**Multiliteracies Praxis Essay**

Max Dent, Kendra Hart, Abigail Murray, Brooke Samms, Ashley West

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Dr. Susan Holloway

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In the Digital Age, teachers are faced with preparing students for evolving futures and complex communications. We strive to develop students into global citizens who are prepared to engage with a broad variety of mediums for communication in culturally diverse societies. A multiliteracies approach to instruction can help us meet these goals. The short story, *A Special Place,* and an accompanying multimodal digital tool were developed in accordance with the Grade 10 English curriculum and a multiliteracies framework. *A Special Place* explores an important social justice issue. By following a star on her journey to discover purpose and confidence, students learn about the Underground Railroad and the significance of the North Star to African American and African Canadian history. The “Live Reading Companion” tool was developed to play concurrently as the story is read aloud. The tool includes audio, visuals, comprehension questions, and discussion prompts to immerse students in a multimodal learning experience.

 The Ontario Ministry of Education outlines effective instructional strategies, emphasizing “inclusive and accepting education, to inform critical examination and action regarding social justice issues” (2013, p. 7). To support teachers in utilizing culturally responsive teaching practices, the inside cover of *A Special Place* outlines tips for educators to approach the text effectively and respectfully.

This activity targets the four factors of multiliteracy pedagogy, as outlined by the New London Group (1996, p. 83). Situated practice is defined by immersion, simultaneously within engaging practice and a community of learners (New London Group, 1996, p. 84). Through an immersive experience including engaging visuals, ambient sounds, and group discussions, students develop critical understandings about the past. Modern technologies and connections to the North Star relate the Underground Railroad to familiar, tangible topics and experiences, empowering students to appreciate social justice issues as relevant and ongoing.

Overt instruction occurs when educators intervene in learning experiences to scaffold, focus, and develop a conscious awareness of learning (New London Group, 1996, p. 86). Our multiliteracies tool is well suited to this form of instruction, as the teacher is encouraged to facilitate and oversees each aspect of the learning experience, from reading the text, to navigating group discussions on meaningful prompts that focus learning, support the development of metalanguages, and scaffold the way to critical insights.

Questions and discussion prompts in the digital tool reflect “critical framing” by requiring reflective breaks for students to engage in critical thinking and consideration of the social and cultural contexts of the story (New London Group, 1996, p. 87). Questions provided align with the ENG2D curriculum in the areas of Media and Reading (The Ontario Curriculum, 2007). Teachers are provided with the option of “transformed practice” (New London Group, 1996, p. 87), as they can adapt the questions in the tech tool to create new contexts. Our lesson also proposes assessment options that could allow students to transform knowledge.

*A Special Place* and its virtual tool develop understandings of the Underground Railroad through multiliteracies pedagogy. Multimodal features contribute to a well-rounded and impactful lesson.

References

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