

Editors' Introduction
Special Issue: New Literacies in Canadian Classrooms

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In May 2011, an interdisciplinary group of Canadian and international researchers met as part of a SSHRC-funded workshop on New Literacies in global contexts. The aim of this workshop was to “consolidate and sustain” a strong network of scholars who study ‘new literacies’ in a range of educational settings, both inside and outside of school (Rogers, Sanford, & Kendrick, 2012, p. 1). By ‘new literacies’, we are referring to “the rapid and continuous changes in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose and communicate information” (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008, p. 8). The 2011 workshop was the second in a series, the first of which was held in 2006, at Memorial University (see Hammett, Mackey & McClay, 2007). Both workshops brought together a collective of pan-Canadian scholars and educators generating theory and research in new literacies studies in Canada and beyond. We believe that literacy researchers in Canada are particularly “poised to play a vital leadership role in exploring the connections among local and global new literacy practices, defining what it means to be literate in the 21st Century, and sharing their work with a broad range of educators and policy makers” (Rogers, Sanford, & Kendrick, 2012, p. 3). This special issue of *Language & Literacy* focuses specifically on new literacies in Canadian classrooms, highlighting the important and influential work of a select group of Canadian scholars and educators: Roberta Hammett (Memorial University), Kathy Hibbert (Western University), Jill McClay (University of Alberta, Edmonton), Shelley Peterson (University of Toronto), Anne Burke (Memorial University), James Nahachewsky (University of Victoria), Diane Dagenais (Simon Fraser University), Andreea Fodor (Simon Fraser University), Elizabeth Schulze (Pacific Cinémathèque), and Kelleen Toohey (Simon Fraser University).

In the lead article, ‘Tech FTW!!!’ Ninth graders, *Romeo and Juliet*, and digital technologies,” Roberta Hammett describes an action research project study in which 9th graders composed digital responses to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Their collaborative digital projects included e-zines, presentations, digital videos and photostories. The participatory piece in her study is a Ning site that the high school students created to share, discuss, and analyze their projects. The article shored up communicational and thinking practices that students used during the composition process. Her work challenges the common assumption that students in Canadian classrooms have considerable knowledge and expertise about new literacies. Along with illustrating the ever-shifting roles of teacher and student, she also redefines the

compositional process in classroom contexts.

Kathy Hibbert's "Finding wisdom in practice: The genesis of the Salty Chip, A Canadian Multiliteracies Collaborative," adopts a narrative approach of 'scenario building' by documenting the author's quest to "find her own wisdom" in her professional practice through new literacies research. Through a description of four critical incidents and a subsequent analysis drawing on theories of cultural studies, critical literacy, critical pedagogy and critical disabilities studies, Hibbert explores the process that led to the development of the Salty Chip: A Canadian Multiliteracies Collaborative. The network challenges outdated institutional frameworks currently in place that privilege developmentalism and practices that are rooted in intellectual measurement and standardization and instead considers how new forms of participation that include digital spaces mediate our evolving subjectivities and cultural practices. Hibbert's piece also shows us what a professional learning community can accomplish as a collective, intermingling possibilities and practice.

In "Teaching composition with new literacies perspectives: "We'll test it out and then let the kids run with it," Jill McClay and Shelley Peterson highlight innovative teaching and the practices of innovative teachers using digital and multimodal literacies in the teaching of composition in elementary and middle grade classrooms across ten Canadian provinces. Building upon a larger database of teachers and interviews from a previous study that found new literacies and digital tools were rarely integrated into teachers' classroom practices, the authors pull together threads from two new studies. The first is from a study one of 21 teachers that the researchers follow into their classrooms and the second is a study of two pre-existing teacher communities of practice. Illustrated through snapshots of teachers' experiences with technology, digital tools, and multimodal textmaking, The authors explore the challenges teachers experience as they acquire computers and other digital devices, fundraise to support their new practices, reposition themselves as learners alongside their students, and use new collaborative processes with students and colleagues. This paper is a celebration of teachers who embrace change and create wider worlds for their students through multimodal composition.

Anne Burke's piece, "Children's Construction of Identity in Virtual Play Worlds – A Classroom Perspective," explores the world of Club Penguin through the experiences of three boys in Grade 4 as they interact as friends both off and online. Burke draws connections between the identities or roles that the boys assume while at school, while playing Club Penguin, and in between. Their actions and the elements of the game are described as fluid and overlapping. She argues that online spaces, especially video games like Club Penguin, sometimes offer opportunities and equity that might not be available in everyday life. The potential for these immersive spaces to transform classroom practices to some degree and also to inform teachers' understandings of children's world is central to the arguments presented. In Burke's work, as well as Hammett and Hibbert's, there is evidence that immersive, converged, networked spaces have prominence and their implied practices and epistemologies should inform our understandings of 'communicative competence.' Such research projects a need to account for the particularities of literacy practices so that they are not reified, but instead seen from a detailed, textured account of meaning makers using technologies in particular contexts, as placed resources (Prinsloo, 2005). There is a demand for more research that

takes a more idiosyncratic lens on technologies used in everyday lives.

In “Understanding the importance of ethos in composing the ‘everyday’ new literacies classroom,” James Nahachewsky examines a senior English teacher’s ethos while composing a new literacies classroom in collaboration with her students. He uses “classroom as text” as a metaphor for making sense of the relationship between the teacher’s own literacies and her role as co-author of new situated classroom literacies. Language and literacy teaching become secondary to multi-textual readings and compositions where previously privileged texts and approaches are no longer dominant in classroom practice. The reciprocal relationship between teacher and students served to both surface the students’ emergent literacies and critical thinking development as well as influence the teacher’s conceptions of what it means to be literate. Nahachewsky telescopes into one teacher’s story of crafting a particular environment and ethos for a new literacies classroom. He opens up new textual and digital epistemologies that resurrect in 21st century classrooms. It is easy to be utopian about ‘new’ literacies, but studies such as this one point to mixed emotions about ‘new’ literacies and the struggles some teachers have with crossing the rubicon into ‘new’ literacies.

In the final article in this special issue, “Charting new directions: The potential of Actor-Network Theory for analyzing children’s videomaking,” Diane Dagenais, Andreea Fodor, Elizabeth Schulze, and Kelleen Toohy offer a preliminary understanding of what Actor-Network Theory (ANT) might contribute to analyzing what they refer to as “enhanced educational practices” for second language (L2) learners. They demonstrate how the theory encourages a closer examination of “the things, the tools, the non-human actants” that are active in particular educational practices, and the relationship of those tools to particular forms of participation. In particular, they focus on aspects of ANT that relevant to videomaking, arguing that the theory highlights the importance of paying attention to the production of networks between both human and non-human actors to understand how these interactions shape the school experiences of language learners. These authors widen the optic and fill a tremendous gap in literature by accounting for English language learners and their blended new and old literacies within classroom contexts. There is very little research that closely examines how language learners mobilize and mediate technologies through their own cultural lens and linguistic practices and this study strongly illustrates a need for such research. Applying Actor Network Theory to extrapolate their argument powerfully illustrates how the act of video-making relies on networks and the intermingling of networks.

Across all of the papers we see a number of examples of students knowing more and teachers relinquishing their expert status, although this superior student knowledge and experience is not always present in expected ways. The work of the teachers featured in these articles draws attention to students’ funds of knowledge and interests in new and dynamic ways. The authors as a collective redefine the compositional process, creating new and viable literacies in classroom contexts and widening the band of compositional practices. We also see many examples of new forms of literacies, which have been referred to as blended literacies, where old and new literacies are brought together in productive ways.

This select group of Canadian scholars contributes significantly to ongoing international conversations on new literacies pedagogies and practices in educational settings. Their work widens the scope on new literacies by collectively challenging

prevailing assumptions about what students know and can do, illustrating changing compositional practices across a range of educational contexts, demonstrating what collaboration can accomplish, and showing how knowledge and expertise are constantly being redistributed in classroom contexts. Reflecting on these studies and many more, it is clear that the field of literacy has moved tremendously, yet there continues to be a gap between shifts in the communicational landscape identified by researchers and more traditional notions of school literacy. Literacy has become a larger overarching discipline with many strands and, in this special issue, there is evidence of many of the communicational transformations.

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Author Biographies

Maureen Kendrick is an Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on literacy and multimodality as social practice, family and community literacy, literacy and international development, and digital literacies. She is author of *Converging Worlds: Play, Literacy, and Culture in Early Childhood* and co-editor of *Portraits of Literacy Across Home, School, and Community*. She has also written numerous journal articles and book chapters on literacy and multimodality in local and global contexts. Currently, she is researching digital literacy practices in secondary English language classrooms in Kenya, Uganda, and Canada.

Jennifer Rowsell is Canada Research Chair in Multiliteracies and professor at Brock University. She has co-written and written several books in the areas of New Literacy Studies, multimodality, and multiliteracies. Her current research interests include children's digital and immersive worlds; adopting and applying multimodal epistemologies with young people; and ecological work in communities examining everyday literacy practices. Her most recent book is, *Working with Multimodality: Learning in a Digital Age* (Routledge).

Diane Collier is a Lecturer in Early Literacy at Brock University. She conducts research in the areas of multimodalities and literacies with a special interest in connections across home and school. Using critical qualitative and ethnographic case study methodologies her work focuses on the processes of textmaking, how children use community resources (particularly, popular culture), what can be learned from children about their consumption and production of texts, and ethical considerations for children's participation in research.

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