

Using a multiliteracies approach to foster critical and creative pedagogies for adult learners

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Using a multiliteracies approach to foster critical and creative pedagogies for adult learners

Looking ahead to the needs of adult learners in a world that has become increasingly complex and diverse, we need more critical and creative approaches to foster innovative pedagogy and develop a broad array of literacies for adult learners. ‘Multiliteracies,’ a term coined by the New London Group (1996), expands traditional understandings of literacy to move beyond a narrow focus on reading and writing, taking into account the necessary abilities to navigate communication increasingly mediated through technologies and various media within a more global world. Although multiliteracies has been taken up primarily by educators working in the school system, in this paper we argue that multiliteracies could also enhance a more critical approach to lifelong learning for adults.

Drawing upon two research studies to explore how a multiliteracies framework may inform more critical and creative pedagogical approaches in a variety of adult education contexts, this paper begins with a brief overview of the literature on multiliteracies and then overviews the methodology used in the two research studies. Data from the interviews is combined with an analysis of the literature to explore the benefits offered by a multiliteracies approach by considering four main areas: lifelong learning and multimodalities; opportunities for engagement for English as Additional Language (EAL) learners; new digital technologies and multiliteracies; and multiliteracies’ emphasis on social justice. The paper concludes with a consideration of the potential for multiliteracies to inform a range of adult learning contexts.

Understanding multiliteracies

A multiliteracies theoretical framework provides a critical lens for lifelong learning by consciously and explicitly engaging with cultural diversity, technology, and multimodality. As

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2
3 Mirra, Morrell & Filipiak (2018) argue, a multiliteracies approach challenges “educators to
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5 rethink the foundational definition, nature, and purpose of literacy, media, and education itself”
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7 (p. 13). The literacies that are required for individuals to participate actively in the workforce and
8
9 in the wider community today are more complex than in the past. As Penuel and O’Connor
10
11 (2018) note in their article that reflects on the ongoing relevance and changing contexts for
12
13 multiliteracies as a theoretical framework, when the New London Group of academics first
14
15 introduced the concept of multiliteracies in the mid-1990s, they “described a world of increasing
16
17 local diversity and global connectedness, accelerated by emerging digital technologies, economic
18
19 globalization, and a declining welfare state” (p. 64). This context of rapid change has not only
20
21 continued into current times, but has in fact accelerated, altering many facets of life in ways that
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23 could not have been predicted a few decades ago. The recognition that learners need to attain not
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25 only basic reading, writing and mathematical skills, but also understand digital technologies and
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27 develop critical learning capacities to be able to function in a diverse and rapidly changing
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29 society, has become even more pressing.
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36 A multiliteracies theoretical framework views literacy as always socially situated and
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38 “starting from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice”
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40 (Hamilton & Barton, 2000, p. 379). The way that people learn has to be tailored to their own
41
42 prior knowledge and previous life experiences. Learning starts with educators finding out what
43
44 their adult learners already know, and then educators create opportunities for bridging onto those
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46 experiences.
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50 Although a multiliteracies perspective has not been taken up extensively in the adult
51
52 education field, some critical educators have drawn upon New literacy Studies to inform their
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54 research and practice (Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett, 2006). Like multiliteracies, new literacies
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3 involve a social justice approach that respects the knowledge that learners already possess.

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5 Rowsell and Walsh (2011) elaborate on what is 'new' in new literacies:

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8 The word 'literacies' in new literacies signaled a shift in thinking about the ways that
9
10 people make meaning with language. Assigning plurality to literacy to privilege
11
12 'literacies' opened up what had traditionally been seen as a standardized model of
13
14 literacy education, to one that acknowledges difference based on situations, subjectivities,
15
16 and multiple text genres. (p. 55)

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19 Although this paper focuses on multiliteracies, we simultaneously acknowledge the importance
20
21 of the closely aligned theories of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 2007; Crowther, Hamilton, &
22
23 Tett, 2006; Street, 1984), and note the work of adult educators who have drawn upon this
24
25 perspective. Multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies similarly share the belief that literacy is a
26
27 product of sociocultural and power relations. New Literacy Studies contends that there is a need
28
29 to further explore social positioning and identities in relation to digital literacies. Multiliteracies
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31 is distinct from NLS, however, with its emphasis on the multimodal aspect of learning and
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33 literacy, taking into account how literacies may be developed through a range of sensory
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35 experiences.
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40 There are some basic tenets of a multiliteracies approach that are foundational, although
41
42 the theory has evolved over time. These tenets are: (1) Cultural diversity should be a deeper
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44 exploration of what a plurality of languages and cultures across the world can bring to a better
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46 understanding a variety of academic disciplines; (2) Technology can enhance learning, but it
47
48 needs to be used in a way that it is helping augment the learning experience. Just because it is
49
50 new technology does not necessarily mean it will improve teaching and learning. (3)

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53 Multimodality involves bringing together two or more modes such as audio, visual, gestural,
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3 spatial, or linguistic to communicate. When learners use drama, for example, they draw upon
4
5 several modes to express their ideas: speaking to the audience (audio); making use of the whole
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7 stage (spatial), communicating through facial expressions, body movement, and props (gestural);
8
9 set design, costumes (visual). The linguistic mode of communication (reading and writing),
10
11 while certainly important, has been privileged for a long time in our society. A multiliteracies
12
13 theoretical framework contends that the linguistic mode *alongside and integrated* with other
14
15 modes is integral to innovative teaching and learning experiences.
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19 Multiliteracies consciously, consistently, and explicitly draws upon cultural diversity as
20
21 an asset in learning and gives attention to the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity
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23 amongst learners, including offering innovative approaches to language acquisition and support
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25 for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners (Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, &
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27 Cummins, 2014; Gee, 2004). As Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue, “the logic of multiliteracies is
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29 one that recognizes that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a pedagogy
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31 based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses for a world of change and
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33 diversity” (p. 175). Its focus on using pedagogies that incorporate new technologies and
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35 curriculum design that stimulate learning through multimodal approaches (combining two or
36
37 more modes such as linguistic, audio, gestural, spatial, and visual) to communicate, supports
38
39 more creative and innovative approaches to engaging with adult learners. This theoretical
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41 framework promotes educators developing good judgment to know when to use student-centred
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43 versus traditional teaching pedagogies. Multiliteracies also emphasizes the importance of
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45 educators engaging in a social justice critique of societal power relations. New Literacy Studies
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47 similarly argues that “literacy the obscures the power relations inscribed in its construction
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3 ultimately disempowers. It treats as technical that which is in fact socially and politically
4 constructed, and is therefore misleading” (Hamilton, Tett, & Crowther, 2012, p. 4).
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8 The social nature of literacy is imperative when thinking through how learning can best
9 take place when working with adults. By acknowledging that there is value in what learners
10 bring to the formal education context from their backgrounds in community-based education and
11 informal learning from the workplace and the homeplace, educators can tap into the strengths of
12 adult learners. The perception that the only valuable adult learning is legitimated in a formal
13 classroom context with the end result of an academic degree is problematic. For instance, Tett
14 and Crowther (1998) argue
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24 Rather than viewing the home as a site of educationally constructed failure, it could
25 instead be seen as a source of diverse influences upon the educational process. From this
26 perspective the focus would be on the recognition of the diversity of thought, language,
27 and world-view that reflect the actual lives and experiences of children, families and
28 community members rather than a reproduction of a constructed ideal (p. 452).
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35 Tapping into the diverse experiences of learners through less tangible resources such as “world-
36 views” harnesses deeper learning opportunities to explore the intricacies of what are sometimes
37 important viewpoints that have been marginalized or decontextualized or learned prejudices that
38 can be unearthed and challenged. Similarly, [Author’s name] (2009) has argued that particularly
39 for women learners, the homeplace is an important site of living and learning. Many adult
40 educators recognize that community literacies are practiced in multiple ways and through an
41 array of mediums (Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett, 2006; Kalantzis, Cope, Daly, & Trim, 2016;
42 Mills, 2015).
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3 Hamilton and Barton (2000) forge this same viewpoint that language, learning, and
4 experience must be seen as legitimate in a variety of social settings. These learning experiences
5 enrich rather than detract from what non-traditional adult learners can bring to their learning
6 experiences as they transition into new fields. It is also important to consider the larger structural
7 power relations of non-traditional learners (West, Fleming, & Finnegan, 2013) in higher
8 education and community settings and consider innovative approaches to teaching that will
9 address the needs of diverse learners.
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19 Research studies

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21 This paper draws upon two research studies: an initial pilot project and a larger study
22 funded through a SSHRC Insight grant to explore the teaching practices of adult educators and
23 secondary school teachers who have developed innovative pedagogical strategies that
24 incorporate elements of a multiliteracies approach (Cope & Kalantzis, 2001; New London
25 Group, 1996). This research aims to enhance dialogue and learning opportunities between those
26 who work in adult education and teacher education, which as Butterwick (2014) argues, are
27 important conversations for educators to have. Using a qualitative, multi-faceted approach, these
28 studies include a mixture of semi-structured interviews which may include short interview filmed
29 clips for the web platform, observation with reflective note-taking, and filming of teaching and
30 learning experiences, and a review of pedagogical materials that have been developed to support
31 teaching in a multiliteracies context.
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47 The initial pilot research project involved film footage of two distinct courses being
48 taught to non-traditional adult learners who were studying to attain a Bachelor of Education.
49 Interviews were conducted with some of the adult educators as well as the adult students who
50 had previous careers in their respective areas of expertise in technological studies including
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3 mechanics, welding, hair dressing, information technologies, carpentry, and cooking to name a
4 few. All of the participants were embarking upon new careers in education that would then draw
5 upon their skills, knowledge, and experience in trades and technologies.
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10 In the larger SSHRC study, using comparative case studies (Stake, 2005), the research
11 draws upon original film footage of secondary and adult community-based classrooms and
12 learning spaces in [locations]. In this study, face-to-face individual interviews from 1 to 2 hours
13 with all categories of research participants are conducted as well as an analysis of educators'
14 curricular planning materials. This research examines features of effective pedagogy and the
15 philosophical decision-making behind its creation. Semiotic analysis of film footage (Jewitt,
16 2009; Kress, 2010) is also a component of the research itself. The interviews include audio visual
17 elicitation, whereby participants are shown short 2-3 minute clips of video footage that they had
18 partaken in, and then they respond to those excerpts in the interview. In this paper, none of the
19 participants are named, as some participants work for a Board of Education that requested that it
20 not be identified, and therefore efforts have been made to respect confidentiality.
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35 A thematic analysis was undertaken with the data, and in this paper four main areas are
36 explored in greater depth: multimodalities; EAL learning; multiliteracies and new technologies;
37 and social justice and literacies. Each section begins with an explanation of the thematic focus in
38 connection to relevant scholarly literature, and then excerpts are provided from the interview
39 transcripts with various participants to illustrate these points.
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47 Although not the main focus of this paper, it should be noted that throughout the
48 transcripts all participants described in some detail aspects of their own personal lives in terms
49 such as social class, race, ability and interpersonal social dynamics that impacted on how they
50 themselves learned or taught others.
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Multimodalities and learning

Using a multiliteracies approach means that educators need to consider how people engage in learning through different modalities. Nagle & Stooke (2016) note that “multimodal design elements are never found in isolation although one element may be privileged in a meaning-making event, and designers make decisions based on shared assumptions about what is appropriate for a given medium” (p. 159). They give the example that in an academic journal article, for example, linguistic modes are privileged. In other teaching contexts, as we see with the participants in our research studies, however, different strategies may be prioritized.

The participants in the pilot research study all indicated that they learned best by doing rather than through traditional modes of predominantly reading and writing text engagement.

One participant describes her preferred learning approach:

First of all, I'm a very kinesthetic person. I want to touch. I want to feel. I want to do.

Actually, seeing the shape of the thing, because before I really know what's that, what's this. I'm very curious too. I learn also best by seeing. I want to see what's the object?

What's the colour? What does it look like?I'm a really physical person. I want to touch. With work in computer department where I worked before, I had to, when some colleagues have problem with their computer, they have to call me. So, I actually need to figure out the software program you have. Is that the hardware program? Is that your machine? Is that the network? Any cable unplugged or plug it in? So, I have to touch it, and actually open and see what's going on.

Yet despite the appeal of tactile approaches to learning, this participant grew up in Africa where all of her formal learning experiences involved rote memorization. She remembered the focus in

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3 her schooling was on covering all the content areas that were assigned: “And when you go to the
4 exam, you don't know what is coming up. They will say that maybe geography will come for this
5 exam. Or there will be maybe history.” Her early formative years in schooling contrast with her
6 current vision of how she herself would like to teach information technologies through
7 modelling. For instance, she uses a web-based engineering program that allows students to draw
8 their dream home by creating blueprints.
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11 Similarly, another participant explains that he learns best “typically by example.”

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13 I don't want to say that it's the only way though. I certainly enjoy reading. Observation
14 seems to be the best way for me though. For instance, I play guitar. And I can sit and I
15 can read tab. Or you know, it's been years since I actually read music. But nonetheless, I
16 could do those things. But when I actually, to sit with somebody and watch them play, or
17 I watch a YouTube video of something, I can certainly pick up a song much faster than I
18 would be able to otherwise. I guess that's one type of knowledge.
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21 Playing an instrument is an intricate skill that involves mathematical knowledge as well as
22 artistic talent. While sheet music can be very important to learning, it is not the only way to
23 learn.
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26 Another participant who is a carpenter articulated the process of learning for himself as
27 follows:
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30 I learn the best by doing and by making mistakes. I am very good, if I'm giving a task,
31 and I do it, and I do it again, I will always critique it. I will rarely do the same thing the
32 same way. Because I'll find a better way to maybe deliver it or to create it or whatever the
33 case may be. I'm very analytical on that factor. So you know, looking at it in my career as
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3 a carpenter, you know, I wouldn't saw the door the same way. The next time, I'll do it a
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5 different way to see if it can be faster, more efficient.
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8 As an adult, he can appreciate more greatly the need to develop capacities in all modes. For
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10 instance, he pointed to his ability to “read plans” helped to make him a better carpenter. By being
11
12 able to draw out a set of drawings, it allowed him to better understand the principles of design,
13
14 and thus made his carpentry “more efficient” and “less wasteful.” Moreover, this participant
15
16 draws our attention to the fact that analysis is not limited only to linguistic modes.
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19 Another participant, who now teaches cooking, mused about his learning trajectory over
20
21 his lifespan:
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24 Learning was always a struggle for me as a child. So, when I learned how I can learn, and
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26 be able to actually focus on what I needed to do, then I always wanted to excel after that.
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28 I found that it's difficult in grade school. They teach you one way. And then if you didn't
29
30 get it, well then you just didn't get it. So then I did okay in high school and then I found
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32 cooking. And I learned, ‘Oh I learn by hands-on. I don't do very well by reading.’
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35 The “how” of learning turned out to be hands-on learning to a large extent for all of these adult
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37 learners. Jewitt (2017) ascertains that touch “provides people with significant information and
38
39 experience in the world” (p. 107). This way of learning has been under-theorized for its value in
40
41 communication. Through hands-on learning, individuals can show what they know when other
42
43 modes fail them.
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46 For example, the same participant who is a cooking instructor said:

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48 It's funny, but if I take IKEA furniture, I can't follow with that little guide. So, if you gave
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50 me an instruction manual and said, “Here, read this with no pictures,” I can't visualize it
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52 in my head. If there are words and pictures, I'm pretty good at it. But [with] just words
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3 sometimes, I'm like, "Okay, how do I visualize this now? It's like Step A. Step B."
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5 Sometimes it doesn't really click.
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8 In his own cooking classes, therefore, he will use a combination of strategies for instruction,
9
10 including demonstrations, hands-on activities, and videos that illustrate the skills being taught. In
11
12 doing so, he recognizes that different learners are more receptive to some strategies and a range
13
14 of multimodalities than others.
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17 Each of these participants draw attention to the ways in which a multimodal approach to
18
19 literacy can enhance learning across the lifespan. Whilst important, reading and writing are not
20
21 the only skills that adult learners need to attain in today's world. As novice adult educators, it is
22
23 important that these learners be exposed to a broader perspective in literacy.
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26 27 28 EAL and multiliteracies 29

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31 In an increasingly diverse world shaped by global migration, multiliteracies takes a
32
33 positive approach to linguistic and cultural diversity, recognizing the complexity and diversity of
34
35 languages. Educators who embrace a multiliteracies approach are encouraged to reflect upon
36
37 how to enhance their teaching to support learners from different language backgrounds. Martin
38
39 (2011) notes that a multiliteracies framework draws attention to how 'discourse patterns reflect
40
41 reality sets or worldviews adapted by cultures, and literacy is embedded within them' (p. 224).
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43 The way that language is used to represent reality is shaped by various cultural insights and
44
45 collective experiences, so if educators acknowledge that vocabulary from different cultures
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47 represents different nuanced understandings of reality that students have been taught within their
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49 own first languages, then they encourage students to think critically about how extending their
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3 vocabulary in English will also affect the way that they will understand the new culture in which
4
5 they are participating or living within.
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8 Martin (2011) notes that there are multiple strategies that students may pursue in gaining
9
10 fluency in English, and educators can think about how to support these approaches to learning.
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12 He explains that one way that students acquire ‘lexical literacy’ is to take up everyday
13
14 expressions or slang phrases like *put on hold*. They may ‘fasten on an idiom and use it
15
16 repeatedly’ (p. 229). In this usage, not only do they embed their knowledge of the words or
17
18 expressions into their vocabulary, but they also receive feedback from native speakers or
19
20 individuals who are more fluent in English, indicating when they have correctly applied the
21
22 words within a particular sentence. Through this repeated practice and responses from others, not
23
24 only do they memorize new vocabulary, they gain lexical literacy in understanding the subtleties
25
26 of appropriate usage. It is critical, therefore for educators to think about contexts in which they
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28 can support their EAL students by providing opportunities to enhance their fluency in English
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30 such as having opportunities for communicative engagement with native speakers in community-
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32 based learning contexts.
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38 One of the participants who teaches with another instructor who has French as a first
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40 language discussed how they often reflect on how different words are used to articulate concepts
41
42 and ideas used in their instruction. When he was asked how he might approach working with a
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44 student who has a different first language he said:
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47 So I might have to go, if I know this person speaks a certain language, maybe is there a
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49 different way can I say it in their language? Or ask them how they say it? I'd be like,
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51 “Okay, this is what this means in French, and now it is in English. Now what's this mean
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53 in your language? How do you say it in your language?” If it's an easy word, then I could
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3 use that instead, or let them, if they are having their own glossary, have them write it in
4
5 their language.
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8 Instead of always viewing the development of English language capacities as the responsibility
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10 of the individual learner, a multiliteracies approach encourages educators to consider how they
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12 can support students with different language abilities to build on their vocabulary and to
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14 participate better in the classroom or community-based context in which they are teaching, thus
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16 creating a more inclusive learning environment.
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19 One of the SSHRC study participants reflected:

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21 if English is not their first language, or if language is a problem, then assessing them just
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23 by pen and paper, or even orally is not in their best interest. They're not going to be able
24
25 to tell you what they know. They are not going to be able to write it down for you.
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29 Instead, instructors might use different strategies to encourage learners to begin to articulate their
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31 ideas and from that explore the topic in more depth. Asking the learners to gather artifacts that
32
33 could be used to represent a concept and then to explain the rationale for their choice may be one
34
35 way to tease out their understanding of a concept.
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37 38 Digital technologies and multiliteracies

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40 Just as educators in the school system recognize the importance of supporting the
41
42 development of digital literacies for children and adolescents, educators in adult, continuing and
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44 higher education are also concerned with the need to foster these kinds of learning opportunities
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46 as well. “In a world where electronically produced text carries meaning, exclusion from digital
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48 technologies can have disempowering consequences – especially for life in the home,
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50 community, and workplace” (Hamilton, Tett, & Crowther, 2012, p. 4). Adult educators can play
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52 an important role in facilitating discussions amongst adult learners to encourage them to think
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3 broadly about how habits and attitudes greatly impact levels of comfort with digital literacies.
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5 Rowsell and Walsh (2011) point out that “designing on-screen has not only transformed how we
6
7 make meaning, but also, transformed ways of reconstructing and renegotiating our identities” (p.
8
9 56). They argue thus that technologies have to also be understood as socially situated; technical
10
11 know-how is only one aspect of working with new technologies. The work learners produce in
12
13 digital spaces requires them to think in very abstract ways with the concepts they build, at times
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15 holding up a mirror to them of their own identities, making them think, “this work I have
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17 produced in cyberspace is in a small way part of who I am.” Curran, Gustafson, Simmons,
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19 Lannon, Wang, and Garmsiri (2019) argue that it would be beneficial to have “a better
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21 understanding of the role and the use of digital and mobile technologies as a resource to support
22
23 the self-directed learning processes of adults in the 21st century” (p. 79). While their research
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25 focuses on continuing professional education for professionals in fields such as medicine and
26
27 social work, educators who work with both young adult or graduate students in higher education,
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29 and adult educators working in community-based contexts such as employment centres, also
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31 recognize the need to consider both the benefits and potential exclusionary aspects of a society
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33 that is increasingly digitalized.
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40 In an article that examines a sheltered program developed to help bridge the gaps in
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42 learning for non-native English speakers coming to study Geography at a university in Canada,
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44 McPhee and Pickren (2017) argue that supplementing learning opportunities with ICTs
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46 (Information and Communication Technologies) provides a beneficial way to bring a
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48 multiliteracies approach to university teaching “in a world where engagements across languages,
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50 cultures, institutions, and disciplines are significantly informed by social media” (p. 419). They
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52 suggest that using mobile phones and apps such as digital map locators can be a way to enhance
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3 teaching strategies when working with international students who are transitioning into higher
4 education programmes and who are still developing their language fluency in English.
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8 New digital technologies shape the ways in which educators and learners communicate
9 with one another, and impact on how they engage and participate in the broader society. Whilst
10 there a many benefits and opportunities for enhanced learning, as Suzanne Smythe (2018)
11 cautions, for some adult learners, new technologies strengthen the inequities that push them into
12 marginalized positions in society. She argues that digital government “is a new form of
13 bureaucracy that ushers in new literacies, new pedagogies, and new implications for adult
14 education and practice” (p. 198), whereby educators have a role in supporting learners to become
15 literate in using new technologies. Without these literacies, learners on the margins may be
16 pressed into even more precarious positions, feeling they are voiceless, and not knowing how to
17 advocate for themselves in a climate where they might feel everyone presumes they already have
18 strong foundations in digital literacies.
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33 At the same time, in terms of teaching with technology, all too often, Mirra, Morrell &
34 Filipiack (2018) note, media literacy and production are presented as “politically neutral”
35 activities, when that is not the case. Sexualized depictions of women, curriculum designed to
36 fulfil marketplace interests, and decisions around what kinds of information will be shared and
37 how it will be presented via various medias, are all indicators of how power, politics, and
38 privilege are embedded in the pictures we see, the digital maps we use for navigation, and the
39 courses and programs that we take with online content. It is important for both educators and
40 students to “analyze not only the text itself, but also the roles of the creator, the audience, and the
41 stakeholders with interest in this power relationship” (p. 14).
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3 As one of the participants in the pilot study sums up the widespread usage of technology
4 in educational contexts: “there's computers everywhere. Now you can't do anything without
5 technology. You have tablets, new computers, phones. Everything is all about technology today.
6 So, if you don't deal with technology, you won't be able to go far.” Regardless of your discipline
7 or subject matter, this participant noted that there will be intersections with technology, so it's
8 beneficial for educators to be well versed in the usage of different technological mediums.
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11 In the SSHRC study, a participant explained that there can be benefits to incorporating
12 mobile technologies into teaching, if you are willing to be flexible: “Having phones that are
13 smarter than you allows you to immediately answer questions brought up during the learning.
14 It's important to pause the ‘planned lesson’ and go where the learning takes you!” Incorporating
15 interactive technologies in teaching may foster an openness to creativity and innovation amongst
16 both learners and educators.
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33 Multiliteracies and social justice

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35 Multiliteracies is concerned with a social justice approach towards learning, drawing
36 attention, as critical theory does, to the ways in which power infuses all learning contexts.
37 Crowther & Tett (2011) state that “how we construct the relationship between the social and the
38 individual is not in a politically neutral vacuum, easily cushioned from the social and economic
39 struggles for power that are enacted in and around the contexts in which learning is located” (p.
40 136-137). One participant who is involved in teacher education in the area of music reflects on
41 the curriculum provided in her Canadian province by the school board:
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51 The Ontario curriculum is an extremely Western-centric curriculum for music. There is a
52 lot of emphasis on Western classical composers. One of things that we do in my class is
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3 we problematize the curriculum. Who holds power in this idea of music? What does it
4 mean when your students are primarily studying the music of dead white men? What
5 does it mean when that knowledge is held up on a pedestal? What does it say to those
6 students who do not have that background? Traditionally music curricula has not been
7 representative of women, of people of colour, of Indigenous people. So we problematize
8 that together. I do talk to them about the issues that I hold with that. The difficulty is that
9 teachers are legally required to teach the curriculum. And in some ways, I'm bound to
10 teach them how to teach this curriculum. So this opens a lot of questions.

11
12 This participant raises a number of important issues in her quote here, as educators, whether they
13 are teaching in a structured program like a B.Ed. which involves external accreditation, or for an
14 employer who has a particular curriculum or set outcomes which s/he expects to be delivered,
15 then both the educator and the student should be aware of how power is shaping their learning
16 contexts. As [Authors' names] (2013) argue "rather than simply delivering subject-based
17 content, teacher education utilizing a multiliteracies pedagogy switches the lens to examine how
18 institutions construct knowledge in particular ways" (p. 55).

19
20 As Penuel and O'Connor (2018) note, although the New London Group correctly
21 identified many factors that shape emerging literacy practices and needs, they could not predict
22 some of the societal shifts that are escalating the need for learners to gain critical and creative
23 literacies to address many of the world's more pressing social, environmental, and political
24 concerns. As they explain,

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26 The neoliberal state has given rise to, and been threatened by, new, virulent forms of
27 nationalism that resist global connectedness and local diversity. And although we
28 appreciate the ways the Internet allows us to stay connected with others, we also worry

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3 that such connections provide data that companies use to shape what we see, believe, and
4
5 do (p. 65).
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8 Within a neoliberal agenda, there is often a call for formulaic education in which a course is 'set'
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10 and can be taught by anyone to anyone with no concern for tailoring learning to learners' needs.
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12 Yet deeper learning from a social justice perspective entails adult learners being encouraged to
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14 draw upon nuanced rhetoric of contemporary examples across home, work, and social
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16 environments to critique whose voice is heard, whose voice is silenced, what is the dominant
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18 discourse, how are values shaped, and where does power lie?
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22 Using a critical lens, the social justice focus of multiliteracies opens up possibilities for
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24 engaging adult learners in deeper forms of learning, in which issues such as democracy,
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26 citizenship, and social participation are taken up as well as more pragmatic concerns such as
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28 workplace skills. A SSHRC participant gave this example of an instructional activity with her
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30 high school class, but a similar approach could be developed in teaching about citizenship and
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32 civic engagement with adult learners:
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35 we would do things like... how is an election like a pizza? And so each riding... there
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37 would be cheese, pepperoni, and...peppers... that were all running. Those were the three
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39 parties for the pizza. And so they would run their campaigns, the pepperoni campaign,
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41 and the cheese campaign, and why having cheese across Canada would be best for
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43 Canada because of all the dairy farmers, etc. We would make those outrageous links, but
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45 at the same time, help them understand how propaganda works, and how we're going to
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47 twist something to focus it so that it's going to be more pertinent to your audience.
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51 In this example, the participant uses a simple analogy that resonates with most learners to delve
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53 into the nuances of political systems.
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3 A critical approach to adult education addresses not only the need for innovative
4 pedagogies but also considers some of the larger structural social and power relations that impact
5 on the educational experiences of adult learners. As West, Fleming, & Finnegan (2013) argue,
6 education has the potential to reduce or to reinforce existing social inequalities. Educators who
7 are committed to a social justice perspective in learning must consider the factors that can
8 challenge social inequalities.
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16 Using a multiliteracies approach in adult education

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19 Literacies are practiced in a wide range of ways and can be supported through multiple
20 mediums (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, R., 2000); Kalantzis, Cope, Daly, & Trim, 2016; Mills,
21 2015). Just as lifelong learning works from a socio-political perspective to engage learners in
22 civic engagement, a multiliteracies theoretical framework similarly considers language as always
23 socially, culturally, and politically based. Enabling adult learners to engage in higher levels of
24 literacy from a multiliteracies' perspective encourages them to challenge hegemony and contest
25 neoliberal perspectives that narrow opportunities for learning.
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35 These two research studies explore how to contextualize the pragmatics of teaching
36 through a deeper understanding of decisions being made by educators to challenge and engage
37 adult learners. The analysis reveals prevailing themes of multimodalities, EAL language
38 learning, digital literacies, and social justice concerns help to shape that way educators think
39 about their teaching and how best to teach. Educators in all sectors feel tremendous pressures to
40 deliver content and get through the curriculum, which often leads to straight lecturing, and
41 minimal, if any, experiential, hands-on learning. A multiliteracies approach develops more
42 comprehensive capabilities to foster lifelong learners, individuals who are then able to initiate,
43 respond, and adapt to changes in workforce, community, and cultural contexts. Lifelong learning
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3 can be enhanced with a recognition for the power of expansive forms of literacy that include
4 multimodalities. When linguistic modes are combined with other modes (gestural, spatial, visual,
5 audio, and tactile) in purposeful ways, the ability to express oneself and communicate more fully
6 become more realizable for many adults. In tandem, when adult educators draw upon the
7 multifaceted social histories of their students, they tailor learning to the specific experiences of
8 the communities they are working with, taking into account linguistic and cultural pluralism.
9
10 Where technology comes into play in education, it is a matter of professional judgement to figure
11 out how it can help shape learning in positive ways rather than simply showcase cutting-edge
12 computational tools or social media. A multiliteracies approach has unique qualities that give
13 educators a theoretical basis and practical ways to engage learners in difficult content.
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26 Building upon this premise, our research entails the development of a web platform [web
27 address] in which exemplars of teaching in both formal and community-based contexts are
28 profiled. Working with innovative educators who are willing to take risks in their teaching
29 practices, this research is able to present models of some of the important components of a
30 multiliteracies approach. Visitors to the web platform can view short video excerpts from
31 interviews and from site visits, examine teaching artifacts, and find links and references to
32 academic articles developed from this study. The purpose of the video exemplars is to highlight a
33 multimodal approach to learning and literacy, using a digital platform to ensure broader access
34 for learners and educators.
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47 The emphasis on social justice within multiliteracies resonates with the social purpose
48 tradition of adult education. Digital and multimodal teaching strategies that takes into account
49 differences in culture and language, are requisites for learning in a more global world. Through
50 critical and creative pedagogies that insist on challenging normative views, inequities in
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3 societies, and deeper socio-political issues, teaching and learning take on a new level of urgency
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5 and importance. Innovative pedagogies informed by approaches such as multiliteracies may help
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7 shape the desires of adult learners to affect change in their own lives, within their communities,
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10 or to advocate as active citizens at a broader societal level.
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For Review Only

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