Multiliteracies Group English 1

Language Across the Curriculum

Dr. Susan Holloway

November 15th, 2016

**Praxis Paper: Multiliteracies and Shakespeare**

Our group decided to incorporate multiliteracies theory, particularly multimodal forms of expression and representation, into a Shakespearean framework. As English teachers, we understand why most students find Shakespearean units tedious and boring, primarily because of the difficulty to understand and comprehend “early modern English.” Our primary goal in this project is to enable students to see Shakespearean work in a more enjoyable, entertaining, and educational perspective. Our goal is achieved through multimodality, intertextuality, and humour, while touching upon a social justice issue regarding the canonical marginalization of the LGBTQ community.

In her article, “Creating ‘Smart Spaces’ in the Language Arts Classroom,” Jill Olthouse (2003) states that “multiliteracies theorists have redefined literacy as being multimodal, situated, and having a social purpose” (p. 247). That is exactly what our group strives to do through our project, redefine literacy. In our multiliteracies project, our group transforms Shakespeare’s play, “Romeo and Juliet,” into a multimodal adaptation combining film, music, visual effects, and modern English speech to make Shakespearean units more enjoyable and entertaining, all while maintaining the educational aspect of both the Shakespearean play itself and of social justice issues by challenging societal, heterosexual norms.

Furthermore, our group project exhibits intertextuality by presenting a modern retelling of “Romeo and Juliet” in a “Harry Potter” context, specifically through our representation of Hogwarts school and the two rival houses, Gryffindor and Slytherin, relative to the Montagues and Capulets. Moreover, our group incorporates mockumentary style cut scenes throughout the second part of our film, similar to the cut scene styles of the popular T.V. show, “The Office.” By including these mockumentary style cut scenes, not only do we build upon our multimodality and intertextuality, but we also allow our audience, and more importantly our students, to better relate to the presented material, especially through the use of humour. We believe that humour is one of the most fundamental elements used to engage students.

By changing the names of Romeo and Juliet to Bromeo and Julian, we are not only shedding light on the canonical marginalization of homosexuality in literature to our students, but are also teaching our students how we can challenge societal, heterosexual norms in and out of the classroom. By challenging societal, heterosexual norms, we hope to teach our students that an objective normality does not exist, that there is no such thing as “normal,” because what is normal for one person is not normal for another, regardless of age, sex, gender, race, etc.

What our project strives to do is help students comprehend and visualize Shakespearean literature. Rather than having confused students due to early modern English, our incorporation of both modern English and multimodality allows students to better understand and visualize the importance of Shakespearean work. Visualizing text “is a crucial skill for students because if they can get the picture, often they’ve got the concept” (Think Literacy, p. 56). Furthermore, words on a page, especially foreign ones, can be a very abstract thing for some students. They don’t inspire pictures in the mind or create other types of sensory images (Think Literacy, p. 56). By creating a multimodal, intertextual, and comic adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet,” we allow our students to visualize, comprehend, and better understand how important and fun Shakespeare can be in a 21st century English class.

**References**

Olthouse, J. (2013). “Creating ‘Smart Spaces’ in the Language Arts Classroom.” *Multiliteracies Theory and Gifted Education.* (4th ed.), 247-253.

*Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12.* Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf