Potentials of the Multiliteracies Pedagogy for Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs): A Review of the Literature

Shakina Rajendram
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto

This article presents the results of a review of published literature on the use of the multiliteracies pedagogy to teach English Language Learners (ELLs). A total of 12 studies were selected for the literature review based on three inclusion criteria: (1) studies using the multiliteracies framework or other aspects of the multiliteracies pedagogy such as multimodality; (2) studies with ELL participants; and (3) studies conducted within the last 10 years. Through a detailed review and analysis of these studies, five emerging themes related to the potential benefits of the multiliteracies approach were identified and discussed in this article: (i) student agency and ownership of learning; (ii) language and literacy development; (iii) affirmation of students’ languages, cultures and identities; (iv) student engagement and collaboration; and (v) critical literacy.

Keywords: multiliteracies, new literacies, multimodal, English language learners

Introduction

In recent years, educators, researchers, policymakers and other educational stakeholders have been engaged in an ongoing dialogue about the need for students to develop a broad repertoire of literacy practices that are not confined to traditional views of literacy and traditional approaches of literacy instruction. This dialogue has been substantially informed by the New London Group’s (NLG) multiliteracies...
pedagogy. Introduced in 1996, this pedagogy was grounded in two main ideas: (i) the expanding variety of text forms related to the expansion of mass media, multimedia and the Internet, and (ii) the increasing importance of linguistic and cultural diversity (New London Group, 2000). The multiliteracies pedagogy aims to create “learning environments in which the blackboard, textbook, exercise book and test are augmented and at times replaced by digital technologies” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005, p. vi). This pedagogy recognizes that not every learner brings the same lifeworld experiences, linguistic ability, sociocultural resources, and interests to their learning, and it supports a multimodal approach where learners move between linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial modes of meaning-making and learning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005).

Cope and Kalantzis emphasize that the critical point of the multiliteracies pedagogy is not the digital technologies and other modalities themselves, but how they are used to promote the “pedagogical acts” or “knowledge processes” of experiencing, conceptualizing, analysing and applying (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 184). These four knowledge processes represent a reframing of the four components of the multiliteracies pedagogy: (i) situated practice; (ii) overt instruction; (iii) critical framing; and (iv) transformed practice. Situated practice is about providing meaningful experiences for students to participate in their own learning by building on their lived experiences (New London Group, 1996). Overt instruction occurs when the teacher provides active intervention and scaffolding to help their students gain conscious understanding and control of their learning. Critical framing helps students to analyze what they are learning from a critical perspective in relation to the “historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice” (New London Group, 1996, p.86). Transformed practice occurs when students apply what they have learned in new contexts by transforming existing meanings to design new meanings (Mills, 2006). In the multiliteracies pedagogy, students usually engage in the transformed practice stage by designing multimodal texts. Multimodal texts are texts that combine two or more communication modes (e.g., print, image, music, film, etc.) or semiotic systems (e.g. linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial) to enhance or transform the meaning of a text (Anstey & Bull, 2010).

The multiliteracies pedagogy has received significant attention in international literacy research (Mills, 2009). Cummins and Early’s (2011) well-known work on the use of identity texts in multilingual schools was based largely on the multiliteracies project: From Literacy to Multiliteracies: Designing Learning Environments for Knowledge Generation within the New Economy. This multiliteracies project provided the inspiration for Cummins and Early’s study on identity texts, and the findings of the project supported the benefits of multimodal identity text creation in a wide range of contexts including Canada, Spain, Uganda, Greece, Mexico, and Burkina Faso. Lotherington’s (2012) book, Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, is a collection of case studies that document the efforts of various public school teachers in Toronto, Canada to engage children in multimodal collaborative story-telling activities based on the multiliteracies pedagogy. The use of this pedagogy helped to create the space for children’s voices and the languages of the community to be recognized in the English-medium classroom. Although studies such as Cummins and Early’s (2011) and Lotherington’s (2011) have called for the increased use of new forms of literacy practices (e.g. multimodal literacies) among multilingual learners, Yi (2014) writes that there is still a lack of awareness among practitioners on the potential benefits of engaging English Language Learners (ELLs) in multiliteracies-based language
teaching pedagogies. This paper attempts to address this concern by highlighting the benefits of engaging ELLs in the multiliteracies pedagogy, based on a review of studies that have been conducted among ELL participants or immigrant students in various countries and educational levels. For the purpose of this literature review, ELL refers to students learning English as an additional language at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. I hope that the findings of this literature review will inform teachers about the advantages of integrating the multiliteracies pedagogy into their instructional repertoire to support the needs of English learners in their classrooms.

Search Procedures

In order to gain an understanding of the theoretical background of the multiliteracies pedagogy, I read a number of key books and seminal readings such as New London Group’s (1996) A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures and Kalantzis and Cope’s (2005) Learning by Design. Following this, I conducted a systematic search of bibliographic resources and databases such as Scholars Portal, Google Scholar and Proquest to find relevant studies that would inform my research. I used different combinations of these search terms: multiliteracies, multimodality, ELL literacy, second language education. Using the same search terms, I also conducted electronic searches of thesis databases such as T-Space, and educational journals including the Canadian Journal of Education, Journal of Language, Identity & Education, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Language and Education, Language and Literacy, L2 Journal, TESL Canada, TESOL Journal and so on. I selected 12 studies for this literature review based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) studies using the multiliteracies framework or other aspects of the multiliteracies pedagogy such as multimodality; (2) studies with ELL participants; and (3) studies conducted within the last 10 years. The limited number of studies that met these criteria points to Yi’s (2014) argument that there is currently a lack of current studies on multiliteracies practices among ELLs. However, despite the small number of studies included in this review, they are quite varied in terms of their research questions, setting, and use of the multiliteracies pedagogy. A detailed overview of the 12 studies is presented in the appendix. Through a detailed review and analysis of these studies, I was able to identify emerging themes related to the potentials and challenges of the multiliteracies approach. This paper presents these key themes with the goal of providing readers with a better understanding of how the multiliteracies pedagogy can be used to support the needs of ELLs. Five specific areas will be examined in this paper: (i) student agency and ownership of learning; (ii) language and literacy development; (iii) affirmation of students’ languages, cultures and identities; (iv) student engagement and collaboration; and (v) critical literacy. After discussing these five themes, I will conclude by examining the challenges in implementing the multiliteracies pedagogy (e.g., the lack of appropriate assessment tools) and proposing future directions for research.

Emerging Themes

Student agency and ownership of learning

Kalantzis and Cope (2008) emphasize that the multiliteracies pedagogy acknowledges the role of student agency in the meaning-making process and views learners as active
designers of meaning, as opposed to traditional views of literacy which position learners as passive receivers of information. Several studies examining the use of the multiliteracies pedagogy in ELL classrooms have found Kalantzis and Cope’s (2008) claim to be well-grounded. According to Hepple, Sockhill, Tan and Alford (2014), unlike deficit approaches to ELL literacy, the multiliteracies pedagogy highlights the “transformative effects of an approach to literacy based on student-led, generative, joint activities supported by strategic assistance, rather than the traditional “remediation” practices of preplanned, scripted, generic practice of basic skills” (p. 227). Hepple et al. (2014) conducted their study in a specialist language high school in Brisbane, Australia which provided intensive English language and settlement services to 300 newly arrived immigrant and refugee students. Hepple et al. (2014) engaged a post-beginner class in the school in a multiliteracies-based project that required them to create multimodal claymation (the stop-action filming of clay figures) texts around the theme of Jurassic Park. Hepple et al. (2014) found that the students exercised their agency and took ownership of the project by leading the different stages of production, and negotiating choices in the storyline and composition to achieve their own personalized and particular version of the text. Hepple et al. (2014) also observed that using the multiliteracies pedagogy resulted in a “construction of knowledge and understanding in which all class members play an active role” (Wallace, 2001, p. 214, as cited in Hepple et al., 2014).

Similarly, Ntelioglou (2012) found in her ethnographic research examining the experiences of ELLs in three drama classrooms that students become active generators of their own knowledge and active designers of meaning by critically reading and writing texts through an embodied drama pedagogy. Participation in this multiliteracies-based drama pedagogy required students to not just passively read texts, as commonly done in many traditional language classrooms, but to actively engage in the collective creation of the story which culminated in the drama. Ntelioglou (2012) emphasizes that this provided students with a platform to integrate their own words, ideas, interests, and perspectives into their multimodal writing, and as their sense of writing developed, so did their “sense of possibility as an active agent” in their own learning and life (p. 153).

In Hung, Chiu and Yeh’s (2013) study, which focused on Taiwanese university students’ multimodal literacy in relation to their design of presentation slides, learners were found to exercise their agency by transferring their learning about multimodal text design to their subsequent presentations, with the help of rubric-based assessment feedback from their instructors. Similarly, Park (2012) found that ELLs demonstrated a high degree of ownership of learning through self-regulated and hybrid learning processes in technology-based multiliteracies environments. While investigating fourth-grade and fifth-grade ELLs’ literacy experiences and use of strategies when reading computer-based texts, Park (2012) writes that the ELLs demonstrated agency and took ownership of their learning in remarkable ways. For example, they were able to make independent choices to access particular websites when searching for information to complete the tasks that they were assigned. Furthermore, they were able to dialogue with online texts and choose ones that were most relevant to their tasks. Park (2012) believes that the students felt a greater sense of agency and control because they were able to see immediate results from the choices they made as readers, and this facilitated learner autonomy.
Language and literacy development

The multiliteracies pedagogy stresses the need for language and literacy education to take into account multimodal forms of expression and learning, because “all of our everyday representational experience is intrinsically multimodal” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 21). The teachers in Ntelioglou (2012)’s study successfully integrated the multimodal expression of meaning through drama with language and literacy outcomes. Ntelioglou (2012) found that the drama pedagogy was a very strategic and valuable means of language and literacy learning for ELLs because it afforded them the opportunity to explore the specifics of reading, writing, listening and speaking, while expanding this connection to multiple modes of meaning-making through drama. The verbal and non-verbal modes of communication offered by drama extended the language learning possibilities beyond the constraints of the regular literacy curriculum. For students who “have trouble reading” or “get stuck with pen and paper”, drama offered an entry point to language and literacy learning unavailable in traditional classrooms (Ntelioglou, 2012, p. 124).

The teachers in Hepple et al.’s (2014) study also used the multiliteracies pedagogy as a way to meet their students’ diverse language and literacy needs within the constraints of their teaching context. Their post-beginner group consisted of 11 ELLs from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including first language speakers of Kunama, Swahili, Liberian English, Kirundi, Arabic, Farsi, and Korean. Most of them had experienced the majority of their schooling in refugee camps where they received minimal literacy instruction in their first language or any other language. Thus, one of the greatest challenges for them was having to learn a new language as well as content knowledge in discipline specific areas. According to Hepple et al. (2014), one of the strengths of the multiliteracies pedagogy was that it allowed the students to integrate language learning with content-based learning. The claymation texts that students produced in the project used a “synaesthetic” or “mode-shifting” approach which combined different modes to represent meaning in drawing, photographs of clay figures, or captions. Developing students’ synaesthetic abilities allowed them to engage effectively in disciplinary content and tasks across the curriculum. At the same time, each stage of the claymation project offered students significant language development opportunities. For example, through the writing of the dialogue, students learned how to use language appropriate to the characters, gained awareness of dialogue structure, began to understand the balance of narration and direct speech, and learned how to use complex causes and a range of verb tenses. These were significant opportunities for them to learn how to manipulate language for literacy outcomes.

In a similar way, Angay-Crowder, Choi and Yi’s (2013) study demonstrated that multiliteracies practices can lead to significant literacy outcomes for second language learners. Angay-Crowder et al. (2013) engaged 12 adolescent multilingual students in a digital storytelling project based on the four components of the multiliteracies pedagogy. Angay-Crowder et al. (2013) found that both the conventional print-based and computer-based multimodal composing activities used in the project helped students expand their literacy repertoires and means of expression. During the situated practice and overt instruction components of the project, students learned how to compose free writing texts and structured narratives. They were also encouraged to think about how non-linguistic elements contributed to the overall meaning of their texts, and to transfer their knowledge of both linguistic
and nonlinguistic modes of communication into the digital storytelling task. An important finding of Angay-Crowder et al.’s (2013) study was that although students’ narratives at first lacked a clear sense of audience or purpose, when they were encouraged to integrate their home and community-based languages and discourses into their stories, the stories became more meaningful and incorporated a wider range of literacy abilities.

**Affirmation of students’ languages, cultures & identities**

By foregrounding topics that can be related to students’ own experiences, the multiliteracies pedagogy promotes learning that recognizes students’ own knowledge, values their linguistic and cultural resources, and affirms students’ identities (Chun, 2009). Giampapa’s (2010) ethnographic research studied how a Grade 4 teacher developed a multiliteracies pedagogy by drawing on her own and her students’ identities, and linguistic and cultural resources to create learning opportunities for all of her students. The demographic landscape of the classroom in Giampapa’s (2010) study included new immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and China. These students brought their diverse languages, cultures, religions, and varying degrees of English language skills into the classroom. During Giampapa’s (2010) interviews with the students, they acknowledged the importance of their first languages in forging relationships with their family members and friends from their community. However, these narratives were juxtaposed with their feelings of embarrassment and fear about being teased or bullied for speaking in their home languages at school. The teacher attempted to help the students overcome these feelings by making the classroom “a space that affirmed student identities and challenged the mainstream curriculum” (p. 420). She was able to do this by making alternative pedagogical choices and introducing a variety of multiliteracies strategies such as the creation of multimodal poetry around issues of identity, language, race, and difference. These multiliterate practices became entry points for deeper discussions that allowed students to express their identities in a positive and affirming light.

Likewise, Danzak’s (2011) research discovered that the multiliteracies pedagogy created a space for ELLs to acknowledge their experiences and solidify their identities. Danzak’s (2011) study is a report of the Graphic Journeys project, a multimedia literacy project in which 32 ELLs in Grades 6-8 researched their families’ immigration stories and depicted them as graphic (comic) stories. Throughout the project, the students expressed themselves through various linguistic modalities and engaged in the multiliteracies components to learn about English, writing, technology, and their individual and family identities. The creation and publication of the graphic stories allowed the students to share their stories with their friends, families, and members of their school and local community. The process of sharing these stories became a means for them to affirm and reaffirm their individual and group identities. Chun (2009) also advocates the use of graphic novels as a way for students to narrate the stories of the struggles their families faced in leaving their home countries, the discrimination and prejudice they may have encountered in their new countries, and how they overcame these problems and adapted to a new environment. Chun’s (2009) study examined the use of graphic novels as a way of incorporating and expanding the multiliteracies pedagogy in classrooms with ELL students. Chun (2009) found that the activity of narrative storytelling through the creation of graphic novels became a way for students to find “their own voices to tell their life stories that need to be told and heard in the classroom and beyond” (p. 148).
The students interviewed in Ntelioglou’s (2012) study also expressed their happiness at being invited to share stories from their own language and culture through the multiliteracies pedagogy. Ntelioglou (2012) asserts that in second language classrooms, so much attention is devoted to learning the new language that students’ home languages and cultures are rarely utilized as relevant resources. The multiliteracies pedagogy which prioritizes students’ linguistic and cultural diversity is powerful for multilingual students as it allows them to reflect on and to recreate their multicultural and multilingual lives, thereby validating and affirming their identities (Skinner & Hagood, 2008).

**Student engagement and collaboration**

The multiliteracies pedagogy envisages teachers as facilitators in classrooms that are rich with student-mediated collaborative learning activities (McClay, 2006). In Vinogradova, Linville and Bickel’s (2011) study exploring the power of ELLs’ digital stories in the context of a multiliteracies and inclusive pedagogy, the teacher acted as a “facilitator of a classroom community of practice” in which students were engaged in collaborative learning anchored in their collective knowledge and cultural life experiences (p. 189). Examples of collaborative learning and negotiation could be seen at each stage of the digital story production in this study. For example, during the peer review of an initial narrative about family, a student from Cameroon and a student from South Korea were seen having a lengthy discussion about what each of them felt should be included in the narrative. This collaborative discussion culminated in the creation of a negotiated story which combined aspects of both their cultural perspectives about family. Vinogradova et al. (2011) also reported that the ELLs’ journal entries illustrated their emotional engagement throughout the project as they linked aspects of the digital storytelling process to their experiences.

The emotional engagement, collaboration and negotiation reported by the ELLs in Vinogradova et al.’s (2011) research were also important outcomes of Ntelioglou’s (2012) study. At the outset of Ntelioglou’s (2012) project, there was conflict between the group members and many of them confessed that it was challenging for them to try to incorporate all the group members’ ideas into their drama performances. However, this conflict opened up the space for them to discover ways to navigate their differences and come to an agreement. They gained an appreciation of the multiple viewpoints and experiences of their group members, and built a strong sense of solidarity among themselves. Towards the end of the study, all of the students Ntelioglou (2012) interviewed referred to their drama project as a “space they felt connected to because of the friendships they have developed through extensive dialogue and sharing of what matters to them most” (p. 281). Sophie, one of the ELLs in the study, even described the project as a refuge from her social isolation in the world outside the classroom.

Many of the refugee students in Hepple et al.’s (2014) study felt socially isolated because they had suffered trauma and had limited formal education prior to enrolling in their new school, Milpera High. Therefore, they initially showed very little engagement in learning. The students’ low levels of English language proficiency seemed to inhibit them from engaging fully with the mainstream curriculum. However, when they were given the opportunity to initiate the claymation project and direct every stage of the claymation process themselves, Hepple et al. (2014) observed that they showed high levels of engagement and longer sustained periods of attention to the task. The collaborative nature of the project allowed
students to take up different roles while working together in a student-initiated learning environment. Each student was able to offer their own expertise (e.g. shaping the clay models, taking photographs, writing dialogues) to the group, and “contributing their knowledge and skills to the group enterprise helped empower and engage students who might otherwise be marginalized in educational processes” (Hepple et al., 2014, p. 227).

Critical literacy

Within the ELL classroom, critical literacy is an essential element in a learner’s journey towards acquiring the academic literacy necessary to be successful in school (Cummins, 2001). According to Van Sluys (2005), “critical literacy is social: disrupting the status quo, questioning, studying taken-for-granted assumptions, acting for change. It is reading the world and taking action” (p. 9). The multiliteracies pedagogy accounts for the development of critical literacy in learners through its critical framing and transformed practice components. The process of designing multimodal texts in the multiliteracies pedagogy should allow students to “critically analyse and interpret the social and cultural context and the political, ideological, and value-centred purposes of texts” (Mills, 2006, p.1). However, a criticism of the multiliteracies pedagogy is that it does not always lead to learners being able to respond to texts critically. When teachers conduct multimodal redesign activities (e.g., students performing a drama based on a story), learners are often guided into pre-scripted responses that display more surface-level content understanding of the texts rather than critical thinking about their social, political and cultural issues and implications. Making similar observations, Lankshear, Snyder and Green (2000, as cited in Neville, 2010) refer to teachers’ use new technologies or methods to fit their traditional and familiar approaches to literacy teaching and learning – for example, children typing up a story on the computer rather than rewriting their final draft – as the “old wine in new bottles” or “digital makeover” syndrome (p. 239).

Ntelioglou’s (2012) study presents some evidence that corroborates Neville’s (2000) claim. Although the teacher in Ntelioglou’s (2012) study recognized the importance of critical literacy, she did not engage them in much critical discussion before or after each of their drama performances because of the restrictions of the structured curriculum, the increased class sizes, and the short time frame allocated to the subject. However, observing students’ drama performances, Ntelioglou (2012) noted that they did, of their own initiative, engage in critical reflection by touching on equality and social justice issues in their drama performances. For example, in their drama about a holiday celebration, one of the groups depicted an active resistance to and criticism of the oppressive gender roles assigned to women in their culture through their portrayal of a female character who questions the male characters in her family about their unfair expectations of her. A study that wielded similar results to Ntelioglou’s (2012) one was Toohey, Dagenais and Schulze’s (2012) study which describes videomaking projects in Canada, India and Mexico in which ESL students were asked to make videos to show children in other countries what their lives were like. Toohey et al. (2012) found that despite their difficulties with the English language, the students went to great effort to create videos that did not just show their daily individual routines but also represented their families and communities. They did this by thinking critically about the cultural resources they could draw upon, such as the religious figures of particular significance to their communities. However, Toohey et al. (2012) felt that the teachers in the study should have scaffolded students
in a way that would have fostered critical thinking. For example, they could have asked the students “why” questions to help them become aware about their decisions to exclude certain languages in their videos.

In contrast to Ntelioglou’s (2012) and Toohey et al.’s (2012) studies, the teachers in Ajayi’s (2009) study successfully used multimodal texts in their literacy teaching and learning as a catalyst for critical literacy practices that linked their students to the broader society. In Ajayi’s (2009) study, ESL (English as a second language) learners were encouraged to use multimodal resources to interpret and construct their understanding of a cellular phone advertisement. In pairs, the students discussed how advertisements could convince or dissuade consumers from purchasing goods. The students’ discussions culminated in the creation of a multimodal text to represent an understanding of the cellular phone advertisement. Ajayi (2009) found that the scaffolding students received through the multiliteracies pedagogy helped them develop a critical understanding of advertisers’ tendencies to oversell products, and to understand the politics and aesthetics of advertisements and relate them to the politics of society. The students also learned how to reject single interpretations of texts, and to deconstruct texts based on their experiences and perspectives. Thus, the multiliteracies pedagogy became a powerful tool for developing critical thinking in the ELLs. Another study by Ajayi (2008) illustrated how the multiliteracies pedagogy of multimodality gave high school ELLs the chance to express concerns about anti-immigration discourses and challenge power relations between immigrant ELLs and society. The students in this study were given the task of representing their understanding of a newspaper article related to the issue of driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants through a campaign advertisement and a cartoon strip. Through participating in these multimodal practices, Ajayi (2008) found that the students developed critical perspectives about the public discourses about immigration, and they critically reflected on their “social conditions as immigrants in America” (p. 224).

Conclusions & Implications

A key contribution of the multiliteracies pedagogy is that it has “awakened literacy educators to recognise that the skills required to communicate effectively in society are constantly changing” (Mills, 2009, p. 108). Today’s students must possess multiple literacy skills that can enable them to utilize the potential of the diverse modes of communication offered by new technologies (Chatel, 2002). The potential of the multiliteracies pedagogy to equip students with these skills is enormous because of the opportunities it provides for multimodal forms of expression through technology-based interdisciplinary explorations of texts. The findings of this literature review have demonstrated that the multiliteracies pedagogy can be especially powerful for ELLs as it enables students to exercise agency and take ownership of their learning, it supports students’ language development by providing them with authentic, communicative purposes for learning and practising language, it helps students to reflect on and recreate their multilingual and multicultural identities (Angay-Crowder et al., 2013), and it increases student engagement and promotes collaborative learning.

Although the studies reviewed in this paper have provided significant justification for the implementation of the multiliteracies pedagogy in ELL instruction, Jacobs (2013) argues that it is not enough merely to provide opportunities for learners to engage in multiliteracies; appropriate assessment of multiliteracies
must also be meaningfully integrated into pedagogy. Although the assessment of multiliteracies for ELL learners is not explored in much detail in any of the studies reviewed in this paper, Toohey et al. (2012) and Hung et al. (2013)’s studies do suggest that there is a lack of alternative assessment methods that support students’ design of multimodal texts. For example, while Toohey et al. (2012) recognized the value of the videomaking projects for stimulating critical reflection, student agency, and collective expression among the students in their study, they acknowledge that structured assessments of video texts were rarely conducted, thereby posing a challenge to educators interested in that approach. Hung et al. (2013) provide another example of the gap between multiliteracies approaches and ELL assessment. They argue that although many language teachers require their students to accompany their oral presentations with multimodal texts such as presentation slides, the teachers still focus on students’ presentations and linguistic skills (e.g. their oral fluency, accuracy of language use) without paying much attention to the nonlinguistic modes of meaning conveyed by the students using their slides. Thus, Hung et al.’s (2013) study proposes the development of a formative assessment tool to assess students’ design of multimodal texts as a means to support assessable multiliteracies practices.

In view of the evolving nature of new literacy practices, Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey (2003) and Cope, Kalantzis, McCarthey, Vojak and Kline (2011) emphasize the need for assessments to be developed in response to the multimodality of contemporary literacy. As Cope et al. (2011) point out, “What we do in schools under the rubric of literacy, and particularly what we measure in our literacy assessments, has not caught up with these profound changes” (p. 84). In Botelho, Kerekes, Jang and Stagg-Peterson’s (2014) study of the current assessment practices within Ontario’s public schools, they found that many of the assessment tools used in schools still privilege cognitive-psychological and psycholinguistic-based reading and writing practices. Although an increased number of teachers are engaging their students in multiliteracies practices in the classroom, these practices are not reflected by assessment tools such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test which still reduces literacy to the modes of reading and writing on the medium of paper. Botelho et al. (2014) conclude that there still exists a significant gap between theoretical approaches underpinning the multiliteracies pedagogy and common assessment practices.

Apart from the lack of appropriate assessment of multiliteracies practices, there are also other challenges to instantiating a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the ELL classroom. Allen and Paesani (2010) explain that typically, introductory second/foreign language courses that claim to use multimodal strategies do not incorporate the critical framing component of the multiliteracies pedagogy in a systematic manner. One reason for this omission is the assumption that because second and foreign language learners have limited linguistic abilities, they are unable to engage in activities that require critical thinking, reflection, interpretation and exploration of social, historical, and cultural perspectives (Allen & Paesani, 2010). However, the results of this literature review have demonstrated that with scaffolding from teachers, multiliteracies and multimodal practices can foster critical literacy practices among ELLs by offering them the opportunity to reflect on and challenge discursive practices that marginalize them (Ajayi, 2009).

If educators hope to narrow the gap between the potentials of the multiliteracies pedagogy and the realities of its implementation, certain areas need to be researched further. Firstly, studies need to be conducted on the development and implementation of a quality assessment of multimodal texts that can provide
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case studies for multimodal learning and multiliteracies practices (Hung et al., 2013). Secondly, studies should address the use and role of multiple languages in developing ELL’s multiliteracies and multimodal communicative competence (Yi, 2014). Although this review was able to locate a number of important studies conducted among second/foreign language learners, there still remains relatively little discussion about how students’ homes or heritage languages can be used to develop their multiliteracies practices. Thirdly, new research should investigate how the multiliteracies pedagogy can go beyond the computer screen and benefit learners who do not have access to technology (López-Gopar, 2007). Although we live in a globalized multilingual world, we must recognize that not all learners have equal access to economic or technological resources (Abendroth-Timmer & Hennig, 2014). Language education based on the multiliteracies pedagogy should counteract these inequalities by promoting a curriculum that values and builds on learners’ linguistic and cultural resources.

The results of multiliteracies research should be used to support the professional development of ELL teachers. Additional professional development activities for ELL teachers should provide varied opportunities for them to engage with multiliteracies concepts and pedagogical strategies (Allen & Paesani, 2010). These opportunities should extend beyond methods courses to include discussions, workshops, and practical teaching sessions that integrate the multiliteracies components with principles of literacy such as collaboration and critical reflection (Allen & Paesani, 2010). Given the challenges of implementing a pedagogy of multiliteracies within existing ELL classroom practices, it is important that teachers and researchers have a platform to engage in constructive dialogue about how they can integrate these new literacies into their existing curriculum and assessment (Yi, 2014). Through this collaborative effort, ELL teachers and researchers will hopefully be better informed about the ways that they can overcome the challenges and effectively harness the potentials of the multiliteracies pedagogy.

References


Shakina Rajendram is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto. Her research focuses on translanguaging, learner collaboration, multiliteracies, and language policy. She can be contacted at shakina.rajendram@mail.utoronto.ca
## Appendix
### Overview of the 12 studies included in this literature review (in alphabetical order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Research Questions/Purpose of the Study</th>
<th>Texts/Activities</th>
<th>Setting &amp; Length of Study</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajayi (2008)</td>
<td>To explore how language learners in high schools use visual representations and the social conditions of their lives to construct meanings that reflect their lived experiences.</td>
<td>Texts: Newspaper report, photographs, campaign video clip  Activities: Guessing the meaning of political texts, making campaign advertisements and cartoon strips on immigration issues</td>
<td>Setting: Advanced ESL 3 program in a high school in Los Angeles, USA</td>
<td>33 ESL students (Grade 9 – 22, Grade 10 – 8, Grade 11 – 3) (majority Hispanic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ajayi (2009)</td>
<td>1. How does the use of signs mediate message representation?  2. How is the choice of a specific sign for representation shaped by the identity of the sign maker?  3. How does the integration of verbal texts and visual images change the shape of knowledge and learning practices in the classroom?  4. What kinds of literacy practices and learning strategies do students learning English as a second language (ESL) acquire through the use of multimodal texts?</td>
<td>Text: Cellular phone advertisement  Activities: Making annotated drawings to represent students’ understanding of the cellular phone advertisement</td>
<td>Setting: Junior high school in USA</td>
<td>18 seventh grade ELLs (majority Hispanic)</td>
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<td>Angay-Crowder, Choi and Yi (2013)</td>
<td>1. To examine how a theoretical framework (i.e., multiliteracies) could be translated into teaching multilingual adolescents  2. To create a context in which students could explore their multiple literacies and identities using multiple semiotic modes and resources (e.g., visuals, sound, gesture, gaze, and spatial concepts).</td>
<td>Texts: PowerPoint presentation about digital storytelling, Wikispace with resources about digital storytelling  Activities: Free writing, filling out a storyboard template, situated writing activities, making a digital story</td>
<td>Setting: Summer program in a city in the southeastern USA</td>
<td>12 adolescent immigrant students in grades 7 &amp; 8</td>
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| Chun (2009) | 1. To advocate the use of graphic novels to aid language pedagogy and learning as one way of implementing a multiliteracies approach that deepens reading engagement.  
2. To present one such graphic novel, *Maus*, as a possible teaching resource that can facilitate critical literacies by using a “critical literacy tool-kit” in the secondary school classroom.  
3. To examine how graphic novels can be used to develop and draw on students’ multiliteracies practices. | *Text:* Graphic novel *’Maus’*  
*Activities:* Teacher read-alouds of the graphic novel, incorporating visual literacies (e.g. video and online gaming) to understand the complex visual metaphors in *’Maus’* | *Setting:* Urban secondary school ESL class  
*Length:* Unknown  
*Advanced level ELL students in grades 9-12* |
| Danzak (2011) | To give students the opportunity to express themselves through diverse linguistic modalities and engage in multiple literacies to learn more about the English language, writing, and technology, as well as their individual and family identities. | *Texts:* Graphic novel *’American Born Chinese’,* comic books  
*Activities:* Discussing texts using graphic organizers, writing dialogues for comics, keeping journals, making graphic stories on the computer. | *Setting:* ESOL classroom in a public middle school on the west coast of Florida  
*Length:* 6 months  
*32 ELLs in grades 6-8 (predominantly of Mexican heritage)* |
| Giampapa (2010) | 1. How can teachers’ own linguistic and cultural experiences provide a pedagogical base for understanding their students’ funds of knowledge?  
2. How can students’ L1 literacy practices and cultures be incorporated into the English-medium curriculum, using forms of multimodal, multilingual meaning making?  
3. How can a multiliteracies pedagogy draw on students’ identity investment to achieve literacy engagement and learning in meaningful and creative ways? | *Texts:* Books in students’ home languages, dual language books  
*Activities:* Discussions about students’ languages and cultures, creating cultural artwork, writing language biographies, making dual language identity texts | *Setting:* Elementary school in Toronto  
*Length:* 1.5 years  
*29 immigrant students in a Grade 4 classroom* |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Hepple, Sockhill, Tan &amp; Alford (2014)</td>
<td>1. To use claymation, the process of stop-action filming of clay figures, as a way to meet the students’ diverse language and literacy needs. 2. To stimulate other literacy and language teachers to explore the benefits of this approach.</td>
<td>Novel ‘The Big Wave’, photos, news articles about the 2011 Japanese tsunami, Jurassic Park movie</td>
<td>Post-beginner class in a specialist intensive language high school</td>
<td>11 ELLs in a post-beginner group (majority refugees)</td>
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<td>Hung, Chiu, &amp; Yeh (2013)</td>
<td>1. To propose a design rubric from the multiliteracies perspective to assess students’ design of multimodal texts as a means to support assessable new literacy practices 2. To investigate how the utility of the design rubric affects English learners’ multimodal text production.</td>
<td>PowerPoint slides</td>
<td>Communication and Presentation course at a public university in Taiwan</td>
<td>18 intermediate-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners</td>
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<td>Ntelioglou (2012)</td>
<td>1. What different drama pedagogies are used in three urban high school programs with a high population of linguistically diverse students? 2. How do the drama teachers view the potential impact of their teaching on the linguistic, social and academic performance of ELLs?</td>
<td>Role play script, drawings, short stories, folktales, scripts, newspaper articles, handouts about drama</td>
<td>Two urban and multicultural high schools in Toronto</td>
<td>106 ESL students in an adult day-time high school program and an ‘At-Risk’ program</td>
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Activities: Creating clay models, writing dialogues, creating two claymation movies about the tsunami and the movie Jurassic Park, filming and editing the movies

Length: Unknown

Activities: Designing and preparing 8-10 minute oral presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint slides

Length: 18 weeks

Activities: Engaging in drama lessons, performing scripted role plays, taking part in improvisational drama, writing post-performance journal reflections, creating identity texts

Length: 4 months
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Texts: Description</th>
<th>Setting: Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Park (2012)                               | 1. What strategies do four elementary ELLs use when they read computer-based texts in their home context?  
2. In what ways do these elementary ELLs describe their use of these strategies in their home context?  
3. What influences these ELLs to use the strategies when they read computer-based texts in their home context?  
4. What strategies do these elementary ELLs use when they read computer-based texts in their school context?  
5. In what ways do these elementary ELLs describe their use of these strategies in their school context?  
6. What influences these ELLs to use the strategies when they read computer-based texts in their school context?  
7. In what ways do ELLs’ use of strategies differ when they read computer-based texts in their home and school contexts, and what influences these potential differences? | Computer-based texts, online resources  
Reading and evaluating computer-based texts, accessing and dialoguing with webpages and hypermedia | Three public elementary schools in western USA, ELLs’ homes  
Spring, summer and fall school sessions | 4 ELLs in Grade 4 and Grade 5, 4 parents, 5 classroom teachers |
| Toohey, Dagenais & Schulze (2012)          | 1. To examine the affordances and constraints of videomaking – how this form of creative expression might contribute to L2 learning.  
2. To examine how videomaking allows children to make use of in and out-of-school physical and social resources. | Photography, podcasts, multimodal storybooks, multilingual videos  
Writing scripts, storyboarding, oral rehearsal, making videos related to multilingualism | English-medium public schools in Canada, community library in Mexico, boarding school in northern India | ELLs between the ages of 9-12 |

Length: 6 weeks
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Texts:</th>
<th>Setting:</th>
<th>ELLs in</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vinogradova, Linville &amp; Bickel (2011)</td>
<td>1. To explain how digital storytelling projects contribute to students developing multiliteracies within a pedagogy of an inclusive community of practice.  2. To discuss how the researchers used digital stories in their teaching practices for the purpose of bringing students’ <em>lifeworlds</em> and interests into the curriculum.</td>
<td>Online digital stories, films, advertisements</td>
<td>English Language center in a US university</td>
<td>intermediate- to advanced-level courses</td>
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<td><em>Activities:</em> Choosing topics, visual images and musical materials, writing journal entries, comparative analyses of digital stories, group discussions, presentations</td>
<td>Length: 1 semester</td>
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