

Exploring Teachers' Knowledge of, Attitudes Towards and Needs in the Use of  
New Literacies in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

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## Abstract

### Exploring Teachers' Knowledge of, Attitudes Towards and Needs in the Use of New Literacies in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

Stephanie Schiller

This study explored secondary English Language Arts teachers' knowledge of, attitudes towards and needs in the use of new literacies in the classroom. Using a mixed method research design, secondary I-IV teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire containing both open- and closed-ended questions exploring the central phenomenon: What do teachers already know and still need to learn about using new literacies comfortably in their classrooms? Following analysis, four questionnaire participants were selected using typical sampling procedures, to participate in one unstructured interview in order to gain a deeper understanding about the trends and themes that emerged in the questionnaire. Implications of the findings for teachers, administrators, policymakers and researchers are discussed.

## Acknowledgements

I want to begin by thanking the Child Study faculty, especially Miranda D'Amico who has been supportive, warm and approachable throughout my years at Concordia. For the most part, I feel proud and excited to be at the end of this journey, however, I do also feel a sense of loss. For five years, the professors of the Child Study program have challenged me to think deeper about educational issues that I deal with in the classroom as well as those that I may one day encounter; I have been offered opportunities to build upon my knowledge base as a professional and, as a result, to create better educational experiences for my students; and I have taken the time to reflect upon my own practices and beliefs and been inspired and challenged by the actions and ideas of my classmates and my professors. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to be simultaneously a teacher and a student.

In the last year, while on my maternity leave from teaching, I looked forward to every "Thesis Monday" when my mom babysat for my son Benjamin because it gave me that brain-time that I enjoyed so much and allowed me to continue to reflect on my profession even while I was on leave from it. I want to thank my mom from the bottom of my heart for always making it her priority to give me those hours. Both Benjamin and I benefited from that time. I also want to extend that thanks to my dad because I feel so lucky to have parents who have always encouraged me to become the best I can be. Finally, I want to thank my husband, Jeremy, for always having the utmost faith in me and for all the advice and support he has given me along this road. It has been an amazing journey!

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## Prologue

### *My Personal Experience with Representing Literacy in Different Media*

I am attending the third session of the Secondary English Language Arts (SELA) workshop implemented by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). The workshop is a training session for secondary I and II (grades 7 and 8) English Language Arts (ELA) teachers across the province who, in the last few years, have begun implementing the Québec Education Program (QEP) in their classrooms. This new curriculum emphasizes the development of general competencies that are essential to students' success in both their academic and social lives. In the ELA program, four competencies are developed: to read and listen to literary, popular and information-based texts; to write self-expressive, narrative and information-based texts; to represent her/his literacy in different media; and to use language to communicate and learn (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec [MEQ], 2004). Because there has not been much training on the new curriculum, many of my colleagues are feeling overwhelmed by the task of implementing the new program and evaluating student progress using competency-based rather than performance-based assessments. The workshop I am attending is training teachers about implementing the curricular competency: *To represent his/her literacy in different media*. We are being encouraged to use new technologies such as digital cameras, iMovie, power point and websites such as YouTube in our classrooms.

This particular morning, we were put into the 'shoes' of our students and we were working on a project where each group of four was given a camera and a laptop with a software program called *Comic Life* that we were to use to create a photo-essay of the community. This was certainly a project that I could see my ELA students embracing. It



was active, interactive and creative. We were taught about the impact of different camera angles and how we might use text and placement on the pages to emphasize the photos and our overall message about the community. For many of us, this was the first time we had learned about camera angles and how to use them to create different effects. We were encouraged to use storyboard sheets and post-it notes to plan out the essay prior to commencing the project. Although this seemed to be a project that our students would really enjoy, the general attitude of my group members was negative. We were in consensus that, while this was a great idea for a project, it would be very difficult to implement this project in our own classrooms. We were beginning to feel very overwhelmed by what was expected of us in this new curricular competency, as it seemed to require us to be adept at using and understanding different media technologies.

One of our main concerns was that we just did not have access to the necessary technological resources. Where were we going to find ten digital cameras? Within our group, we discussed the option of asking the students to bring in personal cameras from home, which seemed to me to be a viable option at my middle-class school, however, one of my colleagues felt very uncomfortable with that idea due to the lower socioeconomic status of the students with whom he worked. He was nervous that this would cause a divide between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the group. Furthermore, he did not feel comfortable with the responsibility of ensuring that these cameras were safely returned to their owners. Some of us thought that the school board might loan these materials out to schools, but we were not sure and we did not know whom to contact about it. Some of my colleagues expressed their discomfort with having to learn a new computer program. Others were concerned about computer time. None of us had regular access to a

computer lab and we each had only a couple of computers in the classroom. The two computers in my classroom happened to be two old Macs that had been discarded by the private school down the street. My students were always grumbling about how slow and inefficient these computers were. I was not even sure that *Comic Life* would work on my outdated classroom computers.

Although, we were reassured by the workshop facilitators that the software *Comic Life* was very affordable and that our schools would most likely buy it, the difficulty seemed to lie in the fact that, once we had the software, how would we time-manage the project with such minimal access to computers? When this issue was brought up to the workshop facilitators, they seemed frustrated themselves because they were under the impression that schools should have these resources and that the government had given the school boards large budgets for Information and Communication Technology (ICT). They could not understand why teachers did not have access to these materials. They also expressed their own expectation that, as teachers, we should be creative and find ways of getting our hands on the equipment we needed by applying for grants or other special funding projects, fundraising, or asking students to bring in equipment from home. Some of my colleagues protested strongly to this opinion, stating that if we were expected to succeed using this new curriculum, we required the necessary tools and equipment.

I left the workshop feeling overwhelmed with what was expected of me. I loved the idea of implementing projects of this kind in my classroom, but felt that it would take hours to order and organize the equipment and to learn the new computer programs and media techniques myself. Wasn't it just easier to stick with the traditional novel study,

essay writing, journaling and oral presentations of the past? Was I still expected to cover classics such as Shakespeare plays? If so, how was I going to fit Shakespeare, novels and new media projects into my program? I was sure that there was an innovative way to incorporate the two, but I didn't know quite where to start.

This experience was the catalyst to my thesis because it brought up a number of issues with developing 'new literacies' in schools: teachers' attitudes towards and comfort levels with new technologies; availability of and access to technological equipment in schools; teachers' knowledge about new media (such as different camera angles and software programs); and lack of communication between the policy makers, the school boards and the teachers. I began to think that if I, a young and dedicated teacher who was quite comfortable with new technology, was feeling overwhelmed by the new curriculum, how were my senior colleagues coping with these new curricular demands? That is just one of the questions that I hope to answer in the following study.

## Introduction

In recent years, a need has arisen for broadening the definition of literacy (Alexander, 2006; Eisner, 1997; Gee, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Kist, 2005; Luke, 2000; Reinking, 1997) due to society's rapid shift away from its page-based past into its screen-based present and future (Kress, 2003). Print-based literacies and the industrial model of schooling built around book culture do not adequately meet the needs of our new and ever-changing information, social and cultural society (Luke, 2000). In fact, more often than not, communication and information are conveyed through multimodal (linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial and audio) means rather than solely through linear (linguistic) texts (New London Group, 1996). In response to these new types of literacy skills that have developed as a result of emerging technologies, the field of literacy has been given new labels such as "new literacies" (Gee, 2000; Kist, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007; Luke, 2000; Willinsky, 1990), and "multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996, 2000; Tyner, 1998) which are closely related to terms such as "media literacy" (Alvermann, 2000; Alvermann & Hagood, 2001), "literacy technologies" (Bruce, 1997), "digital literacy" (Jacobs, 2006) and "Internet literacies" (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). Each of these labels suggests that the field of literacy is about more than just reading and writing print texts. In fact, the International Reading Association / National Council of Teachers of English Standards for the English Language Arts (1996) stresses the need for students to achieve literacy skills in both print and non print texts (as cited by Kist, 2000).

While the purpose of education is not easy to define, the New London Group (1996) writes, "If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could

say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community and economic life” (p. 60). Children now have more ways of learning about the world and more ways of expressing themselves with the use of technology. It is through education that students must acquire critical literacy skills that are multimodal in nature in order to participate fully in the information society. “Firm level evidence shows that productivity is positively related to investment in education and training, and that there are tight links between organization, skills and training on the one hand, and productivity and competitiveness on the other” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] and Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 7). Furthermore, the workforce is upskilling, as a direct result of technological advances. Thus, workers are increasingly required to have higher levels of education along with the capacity to adapt to, learn, and master changes in a fast-paced work environment (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000). In addition to the above-mentioned skills, students entering the workforce will need to be able to use information to solve problems and to work in collaborative teams (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004).

Success in the workforce is not the only justification for being skilled in new literacies. New literacy skills allow people to make their personal lives more productive and fulfilling and provide people with the opportunities to lead more engaged civic lives. For example, “National and local politics are changing as more citizens discover important information about candidates, participate online in campaign efforts, organize online communities to support various political agendas, and communicate more frequently with their representatives via email” (Leu et al., 2004, p. 1577).

The emergence of new technologies seems to have created a widening gap between the literacy practices that adolescents engage in outside of school and the literacy practices expected and practiced in school (Sanford & Madill, 2007; Goodman, 2003). Recent studies suggest that there is a literacy crisis in the United States (ACT, 2004a, ACT 2006a, as cited by Lewis, 2007, p.144). The results of these studies show that in 2004, only 22% of students who took the ACT assessment (a widely used college entrance exam) were deemed ready for college in the three basic academic areas of English, Math and Science. In 2006, another report found that only 51% were prepared for college-level reading (ACT 2006 as cited by Lewis, 2007, p.144). Similar results were found in universities across the U.S. (Cilo & Cooper, 2000, Fields, 2006; Gose, 2006, as cited by Lewis, 2007, p.144). According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a collaborative effort of member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) aiming to assess how well 15 year-old youth use their knowledge and skills of reading, mathematics and science literacy skills, Canadian youth fared considerably better than their U.S. counterparts. However, students from both the U.S. and Canada had a high percentage of students at Level 3 (capable of reading tasks of moderate complexity) and lower, a fact that is concerning to many educators and adults (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000). Some have argued that these statistics provide a false reality and that students, in fact, have higher levels of achievement than previous generations, however, the school system is not using the right tools for assessing students' 'new literacy' proficiencies (Kist, 2003).

Kist (2003) studied a number of 'exceptional' classrooms in Canada and the United States where 'new literacy' was promoted and practiced and he found that

students were assessed, not only on product but also on process achievement through assessment tools such as electronic portfolios of their work. As a result of these new assessment techniques, Kist concludes, “Traditional paper/pencil achievement tests, which are taken in isolation and use print-based formats, are not going to assess the achievements needed by students as they move deep into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p.11-12). Students’ literacy skills are changing due to the presence of new media technologies in their everyday lives (Prensky, 2001), and these skills are often quite separate from the traditional academic literacy skills assessed in high school leaving and standardized college entrance exams (Lewis, 2007).

While the above-mentioned research clearly suggests that students’ literacy skills and instructional needs are changing due to the rapid emergence of ICTs, there is a deficiency in research when it comes to what typical teachers know and how they feel about incorporating new literacies and new literacy instruction into the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Through this study, I intend to shed light on the tools, support and experiences teachers need to successfully bridge the gap between students’ in-school and outside-of-school literacies.

## Literature Review

### *A Historical and Generational Perspective on Literacy*

It is important to view literacy as a technology from a historical perspective in order to better understand the literacy skills of today's adolescents (Davies, 2003; Leu et al., 2004; Moorman & Horton, 2007). Moorman and Horton (2007) divide technology into two important components: the physical tool and the cultural knowledge required to utilize the tool. The technology will not emerge without the social demand for the tool (or for the product created by the tool). Therefore, the technology of literacy only appeared in societies because it responded to social needs and solved socially relevant problems. "The evolution of literacy is marked by the introduction of three technological tools: writing systems, the printing press, and information communication technology (ICT)" (Moorman & Horton, 2007, p. 265).

The ways in which social forces have defined literacy practices became evident during the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when most people believe the first writing system emerged (Leu et al., 2004). The written language developed because it facilitated the transmission and recording of information and business transactions. The social need, however, was for only a small number of individuals (e.g., scribes) to be literate (The British Museum, 2008). It was not until the invention of the printing press, approximately 600 years ago, that a vision for universal literacy began to emerge. As societies evolved from agrarian to industrial economies, the need for literate workers and citizens increased (Moorman & Horton, 2007). The development of democracy led to an even more widely distributed form of literacy as public schools were established to develop literate and thoughtful citizens (Leu et al., 2004). The introduction of ICT came about in the 1960s when the



idea of a decentralized, computer-based communication system first emerged as well as the concept of social networking. In 1992, the first Web browser, Mosaic, was invented. Therefore, the Internet that we know and use today is arguably only 15 years old and the impact that it has already had on the world is dramatic (Moorman & Horton, 2007). The world of ICT is changing so rapidly that the technologies that students use at the end of their school careers were not even imagined when they entered elementary school. These new technologies that they encounter along their educational path require new literacies and new literacy instructional practices (Leu et al., 2004).

Many [recent] graduates started their school career with the literacies of paper, pencil, and book technologies but will finish having encountered the literacies demanded by a wide variety of information and communication technologies (ICTs)....Given the increasingly rapid pace of change in technologies of literacy, it is likely that these students who begin school this year will experience even more profound changes during their own literacy journeys (Leu et al., 2004, p. 1571).

The effect of new technologies on today's youth is especially apparent because they are the first generation to have grown up in a world where computers and the Internet have been a part of their everyday home and school lives (Moorman & Horton, 2007). Prensky (2001) argues that today's students have changed 'incrementally' from past students. He writes that such a large 'discontinuity' has occurred that "one might even call it a 'singularity' – an event which changes things so fundamentally that there is no going back. This so-called 'singularity' is the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (p. 1).

According to Prensky (2001), today's average college graduate has spent less than 5000 hours reading printed texts but over 10,000 hours playing video games and 20,000 hours watching TV. As a result, while students may not have the well-developed book reading skills of previous generations, their "visual literacy" skills are more developed, allowing them to be able to critically 'read' the images in advertising or decipher the meaning in music videos on television (Gee, 2003). Furthermore, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging (IM) are integral parts of their lives. Prensky argues that, as a result of this frequent daily use of technology, today's students "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors. These differences go far further and deeper than most educators suspect or realize" (p. 1).

Some refer to today's generation as the N-(for Net)-gen, D-(for digital)-gen (Prensky, 2001), or as millennials or the millennial generation (Moorman & Horton, 2007). Prensky coined the term *digital natives* to refer to the idea that students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games, cell phones and the Internet. He calls people who were born before the emergence of the World Wide Web *digital immigrants*. He distinguishes between the two by saying that digital immigrants learn to adapt to this new environment, albeit some better than others, however, they retain an "accent" or "their foot in the past." For example, the digital immigrant may read a manual for a program rather than assuming the program will teach them to use it; print out an email or a document in order to edit it rather than editing on the screen; or go to the Internet for information second rather than first. The problem here is that, "our digital immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age) are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (Prensky,

2001, p.2). While digital natives adjust easily to changing technologies and use it adeptly in creative and innovative ways, digital immigrants often struggle to use new technologies.

Davies (2003) conveys the fact that discomfort with emerging technologies is nothing new given that throughout the history of media and communication, almost every invention and innovation has been subject to some form of criticism and blamed for various social ills. According to Moorman and Horton (2007), it is typical for adults to criticize both the academic achievements and work ethic of their own children, a tendency that intensifies during times of rapid societal change. Therefore, there is currently a high level of concern about the literacy skills of adolescents. Lewis and Fabos (2005) describe this anxiety as ‘generational’ in that “the crisis is not to be found in the child or adolescent as subject, but in the teacher, researcher, and policymaker as adult subject whose anxieties about new adolescent identities lead to the valorization and reification of print culture” (p.473). However, this concern does not accurately reflect the current reality and the crisis mentality accompanying much of today’s political rhetoric and media coverage (Moorman & Horton, 2007). Davies examined the differences between print and electronic culture and argues that today’s students live and learn in the electronic culture, while our educational system continues to function as though the print-based culture was still dominating. In fact, Coiro et al. (2008) admonish that, given the speed and scale of the changes that have occurred as a result of the Internet, these changes may have happened too quickly for us to fully understand what we are, collectively, “in.” What is certain, however, is that today’s adolescents must develop literacy skills that are beyond what was required of previous generations. They must

develop skills that will support them through their adult lives and careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Literacy and “New Literacies”*

While many researchers address the need for a broadened definition of literacy, one that is beyond ‘the ability to read and write’ (Gee, 2008), there is a lack of consensus within the literature on what exactly that definition should entail. Leu et al. (2004) ask some very important questions about the definition of literacy:

Does literacy mean comprehension of print or comprehension of a message that has permanence in ways that a nonrecorded oral message does not? Does reading children’s literature presuppose a printed children’s book, or can children’s literature exist on a CD-ROM or website? Does text presuppose only print, or does it include all aspects in an author’s toolbox, which allows meaning to be preserved for later reading and response by an audience? (p. 1583).

These are all important questions to address at a time when technology is rapidly changing our literacy opportunities and experiences.

Lewis and Fabos (2005) stress the need to continue to relate literacy to reading and writing because when used to refer to all forms of knowledge (such as math literacy) or modes of communication (such as visual literacy), it risks becoming too vague to be useful. However, they write that it is important to distinguish between ‘literacy events’ defined as any event involving a written text and ‘literacy practices’ defined as what can be inferred from observable literacy events as embedded within broader social and

cultural norms. “Practices...are more abstract, related to matters of codes and conventions, beliefs and attitudes, and legitimation and control” (p. 474).

Leu et al. (2004) stress that it may never be possible to achieve a precise definition of new literacies because their most important characteristic is that they change and evolve regularly as a result of the emergence of new technology. Coiro et al. (2008) question how to determine what constitutes ‘new’ literacies. Although, in the above discussion, ‘new’ seems to refer to a shift away from reading and writing of print towards the ability to understand and communicate meaning in multiple media and modality forms, they use the example of email becoming an ‘old’ literacy with the emergence of IM. From this perspective, ‘new’ literacies are emerging practically on a daily basis making a definition nearly impossible. Leu et al. argue that the changes to literacy are not limited by technology but by our ability to adapt and acquire the new literacies that emerge as a result of the technology. Nevertheless, they attempt to frame a conception of new literacies according to their belief that the most essential new literacies that are emerging center on the Internet.

The new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers (p. 1572).

Essentially, the foundational literacy practices of reading and writing (including phonemic awareness, word recognition, decoding, vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, inferential reasoning, the writing process, spelling and response to literature) should not be replaced, but built upon by the development of new literacy practices (Leu et al., 2004).

Eisner (1997) has suggested a new definition of literacy that encompasses the information, social and cultural society within which we live. His definition is as follows:

In order to be read, a poem, an equation, a painting, a dance, a novel, or a contract each requires a distinctive form of literacy, when literacy means, as I intend it to mean, a way of conveying meaning through and recovering meaning from the form of representation in which it appears (p. 353).

While this definition does not specifically mention the impact of digital technology on literacy practices, it shows a broadened understanding of literacy to include more than just conveying meaning through printed text. This definition also speaks to the fact that there are distinct forms of literacy required in order to construct meaning from the form of representation in which it appears.

Reinking (1997) describes how digital texts change the static, linear nature of print reading by using tools such as hypertext that allow for a dynamic organization of information through links. This overcomes some of the limitations of print texts and expands the boundaries of freedom and control in accessing textual information.

Reinking writes that the computer is “a revolutionary new vehicle for textual communication that, if fully appreciated for its own merits unencumbered by lingering

biases for print, can act as a catalyst to bring people closer together in a democratic and relentlessly conditional pursuit of knowledge, understanding and enjoyment” (p.642). This suggests that “new literacies” are not just about the new “gadgets and toys” that have developed as a result of digital technology, but it is about the idea that literacy is a social process (Kist, 2005). According to Gee (1996), “literacy is deeply enmeshed in the culture, history, and everyday discourses of people’s lives. To look at literacy out of these contexts is to miss most (if not all) of what is happening” (as cited by Kist, 2005, p. 6).

Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as a profoundly social process and he stressed the importance of understanding the impact of culture on learning. Gee (2003), following in Vygotsky’s footsteps, writes that what determines how a person reads or thinks is decided by his/her own experiences in interacting with others and within various sorts of social groups. As a result of the cultural and social nature of literacy, a new field of study has emerged called *New Literacy Studies*. This field argues that reading and writing should be viewed not only as cognitive skills that are internally and individually experienced but also as social and cultural practices with economic, historical and political implications (Gee, 2003).

Lewis (2007), describes how adolescents use multiple literacies in different communities such as peer groups, family and school, firmly embedding literacy within social contexts, and some literacies are more developed than others as a result of the frequency of their use. Alverman and Eakle (2007) found that most young people have a wide range of texts and nonlinguistic resources at their disposal and that multiple forms of literacy are the rule, not the exception. However, Alverman and Eakle warn that

literacy need not be unnaturally divided into school-based/academic literacies and outside of school literacies. In fact, restricting literacies to those that are either school-based or used outside of school suggests that there is little or no relation between the two.

Although a single definition for new literacies does not exist and may never exist, it is clear that students today are using a plethora of new literacies in their daily lives. The new literacy practices emerging from these new literacies are shaping not only their cognitive processes, but also their social interactions. It is important for schools to recognize the emergence of these new literacies and to build bridges between the literacies students engage in outside of school and the literacies that are promoted within schools.

### *The Multimodal Nature of Youth*

According to Tyner (1998), “youth are wired” (p.70). Even if they do not have computers at home, adolescents encounter computers at friends’ houses, in stores, cyber/gaming cafes, and libraries. As a result, there are many new literacies that are engaging adolescents outside of school such as IM, chat rooms, the Internet, online gaming, personal web pages; comic books, cell phones, blogs, trading cards, film creation and video games. These new literacies increasingly require students to be multimodal (Gee, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Tyner, 1998). In sharp contrast however, digital tools are precious in the common classroom and many students feel they are required to ‘shut down’ (their cell phones, ipods, and sometimes consequently, themselves) when they walk through the front doors of their schools (Prensky, 2006). Sternberg, Kaplan and Borck (2007) write that many schools have policies and procedures against the use of



email, IM and cell phones because their use is often seen as a waste of time and an interference with the work of teaching and learning. Prensky argues,

Our young people generally have a much better idea of what the future is bringing than we do. They're already busy adopting new systems for communicating (instant messaging), sharing (blogs), buying and selling (eBay), exchanging (peer-to-peer technology), creating (Flash), meeting (3D worlds), collecting (downloads), coordinating (wikis), evaluating (reputation systems), searching (Google), analyzing (SETI), reporting (camera phones), programming (modding), socializing (chat rooms), and even learning (web surfing) (p.10).

Although there have been a number of studies about the multimodal nature of youth and the many different new literacies that adolescents engage in outside of school (Brass, 2008; Gee, 2003; Jacobs 2004; Jacobs 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; McGinnis, 2007; Sanford & Madill, 2007; Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006; Tagliamonte, 2008; Trier, 2007), this section will focus on two new literacies that have received a good deal of attention in recent studies: video games and IM.

#### *Video games.*

According to Sanford and Madill (2007), media headlines in both Canada and the United States are repeatedly suggesting that too many students, boys in particular, are failing to meet the standards in reading and writing on standardized tests. Sanford and Madill question the common remediation techniques used in school settings, which entail giving failing students more reading and writing practice as solutions to this problem. In response to this issue, they explored the complex literate lives of adolescent boys (aged 11-16 years) who were working as instructors at a video game making camp for boys

aged 8-12 years in a mid-sized western Canadian city. In accordance with other researchers of video games and adolescence (Gee, 2003; Prensky 2001), Sanford and Madill found that significant and powerful learning was happening through the play and creation of video games. Although the instructors insisted that camp was not at all like school, Sanford and Madill describe their observations as “replete with rich literacy practices” (p. 452). Some of the many literacy practices in which students engaged included being able to read both visual and print-textual instructions, use and adapt semiotic systems to meet their needs, and create icons to communicate with future players of the game being created. Furthermore, listening (both verbally and non-verbally) and talking were essential practices used by the instructors as were critical thinking skills. In fact, the students even engaged in more traditional literacy practices such as writing and sketching their ideas in journals (a required component of camp).

As a result of this study, Sanford and Madill suggest that there is a clear disconnect between the literacy practices being used in schools and those that male adolescents practice outside of school. Unfortunately, their interviews with these adolescent boys showed that the unique richness of their literate lives is not being recognized in the classrooms. Although Sanford and Madill warn that there are potential dangers of video games such as the speed in which adolescents become totally immersed in virtual worlds devoid of social consciousness and justice, it is important for educators to draw on the many benefits that new literacies such as video games would bring to the classroom.

Gee (2003) describes video games as a new form of art, one that will not replace books, but will sit beside and interact with books and change them and their role in

society as they have already done with the many movies that are based on video games. Although there has not been enough research into video game play to inform us of how people 'read' video games and what meaning is made from them, Gee argues that people are doing good learning when they are playing good video games. The fact that adolescents are motivated to play video games during their leisure time and do not view learning from video games in the same way as learning at school suggests that educators would benefit from finding ways of integrating the learning practices that students develop from video game play into the classroom.

*Instant Messaging (IM).*

Technology is no longer complicated when it becomes a normal part of daily life. That is how adolescents such as Sam (pseudonym), a 14 year-old girl, view technology. However, when technology becomes this natural, one expects instant access and connection to friends without delay, thus altering the nature of socialization, privacy, and communication. Sam was involved in a study by Lewis and Fabos (2005) that examined the function of IM among seven adolescents (four females and three males) from low- and middle-income families. They describe new literacy practices, in general, as increasingly relying on a complex range of modalities and IM, in particular, as multimodal in that it blurs the distinction between speech and writing (Luke, 2003, as cited by Lewis & Fabos, 2005). IM is a computer-mediated communication (CMC) used primarily for one-to-one synchronous dialogue (Tagliamonte, 2008). Jacobs (2006) argues that IM is more than just a technology, it is a social practice that involves cultural ways of knowing and making meaning. Lewis and Fabos describe their participants' IM literacy practices as lateral (across windows) rather than penetrating (depth within one

exchange) due to the tendency of IM users to engage in numerous dialogues at once.

While this lateral reading requires complex skills, it is the penetrating, deep analysis that remains predominant in schools and is favoured among academics and adults who were schooled in such a way. Therefore, the literacy practices and skills that adolescents are most comfortable with are often not recognized in academic settings (Lewis & Fabos, 2005).

An important finding of Lewis and Fabos' (2005) study was that being a proficient IM user required well developed literacy skills such as audience awareness and being able to perform a version of one's self, shifting voices rapidly for a variety of audiences at once. Participants were observed adapting word choice, types of abbreviations used, length of sentences, imitation of voice, and attention to spelling depending on the audience with whom they were communicating. In spite of the seeming complexity of this social and linguistic practice, the participants in this study favoured IM over other forms of communications (such as email, phone and online chatrooms) because it was the most convenient way for them to communicate with their friends.

Another finding was that the participants' use of language was quite thoughtful and complex and the IM literacy skills were an extension of literacy practices used in school, often with attention to conventional spelling and punctuation. For example, participants used linguistic features to manipulate tone, voice, word choice, subject matter and the structure of messages in order to maintain a good conversational flow and interest level. Language was used in complex ways for the purpose of negotiating multiple messages and interweaving conversations into storylines. In addition, nonlinguistic visual elements were used to supplement the language such as the use of

ellipses to show they were thinking rather than finished with their message. Font colour and size as well as icons such as smiley faces were used to create visual effects and to depict emotions.

This study shows that it is the change in literacy practices that is more significant than the change in literacy events (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Because these new practices are producing new epistemologies connected to literacies as they occur in a variety of out-of-school settings, bringing these practices into schools will compliment the traditional literacy practices of the ELA classroom. Lewis and Fabos write, “The question we believe should be asked is not how to actually use IM in the classroom but how to apply to school settings the literacy *practices* we observed young people take up with a great deal of engagement” (p. 496).

Tagliamonte (2008) studied the IM communication of 71 teenagers’ (30 males and 41 females) from Toronto, ranging from 15-20 years old over three years. She found that the character and nature of IM demonstrated a fluid mastery of the sociolinguistic resources of adolescents’ speech community and included a linguistic fusion between formal written language (must, shall, should) and informal spoken language. Furthermore, Tagliamonte found that in a million and a half words of IM discourse among the 71 teenagers, less than 3% of the data were short forms, abbreviations, and emotional language. These findings challenge the theory, promulgated in the media, that IM is ruining the English language. She concludes her paper by suggesting that IM specifically, and perhaps CMC, generally, is quite the opposite of the ruin of this generation. Instead, she remarks that it is “an expansive new linguistic renaissance” (p. 27).

Jacobs (2006) explored adolescent use of IM, arguing that digital literacies such as IM have implications for how youth are being prepared to participate in today's society. While Lewis and Fabos (2005) and Tagliamonte (2008) focused on the literacy skills that were being developed as a result of IM usage, Jacobs' focused on the social and cultural impact of IM. In the study, Jacobs describes the study practices of Lisa, a secondary student who is preparing for a History exam. During one 18-minute period, Lisa was observed reading her history notes, sending instant messages to friends, and making a telephone call. Although she appeared to be off task, in fact, "Rather than being off task or fragmented, Lisa's activity during this time period actually consisted of assembling multiple sources from which she could evaluate and triangulate information and finally extrapolate an answer" (Jacobs, 2006, p. 185). Lisa, in fact, was attempting to find out exactly what she needed to study for the test. When she was confident that she understood what to study, she passed that information along to another friend with whom she had been chatting on IM. Jacobs describes Lisa's actions as taking on the role of consumer, producer and distributor because she gathered information used from multitasking and multiple modalities in order to construct her decision about what to study. Therefore, IM allowed Lisa to draw from a larger pool of resources than someone who does not use the Internet. This example shows how Lisa uses strategies such as collaboration, self-efficacy, and problem solving. Through this process, Lisa is developing the skills of collecting, assembling and distributing information, all of which are important skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The above studies exemplify the rich learning and variety of skills students acquire through the use of IM. Although there has been much public interest in

adolescents' use of IM, little research has been conducted into its nature as a literacy practice (Jacobs, 2006). Further research is needed in this area to support teachers in their efforts to construct meaningful learning opportunities for students to use IM and other new technologies in the ELA classroom.

### *School Culture*

There are countless ways of integrating new ICTs into the classroom. Bruce (2003) describes four subcategories of using media for communication in the ELA classroom: 1. Document preparation (using tools such as word processing, outlining, graphic organizers of writing, multimedia word processors, multimedia dictionaries, and book and newspaper publishing programs); Direct communication with other students, teachers, experts in various fields and people around the world (using tools such as email, asynchronous and synchronous computer conferencing, the Internet, and student-created hypermedia environments); 3. Collaborative media (including collaborative remote environments for sharing data, graphics, and text, group decision support systems, shared document preparation and other ways that people can remotely work on common text and graphic objects); 4. Teaching media (including tutoring systems, instructional simulations, drill and practice systems, telementoring, and educational games). Bruce suggests that using computers for these varied purposes can help facilitate a teacher's many roles in the classroom, giving teachers more time to focus on essential tasks that a computer cannot accomplish, maximizing a teacher's efficacy and the learning opportunities available to the students.

In spite of the many opportunities for learning and collaborating offered by using new technologies, “Studies of the process of educational change show that access to new information, procedures, or tools alone rarely leads to change” (Bruce, 1993, p. 9). One reason for this is because there is already a functioning social system and traditional practices which shape the ways in which new technologies are used and understood. Furthermore, there are already many technologies applied to education such as all the techniques and tools of classroom instruction and management that use familiar resources (i.e., desks, boards, books, maps etc.) and support routines that encompass certain value systems. Seasoned teachers have already devised complex systems for dealing with these old technologies (Olson, 2000). Prensky (2007) recognizes this challenge and argues,

Digital technology fits only awkwardly into the old “tell-test” paradigm of education. In that paradigm, you keep your best ideas to yourself, rather than sharing. You don’t go looking up information during a test, because it’s ‘cheating’. You don’t take other people’s work and use it in new ways because it’s ‘plagiarism’. You can’t use your cell phone as a lifeline...because it’s taking ‘unfair advantage’. But modern technology fits perfectly with the kids’ twenty-first century educational paradigm, i.e. find information you think is worthwhile anywhere you can. Share it as early and often as possible. Verify it from multiple sources. Use the tools in your pocket...search for meaning through discussion (p. 2).

Luke (2000) examined a teacher education course that combined new media-cultural studies with ICT, offering preservice teachers new approaches to literacy learning. Throughout the discussion section of the study, Luke incorporated many email



perspectives from his student teachers about how teachers will need to change both the format and content of their lessons to incorporate new technologies. One such student teacher expressed her concern about the grade 7 class she observed where the teacher did not allow the students to use the computer for any assignments because he did not ‘believe’ in computers. Another frustrating situation occurred when a grade 10 student prepared a power point presentation as part of an oral assignment only to learn that the school had one overhead projector and students were not allowed to use it. Those who embrace new technologies and innovations “are often faced with a challenging task of resolving conflicts between old practices that derive from powerful situational constraints and imperatives of the new technology” (Bruce, 1993, p. 10).

In an article addressing the “curricular tug-of-war” occurring in schools, Kist (2007) shares his continuing conversation with Jason, a first-year teacher, who describes his experiences using new literacies in his ELA classroom. Jason hoped that by sharing his experiences, he would be helping other first-year teachers who may face challenges breaking out of (and breaking into) traditional school cultures. Jason is described as attempting to “meld his view of an ideal blend of literacies with the reality of the more-traditional, print-dominated literacy curriculum that he encountered” (Kist, 2007, p. 43). Jason began his career teaching grade 8 ELA and Social Studies to two alternative classes of 15 students who had had difficulties coping academically in the regular classroom. The major focus of Jason’s program was to teach these students skills that would enable them to have more success in the regular classroom. After the many new literacy strategies Jason had learned as a preservice teacher, he was pleased to see that he had five computers in his classroom. However, he was surprised to learn that the district only

wanted the computers to be used for running software programs designed for remedial reading. Jason chose to ignore the rule and to allow the students to use the Internet for research purposes. According to Kist (2007), “it is not an original statement to say that school districts and buildings as organizations put up barriers for new teachers who are trying “new ideas” (p. 47).

Ivey (1999) writes about the ‘old’ culture of middle schools, arguing that in spite of the advocacy for inquiry-based learning opportunities, ‘skill and drill’ activities still predominate in most classrooms. The unfortunate reality is that many teachers and curriculums still hold strongly to the belief that students must learn the ‘basics’ such as the multiplication tables, cursive writing, and the names of the provinces and capital cities. Prensky (2008) argues that this is a serious problem because it shows that teachers do not fully trust the technology of today or the future. When he tells teachers that information was only memorized in the past because there was no quick way to look it up and that the ‘basics’ have changed over time, he inevitably hears responses such as: What happens when the power goes out or the technology breaks down? According to Prensky, this response shows a confusion between ‘methods’ and ‘basics’. Math ‘basics’ are the meaning and proper use of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division but, currently, our best ‘method’ for performing these functions is the calculator. He writes that these ‘basic’ skills of the past are providing students with a ‘backup’ education of old methods that will only be needed in unlikely emergencies rather than providing them with new methods that will be useful today and in their future personal lives and careers.

Hennessy, Ruthven and Brindley (2005) examined teacher perspectives on integrating ICT into the English, Math and Science classrooms and had similar findings

amongst the teacher participants who felt torn between the need to conform to the external requirements of traditional exams (including curriculum expectations such as handwriting skills, basic numeracy skills and the ability to take accurate readings) and the integration of new technologies which in turn required new skills and different instruction.

Sternberg et al. (2007) describe some of the fears that teachers have about using new technologies in the classroom. First, teachers are concerned that IM and text messaging interfere with the development of students' abilities to use formal writing. This is because of their perceptions that with these modes of communication, students often use nonstandard English (e.g., "C U L&R" instead of "See you later"). Second, teachers worry about the danger of students interacting via email or chat rooms in inappropriate ways or with Internet predators. Finally, some educators are concerned about features built into word processors such as spelling and grammar checkers. They are concerned that with these tools, students will no longer be able to spell or construct grammatically correct sentences on their own. These fears suggest that teachers first need to be convinced about the benefits of using new literacies before they can be expected to embrace new technologies in their ELA programs.

#### *Collaboration Using New Media and the Changing Role of Teachers*

The traditional culture of the secondary ELA classroom has been advantageous for students who are strong independent learners because of the favouring of individual over collaborative assignments. The introduction of new literacies shifts this advantage to the social learner who thrives off of learning with others (Leu et al., 2004). In

traditional models of literacy instruction, the teacher's role is to teach his/her own skills to that of a group of students who are acquiring these skills, this is often referred to as a 'teacher-centered' classroom and, while many elementary teachers seem to have successfully moved away from this model of instruction, many secondary teachers still hold on to this system (Ivey, 1999; Prensky, 2007). Within a new literacies classroom, however, this traditional model is no longer reasonable. It is important for educators to recognize that many young students in the class will possess higher levels of knowledge than the teacher about some of the new literacies. This poses a challenge to the traditional teachers who will see their control over the learning environment and decision-making shift toward the students (Olson, 2000). According to Leu et al. (2004),

It is simply impossible for one person to know all the new literacies and teach these directly to others. Each of us, however, will know something unique and useful to others. Consequently, effective learning experiences will be increasingly dependent on social learning strategies and the ability of a teacher to orchestrate literacy learning opportunities between and among students who know different new literacies (p. 1597-1598).

This shifts the classroom into a student-centered, social learning environment in which both teacher and students will have the opportunity to learn from the knowledge of others.

Prensky (2005/2006) argues that schools must take collaborating with students to a new level. Students should be included in everything from discussions about curriculum development and teaching methods to school organization, discipline and

assignments. This open collaboration will provide teachers with 21<sup>st</sup> century solutions to educational challenges.

Bruce (1993) describes a collaborative social learning environment at Gallaudet University, a school for the deaf in Washington, D.C. where both students and the teacher compose messages at computer terminals using a private window at the bottom of their computer screen. As these messages are sent to each other, the messages appear on each screen as in the script of a play, beginning with the name of the sender. These messages scroll up the screen in a continuous dialogue and students and the teacher are able to scroll back and read previous messages they might have missed. The teacher, while being able to participate in the discussion, is also able to use a video switch to view the writing of individual students or of a group of students on a channel, thus facilitating assessment opportunities.

It is evident through this example how this type of interaction would blur the social distinctions in the classroom and change the roles of both teachers and students. Traditional classroom interaction patterns have significantly changed as the teacher is no longer the lecturer and director, but a collaborator in written discussion that is equally distributed among the class members. This collaborative environment also drastically changes the nature of the audience. In the past, students wrote to one audience, the teacher, however, in this example, they are participating in a writing community that includes peers as well. Inevitably, this changes the purpose of writing from writing to be evaluated to writing for purposes such as to inform, persuade, entertain, enlighten, develop relationships, explain experiences and create and develop ideas. Consequently,

in this context, writing becomes less formal and more conversational, merging conversation and composed text (Bruce, 1993).

Grisham and Wolsey (2006), teacher educator and teacher, have worked together in eighth-grade English classes to create vibrant learning communities through the implementation of literature circles that use electronic threaded discussion groups (TDG) as a communication tool about different topics (threads) within a common novel. TDGs are often called bulletin boards, online conversations and eDiscussions. They differ from chat rooms and IM because they are asynchronous, meaning that the posts accumulate over time. This allows students to thoughtfully compose statements in the absence of immediate pressure from an audience and eliminates the possibility of interruptions. Grisham and Wolsey were able to access these discussion transcripts for assessment and evaluation purposes and to add their own questions and comments to each group's discussion on a regular basis. They found that their own participation in and monitoring of the discussions was critical to increase the level and complexity of the students' responses. Through their participation, they were able to model appropriate academic language and the length and depth of the expected responses. Another finding was that the threaded discussion responses had more depth than the more typical literature circle oral discussions and paper journal entries that the students were required to complete. It seemed that, having a broader audience than just the teacher created an atmosphere of positive peer pressure where students felt a responsibility to their peers to keep up with the reading so that they could participate thoughtfully in the discussion community. Interestingly, when the use of TDGs was novel to the students, Grisham and Wolsey (2006) noted many instances of emoticons and font size and color changes. However, as

the students became more accustomed to the TDGs, their discussions became more substantive and fewer 'visual' elements were used. This exemplifies both the motivating impact that using a new technology such as TDGs can have on a more traditional literary activity (a novel study) as well as the important role that the teacher plays in this type of collaborative learning environment.

Not everyone shares the belief that new literacies will encourage social interaction. There remains a concern among adults that the Internet will cause future generations of students to be more solitary and withdrawn because they will be able to hide behind their computer screen and they will lack the skills to have verbal or face-to-face interactions (Luke, 2000). Certainly, it can be agreed upon that these new technologies will change the way people socialize and communicate in future generations.

### *The Importance of Teaching Students How to Use New Media Technologies*

In spite of the frequent use of new technologies outside of school, Rossiter Consulting (2006) reviewed the use of technology in learning at the K-12 level in Canadian schools and found that schools had not come close to reaching their full potential when it came to technology integration. According to various studies (Hennessy et al., 2005; Rossiter Consulting, 2006; Sefton-Green, 2001), effective implementation of new technologies includes more than just adequate equipment and connectivity. It includes teacher pre-service and in-service training, pedagogical and curriculum integration, and encouraging technology integration to become a part of the school culture (Rossiter Consulting, 2006). Simply using technology in the classroom

will not ensure that students are acquiring the new literacy skills they require (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004). Alexander (2006) writes “Access to information, of course, does not automatically lead to a critical ability to understand, analyze, use, and question that information – a fact potentially lost in the ease and speed with which information can be downloaded” (p. 41). This quote highlights the importance of educating students about how to critically view and use new media technologies. Hennessy et al. (2005) also highlight that subject culture plays a role in technology integration and that there will be greater cohesion within school subject departments than across school communities. Furthermore, Burns and Ungerleider (2002) warn that schools are being equipped with new technologies without a clear understanding of their impact on classroom practices and learning and without adequate research or attention to teacher preparation.

Rossiter Consulting (2006) summarizes the major barrier to technology integration in one word – access – claiming that technology will only be successfully integrated with access to knowledgeable and well-trained educators within a supportive school culture; access for all students both at home and at school; access in terms of ‘lived experience’ of policy makers versus that of ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001); and access to adequate funding in order to provide the necessary technological equipment (Rossiter Consulting, 2006).

There has been little research conducted about what new skills and strategies are required to effectively use the Internet and other ICTs in the classroom. Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish and Bosquet (1996) studied secondary history students’ use of multiple primary and secondary resources on the Internet (such as newspaper clippings and



excerpts from books). These documents sometimes provided conflicting opinions about the same historical event. They found that the mental models created by the students became more internally consistent after reading at least two documents, but did not become more consistent afterwards. Therefore, the students failed to make any growth after a first reading. Furthermore, after examining the students' notes, they found that the students took literal notes, regardless of the final tasks and when asked for a description, they remained very close to the text. These findings suggest that providing students with the access to retrieve multiple resources is not enough to benefit learning. Consequently, students require specific instruction in integrating information from different texts in order to use the information gathered effectively.

Interestingly, Jason (a first-year ELA and Social Studies teacher) was very impressed by the creativity and motivation of his students when he gave multigenre literature circle projects where they used multiliteracies to create character mobiles, three-dimensional scenes from the book, rewritings of the end of the book, or movie posters to promote the book. In contrast, their next project was a research project and Jason allowed them to use Internet sites along with books for sources of information. However,

Jason quickly noticed that the students were completely ignoring the textbook as a source of information, relying heavily on the graphics and text found on Internet sites he provided. Still, he made an interesting observation. When students translated what they had found on the Internet into a poster, they reverted to a textbook style of presentation... Most people simply copied, or printed directly

from Internet sources, the information and pasted it to the posterboard (Kist, 2007, p. 46).

Furthermore, because many students just copied and pasted the information onto their poster boards, when it came to presenting their projects, Jason found that most students just read from their posters demonstrating little understanding of the actual content. This was in sharp contrast to the creative oral presentations he had seen in the previous multigenre project where students could speak at length about their work. This example demonstrates the importance of teaching students how to use the Internet not only to gather data, but to analyze, question, and synthesize that data as well. Furthermore, this project exemplifies the importance of teaching students about issues such as plagiarism and choosing appropriate sources when using the Internet for research purposes.

Karchmer (2001) explored K-12 teachers' reports of how the Internet influenced literacy and literacy instruction in their classrooms. She found that many of the teachers felt that there was a difference in the quality of student's writing when they composed and published electronic texts. According to one teacher, writing on the screen increased the malleability of the text and encouraged students to revise their work. Furthermore, others agreed that by knowing that they would have a worldwide audience, students' motivation to write and revise was increased.

Nevertheless, if teachers are expected to use ICT in their classrooms, they must receive appropriate training on, not only the basic ICT user skills, but also on the fundamentals of curriculum integration (Karchmer, 2001). According to Karchmer (2001), the most pressing reason why teachers do not embrace using technology in their classrooms is the lack of substantial training provided by teacher education and staff

development programs. One issue is that most training focuses on basic computer skills such as keyboarding, file management, text and spreadsheet processing, CD-Rom and Internet navigation, some hardware maintenance and troubleshooting skills. Most training does not provide the time and specific instruction about how to integrate technology into the existing curriculum (Karchmer, 2001; Luke, 2000).

Karchmer (2001) also reported that the majority of teachers feel that the greatest barrier to using technology in their classroom is the lack of release time they receive to prepare for technology integration. Karchmer found that secondary teachers who were encouraging Internet use in the classroom were primarily concerned with ensuring safety on the web. As a result of this concern, the school community, sometimes including parents, teachers and administrators had to find solutions to the problem of inappropriate web sites. One teacher described that her school prohibited online searches to ensure safe usage. Consequently, she had to take the time to find a wealth of websites for her students to use when doing research projects in her classroom. This was both time consuming and required that she have a strong ability to sift through information herself if she wanted her students to have access to a variety of Internet sites. Without time to plan and prepare for the changes in the structure and content of the ELA program that technology integration inevitably demands, teachers will continue to fall back on their old and familiar tools and practices.

Prensky (2005/2006) believes that traditional inservice training methods are rendered useless in this fast-paced digital age. He suggests that teachers should be selected based on their empathy and guidance abilities rather than their subject-matter and technological knowledge since it will be important to have teachers who are good

facilitators, who can laugh at their own ‘digital immigrant accent’ and who value and honour what their students know. He argues that teachers do not need to be masters of technology, rather, they must focus on becoming adept discussion leaders, finding ways to incorporate the information and knowledge that students acquire in their digital pursuits into the discussions.

Although it remains unclear as to how to best encourage and prepare teachers to embrace and effectively teach new literacies in ELA programs, it is clear that there is a need to assist and support teachers in their efforts to understand and adapt to the new tools, techniques and practices that have and will continue to develop as a result of the emergence of new technologies in our fast-paced and rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

### Purpose

The above literature review demonstrates the importance of teaching new literacies in the modern ELA classroom both as a way of bridging the gap between students’ literacy practices outside of school and within school and in order to prepare students for the fast-paced information society of the present and future. In order to ensure that good quality and appropriate opportunities for professional development in the area of new literacies are occurring and will continue to occur, researchers and policymakers must determine how typical teachers are coping with integrating new literacies into their classrooms. While Kist (2005) demonstrates the importance of learning from exemplary teachers’ uses of new literacies, we must also hear the voices of typical teachers, like myself, who may desire to bring new literacies into the classroom

but who are not sure where or how to begin. It is the stories of successes and failures when it comes to using new literacies that I wish to explore in this study. The central question I asked: What do teachers know about using new literacies in their classroom? Subsequent questions I asked were: How do teachers feel about using new literacies in their classrooms? How are teachers incorporating new literacies into their classrooms? Are teachers comfortable with incorporating new literacies? What training have teachers had on using new literacies? Has that training been useful, what else might be helpful? What are the factors that are preventing teachers from using new literacies in the classroom? What are some concerns that teachers have about incorporating new literacies into the classroom? Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the knowledge, attitudes, questions and concerns that ELA teachers have about implementing new literacies in the classroom in order to find techniques and ideas for supporting secondary ELA teachers along the path of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy instruction.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

#### *Questionnaire participants.*

The participants (N=60) in this study were Secondary English Language Arts (SELA) teachers who work for the English Montréal School Board (EMSB) and the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB). I selected these particular school boards because they are the English language school boards in the Montréal and surrounding areas and because I am a SELA teacher at the EMSB. The fact that I am a teacher at the EMSB allowed me to capitalize on my, previously established, good rapport with the SELA consultant, Marsha Gouett who assisted with questionnaire (see Appendix A) distribution by allowing me to distribute the questionnaires during a SELA workshop that she had organized in August. Furthermore, I have a very good understanding of the policies and procedures in the board as well as the training sessions that have previously occurred and are occurring for SELA teachers.

Montréal is a very good city in which to conduct this study because, as a result of the many societal changes in recent decades, the Québec government committed to undertaking a major reform of its education system. The curriculum in Québec, the Québec Education Program (QEP) recognizes that schools have the important role of preparing all young students to live successful lives in the twenty-first century. “In short, we expect the schools to turn out autonomous people, capable of adapting in a world marked by the exponential growth of information, by constant change and by interdependent problems whose solution requires expert, diversified, and complementary skills” (QEP, 2004, p.5). The mission of schools in Québec is threefold: to provide

instruction in a knowledge-based world; to socialize students in a pluralistic world; and to provide qualifications in a changing world (QEP, 2004). While it is a large step in the right direction to reform the curriculum to reflect our rapidly changing society, through my personal experiences working as a SELA teacher, I have witnessed much concern among teachers that they have not been adequately trained and prepared to implement the curricular reform. This need must be addressed before success will be fully achieved in implementing the Québec curriculum and similar reformed curriculums across Canada.

#### *Interview participants.*

The initial participants were asked on the questionnaire, “Are you interested in participating in an interview about your opinion of and experiences (or lack of experience) using new literacies and different media in your classroom?” (see Appendix A). Out of the participants who answered ‘yes’ to that question (N=20), I purposefully selected four participants who, based on their questionnaire responses, represented the most typical sample. In order to find the most typical participants, I began by eliminating the questionnaire participants who were not willing to participate in an interview (N=40). Then, in each of the quantitative sections of the questionnaire, I compared the descriptive statistics of the remaining participants (N=20) with the averages of the entire group (N=60) and ranked the participants according to whose responses represented the most average to the least average. For the qualitative section of the questionnaire, I grouped the entire group’s answers into themes and ranked the themes based on most frequently discussed. Then I compared each of the 20 participants with the entire group to see who discussed the frequent themes most often. Once I had determined who represented the

most typical samples, I began contacting participants. I also made sure to select participants from four different schools because, as past research has shown (Bruce, 2003; Prensky, 2007; Luke, 2000; Kist, 2007), school culture and school policies have a strong impact on the attitude teachers have towards change. Some participants who had originally expressed an interest in participating in an interview were no longer willing to do so. Therefore, my interview participants were the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> most typical teachers. I assured the participants' that their identities would remain confidential and anonymous to ensure that they felt at ease sharing not only positive responses to the interview questions, but negative feelings and attitudes as well.

### *Research Design*

This study used a mixed-methods research design, however, more emphasis was placed on the collection of qualitative data. The data collection was conducted in two phases using an explanatory design analysis technique. The first phase consisted of distributing questionnaires to all of the SELA teachers in the EMSB (excluding Secondary V teachers because they were not yet implementing the reformed curriculum) as well as some LBPSB teachers who attended a training session hosted by the Ministère de Loisirs et du Sports (MELS). The questionnaire was triangulated in that it included questions that were both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended). The quantitative responses allowed me to statistically analyze the frequency and magnitude of trends in the data (Creswell, 2005). The qualitative responses provided reasons for closed-ended responses while also providing more depth and insight into individual experiences and opinions from which I can pinpoint common themes emerging across the



data. The first phase of data collection and analysis informed my choice of participants in the second phase of the study.

The second phase of the study took a qualitative approach as I sought to develop a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged from the first phase of the study. This phase consisted of conducting one-on-one unstructured interviews with four participants chosen through a 'typical' sampling process (Creswell, 2005). After analyzing the questionnaires, I had a sense of how my interview participants' perspectives related to the perspectives of all the participants in the study. I chose to use typical sampling in order to explore what typical teachers know and how they feel about teaching new literacies using different media in the classroom.

### *Instruments*

#### *Questionnaire.*

I chose to do a cross-sectional survey (see Appendix A) because I sought to understand teachers' attitudes towards, knowledge about, and questions and concerns regarding using new literacy practices in their ELA program. The questionnaire allowed me to describe trends in teachers' thinking about and experiences using new literacies in the classroom. Furthermore, I included both closed-ended and open-ended questions on the questionnaire. The purpose of including the open-ended questions is that they permitted me to explore the reasons behind some of the closed-ended responses and identified any comments that the participants had that were beyond the responses to the closed-ended questions (Creswell, 2005). I then searched for overlapping themes in the data that helped to inform my choice of interview participants and the types of interview

questions I asked. Unfortunately, the two most typical teachers who completed questionnaires were unwilling to participate in an interview. However, the third and fourth most typical teachers did participate in the interview process along with the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> most typical teachers.

I developed most of the questions on the questionnaire based on what I learned through my literature review and through the development of a conceptual framework for the study. I used the questionnaire found in Creswell's (2005) book as a model for the formatting of my questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the statements in section IV: Classroom Experiences, were replicated from Kist's (2003) *New Literacy Classroom Characteristic Scale*. Kist (2003) used this instrument to aid in the selection of teachers for his study of how teachers teach who teach in new literacies classrooms. Although the purpose of Kist's (2003) study was to weed out the teachers who were not using new literacies and mine was to gain a broader understanding of trends within the teachers' uses, or lack thereof, of new literacies, the selection of statements that I chose from his study assisted in informing me about who is and who is not using new literacies in the classroom.

Prior to distributing the questionnaires, I conducted a pilot test of the questionnaire and made necessary adjustments based on the feedback of two ELA teachers: Mark Sankoff and Cindy Norman. I asked them to note any problems on the survey such as poorly worded questions or questions that do not make sense. I also asked them to record the length of time it took to complete the instrument in order to determine whether it took them an excessive amount of time (Creswell, 2005). Both teachers found the questionnaire straightforward and easy to understand. They both completed the

questionnaire in the time period of five to seven minutes. The results from these teachers were not included in the study.

### *Interview.*

I conducted unstructured one-on-one interviews with four respondents of the questionnaire who represented the most ‘typical’ sample of participants possible. I developed some tentative interview questions (see Appendix B) that were open-ended in nature and that served as probes to invite the participants to share their knowledge about, attitudes towards, and experiences with using new literacies in their classrooms. I used these questions as prompts when our interview conversations slowed or halted.

### *Procedures*

I had two experienced ELA teachers who work for the EMSB: Mark Sankoff and Cindy Norman pilot the questionnaire. They were asked to take note of any problems they encountered while completing the questionnaire and to record the amount of time it took to complete the instrument. Upon receiving their feedback, I decided that there was no need to make any adjustments as they found it easy to understand and they completed it in a short amount of time (five to seven minutes).

I made arrangements with Marsha Gouett to attend a SELA training workshop on August 2008, where I was given the opportunity to briefly introduce my research to the teachers and subsequently pass out my questionnaire. At that workshop, 32 questionnaires were distributed and 30 completed questionnaires were returned. Following that workshop, I made arrangements with Michele Luchs who is a curriculum

writer and teacher trainer for MELS. She conducted a training session for SELA teachers in November 2008, on media literacy. Once again, I was given the opportunity to briefly introduce my research to the teachers and subsequently pass out my questionnaires. I handed out 31 questionnaires and all were completed, however, there was one teacher who had previously filled out the questionnaire at the August workshop, therefore I only used the first of the two questionnaires that she submitted. Between those two training sessions, I was able to get my questionnaire out to the majority of the SELA teachers in the EMSB as well as some SELA teachers in the LBPSB.

The next step was to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire in order to inform my decision about who to use as participants for the one-on-one interviews. I began by calculating descriptive statistics including the means and standard deviations for the closed-ended questions. This allowed me to identify the trends that were typical to the group of participants. For the qualitative responses on the questionnaire, I coded the answers to each question and then narrowed the codes into broad themes that emerged from the coding of the data. In this case, I was not focusing on finding trends, but on understanding the individual reasons why these trends were occurring.

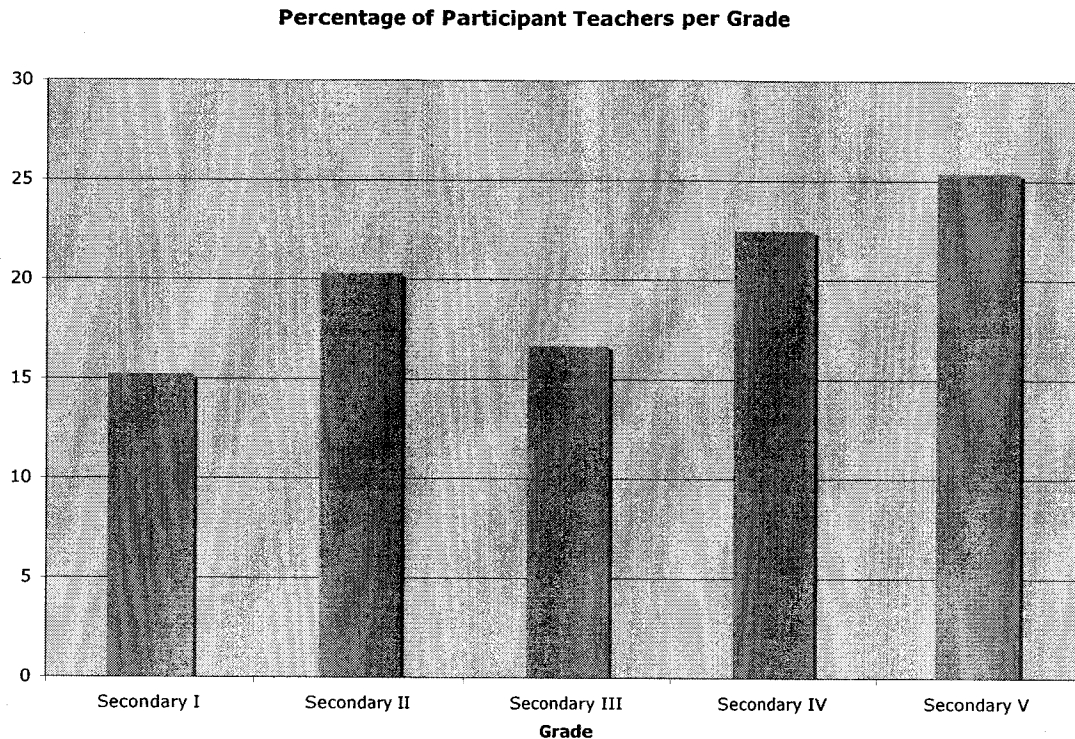
The following step was to rank the participants based on how typical their responses were to the questions. From there, I contacted the ten individuals via email who represented the most typical samples and who were also willing to participate in an interview. Of these ten individuals, four were able to meet with me at their school for an interview. I conducted these interviews in the last week of April, 2009. In three of the four cases, I conducted the interviews in the teacher's empty classroom, either during a planning time, lunch time or after school. This provided us with a quiet, comfortable

suitable place to talk without interruption, where the teachers felt at ease. This also allowed the teachers to share some of the projects that were in progress or already completed in the classroom and to refer to materials and activities that came up while we were conversing (Creswell, 2005). One participant, Ross (pseudonym), was unable to meet me in his classroom because it was being used by another teacher, so we met in the staff room where we had no interruptions for the duration of the interview. I began each interview by showing the participant the questionnaire he/she had previously filled out in the fall term and by obtaining consent from the interviewee to participate in the next phase of the study by having him/her complete an informed consent form. I informed the participant that his/her identity would remain anonymous in the study. I briefly described the purpose of the study to the interviewee and explained that I expected the interview to last approximately 30 minutes and that I would provide a summary of the study to the interviewee upon completion. I audiotaped the responses to ensure obtaining an accurate record of the conversation (Creswell, 2005). I also took notes on my laptop (as it is a more efficient recording method for me than paper and pen) throughout the interview in case the audiotape malfunctioned (Creswell, 2005).

After transcribing each of the interviews, I used the codes and themes that emerged in phase one as a framework for the analysis of the interviews. I added additional themes as they emerged.

#### Phase One – Questionnaire Analysis of Results

## Demographics



*Figure 1 – Distribution of Participant Teachers' Grade Levels*

The questionnaire was distributed to 65 SELA teachers in the EMBS and the LBPSB at two workshops about Media Literacy in the ELA classroom. One workshop was offered in August 2008 by the EMSB and MELS offered the other workshop in November 2008. ELA teachers were required to attend both workshops. Of the 65 questionnaires distributed, 60 were completed and returned. Within the sample, the average number of years of teaching experience was 10 years and the average number of years teaching ELA was nine years. See Figure 1 for a distribution of teachers across grade levels. The majority of the participants taught Secondary V ELA (25%) and the minority of participants taught Secondary I (15%).

*Outside-of-School New Literacy Practices*

In Section II: Outside of School Literacy Practices, teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they engage in the new literacy practices listed in Table 1. The following scale was used:

1	2	3	4	5
never	one to three times per month	once a week	a few times a week	daily

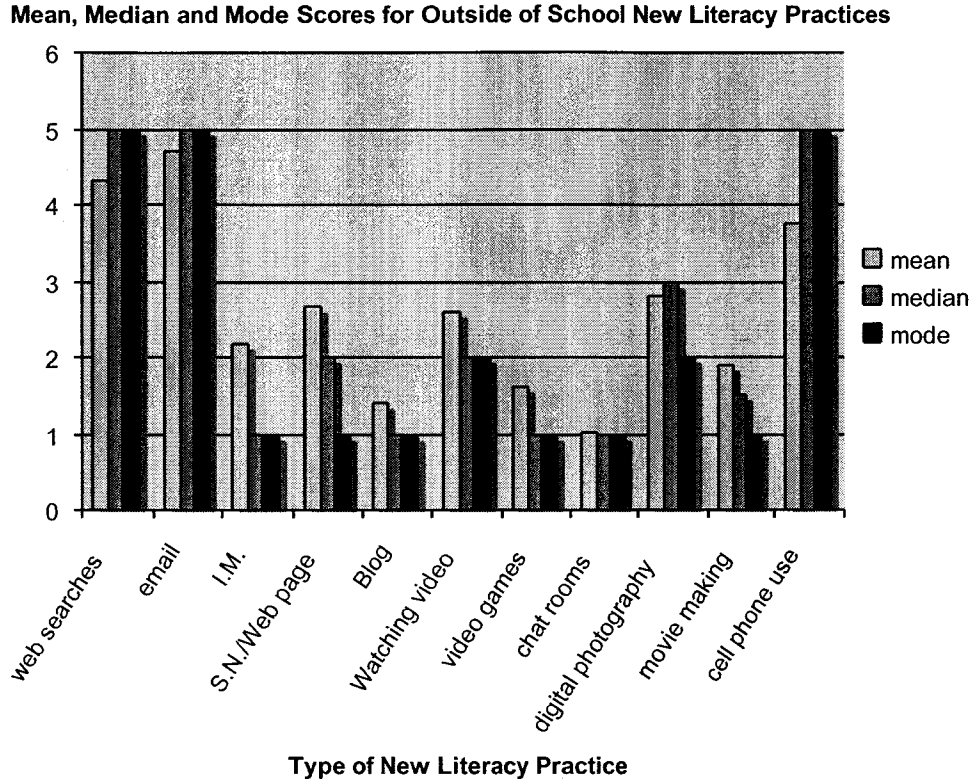
The results for this section of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 and demonstrate that the most frequent type of new literacy practice that teachers engage in outside of school are email (mean =4.7) and web searches (mean =4.3). These results show that on average, teachers engage in these two practices almost daily. The new literacy practices that teachers engage in the least often are blogging (mean=1.4), video games (mean=1.6) and movie making (mean= 1.9). These results show that teachers engage in blogging, video games and movie making less than one to three times per month. The contrast between the frequency of certain new literacy practices (such as web searches) in comparison to others (such as blogging) is quite obvious when viewed as a bar graph in figure 2.

Table 1

*Mean, Median and Mode Proportion Scores and Standard Deviations of Outside of School New Literacy Practices*

Type of New Literacy	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Web searches	4.3	5	5	1
Email	4.7	5	5	0.7
Instant Messaging	2.18	1	1	1.58
Social Network/Web page	2.68	2	1	1.62
Blogging	1.4	1	1	0.9
Watching videos	2.6	2	2	1.2
Video games	1.6	1	1	1.1
Chat rooms	1.03	1	1	0.2
Digital Photography	2.8	3	2	1.4
Video/Movie Making	1.9	1.5	1	1.1
Cell phone use	3.75	5	5	1.64





*Figure 2 – The Frequency of Teachers’ Engagement in New Literacy Practices Outside of School*

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*Teacher Training: Pre-Service and In-Service*

In Section III: Teacher Training, teachers were asked to what extent they felt they had received adequate training to teach new literacy practices using different media in their English Language Arts classrooms. The following scale was given:

1. not at all
2. a little bit
3. fairly well
4. very well

The average teacher response was that teachers felt they had received ‘a little bit’ of pre-service training (mean = 1.93) and ‘a little bit’ of in-service training (mean = 2.14).

When asked to elaborate, 55% of participants left this question blank. Of those who chose to elaborate (45%), 44% commented that training sessions and workshops implemented by facilitators from MELS, the school board, QPAT or McGill were quite beneficial; 26% wrote that they benefited more from practical experiences using technologies such as during a student-teaching placement or ‘tinkering’ at home; 15% wrote that they relied on their students’ knowledge or their children (sons and daughters) and husbands to help them to learn how to use new media; 11% commented that collaborating with other teachers and consultants opened all sorts of new avenues to bring back to the classroom; one teacher expressed that the training she had received was ineffective due to the rapid change in technologies; another teacher wrote that being part of a ‘digital project’ at the school board inspired her to use digital technologies more in the classroom.

### *Classroom Experiences*

Teachers were asked to respond to a number of statements related to classroom experiences using the following scale:

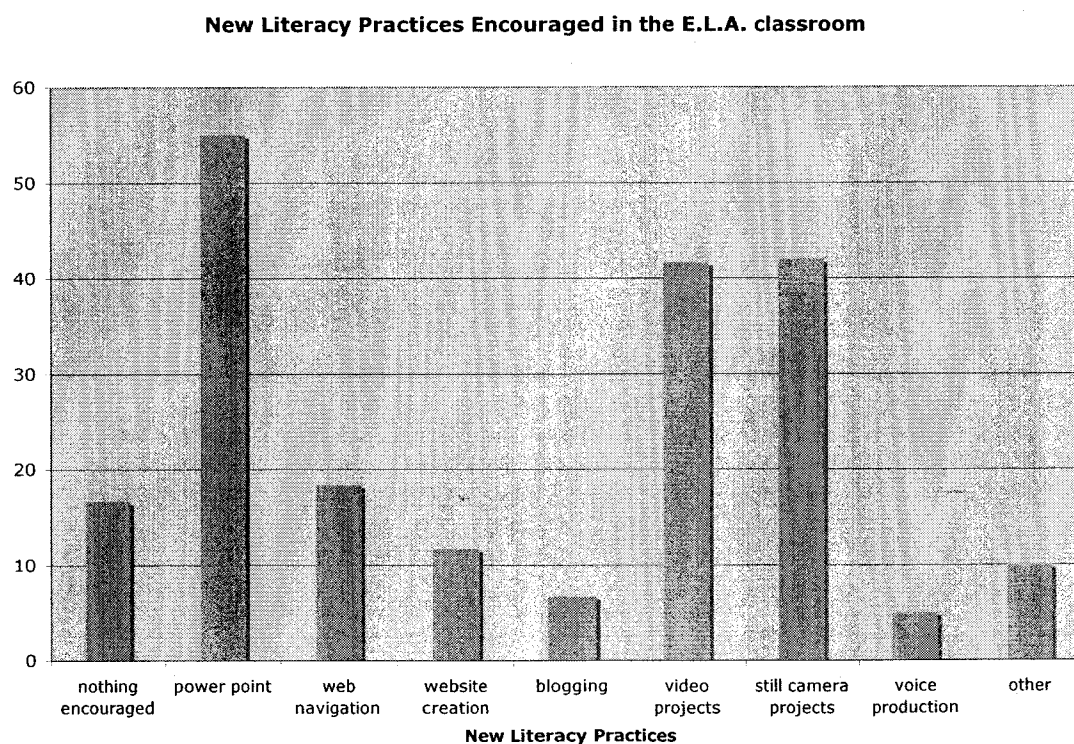
1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	regularly	often

The responses are shown below in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Mean, Median and Mode Proportion Scores and Standard Deviations of Classroom Experiences*

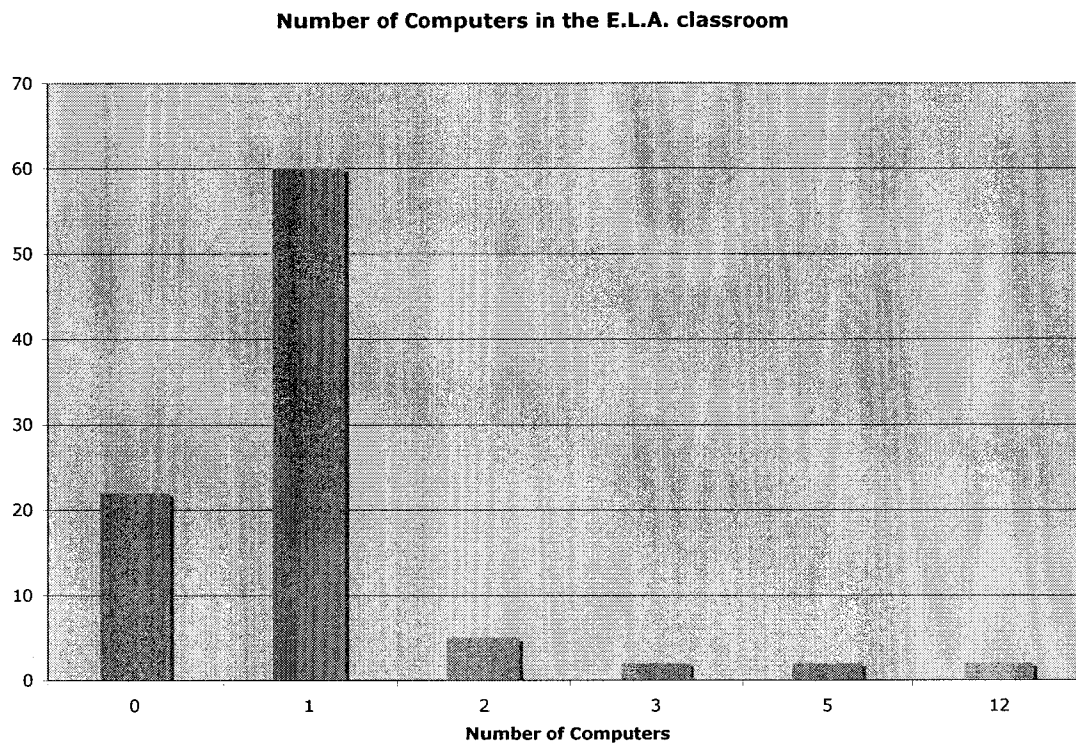
	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D.
I have had opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers in planning my English Language Arts program.	3.20	3.00	3.00	.97
My students work on projects / assignments that use more than one medium.	3.70	4.00	4.00	.90
My students work on projects that require collaboration with other students.	4.00	4.00	4.00	.80
I demonstrate the uses of different media when I am working through a problem in front of the students.	3.20	3.00	3.00	1.00
My students draw, discuss, or use some form of communication when thinking through a problem or getting ready to write.	3.90	4.00	4.00	.90
My classroom features a balance of choice and mandatory activities.	3.58	4.00	4.00	1.00
In my classroom, I am often a co-learner and a co-teacher with my students.	3.70	4.00	4.00	.90
My students use computers during class time.	2.42	2.00	3.00	1.05

The figures in Table 2 demonstrate that the classroom experience that is most frequently engaged in is projects that require collaboration with other students (mean = 4). The average classroom regularly engages in projects requiring collaboration. The classroom experience that is least frequently engaged in is the use of computers during class time (mean = 2.42) in spite of the fact that 85% of participants wrote that they do have access to a computer lab. However, 23% of participants commented on the fact that it is difficult to book the lab and 7% of participants wrote that they do have a computer lab but it is not functioning at the moment or the computers are outdated.



*Figure 3 – Comparisons of Responses to the Question: Describe any ‘New’ Literacy Practices you Encourage in Your Classroom.*

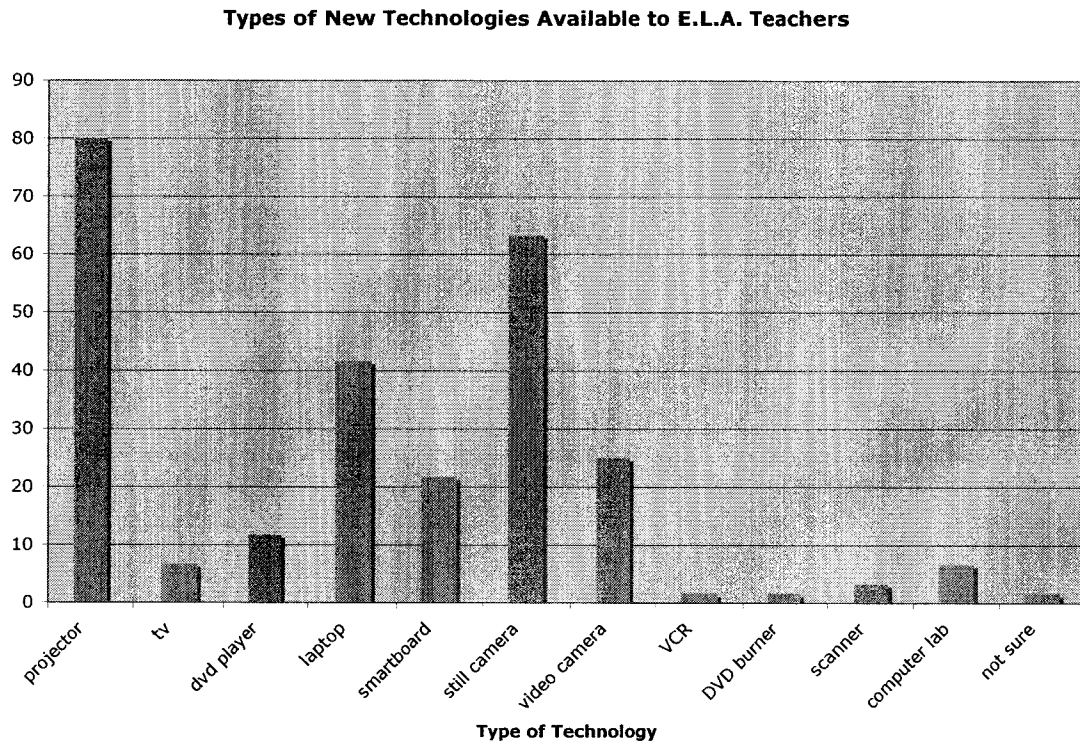
Figure 3 shows that the new literacy practice that is most frequently encouraged in ELA classrooms is power point projects (55%). This is not surprising given that most teachers (80%) have access to a projector (see Figure 5). Projects requiring a video camera such as short movies, music videos, commercials, video editing and soap opera production were also quite frequently mentioned (42%). Another frequent response was projects using a still camera such as photo essays, digital comic books and photography projects (42%). Less common were projects requiring use of the Internet such as web navigation (18%), website creation (12%) and blogging (7%). Voice production such as public service announcements, podcasts/ radio productions were mentioned by 5% of teachers. The 10% of responses included in the 'other' category included music creations, the use of YouTube or I Tunes, sticker making and newspaper advertisement projects. Some teachers (17%) responded that they do not encourage new literacy practices in their classrooms. One teacher expressed that teaching digital literacy takes away from traditional literacy fundamentals. Another wrote that she does not encourage new literacy projects simply because of lack of equipment and lack of confidence in using the technology. Similarly, are the responses, "I am not competent in my knowledge of these technologies" and "I have no idea how to get hold of them or what to do if I suddenly could." One teacher wrote, "Many students do not have access to these resources." Along the same lines is written, "I would encourage them all if I had the technology to produce and present them." In order to get around that dilemma, the same teacher wrote that students are encouraged to create new literacy projects at home and bring them in to school.



*Figure 4 – Comparisons of the Number of Computers Present in English Language Arts Classrooms*

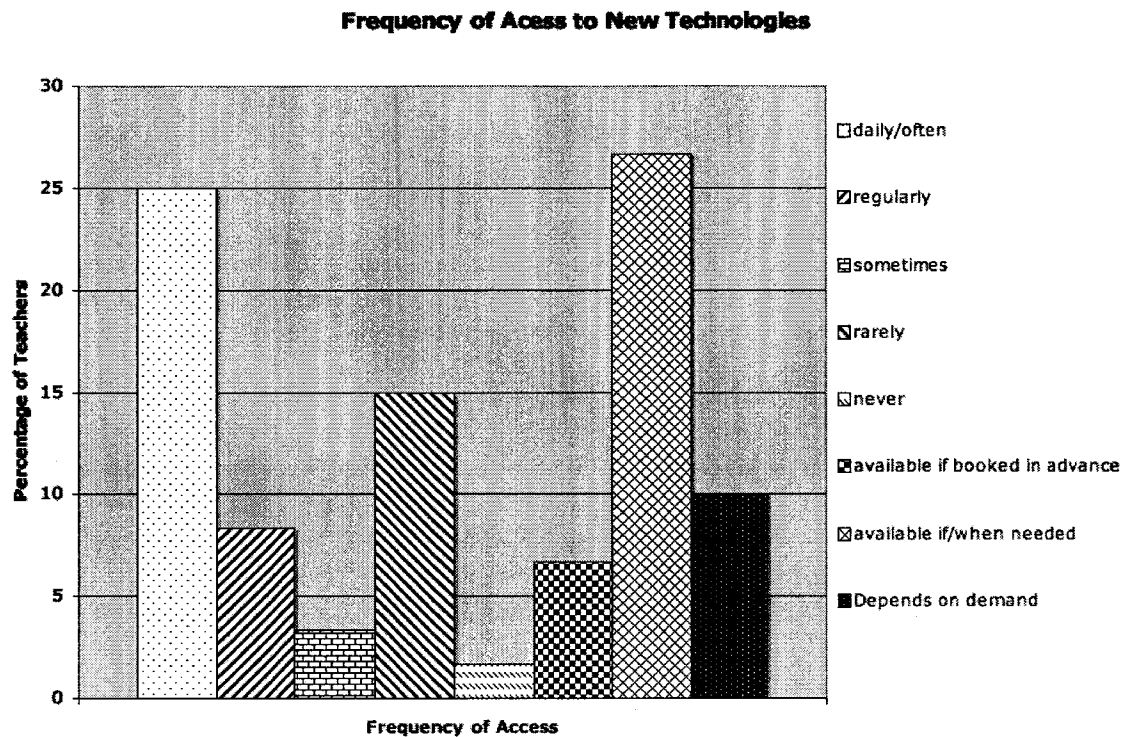
Figure 4 shows a further deterrent from using computers during class time in that the majority of teachers (82%) have zero or one computer in their classrooms. Therefore, teachers are required to use computer labs if they want more than a couple of students to be working on a computer at a time; 8% of participants left this answer blank.

Teachers were asked what new technologies (other than computers) are available to use at school. Figure 5 shows the answers that were given.



*Figure 5 – New Technologies Available to ELA Teachers*

The most frequently occurring answers were projectors (80%) followed by still cameras (63%) and laptops (42%). When teachers were asked how often they had access to the above-mentioned technologies, the answers are shown in Figure 6.



*Figure 6 – Frequency of Access to New Technologies*

This shows that the majority of teachers (52%) wrote that they have access to new technologies either daily, often or if and when needed. Within the commentary, a number of people commented on the fact that, while they do have good access to the technology, there is not enough or it is difficult to use. One person wrote that he never has access to new technologies.

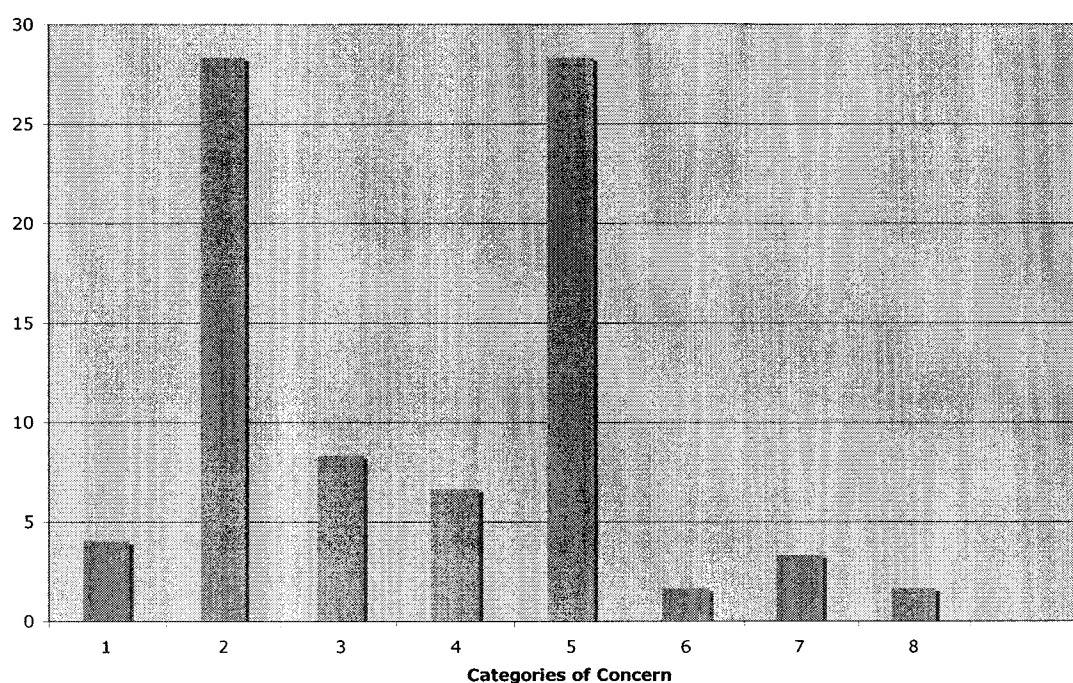
#### *Teachers' Questions and Concerns about New Literacies in the ELA classroom*

Teachers were asked to describe the questions and concerns they had about using new literacy practices in their classrooms. Responses were grouped into the following eight categories of concerns:



1. No concerns
2. There is a lack of access to and availability of equipment
3. New literacy practices will take away from teaching the basic reading and writing skills
4. Using new literacy practices is too time-consuming
5. Teachers lack the skills or the comfort to use new technologies or to fix problems with new technologies as they arise
6. Time is required to collaborate with other teachers about planning new literacy projects
7. Teachers lack the knowledge about how to evaluate new literacy projects and practices
8. Teachers require more support with difficult students and large class sizes, therefore it is too difficult to attempt new literacy practices

### Teachers' Concerns about using New Literacy Practices in the E.L.A. Classroom



*Figure 7 – Comparisons of Responses to the Question: Describe the Questions and Concerns you Might have about Using ‘New’ Literacy Practices in the Classroom*

The frequency of responses in each of these eight categories of concern is shown in Figure 7. 38% of teachers were concerned about the access to and availability of equipment. Included in this category were the concerns that there is an inadequate maintenance of equipment, the ‘tech’ support staff only come in once a week, and that the technology is out-of-date. One teacher wrote, “We do not have anywhere near enough equipment to even hope to do these ‘new’ literacy practices. I rely on my students having equipment.” Another concern expressed by a few teachers is a lack of access to websites. One teacher wrote, “My biggest problem is the amount of sites blocked by the server. Provisions should be made for teachers to access sites for video streaming for example in order to truly incorporate tech in my classroom. Important

resources are being blocked! [This] disallows teachers to put a positive light on sites students are using anyway.”

Some teachers (28%) expressed concern over their own lack of skills and comfort with using new technologies. One teacher wrote, “How do you remain up to date? It feels like technology changes so quickly. By the time I’ve figured something out/or the school has acquired the material, it feels like the kids have moved on.” Another teacher expressed a positive attitude towards using new literacies, writing that she would like to try some new literacy projects but does not feel properly trained to use the technology to do so. Other teachers (8%) were concerned that using new literacy practices in the ELA classroom would take away from teaching the basic skills of reading and writing. One teacher wrote that students will “write in MSN talk” and that spelling and reading will not improve. Another teacher expressed a similar concern, writing, “My main question, or concern, with the shift from the emphasis on literacy vis a vis literature, is that in adopting new modes we’re letting go of or abandoning traditional literacy. My fear is that as we encourage texting or “MSN-ing”, we’re actually helping hammer the nails into the coffin of the English language. I don’t want to come across as a prescriptive grammarian...but basic reading and writing skills seem to be left by the wayside. The paragraph, the sentence are dying media – many of my kids would be hard pressed to be able to read/understand/synthesize the cover pages story.” One teacher wrote that what students learn at school should be different than what they learn at home, therefore, if they are practicing new literacies at home through texting and gaming, they should spend their time in school focusing on traditional literatures that will teach the skills of comprehension/writing and critical thinking. Another teacher shared a similar viewpoint,

however, adding that perhaps new literacies could be taught in a separate media course rather than in the ELA classroom.

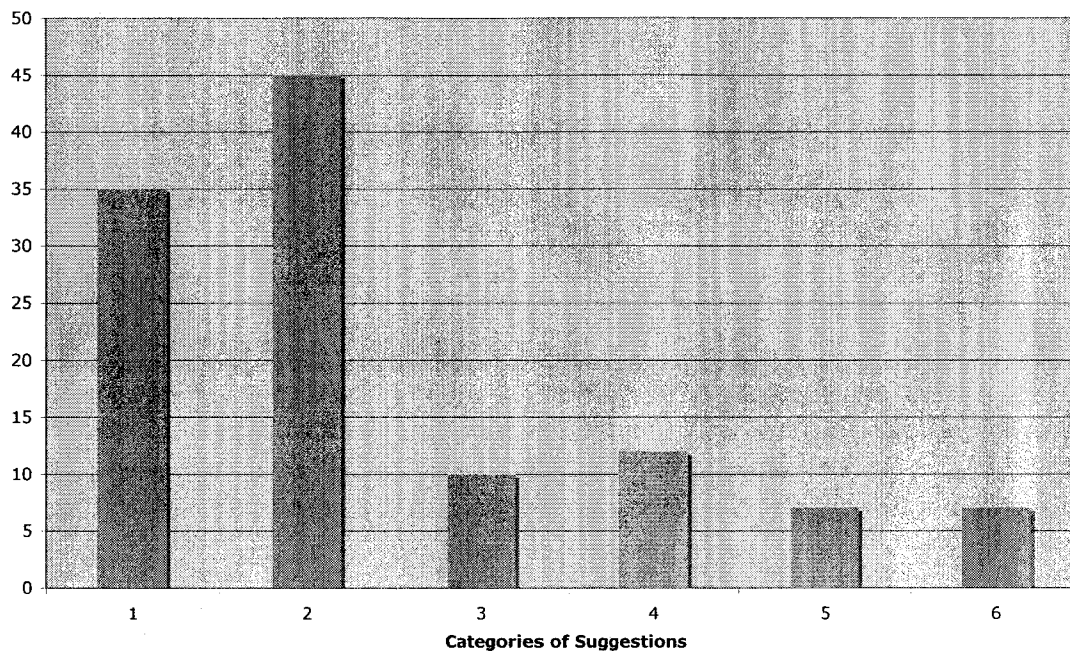
One idea shared was that it would be beneficial to have time to collaborate with other teachers about ideas for new literacy projects. This teacher wrote, “My concern is for teachers in my school who are not ‘technology friendly’. They are reluctant to implement ‘new’ literacy practices because it is not what they know! Also we aren’t given time to work on developing ideas with teachers in our school. More collaboration is needed!” A couple of teachers were concerned about how to evaluate new literacy projects and one teacher expressed the concern about large class sizes and a lack of support with the special needs students in her classroom, asking, “How [do I] do this in a class of 32-35 students with 8 or 9 ‘coded’ kids and no support resources?”

#### *Suggestions from Teachers about Incorporating New Literacies into ELA Classrooms*

Teachers were asked, “What would help you to be able to confidently incorporate ‘new’ literacy practices using different media in your ELA classroom? The responses were grouped into the following categories of suggestions:

1. To attend more workshops/training sessions
2. To have more access to and availability of equipment
3. To be given more time (for planning, collaborating, evaluating etc.)
4. To have access to sample lesson plans/units/evaluation tools
5. To collaborate with other teachers
6. To have more support from technicians or administration

**Suggestions about how to Incorporate New Literacy Practices into the E.L.A. Classroom**



*Figure 8 – Comparisons of Teachers Responses to the Question: What would Help you to be Able to Confidently Incorporate ‘New’ Literacy Practices using Different Media in your ELA Classroom?*

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The greatest number of teachers (45%) suggested that they required more access to and availability of equipment. Specifically, teachers requested Internet connections in the classroom and classrooms furnished to support more computers; a functional computer lab; better maintenance of equipment; the availability of a technician daily rather than once a week; and one computer per student in the classroom.

Some teachers (35%) suggested that they required more training and workshops. Within these responses was the frequent emphasis that workshops needed to be more hands-on and provide realistic lessons that incorporate technologies. One teacher wrote, “Most of our workshops are designed to teach teachers useful things but are not realistic because of the lack of materials in schools and classrooms.” A number

of teachers expressed the need for one-on-one training rather than large-group training sessions or having an ‘expert’ come into the classroom to support teachers with new literacy projects. One teacher suggested having someone come to the classroom to model a lesson or even a project using new literacy practices rather than attending general workshops. Along the same lines, a teacher wrote, “[We need] concrete examples of projects rather than theory, jargon and power point presentations lacking any modeling of how we should use them in the classroom.”

Other common suggestions were to be given sample units and lesson plans (12%); to have more time to plan units and lessons (10%); to have opportunities to collaborate with other teachers (7%) and to receive more support from administrators, support staff and technicians (7%).

## Phase Two – Interview Analysis

### *Demographics*

I interviewed four teachers from four different schools in the Montréal and surrounding areas. I selected these interview participants based on two criteria: their representation as a typical sample and their willingness to participate in an interview (33.3% of questionnaire participants). In order to find who represented the most typical sample, I reviewed each section of the questionnaire and compared the responses of each participant who was willing to participate in an interview (N=20) with the average response of the entire group of participants who completed the questionnaire (N=60). Then I ranked the participants based on whose answers were closest to the average answer the most often. The purpose of these interviews was to acquire a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged in the questionnaire analysis in order to better understand typical teachers' experiences teaching new literacies.

Jennifer ranked as the 14<sup>th</sup> most typical teacher willing to participate in an interview. She is a teacher at an Outreach school for students who have difficulty succeeding in regular programs. She was clearly passionate about the school and the unique opportunities it offers to struggling students. About the students, she remarked "Somebody higher up might call them drop outs, I would call them push outs." She has worked at this school for 12 years and teaches Secondary II-V. However, she noted that, realistically, none of the students are at grade level, most being two to three years behind. Teachers at Jennifer's school encourage students to go to trade schools for their post-secondary educations, however, the students take the same courses as are offered at regular schools and they write the same exams, therefore, they still have the same post-

secondary options as students attending regular schools. Prior to accepting her position at the Outreach school, Jennifer worked as a curriculum writer and a workshop facilitator for three years with MELS.

Ross ranked as the 13<sup>th</sup> most typical teacher willing to participate in an interview. He is a Secondary I core teacher at a school in Montréal. He teaches English Language Arts, History, Geography and Ethics. His position requires him to stay with the same groups of students for two years, therefore, next year, he will be teaching the same subjects to the Secondary II students. Ross has been teaching ELA since he commenced his teaching career three years ago. Prior to teaching, Ross worked for a Montréal-based N.G.O. providing training in Web design for its partner organizations in Senegal. About this experience, he notes, "I think I'm fortunate because I do have training in web design and I'm sort of up with the new media, but, I know I'm rare." He describes his school as having a diverse clientele of students coming from all different backgrounds.

Lily ranked as the fourth most typical teacher willing to participate in an interview. She has been teaching for five years and has been teaching ELA for four years. She teaches Secondary I English and Math which she describes as an amazing mix because it allows her to double up the periods and incorporate both subjects into her projects. She began her career as an Elementary (K-6) computer teacher, which she described as a great learning experience because she said, "When I told people that I was going into teaching and teaching computers, they kind of laughed!" After observing her classroom set up with a Smartboard and laptops, I found it hard to believe that anyone ever thought of Lily as technology-challenged.



Sarah ranked as the third most typical teacher willing to participate in an interview. She teaches Secondary II ELA and Drama at a school in Montréal that houses both elementary (K-5) and secondary programs (6-11). She appeared to be a very warm and dedicated teacher as, shortly after our interview, a former student came by and she greeted him with a hug and welcoming words. She has been teaching for 17 years and she has taught ELA for eight years.

#### *Outside-of-School New Literacy Practices*

Jennifer described herself as a Mac girl, which is a challenge because she has PCs at school. However, she said that her husband had been helping her to learn her way around a PC. On her questionnaire, she wrote that she engages in email daily and web searches a few times a week. She never engages in Instant Messaging, blogging, chat rooms, personal web page designing, online social networking or video/movie making outside of school and she rarely watches videos on YouTube, plays video games or uses digital cameras.

Ross described himself as a social justice activist, a practice that has given him quite a bit of experience designing media campaigns. On his questionnaire he wrote that he engages in email and web searches daily and personal web page designing, online social networking and video games a few times a week. He never engages in Instant Messaging, blogging and chat rooms and he rarely engages in digital photography and video/movie making.

Lily did not see herself as technology savvy at home. She wrote on her questionnaire that she engages in web searches, email and Instant Messaging on a daily

basis and digital photography a few times a week. She watches videos on YouTube once a week and engages in video/movie making one to three times per month. She never participates in chat rooms or blogging, plays video games or visits a personal web page or online social network.

Sarah wrote on her questionnaire that she engages in web searches, email and digital photography daily. She watches videos on YouTube a few times a week and plays video games or makes videos/movies a few times per month. Sarah never engages in Instant Messaging, personal web page designing or online social networking, chat rooms and blogging.

The outside of school literacy practices of these four participants represent a very typical sample from the questionnaire participants. Amongst these four participants, the most frequent type of new literacy practices that are engaged in outside of school are email and web searches. The participants showed differences in their use of Instant Messaging, personal web page designing and online social networking, watching videos on YouTube, playing video games, video/movie making and digital photography. All four participants never engage in chat rooms or blogging.

#### *Teacher Training: Pre-Service and In-Service*

Jennifer did her teacher training at a local university where she received a little bit of training to use new literacies. She did not speak much of the in-service training sessions she had attended, but she wrote on her questionnaire that it is her own practices that have helped her to bring these new technologies into her classroom.

Ross had training in web design prior to commencing his career in teaching. When asked about the in-service training he has received, his response demonstrated a deep frustration. He said that, although [teachers] have been given lots of interesting activities to do with the students at the MELS implementation sessions, there has been absolutely no training on how to evaluate the students in Media Literacy. “We’ve been to four days of workshops on that single competency that were all wasted playing with Macintosh computers, again, not a single rubric was given, no suggestion as to how to evaluate it.” He went on to say that there is just no time to use the ample resources recommended by MELS and the school board, he said, “The English consultants from the board are constantly sending us weblinks of great things that we can do, I don’t need to know how to find stuff on the Internet, the one thing that anybody who is teaching the reform is good at right now, is finding stuff on the Internet. What I need is materials that are ready to go that I can use in class.” It is clear that Ross feels strongly that the training and support available are not meeting his needs as an ELA teacher.

Sarah told me that she needs more support than what she has received and that the training just has not been enough. She wrote that she had no training at all in new literacy in her pre-service education because it was a long time ago. She described one training day that the school board organized where she attended a workshop on doing clay animation with a computer program. She said that she just got a taste of it, and she would like to bring it into her classroom, but requires more training in order to do so. Further, like Ross, she agreed that the evaluation is the hardest part because media projects require so much time that you need to evaluate a few competencies within the project which requires careful planning and preparation. She was also excited to tell me about

her plan to have a colleague teach her how to make videos. She told me she was planning to follow him around while he made a video to present to the principal at the end of the school year and that he was willing to show her how to edit. She admitted however, that he had been collecting the equipment personally and he would be using his own equipment for the video project because they did not have the necessary equipment at the school.

Lily described the MELS training sessions as a tremendous help. Unlike Ross who did not seem to benefit as much from the hands-on aspects of the training, Lily found that aspect particularly useful. She said, “It’s made me feel more comfortable with the technology and one thing I realize through the MELS implementation sessions was that it’s by doing it, actually doing it, you’re not just sitting there and listening to someone talk about it, you’re actually doing it and isn’t that the way it is with our kids. When the kids are doing it instead of just sitting there and listening to us, that’s how they learn best.” However, Lily continued by saying that unfortunately, there’s just not enough time to implement everything that is suggested at these workshops. Furthermore, like Ross, Lily has received many resources sent out through email by the consultants at MELS and the school board and she noted that she has found some great resources in this way, although she does admit that finding time to read through everything is a challenge and requires a deep commitment. Lily described a training session that she attended on using a Smartboard and found it to be “a total waste of time” because she did not have a Smartboard in her classroom. She said that in her opinion, there is absolutely no point in training teachers if they do not have the technology to practice on. Since that initial training, however, she now has a Smartboard in her classroom, one of two in the school

and she had a second training which she found far more useful since she was able to return to school and practice what she had learned. She was looking forward to a third training session on using the Smartboard in May.

The common concern amongst these participants was time, whether it was the need for more training time or a lack of time to plan, prepare and evaluate media projects. Ross' suggestion that more ready-made materials such as unit plans be available would significantly help teachers' even to have a starting point in their preparations. Furthermore, what is evident by these four responses is that different teachers require different types and levels of support. While Jessica seemed to be comfortable tinkering with technologies on her own, Sarah sought out mentorship with a more experienced colleague and expressed the need for more training sessions. While Ross saw using technology in workshops as wasted time, Lily felt that the hands-on workshops were very effective. Another theme that arose in the responses was more direction in the area of evaluating new literacies. Perhaps providing sample rubrics and other evaluation options would provide teachers with some scaffolding when it comes to planning and preparing new literacy projects.

### *Classroom Experiences*

All four participants described some very interesting new literacy projects that they had facilitated in their classrooms such as video book trailers (Jennifer), photography projects (Jennifer, Lily), three-dimensional posters (Sarah), podcasts (Lily), and advertisement and news coverage analysis (Ross). While Lily and Jennifer seemed quite comfortable with creating and implementing these projects, Ross and Sarah seemed

less confident about creating projects that were teaching the skills that they viewed as necessary for their students.

Ross' resistance to teaching new literacies in his English Language Arts class was evident. He said, "[the students are] coming in [to school], they already know how to surf the net, how to find information, even how to interpret meaning in visual text. I don't feel that kids are particularly weak in that, however I do feel that they're particularly weak in the basics of writing and reading, in the traditional texts." About the reformed curriculum, he said "reading and writing are 50% of the content which is insanity, if you ask me, it's not responding to the needs these kids have, I have kids every year coming in grade 7. In a class of 27 kids this year, there were probably seven or eight that had no clue how to use paragraphs!"

Interestingly, Jennifer had a differing opinion. She found that, although her students were avid users of the Internet, they understood surprisingly little about how the Internet actually worked. She discovered this when she taught a lesson about how to research on the Internet. She said, "I was surprised by how, for kids who have their MySpace pages and MSN, they really don't understand even how the Internet works. So we spent some time talking about what happens when you type something into Google. That was quite fascinating to see their sort of literacy, I just thought they'd be so ahead of everything, but they really didn't understand." Jennifer also explained that it was more successful to assign writing projects to be completed on the computer rather than by hand. She found her students were much more motivated to write and wrote more when they were given an assignment that required the use of a computer. She said, "I mean these are kids with a lot of learning issues, learning disabilities. I was concerned when I

put them on the laptops that they'd be fooling around, they'd be going on the Internet, but they're sitting there, they're focused, most of them, I have a few who really prefer writing by hand, but most of the kids who don't write, will write with a keyboard in front of them and it makes such a difference, I've had great success with the projects I've done this year with computers."

Similar to Jennifer's concerns prior to giving her students laptops, Sarah was concerned about classroom management. When I asked her what experiences she has had teaching new literacies in the classroom, she told me that she is struggling with discipline issues "because [the students] are not used to seeing English taught in that manner so they still feel like the essay is the most serious component." She added that she agreed that essay writing was an important skill. She also expressed concerns about having student teachers attempt new-literacy projects in the classroom because they were 'more complex' than traditional lessons. She felt that the student teachers she had this year did not have solid enough discipline techniques to manage a "complex" project. One project that Sarah described with pride was having her students create three-dimensional posters of their "Simple Pleasures." She had displayed the projects all over the classroom and was amazed by the creativity demonstrated by the students. While these projects encouraged the students to use more than just written language to express themselves (such as images, fonts and colours), there was no expectation for students to use new media technologies and many students used more traditional tools such as markers, paper and other crafting materials. Sarah seemed self-conscious of the fact that she had not yet tried to implement a project using new technologies and spoke repeatedly of her desire to have the students make video book trailers, a new literacy project she had

learned about at a MELS implementation session. She explained that she knew the school board leant out laptops that could be used in the classroom, although she was not sure how she could get them or if they would be available. Her lack of confidence at maintaining classroom management and managing the equipment came through in our discussion as she explained, “But again, the students are limited to their own [equipment], or I’ll call the board, I don’t know if anybody’s booked this month to bring in the laptops to do the trailers...it’s just returning the equipment and settling the kids down, like I said, our kids are not used to it, so it’s a little exciting at first!”

Of the four interview candidates, Lily was the most confident about new literacy projects. She described some very interesting new literacy projects that she has implemented the year before such as photo essays, podcasts and having a media station in the classroom. However, she emphasized the importance of taking the time to carefully plan new literacy projects down to the smallest details. She said her biggest problem was remembering the little details that are technology specific such as having back-up batteries for the digital cameras. She explained, “So you have to be conscious, these are little things that you have to think of but once you’ve done it a couple of times, you remember that you have to have lots of batteries on hand and we’ve also gone a step further, the beginning of the planning when we’re asked what do we need for our classrooms, we now have put batteries in our budget.” Lily advised that not only was teacher-planning an important component of a good new literacy project, but incorporating a planning phase into the project for the students was integral. She explained, “the actual time that [the students] need with the computers and they need with the, for example the cameras, if the planning has been done effectively with your



storyboarding, when they're taking a certain shot with their camera, they know the angle, they know exactly what they need, the planning is crucial and I think this is where many teachers make a mistake in the beginning is that they let the kids go to the production phase before they have accurately completed the initial planning stage. The planning stage has to be followed, I'd say, meticulously." Clearly, all four interview participants were at different comfort and acceptance levels with integrating new literacies into their ELA programs. While Lily and Jennifer appeared to be quite positive about the learning involved in these projects, Ross and Sarah were much more hesitant about the benefits of doing new literacy projects in the classroom due to the risks of the students losing the more traditional skills such as essay writing.

#### *Collaboration in the Classroom (Teaching Style) and with Colleagues*

All four interview participants discussed the successes and challenges they faced when it came to collaborating both with the students and with their colleagues.

Of the four participants, Lily did the most collaborating in her classroom with the students. According to Lily, she has become part of a learning community with her students. The class makes up a rubric with her prior to commencing a project, which allows the students to thoroughly understand the goals and expectations of a project. She also engages the students in class and group discussions about working together prior to beginning projects. When I asked her how she grouped students, she explained that it depended on the assignment. The following discussion sheds light on how intricate and well thought-out her project implementation has become:

L - In certain projects I let the students decide who they're working with. In the last project I did with the photo essay, I paired the students up together based on needs, based on personality and also based on experience.

S - Sounds good and generally the groups work well together?

L - There's always issues (laugh)! But it's kind of interesting because sometimes, well, a few times when I've let the students decide who they're working with, in the end on their comments it often comes back, "I realize that I shouldn't be working with my friend."

S - (Laugh), it's the same as when you go off to university and live with a friend, it ruins your friendship! Twenty, twenty in hindsight right?

L - Yeah! But it's also that for the students, that in itself is part of the process and it's also part of them understanding who they are as an individual and who they work well with and understanding other people's strengths and other people's weaknesses and sometimes you've got two kids that are technologically very strong but it's not a good mix because one person's kind of dominating one of the components of the project and they don't have enough balance within the group.

S - Right.

L - Sharing also the technology, making sure the person who's technologically strong is not always the one that's dominating and using the technology, that's another issue, we have to make sure there's a rotation going on and it has to be specified and you have to observe it also because the person who's weaker tends not to want to touch it, they can be intimidated.

S - So what do you do in that case? Is it you that comes in and says "Ok it's so and so's turn to now take over?"

L - We talk about these issues in class before we're actually doing the projects.

S – So as a whole class discussion?

L – Yes, as a whole class discussion and also there is teacher observation and if you haven't seen the person go on the computer, so “Ok guys, what have you done?” and then talk with the students as they go through the actual project and usually you get the student who's not working too much on the technology or with the computer or whatever, they'll say “Oh yeah, I haven't done much.”

S- Yeah?

L – And when they realize also that they're gonna be evaluated on what they're doing and they're not always gonna be with that person. This is a learning experience, so if you're not picking up the skills...

S – Yeah, you're gonna be in trouble next time.

L – You're gonna be in trouble down the road.

S – And so do you have, what do you use? Do you have formal evaluation tools or is it more just informally observing?

L – The rubrics are created at the beginning of the project with the students.

S – So you're doing that?

L – With the students and then we have a formal, well I call it kid-friendly rubric and then the rubric that's created by the teacher based on, you know, that I wouldn't give to the students but the rubric the students create with me, and that's in the past, what I have done previously is I just came up with a rubric and here's the project guys, here's the rubric and go for it, but once I started creating a rubric with the students, it became more powerful because then they really understood what they had to include in their project

and it takes time but it's kind of like the, what's that expression? Sometimes the easy way ends up being the hard way and the hard way ends up being the easy way. With creating rubrics with your students, it ends up being easier, because of the fact that they really have an understanding of what they need to include in their podcast or what they need to include in their photo essay.

S – Yeah, and so do they end up coming out with a mark? Or do they end up coming out with a rubric with different sections highlighted?

L – Well we do have, because of the evaluation system, we do have to end up with a final mark, right, so, it's on the rubric and then the rubric is transferred into a mark.

This discussion demonstrates the importance of thinking through and preparing for the many challenges that will arise when students are working together on projects. It is evident that Lily is finding such success with new literacy projects because she anticipates issues and discusses them with her class prior to implementation and throughout the project. It is also obvious that the students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them throughout the project. Although this type of facilitation of projects may seem daunting, Lily does not pretend to know everything, she realizes that she is undergoing a learning process and that each year she will take her learning one step further.

Lily found much success with collaboration in the classroom, however, she has found it difficult to collaborate with her colleagues. For one, she explained, the cycle one teachers do not have a common planning time. That means that when they wish to collaborate, it is on their time either at lunch or after school. She told me that there is an amazing team of teachers at the school, but everyone is struggling to find time in their

busy schedules, and, due to the fact that there are no common planning times, collaboration is not easy to achieve. She told me that they do share resources whenever they can and they try to work together in the same direction. She explained that her administration is quite supportive, however there is “not enough planning time. At our last staff meeting we were told, ok there’s money if you want to apply for a grant and you can get time to work together as a staff, well someone has to take the initiative to do that, someone has to take the initiative to fill out the grant applications and that comes back to what I was saying at the very beginning, as teachers we need to take that time to do that, to take that step but sometimes it can be overwhelming if you’re the one who’s always doing that stuff – someone else take it!” Clearly, Lily was feeling that she is the one that most often takes initiative and it was evident that she had a lot on her plate already. She described a workshop that she would be leading in June to teach the other Cycle One teachers how to do photo essays. While Lily has found it challenging to collaborate with her colleagues, she told me that the consultants at the school board had been extremely supportive in helping her develop projects such as the photo essays and podcasts that she was implementing in her classroom.

Lily also described one training workshop that she had attended where the facilitator gave his power point to the audience with links to the video clips he had used. Lily told me, “So all you had to do was literally, you could take his power point, you could take his video clips and you can take that, you’ve got a lesson! It’s these ready-made lessons, now, obviously, you know I know they don’t like us having stuff that’s already ready made and here you go, but then you can adjust it according to your classes instead of having to capture the movie yourself and rent the movie and all that whole

process, it takes forever and I think teachers go, 'I don't have that time!'" Although Lily was clearly hoping to have more collaboration with her colleagues, she seemed to be ahead of the others when it came to collaborating within her classroom and with consultants at the school board.

Sarah was not yet ready to embark on new literacy projects like the ones Lily was implementing in the classroom, however she shared Lily's attitude about being a learner and a part of the classroom community. She told me that she did have her students work together in partners or in groups sometimes but that often the students just used those times to play and talk rather than to work. She also recognized how empowered the students felt when the teacher becomes a learner in the classroom. She explained, "I'm not very comfortable [using new technology] but I'm not shy to say I don't know and I don't mind working with my students. If anything I find when you admit you don't know something and you're learning with them and you tell them, I will relay the knowledge, I know what I'm looking for, show me how to do this or how would you do that, they feel empowered too." She also explained how she saw the changing role of the teacher, "The teacher can no longer be the know it all...you have to be a facilitator, the person that guides them, the person that motivates them. Actually, that is the key, the motivator, the one that takes their interest and says 'Ok this is valid this is what you need to learn, let's put it together and that way we can combine your interests and do something that is required of you too', and they like that." She did admit however, that it was not easy to take on that role "It's like starting teaching all over again!" I believe many teachers share that same sentiment. It was evident that Sarah knew how and was eager to teach new

literacies but did not yet have the skills and confidence to implement these teachings in her classroom.

As for collaboration with her colleagues, Sarah expressed her desire to have a technology mentor. Our conversation went as follows:

Sa - I want a little support, you know, if you needed to call this person, that would be fine. That would be interesting – like this person has worked with it before.

S - Right, so like mentoring.

Sa – A little mentoring, or question and answer, like this is something I encountered. The snag I’ve hit or how do you keep them focused? When one group is at point C, how did you keep your other group interested?

S – That’s a great idea!

Sa – You know like, “Hi I’m so and so I heard you did this project last year, did you have trouble with equipment. Give me a call.”

S – So you’re talking about collaborating with other teachers, you know, what worked for you, what didn’t work for you? And do you have any opportunities like that?

Sa – I spoke with one of the teachers upstairs and I find that perhaps next year we’ll be able to collaborate a little bit more.

It is evident in this conversation that Sarah required a little more guidance before she felt comfortable implementing new literacy projects in her classroom and that she felt that support from colleagues who had attempted projects in their classrooms would help her to understand how to implement them within her own. Furthermore, Sarah approached a colleague at school who makes videos professionally and she told me proudly that he will be showing her how to edit videos so that she can eventually bring

that skill into her own classroom. With Sarah's positive attitude and some more training, perhaps through mentoring and collaboration with colleagues, Sarah could be doing great new literacy projects in her classroom!

When I asked Ross about collaborating with his colleagues, he described his colleagues as "a great team of teachers." However, he then went on to admit that he had not found any success with collaboration at his school. It was not for lack of trying. Ross described his valiant effort to collaborate with the other teachers in his school in the following conversation:

R – We've tried to [collaborate] this year and I have to say, just for example, in term one, I put together a binder that was for cross-curricular connections where people were supposed to write down what they were teaching, it was divided by grade and each subject, you know, other teachers could leaf through that and see if there was a connection there with something I'm doing in my class, maybe do some collaboration.

S – Yeah.

R – The reality is though, I mean it was a nice idea.

S- Yeah.

R – The reality is that none of us have time for that kind of collaboration, that level of collaboration. And then I also brought out this unit on plastic I kind of suggested it as a cross-curricular unit because there was this article in the Gazette about the problem of plastic and, just for example, there's a blob of plastic floating in the Atlantic ocean the size of Québec (laugh). So there's all kinds of good statistics that I thought, you know, Math teachers could be using that and then we did persuasive posters in English and covered the issue in Geography, but again, even though I kind of put it all together, there



wasn't so many teachers who got on board and I'm not, I totally understand, we are all overloaded and I think all of us would want to be doing that kind of collaboration more often, especially here, we've got a really great team of teachers here that I think we all do work very well together, but it's a question of time, you know like, people, by the end of term are walking around here like zombies cuz they're just trying to survive.

Ross' project ideas were interesting and very relevant in a number of different subject areas, however, his frustration with bringing other teachers on board demonstrates a struggle with the old individualistic culture of teaching as well as a lack of scheduling that promotes collaboration. Unfortunately, Ross' failure to get the other teachers involved in his cross-curricular project was very discouraging and he seems to have backed away from collaboration for the time being.

As for Jennifer, she described herself as a learner in her classroom. She told me, "There's always a couple [of students] in the classroom, who are saying 'Oh Miss Miss let me do it?' It's funny, often they're the ones saying, 'Miss, it's right, just give it a few seconds, relax!' Well I love it because it's so validating for them. They love that, they love saying, 'Miss you don't know anything about technology!' Well sure I don't, go ahead." She easily admitted that her students were more skilled at using new technologies than she was herself. Jennifer also described a new literacy project where the students created video book trailers (like the ones Sarah hoped to do with her class). When I asked her if the students had worked in groups, she answered, "No, I recognize where that kind of thing does, where media projects are better as collaborations, but each kid had their own book that they had read that was personal to them and they wanted to do their own interpretation. So I worked on the learning how visual language works

differently than written language. We looked at actual movie trailers. We spent several classes looking at that analyzing them, the devices that worked there, how music does different things and then had them sort of plan out as much as I could get them to plan out, their trailers and then they actually put them together in their computer class.”

Jennifer was also in a unique situation because at the Outreach school, there was a computer (media) class that the students attended three times a week in addition to four English classes a week. Jennifer told me that she often collaborated with the computer (media) teacher on projects, especially before she had her own computers. She explained, “Before I had my own computers, in the past I would have [the students] prepare slideshows or do power point kind of things where the work would be done [in English class] and then they would be doing the putting together in [media class].” Furthermore, Jennifer explained that she met with another Outreach teacher at the beginning of each school year and they swapped ideas and lessons. She said that teachers really should be collaborating more often because of how time-consuming it is to plan a curriculum, “I mean my first year teaching, I was putting in 80-90 hour weeks because I was starting from scratch!”

While all four interview participants were open to collaborating both with the students and with their colleagues, they were all struggling with issues surrounding collaboration, primarily with colleagues. These issues included finding time, sharing the workload, and getting colleagues on board. Lily and Jennifer seemed quite comfortable playing the role of facilitator and learner in the classroom while Sarah was struggling with issues of classroom management and keeping the students on task and Ross,

although he spoke of some group work, found it difficult with large class sizes due to the raised noise level in the classroom.

### *Availability of New Technologies*

All four interview participants had access to a computer lab, however, Lily, Sarah and Ross all discussed scheduling issues surrounding the lab. Jennifer, on the other hand, did not have the same experience because her students attended computer class three times a week and she had a one to one ratio of computer to student in her own classroom.

When Sarah was glancing over the questionnaire she had filled out prior to our interview, she looked at me after reading the section that asked whether teachers had access to a computer lab and she had checked off the 'yes' box, and she said, "Computer lab? Still haven't used it!" She proceeded to tell me that the school had just bought four or five digital cameras, but that the class average is 26 and there are 700 students in the school. She explained that she feels quite concerned about having the students bring in their own cameras because she does not want to be responsible for them. She said, nevertheless, some students have brought in their own video cameras for projects, but the projects she assigns tend to have the option of using media equipment, but not the requirement. She explained that scheduling was very tricky at her school due to the limited equipment. She was aware that the school board leant out laptops, but seemed a little wary about how to go about accessing and returning this equipment. This lack of access to equipment has definitely discouraged Sarah from embarking on video book trailers, a project that she is excited to explore.

Ross had similar sentiments about the access to equipment at his school last year. He explained, “the computer lab was under renovation, so we went through most of the year with no computer lab. The librarian, her father was sick and then passed away so she was out for most of the year, the board had no replacement, so for probably about 50% of this year we had neither a computer lab nor a library.” Even when the computer lab was available, there was 1 lab for 800 students, so there was not a lot of time available for each class in the lab. He told me that there was one projector on each floor but it was utterly useless because there was no computer to use with it. In a more positive light, he said that things were definitely looking up for the upcoming school year. He described his principal as having a real commitment to technology. “After all my bitching and complaining about that, I kind of feel bad now, they were training us on these Mac laptops and, I was like, ‘Who’s got Mac laptops at their school! This is ridiculous!’ and now [our principal] has gone out and bought 20 Mac laptops. That’s good. He’s shown a commitment to improve our technological situation.” Ross now has a laptop to use, although the challenges do not end there. He told me he has been struggling to use it with the school projector.

As a result of this commitment to new technologies, Ross expressed his deep concern that media literacy would take over traditional literacy practices. He described his feelings about the importance of continuing to put money towards buying books for the students, “I think the books in our English book room need, there needs to be more contemporary stuff in there. For example, the collections of short stories are from the 1960s or 70s and the kids see it right away. They look at the pictures and they’re like ‘What is this?’”

While Ross and Sarah expressed their frustration with their lack of access to equipment, both Jennifer and Lily felt otherwise. They had in common a deep commitment to finding creative ways to obtain technologies for their classrooms. Jennifer admitted that her situation was out of the ordinary due to the small number of students in the school and in each class. Nevertheless, she explained that she went in search of finding affordable ways to bring technology to her class. “This year I found out that there’s a program, something with businesses refurbishing laptops and regular desktop computers and bringing them into schools for absolutely ridiculously cheap prices and I had all this money from the student-teacher I had last year so I bought 13 laptops.” This meant that all 12 of Jennifer’s students had their own laptop to use plus one for Jennifer herself. With student-teacher money, Jennifer also bought her class some digital cameras. These were used for a project that she brought to her classroom a couple of years ago that paired professional photographers with the students. She admitted bashfully, “It was actually my wedding photographer!” Jennifer showed me the published book that her students had created after working with the professional photographers. Each student had taken photos of the community and then produced a piece of writing to go along with their photos. Jennifer described the writing component as, “the different musings they had about themselves, what’s important to them, what school is like. They talked a lot about what coming to a school like this meant to them because they’re all from different parts of the city and they come together here, because we’re not a community school at all, we have kids from everywhere so this becomes the community.” Jennifer described the experience of seeing their work published in a book as “powerful” for the students. We also discussed how, the knowledge that this work

would go into a published book, was a huge motivator and changed the nature of the audience from just the teacher to a much broader readership.

Lily also embraced the practice of finding resources herself. She explained, “We can complain about not having enough money and we can sit and complain about not having enough support but there are a lot of people out there who are willing and who want to help teachers that are enthusiastic, that want to learn, but we have to as teachers, we do have to make that effort to find it. It’s the same thing with money, you have to work at finding the money and sometimes it means a teacher taking on an extra project. I do entrepreneurial grants with my students every year. Last year I did three projects and it brought \$2100 into my classroom and that’s how I’ve financed different things that I’ve done in my classroom. That’s what I call the reality of teaching right now. You’re not going to sit back and things are going to be put on your desk without any effort on your part.” Lily seemed very proficient at maximizing the resources available to her, both in terms of personnel and equipment. She had worked with two consultants from the school board to develop a photo essay project and a podcast project which she had implemented quite successfully in the classroom. At the time of our interview, she had three mini laptops and three netbooks on loan from the school board. She also had the school’s ‘portable lab’ of 13 netbooks set up in her classroom. She explained that one of the biggest issues was electrical power because she only has one outlet in her classroom. As a result, she had an extension cord reaching out into the hallway to give her more power for all the technology. When I asked her if there was a lab with a greater power supply, she admitted that there was quite an issue about getting access to the lab. “When you talk about an issue of planning and everything, that’s a whole nother set of problems because

of the fact that you can't get in the computer lab for let's say a two week period of time consistently and you can't have every single one of your classes going down there or else you're monopolizing the computer lab." Lily admitted that she often did have her students practice their new-media skills at home. She described a free program called Audacity that was used to create podcasts. For this project, she encouraged her students to download Audacity at home so they could practice. However, she warned against letting too much of the work get done at home. "One thing I've also learned is that giving them time in class is important for several reasons. It gives you an opportunity to evaluate what they're doing throughout the process. It's an ongoing evaluation. If they bring stuff home, you can't be sure of who's doing what, who's involved in the troubleshooting that goes on. Is it the parents, is it an older brother or sister?"

What can be seen from these four candidates is that the two candidates who took it upon themselves to find creative ways of accessing equipment were finding far more success with incorporating new literacies into the classroom. However, throughout our interview, Lily did admit that she needed more time and that she worked long hours to plan and implement the new literacy projects in her classroom. I cannot help but wonder, upon reflecting on each teacher's efforts, whether finding creative ways to access equipment should, in fact, be a part of a teacher's workload.

### *Teachers' Concerns with Using New Literacies*

#### *The students are losing 'traditional' literacy skills.*

While all four teachers discussed the concern about students losing their traditional literacy skills, Ross and Sarah felt very strongly that a focus on acquiring traditional skills such as reading (ex. novels) and writing (ex. essays) needed to remain at the forefront of the English Language Arts program. Ross said that he believed that students are already coming to school with new literacy skills, however, they are not the literacy skills that they need to succeed in society. He explained that he typically spends the first half of the year trying to get the kids to pick up a novel. "We have a lot of silent reading time in class, it's all developing the love for reading, if you read independently, without exception, the strong students are the independent readers." He explained that it is difficult in a school with a diverse clientele. "We have kids coming from all kinds of different backgrounds some of whom have no literacy support happening in the home, you know single mother families, or single parent families. So these kids are coming in facing barriers and what does it mean now that we're squeezing out literacy even more from the curriculum? I mean maybe it means that we're going to pass more students but at what cost to society?" Ross had observed that students at his school were struggling in their Math classes not as a result of weak Math skills, but as a result of weak literacy skills and he felt that he had a heightened responsibility, as an ELA teacher to develop strong literacy skills that the students could transfer to other subjects such as Math. It was clear from my discussion with Ross that he spent a good part of his curriculum focusing on traditional literacy skills and was quite confident that this was the best way to



meet the learning needs of his classroom. He explained to me, “Now there’s times when the computers are very useful, but the fact that they’re there doesn’t make it my priority, my priority is determined more based on the needs of the students.”

Sarah shared similar sentiments towards covering traditional literacy skills, however, I was under the impression that she felt quite guilty about ‘resorting’ to the traditional literacy lesson. This was evident in her apologetic response about teaching comprehension. She said, “I hate to say it but, you do have to resort to the traditional lesson because when you see [the students’] comprehension is weak, you will go back to the [basic comprehension] questions, I am sorry, just to see if the basic comprehension is there.” She also reported the need to focus on language and spelling in her classroom because she found that, more than ever, her Secondary IIs were struggling with grammar and spelling errors which she attributed to too much television and reading books such as “Harry Potty” and “Captain Underpants” where words were deliberately misspelled for a laugh.

Lily and Jennifer discussed their concern about incorporating traditional literacies into a curriculum that focused on new literacies. When I asked Jennifer what concerns she had about teaching new literacies, the first concern she reported was about the Ministry-produced exam that all Québec students have to write at the end of Secondary V in order to pass English Language Arts. These “looming” exams forced her to have to teach very traditional lessons in order to adequately prepare the students to pass the exam. Jennifer reported, “I have the big fear now that they are going to bring in the exam at the end of Secondary IV as well, not just Secondary V and they are trying to incorporate media production into the exam settings, I think that’s where they’re going, I

hope that's where they're going because I don't want to think that in April, I have to stop teaching and then start doing exam prep because bottom line, reading literature and writing about literature is still the primary thing, it's still very much a reading and writing exam." The disconnect that the final exam has with the new curriculum causes teachers, like Jennifer, to become stuck in the middle between preparing students to pass an exam and creating a curriculum that encourages new literacy skills along with more traditional ones. Furthermore, Jennifer felt that the time she spent preparing the students to pass the exams took away from time she would rather be using to focus on new literacy projects with the students.

Lily seemed to have the most solid grasp of how to develop projects that incorporated traditional literacy learning with new literacy projects. However, she admitted that finding the time to develop these projects was the biggest challenge and that it was overwhelming to think about the amount of time invested in the planning process. She reported that, when a new literacy project is well-developed, it can incorporate many different traditional literacy elements. "When [the students] are creating their storyboard, they're doing a certain amount of communicating using words and even pictures, they also have to write reflections, they're doing self-evaluation throughout the process and at the final photo essay presentation, there is a reflection that they do in regards to the entire project. So you're getting the writing in there also and you know, as I go along, I can see how you can bring in more writing if they were doing more research on a particular topic you can combine it." Lily clearly had a good grasp of how to develop projects that combined more traditional literacy skills with new literacy skills, however, she did not

have to develop these projects on her own. She explained to me that she worked with consultants from the school board to develop these unique projects.

*Teachers are lacking direction for evaluating new literacy projects.*

All four interview participants discussed their concerns about evaluating new literacy projects. Jennifer told me that before she assigns a project for the student, she begins by thinking about what she is expecting in an end product and what skills and competencies will be addressed. She admitted that, “what takes forever is the evaluations. It’s the rubrics because in order for them to be useful for my students, they have to be very [simple], even things that I find on the Internet, the language isn’t simple enough and I need them to be useful. I should be making them with my students but I haven’t gone there.” She remarked that “sadly”, especially her Secondary IV students are quite unfamiliar with rubrics and prefer to receive a percentage as a mark rather than the rich feedback provided on a rubric.

Lily had a similar approach to project-planning. Akin to Jennifer, Lily admonished that rubrics take a very long time to prepare, however, on a positive note, she said that, “Sometimes the easy way ends up being the hard way and the hard way ends up being the easy way. With creating rubrics with your students, it ends up being easier, because of the fact that they really have an understanding of what they need to include in their podcast or what they need to include in their photo essay...One thing I will say is a challenge is that because we don’t have many samples, ok photo essay, what is a 90, what is a 70, that’s one area where they’ve really done a poor job in the implementation

sessions.” Lily also commented on how difficult it was to incorporate all the different elements of the English program into her yearly plans.

Sarah was definitely struggling with the issue of fitting all of the elements into her programs. She admitted to me that she found her schedule very overwhelming. Her schedule included English, Drama and Moral Education. She explained that she did not have time to even read the Moral Education textbook and that maybe she would have the students create pamphlets and she could give a combined mark for Moral Education and English Language Arts because she was required to provide a mark for the subject of Moral Education. She explained that the evaluation is the hardest part, “Well because you will spend so much time [on a project] and unless you’re evaluating a couple of competencies, you find that you’re short for time.” When I asked her about her evaluation techniques, she explained that she is still getting used to the new vocabulary used in evaluation. Our conversation went as follows:

Sa - I appreciate the marking 1,2,3,4, 5 [as opposed to percentages]. I’m getting used to it.

S - The rubric style?

Sa - Well, rubric style, but again, I’m more in my head, “Is this thorough, is this advanced, is this acceptable?”

Sarah was clearly not yet ready to approach rubric writing with her students as she was still wrapping her head around the vocabulary and language used in this type of evaluation.

Ross also talked about the new language of the reformed curriculum and explained that because teachers still did not have a solid understanding of the curriculum,

they were just applying new evaluation vocabulary to traditional teaching techniques and lessons. He explained, “Largely because there wasn’t adequate time taken to explain to teachers, especially some of the senior teachers who have been teaching one way all of their lives, what this means, and so what I see happening every day is not that teachers are struggling to teach the reform as it’s intended but they’re teaching, they’re striving to teach the way they’ve always taught and use reform language to justify it.” He also reported that many teachers were not able to fit all of their responsibilities into the work week and therefore were taking sick days just to do their marking.

Although all four teachers demonstrated different comfort levels with creating and implementing evaluations for the projects in their classrooms, the consensus was definitely that they found the process of evaluation overwhelming and that they lacked support both from personnel and materials.

*Teachers feel overwhelmed with planning and implementing new literacy projects.*

All four participants expressed the similar concern that they felt overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them when it came to planning and preparing new literacy projects. There was a common consensus that there was a lack of time to prepare and plan thoroughly, as Ross reported, “If I had the time to prepare adequately, the things that you could do, but the reality is, because of the lack of support, there’s a lot of us that are, I hate to say it, doing it half-assed, there’s just not the time to develop all these wonderful constructivist [projects].”

Sarah agreed with Ross, and explained that she genuinely felt guilty because she just was not able to adequately prepare her students for the real world. She explained,

“[The ministry] is asking us to do a lot, and they don’t realize how much it is, but we have to reflect the real world and we’re not really. I feel bad when I’m not using the computer with these kids when I know full well that if I have to give something to the board, I’ve gotta type it, I sit there for ten hours, and I said it’s unfair! And what about visual texts? Everywhere we’re bombarded with images and [the students] can’t read them!” She explained that teaching the traditional skills in creative ways requires teachers to have more creativity and more time and it just is not easy.

Lily admitted that she knew many teachers were overwhelmed, “because they’re seeing everything thrown at them at once...and what I’ve seen is there are some teachers that are very reluctant because they don’t have the experience, they’re used to the aspect of being the person in the front of the class who knows the whole topic so there’s this type of giving up responsibility and letting go, and letting some of your students who are more proficient and have the experience and understanding of the technology teach you.” Furthermore, she reported the following concern, “The thing that I find very frustrating is that, teachers are not willing to share their material, you know if we share, can you imagine?” She also explained that the outcome of this individualistic planning style was that students ended up watching the same video in their English and Science class or that similar topics were covered in English and French. When this lack of collaboration occurred, it was a waste of time for the students.

Jennifer expressed similar frustrations, saying it takes a lot of work to put together a unit and that, “Teachers are notoriously territorial over their stuff and don’t like to share which I think is so sad. I think it’s because they feel insecure and they don’t want to be judged by another grown-up which is awful.”

*Large class sizes, classroom management and the lack of available technology.*

Ross, Sarah and Lily all shared their concern over their large class sizes and the lack of available technology. Jennifer did not share this concern due to the fact that she works at an alternative school with small class sizes. Ross explained that at his school, there is one class with 39 students in it and they do not even all have desks, let alone enough media technology. In addition, doing new literacy projects generally involves students working in groups and the new reformed curriculum encourages group work, however, he had large concerns about the reality of group work in classrooms with over 30 students. He explained, “My last two years for my core group, I had 33 or 34 [students in my class]. I tried doing group work, I really tried. I came out of [my university training], like, group work, yah! But then, you get them in groups, the noise level starts going up, not only do I have a headache, but by the end of the class, I have two or three kids coming to me going ‘Sir, I’ve got a headache, you know, I can’t handle this!’” Ross observed that, when concerns such as a lack of available technology and large class sizes were brought up at the MELS training sessions, the facilitators seemed surprised, claiming that the school boards were given large budgets to buy technology. He stated that there is a real lack of communication between the needs of teachers, the school board and the ministry. He said “If you ask the ministry, it’s the school board’s fault, if you ask the school board, it’s the ministry’s fault, or even at the last one, we had someone from the EMSB saying, you’ve got to bring this up with the union, which is like ‘NO you need to communicate what we’re saying up the chain because the message is not getting there’. And that’s what I see at every one of these workshops, like, you need to do better because I feel bad for the workshop facilitators, they come in, they’re already

afraid of what they're about to face because they know they can't defend what they're being told to defend." The frustration is evident in Ross' remarks.

Lily expressed very similar concerns about large class sizes. She explained that she was lucky because she started off the year with 38 students, but a reorganization occurred in October and the class went down to 26 students. When she was describing the situation to me, she glanced around the room and said, "Can you imagine this classroom with 38 kids?...The whole dynamics of the first 3 weeks of school were just spent on finding space for the kids, finding desks, finding chairs. And the noise level too!"

Sarah was particularly concerned over how to manage a large class of students who were excited because they were working on computers, she reported, "Our kids are not used to it, so it's a little exciting at first." She explained that because of this heightened excitement when working on new literacy projects, she did not feel comfortable attempting these projects when she had student-teachers working with her. She had two student-teachers over the course of the year and it was important to her to get a feel for how competent they were at teaching more traditional lessons before embarking on more "complex" projects. She explained that she taught the first term without a student-teacher, however, she told me, "I wouldn't attempt [a new literacy project] that early on, I like to get a feel for who my students are before I start working on any project." It was clear that Sarah herself, was not as comfortable teaching new literacy projects, therefore it was difficult for her to model these projects for student teachers and to dive into them so early on in the year before getting to know her class and establishing a rapport with the students.



*Technical difficulties.*

Both Lily and Jennifer expressed their frustration with technical glitches. This is an issue that must be even more daunting for a teacher like Sarah who is less technology-savvy than the other interview participants. After explaining to me that she's a "Mac girl", Jennifer recounted a morning lesson that went awry. "I was trying to show a DVD to project off the laptop on to my screen in my classroom and I couldn't, I know how to hook up the projector. I couldn't get the image to show on my screen and on the projector and it was so simple. There's a toggle key, one of the function keys you press and I didn't know this. It's a PC thing and honestly it destroyed my morning because I didn't know that simple little technology thing." She explained that in cases like this, she calls on another teacher for support or, if he cannot help her, the 'tech guy' comes every Wednesday. However, it is understandably frustrating if a technical difficulty occurs on a Thursday in class and the whole project must be put on hold until the 'tech guy' is in on Wednesday.

Lily confessed that working with video was particularly challenging in her school. She explained that it was not so much the technology that is at fault but poorly thought-out projects. She reasoned that it was not only a lack of time for planning but also a lack of experience with planning new literacy projects that caused technical glitches to occur. She told me that, "because teachers have been giving projects to kids but they don't put the planning process into it and because they don't have the experience, the kids come to the production phase, then they go to the library and they try to upload their program, or upload their video, they run into all sorts of technical issues, so then the librarian gets involved, she gets really frustrated! So those are issues that we've had to address within

our school.” Furthermore, she explained that using new medias creates a whole new level of planning. For example, she has now included batteries for her digital cameras in her yearly budget, something she learned only after the first couple of years of struggling to find batteries. She explained, “It sounds so simple but the first time I did [photo essays] two years ago, my biggest problem was the batteries and then finding the batteries in the school and to buy the batteries, it becomes very expensive. So you have to be conscious, these are little things that you have to think of but once you’ve done it a couple of times, you remember that you have to have lots of batteries on hand and we’ve also, you know, it’s gone a step further, the beginning of the planning when we’re asked what do we need for our classrooms, we now have put that as a budgetary thing.” What Lily’s experiences suggest is that teachers need to be prepared to make mistakes when trying out new literacy projects in their classrooms and then, afterwards, learn from those mistakes and improve a little bit each year and with each lesson.

#### *Teachers’ Suggestions for Using New Literacies*

When I asked each teacher to make some suggestions about what would help them to implement new literacies in their ELA classrooms, I received some very thoughtful and practical answers. Jennifer suggested that teachers use Professional Education (PEd) days to get together with other teachers and share their materials. Ross expressed the need for teachers to have more resources, materials and lessons that are ready to use so that teachers do not have to start from scratch with each new project. Sarah advised teachers to take one small step at a time when it came to incorporating new literacy projects in the ELA classroom, she told me, “I say every year I will change a

little bit because it's insurmountable to change all." She also said that she still felt that the priority was to teach students how to read and write, and especially how to write essays. She said that it would help her and her students if she had a booklet with sample essays as models for the students and for herself as an evaluation tool. Lily discussed the importance of working with the administration. She suggested re-implementing department heads to ensure that there is a balanced program across the different subject areas and grade levels. She also said that teachers require some extra time after attending a training session for planning how to implement the new resources and learning they have acquired.

#### *Teachers' Successes with Using New Literacies*

Lily, Sarah and Jennifer all commented on the benefits of teaching new literacies in the classroom. Both Lily and Sarah observed that using new technologies in the classroom allows different students to shine. Lily said, "The thing with the technology also is it allows students who have different skills to shine and it's amazing what's come out of it because kids that were quiet, didn't participate very much, all of a sudden they became the leaders and they started communicating about different aspects of the project, about the topic because they were comfortable with it. That's their world, it's their way of communicating." Sarah observed just how motivating it was for the students to work on computers, saying that, while it may be more work, it's much more fun so the students are willing to put in the work!" Jennifer commented that she had seen a huge change in the quality of her students' writing once they began writing on the computers rather than with traditional pens and paper. She told me, computers made a "huge difference, night

and day and I didn't even believe it would make that much, like I was astonished, I'm trying to figure out how many of my kids I can get on computers for their exams at the end of the year. It just makes such a difference for their writing!" Ross had yet to find any true successes with using new literacies, but he was pleased about the commitment his administration had made to buying new technology for the school and he was open to collaborating with his colleagues about new literacy and cross-curricular projects.

## Discussion

This study examined secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers' knowledge of, attitudes towards, questions and concerns about the use of new literacies in the classroom. Using a mixed methods research design, the study was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of 60 ELA teachers completing a questionnaire that contained both open- and close-ended questions. During the analysis of these questionnaires, certain trends and themes emerged in the teachers' responses that were then elaborated upon in the second phase of the study. These themes are outlined in the following discussion. Phase Two consisted of non-structured interviews of four typical teachers. This second phase enabled a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns facing teachers as they implement new literacies into their ELA classrooms as well as provided an opportunity to understand the process involved in successful implementation of new literacy projects. Many of the findings are consistent with the existing literature on teaching and using new literacies in the ELA classroom, however, what stands out in this study is the wide range of individual abilities and difficulties that teachers have in implementing new literacies and the many different comfort and knowledge levels that teachers have when it comes to using media technology.

### *Teachers' New Literacy practices are not being encouraged in the classroom*

This study found that, outside of school, teachers frequently engage in email and web searches and infrequently engage in blogging, video games and chat rooms. This is particularly interesting because, in spite of their frequent use of web searches outside of school, when asked what new literacy practices teachers are encouraging in their

classrooms, web navigation was only mentioned by 18% of teachers. The fact that teachers are infrequently assigning projects that encourage use of the web is troubling because as Reinking (2007) describes, digital texts change the static, linear nature of print reading through their hypertext structure. In our present-day society, communication and information are often conveyed through multimodal means rather than linear texts (New London Group, 1996). The fact that students are not being exposed to reading in a multimodal form in their ELA classes has implications for both their present-day lives and future careers.

#### *Teachers' Lack of Access to Computers*

Although teachers are comfortable with web searches outside of school, there are factors that are discouraging teachers from assigning projects that include web navigation. One such factor may be related to the finding that teachers rarely use computers during class time. This may be due to the fact that 82% of teachers have zero or one computer in their classrooms. Nevertheless, 85% of teachers have access to a computer lab. What remains troubling then, is that, in spite of this access to a computer lab, the majority of teachers are concerned about their lack of access to equipment and technology. All four interview participants shed light on this particular issue. In Lily's, Sarah's and Ross's schools, scheduling the computer lab was very challenging due to the fact that there was only one lab for 800 students. The easiest solution to this dilemma would seemingly be to create more computer labs in each school. However, Lily also explained that how teachers are allowed to book the lab is imperative. For example, it would be advantageous to be able to book the lab for a two-week period at a time, in

order to complete a project. However, Lily says this is not possible at her school because she would be seen as monopolizing the lab. This reality deters teachers from embarking on projects because they end up dragging through the term and losing momentum. These findings suggest that it would be a good idea for administrators to implement yearly computer lab schedules that allow teachers blocks of time (e.g. 3 week blocks) in order to enable them to plan projects that require students to spend a greater amount of time on computers. Furthermore, it would be beneficial if classrooms had more Internet connections and power supplies so teachers could bring laptops into their own classrooms.

#### *Teachers' Concerns about Technical Difficulties*

Another reason why teachers may not be using computers and other new technologies is their fear of encountering technical difficulties. Because Jennifer works in a small alternative school with smaller class sizes, scheduling is not an issue, however, she did explain that her particular challenge with using new technologies, and computers in particular, occurred when she ran into technical difficulties. The fact that the 'tech guy' only came to the school once a week (a common schedule) was extremely frustrating for her. This concern was echoed by some of the questionnaire participants as well as the fact that computer maintenance is often inadequate. Jennifer was lucky because one of her colleagues was quite knowledgeable about computers and willing to help her out. This spirit of collaboration and supporting fellow colleagues is one that should be encouraged in schools and could be further encouraged by administrators if teachers were provided with weekly schedules that allowed for collaboration to occur

during planning times rather than on teachers' own time at lunch or outside of school hours. Furthermore, having access to tech support more frequently than once a week, either by training librarians or hiring assistants in the computer labs, would help teachers to feel more at ease with embarking on projects involving the computer and other new technologies.

### *The Divide Between Teachers and Students in their Uses of New Literacies*

Previous studies have found that today's youth are multimodal and the types of new literacies that are engaging adolescents outside of school include IM, chat rooms, the Internet, online gaming, personal web pages and blogs (Gee 2008; New London Group, 1996; Tyner, 1998). This study found that teachers rarely engage in blogging, video games and chat rooms and infrequently use IM outside of school. Furthermore, none of these new literacies were mentioned as being included in class projects. As a result, there is a clear divide between the new literacies that teachers are using outside of school and those that students are using outside of school.

Unfortunately, teachers are missing out on the opportunity to motivate students by including some of the daily new literacy practices of the students in their assignments. For example, blogging is an excellent new literacy to include in assignments. Through a blog, students can self-assess their own work, write reflections and have the opportunity to write for a larger audience (e.g. fellow classmates, schoolmates or families) than just the teacher. Jennifer found that her students were much more motivated to write when they were writing on a computer rather than by hand. This finding is similar to the findings of Grisham and Wolsey (2006) who implemented literature circles using



electronic threaded discussion groups (TDG) as a communication tool about different topics (threads) within a common novel. They found that the threaded discussion responses had more depth and length to the responses than the more typical paper and pen journal entries and oral discussions. Unfortunately, the majority of teachers are not yet well trained enough to be able to do this. Most teachers who participated in the questionnaire wrote that they have only received a little bit of training, both in-service and pre-service on teaching and using new literacies in the classroom and the majority expressed a preference for hands-on workshops as a method for training as they allow teachers to develop the skills needed to use particular new literacy practices. In addition, Lily explained that, it is not enough to just send teachers to workshops, teachers need to have access to the necessary equipment for the workshop to be beneficial. Furthermore, both Ross and Lily agreed that teachers leave workshops with information overload and they would benefit from having some release time following the workshop, ideally in collaboration with colleagues, in order to process, plan and prepare project ideas provided in workshops. Therefore, for information provided at workshops to truly be effective and brought into the classrooms, administrators should plan an extra block of time (ideally the day following the workshop) for teachers to use to consolidate the learning that occurred at the workshop and ensure that teachers have access to the equipment needed prior to attending the training session.

### *Traditional Literacies Versus New Literacies: One or the Other*

This study's findings are consistent with the findings of Hennessy, Ruthven and Brindly (2005), that one of the barriers to using new technology and teaching new literacies is teachers' feelings of being torn between the need to conform to the external requirements of traditional exams and curriculum expectations and the integration of new technologies. In fact, Jennifer explained that she had to give up including a digital photography project that she had planned for her students because they needed time to prepare for the final exam. She also expressed her desire for her students to write the exam on computers because, "it makes such a difference for their writing." This is consistent with Karchmer's (2001) findings that the quality of students' writing improved when they composed and published electronic texts. However, as Kist (2003) explained, the school system is not using the right tools for assessing students' new literacy proficiencies. "Traditional paper/pencil achievement tests, which are taken in isolation and use print-based formats, are not going to assess the achievements needed by students as they move deep into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (p. 11-12). It is no wonder, with final exams focusing on more traditional literacy skills, that teachers are torn between teaching new literacies and teaching more traditional literacies.

It is not only the curriculum expectations and exam content that convinces teachers to stick with more traditional literacy practices, this study found a high level of concern about the literacy skills of adolescents from both the questionnaire participants' and in Ross' and Sarah's interviews. Teachers were primarily concerned that students' would lose their English proficiency if teachers shift towards teaching new literacies in their ELA classrooms. This sentiment is obvious in the following statement by a

questionnaire participant, “My fear is that as we encourage texting or “MSN-ing”, we’re actually helping hammer the nails into the coffin of the English language.” As discussed in the literature, Tagliamonte’s (2008) study challenged this theory that IM is ruining the English language by finding that IM discussions actually demonstrated a linguistic fusion between formal written language and informal spoken language and that in a million and a half words, only three percent were short forms, abbreviations and emotional language. As Moorman and Horton (2007) explained, this high level of concern among adults about the literacy skills of adolescents is a trend that intensifies during times of rapid change. Lewis and Fabos (2005) described this anxiety as ‘generational’.

This study also found the print-based culture thriving in at least two of the four classrooms visited in spite of the fact that our students are living in the electronic culture outside of the classroom. A number of questionnaire participants expressed their beliefs that if students were engaging in new literacies outside of school, they did not have to focus on these skills at school, and could teach more traditional literacy skills. For example, one questionnaire participant wrote, “[I have] some concern about the idea of using the ‘skills [students] acquire at home by texting and gaming’ in the classroom. If they learn these skills at home, shouldn’t we teach the skills they don’t learn at home on their own?” Contrary to this opinion, a number of studies (Hennessy et al, 2005; Rossiter Consulting, 2006; Sefton-Green, 2001 and Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004) found that effective implementation of new technologies includes more than just adequate equipment and connectivity. In order for students to acquire the skills to critically understand, analyze, use and question the wealth of information they have access to with new technologies, they need to be educated about how to critically view and use new

technologies. Jennifer had a similar observation, evident in the following comment, “I was surprised by how, for kids who have their MySpace pages and MSN, they really don’t understand even how the Internet works.”

This finding that teachers are concerned that students’ literacy skills are at-risk if new literacies are taught suggests that teachers are creating an unnatural divide between traditional and new literacy practices. This is most likely due to the fact that, as Ross had observed at his school, teachers do not have a comprehensive understanding of what new literacy entails. Traditional literacy skills such as writing essays or research papers and analyzing and discussing characters can all be emphasized in a new literacy project. For example, a traditional Shakespeare play such as Hamlet could be taught through units that include new literacy practices such as: students creating digital comic books of the traditional play; students reenacting scenes from the play and then creating short movies; students creating web pages that show research projects about William Shakespeare’s life and times; or students discussing themes and characters through electronic Threaded Discussion Groups. However, it is a lot to ask of teachers, who are not yet comfortable with or knowledgeable about using new technologies, to develop these projects. All four interview participants’ along with some questionnaire participants stressed the need for more materials such as lessons and activities that can be implemented, with minor adjustments, in the classroom. Ross elaborated that, he understands that a teacher is responsible for adjusting and tweaking activities to target the learning needs of the students in the classroom, however, access to more materials would save teachers the time it takes to create these projects from scratch because teachers just do not have enough time to do this!

In addition, the concern about how to evaluate new literacies arose in the questionnaire responses. All four interview participants shared similar concerns in their interviews, although each had their own individual challenges. Lily discussed the effectiveness of creating rubrics with the students, albeit she admitted that it took a lot of work and time. Sarah was still wrapping her head around the new vocabulary used for evaluating new literacy projects. Jennifer admitted that finding simple enough language to use for her students to understand was a huge challenge. Ross shared his observations that teachers really do not understand how to evaluate new literacies and are using new language to justify traditional teaching. Clearly, all four teachers require more support in this area. For a start, when workshop facilitators are implementing training sessions, it is important to provide teachers with ideas for evaluating projects in addition to the project ideas themselves. Furthermore, giving teachers sample rubrics at these workshops would save a lot of time and then teachers could adjust these originals according to the learning needs of their students. Furthermore, administrators could provide time for teachers to work together with same-grade colleagues or consultants (as per Lily's experience) to develop both projects and evaluation tools to accompany those projects.

### *The Traditional Culture of the Classroom*

It is interesting to note the types of new literacy practices that are most frequently encouraged in the ELA classroom. This study found that power point was the most frequently encouraged new literacy project. This is not surprising given the fact that 80% of teachers have access to a projector. When it comes to new literacies, power points are, in fact, an old technology compared with many of the alternative new literacy projects

that teachers could be engaging in (such as Threaded Discussion Groups or Website design). Furthermore, power point presentations rarely stray from the linear nature of print based texts (Reinking, 1997). Power points can also easily maintain an individualized culture of teaching and learning in the classroom rather than encouraging group work and collaboration between the students and the teacher.

One concern that became evident in the questionnaire was that some teachers were not comfortable letting go of the traditional teacher-centered classroom, where the teacher was expected to be imparting his/her knowledge on the students (and not vice versa!). Sarah shared her similar sentiments, explaining that classroom management was an issue to her when considering implementing new literacy projects. Although she had a very positive attitude towards allowing her students to teach her when it came to using new technologies, she felt that implementing group projects using new technologies got the students overly 'excited' because they were not used to learning that way and some students used that time to talk rather than to work. Sarah, Ross and Lily also emphasized how difficult it was to have students work in groups when there were large class sizes. Prensky (1997) acknowledges this shift in role that teachers must embrace in order to successfully implement new literacy projects. However, he suggests that teacher training needs to focus on training teachers to become adept discussion leaders and facilitators who can laugh at their own 'digital immigrant accent' and who value what their students know. According to Prensky, it is not teachers' technological knowledge that should be valued but their empathy and guidance abilities. In order for student-centered classrooms to thrive, class sizes need to remain reasonable so that students do not go home every day with a headache. Furthermore, administrators need to find new and dynamic ways of

training teachers to be comfortable taking on the role of facilitator and learner in the classroom.

### *Successes with Teaching New Literacies*

This study found that many teachers are very positive and excited about implementing new literacy projects in the classroom. In fact, after power point presentations, the next most popular new literacy practices that were encouraged in ELA classrooms were projects that used either the video camera or the still camera. When well-planned, these types of projects (e.g., video book trailers, comic books, photo essays) can offer a wealth of learning opportunities for students. As Lily described, the reading and writing components of the project could include students researching the topic beforehand, writing scripts, writing self-assessments and creating storyboards while the oral components of the project include students working with others, solving problems as a team, taking on different roles within a group, in-class discussions, and presentations of final product.

Lily, Sarah and Jennifer stressed the need to approach new literacy implementation one step at a time, which was clearly what they were doing in their own classrooms. They had all observed the following benefits to incorporating new literacy projects in the classroom: motivated students who are willing to put in extra work; different students shone than those who had stood out in the traditional projects; computers encouraged students to write more in depth; quiet students become more communicative; and most importantly, both the students and the teachers had fun while they were learning!

## Conclusion

The findings in this study were similar to previous studies that found that there is a gap between the literacy practices that students are engaging in outside of school and those that are being taught within school. A particularly interesting finding in this study was that, even literacy practices that teachers are frequently engaging in outside of school (such as web searches) are not being carried back into the classroom. This is, in part, because of a lack of access to equipment, but more importantly a need for more appropriate scheduling of the existing technology within schools.

The mixed-method design of this study allowed for a triangulation of data by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and by conducting interviews to elaborate on initial themes that emerged in the questionnaire phase. Unfortunately, a limitation of the study is that the only participants were teachers. In the future, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study on a larger scale to include administrators and students. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of incorporating new literacies in ELA classrooms and offer a number of different perspectives on the experience. Furthermore, this study relied upon teachers' ability to communicate their experiences either through writing or oral discussion. It would be interesting in a future study to include observations, either participant or non-participant, of new literacy projects being implemented in typical ELA classrooms.

This study strove to find a typical sample of interview participants, however, unfortunately, the most typical questionnaire participants were not all willing to participate in interviews. The impact of having these interview participants in the study is that, some of the teachers who were willing to participate in the interview process were



also the teachers who had rather strong feelings (whether positive or negative) about implementing new literacies in the classroom or worked in unique school settings.

Furthermore, in two of the short answer questions on the questionnaire, examples were provided in order to help teachers further understand certain questions. For example question #1 in Section V1: What new technologies (other than computers) are available for your use at school (i.e. cameras, projectors, laptops)? Although providing these examples helped to clarify the question, the examples given may have influenced teachers' to respond with those specific answers and may have skewed the results on those particular questions.

Professionally speaking, this study was relevant to me on two levels, first as an education student seeking knowledge and learning not only about an educational question but also about the process of conducting a research study; and second, as an English Language Arts teacher who has struggled with teaching new literacies in my own classroom. Initially, I wondered how, if I, a young and dedicated teacher, felt overwhelmed by teaching new literacies, how were my colleagues, especially my senior colleagues, coping in their ELA classrooms? In answer to that question, I found a huge range of attitudes, knowledge and comfort levels and concerns from my fellow teachers. More importantly, I also found that many of my colleagues were incorporating interesting new literacy projects and finding success and heightened motivation from their students when they were using new media technology such as computers and digital cameras.

I was pleased to discover, that even teachers, like Sarah, who were clearly uncomfortable with both using and teaching with new technologies, for the most part, there was an openness and understanding that it was important for students to be using

new media technology in the classroom and learning new literacies. In fact, I sensed true feelings of guilt from Sarah, and teachers facing similar challenges, that they were not meeting those learning needs of the students. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that there was also a real sense of fear and frustration from teachers that the new curriculum that emphasized new literacy practices was not meeting the literacy needs of our students and that teachers felt it was important to continue with more traditional reading and writing lessons. What I witnessed, however, was that there seems to be an unnatural divide between new literacies and traditional literacies. I believe this is primarily due to a lack of understanding from teachers about how to create and implement new literacy projects because, as described in the discussion section, new literacy projects can and should incorporate more traditional reading and writing skills. Of course, teachers are not to blame for this lack of understanding. As expressed by Ross, Lily, Jennifer, Sarah and many of the questionnaire participants, teachers just do not have the time to develop new literacy projects from scratch, especially because, as Lily stressed, if the initial planning is not done thoroughly, then the project is not nearly as successful. In order for new literacy teaching to be successful and implemented in more ELA classrooms, teachers need more resources, such as ready-made units and lessons as well as more opportunities to collaborate with one another in order to develop new literacy projects that incorporate both traditional skills and new literacy skills. Teachers should not be required to use outside of school time in order to develop these projects. In fact, even creating websites where teachers could post their projects for other teachers to use would be extremely beneficial as this gives teachers a starting point for developing similar projects that would suit the learning needs of their classes.

However, materials and resources are not nearly enough. Many teachers expressed a need for more training as they are not comfortable using new media technologies. Although teachers no longer need to be ‘all knowing’, they do need to have a basic knowledge of the technologies they are using in order to be able to plan interesting and relevant projects for their classes. While the majority of teachers felt workshops were the preferred method of training, other suggestions were also given such as mentoring from fellow colleagues, and working with consultants to develop project ideas. Administrators must also re-examine teachers’ schedules and ensure that there is time given to teachers for working with colleagues on a weekly, or at least, monthly basis as well as time provided after workshops in order for teachers to consolidate the learning from the workshop and modify them to suit the needs of their own individual students.

Finally, new literacy teaching just is not feasible without access to the required technology. Although it is unrealistic to expect that every student will have access full-time to a computer, it is imperative that administrators arrange computer lab schedules in a way that allows teachers to spend blocks of time working on projects and gives all the students in the school equal access to new technologies. Furthermore, ensuring that there is someone trained in tech support available to teachers in case they run into technical difficulties is required. Many teachers shy away from using new technologies because of their fear that they will encounter technical difficulties that they are unable to fix. In fact, a wonderful way to empower students is to train a group of students in the school to be available to provide technical support to teachers when necessary.

To return then, to the central question: How are typical teachers coping with teaching new literacies? They are taking it one step at a time, and although most teachers

still have a lot of learning and programming to do before they are truly embracing teaching new literacies, small steps are being taken every year towards preparing students for the fast paced 21<sup>st</sup> century world they live in outside of school walls. It is my hope and belief, that if teachers, administrators and policy makers work together, through positive attitudes, collaboration, and innovative training and scheduling, teachers will become more and more successful at teaching new literacies to the multimodal youth in their ELA classrooms.

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## Appendix A

### TEACHERS' USES OF NEW MEDIA IN THE ELA CLASSROOM

#### I. DEMOGRAPHICS:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

I have been teaching for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

I have been teaching Secondary English Language Arts for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

I teach English Language Arts to the following grades:

\_\_\_\_\_ Sec. I (grade 7)

\_\_\_\_\_ Sec. IV (grade 10)

\_\_\_\_\_ Sec. II (grade 8)

\_\_\_\_\_ Sec. V (grade 11)

\_\_\_\_\_ Sec. III (grade 9)

Are you interested in participating in an interview about your opinion of and experiences (or lack of experience) using new literacies and different media in your classroom? (*Your identity will be ANONYMOUS and your participation will be kept confidential, please put a check mark beside one of the following answers*)

\_\_\_\_\_ YES

\_\_\_\_\_ NO

*If you answered YES, please be sure to have included your email address (for the use of the researcher only)*

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#### II. OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES:

Using the following 1-5 scale, please indicate, by circling the most correct response, how frequently you engage in the following 'new' literacy practices outside of school.

1	2	3	4	5
never	less than weekly	once a week	a few times a week	daily

1 2 3 4 5 Web searches

1 2 3 4 5 Email

- 1 2 3 4 5 Instant Messaging
- 1 2 3 4 5 Personal web page or online social network page (i.e. Facebook, MySpace)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Blogging
- 1 2 3 4 5 YouTube (watching or posting videos)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Video Games
- 1 2 3 4 5 Chat rooms
- 1 2 3 4 5 Digital photography
- 1 2 3 4 5 Video / movie making
- 1 2 3 4 5 Texting on a cell phone (Blackberry?)

### III. TEACHER TRAINING:

**To what extent do you feel you have received adequate training to teach ‘new’ literacy practices using different media in the classroom? (you may find it helpful to use the list above for examples of ‘new’ literacy practices and then put a check beside the answer that most applies).**

Pre-service (while in university):

In-service (while working as a teacher):

- ☐ a. not at all
- ☐ b. a little bit
- ☐ c. fairly well
- ☐ d. very well

- ☐ a. not at all
- ☐ b. a little bit
- ☐ c. fairly well
- ☐ d. very well

In the space below, briefly describe any experiences (formal or informal) that have helped you to teach ‘new’ literacy practices using different media in the classroom (*use the additional sheet if necessary*).

### IV. CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES:

**Please answer the following items using the scale below:**

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	regularly	often

- 1 2 3 4 5 I have had opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers in planning my English Language Arts program.
- 1 2 3 4 5 My students work on projects / assignments that use more than one medium.
- 1 2 3 4 5 My students work on projects that require collaboration with other students.

- 1 2 3 4 5 I demonstrate the uses of different media when I am working through a problem in front of the students.
- 1 2 3 4 5 My students draw, discuss, or use some form of communication when thinking through a problem or getting ready to write.
- 1 2 3 4 5 My classroom features a balance of choice and mandatory activities.
- 1 2 3 4 5 In my classroom, I am often a co-learner and a co-teacher with my students.
- 1 2 3 4 5 My students use computers during class time.

#### **V. ACCESS TO COMPUTERS:**

How many computers are in your classroom? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have access to a computer lab? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **VI. SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:**

**Please respond briefly to the following questions, *using the additional sheet provided if necessary*:**

What new technologies (other than computers) are available for your use at school (i.e. cameras, projectors, laptops)?

How often do you have access to these new technologies?

Describe any 'new' literacy practices you encourage in your classroom (i.e. power point presentations, website creations, short movie and music video creation, photo essays, web navigation, blogging). If you do not encourage any 'new' literacy practices, why not?

Describe the questions and concerns you might have about using 'new' literacy practices in the classroom.

1. What would help you to be able to confidently incorporate 'new' literacy practices using different media in your ELA classroom?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND CANDID RESPONSES.**

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

Begin by explaining the purpose of my research:

My goal is to understand what teachers know about new literacies as well as how teachers are feeling about implementing new literacies in the classroom in order to help find ways of supporting teachers through the process of implementing new literacy projects in their curriculum.

- Tell me about your experiences (if any) using new literacies in the classroom.
- How comfortable are you with using new literacies both outside of school and in school?
- What new literacy practices are you particularly comfortable / uncomfortable with?
- What new literacy practices do you believe your students are engaging in both inside and outside of school?
- Describe training sessions or other events that have helped you to become more confident using new literacies in the classroom?
- What concerns you when it comes to incorporating new literacies into the classroom?