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Orchestrating Literacies: Print Literacy Learning Opportunities Within Multimodal Intergenerational Ensembles


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Orchestrating literacies:

Print literacy learning opportunities within multimodal intergenerational ensembles

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ORCHESTRATING LITERACIES: PRINT LITERACY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN MULTIMODAL INTERGENERATIONAL ENSEMBLES

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Abstract

This exploratory case study considered the opportunities for print literacy learning within multimodal ensembles that featured art, singing, and digital media within the context of an intergenerational program that brought together 13 kindergarten children (4 and 5 years) with 7 elder companions. Study questions concerned how reading and writing were practiced within multimodal ensembles and what learning opportunities were afforded the children while the participants worked through a chain of multimodal projects. Data were collected through ethnographic tools in the Rest Home where the projects were completed and in the children's classroom where project content and tools were introduced and extended by the classroom teacher. Themes were identified through the juxtaposition of field texts in a multimodal analysis. Results indicate that the multimodality of the projects and the reciprocal intergenerational relationships forged in and through text-making afforded children opportunities to improvise and refine their print literacy practices as part of multimodal ensembles. The study is designed to contribute to the nascent, yet growing body of knowledge concerning print literacy practices and learning opportunities as conceptualized within multimodal literacy and intergenerational curricula.

Keywords

Literacy, early childhood, multimodal, case study, reading and writing

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In a community room within a Rest Home in rural southern Ontario, Canada, Ron, an elder, and Talon, a four year old child, lean together over an iPad. The duo are collaborating on a digital storybook, viewing and selecting photos that Talon has taken of important people, places, and objects in his life and recording oral narratives to accompany the images. Talon shows Ron how to swipe through different screens and push the necessary buttons to navigate within an app, and Ron guides Talon's next steps by reading the written, onscreen prompts. Throughout the entire process Ron and Talon contribute their individual and collective resources to the problem of building the storybook, and in so doing, they strengthen their ties to each other and their community.

This paper profiles an intergenerational project that is replete with examples of children and elders working collaboratively and with a range of modes and media to create intergenerational, multimodal texts. The *Intergenerational Digital Literacies Project* (hereafter referred to as the Project) from which this paper is based sought to document and understand one school's attempt to offer expansive literacy learning opportunities to its kindergarten students through a multimodal curriculum that combined a variety of modes and media, including, art, song, writing and digital media (e.g., iPads) while drawing on community elders as curricular partners. The focus of this paper is the print literacy opportunities that were afforded the children through the constituents of the intergenerational multimodal curriculum. By taking place during school hours, participation in the Project consumed a significant amount of instructional time. The importance of meeting programmatic curricular expectations related to print literacy weighed heavily on the school educators. Following the Project, the kindergarten teacher commented that she believed that the opportunities for the children to work on multimodal

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activities with their elder partners helped to satisfy these programmatic curricular expectations related to print literacy in ways she did not anticipate (Jan 15, 2013). We highlight examples of the print literacy learning opportunities within the Project as a means to explore the relationships between various modes within multimodal ensembles and the development of multimodal pedagogies and curricula that can satisfy institutional demands for print literacy acquisition while creating expansive opportunities for multimodality. The paper also provides novel illustrations of intergenerational curricula to remind readers of the social, dialogical elements of literacy practices and learning opportunities.

(H1) Theoretical Framework and Background to the Study

Singing featured strongly in the Project, thus we employ the metaphor of music to explain the study's theoretical proclivities and findings. Music has been widely used to explain the interconnectedness and complexity of literacy teaching and learning (e.g., Brandsford et al., 2005; Kress, 1997; Sanders and Albers, 2010). Many researchers have also applied musical terms to describe the various ways children construct meaning across and between modes and media (Kress, 1997; Sanders and Albers, 2010; Tierney et al., 2006;); for instance, Jewitt (2009a: 15) posits that “people *orchestrate* meaning through their selection and configuration of modes” (emphasis added), and the term “orchestrate” is often used in reference to literacy practice (e.g., Siegel, 1995; Winters, 2010; Wissman et al., 2012).

We leverage the musical metaphor as an epistemic resource. It allows us to connect with and build on the prevalence of musical language in the literacy literature. Also, given the notion that moving an idea across modes can be a route to creativity and innovation in concept development (e.g., Stein, 2008), we reckon that thinking about literacy through music might

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open up new possibilities for conceptualizing print literacy and literacy practices within multimodal ensembles. The use of metaphor, however, is a strategy often used to express an idea that is not a perfect fit with existing semiotic resources. Consequently, we attempt to capitalize on the affordances while being aware of its limitations.

The term *print literacies* refers to “the reading and writing of some form of print for communicative purposes in peoples’ lives” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004: 26). The study’s conceptualization of print literacy is embedded within a multimodal literacy framework that is related to the literacy demands of contemporary schooling. Multimodal literacy is here defined as “the simultaneous reading, processing and/or writing, designing, producing and interacting with various modes of print, image, movement, graphics, animation, sound, music and gesture” (Walsh, 2011: 106). Just as music involves the interconnectedness of melody, harmony, dissonance, rhythm, dynamics, and tone, multimodal literacy involves the complex interrelationships between different semiotic modes and the materiality of each. We understand modes as being “a regularized organised set of resources for meaning-making, including image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound effects” (Kress & Jewitt, 2003:1). Materiality refers to a mode’s “physical” features and the social, cultural, and historical aspects that pertain to “what has been done in the past with this material, and how the meanings made in the past affect what can be done with a mode” (Kress & Jewitt, 2003: 15). The emphasis is on the “multi” meaning that modes, including print, are never really isolated. Instead, the “processing of modes, such as image, words, sound, gesture and movement” either receptively or expressively, “can occur simultaneously” though “specific modes may dominate or converge” (Walsh, 2011: 12).

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Print literacy can be considered a multimodal process as readers, especially young readers and readers of text that engage new media, read and write print text alongside other modes. For instance, as readers attempt to make sense of written language in their decoding of text, they may also process illustrations and diagrams in addition to the “font, layout and punctuation on a page” (Walsh, 2011: 8). Writing has also been identified as “‘multisemiotic’ in that it uses a multiplicity of semiotic means all at one time” (Kress, 1997: 79). Much of the literature in multimodal literacy recognizes that print literacies are part of composing and consuming multimodal texts (Wissman et al., 2012), though the modes used in meaning making, and the orchestration of modes is particular to the meaning maker. This paper seeks to contribute to multimodal understandings of literacies and pedagogies by documenting and illustrating the opportunities for print literacy acquisition within multimodal ensembles.

(H2)The multimodal ensemble

The term *multimodal ensemble* “is suggestive of discrete parts brought together as a synthesized whole, where modes, like melodies played on different instruments, are interrelated in complex ways” (MODE, 2012). The term has been used to explain how the semiotic resources from different modes combine to express meaning; it “refers to interrelationships between co-present modes. As the resources of different modes are combined, meanings are corresponding, complementary and dissonant as they harmonize in an integrated whole” (Jewitt, 2009b: 301). Within such an ensemble meaning is constructed, in part, through the interrelationships and interconnectedness of various modes.

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To realize the collective meaning making potential in multimodal ensembles, different modes must be viewed as “relevant options for creating and expressing meaning” (Kendrick and McKay, 2004: 111). Literacy in the multimodal ensemble:

is not, nor can it be enacted by simply adding another communicative mode to traditional print literacy and calling it “multimodal”. Literacy is entangled, unwilling to be separated from other modes, media and language systems that constitute the very messages that are sent, read, and/or interpreted (Sanders and Albers, 2010: 4).

Print literacies can be integral parts of multimodal ensembles but in general need not be privileged. Instead, print literacies might be viewed as *parts* of a larger communication repertoire where their importance is dependent upon the circumstance (Sanders and Albers, 2010). Within the metaphor of the musical ensemble, print literacy may contribute to the “music” of literacies within the classroom context, but need not represent the full instrumentation. The orchestration and integration of print based modes with alternate modes within the multimodal ensemble allows for richness within meaning making opportunities.

At the outset, it may seem contradictory for a study that uses a multimodal framework to focus on opportunities for print literacy acquisition. We adopted this stance, however, to reflect the value that has been ascribed to print literacy in schools (e.g., Kress, 1997) and to acknowledge the challenges facing educators in meeting a multiplicity of programmatic curricular expectations within a changing communication landscape. While many programmatic curriculum documents recognize that literacy includes communication channels such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing and acknowledges the importance of communicating meaning through traditional and digital text forms (e.g., OME, 2006), print

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literacy continues to be privileged in standardized, outcomes-based curricula and assessments (e.g., Heydon, 2012). These competing mandates may make it difficult for educators to integrate new literacies and technologies within their classrooms (Wohlwend, 2009). “Teachers need to be able to develop pedagogy that embeds digital communication and texts to meet curriculum outcomes and assessment requirements while at the same time maintaining students’ engagement with print-based technologies” (Walsh, 2011: 7). As we focus on opportunities for print literacy acquisition within multimodal ensembles, we are cognizant of the risk of further privilege traditional print literacies. We thus attempt to convey a view of the opportunities for print literacy acquisition through a multimodal lens. In so doing we hope to provide working hypotheses of how print literacies work *in concert* with other modes within multimodal ensembles and the curricula and pedagogies that support them (e.g., Walsh, 2011).

[H2] *Print literacy acquisition in multimodal ensembles*

Young children’s print literacy acquisition through traditional written modes has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Clay, 1993). However, the advent of digital and multimodal texts has impacted the ways that children produce and construct meaning from texts and practice their literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Children’s acquisition of print has been found to occur in concert with other modes, and a growing body of knowledge documents how print develops in relation to these other modes. Pahl (2007), for example, noticed that children’s reading and writing are “accompanied by talk and discussion” (p. 88); Kress (1997), found that children treat print as multimodal, drawing, cutting, and writing together; and Wohlwend (2013) identified the ways in which children play with literacies within digital media such as iPads. Across all three studies, children drew on the resources of various modes and media within

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meaningful communicative ensembles—ensembles that included print literacies. Still in its infancy is knowledge of multimodal curricula that might build on this insight, especially curricula that can be leveraged within schools.

There is a foundation of literature concerning multimodal pedagogy and curriculum (e.g., Stein, 2008). Walsh (2011), for instance, highlights several examples of classrooms that enact pedagogies that draw on the affordances of traditional text forms as well as newer technologies. In these examples, multimodal pedagogies allow for students to use their “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992: 132) to build upon the literacies developed outside of school within the classroom. More examples and analyses are certainly warranted, and this is also where this study resides. Further, through its intergenerational component, the study builds on understanding literacy learning across ages (e.g., Gregory and Williams, 2000) and the potential for intergenerational programs to provide children with the social and linguistics supports necessary to acquire and strengthen their literacy practices (Heydon, 2013a).

(H1) Research Design

This exploratory case study sought to understand the print literacy learning opportunities afforded by the *Intergenerational Digital Literacies Project*. The project focused on promoting communication and identity options for participants within an intergenerational multimodal curriculum that united elders and kindergarten children to work through a chain of multimodal projects that featured the use of art, singing, and digital technologies (e.g., Heydon and Rowsell, in press) while needing to satisfy the children’s programmatic curriculum (OME, 2006). We used ethnographic methods to collect data within the case of the ways print literacies were

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enacted by young children as they worked with their elder partners to create multimodal artifacts within the intergenerational multimodal curriculum (Dyson and Genishi, 2005).

(H2) Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a rural community in southern Ontario, Canada. Data collection took place in a community room at a Rest Home during intergenerational sessions and in a kindergarten classroom when project content and tools were introduced and extended by the classroom teacher. The project came about when the principal of a publicly funded, Catholic elementary school who had read Author B's work asked her to support the school staff in the design and implementation of an intergenerational literacy curriculum project. The principal's goals in initiating the project were to improve the students' achievement in reading while cultivating community connections within this rural locale that had recently experienced difficult times as industries had closed and people moved away. He hoped to leverage the affordances of digital technology (in particular iPads) to do so.

Two of the school's teachers volunteered to take part in the project, a kindergarten teacher and the special education resource teacher. The teachers and the school principal were participants in the study as well as collaborators in the design and implementation of the curriculum. During the program development phase, the research team provided resources to the educators including lesson plans from Author B's previous work with intergenerational multimodal curricula, and we collaborated to create lesson plans that satisfied the programmatic curriculum expectations (since the program took place within the school day) as well as particular instructional goals the classroom teacher had identified for the children. Additional to the principal's goal of improving reading, the kindergarten teacher had identified a goal of

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improving her students' oral language proficiency. The classroom teacher taught the co-constructed lessons within the intergenerational sessions and in her classroom. During the program, we continued to support the school team by providing resources, setting up the instructional space within the Rest Home, and sharing our observations.

Participants also included one class of junior and senior kindergarten students (ages 3 to 5 years) (13 kindergarten students participated in the study¹); six Grade 8 students who assisted in the class during one intergenerational session); and elders who lived in the community and were recruited through the Rest Home for the project (seven out of 10 elders who participated in the intergenerational program were also participants in the study).

(H2) Data collection and analysis

Data sources included the periods when the researchers worked with the teachers, principal, technical support person, and elder liaison from the Rest Home to support the development of the curriculum and participant observation data from program sessions. Observational data from classes were collected 6 times over 4 months (four intergenerational sessions and 2 classroom observations). This period represented one cycle of activity with the cycle defined by the beginning of the project in the fall and ending with the commencement of Christmas break which was launched by a Christmas concert at the school which both generations attended. We collected qualitative data through multiple data sources (Jewitt and Kress, 2003) such as photos taken of session artifacts, field texts including transcriptions from

¹ All teachers, students, and elders could participate in the program even if they did not take part in the study.

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audio and video taped interactions, informal conversations with participants about artifacts constructed, field notes describing interactions in classes, and semi-structured interviews with all participants.

The units of analysis were bounded by the different “literacy events” (i.e., “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (Heath, 1982: 93) within the curriculum. We read through the data from the various sources multiple times to identify the literacy events (Dyson and Genishi, 2005) wherein we further identified the children’s print literacy practices within the multimodal ensembles and looked for ways that children’s print literacy practices were supported by the curriculum. We triangulated the data sources as we viewed the data showing the literacy events through multiple data sources. During the analysis and interpretation of the data, we juxtaposed the photographs of texts next to the interview transcripts, field notes, and video looking for consistencies and surprises (Pahl, 2007). Throughout the analysis and interpretation, we considered data from before and after the literacy events to help contextualize them (Dyson and Genishi, 2005). We conducted member checks with key participants to share nascent findings to further develop understandings (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The key participants clarified aspects of the interactions that were unclear in the data and verified the themes identified.

(H1) Findings

There were many opportunities for children’s print literacy acquisition within the program, and we identified the interrelated curricular constituents that supported print literacy acquisition as being the intergenerational relationships formed between participants within the program and the opportunities for meaning making through multiple modes. Intergenerational

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relationships were formed in and through text making activities as participants worked to create multimodal artifacts through singing, art, and digital media. Participants shared their literacy practices and identities through different modes and media, allowing multiple modes and media to interact and feed off of one another. Through its constituents, the curriculum allowed skipped generations to come together in ways that provided opportunities for print literacy acquisition as the children rehearsed and improvised their print literacy practices. We elaborate on these connections in turn.

(H2) Intergenerational relationships

The relationships formed between child and elder partners while working together to construct multimodal artifacts supported the children's print literacy acquisition within the multimodal ensembles. Each of the projects was designed to help connect generations in *reciprocal ways* where they were able to share literacy practices and meanings created; for instance, elder Marg credited the singing and art activities as a helpful way of engaging her child partners, Makayla and Mackenna, in multiple forms of text making which included reading and writing. Makayla and Mackenna were shy and quiet participants, and initially were reluctant to speak with Marg. In the first session, participants were invited to create *Songs in My Head* collages. The participants selected pictures from magazines that signified the songs that they had stuck in their heads, sang the songs with their partner, and glued the images on their collages. Through the singing and creation of collages, Makayla and Mackenna started to speak and sing with Marg. Marg explained, "the singing and the art were great because it was easy to get involved with the child that way...to kind of make it a duet or what have you" (Jan. 14, 2013).

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Certainly there were instances of literal duets between elders and children, as participants joined their voices in singing songs that both generations knew. During the first session, after creating the *Songs in My Head* collage, the teacher showed Makayla's collage with a picture of a man with a basket of apples and some apple seeds, and asked the group, "What song would Makayla be thinking of?... Johnny Appleseed, so that's a lunchtime prayer" (Oct.29, 2012). The teacher started to sing, and participants of all generations joined in singing:

*The Lord is good to me,
And so I thank the Lord,
For giving me the things I need,
The sun, and the rain, and the appleseed.
The Lord is good to me!
Johnny Appleseed, [clap] Amen! (Oct.29, 2012)*

The singing was also a figurative duet as it signified a social practice that united young and old participants from several Christian denominations. The children all attended the Catholic school, however, the elder participants belonged to several different churches. The singing of the grace in unison signaled cohesion between the generations and was a vehicle for further strengthening of relationships. We build on Marg's use of the musical term "duet" to show examples from the data that highlight how the elders and children formed reciprocal relationships and synchronized their literacy practices as they composed multimodal artifacts, and how these relationships were integral to opportunities for print literacy acquisition.

In her interview, Martha, an elder participant, explained that the use of the iPads within the intergenerational sessions helped her to "connect" with her child partner, Karl (Jan. 14, 2013). One of the sessions involved the construction of a digital storybook using an app called

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Pictello. The children took photos with the iPad of things that were important to them at home and school and stored the pictures in the photo bank of the app. During the intergenerational session, the children selected photos from their photos banks and recorded oral texts with the help of their elder partner. Martha explained that she knew very little about using the iPad, and told us that she was found it “fascinating” that her 4 year old partners could remember all the steps for using it (Jan. 14, 2013). Martha relied on Karl to show her how to manoeuvre through the various screens and menus by tapping and swiping. As Karl swiped through his photos, Martha recognized Karl’s family members and realized that she was related to Karl. Martha used this connection as a catalyst for conversation, and supported Karl in asking questions that helped him to compose an oral text. The use of the iPad allowed children and elders to collaborate as equal partners within the meaning making process.

The reciprocal intergenerational relationships were integral to the participants’ meaning-making experiences as they collaborated as equal partners to construct multimodal artifacts. Whereas Walsh (2011) found in her studies that the social context enveloped meaning making, we found that the relationships were inseparable from meaning making. When children and elders worked together, we observed expressions of joy such as when Makayla and Marg worked on their Christmas centrepiece (See Figure 1). We heard participants refer to each other in affectionate terms, for example when Martha called her child partner, Karl “a good man” when they were working to create a collage (Oct. 29, 2012). We identified the importance of the participants’ growing relationships when after a month of not seeing each other for the Christmas break, child participant Mackenna told us about her drawing of something she liked at the Rest Home:

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Mackenna: I drew a heart.
Author B: You drew a heart. Yes.
Author A: Why did you draw a heart?
Mackenna: I like my best friend.
Author A: You... like your...
Author B: Best friend.
Author A: Who's your best friend?
Mackenna: [points to photo of Marg]
Author A: Marg.

(Jan 15, 2013)

We found further evidence of the importance of relationships to the participants when Ron placed his hand over his heart, his eyes welling with tears and his voice filled with emotion to share in his interview how special it was to him when his child partner Zachary talked to about his family while he drew the family home (Jan. 14, 2013). The construction of multimodal artifacts, including those experiences that did not directly relate to print literacies fostered relationship building. These relationships forged through the creation of multimodal artifacts impacted the ways print literacies were practiced within the sessions and influenced what was signified in the artifacts constructed.

Figure 1. Marg and Mackenna constructing Christmas centerpiece



Literacies were full with the weight of relationship (Heydon, 2012) as the children practiced their print literacies within the program. For instance, within the intergenerational sessions, the children frequently wrote their names to signify themselves on their own or partner's texts. Some of the children could write their names independently, but others required the support of their elder partner. As the children and elders interacted with one another to write names, there were opportunities to build relationships while practising print literacies. For example, Talon, worked with his partner Ron during the first session to write his name on his *Songs in My Head Collage*. When doing so, he recognized the similarities between his name and Ron's (See Figure 2). Ron explained to us how Talon noticed the similarities:

My little buddy looked at his name and my name and he pointed to my name... "o-n" just like in my name and he went to his work and his name is Talon. He said there's the "o-n" the same in my name and in [his] name (Oct. 29, 2012).

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The writing of names on the multimodal texts sparked an opportunity for Talon to practise identifying letters that he knew from his name in different words, and cemented the relationship between him and Ron. In our discussion with the educators following the first session, we noted that Ron and Talon had made a “great connection” through the similarities in their names (Oct. 29, 2012). Talon and Ron connected and formed relationships through practising print literacies. This relationship continued to support Talon as he practised his print literacies throughout the sessions.

Figure 2. Talon and Ron's "Songs in my Head" Collages



During the second session, the writing of names continued to be a reflection of Ron and Talon’s relationship and a way for their relationship to further develop as Talon practiced his print literacies. In this session, the participants constructed *Heartmaps*. Using Sara Fanelli’s (1995) *My Map Book* as an example, participants signified the people, places, and things that they loved through drawings and words on a map of their heart. As they worked together to construct heartmaps, Ron assisted Talon in writing his name on Talon’s work by writing

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“TALON” (See Figure 3). Ron was a retired principal who was very interested in supporting Talon’s print literacy acquisition. He was concerned when Talon did not recognize his name in the way that he had written it, so Ron called Author A over to assist:

- Ron: Am I doing this right?
- Author A: How do you spell Talon?
- Talon: I don’t have this. [points to A in his name that Ron wrote]
- Author A: Ohhhh! [to Ron] You know what I think...I wonder if it’s a capital, if he’s used to seeing it like a capital T and lowercase. Do you want to write your name Talon?
- Talon: It goes like this.
- Author A: Okay. Show us how.
- Ron: You show us.
- Talon: T [looks up at Author A then looks at Ron]
- Author A: T...yep. [Talon writes a T]. Yes, and then what?
- Talon: A circle. [draws circle]
- Author A: Circle.
- Talon: Then this. [draws a vertical line to make an a]
- Author A: Yes.
- Talon: That’s how we write...
- Author A: That’s the a. That’s a little a, right?
- Talon: Um...O [draws an O]...O...[looks at it] The...[looks closer, looks back at where Ron had written his name in capitals and points to it]...O, then....
- Author A: What’s the last-
- Ron: What’s the next letter?
- Talon: Ummm
- Ron: The last letter in your name?
- Talon: [writes something on page and looks at Ron]
- Author A: Is it an N? (Nov. 12, 2012).

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This example illustrates how Talon used print within the multimodal ensemble. He drew on visual and spoken language as well as writing to form his name. Also supporting his writing was the fact that the name was part of a text that was meaningful to him; the writing of his name took place within a particular social context for the purpose of identifying his work. More than this, given the subject matter of the heartmap (ie., identifying the things that were important to the individual), the writing of Talon's name connected Talon, the person, to the meaning signified through the images and marks that he had drawn. Within the multimodal ensembles, the writing of names was a multimodal process that allowed the children to construct and communicate meaning.

The meaning making process of writing names was supported through the inter-generational relationships. Talon's attempts at writing his name were supported by his elder partner, Ron. Initially, Ron attempted to support Talon by modelling the writing of Talon's name on Talon's work, but this was unsuccessful. As Ron and Talon continued to work together in the sessions, Ron adopted the literacy practices Talon was familiar with and, in later sessions, wrote Talon's name according to the capitalization conventions that Talon used (i.e. a capital letter followed by lowercase letters). Ron continued to adjust the supports he provided for Talon in writing his name as he recognized that Talon became more comfortable and confident with his ability to write his name independently on his multimodal texts over the course of the sessions. In the early sessions at the Rest Home, Ron wrote Talon's name as a model for Talon to copy. In the final session, Talon took the lead in writing his name and Ron, following Talon's example, wrote Talon's name. Over time, as the children became more proficient with their literacy

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practices, their elder partners adjusted the supports they provided within the multimodal environment.

Figure 3. Ron writes Talon's name TALON on Talon's heartmap



The multimodal artifacts constructed by children and elders provide evidence of the importance of the relationships formed within the program and also illustrate how the reciprocal intergenerational relationships provided opportunities for print literacy acquisition within the ensembles. When constructing her *Heartmap*, Martha included her child partner, Karl, in it, signifying that he was an important person in her life. Martha's desire to include Karl in her heartmap also provided Karl with an opportunity to practice his print literacies because Martha invited Karl to write his name on her heartmap. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Martha's heartmap

Similarly, the participants' interest in using literacies, including print literacy, to communicate what was of import to them and their tendency to *echo or sing in unison* in this process was also evident with Marg and her child partner Mackenna. Marg enjoyed looking at the images from "My Map Book" (Fanelli, 1995). When she had completed her heartmap, she looked through the picture book again page by page and recorded the title of the book on her on the lower left corner of her page (see Figure 5). Mackenna watched Marg refer to the book to help her write the title on her heartmap. Mackenna echoed Marg's practice by also using the book to write the title of the book in the lower left corner on her own heartmap (see Figure 6). Marg's literacy practice provided a model for Mackenna. The intergenerational relationships provided opportunities for the children to rehearse and improvise their own print literacy practices as they used a variety of modes to communicate meaning within the curriculum; for instance, it bears highlighting that the print here was written within a drawing of a heart.

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Figure 5. Marg's heartmap

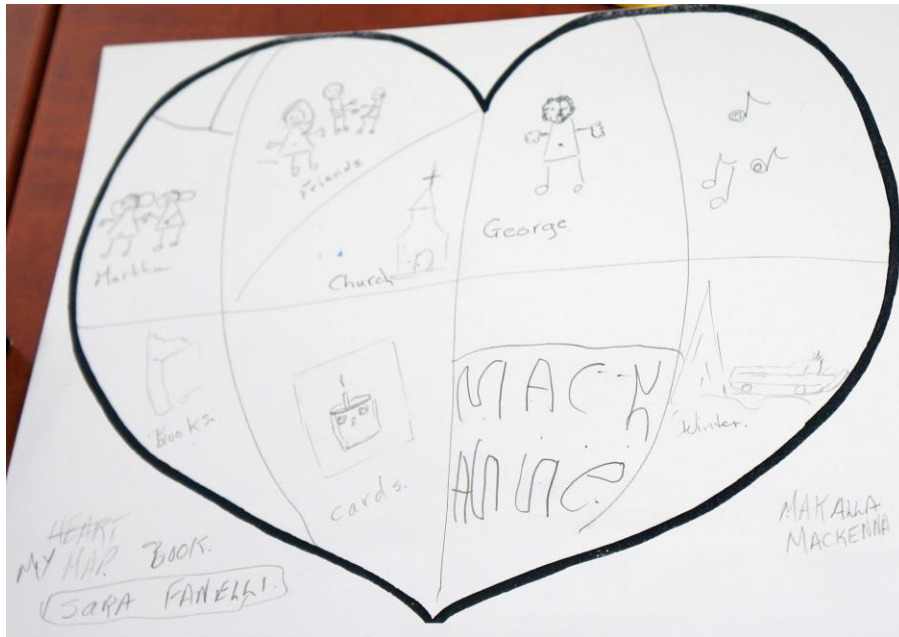


Figure 6. Mackenna's heartmap



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(H2)Multimodality

The inter-relationships between modes of expression allowed for different modes to support one other as the children practiced their print literacies with their elder partners. This was evident, for instance, in the cases where singing and gesture supported the children's print literacy practices when they constructed their *Heartmaps*. As he created his *Heartmap*, Karl engaged in a lively conversation with Martha about how he wanted to draw his "Mom", "Dad", and "my best friend, Jesse" on the heartmap (Nov. 12, 2012). Karl was not sure how he could draw these people, so he asked Sarah, the Special Education Resource Teacher, to do it for him. Sarah passed Karl a pencil and responded, "No, you do it, and I'll sing [the Mat Man song] (Nov. 12, 2012). Mat Man "is a character used within the Handwriting Without Tears® program that was created [with the intention] to teach readiness skills related to 'body awareness, drawing and pre-writing, counting, building, socializing and sharing' (Handwriting Without Tears®, 2013)" (McKee, 2013: 42). Mat Man was widely used in the children's classroom and Jillian, the classroom teacher, explained to the participants in an intergenerational session that, "Mat Man is an easy way to help to do us do our writing" (Nov. 6, 2012).

Sarah supported Karl's drawing through song and gesture as she knelt down in front of him. When Sarah started to sing, Martha paused in constructing her *Heartmap* and became Karl's audience. Martha added further support to Karl as she followed along with Sarah's gestures and song, encouraging Karl along the way (See Figure 7). She also used the song herself to help in the completion of her *Heartmap*. The following video transcription shows how Sarah sang the Mat Man song with the accompanying gestures, pausing at each line to allow for Karl to draw each body part. (Words expressed through song are indicated through the use of italics).

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- Sarah sings: *Mat Man, it's time to build you*
from your head down to your feet [points to head]
Mat Man, it's time to build you,
We'll take it piece by piece.
One head [points to head]
To hold your brain
- Martha: [nods her head as Sarah sings and mouths the words]
- Sarah: Do you have a head?
- Karl: [Nods, and draws a head]
- Martha: [leans in to look at Karl's paper] Yeah.
- Sarah sings: *Two eyes so you can see* [points to eyes]
 [Karl draws eyes and Martha leans over to see, picks up her pencil and writes something on her own heartmap]
- Sarah: Eye? [nods and smiles at Karl]
- Sarah sings: *One nose to smell and blow* [points to nose]
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws a nose]
One mouth to talk and eat [points to mouth]
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws a mouth]
Two ears so you can hear [tugs on her ears]
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws ears, tugs on ears again]
One body for your insides [hands on ears still]
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws a body]
Two arms so you can reach [stretches out arms]
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws the arms]
- Martha: [leans in to look at Karl's heartmap, nods and writes something down on her heartmap]
- Karl: There's a long arm!
- Sarah: That *is* a long arm.
- Sarah sings: *Two hands to clap the beat*
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws the hands]

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Two legs so you can stand
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws]
Two feet so you can walk
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws feet]
Oh, no, we forgot, your...

Karl: Belly-button.
 Sarah sings: *Belly-button spot.*
 [Sarah pauses while Karl draws the belly-button]

Martha: Umhmmm!
 Sarah: Good job dude! [Sarah and Karl give a high five]
 Martha: [smiles and nods] Super!
 (Nov. 12, 2012).

Figure 7. Sarah sings the Mat Man song to support Karl's attempts at drawing



Sarah, Martha, and Karl's singing of the Mat Man song with accompanying gestures highlights how multiple modes interacted to support Karl's print literacy practices. Without the song, Karl did not know how to begin to signify his mother. Sarah's singing of the Mat Man song allowed Karl to create an image of his mother, a person who he had placed on his

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Heartmap (see upper right quadrant of Figure 8) to indicate that she was important in his life, and share it with Martha while extending his writing. The singing of the song also allowed Karl to share an important classroom literacy practice with his elder partner. Martha reinforced these supports and showed herself to also be a learner by including Mat Man type figures on her *Heartmap*.

Figure 8. Karl's heartmap



At times the elders guided the children when constructing their texts and so too the children led their elder partners. The process of meaning-making between partners was reciprocal, as each partner contributed the resources that s/he had. This was especially evident when using iPads. Prior to the program, none of the elders had used an iPad. As the iPads were introduced within the sessions, the children did most of the navigating on them, while the elders

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looked on with great interest. Then the elders gained comfort with the medium leading to collaborative meaning making and each partner contributing to the process. The following narrative suggests the collaborative nature of meaning making within the multimodal environment as elder and child contributed equally, using the different resources each held.

Makayla and Marg leaned closely over the iPad as they worked together to select photos and record oral texts for Makayla's digital storybook. Makayla rapidly tapped through the different screens. Marg reached in to tap the screen to select the photo:

"Oh my! Did you want to use that picture?" Marg asked.

Makayla shook her head, "no", and tapped and swiped to remove Marg's choice.

Marg smiled and said, "Oh, I mustn't touch, okay."

Makayla continued to scroll through her photo bank from bottom to top and tapped the photo in order to select it, but nothing happened.

Marg leaned in a little closer and pointed to the button onscreen, "Oh okay, now what? Do you go *next*?"

Makayla continued to smile and pushed the *next* button that Marg had indicated.

Marg nodded slightly and guided, "Now what?"

Makayla tapped through several screens in rapid succession in order to locate her photo bank again, and started to scroll through pictures.

Marg, intently focused on Makayla's actions and the images onscreen asked "What's happening here?"

Makayla whispered something to Marg and nodded and selected a picture for her digital storybook.

Marg continued to encourage Makayla, "Okay, we chose our picture. So now what do we do? Oh, we want to *use* it. See that little tiny word at the top?"

Makayla tapped the screen and the image went black. She opened her eyes wide and shook her head. "What's this?"

Marg echoed, "What's that?" and placed her hand to her forehead. "Oh, my goodness! We don't want that, do we?" Marg tapped the bottom of the screen, to clear the error.

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Makayla continued to smile as she tapped through several screens and located the photo.

Marg: “Did you find one? Find your picture. Can you find your picture? Good girl! Okay. Now [points to a button at the top of the screen] see up there, that tiny word *use*. That’s what we want! Alright.”

We see in examples such as this one how the multimodal texts were completed *within relationship* with print literacies being practiced for purposes meaningful to the participants, both intergenerationally, and in concert with other modes.

The ways the participants orchestrated print literacies with other modes reflected each person’s particular meaning making practices. When Makayla, for example, constructed her *Heartmap*, she communicated meaning through a combination of visual images, standard spelling (e.g. COHEN, MAKAYLA), text scribed by an adult (e.g. MOMMY, HOUSE), and non-standard spelling (see Figure 9). Makayla made her own decisions about how to proceed and moved fluidly between different modes of expression as her elder partner, Marg, quietly observed with great interest, ready to assist if necessary. In her attempts to communicate meaning through writing, Makayla independently recorded what she thought the word should look like using non-standard spelling on the reverse of her paper (See Figure 10). When she was satisfied with her attempt, Makayla re-wrote the word on the front of her page. Marg explained Makayla’s independent rehearsal process to Author A following the session:

Marg: She just sat there and you know, before she put it on here, [front of the page], she put it on the back.

Author A: Ohhh!

Marg: She wrote it, but she never asked me for anything, and I said to her, I asked her about her dog and she wrote Cohen here [back of the page]. I

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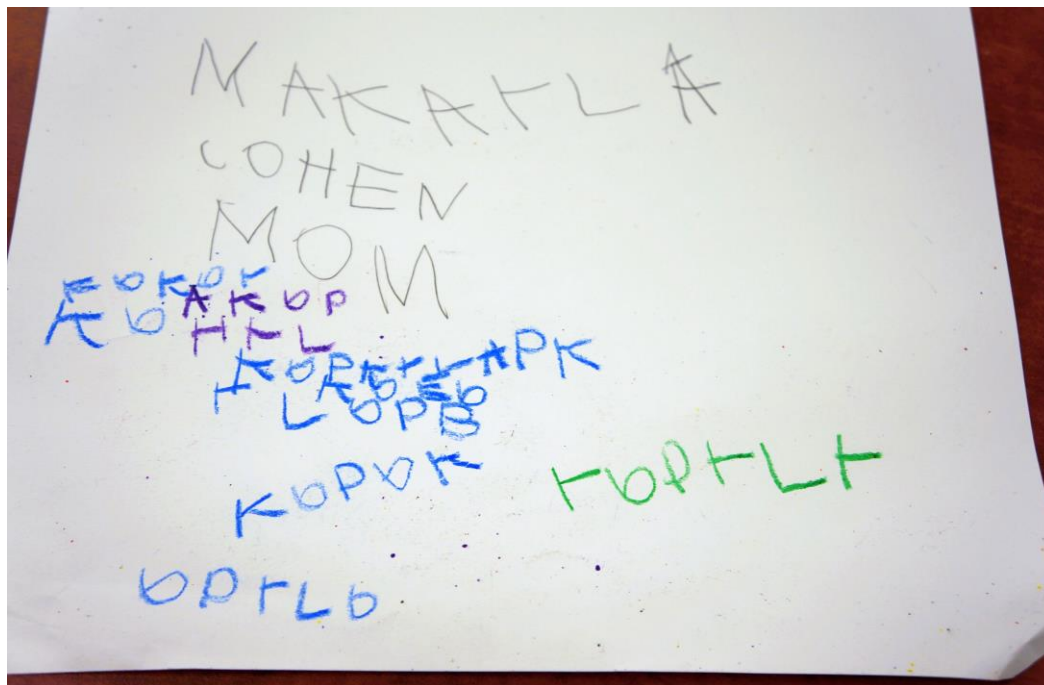
thought, Cohen for a dog's name? And then she wrote it over here [front of page]. [I asked,] What is your doggy's name? Cohen. She knew exactly what she had written.

- Author A: That's interesting that she practised on the back and then she...
 Marg: She did! Every word she wrote, she did on the back first and then she'd flip it over.... She's going to be a novelist!" (Nov. 12, 2012).

The practising of words on the reverse of the *Heartmap* was more than practising a list of spelling words; Makayla practised the words so that she could signify the people, places and things that were important to her within her heart. Through words and images, Makayla signified *her* world. The multimodal curriculum created a context where meaningful communication through various modes was valued. This context allowed for the sharing of literacy practices that fostered relationship building. Within the intersection of multimodality and intergenerational relationships the children were afforded meaningful opportunities for print literacy acquisition.

Figure 9. Makayla's heartmap (front view)



Figure 10. Makayla's heartmap (reverse view)**(H1)Discussion**

In this study of an intergenerational multimodal curriculum we asked how reading and writing were practiced within multimodal ensembles and what learning opportunities were afforded the child participants in relation to these print literacies. Our question was born out of our alignment with the multimodal literacy literature whose pedagogies (e.g., Stein, 2008) ask for a homophony of modes and media and our need to understand how to do this within domains such as school where print literacies are often required. The findings that ensued from the study are a form of intermezzo, connecting the literatures on print literacy acquisition and multimodal literacy and doing so within the novel medium of an intergenerational curriculum. More specifically, we see that the findings bear noting given that they:

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- reinforce the importance of multimodal pedagogy for the acquisition of print literacy (e.g. Walsh, 2011) as children orchestrate print in concert with other modes and media;
- document and illustrate the opportunities for print literacy acquisition within formal intergenerational contexts;
- suggest the important reciprocal links between multimodality and relationship, gesturing toward the need for both in literacy learning opportunities, even in monogenerational settings; and
- provide examples of multimodal and intergenerational pedagogies in action and the ways in which they can support print literacy acquisition such that intergenerational programs can be integral parts of school curricula, not just recreational add-ons.

The importance of multimodal curricula and pedagogies for the acquisition of print literacy and the forms that they might take are being increasingly documented in the literature (e.g., Walsh, 2011). The study illustrates how the inter-relationships between modes of expression allowed for different modes to support each other as the children expressed their print literacies. The use of speaking, gesture, and singing allowed children to refine their print literacies when they were unsure of how to signify their meaning in writing. Equally, the other modes augmented the children's use of writing: images, gestures, song, and words all coalesced to create meaningful communicative ensembles. The use of writing was never an end in and of itself; rather it was the means for further communication.

Central in the findings was the notion that all literacy practices were orchestrated within an event that had significance for the participants. These events allowed participants to share

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what was of import to them, and the participants drew on the modes and media that could help them accomplish the purpose of their communication. Writing or reading, within the ensembles was thus not practising print literacy just to satisfy the desires of the teacher or move up a level as can often be the case in school (e.g., Heydon, 2013b); rather, it was about satisfying the interests and ends of the child participants in relation to others within a *dialogic* (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981).

The study documents and illustrates the opportunities for print literacy acquisition within a formal *intergenerational* curriculum. The literature is clear on the importance of more knowledgeable language users scaffolding the language acquisition of learners (e.g., Vygotsky, 1987); however, perhaps more important to the children's print literacy learning opportunities here was the presence of an immediate other with whom the children and their texts could be *in dialogue*. The participants made meaning together and worked out in concert with each other the puzzle of how to do so. They experimented with form, they troubled over modes and media, and they drew on their own strengths to add to the duet. The intergenerational component of the curriculum provided a *relationship-rich context* in which to learn and communicate, and our findings related to the affordances of relationship in literacy learning opportunities remind the literature that indeed literacies are best learned from those whom learners value and love (Hicks, 2002). Moreover, they suggest that learning together can strengthen relationships which in turn can strengthen one's literacy practices. Again, pertinent in the study were the reciprocal links between the nature of the multimodal curriculum and the opportunities for relationship; each aided the other. The study strongly suggests the need to consider how multimodality and relationship can become accompaniments to literacy curricula, even in monogenerational

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settings. As children construct meaning through various modes and media with their age-peers in classrooms, the modes they are invited to use and the relationships they form in and through text making will affect the ways(s) meaning is constructed and communicated.

Despite the above being pertinent for any setting, we believe the study does advocate for intergenerational opportunities for all children and elders. It begins to describe the harmonious opportunities that can be created when people with varying literacy practices and facilities are invited to make meaning together. The study clearly saw the importance of reciprocity in the learning process with children and elders communicating about themselves through their own means to their partners, each group drawing on their own strengths to be variously teachers and learners, but always, in the end, being communicators engaging in literate practices as best they could. We described the curriculum as being an invitation into multimodal ensembles. We might equally think ensembles as groupings of generational diversity. In the project the intergenerational ensembles (using both forms of the word ensemble) were their own unique spaces where literacy practices from diverse domains such as school (e.g., Mat Man) and home (e.g., documentation of participants' home environments), could be orchestrated into something unique, belonging to neither *here* nor *there* but to a *syncretic* (Gregory et al., 2004) space where new literacy practices could be generated. The exigencies of schools can sometimes be seen as impediments to multimodal literacy (e.g., McClay & Peterson, 2013) and to intergenerational curricula being seen as anything more than an add-on (e.g., Heydon, 2013a). The study illustrates that this need not be so and the findings suggest some of the ways that an intergenerational multimodal curricula can be a foundational part of children's school programming. Specifically, the study provides evidence that supports the relationship between print literacy learning opportunities and multimodal and intergenerational curricula. Indeed, making meaning together

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within the multimodal and intergenerational ensembles is what made the participants' literacy practices sing.

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