideological or institutional curriculum* (the legislation surrounding education), the *practical or programmatic curriculum* (the curriculum expectations document), and the *enacted or classroom curriculum* (classroom events). While agreeing on the definition of the enacted curriculum, Bloomer (1997) offers an alternative to the former two categories with the term *prescribed curriculum* (the Ministry documents) and the *described curriculum* (intentions and aspirations of the teacher seen through unit plans and the like). Eisner (2002) agrees with Bloomer’s distinction stating “there is always a distance between the intentions of curriculum designers and actual teaching practices” (p149). Within these
conceptions of curriculum, Eisner notes there may also be the *intended curriculum* (what the document says to teach), the *hidden curriculum* (what gets unintentionally or unknowingly communicated to learners), the *null curriculum* (what is not taught but has an effect by virtue of it being excluded from the intended curriculum), and the *lived curriculum* (how learning is experienced).

These varied conceptions of curriculum present in the literature suggest which aspects of curriculum may hold the most influence in mediating and enabling opportunities to include visual art in the classroom. Specific to my research, which recalls my classroom experiences teaching multimodal literacy, the narratives in Chapter Four focus on the classroom or enacted curriculum as the site of literacy and learning.

**Studies of Multimodal Pedagogy**

Several researchers have created a variety of curricular supports to help educators understand and enact a multimodal pedagogy that assists students in developing multimodal literacy skills (e.g. The New London Group, 1996; Walsh, 2011; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Stein, 2008; Garhart, 2005; Stoermer, 2009; Albers, 2007; Richards & Gipe, 2000). Their studies are presented in this literature review for several reasons. First, they are recent and therefore contribute to a growing understanding of contemporary approaches to literacy instruction. Second, each of these researchers offer a different angle or perspective from which I have learned a great deal about the breadth of pedagogical practices and the resources necessary to not only help students to acquire multimodal literacies, but to put these pedagogies into action in the classroom.
Paraphrasing the multitude of definitions presented in the literature, *pedagogy* is referred to as the art and practice of teaching. (e.g. Stein, 2008) In this study, reflections on pedagogy include the analysis of teaching methods, including the aims of education, the ways in which such goals may be achieved, and a teacher’s decisions about instruction, the built environment, and teaching materials.

Since the advent of The New London Group in 1996, a growing attention to literacy pedagogy (and subsequently multimodal pedagogy) has been evident in the literature. Educators and educational researchers alike have begun to document their practices in an effort to understand the changing needs of 21st century literacy learning.

The New London Group’s (1996) *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures* argues that pedagogy that can promote multiple literacies, including multimodal literacy, is a complex integration of four strategies:

- **Situated Practice**: A strategy that draws on the experience of meaning making and involves immersing students in literacy practices. The New London Group notes that if a pedagogical goal is a degree of mastery in literacy practices, immersion in a community of learners engaged in situated practice is necessary. But, situated practice alone, does not necessarily lead to conscious control and awareness of how to practice these literacies in diverse contexts and for a variety of purposes.
- **Overt instruction**: A strategy through which students develop an explicit metalanguage of *Design* – a language for talking about language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions. The authors choose to use the word *Design* in place of *grammar* as the term can be used not only to describe the organizational
structure of modes of meaning, but also the process of constructing meaning. According to The New London Group, the semiotic process of design includes three elements: *Available designs* (the *grammar* or rules of each mode that contribute to meaning), *Designing* (the active use of these available designs to construct meaning), and *Redesign* (the new meaning that is produced through the transformation of the available designs).

- **Critical Framing**: A strategy in which students learn to interpret the social and cultural context of communication, focusing on what people do with text and what text does in the world. Note the similarity of critical framing to Halliday’s (1969) functions of language in which students learn how language can work for them, and to Jewitt’s (2008) notion that meaning is always socially and culturally constructed.

- **Transformed Practice**: A strategy that involves applying these literacy skills to other contexts that are in line with the interests and goals of the communicator.

Looking forward to the multimodal pedagogy that is described in the narrative portions of this study, these interconnected strategies suggest that enacting a multimodal pedagogy means more than offering students experiences to include multiple modes in the classroom. Multimodal pedagogy might equally need to include explicit instruction of the affordances, uses, and grammar of each mode so that students can gain facility in making effective design choices while communicating through multimodal means.

While there is a multitude of resources that tell teachers and other education practitioners what they *should* do in the classroom, studies such as this one highlight the
lived experience of teachers – what we as teachers do do – our successes, our struggles, our voices heard. This study is not novel with this purpose, but rather, is part of a larger conversation presented in other studies of multimodal pedagogy.

Walsh’s (2011) *Multimodal Literacy: Researching Classroom Practice* offers an articulation between the theory and practice of multimodal pedagogy through visually demonstrating what engagement with multimodal texts, and explicit instruction of the uses of multiple modes, looks like in elementary classrooms. Working from the perspective of the digital-age, she offers insight into the approaches of curricula and pedagogy that “enables a fuller understanding of how to foster children’s skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to the analysis and production of multimodal, multimedia texts” (p.v). She highlights several multimodal literacy activities in an Australian elementary school complete with vignettes of images, descriptions, and teacher feedback. Like The New London group (1996), Walsh (2011) notes the importance of explicitly teaching the essential aspects of reading and creating multimodal texts, and adds new illustrations of the importance of pedagogies that create opportunities for social interactions and the participatory nature of learning whereby students teach and learn from each other. She also highlights the importance of teachers’ plans for literacy instruction to make use of appropriate scaffolding of skills.

Pahl & Rowsell’s (2005) *Literacy and Education: Understanding the New Literacy Studies in the Classroom* and Stein’s (2008) *Multimodal Pedagogies in Diverse Classrooms* share examples of multimodal classroom practice from both the U.S. and the U.K (Pahl & Rowsell) and post-apartheid South Africa (Stein) that reflect current changes in literacy and the affordances that multimodal pedagogies offer to students in
different societal contexts. Pahl & Rowsell argue that “stable moments in literacy are few and far between,” and that the pedagogical decisions teachers make in regards to literacy instruction are “dependent not on some science of literacy, but upon how literacy figures and refigures in changing economies, cultures, institutions and possible worlds that we inhabit” (p.x). Specifically, these researchers relay the importance of bridging the gap between home and school literacy practices which requires a shift both in instructional modes and in the way educators see students as funds of knowledge. Specifically, Stein argues for the importance of culture and identity and states that students are agentive, resourceful, and creative meaning makers. Pahl & Rowsell note that one of the steps to change is for teachers “to think outside the box, and remove themselves from where they have been placed by curricular regimes” (p.138).

Garhart’s (2005) Documentation Panels: Evidence of Scientific Literacy in a Primary Multi-age Classroom: Teaching at the edge of magic, demonstrates a cross-curricular look at visual literacy inclusion in the science curriculum. This is particularly interesting to my study as I also look at the use of the visual as a literacy practice, not only in the language art curriculum, but also across all areas of classroom life. As a teacher-researcher reflecting on her own pedagogy of multimodal literacy, Garhart had her students demonstrate their understanding of the science content through the creation of multimodal documentation panels which included both a visual component (picture glossaries, life cycles, scales, analytic diagrams and maps) and a conversational component (vocabulary, and discussions of concepts). She found that the visual paralleled the conversational in terms of communicating knowledge learned, discovering the potential that visual modes of literacy offer.
In terms of Garhart’s (2005) pedagogy, she explains that this particular cross-curricular literacy activity was conducted at the end of the school year after students had received direct instruction and many demonstrations of various modes of communication. This included lessons that prepared students to make decisions about what visual elements to include as well as the aesthetic quality of their finished piece. Garhart also notes the significance of the classroom environment in relation to her multimodal pedagogy, noting that her classroom is a space where art is valued and where visual information such as graphs, charts, labels, and diagrams (drawn, painted or sculpted) are seen as legitimate forms of expression.

Also looking at how multimodal pedagogy is enacted, Stoermer’s (2009) *Teaching Between the Frames: making comics with seven and eight year old children: A search for craft and pedagogy* explored the use of creating comic books as a way to strengthen traditional language and literacy skills usually taught through traditional texts. Like Garhart (2005), Stoermer (2009) found that the images in the comics not only complemented the written portions of the created texts, but also communicated just as much meaning to the final product. As a teacher-researcher, she also questioned the resources and knowledge that she needed to enable her to develop the multimodal pedagogies and practices in her classrooms. She explicitly reflected on students’ identities, emotional commitment to their work, and the impact that artistic confidence has on students ability to take pride in the visual texts they create, as well as on the importance of explicit instruction of the grammar or use of visual elements of communication (discovering that the uses of frames, continuity between frames, and the relationship between actions and words in comics was not intuitively understood by
students). Like Albers (2007), Stoermer (2009) reiterates the importance of teachers having pedagogical and content knowledge of the grammar of visual design and how this relates to the other modes used in a text.

Adding to the discussion on the resources teachers require to teach multimodal pedagogy, Albers’ (2007) *The Artist Within: Creating and Reading Visual Texts in the English Language Arts Classroom* (a favourite resource of mine) strongly emphasizes the “need [for educators] to study the discipline of art” in order to encourage complex literacy learning rich in visual modes of communication and learning (p. xv). For example, in order to understand and communicate meaning through a piece of artwork, one needs knowledge on what the elements and principles of design can say to a potential audience. (The same can be said for dramatic and gestural elements as other visual modes of communication). Albers explicitly educates teachers on the fundamentals of visual art and its use as a semiotic tool for meaning-making, and includes specific examples of classroom opportunities with student exemplars, suggestions for reading and assessing visual images, as well as vignettes of other artists’ and educators’ narrative experiences and beliefs. While Albers does not discuss pedagogy directly, her book is a strong example of what a multimodal pedagogy looks like.

Finally, Richards & Gipe’s (2000) study, *Linking Literacy Lessons with Visual Arts: Preservice Teachers Dilemmas and Accomplishments*, notes the importance of sharing pedagogy and practical examples of classroom application. Preservice teachers were observed and interviewed in an attempt to illuminate gaps in the instructional processes of teacher educators in the area of meaningful visual art integration into literacy lessons. Their findings “stress the importance of preservice students modeling
literacy-based art lessons for their students, [and likewise] critical for us [teacher educators] to demonstrate these types of integrated lessons for our preservice teachers” (p.39).

The above mentioned research points toward a need to understand how the arts can be infused into our public school classrooms. Consequently, my research will explore the contextual conditions that facilitated my own ability to infuse art across the curriculum as well as to reflect upon the affordances and challenges of situating the use of the visual arts (and dramatic arts as they include visual modes of communication) as a literacy practice.
Chapter Three
Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology and methods I have chosen to address my research questions:

1. Within my practice as an elementary teacher, what were my experiences using visual art as a multimodal literacy across the elementary curriculum?

2. What did the process look like? What resources enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my practice?

3. What were my understandings of the affordances and limitations of the modes and multimodal pedagogies for students? What were the affordances and limitations for myself as a teacher?

In a bid to document and understand the complexities and nuances of multimodal literacy in elementary curriculum, this qualitative study employed a hybrid methodology that combined select elements of autoethnography and narrative inquiry. Included in this chapter is a definition of autoethnography and narrative inquiry which I have combined into what I call a narrative autoethnographic account, the specific uses of autoethnography and narrative inquiry in educational research, ethical issues, limitations and affordances of autoethnographic narratives, and a detailed account of the study’s participants, procedures, narrative analysis, and dissemination of research findings.
Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research opens doors for personal experiences, life stories, and observations to be looked at rigorously with the purposes of making meaning of phenomena and of contributing to knowledge surrounding contextualized human issues. As “a field of inquiry in its own right” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.2), Denzin and Lincoln assert:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. … Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.3)

The most apt way to study my own visual literacy teaching experiences, to understand the contextual factors that were part of my pedagogical decision-making practice, and to present these narratives in a way that might be transferable to other educational practitioner’s situations is through a qualitative approach. Likewise, it is through a qualitative approach that personal experience and contextual circumstances are seen as valid and valuable to research in the first place.

Defining Narrative Inquiry & Autoethnography

“We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life… [stories] give theory flesh and breath” (Pratt, 1995, cited in Holman Jones, 2005, p.763).

This study was conducted through a combination of narrative inquiry and autoethnography. Both methodologies are based in story. Chang (2008) notes that telling stories is an ancient practice, perhaps as old as human history itself. Stories come in an array of forms from biographies to journal and diary entries, from conversational
descriptions of people’s daily events to fictional stories and novels. Stories are an overarching part of human history and daily life, and are embedded in the way people communicate with one another, and the way they learn about themselves and the world.

The term narrative refers to the stories people tell – “the way they organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (Ellis, 2004, p.195). Teachers are “inveterate tellers of stories” as evidenced by anyone who has ever entered a school staffroom or teaching conference (Graham, 2005, p.195). Of the stories that teachers tell, Graham (2005) argues that those that receive the greatest critical attention are “not the fleeting anecdotes…uttered over coffee, but written accounts of teaching, ‘frozen texts’ constructed in particular ways and for specific purposes by human acts of intention” (p.196). This purpose and intention that Graham speaks of is what drives the transformation of my narratives into an autoethnographic study.

In this narrative autoethnographic account, I use the art of narrative as a tool to reflect on and critically analyze my own experiences teaching multimodal literacy in elementary classrooms. Through this reflective practice, I aim to garner a deeper understanding of the curriculum, the practice of teaching, the processes of learning, and the matter of practicing how to teach in informed and sensitive ways.

I recall my own teacher education program and its unspoken motto of reflect, reflect, reflect. During my pre-service days, I wrote more journal entries and reflection notes than I can count. In my experience, the questions that were not often addressed with such reflective practice were So what? What do we do with these reflections? Essentially, if these reflections are to be useful to educators, they need to incite a greater understanding of ourselves, and lead us towards learning lessons and improving our
practice (e.g. Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004). It is the analytical and interpretive nature that distinguishes this autoethnographic study from other forms of self-narrative.

In addition to defining narrative, describing autoethnography is necessary to understand the make-up of this study. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “the study of a culture, cultural group, community, or institution, such as education, by a ‘full insider’” (p.739). Alternatively, Reed-Danahay (1997) defines autoethnography “as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (cited in Spry, 2001, p.187). Blending both of these definitions, my study uses my personal narratives to gain an understanding of the culture of my practice as an elementary teacher.

Ellis (2004) expands on these definitions with specific examples of some of the distinguishing features of a narrative autoethnographic project:

The author usually writes in first person, making her or himself the object of research. The narrative text focuses on generalization within a single case extended over time. The text is presented as a story replete with a narrator, characterization, and a plot line, akin to forms of writing associated with the novel or biography. The story often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience…. And the relationship between writers and readers of the text is one of involvement and participation. (p.30)

This study’s narrative component adheres to the features listed by Ellis. Specifically, the narratives are written in first person, focus on making generalizations from the cases of my classrooms, highlight personal and emotional experiences, and involve the reader in the sense-making experience as they make connections to their own professional practices surrounding education, and literacy.

Autoethnography is not about focusing on the self alone, but on the relationship between self and others. Moving from the self to others is necessary given that the
methodology aims to “fram[e]” “individual stories . . . in the context of the bigger story, a story of society” (Ellis, 2004, p.49). Along this line of thought, Chang (2008) notes, “what makes autoethnography ethnographic is its intent of gaining a cultural understanding” (p.125). Taking this to heart, my study draws upon situating my experiences when interpreting the narratives to understand the experience of including visual literacy practices and a pedagogy of multimodal literacy across the elementary classroom curriculum.

Finally, Spry (2001) notes, “Autoethnographic writing resists Grand Theorizing and the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth” (p.188). In the context of my research, I aim not to demonstrate a singular answer for what meaningful visual art inclusion should look like or which definitive resources are required – there is no singular truth for multimodal pedagogy. Rather, this research showcases one of many truths and experiences that comprise the complexity of education through the reflective practice of sharing my own teaching experiences under a new critical and focused academic eye, in a bid to incite further conversation on the issues surrounding multimodal pedagogy.

Similar to Heydon’s (2012) study of the production of kindergarten literacy curricula, this study is “designed to identify and gain insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the production and practice” (p.1) of multimodal pedagogy. It also uses similar ethnographic methods to answer questions that are tied to the “material and everyday details of a situation” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p.145) so that readers may assess the particularities of my situation to determine how they lessons might apply to their own situations (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).
Participants

The narrative autoethnography takes as its focus my experiences designing, implementing, and reflecting on multimodal pedagogy – my classrooms, my teaching and learning opportunities offered within them, and my pedagogy and experiences related to meaningful visual art inclusion across the curriculum – there is only one main participant. However, it is necessary to note that, as ethnography records cultural and societal contexts, individual’s stories are never truly contained with the individual themselves. My stories of my classroom experience have my students, colleagues, and even my family embedded within them.

Since autoethnographers’ stories are often linked to stories of others, no matter how explicit the linkage is, the principle of protecting confidentiality of people in the story is just as relevant to autoethnography. Because main characters reveal their identities in autoethnography, it is extremely difficult to protect others intimately connected to these known characters...This inquiry method requires researchers to adopt creative strategies in practicing this principle. (Chang, 2008, p.55-56)

Being committed to this principle, no photographs containing any identifiers of the schools, communities, and students have been used (and any identifying features have been blurred from photographs). Additionally, no names have been recorded in the stories told. Any names used to facilitate the flow of the narrative are pseudonyms. This of course, does not apply to myself as the primary researcher and subject of inquiry. Through disclosure of my thoughts and subjectivities (as well as through the quick summary of my personal history in Chapter One), my personal culture, background, upbringing, education, and experiences are as transparent as possible to aid in understanding the classroom activities being narrated and interpreted.
**Procedures**

The process of conducting this narrative autoethnography has been a messy one. The generation of narratives and the narrative analysis was not a linear task consisting of neat steps. Rather, each of the described processes below was conducted as a patchwork of tasks – going back and forth to the curriculum documents and resources, theories on visual art, visual literacy, and multimodal pedagogy, and the memories and artifacts I have stored over the years. Described below are the segments of narrative generation and narrative analysis that were performed throughout the journey of writing this narrative autoethnography.

**Narrative Generation**

I used multiple sources to generate my narratives. I retrieved artifacts that I have collected over my years teaching in elementary classrooms – classrooms that I recalled to have exhibited a high degree of arts inclusion across the curriculum. These “visual [texts] complement [my written texts] and sometimes supersede the benefit of [written texts] because visual [texts have the ability to make] long-term impressions on viewers” (Chang, 2008, p.109). These visual artifacts include: physical diagrams and photographs of my classroom set up, Ministry curriculum documents and other print resources, lesson and unit plans that have examples of meaningful visual literacy opportunities, sample exemplars that I have made for my students, journal entries and other self-reflective notes, and feedback from students, colleagues and administration in relation to the classroom events under review.
To choose the specific experiences to share, I created a timeline of my teaching career, noting the grades I have had the pleasure of teaching, and the units, lessons, or activities that stood out as the most memorable to me. Of those experiences, I narrowed the list down to those with the highest degree of visual and multimodal literacy inclusion. I then prepared an inventory of these events, collecting physical documentation such as the lesson plan, my notes, exemplars, and feedback from others. Finally, I attempted to organize my memories and artifacts in such a way that would lead to discussion surrounding my three main research questions.

To contextualize these artifacts within the narratives, I began with what Dyson and Genishi (2005) refer to as ‘casing the joint’ – (re)situating myself in the context of the curriculum space to notice its components. They note the importance of paying attention “to the physical layout of the schools themselves, as well as the surrounding neighborhood” (p.21). They also note the importance of the arrangement of seating (does it change?), the location of individual possessions, the placement of shared classroom supplies, what kind of materials are on the wall (commercial, teacher, or student made). To aid in the contextualizing process, I drew on photographs I had archived of my classroom set up, and drew maps from memory of the school layout and surrounding community.

In addition to the artifacts already discussed, I examined the official Ontario curriculum itself and other Ministry-created literacy resources looking for expectations and explicit or implicit opportunities for the inclusion of the arts. I then turned my observation to the enacted curriculum – what was done in my classroom – through noting schedules, classroom set-up, resources in the room, day planner notes, wall decorations,
and recalling teaching and learning opportunities that are documented in the collection of artifacts noted above.

**Narrative Analysis & Interpretation**

After collecting all of my data (artifacts, maps, schedules, photographs, educational resources, curriculum documents, lesson plans, exemplars, journal notes, etc.), I systematically studied the pieces in order to provide an analytic portrait of the classroom curriculum and the inclusion of visual art practices within it.

Chang (2008) distinguishes between analysis and interpretation: Analysis refers to the original data (my narratives) being recorded and coded, and is focused on the details of such data (my narratives and the artifacts that helped generate them). Interpretation refers to what is done with the analyzed narratives, connecting them to big ideas, focusing on the bigger picture and lessons learned, and artistically sharing the new understandings with others. Chang’s description of interpretation closely resembles Ellis’s (2004) idea of thematic analysis, whereby researchers treat stories as data and use analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate content in new light. Keeping true to this distinction between analysis and interpretation, I start with a description of my analysis methods separate from my interpretation of the stories.

One of the methods I used to analyze my artifacts and narrative components involved the juxtaposition of photographs of texts and salient objects next to the journal entries and recalled memories of the experiences associated with them (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Within the narratives shared in Chapter Four, I included these images to facilitate these connections and to demonstrate the use of visual literacy and multimodal communication.
Specifically, in relation to visual literacy practices in the classroom, I analyzed three different types of interaction with the arts: Learning *with* the arts (exploring subject matter with the aid of an artwork, such as looking at Mondrian paintings to study parallel lines in a math period); Learning *through* the arts (creating works of art to express reflections concerning certain subject matter, such as creating a visual display of the solar system in a science period); and Learning *about* the arts (such as learning about how the use of lines and colours can evoke certain emotions) (Goldberg, 2012).

To provide deeper meaning to these analyzed pieces of narrative, interpretation becomes a necessary next step in the research process. Through self-reflection and interpretation of the analyzed documents and artifacts I have gained a deeper understanding of how all these pieces fit together within the enacted curriculum in regards to meaningful visual art inclusion within a multimodal literacy pedagogy. This reflexive understanding coupled with shared personal memories form the basis of my autoethnographic narrative on the experience of teaching through multimodal texts. Seeking the bigger picture that Chang (2008) talks about, the act of recalling my pedagogical experiences allowed me to identify the commonalities that united these experiences, what encouraged their existence in my classroom practice, and the implications of telling my stories.
Shaping my narrative autoethnographic account:

Revisiting my research questions

In efforts to put the above modes of data analysis and interpretation into perspective within the scope of this study, I now return to my research questions and describe the ways in which I sought responses.

1. Within my practice as an elementary teacher, what were my experiences using visual art as a multimodal literacy across the elementary curriculum?

To investigate this question, I reflexively recalled a selection of units that I planned for my students over three years of practicum experience and three years of teaching experience in Ontario elementary public schools. I chose particular units, because they exhibit a high degree of visual literacy inclusion as part of the literacy program and are balanced across various grades from 1 to 8 as well as across various subject areas that intersect literacy learning opportunities. The units are also ones where I had ample documentation (e.g., unit and lesson plans, feedback notes from my administration, and photographs and videos of the activities, products or presentations that culminated the unit). These experiences are written in narrative form in Chapter Four.

2. What did the process look like? What resources enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my practice?

To investigate this question, I used much of the same method as described above, but with a higher degree of reliance on the details included in my unit plans, notes, and photographs. Drawing on the literature on the human and non-human resources
highlighted in Chapter Two, I was able to more concisely focus my recollections and reflect on how each resource may have affected my pedagogical decision making in regards to the visual art inclusion and the connection to literacy practice that these inclusions allow.

3. What were my understandings of the affordances and limitations of the modes and multimodal pedagogies for students? What were the affordances and limitations for myself as a teacher?

With a greater focus on the literature, I was able to explore this question by reflecting on the learning that was demonstrated through these activities, as well as on the feedback that was offered during and after these experiences. Connecting these reflections with theories on multimodal literacy, multimodal pedagogy, and the benefits of meaningful visual art inclusion allowed for the interpretation of the narratives to respond to this question.

The Limitations and Affordances of Narrative Autoethnography & Standards of Rigor

This next section explores some of the limitations often associated with narrative autoethnography and qualitative research in general. I also highlight how these limitations, if addressed and dealt with appropriately, can be seen as affordances and valuable assets to the qualitative research process.

As the plea of many qualitative researchers before me, I note, “What is valid for clinical studies...may not be adequate or relevant for ethnography or autoethnography” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p.582). Autoethnography is a “disciplined way to interrogate
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one’s memory, to contextualize or re-contextualize facts or memories within interpretations or perspectives that ‘make sense’ of them in new or newly appreciated ways” (p.584). By going through the process of collecting information, organizing it in narrative form, and analyzing and interpreting those narratives through the reflexive lenses of multimodal literacy and multimodal pedagogy, I increase the reliability of my assumptions (how accurately my findings can be replicated) and the resonance of my experience with my readers (how readers can find varied meaning within the text). In addition, Chang (2008) notes, “Literature review gives autoethnography an identity as social science research, intersecting the subjectivity of the inner world with the objectivity of the outer world” (p.110). Accordingly, interweaving my personal recollections with existing literature has been integral to the research process.

The autoethnographic approach is not prescribed nor does it employ an outline of sections that must be included in each research text. However, there has been a great deal of scholarly discussion regarding the integrity of autoethnography. Chang (2008) offers four pieces of advice for autoethnographers to adhere to: 1) do not focus on self in isolation from others; 2) emphasize analysis and interpretation rather than over-narrating events; 3) rely on more than personal memory and recalling as a source; and 4) be considerate of ethical standards relating to others in self-narratives. In this study, I follow these pieces of advice to ensure a more scholarly report is produced as the product of this inquiry.

In addition to Chang’s advice, other literature suggests three areas that pose possible limitations to the autoethnographic approach: a) bias and subjectivity, b) authenticity and resonance, and c) transferability. I will now address each of these issues
and attempt to shed new light on how these issues can be transformed into affordances if accounted for appropriately.

**Bias and Subjectivity**

One of the most prominently stated limitations of qualitative research is the notion that studying one’s self and ones’ experiences is ridden with bias and subjectivity (e.g Ellis, 2004; Ellis, 1997; Hoffman, 2008; Altheide & Johnson, 2011). While bias and subjectivity can be difficult to manage in any research, this is especially true in qualitative research where the researcher is trying to interpret or make sense of the artifacts collected. This task becomes increasingly challenging when the artifacts and interpretation of such items are based on human behaviours and actions, and when as conscious beings, humans notice that they are being researched.

To make the complexity of the problem even greater, in this kind of [qualitative] study, the [researcher] is studying him/herself. This requires the researcher to be constantly breaking down the impact of bias/subjectivity with outside [artifacts]...and critically thinking about the integrity of what is reported. (Hoffman, 2008)

As stated earlier, I include information on my thoughts and biases, and rely on multiple sources of artifacts to strengthen the integrity of my reflexive narrative account.

Offering a different stance on subjectivity, Chang (2008) notes that taking an introspective approach through recalling classroom experiences affords researchers “easy access to the primary data source from the beginning because the source is the researcher themselves. In this way, autoethnographers are privileged with a holistic and intimate perspective on their ‘familiar data’” (p.52). In many qualitative studies, the focus is on the everyday experiences that comprise human life rather than quantifiable absolute
truths. As such, some degree of subjectivity and intimacy with the data (in my case, artifacts, memories, and ensuing narratives) is required in order to account for the particular cases under study.

Vital to this introspective approach, “Ethnographic ethics call for ethnographers to substantiate their interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the process(es) of their research” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p.587). While using ethnographic tools in this self-reflective study, I have made efforts to be aware of my own history, biases, and experiences that comprise the tacit knowledge I bring to the interpretation and analysis of my narratives. I have been explicit in the process of my research, and with the challenges associated with recalled memories. Such transparency helps to promote “empathetic and sympathetic understanding, and participation between the author and the audience” (p.588). I also attempt to be aware of the influences my personal history and experiences have on my interpretation of the events recalled.

A second issue related to bias and subjectivity when focusing on an individual experience is the reliability of the researcher. Unlike clinical studies where analyzed data often results in irrefutable facts, qualitative data is highly interpretive – that is, meanings are attributed to my narratives both by the researcher (myself) and by the reader. “When the single tool is the researcher self, the unbridled subjectivity of autoethnographers can be more severely challenged ... Autoethnographers [therefore] need to support their arguments with broad-based [artifacts] as in any good research practice” (Chang, 2008, p.55). In addition to researcher reflexivity, methods such as the collection of various forms of artifacts and from various perspectives, triangulation of artifacts, and rich description in the resulting narrative are included to “enhance the content accuracy and
validity of the autoethnographic writing” (p.55). As mentioned previously, this study includes several forms of textual sources and artifacts and points of analysis, and is rich in narrative details. These rich details also aim to portray authenticity and gain resonance with readers.

**Authenticity and Resonance**

Rather than seeking reliability (how accurately results can be repeated), validity (how well the research measures what it intends to) or absolute truths, qualitative researchers aim for authenticity (mirroring the complexity of phenomena by showing different realities), and resonance (openness to the varied potential meanings embedded within text) in their accounts (e.g. Denizen & Lincoln, 2000, Altheide & Johnson, 2011). In addition to seeking truth through triangulated and varied sources to support theories, autoethnographers seek verisimilitude in their writing – evoking a feeling that “the experiences described feel life-like, believable and possible” (Ellis, 2004, p.124). One of the values of autoethnographic accounts is that it inspires one persons’ experience to inspire critical reflection on another’s. This is a clearly stated goal of my research.

Specific to narrative autoethnography, Ellis (1997) notes that stories told are always partial and reinterpreted from one’s present circumstances. This does not need to be seen as a limitation, but rather as being true to the current reality while thinking critically about how to gather artifacts related to particular research foci. According to Ellis (2004), it is less about the truth of the moment, and more about the meanings that researchers and readers ascribe to these moments. In other words, the issue is not the
subjective nature of the research, but the way that one approaches and deals with biases that matters. In paying attention to the way I deal with my own subjectivities, I become a more credible researcher, give the narrative data an authentic quality, and aim to have my experience resonate with the readers of my stories.

In relation to the meanings that are ascribed to a qualitative research text, such as a narrative account, Tsang (2000) notes, “each reader brings different resources to a text and, thus, different tools for making meaning out of my stories” (cited in Sparkes, 2002, p.218-219). This means that each reader might transfer the ideas presented in my narratives into their own lessons and meanings. As this study was written with an audience in mind larger than a thesis defense committee, it is my hope that both academics and educators will take away meaning relevant and transferable to their own lives and practice.

**Transferability**

A third area of concern to qualitative researchers is transferability: the degree to which the research findings fit into contexts outside of the study situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative studies where results are supposed to be exactly replicable, in qualitative studies, transferability is enhanced by providing sufficient descriptions to allow for comparisons in other situations.

The overarching aim of this study is to generate conversation on multimodal pedagogy in efforts to enhance education and elementary classroom literacy practices and to explore the use of the visual arts and other visual texts as a multimodal literacy practice. As part of the narration in this study, I engage with myself in critical discussions
that allow for a deeper understanding of opportunities that exist within the curriculum for the inclusion of visual literacy practices, and the relationship between the entities that mediate and enable these occurrences. In order to influence educational practice, my stories need not only to resonate with others, but the lessons I learn need to be transferable to other classrooms and educators.

One of the limits of a single-case study, especially one that takes place in a classroom (physical or recalled), is that each context – that is, each classroom – may be different. Research of a single voice alone also leads to a tendency to see the work as highly biased. In addition to including artifacts and documentation of my teaching practice, as noted in the previous section, I have also included the voices of others through emails, letters, or notes that became present in relation to the stories told. Even so, questions remain: How is one to formulate a theory from a single description that may not match another’s reality? and How can one voice shed light on the collective of education?

Flyvberg (2011) notes, “even when generalizability is not guaranteed, this does not mean that the knowledge gained cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field...Knowledge may be transferable even where it is not formally generalizable” (p.305). The aims of this study are to add to the collective knowledge about multimodal pedagogy and to incite further conversation that can help other teachers and schools understand what resources and processes can enhance the use of visual modes of learning in other settings. Through the narrative voice of this autoethnography, I hope to increase the resonance with other educators and those with a vested interest in education.
Furthermore, transferability is easy to attain in ethnographic studies as events relating to the self are situated within the context of others. Referring to autoethnographic accounts, Mykhalovskiy (1996) argues that “to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience” (cited in Sparkes, 2002, p.217). While some might argue that a single voice is inadequate to learn from, this study holds a different aim: to add to the growing number of single voices describing classroom pedagogy and curriculum so that a collective voice of varied experience (reflective of the diversity that exists in teaching) can be heard. In essence, each teacher has a story to tell, and these stories, one-by-one, can amass to a powerful body of work that will enable education to progress in new and innovative directions.

**Dissemination of Findings: Reflecting on Accessibility**

One of the issues noted in research is the gap between academics who write theory and practitioners to whom these theories are intended to be useful (Suleski & Ibaraki, 2010). Much (but not all) research is written in highly academic language and is lengthy in volume. Teachers most often do not have the access or time to read such research and efforts should be made to reach this vital audience if our work as educational researchers is to make a difference. As part of her debate over the relationship between theory and practice that so often typifies educational discourse, Lather (1996) asks,

> In the face of pressing problems around language, knowledge, and power, across multiple public spheres and diverse levels of intelligibility, how are we to proceed? In the face of the need to expand possibilities for different ways of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and hearing, for acquiring multiple literacies, what practices can be of use? (p.529)
One of the practices I have employed in this research is creating a “hybrid ethnographic text” (p.538) – mixing autoethnography and narrative, “academic high language” and “clear speech” for the “real world” – something Lathers notes is nothing new, nor is the effort to reach broader audiences.

One of the advantages of writing in narrative form is the ability to contextualize theory within perceived realities. While different readers respond differently to different texts, teachers, as inveterate storytellers themselves (Graham, 2005), are one audience that may be more receptive to learning through the narratives of others. Stockrocki (2004) notes that the “translation of research findings are paramount if researchers expect to convince teachers to use contextual findings and the public to pay attention to contextual research results”. This narrative autoethnographic account attempts to do just that: create order and understanding out of the complexity of teaching literacy within a multimodal pedagogy.

This does not mean that I have simplified the pedagogical practices surrounding multimodal literacy. According to Lather (1996), “sometimes we need a density that fits the thoughts being expressed…clear and concise plain prose would be sort of a cheat” (p.528). In other words, sometimes, making complicated things simple is disingenuous. Some things need to be complicated, and I believe education is one of them. Narrative, however, can make the complicated messiness of education – for “what is more messy than the many competing and often ambivalent factors that influence a teacher’s decisions in the classroom in relation to what they teach and why they do it?” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p.ix) – more accessible.
Glesne (2010) suggests that to make educational research accessible “to others beyond the academic community…means creating in forms that others will want to read, watch, or listen to, feel and learn from the representations,” (p. 262) such as “drama, poetry, and narrative” (p.245). Ellis (1997) poetically notes that stories “add blood and tissue to the abstract bones of theoretical discourse” (p.117). In other words, stories and visual images add life to academic works and expand the breadth of readership. It is this life that I hope my stories have helped to bring to my study – a voice that is readable by an audience larger than a thesis defense committee and that can be used to inspire others into action and critical thinking about multimodal literacy and the visual arts.

**Telling my Stories**

Autoethnographic narratives, and narratives in general, are each unique. Unlike other more traditional quantitative or clinical research methods, there is no established template for the final product of inquiry. Narratives, as personal reflections based on a variety of sources, have the personalized signature of the researcher or author embedded within them – little nuances that give the shared experience character. Gergen & Gergen (2002) state,

> In using oneself as an ethnographic exemplar, the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One’s unique voicing – complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness – is honoured. (p.14, as quoted in Chang, 2008, p.52)

It is this unique voice that readers may respond to.

Through this study, I hope to add to the growing body of research that supports the inclusions of the visual arts as multimodal literacy. As this mass of research grows, I can only hope that it can be used to enact change at the school level – enticing
administrators to increase their support for the arts, to increase professional development in the area of the arts, to collect further resources for school libraries and classrooms, to suggest change to the physical layout of classrooms to accommodate this visual mode of learning and communicating, or even to encourage a teacher to take a leap and jump into the wonderful branch of literacy that visual modes of expression and can create.

And now, a collection of stories…
Chapter Four

Curriculum & My Classroom Narratives

In this chapter, I analyze the Ontario curriculum documents for the ways in which they address (or not) multimodal literacy and visual modes. I then invite readers to share in the experience of my classroom practices through a series of narratives. Four stories are told: The Quilt Project; Geometric Communities; The Safari Tour; and Wild Things. These stories are of units and assignments I created for, and with, my students over three years of practicum teaching and three years of teaching in my own classroom. Each story explores what multimodal literacy can look like across grades and across subject areas, focusing on primarily the visual modes and meaningful visual text creations. I also delve into my process and decision-making, as well as the resources that mediated these decisions.

The first two stories depict examples of visual art being used as a mode of literacy itself, where visual modes (specifically artworks as visual texts) are the primary mode to communicate ideas and information. In these stories I illustrate that students can often communicate more ideas in an image than they can through words alone, and that these images have the power to portray deep metaphorical thought processes and critical thinking. The second two stories depict visual texts (both art creations and visually dramatic gestures) in a supporting role, adding additional meaning to the written or spoke words of traditional literacy events. In these stories, I illustrate my understandings of how the inclusion of visual text components affected both student enjoyment and student learning. In each of the stories, I aim to recall my pedagogical decision making and practices to illuminate the entities that enabled me to enact a multimodal pedagogy.
An overview of the elements of each story is outlined in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Story</th>
<th>Unit 1: The Quilt Project</th>
<th>Unit 2: Geometric Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Grade 8 classroom</td>
<td>Grade 3 classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Subject &amp; Unit of Study</td>
<td>Geography (migration), Language Arts (reading, writing, and oral), and Visual Art (using elements of design to communicate; and understanding cultural symbolism)</td>
<td>Social Studies (communities), Mathematics (geometry), and Visual Art (spatial element of design)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Multimodal Literacy Components | • Reading non-fiction texts and realistic-fiction novels  
• Responding to text through writing journals, drawing pictures, or dramatizing events;  
• Visual art creation of a quilt;  
• Oral presentation of quilt and accompanying character monologue. | • Reading of non-fiction textbook info;  
• Viewing images of communities in print, in movies/ TV, and on a walk around the neighbourhood;  
• Creating 3D figures from nets;  
• Visual art creation of a community landscape using geometric figures and knowledge of the art element of space. |
| Visual Literacy Event | • Visual colours, shapes, textures, and symbols on a quilt patch communicate stories, emotion and deep metaphors. | • Visual creations of 3D landscapes help students demonstrate knowledge of community features. |
| Role of Visual Texts | • Primary mode of communication and demonstration of knowledge  
• Visual modes is supported or enhanced by other literacy modes |
| Resources | Curriculum Documents, Geography textbook, student notebooks for content, several picture books, internet sites, two novel study texts, limited school art supplies, students’ own art supplies. | Curriculum documents, Social Studies textbook, student notebooks, several picture books, geometric solids, nets of geometric solids, empty pizza boxes, limited school art supplies. |
| Title of Story  | Unit 3: The Safari Tour | Unit 4: Wild Things |
| Grade           | Grade 6 classroom         | Grade 1 classroom           |
| Curricular Subject & Unit of Study | Science (biodiversity), Drama (role play), and Language Arts (reading, writing, oral, and media) | Drama (stepping into stories, role playing) and Language Arts (reading, writing, and oral) & Character Ed. |
| Multimodal Literacy Components | • Reading of non-fiction in the form of textbooks, other print books, internet sites, and interactive signs at the zoo;  
• Listening to guided tours at the zoo;  
• Writing non-fiction research picture books (media text), and drama scripts;  
• Art creation of sets and costumes to dramatize information on biodiversity. | • Reading and listening to fiction story;  
• Reading scripts to memorize roles;  
• Writing sentences and scripts;  
• Stepping into stories in various ways;  
• Drawing images to communicate understanding, and to develop ideas;  
• Art creation of sets and costumes to dramatize story. |
| Visual Literacy Events | • Images and layout offer information in non-fiction text creation;  
• Visual aids such as costumes and sets help students to communicate ideas in a dramatic play. | • Visual drawings show understanding of content and communicate ideas;  
• Visual aids such as masks and sets help communicate ideas in a dramatic play. |
| Role of Visual Texts | • Supporting and enhancing communication and knowledge demonstration  
• Visual mode is one of many components of a multimodal literacy project. |
| Resources | Curriculum documents, science textbook, non-fiction library books, internet sites, several forms of information at the Zoo, student research booklets (premade by teacher), large cardboard boxes, limited school art supplies (paper, paint, markers) | Curriculum documents, picture book: Where the Wild Things Are (Sendak, 1963), student activity booklets (premade by teacher), limited school art supplies (mural paper, paint, paper, markers). |

Table 4.1. Outline of narrative components
In this table, the curricular subjects areas are noted to show that multimodal literacy has been looked at across the curriculum. The multimodal literacy components are listed to highlight the various modes (visual, linguistic, oral, or other) that have been included in the units under study. Specific attention is brought to the visual literacy events in each story or unit. These literacy events are “observable episodes” (Stein, 2008, p.31) of literacy interaction which capture “the moment of composing a text” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.9). The visual literacy events of each unit are described in this table to emphasize the type of meaning-making that is conveyed through the visual modes used. The two different roles of the visual texts created (described above) are also included. Finally, an introduction to the physical resources (e.g., books, documents, art supplies) that were drawn upon for each unit are included. The more human resources (e.g., teacher knowledge, student interest) and contextual resources (e.g., space, time) are accounted for in the narrative portions of this chapter.

It is my hope that these stories will allow readers to step into my classroom, take a look around, and learn something that they can take back to their own lives and educational practices.

**Curriculum**

The first section of this chapter revisits the multiple conceptions of curriculum (as one of the resources identified in the literature as possibly mediating the decisions educators make in regards to multimodal pedagogy – the *if* and *how* of integrating various modes into instruction and learning opportunities), and analyzes the language of the
Ontario Curriculum Documents for the ways in which they address (or not) multimodal literacy and visual modes.

Revisiting the multiple conceptions of curriculum

Eisner (2002) argues that “two of the most important factors affecting students’ experiences in classrooms are the quality of teaching they encounter and the quality of the curriculum provided” (p.46). He expands on this notion when he defines curriculum as “the array of activities that give direction to and develop the cognitive capacities of individuals” (p.149).

Returning to the multiple conceptions of curriculum, the literature notes that there are several levels of curriculum (the what to teach) that may influence pedagogy (the how to teach). These levels may present themselves as an ideological or institutional curriculum (the legislation surrounding education), a practical or programmatic curriculum (the curriculum expectations document), or an enacted or classroom curriculum (classroom events) (Doyle, 1996). Other researchers have used the terms prescribed curriculum (the Ministry documents) and the described curriculum (intentions and aspirations of the teacher seen through unit plans and the like) (Bloomer, 1997). Additionally, Eisner (2002) notes there may also be the intended curriculum (what the document says to teach), the hidden curriculum (what gets unintentionally communicated to learners), the null curriculum (what is not taught but has an effect by virtue of it being excluded from the intended curriculum), and the lived curriculum (how learning is experienced).
Specific to my research, which recalls my classroom experiences teaching multimodal literacy, the narratives in this chapter focus on the classroom or enacted curriculum as the site of literacy and learning. Due to the nature of the Ontario public school system, where teachers are expected to use the curriculum documents as a guide for classroom activities, the programmatic curriculum has a direct influence on the enacted curriculum. In the next section, I relate my analysis of the programmatic or practical curriculum written in the Ontario Curriculum documents.

**A look at the Ontario Programmatic Curriculum**

Teachers in Ontario public schools are required to follow the Ontario Curriculum documents, which organize the outcome-based expectations that students are expected to achieve in each subject area by the end of each grade level. In the elementary system (Kindergarten to Grade 8), there are eight main documents that include: a complete Kindergarten curriculum guide, and subject area guides for Grades 1-8 in Language, The Arts, Science and Technology, Social Studies (Grades 1-6) / History and Geography (Grades 7-8), Mathematics, French as a Second Language, and Health and Physical Education. There is also a guide for Native Languages for those schools who choose to adopt this program. Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of Education website hosts a number of support, policy, and resource documents.

To identify possible influences of the curriculum document on classroom curriculum practices, I analyzed five documents (Language, 2006; The Arts, 2009; Mathematics, 2009b; Science and Technology, 2007; and Social Studies/History &
Geography, 2004) for their explicit or implicit viewpoint on literacy instruction and the inclusion of visual literacy texts across various subject areas.

In the introduction to the Language document (2006):

The word *text* is used in this document in its broadest sense, as a means of communication that uses words, graphics, sounds, and/or images, in print, oral, visual, or electronic form, to present information and ideas to an audience (p.4).

The document then lists some forms of text that could be used in the classroom:

- picture books and novels; poetry; myths, fables, and folk tales; textbooks and books on topics in science, history, mathematics, geography, and other subjects; biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and journals; plays and radio, film, or television scripts; encyclopaedia entries; graphs, charts, and diagrams in textbooks or magazine articles; recipes, instructions, and manuals; graph novels, comic books, cartoons, and baseball cards; newspaper articles and editorials; and essays and reports (p.11 emphasis mine).

What I noticed in this list is that all of the examples of text are primarily written text or images *within* written text. The document thus does not express that visual modes of communication should stand alone as a means of communicating ideas. It is not until the Media Literacy strand (the fourth strand in the document, coming after oral, reading and writing) that the document recognizes the “construction of meaning through the combination of several media ‘languages’ – images, sounds, graphics, and words” (p.13).

The list of example *texts* is then expanded to include visual texts such as films, songs, video games, action figures, advertisements, CD covers, clothing, billboards, television shows, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and websites.

The Language (2006) document suggests examples of multimodal integration such as “Students can create drawings or devise dramatic scenes as they rehearse, evaluate, and revise ideas before writing. Conversely, students can use language to respond critically and creatively to music or works of art” (p.24 emphasis mine). Again
art is suggested to be useful as a pre-writing tool, but not as a literacy. This is in direct conflict with the literature on multimodal literacy that argues that visual modes are a literacy practice.

I expanded my research to other subject area programmatic curriculum documents in hopes of understanding the place of multimodal literacy and the specific use of visual texts as a communication tool. The Science (2007) and Social Studies (2004) documents most commonly incorporate language or literacy experiences through the suggestion of a written or oral report on the subject matter. In the Mathematics (2009 b) document, drawing pictures is an explicit possible stage of the problem solving process. It is noted that “communication is the process of expressing mathematical ideas and understanding orally, visually, and in writing, using numbers, symbols, pictures, graphs, diagrams, and words” (p.17). This is the only explicit example of visual text inclusion in the introductory sections of the content area documents. Theories of multimodal pedagogy (explained in Chapter Two) argue that explicit instruction and experience with the grammar of visual modes are essential for multimodal literacy development (e.g. The New London Group, 1996). Not only is this explicit instruction absent in most of the content area documents, but the direction to include experience with visual modes of expression are very few in number. This presents a direct issue that can be responded to through a renewed pedagogy on multimodal literacy.

The Arts (2009) document offers an entirely different position, stating that an integral aspect of an arts program “is concerned with understanding the meaning and ‘language’ of art forms and contemporary and historical artistic products” (p.6). It further contends that students “gain an appreciation of the great importance of the arts as sources
of enjoyment and as a means of communication in cultures around the world” (p.4), that “the arts can increase understanding or can give [students] alternative modes of expression for their ideas” (p.5) and that integrated learning in the arts involves teachers having “students demonstrate their learning in other subjects by using artistic modes of expression” (p.6). The difference between this Art document and the other subject area documents written before it can be explained by changing philosophies in art education.

The most current edition of the Ontario Arts curriculum (2009) is written from the philosophy of VCAE (Visual Culture in Art Education), which replaced the former DBAE (Discipline-Based Art Education). While DBAE focused on the teaching of the elements and principles of design (understanding line, colour, shape etc.) and traditional fine art, VCAE philosophy sees art as a cultural issue (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004) and understands the elements and principles of design to be cultural communicators and an expression of human and social meaning making (Gude, 2007; Keifer-Boyd, 2007). Eisner (2002) notes DBAE instruction was based on the notion that students learn best when they experience a discipline in a similar form to that used by scholars in that discipline. Therefore, instruction was based around the four things people do with art: they make it (art studio), they appreciate its qualities (aesthetics), they locate its place over time and culture (art history), and they discuss it (art criticism). Albers & Murphy (2000) note that the aims of DBAE (started in the 1990s) were based on a desire to elevate the status of the arts to an academic level and enable art to be taught by classroom teachers. However, it eventually became criticized for its focus on old-world Western culture rather than connecting students to the culture in which they lived. VCAE identified art education as playing a role in how people are influenced by media and other
visual communications in contemporary times. According to Eisner (2002), “in this view, any art form can be regarded as a kind of text, and texts need to be both read and interpreted, for the messages they send are often ‘below the surface’ or ‘between the lines’” (p.28). From this perspective, one can appreciate how the arts can be situated within as part of a multimodal literacy pedagogy that is accountable not only to the cultural and contextual nature of communication, but also to the functions that language and literacy can serve in contemporary society.

Being written from the perspective of the most current view on art education (VCAE), the Arts (2009) document is therefore relatively progressive in its definition of literacy and its inclusion of visual art as a form of literacy. Written in this document is specific direction to integrate the arts into science, math, and language arts lessons, and a high focus on the learning skills and personal development that students gain through exposure to and experience with the arts. This is in line with the literature on literacy, multimodal literacy, and visual literacy recounted in Chapter Two that place visual text creations as part of the broader literacy context and contemporary communicational landscapes.

One problem I see is that this Arts document is isolated from other subject areas in the programmatic curriculum. Having a stand-alone programmatic curriculum for the inclusion of visual communication modes whose messages are inconsistent with the rest of the curriculum documents is problematic. The Arts document notes that visual art is to be a part of science and math and language (and therefore situates visual literacy instruction across the curriculum), but the other subject area documents do not explicitly guide teachers to incorporate the arts in multimodal ways.
As is illustrated in the classroom narratives that follow, while the curriculum documents themselves play a vital role in the initial decisions of what to teach my students, my own intentions and pragmatic decisions influence the communicative modes I introduce to my students and how they are given opportunities to express their understanding through multiple modes. Jewitt (2008) points out that although educational systems are now recognizing the importance of multimodality (Canada included), the implications of this work on teacher education and educational policy are still emerging. Research in the area of multimodal pedagogy – specifically what this practice looks like in the varied contexts of Ontario’s diverse classrooms – is therefore an important step in bridging the gap between what we, as teachers, know we should do to prepare our students to be multimodally literate, and knowing how to accomplish this goal. The narratives that follow are part of the conversation that responds to this growing need in the literature on multimodal pedagogy.

The Story of The Quilt Project

Grade 8 – Geography & Language Arts – Immigration Novel Study

Setting the Scene

It’s a Thursday morning, my weekly teaching day in my final year of practicum. I am armed with my morning cup of Tim Horton’s tea, my daily lesson plans binder, and a dose of my natural enthusiasm that I am eagerly waiting to unleash for when I describe the new unit we will be starting today. I am sitting at my desk in a classroom on the second floor of a medium-sized urban school. I look around the room proudly at the walls plastered with the work of my students from the previous units they have been immersed
in. (Figure 4.1 is a digitally drawn recreation of the classroom space showing the organization of the classroom, and the type and location of resources available to my students and myself).

(Note the full wall allocated to literacy; a designated art supply center; subject specific boards for vocabulary, notes and the display of student work; and the several different types of meeting spaces provided).

My host-teacher is seated beside me, a coffee in her hands as she takes a long, slow sip to start the day. This will be the final quiet minute we have together to go over the events of my teaching day. She is pleased with the unit I have created and I feel confident and eager to begin. I am happy to have received similar feedback from my instructor at the university (Figure 4.2).
Specifically, the positive feedback regarding the integration of an art component into my unit is a welcomed comment, as I have heard from others in the faculty that their teachers and advisors do not all value the visual arts equally.

My class of 30 grade 8 students greets me and settles into their seats, neatly arranged in clusters of 6 around the room surrounding a medium sized carpet taking up residence in front of the whiteboard (see Figure 4.1). My students are from many different backgrounds and countries. Some are newly immigrated to Canada, others are second or third generation. I am excited about how much I will learn from them over the course of this next unit with the variety of backgrounds and experiences they will bring.

As the students continue to stream in, I look around my desk to ensure I have all the materials I will need: 30 copies of a Geography textbook we will be using and 30 green notebooks, the colour of which distinguishes it from other subject area notebooks I have already distributed; 15 copies of *White Jade Tiger* by Julie Lawson (1993) and 15 copies of *The Irish Chain* by Barbara Haworth-Attard (2002), the two novels that will be read by my students; An overhead of the rules for our novel study and weekly literature circles, and 30 copies of a handout including the journal entries and responses I will be

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*Figure 4.2. Feedback from associate professor on initial unit outline*
requesting; An overhead of our introductory activity selected to immerse my students and invite them to connect to the unit ahead; A stack of copies of the first assignment, and its link to the final assignment of the unit; And my own first assignment completed over the past weekend to share with students as an exemplar. In retrospect, the sheer number of photocopied pages and written text descriptions seems overwhelming. Yet, it was important for me, as a student teacher who was not in the classroom everyday, to arm my students with explicit instructions and organization that would serve them in my absence and help them succeed in multiple overlapping components of this unit.

**Introducing the Unit**

I stand eager at the front of the room. “Good morning!” I say brightly. “We are going to start a unit that will blend into Geography, Language Arts, and Visual Art. It is mostly going to be about you: where you come from, where your parents come from, how your personal histories affect who you are. We are going to learn a lot about each other, and I bet you will learn a lot about yourselves and your families that you never knew before”. I am greeted with a few blank stares, a few smiles, and a few confused faces – pretty much what I have come expect from this mixed group of students. “To start off, I have a test for you!” I say with much more enthusiasm than my students expect at 8:15 in the morning. Some moans and groans erupt, but I quickly assure my students that they will not be graded on this particular test, and that in fact, I am equally sure most of them will totally fail it! Confused looks morph into shock. I laugh it off and tell them not to worry so much – “The test is in comic format! You will enjoy it! Trust me!” I say as I hand out the first photocopy of the day. The test questions students’ knowledge of their own family and their families’ migration histories. It foreshadows the type of information
that will be learned in this unit. My students relax as soon as they see it and get to work. The test had 18 questions in total. A sample of questions are shown in the recreated sketch below (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Recreated sketch of a sample of pre-test questions

We take up some of the answers in groups, and discover how many students know the answers and how many do not. My students are starting to figure out that they will be expected to try to find some of these answers and learn about their own migration histories. For some of them with stories of struggle, this unit might require maturity and a lot of sensitivity. I am confident that this group of students can handle the challenge ahead. I explain the rest of the unit components and help them to organize their new notebooks. This organization is important to me, as a student teacher, since my host
classroom teacher will oversee several days of this unit in my absence (specifically some
of the early literature circles to be conducted as part of the novel study).

**Starting from the Beginning: Designing the Unit**

When I started to plan this unit on migration, I picked up my copies of the Ontario
curriculum documents. Language Arts (Minstry of Education, 2006) and Geography
(Minstry of Education, 2004) were the first books I perused, followed by The Arts
document (Minstry of Education, 2009) as this is where my passion lies and where I find
creative ideas to add to the units I create. At this stage in my teaching career, this
decision was made more out of personal interest than sound pedagogy. Reflecting back, I
can see that this was the beginning of the formation of a pedagogy of multimodal literacy
(although I would not be consciously focused on this terminology until my Master’s
education five years later).

I began to read one of the passages in the introduction of the Language Arts
curriculum document:

> Literacy learning is a communal project and the teaching of literacy skills is
> embedded across the curriculum…. The study of language and the acquisition of
> literacy skills are not restricted to the language program, and this [Ontario] curriculum
> promotes the integration of the study of language with the study of other subjects. (Ministry
> of Education, 2006, p.3-5)

This explicit statement is something that I have always believed in, and is now a part of
my personal pedagogy surrounding teaching. My language program is rarely taught in
isolation, but rather as a large component of several other curriculum subjects. After all,
it is the content in science and social studies that often gives my students something to
read and write about, to speak about, to create visual art pieces around and to present in
creative and meaningful ways. This pedagogy may have been formed during my pre-
service education, but more likely has been part of who I am since my early years with my interest in artistic and creative expression. I loved the opportunities my own teachers offered as ways to demonstrate my learning through multiple modes of communication, and I strive to offer those same opportunities to my own students through cross-curricular units and integrated projects.

I recall sitting on my bed at home with my MacBook on my lap and books and curriculum documents spread all around me (Figure 4.4).
Looking through all of these documents and books, the task of creating a cross-curricular unit plan loomed before me and there was so much to connect. I had the content that was to be explored in the Geography document (such as “identify[ing] factors that affect migration and mobility” and “connect[ing] the real experiences of
Canadians to information [learned]” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p.76)), and the expectation to provide opportunities for students to read and write in “a variety” of forms in the Language Arts document (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.141 & 144) (refer to Figure 4.4 for these expectations). My personal pedagogy around integrated learning led me to build this unit around information from a textbook and to have this information come to life through a novel dealing with the same subject matter. In hopes of making connections more meaningful for my students, I wanted them to write their own histories (as “real Canadians”) to add to the shared learning space.

As I read through the two different novels that the school librarian helped me to select (also shown in Figure 4.4), I made notes on connections to the curriculum documents and thought about the creative assignment through which I could ask my students to demonstrate their learning. My love for art and creativity pushed its way to the front of my mind. Migration has strong ties to culture and identity and I decide that art classes will focus on art styles of various cultural groups. Connecting directly to the novels my students would soon be reading, the image of a quilt came to mind – a mosaic of individual parts becoming something more meaningful as a whole. The Visual Art curriculum requires students “to produce art works… that communicate feelings, ideas, and understandings, using elements, principles, and techniques of visual arts” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.154). This art knowledge is something I felt very confident teaching. Reflecting back on my own art education and my previous practicum teaching placement working with a visual arts teacher, I thought about all that I have learned about how to integrate visual arts in meaningful ways across the curriculum. While I still had a lot to learn, I felt I was ready to put together the various parts of this unit.
The unit components began to take shape as I read through the expectations and connected the dots between the content and the forms of communication I wanted to use for both teaching and learning. In essence, Geography provided the background curricular content for this unit. My students would be learning about different cultures, what migration is, why people migrate, and what barriers people might face when migrating. In Language Arts, students would be reading and writing about not only about the migration stories of the characters in their novel study stories, but also about their own families’ histories.

Drawing in forms of drama and visual/gestural literacy, students would be assuming the roles of characters from their novels and creating dramatic monologues to present to their peers. Infusing visual arts into the unit, students would be creating a patch of quilt work to accompany their monologues. These quilt squares would use visual symbols, colours and patterns to communicate their stories.

I began to look for other resources that could help me strengthen the connection between the visual art forms I wanted students to express their ideas through and the meaning that these visual pieces could add to the content area of study. I found several picture books such as: *One Day We Had to Run* by Sybella Wilkes (1994) and *Stand Up for Your Rights* by Paul Atgwa (1998), both of which were collaboratively written and illustrated by children to share their stories of migration and struggle and their dreams of human rights; *My Backyard History Book* by David Weitzman (1975) which offered suggestion for how my students could explore their own histories and family and cultural identity; *The Memory Coat* by Elvira Woodruff (1999) and *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia
Polacco (1998), both of which strengthen the meaning of fabric and image in telling stories and carrying more meaning than words could possibly express.

The culminating unit project (see handout shown in Figure 4.5) blended the literacy strands (reading, writing, and oral) that were integrated with the migration unit, and included the multimodal literacy components of reading, writing, speaking, creating and dramatizing. Students would able to see how the reading of both fiction and non-fiction can assist them in gathering ideas for writing a character monologue, and how refining their writing process would allow them to organize their oral speaking abilities for the presentation of this monologue. In addition, the use of a creative visual product (quilt patches) would allow students to use art in a meaningful way that enhances and adds to the messages they communicate through the writing and reading of their monologues. Using their art knowledge of the elements and principles of design would assist them in choosing appropriate colours, shapes, objects, and textures (among other elements) to help convey meaning.
Patchwork: The Final Project

Your final assignment has three components:

Component A: Written Monologue
1. Select a character from your novel.
2. Choose an event in that character’s life that was significant to their development (in other words, an event that caused a character to change).
   - What was this character like a few years before the event? (You may need to infer this part if it is not stated in the book)
   - How was this character feeling during and immediately after the event (the change)?
   - What will this character be like 10 years later? (You need to predict this part)
     - If your character dies, be creative in how they will be speaking (Have they come back in spirit? Are they looking down on their old life? Etc).
3. Write a monologue in the role of the character you chose. (A monologue is a speech made by one person speaking his or her thoughts aloud).
   - Include the significant event, your thoughts and feelings, and how you changed
   - Speak as if you are the character in the future (10 years after the novel takes place).
   - Include feelings from your childhood, feelings around the time of the event, and feelings in the present as you look back on the event and your past.

Component B: Creative Quilt
To enhance your monologue and to help you tell your story, you will create a section of a quilt. This quilt will include symbols that reflect the events in your character’s history.
1. Think of the pieces you would like to use on your quilt. Your selected items should represent each of the three parts of your monologue. Think about the elements and principles of design you can use to help you communicate meaning (what do certain colours, lines, textures, and space help you say?)
2. Create your blank quilt patches (Follow the requirements on the back of this handout)
3. Select 4-5 items to include in your quilt. (No more, No less). Make sure they are an appropriate size.
4. Create your quilt!

Component C: Presentation
1. You will present your monologue to the class, using your quilt to help share your story. Make sure to do the following:
   - Remember that a monologue is like thinking aloud. It is not a skit with a lot of animation or movement. There is, however, much emotion in the character’s voice and tone.
   - Stay in character the entire time, and be convincing as that character.
   - Incorporate your quilt into the presentation. It is not an add-on, it is a tool to help you tell the story.
   - Limit your presentation to 1-3 minutes. You will be surprised how much you can say in such a short period of time.
   - Memorize your speech. (You may have cue cards to refer to if you need them, but try not to sit and read to the class).

Figure 4.5a. Patchwork: the final project (front of handout)
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

Figure 4.5b. Patchwork: the final project (back of handout)

**Visual Art as Literacy**

The unit is coming to a close. Over the past 6 weeks, I have seen my students learn about migration and the variety of cultures that meet when people move to new places. We had gathered on the carpet as I had shared stories of my own family’s migration: My great grandparents fleeing Poland to Canada during the second world war, working hard to run a convenience store and raise a family, learning a new language, and trying to create a future for my grandmother and her two sisters while maintaining their Jewish heritage. My students have shared stories of migration and struggle, a mix of stories about their grandparents, parents, and for a few, stories about their own memories of plane rides or long boat voyages across great bodies of water. It has been an illuminating experience for all of us.

### Patchwork: The Final Project

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Their novel study journals and literature circles have been full of multimodal expressions – they have written responses, discussed major themes, drawn pictures of the story and of their emotional responses, and dramatized significant events in the stories.

Today will be one of two days for students to present their final 9x9-inch quilt squares and accompanying monologues before I display them on a bulletin board in the hallway for the rest of the school to see (Figure 4.6).

Students stream into the classroom after lunch, proudly placing their quilt squares on their desks for me to see. I am instantly in awe of how different they all are. While the school art supply closet only afforded my students construction paper, paint, and a few other craft supplies such as pipe cleaners and googly eyes, I had instructed them to find their own materials at home to get more creative. In short, they did!

Some quilt patches were made of paper, others of felt or fabric. Some were taped together, others glued onto a backdrop, and a few were even sewed or stitched together.

Figure 4.6. The Quilt Project bulletin board display
Colours were plentiful, as were the objects and images attached to each square in the patch. Some squares contained found objects, others computer printed images, and some were of student’s original drawings. I can’t wait to hear the meanings that my students had attached to their work.

Here, I do have to admit that, like in any elementary classroom filled with diverse interest, abilities, and talents, some students had more facility with the mode and media than others. While many quilt patches impressed me far beyond my expectations, there are a few that seemed done in a rush. This is understandable if I think back to other projects over the course of the school year where these same students have shown limited facility and even less dedication or patience with creating visual texts. At this age, where students are able to identify their own academic and personal strengths, I wonder if this quilt should have been one of several options for a final project, rather than forcing a visual expression piece on my students. On the other hand, I took comfort in knowing that I had offered experiences in several other modes on different assignments throughout the year and was eager to introduce students to a variety of forms of communication, even if some of those forms were out of their usual comfort zones. (Like my Dad always say, “you don’t know if you like it until you try it”, and “practice makes closer to perfect”). It was important to remind myself that I was not assessing students on artistic ability, but rather on how they were able to choose specific elements of design to communicate ideas and emotions.

The addition of an oral presentation in the form of a monologue helped me to assess my students’ facility in communicating through this visual mode. This oral presentation also served a second purpose – that of ensuring the messages my students
were trying to express actually got across to the audience. Visual texts are fascinating in that each viewer tends to take away his or her own meanings and connections. The way that visual texts can speak to so many people and in so many different ways is impressive, however, when an artist wants to convey a specific message and ensure all viewers understand that message, a description of sorts becomes necessary. This can be in the form of an artist statement, which I have seen to often accompany visual texts and art produced in schools, or in this case a monologue containing the ideas, emotions, and metaphors my students were expressing.

During the presentations, it becomes clear that throughout the reading of the monologues, most students did not necessarily need to point to their visual patches – the colours and symbols and objects were clearly representing themselves – holding their own meaning without needing to be overtly explained. A red square with burnt edges symbolized both a destructive fire and rage. A fluffed out cotton ball symbolized both a lost teddy bear and the simultaneous loss of childhood. My students were making much deeper metaphors and connections than I initially thought they would be able to do. The addition of facial expressions and other body gestures used by students throughout the reading of their monologues brought even more emotion and understanding to the audience. In short, my students wrote emotional stories and showed a great capacity for empathy through the connections they were able to make to their personal histories.

For some students, these monologues and visual quilt patches showed a depth of understanding greater than their initial written journal responses. For others, the visual metaphor was a difficult concept to grasp. Regardless of the level of facility each student
possessed in this visual mode, these quilts demonstrated how powerful a visual symbol can be and how much meaning can be expressed through this mode of communication.

The Story of the Geometric Communities

*Grade 3 – Social Studies, Math, & Language Arts – Shaping Communities*

**Pedagogical Reflections**

It is 5pm. I am sitting cross-legged on the carpet in the very first classroom I get to call my own – papers, curriculum documents, and textbooks sprawled out all around me (*Figure 4.7*) as they so often were throughout my practicum teaching.

According to the social studies curriculum document, my students are expected to “identify and compare distinguishing features of urban and rural communities”, such as land use, transportation, population density, and structures; “use a variety of resources and tools to gather… and communicate geographic information about urban and rural communities”; and “explain how communities interact with each other… to meet human needs” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p.39).

I think back on my three years of practicum teaching placements and all that I have learned about assessment and student demonstration of understanding. I look down at the Urban and Rural Communities textbook, and think about how I am going to bring this unit to life. Some of my students have never seen a farm or a cityscape outside of their television sets – being in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood, most of them hardly leave this small subdivision. I want them to be able to experience different
communities, and to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the different features in a meaningful way.

Figure 4.7. Resources that initiate unit planning
I look around the room at the other units of study we are currently engaged in and wonder which units I can combine into our study of communities. Always conscious that subjects do not exist in a vacuum outside the walls of the classroom, I am constantly trying to find ways to ‘tie it all together’ for my students. My eye catches two geometric solids left out of the bin by my students rushing to clean up – a cube and a triangular prism stacked to resemble a house. The gears in my mind start to turn.

I think about my love of creating artwork and quickly glance at the bulletin board where my grade 3 students’ artworks are displayed. The curriculum document suggests that students “use media works, oral presentations…[and] drawings…to communicate information about urban and rural communities” (p.39). I have a burst of inspiration – an idea that students can create 3D communities to metaphorically step into and walk around. They can create the features out of the real-life geometric shapes that comprise structures in our world, and can use their knowledge of the elements and principles of design to plan the layout of their communities to maximize human use and interaction. I confidently pick up my computer and start to type of the unit’s sequence of lessons that will lead students to succeed in this task.

**Setting the Scene**

My grade 3 students walk down the hallway as they come in from recess. They hang up their jackets and step out of the winter boots outside of our classroom and walk past the display cases on the outer wall of the library as they enter our learning space. They are one of the quieter groups of students in the school as their hooks are very close to the main office. (*Figure 4.8 shows the location of our classroom in relation to the other rooms, resources, and people in the school*).
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

They walk into class and settle themselves on the carpet at the front of the room – our common meeting place for reading stories, generating discussions, and listening to and negotiating instructions for upcoming tasks. They look at the schedule posted on the left side of the whiteboard, and note that the next two periods are designated as social studies. One student calls out, “Ms. Taylor, I thought you said we were doing art this afternoon?” “Be patient” I smile, “There is a whole bunch of fun stuff going on this afternoon. We just have to wait for everyone to settle in”.

Today was pizza day at school – a day I have been waiting for to complete our final project of the unit on urban and rural communities. The empty pizza boxes collected from the thirty classrooms of hungry students are piled high in the caretaking office waiting for a home other than the recycle bin today. I ask for a few volunteers to go and bring back about 20 party-sized pizza boxes to our classroom. Most of these will be cut in half so that each of my 24 students will have a more reasonably sized canvas to work with, although some students might want to work with full size canvas.
Following the curriculum expectations and the maps and activities offered in the textbook, my students have learned about the various regions in Canada and the natural resources that come from each zone. They have read about and discussed the various human uses of different spaces. They have observed the different structural features of urban and rural communities through textbook images, movie scenes, and a neighbourhood walk around the block. They have created comparative charts on the pros and cons of living in each type of community. Finally, my students are ready to put it all together and create their pizza box communities.

**Shaping Communities**

“Now that our pizza boxes are cut in half and taped into position, we are ready to decide what kinds of communities will be created in each one” I tell my students, “Each of you will pick a connecting cube out of this bag. If you get a primary coloured cube, you will be creating an urban landscape. If you get a secondary coloured cube, you will be creating…” I pause to ensure my students are following. “… a rural landscape” they finish for me in mottled unison.

As students pick a designation cube, they head back to their seats to sketch their idea for their community. They know they need to include a variety of structures made up of several different geometric solids (which they will construct from available nets), think about the placement of their shapes in a way that functions well for those who might live in the community, and add other artistic features that help identify the space. They will also have to use their art knowledge of foreground, middle ground, and background when creating this 3D community.
My students start to cut out their chosen geometric figure nets. They do a practice fold of the paper, as I taught them to do, to discover which end is up and which faces are the front and sides. This is a vital step so that they can colour in the shapes as a flat surface, and have their windows and doors in the right spot once folded and taped into a hollow 3D structure. They also design how far apart their structures will be, what type of road systems to create, which forms of transportation and animals to include, and any other creative component they choose to add to their visual texts. (*Figure 4.9* shows a sample of pizza box communities that were on display in the school showcase).

As they work I can see their sketches come to life as barns and high-rise buildings are built, and paved roads and ponds are drawn onto their unconventional canvases.

As students work, our principal walks in to the room from the office next door and asks some of my students what they are creating. My students eagerly start to explain their design and the components of their communities. They talk about what they are learning and what they have to do in this task. They share the connections to math and
art, and sound really engaged in the task at hand. My principal gives me a smile and nod of approval and moves on down the hallway on her daily walk-around.

As my students continue to put their plans into creation, I remind them of the student-teachers conferences that will take place after their communities are complete. In lieu of a whole class presentation, students will be displaying their communities in the showcases across from our classroom for two weeks. (This time period was signed up for on the clipboard in the library). While the majority of their mark will be determined based on the visual creation of their communities, students will have an opportunity to point out details of their visual texts and the decisions they do not want to go unnoticed. A few sample sentences to guide their thoughts have been written on the whiteboard (Figure 4.10):

![Figure 4.10. Suggested topics for student-teacher conferences](image)

These sentences were an important accommodation for students who found it difficult to come up with ideas during the oral or written communication process, or those with difficulty following a longer set of instructional components. They also acted as a general reminder for all students who benefitted from being able to refer to these key words while creating their community landscapes.
Multimodal Literacy

In assessing their understanding of communities, I could have had my students write sentences or fill in a chart that noted the differences in structures, transportation modes, use of space, and population descriptors. However, when I reflected on what I had learned from my students during my three years of practicum teaching, I was reminded of how many other modes exist to communicate understanding – especially in the younger grades where creativity and imagination seem to come so naturally.

As many of my students worked with the literacy support teacher next door, asking them to write sentences to describe the details of a community most likely would have resulted in less information being provided. This would not necessarily have been due to a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will to write more than 1-2 sentences at all. In creating these visual 3D landscapes, my students were able to show me an understanding of the types of structures, transportation, and people that existed in the type of community they created, as well as how that space was used and what resources were natural to the area.

Of course, using geometric nets, and drawing/colouring details on buildings and other community features was not something that every student had had an opportunity to develop facility in. Some communities looked amazing, and other looked more like crushed jumbles of scribbled-on shapes. For some students, there was a limited understanding of the fact that flimsy printer paper was not meant to be held so tightly when constructing an empty shell of a 3D figure, or that working too quickly or aggressively may result in a bit of crumpled shape that sort of resembled a cube rather than the perfect cube they intended to create. (I wish the school had more cardstock
available as an art supply, but it seemed to be a treasured commodity in the photocopy room adjacent to the main office).

I was beginning to fear that this project might not look as impressive as I intended it to in the showcases at the front of the school. (I was calmed by the knowledge that not all of the pizza boxes would fit into the showcase, and that I was going to have to ask for students to volunteer their own and their classmates work to be on display. The rest would go up for display around the classroom so that each student felt honored in some way). I reminded myself that while this was an art creation, I was not assessing students on their artistic ability or their fine motor control. I was looking at their facility to express meaning through this visual mode – observing the choices of buildings, people, transportation, and layout that comprised the communities they were representing through their visual texts.

Whether precise or messy, looking at the jumbled communities, it was obvious that three stacked cubes symbolized a skyscraper, and that three of these structures really close together and situated along a paved road with a bus on it was representative of the layout of a city. The added component of a student-teacher conference allowed for even more description to emerge – for example, the three buildings described above were noted to be a condo, an office building, and a hotel with a restaurant on the main floor. I would not have extracted these details out this particular student’s head if he were asked to write sentences. I should also note that this information might not have been expressed through his visual community landscape alone. The inclusion of both visual and oral modes built on my students strengths – their interest in talking with each other and their growing facility with different modes that allowed them to choose which modes were the
most apt for communicating certain information – and enabled me to gather a wealth of information from my Grade 3 students.

In addition to this visual project providing more information from students, I could clearly see their thought processes evolve over the course of planning and creation. If my students had written a description of an urban and rural community (say, on a written test), the information written would have been what was on their mind in that moment. Having time to see their community come to life, they were constantly adding details and improving their landscape. One student drew a barn and a silo in their sketch, but once they saw the space come to life, they added a pond with four ducks, rolling hills in the background, and a farmer equipped with coveralls and a pitchfork beside a bail of hay. The act of creation activated their imaginations and allowed for more and more details to emerge, and ultimately, a greater understanding of the curriculum material to be demonstrated. While the final visual display may not have been up to the same artistic standard I had been previously exposed to in my practicum teaching of intermediate students, the creation of a visual text as a communication medium was demonstrated to be just as successful and effective with this younger group as it was with my older students.
The Story of the Safari Tour

Grade 6 – Science, Drama, & Language Arts – Exploring Biodiversity

Setting the Scene

In my next year of teaching at the same school, I was moved upstairs to the Junior hallway (*refer back to Figure 4.8*). This meant I was further from the office (and often had to drag our new administration up to see the work my students were engaged in), further from the library (resigned to booking library periods rather than sending a couple of kids across the hall), and further from the entrance doors (meaning that almost 10-15 minutes were lost after each recess). I was also the only straight grade-six classroom, having two five/six split classes as my grade partners for co-planning units. This proved to be a challenge as my grade partners had different needs and priorities than I had. However, I had an amazing group of Grade 6 students who were open to my crazy ideas and creative projects. I was having a fantastic year and my students were constantly surprising me with how innovative they could be when given the chance to do something new and exciting.

Being part of a school where sharing and collaboration were strongly valued meant that my grade partners and I often found time to meet and plan our units together. This year, having a complicated mix of straight and split grade classes added a challenge. As a team, my colleagues and I planned some units together and divided the rest up to plan alone and share with each other. Some units fit neatly together, such as a grade 5 social studies unit on early civilizations and a grade 6 social studies unit on First Nations people and early settlers. In those social studies units, students in both grades were able to connect the content matter through reading and writing stories on myths and legends.
and create similar projects with similar timelines. (For example, Grade 5 students connected their knowledge of early civilizations to legends about Roman, Norse, Greek, or other Gods, while Grade 6 students connected their knowledge of First Nations people with myths and stories about animals and nature that were orally shared in these early communities. Students in each grade researched various stories and rewrote their own versions to share with the class). That unit was planned as a team.

Science, however, was a different story, with grade 5 and 6 foci being more difficult to connect (the Grade 5 curriculum content is about human organ systems, whereas the Grade 6 curriculum focuses on biodiversity of living things). I was therefore in charge of planning the Grade 6 biodiversity unit for all three classes and sharing it with my grade team of other teachers. They could then do with it as they wished, trimming and modifying the unit to meet the needs of their classroom with respect to the timing and organization of the grade 5 learning components.

Referring back to my long range plans, I noted that my upcoming science unit on biodiversity complement a fieldtrip to the city zoo. As a relatively new teacher, I knew that flexibility was essential to planning my units. I was still learning how to judge how long it would take my students to complete certain tasks, and how long units were expected to last while balancing the limited time in the school year to cover all the curriculum expectations, on one hand, and the important task of ensuring my students were actually learning and engaged in the material in meaningful and memorable ways, on the other. Once I finally knew the dates that would be dedicated to our biodiversity unit, it was time to start planning the field trip and the curricular connections that would ensue. (As a bit of an organizational enthusiast, I wanted the timing of the field trip to
line up perfectly with the connecting projects, and thus had waited to plan the trip until this timing was in sight).

**Designing the Unit**

I have learned that literacy is a large component of everything students do in school. The Science curriculum document explicitly states that, “all subjects, including science and technology, can be related to the language curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.30), and offers examples of reading, writing, and oral communication tasks that relate to the content studied in this subject area. For this reason, I have always tried to incorporate as many modes of literacy as possible into my units, such as including both fiction and non-fiction reading and writing opportunities, artistic components such as an art task or dramatic performance, and an oral presentation so that students are able to develop and use language skills in varied ways.

This part of my teaching philosophy was not only based on the units I had observed during my practicum teaching experience, but also based on the advice offered in the Language Arts curriculum document that stated,

> Teachers are expected to plan activities that blend expectations from the four [literacy] strands in order to provide students with the kind of experiences that promote meaningful learning and that help students recognize how literacy skills in the four areas reinforce and strengthen one another. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.5)

I decided that a research project where students would learn to find information on biodiversity from a variety of sources and present it in a variety of forms would be an excellent way for this vision to be accomplished. Students would read information on a particular species, write summaries of the information, create a media product in the form
of a non-fiction picture book to represent the information (a visual text), and orally present their books to relay the information in an interesting and creative form (in this case, a dramatic play that brings the species researched to life for an intended audience).

Noting that the Language Arts curriculum in every elementary grade requires students to “read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts” (Ministry of Education, 2006, pg.11), I knew that a field trip to the zoo would provide several varied sources of information (*Figure 4.11*). There would be plaques to read, interactive displays, animals to observe in their (simulated) natural habitats, and guides to listen to and ask further questions about the animals and environments my students would be studying.

*Figure 4.11. Varied sources of information at the zoo*

These varied sources would be supplemented with library books and Internet sites upon our return to the school. This research component also awarded me an opportunity to allow my students to experience the various kinds of ‘texts’ that exist in our world.
Upon reflecting on my most current pedagogical framework, I was happy to recall that “[t]he word *text* is used in [the Language Arts curriculum] document in its broadest sense, as a means of communication that uses words, graphics, sounds, and/or images, in print, oral, visual, or electronic form, to present information and ideas to an audience” (p.4). Students were able to ‘read’ not only words, but also images and the movement of animals as sources information for their projects.

With these language components in mind, I began planning a unit and organizing the details of the unit – ranging from science content lessons, to literacy-related projects, to a field trip-based assignment that included my class as well as half of each of my grade partners’ classes. It was the grouping of students that posed one of the biggest challenges, as each group of students on the trip would only get to tour two of the three regions of the zoo. As part of students’ research project was to include a group presentation of animals found in similar regions of the world, an even split of animal regions chosen to research was essential for the components of the final project. Groups had to be chosen based on who would create a good group dynamic at the zoo (where I was not going to be able to supervise every group myself), and be equally suited to work together on the final presentation. Balancing reading and writing abilities was therefore equally as important as social dynamics.

With student groupings finally out of the way, I was ready to begin planning the rest of the unit components. Within the science curriculum, students would “investigate the characteristics of living things, and classify diverse organisms according to specific characteristics”; “demonstrate an understanding of biodiversity”; and “assess human
impacts on biodiversity” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.112). Many of these expectations would be assessed through a short written test, but also through the visual texts they would be creating to represent this information.

Within language arts, students would be reading about biodiversity, researching the characteristics of various species using a variety of data sources (Figure 4.11), writing non-fiction reports in the form of an illustrated non-fiction book (Figure 4.12), writing fictional scripts to present their reports in a creative way to a grade 4 class studying habitats (Figure 4.13), and orally presenting their dramatic plays in groups (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.12. Recreation of the visual elements present in students Non-fiction picture books presenting research of a chosen species.

These independently created non-fiction texts demonstrated an understanding of the characteristic of a diverse organism, as well as the features of non-fiction texts...
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

(headings, sub-headings, captions, illustrations), and the design elements that help to convey meaning in such texts (colour, texture, space and layout).

Building onto this final creative component, students’ collaboratively written scripts would be used to put on a dramatic play. As part of their drama mark for the term, students were working on extending their understanding of the elements of drama through “using gestures and movement to convey characters…establishing a clear setting [and] sustaining belief in that setting. … [and using these elements along with visual aids to] engage actively in drama exploration and role play, with a focus on identifying and examining a range of issues, themes, and ideas from a variety of fiction and non-fiction sources and diverse communities, times, and places” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.124). Students would create visual backdrops as well as costumes to represent a range of natural settings and the different creatures that cohabitate in a chosen region (see Figures 4.14 & 4.15). In essence, these presentations were also considered visual texts (as part of the greater multimodal literacy production) as the visual information displayed through costumes, sets, and gestures added to the communication of what students had learned.

These plays turned out to be one of the most exciting things I have seen in the classroom. My students were excited to be writing and collaborating with each other. They appreciated the artistic opportunity to create sets and make their research come to life. They were equally looking forward to being mentors to the grade 4 students who would make up their audience as they took on the role of teachers through their plays. Looking back through this newly adopted lens of multimodal pedagogy, I can see that students were using written, oral, and visual modes (both artistic and dramatic/gestural)
to communicate.

**Exploring Biodiversity – Learning Comes to Life**

I am sitting cross-legged on the carpet at the front of the classroom – one of my favourite meeting places in our room. (My grade 6 classroom is one of the only non-primary classes to have a carpet – I fought hard to have one and it is a well-used asset in our classroom). I have a group of students around me, all of whom have chosen to research species from Africa. We are having a conference to come up with a creative idea for their play. What does the scenery look like? How will each animal interact? Will they interact? What is the theme of the play? What information needs to be included? The ideas derived from these discussions will be typed up for students to reference and to exist as a kind of contract for each group member to follow (*Figure 4.13*).
Biodiversity of Living Things Presentation Outline

Science Curriculum Expectations:
- Investigate the organisms found in a specific habitat and classify them according to the classification system.
- Compare characteristics of organisms in the animal kingdoms.

Oral and Visual Literacy Expectations:
- Evidence of effort and planning
- Communicate in a loud, clear voice
- Present important information without reading word-for-word
- Engage audience (visual aids, enthusiastic body language and voice)

Geographical Group: African Region

Presentation Idea:
Rotations of two people on an African Safari Tour who spot various animals in their habitats. Animals tell the Safari-goers about themselves.
*Need to plan rotation schedule (animal, jeep-riders, off-stage)

Materials Needed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student*/Animal*Pseudonym</th>
<th>Set Location</th>
<th>Costume detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karani (Lion)</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Mane, tail, crown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel (Lynx)</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Ears, tail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameena (Gorilla)</td>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Abs, wear black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex (Crocodile)</td>
<td>Water/Grassland</td>
<td>Teeth, tail, wear green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monika (Elephant)</td>
<td>Water/Grassland</td>
<td>Trunk, ears, mini-tail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anessa (Cheetah)</td>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Tail, wear cheetah shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan (Warthog)</td>
<td>Mud hole</td>
<td>Tusks, snout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also need: binoculars and a jeep cutout.

Other Details:
Order of presentation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Jeep</th>
<th>On set In costume</th>
<th>Off stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monika / Ameena</td>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Manuel / Karani / Alex / Anessa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameena / Anessa</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Manuel / Karani / Ivan / Monika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anessa / Ivan</td>
<td>Karani</td>
<td>Manuel / Monika / Alex / Ameena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan / Alex</td>
<td>Manuel</td>
<td>Monika / Ameena / Karani / Anessa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex / Karani</td>
<td>Monika</td>
<td>Ameesa / Ameena / Ivan / Manuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karani / Manuel</td>
<td>Ameena</td>
<td>Ameesa / Ameena / Alex / Ivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel / Monika</td>
<td>Anessa</td>
<td>Ivan / Ameena / Alex / Karani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will need to create a script that summarizes your research in an interesting way to present yourself to the class. Decide the order of conversation topics and how to make your presentation interesting and accurate for your Grade 4 audience.

Good luck!
I look forward to your presentation!

Figure 4.13. Sample of student ideas organized into charts to exist as a contract for group members to follow while writing scripts and designing sets and costumes. Ideas for each group were collaboratively decided upon during a student-teacher conference, (Details of each group’s contract are explained next).
While the ideas generated were solely derived from students in each group, I assisted some groups with the organization of the presentation. For example, what order to present and which groups of students were to be paired up during different parts of each dramatic play. As mentioned earlier, student groupings for this unit were designed with this collaborative writing task in mind, with lower-leveled writers paired with higher-leveled writers for assistance.

The Indo-Malaya Region has already met with me. They have decided that their sets will consist of a pond, a tree, and some tall grass. Each animal will present itself to another and compare their similarities and differences. For example, the tiger and the rhino will meet up in the grasslands and strike up a conversation about themselves. Students paired up into their conversation partners to write their scripts and returned to a quiet space in the room to work.

The America/Australia Region has also already met with me. They have decided to create a spoof of the Crocodile Hunter, a documentary-style show on Animal Planet where Steve Irwin explored some of the world’s deadliest creatures in unconventional ways. They have all seen and love this show and have chosen be reporters who describe the species they are observing. Rather than dress up as the species they researched, they will dress up as each other’s species so the researcher can do the reporting. For example, one student will slither on the ground with a long tongue prop, while the reporter is crouched in a bush saying ‘Wow! Look! It’s a komodo dragon. You can see his tongue sticking out as his weapon of poison…” and so on. They eagerly move into a quiet space to write up their scripts in documentary fashion.
Sitting with the Africa region group, comprised of some of my most creative students, I am excited to hear what they have come up with. They decide to go on a Safari tour equipped with a jeep from which they will spot different species. They will each rotate so that two jeep riders will spot an animal and ask it questions about itself. The animal will respond with “Roar! I’m a lion, and I eat…” *(see Figure 4.15)*. We discuss the different backdrops needed, and they decide how to write such an interactive script with a revolving set of partners. They too go off to collaborate.

As I walk around the room, I see that students have their research reports in front of them, using the information they so artistically crafted into illustrated non-fiction books on their species – a multimodal text. They have included paragraphs, maps, diagrams, charts, and images with captions. Each subheading is clearly organized and helps them to organize their scripts in the same order without missing too many details. There is a buzz of productivity in the room and I smile with pride at how engaged my students are in this task. As they move into creating costumes and sets, I am getting even more excited to see how these presentations turn out.

**Multimodal Literacy**

My students continue to prepare for their dramatic plays for two days during our literacy and science periods. They continue to write and revise their scripts, and start designing their sets and costumes *(Figure 4.14)*. They practice their parts aloud, see how their costumes move, and help each other to make any improvements before the final presentation. Many of the sets are designed and painted as a group, while each animal costume is created mainly by the member in charge of representing that species.
I am elbow deep in paint, helping a group of students paint the final piece of their set, while simultaneously working with a student to revise their script. I look around the room to see students writing, painting and practicing their plays aloud. Everyone is engaged and on task. I see reading, writing and oral literacy happening all at once. I see art and drama assisting the process. I see a love for learning and a growing work ethic among my students. I see collaboration and teamwork. I glance at the door to see my principal stride in and look around. I recall our last principal thoughtfully making the rounds to each student to ask what they were working on or learning about, listening for key curricular words to ensure I was being accountable. I used to love the opportunity to hear my students proudly stating what our focus was in their own words and showing off their work (Refer back to Unit 2).

Our school has a new principal this year that doesn’t seem to have as strong of an understanding of the power of the arts as our last one. To her, literacy is mainly about reading and writing traditional texts, and our school focus is almost solely directed at
raising literacy scores (as evident through DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment)) and other standardized reading tests) as well as preparing students for writing the Province-wide EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) standardized tests (of which my grade 6’s will write the reading, writing, and mathematics sections of in May). While I always knew there was more to literacy, it wasn’t until I started to read more about multimodal literacy that I had the words to express what I was doing in the classroom.

Like much of the literature I have recently read suggests, my teaching style, rich in artistic opportunity for expression, was sometimes seen by this principal as playful and less serious than it should have been. This was not true of my colleagues who constantly asked for my help with planning creative units, and both teaching and incorporating visual art into other units of study.

This principal did not ask the students any questions, but rather walked up to me and said, “The group of students by the door doesn’t have newspaper under their painting. It’s on the floor and is a safety hazard”. I swallowed and counted to 10 through

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2 The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is an individually administered assessment of a child’s reading capabilities that is conducted annually or semi-annually. It is a tool to be used by instructors to identify a students reading level, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Once levels are identified, an instructor can use this information for instructional planning purposes, and students can use their level, or reading score, to help them identify appropriately leveled books for independent reading. (source: http://www.scholastic.com)

3 EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) tests measure student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to Ontario Curriculum expectations. The resulting data provide accountability and a gauge of quality in Ontario’s publicly funded education system. The tests aim to provide students, parents, teachers and administrators with a clear and comprehensive picture of student achievement and a basis for targeted improvement planning at the individual, school, school board and provincial levels. (source: http://www.eqao.com)
clenched teeth, forcing myself to remain calm. *Are you not curious about what students are engaged in? Do you want to know what they are writing? What they will be doing with this work? Why they are painting rocks and trees and icebergs? Do you really have nothing to say except that there is paint on the floor? “There is some newspaper by the sink” I manage, “can you pass it to them on your way out?”* 

I compose myself, continue painting and reading scripts, talking with students about their work. Tomorrow is a new day – my principal has been invited to see our presentations along with the grade 4 audience that has been looking forward to this for the last few days. I am eager to show her that my students have been engaged in a complex web of reading, writing, oral expression, drama and art, all in efforts to communicate their research from the zoo in an interesting way that is visually appealing and memorable.

The next day arrives, as it always does. It is Friday. We are gathered in the library across from the main office and my old classroom. Two grade 4 classes are sitting on the carpet facing the mock stage my students have set up. My students are seated in the computer area just off to the side holding their props and waiting to be introduced. There are three plays in total, one for each region where the groups of species reside. The grade 4 students will be starting their unit on habitats on Monday and these presentations are designed to get them excited about learning where different animals live.

As the plays are presented, the animals and scenery come to life (*Figure 4.15*).
Figure 4.15. Recreation of students rehearsing for biodiversity plays – journal sketch shows cardboard painted sets, student made costumes, and dialogue from the scripts written collaboratively in groups.

The safari-goers ride along in their jeep and spot a lion sitting lazily on a rock licking his paw. “Hey!” the jeep riders say, “the zebra we just spoke to said his brother was eaten by a lion. Do you think that might be the one?” The lion roars and nods his head “Roar, that zebra was delicious, but did you know that I also eat gazelles, and boars?”

The inclusion of the visual component added to the written and spoken words enables the younger audience to not only pay attention for a longer period of time, but to visualize and remember the information. They are laughing and pointing at the stage “That lion was cool!” one of them says. After answering more of the safari-goers questions, and giving the audience one final roar, the lion takes a bow, exits stage left, and leaves an impression on the audience as the star of the show.
The Story of the Wild Things

Grade 1 – Drama & Language Arts – A Tribute to Maurice Sendak

Pedagogical Reflections

In my next year of teaching, I had the opportunity to teach over 250 students. I was assigned as a prep-coverage teacher, and taught five kindergarten math classes, three grade 1 art, drama, and physical education classes, three drama and physical education classes to a split 2/3, grade 3, and split 3/4, and one grade 5 drama class. I also coached intermediate boys’ basketball, and continued to organize assemblies and school-wide events. I did not have a classroom, but was turned into a cart-lady, toting around my easel and supply bins from my office pod to each classroom I visited.

This travelling show posed a challenge in terms of the amount and kinds of supplies I could bring to a classroom. Many teachers may agree that no matter how big their classroom is, there never seems to be enough wall space for student work and anchor charts (posters that act as reminders for students), or enough cupboard and counter space to organize all the materials that they want their students to be able to access. As a prep-coverage teacher, there is a careful boundary between feeling comfortable in someone else’s classroom, and claiming space designated to the subject you are teaching. (The hallway walls seemed to be a space I was allowed to claim as my own, and as a high-traffic area, this posed its own pressures to create pieces of artwork that were meaningful and impressive enough for a wider viewing audience). It was a busy year, and I was excited to be teaching art and drama.
In reading through The Arts curriculum document, I noted that

Because of the children’s different developmental levels when entering Grade 1, it is expected that this year will emphasize joyful exploration and discovery. The program should expose children to many manipulative materials and encourage exploration with them in a wide variety of open-ended ways. (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.63)

If joyful exploration and discovery were one of the aims of this year’s art and drama program, I was eager to begin planning projects that introduced students to the elements of design (line, shape and form, colour, texture, and value as listed on pg.72) and the elements of drama (role/character, relationship, time and place, tension, and focus and emphasis as listed on pg.68) in ways where they discovered the uses of these elements in “communicating different feelings, ideas and stories” (p.68).

With a desire to make my drama and art classes more meaningful than decorative and frill, I collaborated with each of the classroom teachers I worked with to integrate my drama and art activities into the literacy and content area units they were creating. For example, when my grade 1 students were learning about families and people, I taught them about shapes and had them create images of their family members using circles for heads, rectangles for bodies, triangles for heeled shoes and ovals for sneakers. They wrote sentences about the shapes they used and which family members they included (Figure 4.16).
When these same students were focusing on an Eric Carle author study, I took the opportunity to use Eric Carle’s *The Mixed Up Chameleon* (1984) to teach them about texture. Students created their own wacky creatures using textured rubbings from surfaces around the room and collaging them into a creature to write a story about (*Figure 4.16*). These art projects were displayed in the hallways as evidence of integrated learning where students were using the elements of design to create visual texts that communicated their understanding about some of the content being taught by their homeroom teachers.

In each of these units described above, both the classroom teacher and I assessed the students’ visual texts for different features that were expected of students. In the case
of the family shape art, for example, I assessed the texts for labeling the shapes correctly as part of the expectation to “demonstrate an understanding of composition, using principles of design to create narrative art works or art works on a theme or topic” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.73), while the classroom teacher noted the students’ understanding of family structure (“describe significant people and places in their lives” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p.21)) and sentence writing skills (“write simple but complete sentences that make sense” and “spell some high-frequency words correctly” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.43)).

As my art and drama components were attached to content areas, I had very few resources to draw upon other than the curriculum document expectations I was reporting on (namely the Grade 1 art and drama expectations discussed shortly), the content area unit plans of my colleagues, and a few books from my personal collection of art and drama resources. Many of the art activities in these resource books were craft projects that were decorative in nature and left little explicit connection to other curriculum content. To gain further ideas, most of the units I created surrounded a central text that I borrowed from the library. These texts were either about something that was being studied in the classroom, or had amazing images and plot lines that incited further artistic and dramatic activities.

One such central text was *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (1963). Our grade 1 students were having some issues with bullying this year and I was asked to do a drama unit around character education and bullying. According to Bickley-Green (2007), “art teachers can attend to and encourage students to visualize their personal experiences in confrontational situations such as bullying incidents. All students, even
those who are more likely to bully others, may benefit from these visualizations” (p.7). I was determined to use the arts, both visual and dramatic, along with this central text, to address this issue with students.

I thought of the Wild Things and how even though they all looked different, they seemed pretty united in the jungle. I thought that if I used monsters to address this issue, I might be able to get through to the students without pointing fingers and turning the lesson into a lecture. Researching a variety of websites, I found a number of great activities to do surrounding this book. Collecting some and modifying others, I created a unit that would include drawing to generate ideas, drama and role-playing, writing scripts, oral literacy skills, and collaboration skills in addition to other character education and bullying lessons.

**Setting the Scene**

My students are gathered on the carpet for their first reading of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). As I am concurrently doing this unit with three classes, this is the third time I will be reading the story this week. I have them make predictions and connections to the events. Part of the drama curriculum requires students to understand the element of time and space by “pretending to be in an established setting” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.68). We metaphorically step into the story: acting out the scenes in a series of tableaus, imagining the sounds and sights of sailing across the ocean in Max’s boat, and running through the forest on the other side. We play a game of hot seat, where students get to step into Max’s shoes and describe how it feels to be sent to bed without dinner, or into his mom’s shoes and describe what she thinks of her son’s behavior. All of
these ideas are then transferred to group-made mind-maps (Figure 4.17) – visual texts that help students remember what they are learning as the unit goes on.

![Mind-maps of stepping into Where the Wild Things Are](image)

*Figure 4.17. Mind-maps of stepping into Where the Wild Things Are*

As I only see these students for 30-40 minutes two times a week, this unit is broken up. The visual reminders are a key component to bringing the unit some cohesion.

On another day, we revisit the story and the students become monsters themselves. In doing so, students are able to explore the element of role/character by “adopting the attitude, voice, or emotional state of a fictional character” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.68). They come up with monster names for themselves and think about what they look like, what they eat, what they wear, where they live, what they do for fun, and what makes them unique. Two classes opt to draw pictures of their monster selves and present their new identities to the class. The third class opts to use plasticine to create 3D replicas of their monster selves and write stories about their daily lives (Figure 4.18).
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

Creating these visual 2D or 3D images of their monster selves helps the students to generate ideas about the role they will be assuming this unit. The addition of writing down stories or key words helps students to remember the different characteristics of the monsters they are creating. This not only seems like a fun task, but gives them ownership over their ideas and an investment in the activities to come. Student ownership over their decisions is a large part of this unit. Students are directing many of the components of this unit, and like I expected them to do, are leading us right towards the character lesson I want them to learn.

Much like their true selves, their monster selves are all very different. Some have purple skin, some eat bugs, some only wear the colour pink, and one of them is bald and burps all day. But as we read through the book again, we notice that the monsters all get along. The following week, we decide to create a monster’s code of conduct (much like the 10 character traits and the TRIBES agreements we follow as a school: Attentive listening, No Put downs, Mutual Respect, and the Right to Pass/Participate (Tribes Learning Communities (Gibbs, 2006)). My students go off to illustrate the rules they think should be included in our code (Figure 4.19).
Looking at the rules they are illustrating tells me a lot about these students and the kinds of issues that are present in this classroom. I was particularly interested in the rules about not making fun “of other monsters weight or size” or “clothes”. While students present their rules for the monsters in *Where The Wild Things Are*, we have a discussion about the ways that we are similar or different from the monsters in the book, and the ways that we are similar and different from each other. There seems to be an understanding that we should all be following these codes of conduct too, and we stand up to read through the posters aloud as an oath to “share” and “say nice things to each other”

**Wild Things Come to Life**

After a few weeks and a lot of stepping into the story to assuming different roles from different points of view, my students are finally ready to put all the lessons they have learned together into a final production. They will be recreating their own version of the *Wild Things* where they step into a story and assume the role of their monster selves.
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

(“engaging in dramatic play and role play” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.68)), use body, voice and facial expressions to communicate meaning and emotions ("adopting thoughts, feelings and gestures relevant to the role being played" (p.68)), teach themselves about the code of conduct (“create a short scene to show the importance of acceptance, understanding and inclusion” (p.68)), and finish the story with their own twist ending (“plan and shape dramatic play by building on the ideas of others” (p.68)). This will all be filmed and edited together for a grand movie premier with family and friends in the school gymnasium.

Students have painted backdrops of Max’s room, the ocean, and the forest, and have made themselves a mask to wear to become monsters (“communicate… using simple visual… aids to support and enhance dramatic work” (p.69)) - (See Figure 4.22).

With my assistance they have written scripts for the movie, introducing themselves to each other and describing their character traits (Figure 4.20). They have written the script portions for the code of conduct (Figure 4.21). We have elected a narrator, and people to play Max and his mom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tristan to Selina:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My name is Cyclone! I have red eyes and a mechanical body. I ride a motor cycle!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch out – I can turn invisible and I may sneak up on you!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selina to Tristan:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well, I’m Taylor! And I can see invisible things! So you can’t sneak up on me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a green skin and a great tail! I eat green bugs to keep my tail shiny and my skin green!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vincent to Zayan:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hey! I’m Timer! I tell people what time it is! I can also be your alarm clock and wake you up at the right time. I eat clocks to recharge myself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can also count by 5’s and I will teach you if you want! I love math!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zayan to Vincent:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m Bubble Face! I like to blow bubbles!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I also eat the heads of bad guys because their bubbly brains taste good!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to catch bugs with the bubbles I blow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My face looks like a bubble, but don’t make fun of me!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.20. Scripts written by students* of monsters introducing themselves
*Pseudonyms
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

These scripts were representative of the activities and lessons students had learned along the way. I have typed up their short lines (in large font and simple sentence structures and with proper spelling) and stapled them into their agendas so that they can rehearse their lines with their parents each night. My students and their parents are looking forward to seeing the final product.

**Multimodal Literacy**

The initial visual texts (drawings) that students created helped to reinforce the dramatic activities that were engaged in over the past two months. The creation of visual backdrops and masks helped them to step into new settings and respond in role. They were able to engage in story and script writing, and discover the use of vocal, facial, and body expressions in helping them to assume roles and communicate to an audience.

*Figure 4.21. Script written by students to create code of conduct for monsters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The monsters soon noticed that they were all very different. Some of them were different colours, ate different food, and liked to do different things. They needed to find a way to all get along.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We should make a Code of Conduct!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is a list of rules for how to behave so we all get along. We can use this page!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oh! Like Respect other monsters?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exactly! Who else has a rule we can put on our code of conduct page?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monster 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t make fun of what other monsters look like!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.22 shows a recreation of scenes from our final production.
My students and their parents are noisily assembling into the chairs set up in the school gymnasium. The big screen is pulled down and the projector is ready to roll. I run frantically back and forth from the gym to the staff room where I am simultaneously trying to pop popcorn in our single microwave and greet the thirty or forty parents who have arrived for the premier.

“Welcome” I say, “I am so please that so many of you were able to come in to school to see what your children have been working on for the last month. First, I want to tell you that your kids are incredible! They have been reading stories, writing scripts, creating works of art to help them step into stories and to show their understanding of the lessons we have been learning. I hope you enjoy the premier of our production of Where the Wild Things Are”. As I turn out the lights, I see our principal walk into the gym. I am excited that an invitation was finally acted upon.
Our movie plays with my students seeing the edited product for the first time along with their teachers and parents. As I watch, I think back over the course of the unit. Could I have done things differently? Approximately three periods were used towards the filming of the movie scenes, during which time those not ‘on set’ were asked to quietly (yes, I thought that may have been possible, and no, it was not) work on activity booklets filled with artistic tasks (such as drawing a monster, designing Max’s crown, and spotting the differences between two seemingly alike pictures of monsters) and small literacy tasks (such as writing a letter to Max’s mom apologizing for causing mischief, or listing five rules they would decree if they were king Max). Was this just busy work? Were there more meaningful tasks that my students could have engaged in with a greater curricular focus? Or was this the best I could do with a group of 45 students who were still limited in their skill set to work independently on a more difficult task? Should I have continued to use ‘class time’ for richer activities, and pulled smaller groups of students to a filming set during recesses? How much time do we, as teachers, feel the expectation to use ‘our own’ time for class-related work? The video editing took me three or four nights to get right. Did I miss an opportunity to introduce this technology task to my students and have them experience yet another set of skills for multimodal communication? Could they have been involved in the editing process and worked on creating a media piece? Was that even my job as an art and drama prep-coverage teacher? If this had been my own classroom, would I have tried to stretch this unit to integrate more curricular components and real-life opportunities? Or am I too much of a perfectionist and enjoy surprising my students? With my mind still reeling with questions, the 45 students in the video bring me back to the present through the choral
singing of “The End!” followed by giggles in the final scene of the production. I stand up to turn off the projector and look around to gauge the reaction of the audience.

Everyone is clapping. My students are beaming with pride and excitement! This is the first time they have seen their work come together in this movie format and I am instantly happy that I decided to surprise them with this show of themselves. Perhaps they can learn the process of this media creation in a future project. My colleagues are impressed and offer me praise on a job well done. It was not easy organizing a unit over different periods in three different classrooms, nor was it easy to manage all forty-five students together at once while trying to film sections of the movie. My efforts have paid off with this visual ending to a long unit.

While the main curricular focus for this unit was drama (specifically the expectation to be introduced to and explore the elements of drama: using body, face, and voice expressions to portray emotion and meaning, and to step into a story and assume a role in a convincing manner (Ministry of Education, 2009)), I learned that these visual cues used in acting are arguable part of visual literacy and are, in fact, visual texts in their own right. The backdrops and costumes, as visual art creations/visual texts, aided students in being able to visualize the story, step into roles, and see literacy come to life. The drawings and mind-maps that were created demonstrated a level of understanding of the content of the story and the connections I was trying to foster to character education and bullying. Reflecting back on this unit several years later and with a new focus on pedagogy, I’d say this unit was a great success and a prime example of multiple modes of literacy intersecting the curriculum.
Chapter Five

Narrative Analysis, Discussion, & Implications

In Chapter Four, I recall four different units of study that I designed for students in multiple grades and across a variety of cross-curricular subject areas. Reflexively recalling the stories of planning and implementing these units assisted me in illuminating responses to each of my research questions. Through examining my unit plans, personal journal entries, photograph collection, student samples of artwork, and other collected artifacts, I described the performance of the multimodal literacy events that my students were engaged in. This helped me to form a response to the questions: What were my experiences teaching multimodal literacy? and What did this process look like?

I attempted to recall as many details as possible of the planning process and my decision making regarding the initial creation of these units and the flexible changes that may have been incorporated as the unit was delivered. This helped me to shed light on a response to the questions: What did the process look like? and What resources enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my practice?

Finally, through reflecting more deeply on these multimodal literacy events and connecting this learning with the literature in Chapter Two, I have come towards an understanding of my final set of questions: What were the affordances and limitations of the modes and multimodal pedagogies for my students? and What were the affordances and limitations for myself as a teacher?

In this final chapter, I revisit my research questions, critically reflect on my stories, and summarize the understandings that I have gained through the reflexive
practice of writing my narrative autoethnographic account. My reflection is separated into three sections that directly relate to my research questions: a) what multimodal pedagogy looks like and the commonalities I discovered between the multimodal literacy units I described, such as central texts, student advocacy, and the presence of multiple modes; b) the resources that enabled or constrained the enactment of multimodal pedagogy such as curriculum documents and other print resources, as well as resources of the teacher, students, and the school; and c) the affordances and limitations of integrating visual literacy modes in the classroom as part of a multimodal pedagogy.

Following this reflection, I also relay the contribution that autoethnographic accounts can bring to the field of education, and discuss the specific contributions and implications of this particular study on both multimodal pedagogy and on the practice of teaching. I end with a note on the limitations of this account and propose future directions of study to enhance the understanding of multimodal pedagogy, visual literacy, and visual art inclusion as a multimodal literacy practice.

**Reflecting on Multimodal Classroom Literacy Events: Commonalities Discovered Through the Process of Reflexive Narration**

As demonstrated through the narratives in Chapter Four, multimodal literacy and pedagogy does not have a single face. By including a number of communicative modes, (such as writing, drawing, creating, singing, dancing, dramatizing, or speaking) in a variety of combinations, a teacher can create a wealth of diverse multimodal learning opportunities. Sharing my own experiences of teaching through multimodal pedagogy offered examples of visual creations accompanied by written or oral descriptions, or
written products enhanced through dramatization and visual aids. While my own sample of classroom practice included relatively little musical and physical modes of expression, these modes should not be ignored in the bigger picture of what multimodal literacy can look like.

In responding to my first set of research questions – *What were my experiences teaching multimodal literacy? and What did this look like in the classroom?* – I discovered three common threads: the power of a central text; the spark of student interest and advocacy; and the presence of multiple modes of communication opportunities.

**The Power of a Central Text**

Reflecting on the four units in Chapter Four, one frequently used resource was a central text to which classroom activities were linked. This link between text and activity seemed to appear in two different roles: the text either inspired curricular activities or connected several other curricular activities together. I explain the difference between these two roles through examples in my narratives.

In the narrative of the *Wild Things*, Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), was the central text on which the unit was based. The plot, setting, and characters in this text directly inspired the evolution of student activity. The unit invited students to read Max’s story and then reenact the scenes; the students were introduced to the pictures of the setting and stepped into the pages of the story to explore this setting using their imaginations; they were introduced to the creatures in the story and became part of the group of wild things themselves, gathering ideas from the pages in the text to create their
new identities. As a source of inspiration, this central text was the catalyst for all of the multimodal activities that comprised the unit.

Eric Carle’s *The Mixed-Up Chameleon (1984)* also played the role of inspiring curricular activities as the collaged creatures that comprise the illustrations in the book became the starting point for students to create their own creatures using similar patterns, textures, and configurations. As the source of inspiration, these central texts were anchors that were continuously referred back to throughout the course of the multimodal activities that were linked to the curriculum.

The Grade 8 migration unit described in Chapter Four also contained central texts, but made use of them in a different way. Rather than inspire activities, the texts became the connection that united each multimodal activity that was planned in advance of reading the text. For example, I used the two novels, *The Irish Chain* (Howarth-Attard, 2002) and *White Jade Tiger* (Lawson, 1993), to link multimodal activities such as literature circle discussions, journal entries where connections were made between the fictional characters and real-life migration stories, monologue writing, and the creation of a quilt patch. The central texts in this case did not directly inspire the activities themselves, but rather became something to continuously return to as a link between each of the big ideas in the unit.

The two different roles that central texts played in these examples are not mutually exclusive. This became clear to me when I reflected on the character monologue and quilt creation project as the culminating task to the migration unit. The inspiration for creating a quilt was first born from reading *The Irish Chain* (Howarth-Attard, 2002). The ideas that students included in their character monologues were also directly inspired
from the setting, characters and plots in one of the two class novels. In this way, these central texts were an inspiration for this particular quilt making activity. At the same time, these central texts were used as a common denominator for students to refer to while discussing issues of migration that were learned during social studies lessons and through other texts, and while finding connections between fictional and non-fictional stories for their journal entries and a final written test.

The use of central texts in multimodal pedagogy is also found within the literature. Walsh (2011) notes that in her research of literacy classroom, “teachers were either focusing on literature as the central theme of their unit, or integrating literature in their programs when the topic was focusing on a content area from Science or Social Studies” (p.52). In either role, it is clear that a central text is a powerful resource to draw upon when planning and implementing multimodal curriculum and when connecting various multimodal literacy events that can take place in a classroom. In reflecting on my own teaching experience, I now understand the different ways in which these central texts can be the catalyst for the creation of not only written texts and oral texts, but also powerful visual texts that might assist students in developing new and powerful ways to connect to the content and experiences of others, and communicating their learning in creative ways (e.g. Albers, 2007; Amorino, 2008; Hanna, 1994; Walsh, 2011).

Additionally, when a central text is an picture book filled with written words and pictures, the picture book also serves as an example of a multimodal text, and offers the opportunity to discuss how words and images (and even sounds and gestures when read aloud) all work together to effectively communicate ideas and emotions, and provide learning opportunities related to content area knowledge. This finding is consistent with
the literature on multimodal literacy that asserts that picture books and other texts “can be integrated into instruction in a meaningful way” (Albers, 2007, p.184), and that this can be done not only through “a single text but across texts” (p.183). What my classroom stories add to the conversation of multimodal pedagogy are additional examples of what the use of these central texts might look like in the context of multimodal literacy experiences in the elementary classroom.

**The Spark of Student Interest and Advocacy**

In reflecting on the four stories told in Chapter Four, another common theme was the presence of student interest and advocacy. The literature also validates the importance of students’ interests noting that, “texts of all kinds are produced based on the interests of the producer” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.29). Pahl and Rowsell (2005) explain that this is based on both the intentions of what is to be communicated through the text as well as on the personal interests of the student who is creating the text. This was clearly true of the Grade 3 community landscapes. This is supported in the Ontario curriculum document where it states that it is “important to give students opportunities to choose what they read and what they write about” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.5). The narratives begin to illustrate how in planning multimodal curriculum, I thought about what my students would be interested in learning and in what ways they would enjoy or excel in demonstrating their learning. Looking at this process across grade levels, I found that as my students grew older and developed greater capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, the decisions regarding modes of expression and topics of learning could become less teacher-directed and more student-directed. Returning to Kress &
Jewitt’s (2003) notion of the elements of communicational decision-making (what to communicate, how the message can be transmitted, and which mode is the most suitable for the audience and intent), within my narratives I could see students gaining not only facility in a variety of modes, but also gaining confidence in choosing the modes through which they communicated.

In the narratives presented in Chapter Four, student choice was evident in the community landscape project as my grade three students were able to choose their canvas size, their shapes and choice of material, and every feature that became part of their final community landscapes. Many of the details that the students added to the communities were based on student interest and choice, such as the students who included a restaurant in the lobby of the hotel, or a pond filled with wading ducks. As well, the choices made by students to communicate the features of their communities either in their sketch or 3D visual texts, or through their oral accounts was also evident. Some students chose to communicate their understanding fully through visual modes of expression (including very detailed features on their canvases), while others used a combination of visual modes with oral elaboration to fully communicate their ideas (such as the student who orally expressed the restaurant in the lobby of the hotel which was not visible in either of his visual text creations). This growing facility in choosing which mode is most suitable for their communicational needs is something that is found both in the literature (e.g., Kress & Jewitt, 2003) and in my own narratives of experiences with students.

There is additional evidence in the literature that decisions regarding text creation can be strongly rooted in a sense of identity. Research on the benefits of engaging with
visual modes of expression suggests that the arts offer opportunities for students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their identities (Hanna, 1994). Pahl & Rowsell, (2005) argue that, “we invest our time, energy, intellect and imagination in literacy practices that are meaningful to us in relation to our life goals and personal interests” (p.141). Stein (2008) notes that, “each visual text can be thought of as an identity text which carries the traces of its author within” (p.83). This construction of identity through text is something that can be cultivated not only through the arts, but through allowing students to experiment with multimodality – that is, multiple modes of communication such as written, oral, dramatic/gestural, musical, physical, and visual. This experimentation (or situated practice to use the term introduced by The New London Group, 1996) can assist in developing facility in each of these modes (Albers, 2007) and enable students to advocate for their interests and abilities more often in the classroom. This was especially evident in the data that describes the decisions of my Grade 8 students throughout the multimodal texts produced in their migration unit.

In relation to student choice, my Grade 8 students identified a character in their novels with whom they could relate to and write a monologue in role of, decided on a format and viewpoint that most resonated with them, and carefully planned each quilt square with their choice of objects, colours, materials, and metaphorical or literal meanings. Their work was therefore infused with their own interests, ideas, and individual identities as they made personal connections to the migration stories of real and fictional characters. Had I had given each student a photocopy of a blank quilt patch and asked them to draw symbols from the main character’s life in their story, I might not have seen the risk-taking and creativity (Hanna, 1994) that comes with students being
able to make choices based on their own interests and commit to their own ideas. Giving these students a flexible structure to work within also allowed them to make choices about what they wanted to communicate. Referring to Halliday’s (1969) functions of language, I could see that students represented curricular ideas as well as their own, shared personal emotions through their work, imagined fictional worlds, regulated the emotions and reactions of their audience, and heuristically asked questions that were above the curricular expectations of the assignment.

I also reflexively observed student advocacy to be an integral part of the curricular planning and implementing process – or the enactment of multimodal pedagogy. This is consistent with literature on multimodal pedagogies that “acknowledge learners as agentive” (Stein, 2008, p.122). This sense of agency and purpose, undoubtedly instigated by student interest, influenced my planning process around multimodal literacy events across the curriculum. The narratives start to document how the programmatic curriculum and my interpretation of it in unit planning became something new again once it was implemented and became the classroom or enacted curriculum. Nothing was ever set in stone– the students asked questions that took the lessons in new and unanticipated directions, they voiced their opinions, and asked to do activities that were not quite what I had had in mind, but that I simply could not say ‘no’ to. I negotiated the curriculum with students to create learning opportunities that capitalized on their interests and knowledge. In so doing my students amazed me constantly! They were unique, they knew what they were interested in and where their talents resided, and they were often eager to show this off.
Referring back to my narrative on the Grade 6 Biodiversity unit, over the course of the planning stages for the final dramatic plays, the student-teacher conferences that took place were yet another prime example of student advocacy. While I assisted students in organizing the timing and roles of their respective plays, the ideas for each of the three presentations were solely the intellectual property of students. (In fact, the idea for sets and costumes was something they brought to the table when I first told them about presenting information to their younger peers). The ideas that students came up with were not ones I could turn down. Did this make the unit slightly longer than I had planned? Yes. Did this require more materials, more time, and a negotiation of the other subjects to be taught that week? Yes. Was it worth it to see students so invested in their work? YES!

Adopting a multimodal pedagogy allowed me to see the value in investing more time in multimodal practices that offered students opportunities to use languages and visual modes for a variety of functions (Halliday, 1969) and to develop a love for learning that was based on their own interests and funds of knowledge (e.g., Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

Within my narratives, student advocacy was observed even in the early grades. During the course of the Wild Things unit, the Grade 1 students in each class did slightly different activities. For example, during the initial brainstorming of their monster-selves, one class agreed to draw pictures of their monsters and write words or sentences around the image that described the characteristics of their monsters (in accordance with my idea and instruction). Another class, engrossed in the short stories they were writing in language classes, asked if they could write a story of ‘a day in the life’ of their monster-selves. I encouraged them to do so in addition to their drawings. The third class decided they were doing a lot of drawing with me (which was the easiest set of supplies to tote
around school in my cart), and begged me to let them create their monsters with plasticine. Again, after checking the supply closet and finding a few blocks of the colourful, clay-like substance, I changed my plans and had students create 3D, rather than 2D, monsters. Regardless of the age of students, this ability and determination to advocate for their own learning, communication modes, and demonstration of knowledge is something that greatly affects the enactment of multimodal pedagogy in my classrooms.

Heydon’s (2012) study of Kindergarten curriculum production noted that young children were often “seeking to impose their ideas … and pushing the curriculum in new directions by drawing on their funds of knowledge” (pp.24-25) even if these new directions were a challenge to the programmatic curriculum or the original intentions of the teacher. While my initial thoughts were that students developed a sense of advocacy only after they had developed skills to express themselves more clearly (i.e. in later grades after sufficient situated practice and overt instruction), both my narratives and the literature suggest that this is possible in early years as well. For example, Lynn & Rudkin (2011) note that the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education acknowledge capacities for autonomy at very early ages when children are encouraged to think and act for themselves. My study sheds light on what multimodal pedagogy can look like across the elementary school system (from Grade 1 through to Grade 8), and the finding that students have an early sense of advocacy and identity contributes to the literature on multimodal pedagogy by bridging studies of young learners and older learners by highlighting commonalities that join all students, regardless of age.
This sense of advocacy for students’ own ideas and creative interests is further validated in other literature. Giving students choice in the types of multimodal texts they create (and the way they respond to texts or communicate through them) has been found to help them to take ownership over their ideas and decisions and commit to learning processes and products (e.g. Amorino, 2008; and others). Specifically in relation to multimodality and visual literacy opportunities, the planning, decision making, and risk-taking that are inherent in creating works of art (e.g. Drew & Rankin, 2004; Hanna, 1994; Albers, 2007) contribute to a sense of ownership, pride, and positive self-concept that can increase the effectiveness of communicating ideas (e.g. Caughlan, 2008; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Albers, 2007).

Additionally, Amorino’s (2008) study found that rich, meaningful interaction with the visual arts increases student ability in the areas of original idea formation, flexible thinking, and a greater capacity to understand visual images and ideas. I could see, in each year that I taught, that my own teaching style full of creative and artistic inclusions may have contributed to the growing desire of my students to think outside the box and come up with creative ways to express themselves and engage in the learning process.

While the prevalence of student interest, identity, and advocacy are evident in my own experiences and the research on multimodal literacy and pedagogy, I noticed an additional aspect related to student choice that was not found in the literature. In each of the visual text projects my students were immersed in creating there was variation in materials chosen and used by my students. In relation to the amount and type of visual text creation practices in the classroom, Albers (2007) discusses the barriers of time, messiness, and lack of teacher knowledge of the arts. But there is limited research on the
barriers of the art supplies themselves. Eisner (2002) discusses lack of water as a barrier to painting, and Wilson (1984) discusses issues of supplies being ready and accessible to students (as opposed to hidden in cupboards and supply closets), but there is little talk about the supplies being in the school at all. In the case of my own classroom experiences, the materials that students chose to use to create their pizza box communities and quilt patches was a direct reflection of student interest and intentions – most of the material was gathered from home and other sources outside of the school and therefore highlighted the imagination and thought process that my students used to design and create their visual texts. This is one area where my study adds to the literature, and will be examined later in this chapter.

The Presence of Multimodality

When searching for commonalities in each of the four units described, the final point was the presence of multiple modalities in each unit – that is, that traditional modes (written and oral) and creative modes (visual and dramatic) often came together to enhance and expand communication through the affordances of each mode. This is consistent with the literature that argues all modes are partial and work together to enhance the communicative potential of a given multimodal text (Jewitt, 2008). While initially recalling units that had a strong visual art component, I found myself relating stories of my students writing traditional texts, creating media texts, dramatizing and role playing, and using body, facial, and vocal gestures to communicate. I saw that in creating visual art opportunities, I also offered students opportunities to gain facility in other visual modes as well as to use these multiple visual modes in conjunction with other
modes of communication. Children’s capacity to quickly gain facility in multiple modes of communication is consistent with the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education which maintains “children participate in the world using “one hundred languages” for exploring, discovering, constructing, representing and conveying ideas” (Lynn & Rudkin, 2011, p.1). Additionally in regards to the literature, my narratives are consistent with researchers who argue for the literacy practices of the classroom to be more consistent with the communication practices of students’ (and adults’) daily lives (e.g., Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010;) such as through moving within, across, and between different sign systems (Albers, 2007).

Through naming my pedagogy as multimodal and learning about what this entails, I have come to a greater understanding of my classroom practices and the decisions I made in regards to the literacy events in my classroom. When reflecting on the reasons I chose to include multiple modes of communication opportunities in my classroom, I realized that part of my motivation behind each unit and project was, in fact, to connect the curriculum content to the home lives, interests and funds of knowledge of my students. In everyday routines, people use a variety of modes to communicate and these modes are often used in combination. It then follows that bridging school and home literacy practices could be best accomplished through the inclusion of multimodal literacy opportunities in the classroom. Albers & Sanders (2010) agree with this notion arguing that learning best occurs when students are engaged in complex, personally relevant, creative composition of texts that incorporate a variety of meaningful communicative modes. This is in accordance with other literature that notes that different modes are most apt for communicating particular messages (Eisner, 2002) and that each
mode has the capability to complement other modes, enhancing or building onto to
message being communicated (Jewitt, 2008).

In the units narrated in Chapter Four, there were two different ways that multiple
modes of communication were combined in the curriculum. In the case of the community
landscapes and the quilt patches, the primarily visual mode of creation was enhanced
through the addition of oral and written modes of communication. For example, the
community landscapes, as visual texts, told volumes about what my Grade 3 students
knew about the features of urban and rural communities. The addition of an oral
conversation allowed students to add to the messages I received through viewing their
artwork. Likewise, the quilt squares that my Grade 8 students designed communicated a
variety of ideas, concepts, emotions and deep metaphors on their own. Anyone who had
read the novels might have been able to connect the objects, colours, and symbols to their
meaning. The addition of a written monologue and the oral presentation of these two
pieces enhanced the meanings of the quilt patch elements, added emotion, and provided
clarity to the visual messages being communicated.

Conversely, in the case of the *Wild Things* and the *Biodiversity* project, the visual
modes of communication, such as artistic costumes and sets, and body movement and
facial expressions, were used to enhance the meaning of the primary dramatic and written
modes. My Grade 1 students could have written scripts or retold the story without the
addition of props and visual aids. This would have communicated their understanding of
the story and the character education messages, but would not have had the same impact.
Whether visual or written modes were produced first or second, the inclusion of visual
modes of communication was vital to allowing students to express a greater number of
ideas. This was especially relevant in the Grade 1 classroom where writing skills are not as developed as oral speaking skills (Drew & Rankin, 2004) and where the ability to move easily between sign systems (Albers, 2007) or the hundred languages of children (Lynn & Rudkin, 2011) is abundant.

Likewise, in the case of the biodiversity plays, I could have had my Grade 6 students share their written media texts with their Grade 4 peers. However, the addition of costumes, sets, and scripts allowed my students to more fully demonstrate their understanding of the characteristics of the species they studied (perhaps through moving and speaking like the animals they studied), and the connection that exists between the species in a similar habitat. (I also think the Grade 4’s were happier watching a play than simply reading through a book with my students).

The importance of the use of multiple modes in the literacy classroom (and in literacy learning across all subject areas) is corroborated by the literature on multimodal literacy. Eisner argues, “not everything knowable can be articulated in one particular form. Written language, for example, is not always the most apt form of representation” (as quoted in Albers, 2007). Referring to the notion that school literacy should be consistent with outside-of-school communication (e.g., Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), Jewitt (2008) contends that no single mode, including the linguistic modes of writing and speaking, “stands alone in the process of meaning making; rather, each mode plays a discrete part in the whole” (p.247). In relation to the use of visual modes (primarily the visual arts), both Albers (2007) and Eisner (2002; 2003) express that the visual arts are a form of meaning making (interpreting, understanding, and representing) that complements written and oral communication in a way that is essential to both human
and personal development, and preparation for participation in society outside of school.

The narratives suggest that the combination of several modes offered students multiple opportunities to express themselves and their ideas in the most apt ways possible. When students use a number of different modes to communicate, they often add on ideas through one mode that would not have been possible in another (Albers, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2008; Stein, 2008). For example, writing descriptions of animals and then physically showing how they move added to the information communicated. Drawing a cityscape and then orally communicating the additional features of a building again added to the information communicated. Creating a quilt patch to communicate important symbols on a life journey, writing about these metaphors to enhance the audience’s understanding, and then orally relaying this information to added emotion relates a fuller story than any one of these modes could tell alone. As The New London Group (1996) suggests, my students growing facility to use the these varied multimodal texts for a variety of purposes was enabled through ongoing situated practice over the course of the school year, and the overt instruction of the communicative affordances (or grammars) of each of these modes. For the Grade 8 students specifically, the addition of critical framing became apparent when accounting for cultural and historical meanings translated through their migration quilts and monologues. This is something I am thankful to have learned throughout this process, and that will have great impact on both my own future professional practice, and hopefully, on the future professional practices of others.
Reflecting on the Resources that Enable or Constrain the Enactment of Multimodal Pedagogy

Deciding on how to plan and implement multimodal practice is dependent on many things. While teachers’ own knowledge, education, interest, and confidence in teaching in each of the modes listed above, may be significant enablers or constrainers of classroom curriculum production (e.g. Albers & Cowan, 1998; Wilson, 1984; Albers, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Stockrocki, 1986; Erickson, 2004; Olson, 2003, Amorino, 2008), other human influences such students, colleagues, and administrators may play a contributing role (e.g. Albers, 2007; Albers & Cowan, 1998; Albers & Murphy, 2000; Stockrocki, 1986; Wilson, 1984; Olson, 2003). In addition to these human influences, the layout of the classroom and school (e.g. Dyson & Genishi, 2005), the availability of supplies and materials (e.g. Erickson, 2004), curriculum and other school documents (e.g. Eisner, 2002), school policy and initiatives (e.g. Albers & Murphy, 2000), and the organization of time (Albers, 2007) all enabled or constrained my ability to enact of multimodal pedagogy in the narratives.

In my reflection on the narratives, I identified that curriculum documents and my own interests and knowledge greatly affected my curricular planning and decision-making. In this next section, I discuss how the following enabled or constrained my ability to practice multimodal pedagogy: Curriculum Documents and Other Print Resources; Teacher Resources (i.e. knowledge); Student Resources (i.e. interest); School Resources (i.e. administration); and Physical Resources (i.e. supplies).
Curriculum Documents and Other Print Resources

The Ontario curriculum is an adaptable curriculum in which the learning outcomes (the what to teach) are prescribed in the documents in the form of expectations, but the methods to achieve these aims (the how to teach) is left to the responsibility of the teacher (Heydon, 2012). Re-reading through the entire set of the Ontario elementary curriculum documents at the beginning of this project was an enlightening experience. While I had read through the introductions to each document at some point in my career, I more often skipped past the beginning pages and jumped right to the expectations for the unit I was embarking upon. In a brief conversation with six of my former colleagues, they confirmed that the same was true of their practice. While the expectations sections play a major role in the planning stages of teaching, the introduction and philosophy of instruction in the beginning of the document seemed to play less of a role in affecting my decisions. I personally focused on prescribed expectations in the document as part of my responsibility as a teacher is to report on these learning expectations on the Provincial report cards.

The importance of the expectation sections on my own planning of units was evident in Chapter Four as most of my quoted resources were of the overall and specific expectations listed in the curricular subsections for the grade I was teaching at the time. While the overall expectations in the curriculum documents describe the general knowledge or big ideas students are expected to understand, the specific expectations include examples of possible learning activities and teacher prompts – some of which led me towards activities in one or more modes (i.e. the Grade 6 media literacy expectations suggests having students “make a movie poster advertising a movie based on a narrative
they have studied” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.119). However, more often, I found that it was through my own imposition that multiple modes of communication and visual art were brought into the unit. In reflecting on the literature on multimodal pedagogy, I have become more aware that enacting a pedagogy of multimodality means more than including opportunities for students to use visual and other modes in the classroom (i.e. to make a movie poster). Rather, the explicit instruction of the grammatical affordances, or a Metalanguage of Design (The New London Group, 1996), for each mode is imperative to students gaining multimodal literacy skills. This language is absent from the Ontario curriculum documents and is left to teachers to implement on their own accord.

Referring back to the curriculum document analysis at the beginning of Chapter Four, it was evident that the Language document (2006) and the other subject area documents (Mathematics, 2009b; Science, 2007; and Social Studies/History & Geography, 2004) viewed literacy as primarily print-based. The word text was broadly defined “as a means of communication that uses words, graphics, sounds, and/or images, in print, oral, visual, or electronic form” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.4), but the examples that followed were of written text forms, or of visual texts within written texts (such as a diagram in a textbook). The Science (2007) and Social Studies (2004) documents brought in language or literacy experiences through the suggestion of a written or oral report on the subject matter. Literacy-rich visual text creations are only explicitly suggested in the media literacy section of the Language document, and in The Arts documents (2009). Even so, there is still a missing link between the inclusion of visual modes and the facility in understanding the communicational affordances of such
modes that will allow students to make critical decisions about what and how to communicate.

For example, the Arts document (2009) explicitly states that “students [should] demonstrate their learning in other subjects by using artistic modes of expression” (p.6) and that it is vital for students to “gain an appreciation of the great importance of the arts as sources of enjoyment and as a means of communication” (p.4). On the surface, the suggestions in these documents sound consistent with multimodal pedagogy and a high appreciation for the visual arts as a visual literacy mode (encouraging students to develop facility in a variety of modes). However, in digging deeper into the underlying principles of enacting multimodal pedagogy, it becomes apparent that the necessary elements cited in the literature (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice) are not explicitly, or even implicitly, included in the curriculum documents. Teachers looking to truly adopt a multimodal pedagogy must therefore look elsewhere for resources.

To bring these understanding about multimodal pedagogy back into perspective of the units I described in Chapter Four, I can see that the documents played a major role in telling me what to teach, but less of a role on how to teach it (e.g., Heydon, 2012). Pahl & Rowsell (2005) explain this through their distinction between curriculum: “that is, what is taught, often inscribed in documents and disseminated and formed at national level” and pedagogy – “that is, the way in which the curriculum is interpreted and taught, and the assumptions behind that teaching that guide and shape teachers’ practices” (p.114). The task of how to teach the what inscribed in the curriculum documents was based on my own interpretation of the document wording and my own assumptions about teaching and
learning. My teaching methods and subsequent opportunities awarded to my students (my pedagogy and classroom practice) were gathered from my personal resources and areas of expertise. As a teacher who is artistically inclined and educated in the arts, the use of visual art, drama, and tactile creations were some of the modes that I used to make sense of the curriculum and the ways in which my students could both learn content and express their ideas. Having facility in these modes myself, I was confident teaching the grammar of these modes so that students could gain their own facility and foster their multimodal literacies.

**Teacher Resources: knowledge, interests & confidence**

The literature confirms that there is a relationship between teachers’ confidence and knowledge of visual art and its inclusion in the classroom curriculum (e.g., Albers, 2007). My reflections on the narratives suggest that this might also be true of the inclusion of visual texts in the curriculum as well. Albers (2007) argues that teachers need to know something about the systems of meaning that operate in the visual arts for the purpose of more effective production and interpretation and explicitly states the need for literacy teachers to have basic knowledge in the visual arts. When teachers do not understand the communicative affordances of visual modes, they often choose (knowingly or unknowingly) not to include them in their classrooms. Albers and Cowan (1998) attribute this to fear of the arts.

When reflecting on my narratives I noticed that in my teaching I included the modes with which I had the most confidence, knowledge, and facility. What helped me come to this conclusion was a reflection of the null curriculum, or what I did not include.
For instance, I noticed that music was rarely a part of my classroom. My students had music instruction by our designated music teacher, who was very talented and knowledgeable. While I love listening to music and belting out tunes in the car, I do not have much facility or knowledge of music. Subsequently, I left the instruction of music to this other teacher and it remained an isolated subject area in my classroom curriculum. As a teacher, my knowledge, education, interest, and confidence played a significant role in multimodal literacy inclusion and the types of learning activities I offered my students. That said, the students did, of course, sometimes challenge this when they advocated for a mode of learning that represented their own interests, knowledge, and facility.

**Student Resources: interests, abilities**

My students were another vital resource in the planning and production of the classroom curriculum in the narratives. In the beginning of this chapter, I note the role that student interest and advocacy played in the curricular planning process. For example, as I describe in Chapter Four, my Grade 1 students requested the opportunity to work with plasticine instead of markers. While this may not seem like such a far-fetched tangent to my original plan, it was a change nonetheless that I was originally hesitant to make. While I am confident in drawing, my clay sculpting skills are not as developed. (Part me of may have been afraid of not being able to distinguish my own monster from those of my six-year-old students). I also thought about the mess of plasticine on the desks and carpets of classrooms that were not my own, and how much longer it might take students to complete the task – two issues that Albers & Cowan (1998) present in the literature on factors that inhibit the inclusion of art in classrooms. However, being
flexible to the needs and interests of my students meant that my own plans were never set in stone, but rather evolved as I got to know my students and they became comfortable in sharing their own talents and steering the direction of the classroom curriculum.

**School Resources: teaching colleagues, literacy and art support personnel, & administrative support**

The people who worked within my school also had an effect on the classroom curriculum and the inclusion of multimodal pedagogy within it. Champlin (1997) describes school and culture as “the shared characteristic and features of the environmental conditions, physical space, human relationships and interactions, and pedagogical milieu within the institutional setting called the school” (p.117). In other words, schools and the people inside them become part of a culture that communicates a similar set of values and norms regarding educational matters. In the school I worked in, time was set aside for team planning where grade partners would get together to plan units and activities. Negotiating between two different styles of teaching, learning from each other, teamwork, and compromise were all part of the process. Having similar values and pedagogies assisted in this process.

Having a literacy support teacher and a librarian on staff that were involved with each grade team during planning and implementation stages of curriculum also affected the classroom curriculum. In my school, the librarian was a great resource for identifying central texts and possible literacy-to-subject area connections. The literacy support teacher, on the other hand, was under pressure to focus on reading and writing skills and ensuring that students with difficulty were getting additional support. Rarely did the
literacy support teacher discuss multimodal literacy and other modes of communication for struggling writers, but rather made time to scribe for a student on a written test, or pull them aside for extra reading lessons instead. I heard that other schools in the area had arts coordinators and arts consultants come into the school to discuss multimodal opportunities and the power of the arts. Such assistance might have provoked even great inclusion of modes in the classroom curriculum. Of course, where to allocate support and the type of those supports were administrative decisions.

During the timeframe of the narratives I had several different administrators. In addition to the three different schools I taught at during my practicum teaching, the school I worked at had a series of administration turnovers in a short period of time. I quickly learned that the principal and vice-principal of the school also played a part in the inclusion of multiple modalities within the classroom curriculum. This is a fact that is prevalent in the literature on factors that minimize or dismiss art in schools. For example, Albers & Murphy (2000) cite several studies that indicate the direction set by the school principal regarding curriculum matters has wide consequences.

Examples of the above were not seen directly in the narratives, but behind the scenes I was able to identify that the foci of staff meetings and professional development days helped to set the goals and direction of school focus. These roles can affect the knowledge base of educators (both at the school and pre-service levels) which in turn affects the inclusion of art practices across the curriculum. Albers (2010) notes “non-print-based data collected in [literacy] classrooms [often goes] unanalyzed because of educators’ lack of techniques for analyzing visual texts” (p.158-159). These techniques are something that can be taught on professional development days, but in the schools I
have worked in, had never been brought up or acknowledged by administration. This may be due to the strong emphasis of reading and writing traditional texts that was brought on by what Albers (2010) refers to as “the onslaught of national testing and accountability” (p.159) such as EQAO (Educational Quality and Accountability Office) standardized testing. Eisner (2002) corroborates this notion by theorizing that because the arts cannot be encapsulated in a standardized test, they are given little room in the classroom curriculum.

In addition to helping to set the focus of the school, my narratives shared my experience that principals often visit classrooms and observe what teachers do. Occasionally, principals also evaluate teachers as a board mandated process for accountability and continuous improvement (Ministry of Education, 2010). As suggested in the narratives, in my experiences with the first principal of the school I worked at, I recalled almost daily visits to my classroom and a sense of interest and acceptance of the way I was teaching and the multimodal learning opportunities my students were engaged in. This particular administration also had a love for the arts and was eager to see it integrated in various ways. That first year, I was one of two teachers placed in charge of a drama and art showcase where students would perform in a type of talent show or concert with the theme of a garden (symbolizing growth of students and their achievement). The halls were decorated with student artwork on the theme, and songs, plays, dances, and presentations were taught and practiced in every classroom, (often integrated into some form of assignment so that students found it relevant to their learning and so that time was not lost. My students, for example, were working on poetry and rhythm at the time – learning about the communicational effects of tempo, rhyming sounds, word choices,
The arts were very prevalent that year. In the following two years, under changing administration, these whole-school gatherings did not take place as frequently, my classroom activities were no longer overtly praised by administration, and traditional reading and writing forms of literacy was most often advocated for in staff meetings and professional development days.

Administrative support for the arts comes up in the literature. Wilson (1984) found that, among other factors, a lack of administrative support had a negative impact on art implementation, as did low funding for the arts (which is dependent on administrative forces at levels higher than the school itself). Additionally, Olson (2003) notes that one of the reasons that language arts teachers do not include the visual arts into their curriculum is “the fear that colleagues or administrators will think students are wasting time by not focusing on more ‘serious’ work” (p.39). This, of course, relates back to the underlying misconceptions about the value of visual arts and other visual modes of expression in our education system.

**Physical Resources: classroom space, school layout, & supplies and materials**

Finally, in my reflection on the narratives I noted the importance of physical resources that may have enabled or constrained my implementation of a multimodal pedagogy. As the narratives suggest, in my first years of teaching, I had access to my own classroom. These were large spaces filled with additional desks or tables, computer stations, spaces for painting supplies, and bulletin boards and walls to hang and display
student work. It was easy to paint as I had access to a sink for clean up. If my students
needed additional supplies, the art closet was just down the hallway. Teaching in a
holding school (taking on additional students until a new school was built) meant that
several of my colleagues were in portables outside of the main building. With no sink,
very limited space for additional tables, and difficulty accessing and storing many
supplies, painting, clay or anything too messy was out of the question.

This space issue was something I could relate to while I was toting my cart
around in my most recent year of teaching. The amount of supplies I could carry was
limited, and I was resigned to using some of what was already in the classrooms I was
entering. Space for drying artwork was borrowed from the homeroom teacher and needed
to be negotiated at times. Eisner (2002) validates that that travelling carts can be a barrier
to arts education, and subsequently, visual text production in the classroom.

The effects of space and available art supplies on a teacher’s ability to integrate
the arts into classroom literacy practices are well documented in the literature. Albers &
Murphy (2000) note that a variety of materials, storage space, and a sink are key
essentials for art production in the classroom. In addition to lack of space or art supplies,
one of the most prevalently cited reasons for teachers’ lack of visual art inclusion in the
classroom is that art is too messy and time consuming (e.g. Albers, 2007; Albers &
Cowan, 1998). Albers & Murphy (2000) note that these issues are particularly
overwhelming for many teachers, and that the lack of materials, space, and time “results
in teachers generating art projects that are clean and require few materials, thus
reinforcing the desire to encourage children in art projects that demand only cutting,
pasting, and colouring skills, and severely constraining representational possibilities in
art” (p.124). In order to enact multimodal pedagogy, The New London Group (1996) argues for situated practice and opportunities for transformed practice where skills learned can be transferred to other situations. This is unlikely to occur through simple, quick, neat, and decorative art projects. Albers & Murphy (2000) further discuss other enablers, which include an open space to create art, easy access to supplies in a variety of mediums, and an environment that allows students to feel supported as they collaborate on projects. They also noted the corollary to this, where classroom art materials “were meted out like precious gems and talk was seen as betrayal of the rules” (p.61), had negative consequences on the uses of art in the classroom.

One issue related to art supplies that I identified from the narratives was missing from the literature – that of where many classroom supplies come from. Studies that mention funding issues were vague about what the funding was for – whether the money was intended for art initiatives and personnel or art supplies and resources for classrooms. For example, Albers (2007) mentions the problem of U.S. federal funding for the arts being cut, and Mims & Lankford (1995) report that money is a practical restriction that can impinge greatly on elementary art teachers’ curricula choices (as cited in Erickson, 2004). In the schools were the narratives took place, art supplies were always under discussion by students, teachers, and administration alike. Having most supplies stored in a single art closet, fights broke out between teachers over equal distribution and fairness of use. “I ordered yellow tissue paper and someone else used it up!” was heard once or twice. To avoid being caught up in this drama, I often spent my own personal money on supplies, or asked students to find things from home. While this was not ideal, it was an indication of how much I wanted to include art in my classroom, and how committed I
was to awarding opportunities to my students to explore multiple modes and gain facility in communicating through each of them (especially the visual modes that were so prevalent in the home lives of my students). I could not, however, find anything in the literature about school or personal money usage for classroom supplies.

In relation to classroom space, supplies, and money in my first year of teaching, artworks that included painting or gluing were done at the end of the day so that the pieces could dry over night on student desks before being stacked. In subsequent years, one of the purchases I made was a drying rack for artwork so that painted and glued works could be stacked one inch apart rather than splayed over several workspaces. These racks were prevalent in the Kindergarten classrooms where painting was done almost daily, but nowhere else in the school). This purchase allowed my students to create art at multiple points in the day with little interruption to the workspace for future individual or group activities.

Taking all of these resources into account in the narratives, it is clear that curriculum expectations, student interest, and teacher knowledge and confidence were the primary resources that influenced the multimodal literacy opportunities that were offered in my classroom. Administrative support, classroom layout and available supplies, also played a role, and though they constrained opportunities for the inclusion of visual texts in the classroom curriculum, there were opportunities nonetheless, and these opportunities came with their own affordances and constraints.
Reflecting on the Affordances and Limitations of Visual Modes

The literature on multimodal pedagogy and experiences with visual art offers many benefits to students that include real-life learning, the cultivation of cognitive, social, emotional, and personal skills, and preparation for participation in our increasingly visual contemporary Western society (e.g. Caughlan, 2008; Barrett, 1997; Hanna, 1994; Lee, 2009; Albers, 2007; Nakamura, 2009; Amorino, 2008; Drew & Rankin, 2004; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Eisner, 2002; and others). In the narratives in Chapter Four, I was elated to discover that these benefits were observable and genuine.

Through reflecting on the narratives, I identified three related affordances of meaningful integration with visual art and other visual literacy modes: opportunities for communication, opportunities for the demonstration of knowledge, and opportunities for new experiences and new ways of knowing. As most good things come at a price, the enactment of a multimodal pedagogy was no exception. The narratives in Chapter Four suggests that the limitations of this pedagogy came in the form of challenges to my students and challenges to myself as a teacher.

Opportunities for communication

One of the main goals of this thesis is to highlight visual art as a form of literacy filled with rich communicative opportunities. As noted in Chapter Two, Stevens and Walkup (2001) argue that both the visual arts and language arts are chiefly concerned with communicating. Within semiotic theory and multimodal pedagogy, “Humans communicate not only through written and oral language but, as semioticians suggest, through languages such as: art, music, math, dance, and written/oral language” (Albers,
In the case of each of the units described in Chapter Four, it is clear that the use of art and other visual texts held communicative affordances. Grade 3 students creating community landscapes visually communicated information about the features of the communities. Grade 8 students creating quilts patches used the elements of design as well as knowledge of cultural symbols to communicate meaning associated with a characters life. While creating costumes and sets, students were able to communicate information that, because of the visual cues, did not necessarily need to be spoken to be conveyed. For example, the Grade 1 Wild Things did not have to say “now we are walking through a forest full of trees and animals”. These ideas were communicated through visual modes of expression and the creation of visual texts.

Referring back to Halliday’s (1969) functions of language, my narratives suggest that students used visual modes for different purposes. The community landscapes were mainly representational as they communicated curricular knowledge of urban and rural features. The visual texts also served as imaginative texts where students created new worlds filled with many possibilities, and personal texts where students could express their opinions about the positive and negative aspects of each community type. The quilt projects and accompanying monologues served several other functions. In addition to being representational of curricular and other knowledge, they were imaginative (made up), interactional and regulatory (acting upon the audience to feel and relate to the stories told), heuristic (in that that questioned deeper issues of fairness, childhood, loss, and family), and personal (filled with emotions and obvious pride in the effort taken to complete the multimodal texts).
Similar to these functions of language, Drew & Rankin (2004) contend that art is an extension of thinking and communicating, and that “art making can be especially valuable for young children whose verbal skills are not well developed, [as] the diverse materials offer a variety of ways to communicate” (p.41). When my Grade 1 students drew their monster selves, the visual images were a mode for communicating the appearance and interests of their characters. Rather than writing sentences, which may have limited the amount of information expressed, the creation of visual texts afforded them the creative capacity to include many details in their work and therefore communicate a greater quantity of information.

**Opportunities for demonstration of knowledge**

Connected to the idea of communication is the use of visual texts to demonstrate knowledge related to the curriculum (primarily for assessment purposes on Provincial report cards). According to Albers (2007) visual art can be a semiotic tool for representing and understanding. Goldberg (2012) further notes that limiting knowledge expression to a logo- mathematical manner (as is dominant in most school settings), places many children at a disadvantage, as their creative modes of expression are not being validated. This is in agreement with the Reggio Emilia philosophy stated earlier of “the one hundred languages” of children.

In the case of the units described in Chapter Four, visual art creations were used not only to communicate details and ideas but also to demonstrate content knowledge. This was most evident in the Grade 3 community creations where students created visual
texts to share their understanding of the features of urban and rural communities, which was an explicit curriculum expectation for students to learn. Grade 6 students also created visual texts in the form of illustrated media texts and in their costumes and sets to demonstrate curricular knowledge related to biodiversity. Demonstrations of knowledge related to curricular expectations is most closely related to Halliday’s (1969) function of representation which Bainbridge & Heydon (2012) note to be the most predominant in classroom discourse. They further contend that this is in contrast with Halliday’s belief that the most useful functions of language are heuristic and personal.

Opportunities for new experiences and new ways of knowing

Chapter Two highlighted many of the benefits of learning about, with and through the visual arts. To give a short summary, as a visual mode of expression, the visual arts promote creativity (Hanna, 1994), instill an appreciation for perseverance and deferred gratification (Hanna, 1994), cultivate problem solving skills and complex thinking (Albers, 2007), and allow children to understand and appreciate not only their own ideas and ways of doing things, but to also take interest in the work and perceptions of others (Amorino, 2008; Drew & Rankin, 2004; Heydon & Daly, 2008). As noted above, these affordances were highly observable in the classroom curricula expressed in the narratives.

While working on individual art products, students took care in the planning and decision-making stages (Albers, 2007; Hanna, 1994) and took creative risks that I had not seen them take in more traditional writing response activities (Drew & Rankin, 2004). Through listening to their thinking relayed through oral accounts of their visual texts, I
could see evidence of rich metaphorical thinking (Amorino, 2008), the use of design elements to help them convey messages (Albers, 2007) and a sense of pride in the students’ practices and texts. Through undergoing the creative process, students had a great sense of understanding the work of their peers and an appreciation for the efforts and thought that went into the production of their peer’s work (Caughlan, 2008; Hanna, 1994). In other words, students demonstrated growing facility in the process of making communicational decisions where they could select apt modes for conveying desired messages (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). Additionally, while working collaboratively on other artistic projects, students showed a growing sense of teamwork and cooperation. They highlighted their own talents and sought to find the talents of their peers that would enhance their group presentation.

Most applicable to the units I narrated, Amorino’s (2008) study found that rich, meaningful interaction with the visual arts provide opportunities for students to acquire facility in the areas of original idea formation, flexible thinking, to the use of metaphorical language to represent ideas, transcending traditional thinking and problem solving methods, and reading visual images. This was especially suggested in the Grade 8 quilt project where the metaphors and visual imagery were used in far more creative ways that I could have imagined from this group of students. As noted in Chapter Four, my students created impressive metaphors using visual elements (a red square with burnt edges symbolized both a destructive fire and rage; a fluffed out cotton ball symbolized both a lost teddy bear and the simultaneous loss of childhood).

In terms of the new experiences that were offered to my students through engagement with visual texts, and the overt instruction associated with multimodal
pedagogy, some of my Grade 8 students struggled at first to understand how to communicate through this visual mode. As I mention several times in this study, the traditional mode of writing text is most prevalent in many schools. Gaining facility in visual modes of communication was something new to many students. While some had learned about the elements and principles of design in visual art classes over their previous years of schooling, many had not been given the opportunity to use the arts in deep metaphorical ways, or in ways that communicated meaning beyond the aesthetic or decorative purposes that art has historically held in schools. What has been missing is the critical framing and opportunities for transformed practice that The New London Group (1996) argue is necessary to develop multimodal literacies. While the experiences shared through my narratives do not add any new insights to the literature in this regard, they certainly serve as another piece of the curricular dialogue on multimodal literacy and pedagogy.

Challenges for students

In designing classroom curricula and pedagogy that incorporated multiple modes of communication, I noted that student interest was paramount to my decision-making process. This is consistent with the literature noted earlier (e.g., Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Hanna, 1994; Stein, 2008; Heydon, 2012). One of the challenges with using any modality in my classroom was the variation in student knowledge, interest, and facility. While some of my students had great facility with the curricular modes and media, others were not confident in their work, and some had little interest in or knowledge of the modes. While some students were eager to put on dramatic skits and present their work at the
front of the room, others seemed to be shy and feared the spotlight. Some students worked best independently, other in groups. Some students thrived with the freedom of open-ended creative assignments, while others worked best under direct instruction. It was difficult, if not impossible, to please all of my students all of the time. (I should also note that getting to know my students’ interests and knowledge was a slow task that was much easier with a single class of students than it was in the year I taught over 250 students in 12 different classes).

Looking at the case of the Grade 3 community landscapes, some students really had trouble creating 3D shapes from the nets provided. They were crumpled and did not stack neatly like the solid blocks with which they were used to building. These students may have preferred building a temporary structure out of blocks and describing their community to me orally. Could this have been an option? If so, would my students still have learned the affordances associated with creating this visual text? I think not. The addition of using colours, shapes, lines, and design features that were drawn onto the surfaces of their hand-made 3D shapes offered them opportunities to express more details of their understanding and to share with their classmates the variety of possibilities for the visual texts.

Furthermore, part of enacting a multimodal pedagogy is to allow students to see the multiple functions of language that are accessible to them upon gaining facility in various modes and understanding their communicational affordances. Were my Grade 3 students given enough opportunity to do so? Perhaps not. While I mentioned previously that these students were able to use their community landscapes in mainly representational and imaginative ways, creating this particular visual text did not gain
experience with creating that were interactional, heuristic, instructional, regulatory, or deeply personal.

In prescribing a pre-defined visual text to be created, my Grade 3 students also did not have the opportunity to decide for themselves if this was their most suitable mode to communicate their curricular understanding to me. As mentioned, some students chose to communicate more details orally than visually. Had I have offered more choice, would they have chosen other modes of expression? In my early teaching days, I was still under the impression that fairness meant that everyone completed the same assignment (even if some students needed accommodations or more assistance than others). The more I reflect on the units I created, the more I question this aspect of my pedagogy. Should students be able to select a mode of communication that works for them? Or should they be pushed to new challenges through experiencing new and different modes of expression and creation? Both of these options are shown to be essential in literature, but what balance of the two is not clear. I do not necessarily have answers to all of these questions. However, through the process of critical reflection, these issues transform the way I teach and keep me thinking about the purpose of everything I do in the classroom.

**Challenges for myself as a teacher**

In reflecting on the narratives, I thought about what challenges were present for me during the units described in Chapter Four. My challenges primarily surrounded assessment. Initially, I found it to be a struggle to separate the visual art itself from the communicative mode I was treating it to be. In the community unit, crumpled cubes and
scribbled on houses were an issue to look past as I tried to focus on the features they were symbolizing. The Grade 1’s pile of plasticine with arms and legs and eyes was also not what I was assessing, but rather their ability to step into stories and become the characters they were creating and describing. In contrast, incredibly impressive, stitched with thread, beautifully handcrafted quilt squares automatically seemed to warrant an A+, but the use of elements and artistic ability was not under assessment, the ability to communicate emotion and ideas through this mode was what the programmatic curriculum led me to assess. Assessment, therefore, had to wait until the presentation of the quilted artwork.

Constrains of assessment practices in regards to artwork and visual texts is found in the literature. Both Albers (2007) and Eisner (2002) argue that teachers need to know how to assess artwork for its semiotic representations and communications. While my own assessment practices attempted to separate the form from the content (i.e. look past the artistic elements and read the visual text for the messages conveyed), Eisner (2002) notes that the way something is formed matters. What is said and how something is said are interconnected, and “the way something is said shapes it’s meaning” (p.197). This is something I found difficult to agree with when assessing the work of my students. I was focused on the curricular objectives that were communicated through visual modes of expression, and was therefore looking primarily for evidence of content and understanding, and trying to ignore artistic skill.

Saxton (2012) notes that there are a number of new resources pushing multimodal pedagogies on educators, but relatively few that offered practical suggestions for the implementation and assessment of such practices. Burke & Hammett (2009) note that
there needs to be a radical shift in the way teaching, learning, and consequently, assessment, are conceptualized in light of the new multimodal practices that do not neatly fit into existing standardized methods of assessment in literacy education. According to the authors, one of the directions this shift needs to take is in seeing assessment from a process- rather than product-oriented framework (as cited in Saxton, 2012).

Eisner (2002) notes the issues associated with assessing visual texts are exacerbated by the way that teachers are taught to plan curriculum based on the intended outcomes stated in the curriculum documents, as the arts encourage improvisation and a personal rendering of ideas that do not lend themselves well to the kind of predictability inherent in this approach to curriculum. Goldberg (2012) agrees with Eisner’s (2002) notion that traditional assessment measures do not fit neatly in with the arts, but argues that “viewing the arts as an assessment tool may broaden the methods available to [teachers] as well as challenge some traditional notions of what constitutes a lower- or higher-functioning student” (p.199). (This was evident for me as students were able to communicate additional information in visual forms that would not have been demonstrated in purely written forms of communication). She further notes that the concept of assessment fits very well with art productions as the process of creation requires continuous assessment, feedback, and self-reflection (such as when artists create multiple sketches, figuring out what to add, remove, or change before moving to the canvas).

The issue that is still unclear is how visual texts can be assessed. Eisner (2002) argues that if conventional standards of assessment are not applied to the arts, “the field might risk losing even the marginalized position it now employs”; however, if these
conventional standards are applied to the arts, in the name of validity and reliability, “doing so might undermine the distinctive values the field seeks to achieve” (p.5). In reviewing my narratives, I noticed that I touched on my assessment practices, but did not go into detail about my process and the subsequent grades awarded to my students that correlated with my perception of their level of understanding of the curricular agenda. In reviewing several papers about multimodal literacy and visual art in the literacy classroom (about 20 articles that were read over the course of my Master’s degree, but not cited in this thesis), I noticed that examples of visual literacy activities are abundant, as are the explanations on the benefits and affordances of these activities, but the assessment piece is missing from much of the literature.

Another challenge for me was the organization of my time. In my experience, the time and energy that went into planning each of these units was not small. I often asked myself if the rate I was going, and the hours I was putting into my unit planning, was going to be sustainable throughout my teaching career. Once I had children of my own, my nights would no longer be my own. Many of my colleagues, with or without families, would not have put in the hours that I had. Were these hours necessary? Could I have created multi-component, multimodal, and complex units in less time? I am sure the answer is yes, as the more years of teaching experience I gained, the more efficient I became at using my time. I learned about my students more quickly, asked for their input more often, co-created and negotiated rubrics and projects with my students, and consequently, spent more of my home hours devoted to my family and myself. Through the process of reflecting on my narratives and the literature, I have gained a greater understanding of the essential components of a multimodal pedagogy and will be able to
use this knowledge in my future practice to create learning opportunities for students that engage them in developing multimodal literacy.

While lack of classroom time and scheduling is noted to be an issue in the literature (e.g. Albers & Cowan, 1998; and others), there is little research on the teacher experience of time spent planning curricular experiences. This is a conversation that my study lends itself toward and that needs to be explored. What I can gather from observing many different colleagues over the years is that the time spent on curricular decisions and preparation varies greatly. What I do not know are the factors that contribute to the amount of time spent, the effects on teachers themselves, and if there is any correlation between time spent on planning multimodal literacy opportunities and the affordances that are awarded to the students who are participants of such opportunities.

Along a similar note, I had to ask myself if I was always going to be so eager to spend my own money on supplies for my classroom. Should we, as teachers, have to do this? The Ontario curriculum guides state that it is the responsibility of the school principal to ensure that “that the appropriate resources are made available for teachers and students” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.7). What exactly is deemed appropriate to “ensure that the Ontario curriculum is being properly implemented in all classrooms through the use of a variety of instructional approaches” (p.7) is left vague and unanswered. To different teachers and administrators, this might mean different things. However, with the increased presence of multimodal pedagogy slowly being adopted by schools, materials for each mode of learning and communication should ideally be provided. (This, of course, drudges up questions of funding and fund allocation, and the even deeper questions of the purpose of education – which are both well beyond the
scope of this study). I have already stated that there was little in the literature that specifically identifies the extent of the problem related to funding of art materials.

Lastly, one of the challenges I experienced as a teacher was the balance between the use of visual texts and the explicit teaching of artistic and dramatic elements that might aid in the students’ acquisition of facility with multiple modes of making meaning. Albers (2007) emphasizes the “need [for educators] to study the discipline of art” in order to encourage complex literacy learning rich in visual modes of communication and learning” (p.xv). The literature notes that the same can be said for students (e.g., The New London Group, 1996). If teachers expect students to engage in complex literacy learning rich in visual modes of communication, students need explicit instruction and opportunities to explore how to use this visual mode. A certain amount of art instruction and exploration time is necessary for students to be able to make effective decisions regarding the elements they wish to include in their visual texts. The literature clearly states that these elements are important, but the challenge of knowing how much explicit instruction is required, versus how much exploration to offer, is something that is missing in the literature. This may be due to the messiness of education and the varied contextual factors of each classroom – no two of which are exactly alike.

**Discussing my Contribution to Autoethnography**

**Revisiting Why Stories Need to be Told**

As noted in Chapter three, stories are an important vehicle to reflection and renewed understanding of curricular practices in the working lives of teachers. Graham (2005) argues that the stories that receive the greatest critical attention are the written
accounts of teaching, ‘frozen texts’ constructed in particular ways and for specific purposes by human acts of intention” (p.196). As an example of a ‘frozen text’, my own stories of teaching multimodal literacy are my way to communicate what I have learned about teaching and about myself. Stories “have a vital role to play helping us to understand the curriculum, the practices of teachers, the processes of learning, and the matter of practicing how to teach.

Jewitt (2008) points out that although educational systems are now recognizing the importance of multimodality (Canada included), the implications of this work on teacher education and curriculum policy are still emerging. Research within multimodal literacy “provides pedagogical models, principles, and strategies for the classroom. Teachers and policy makers can reflect on, adopt, and adapt these towards developing situated pedagogic approaches that connect with contemporary multimodal literacy practice” (p.261). Research in the area of multimodal pedagogy – specifically on what this practice looks like in the varied contexts of Ontario’s diverse classrooms – is therefore a potentially important step in bridging the gap between what we, as teachers, know we should do to prepare our students to be multimodally literate, and knowing how to accomplish this goal. It is my intention that the stories I have told contribute to the growing body of accounts of pedagogy in action.

**Implications for multimodal pedagogy**

Multimodal pedagogy is a relatively new innovation in the history of literacy education. As I have gestured towards, it is a vast practice and can look very different in each classroom. Telling stories of multimodal pedagogy adds to the growing body of research in this area to assist in describing this phenomenon. Spry (2001) notes,
“autoethnographic writing resists Grand Theorizing and the façade of objective research that … searches for singular truth” (p.188). Likewise, multimodal pedagogy, and pedagogy in general, has no singular truth. Rather than attempting to define pedagogy neatly, autoethnographic accounts such as this one add to the growing understanding of pedagogy and the real-life messiness of education.

Even though multimodal pedagogy can be manifest in a plethora of educational activities, the literature demonstrates the growing understanding of the common elements that are necessary for students to develop multimodal literacy. For example, multimodal pedagogies should include: opportunities for situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (The New London Group, 1996); opportunities to use language for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational functions (Halliday, 1969); and opportunities for increased decision making about the modes available through which to effectively communicate (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). My narrative account offers an example of how these elements can be embodied within elementary curriculum experiences.

While this account is not a moving image of pedagogy in action, it serves a living, breathing entity of a classroom. Through reading my accounts and seeing frozen images of my students at work, these stories act as a type of demonstration classroom. While my stories and my visual literacy opportunities are not a complete picture of how to design multimodal literacy activities rich in the creation of visual texts, they are a window into one possible view of what multimodality can look like, what resources may be required, and what affordances and limitations are inherent in such an undertaking. It is my intention that through reading my autoethnographic account, educational practitioners can
metaphorically step into my classroom, take a look around, and be inspired to take action in their own classrooms and schools.

**Limits of this Study & Implications for Further Study**

The limitation of any study consisting of a single voice is that one account cannot be used to generalize a theory. Rather, this study can be used to contribute to a growing understanding of multimodal pedagogy and visual texts in elementary classroom curricula through transferability, authenticity, and resonance.

In addition, as with any autoethnographic narrative, the tendency for bias is prevalent. As a subjective piece of inquiry, this bias is unavoidable. I have tried to share my stories in as honest a way as possible, but it is hard to hide the fact that I am proud of the units I have created and of the work my students have accomplished. Part of painting such a rosy picture was to entice other practitioners to adopt a multimodal pedagogy and to incorporate more visual literacy opportunities in their own classrooms. In the efforts of staying true to the events, I have also included the challenges I have faced during planning and implementing my units, and by identifying areas where my multimodal practice was in need of improvement (such as through the inclusion of modes outside my comfort zone like music and dance, and through more conscious commitment to Halliday’s functions of language and The New London Groups elements of multimodal pedagogy).

As this account is only one person’s story – my own – more stories need to be told to capture a more detailed understanding of multimodal pedagogy and visual
literacy. Referring to autoethnographic accounts, Mykhalovskiy (1996) argues that “to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience” (cited in Sparkes, 2002, p.217). While some might argue that a single voice is inadequate to learn from, this study holds a different aim: to add to the growing number of single voices describing educational pedagogy so that a collective voice of varied experience (reflective of the diversity that exists in teaching) can be heard. In essence, each teacher has a story to tell, and these stories, one-by-one, can amass to a powerful body of work that will enable education to progress in new and innovative directions.

In addition to further action on the part of other educational practitioners to illuminate what multimodal pedagogy looks like, further study needs to be conducted on the resources that enable the enactment of visual literacy and other multimodal opportunities, as well as on the assessment practices of visual texts as they fit into literacy education. The limited number of schools and classrooms I have experienced has not given me a detailed enough picture of the state of resources and practices across all elementary schools in Ontario. Rather, I have been given a snapshot of the resource allocation, available materials, and classroom configurations and practices at a few elementary schools. The possibilities open to multimodal literacy opportunities would be expanded if school planners were aware of how classroom spatial configurations influence curricular production (such as a lack of sink resulting in limited painting opportunities offered), how school resources impact classroom activities (sewing of quilts, for example, was an option only for those students with access to a machine at home), and how the wording of curriculum documents encourages or discourages particular classroom curricular decisions and assessment practices (such as the explicit
instruction leading teachers to conduct rich multimodal tasks with their students to meet expectations and to foster multimodal literacy skills). It is in these areas that more research is needed to foster a greater understanding of multimodal pedagogy and the various entities that encourage the creation and use of visual modes of learning in elementary classrooms.

**Other Lessons Learned**

To conclude, I would like to reflect on the process of writing an autoethnographic account. First and foremost, I have to acknowledge how much I have learned from the beginning of this project until the final drafts of this work. In the introductory chapter I alluded to the fact that while reflecting on my own pedagogy of multimodal literacy instruction, I have had to refine and redefine my understanding of what it was I was even reflecting on in the first place. This project started as a testament to visual art, and slowly morphed into an appreciation of not only all visual modes of expression, but a deep respect for how different modes can interact and enhance the messages being communicated – each bringing their own affordances to the conversation. My understanding of the multimodal pedagogy that is necessary to foster multimodal literacy in my students has also deepened as a result of this academic undertaking.

In addition to my learning during the timespan of my Master’s of Education, I have been once again amazed with the power of retroactive reflection, and at what can be learned when past experiences are looked at through new lenses and with renewed intentions. I am confident that there were many more factors that influenced the multimodal learning opportunities offered to my students than were noted in this thesis.
Some of my thoughts were written in journal entries and in the margins of lesson plans, and these were easy to look back on and report with confidence. Others were never recorded, and I was left up to the devices of my own memory. However, with the reflexive lens of multimodal pedagogy and a great deal of newly attained knowledge, I was able to see my curricular decisions in a new light and understand what had been done in my classroom, the resources I relied upon, and the affordances and limitations of my teaching practice.

Granger (2011) notes that “in reading and writing about and reflecting on individual experience, we might expose possibilities previously unconsidered, ultimately benefitting both education (the social) and the individual participant in it (the psyche)” (pp.33-34). Through the process of reflecting on my own practice, I can see this to be true.

Sharing this new understanding through narrative has been a very therapeutic process. Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) note that “writing personal stories can be therapeutic for authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (section 4.2, para 1). In other words, “I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something I didn’t know before I wrote it” (Ellis, 2004, p.170). In doing so, as an educator I sought to improve and better understand my role in curriculum, encourage responsibility and agency in my students, and raise consciousness and promote cultural change. Discovering something about oneself (and the collective culture of others in similar circumstances) can be very enlightening, and it has the power to change both the way one views oneself and the future decisions one makes. This has certainly been proven true for me.
My hopes for this thesis are summed up in the words of Ellis (1997) who wrote,

[I can only hope that my story] permitted readers to move back and forth between being in my story and being in theirs...I wanted readers to feel that in describing my experiences, I had penetrated their heads and hearts ... I invited readers into the house of my past, hoping that the threshold crossed would lead them into their own homes. (p.131)

If I succeed in this goal with at least one person, if at least one conversation is started, if at least one more story starts to be told, then I will consider this work a success.

A Post-Narrative: It All Comes Down To This

The process of writing this thesis has been a journey, to say the least. My research on this project began with a passion for the visual arts and asked ‘what benefits does art have in education?’. The question soon morphed into ‘how are the arts a part of multimodal literacy?’. My thesis then took on aims of inciting conversation and adding to the growing body of literature and discussion surrounding what multimodal pedagogy looks like and how it can be enacted in the elementary classroom. The question left to be answered is ‘why have I adopted a multimodal pedagogy?’.

The answer goes far beyond the research that describes benefits of engaging with the arts, and even beyond the research highlighting the affordances of including visual modes in the classroom. The answer comes from somewhere much more personal, as the question can be simplified to ‘why do I teach?’. I teach because I want to inspire. I teach because I want to instill a love for learning and a curiosity that can never be fully satiated. I teach because I want to make learning enjoyable, and have students understand the application of what they do in the classroom to their lives outside of the four walls of the school. I teach because I want to learn. Adopting a multimodal pedagogy is one of the ways that I achieve these goals. (Adopting a pedagogy of hands-on learning opportunities is another, as is enacting a pedagogy of community and collaboration. Pedagogies are not exclusive and adopting one does not define me as a teacher completely).
Reflecting on Multimodal Pedagogy

With regards to the stories recollected in this study, I constantly asked myself why I included art and other visual modes of literacy in the classroom. What was the purpose to using art and creating visual texts? What was I going to either get across to students, or get out of my students, through this mode that I may not be able to through other modes? In the case of the quilt production, the visual mode allowed for the cultivation of deeper metaphors. In the case of the community landscapes, the visual creation allowed me to gain an increased amount of details regarding my students’ understanding of the social studies content. In the case of the Wild Things, the addition of visuals assisted my younger students to more fully step into a story and take on the role of a character. Were some of these tasks difficult for some students? Yes. Is challenging students a bad thing? Not if the goal is attainable and pushes students to learn new things and try new methods of expression (e.g., Lev Vygotsky’s theory on the zone of proximal development).

I am reminded of a quote I once read by Winterson: “And in a moment of passing [I] saw a painting that had more power to stop me than I had power to walk on” (Quoted in Albers, 2007, p.3). I have personally experienced this reaction to works of art – both in museums and on the street. I have experienced the same physical reaction to the question ‘why am I doing this?’. This thesis has definitely stopped me in my tracks on more than one occasion. I hope that for you, my reader, it has at least made you pause for a brief moment to reflect on literacy education and why we teach the way we do.

I think that the desire to ask the question ‘why?’ is a vital human instinct that should not be overlooked. These ‘why’ questions have the potential to keep us up at night, and stop us in our tracks. The answers to these ‘why’ questions are what spark fires in conversations, what drives innovation and change, what keeps us accountable for the decisions we make. In my opinion, the ‘why’ can often be more important than the ‘how’.

What I have learned throughout this process is the importance of understanding the reasons behind the decisions that we, as educators, make in the classroom. What drives us? What are the rewards and consequences of our actions? What can we learn from reflecting on our practice, and sharing those reflections with others? The answers to these questions have the power to move education in new and innovative directions. We just have to be ready to act once the answers appear.
REFERENCES


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