POPULAR CULTURE AND LITERACY LEARNING: NEGOTIATING MEANING WITH EVERYDAY LITERACIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is written in response to the prevalence of popular culture in everyday lives and the broadening definitions of literacy that result. With professional concern about the relevance, meaningfulness and effectiveness of literacy curriculum in public schools, this paper examines the effects of popular culture texts on literacy learning of public school students. The terms popular culture, popular culture texts and literacy are defined within the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical context of public education in the United States. The review of quantitative and qualitative research presents how congruence between public schools and student's lives affects learning, the factors that influence students' motivation to engage in literacy learning, and the skills and knowledge students construct through engagement with and negotiation of popular culture texts.

Pedagogical philosophies and techniques, like student-centered learning, critical pedagogy, and reading and writing workshop, were found to allow the aspect of students' identities – as negotiators of meaning with popular culture texts – to permeate the classroom walls, with the effects of increased literacy engagement. The paper concludes with suggestions for further research that examines the classroom relevance of students' literacies shaped by popular culture texts; and how the inclusion of these literacies and texts impacts students' engagement and achievement with school-based literacy learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Electronically and digitally mediated transformations in communication alter the landscape of society and literacy. In the context of rapidly developing technologies, notions of literacy and literacy learning are changing and are certain to continue to change. Mahiri (2004) highlights how these changes may impact public students' learning in schools by claiming, "Contemporary youth in their everyday lives–often through powerful influences from electronically mediated popular culture—both construct and consume personal/cultural meanings, pleasures, and desires that prefigure and inform their engagements with school" (p. 3).

Images, gestures, music, movement, animation, and other powerful influences from popular culture texts exist as possible pedagogical challenges and points of insight for current educators. Cultural differences and rapidly shifting communications media mean that the very nature of literacy pedagogy is changing radically. Particularly important to understand, in regards to popular culture, is the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral, and so on.

Rationale

As the United States' population continues to diversify and the means of communication evolve, so does the understanding of what counts as literacy and how people are defined as literate. Public discourse related to literacy crises or literacy achievement gaps is often accompanied by calls for better schools or more adept literacy curricula (Hull & Shultz, 2002).

The ways that literacy is lived, learned, pursued and rewarded in the United States is continuously at the core of pedagogical and political concerns (Brandt, 2001). Both Brandt and Dyson (2003a) claimed the pursuit of literacy in the twenty-first century requires openness toward the change in uses, forms, standards, and meanings of literacy. Newkirk (2002) claimed literacy learning in the public schools traditionally revolves around a curriculum that is print-dominated and narrowly defined.

The call for a broadening of what is identified as literate acts is due to the multiplicity of textual forms available to children and adolescents in the information society. Textual resources and literate processes of the everyday lives of children and youth are predominantly related to popular culture texts. Popular culture is embedded in daily living, reaching into neighborhoods, homes, cars, and classrooms; and influencing what is purchased, worn, listened to, watched, talked and thought about (Dolby, 2003).

This paper is written in response to the prevalence of popular culture in students' lives and its transformation of literacy. It is also a matter of professional concern about the relevance, meaningfulness and effectiveness of literacy curriculum for contemporary public school students. Given what is known from sociocultural theories about the necessity of learning to start with what is previously understood and be supported by concrete experiences (Miller, 1993; Zull, 2002), this literary and research based investigation will explore the effects of popular culture texts on literacy learning of public school students.

The remainder of this chapter will be a synopsis of the key aspects of a broadened view of literate acts, literacy learning, and the pedagogical value of popular culture texts. In the following paragraphs characteristics of the achievement gap in Washington State,

plus claims about students' literacy learning needs and unofficial literate acts are presented. This is to highlight how the same groups of students who predominantly negotiate meaning outside of school with popular culture texts are also the same groups of students who continue to concern educators because they remain negatively affected by the achievement gap. It draws into focus how the complex nature of students' contemporary literacy needs, knowledge, and skills are influenced by popular culture, and also perhaps overlooked as a potential resource or asset for their achievement, instead of a deficit for their learning.

A brief discussion on students' engagement with and motivation for literacy learning, and the relationship between this engagement and certain types of literacy acts is then presented. This is followed by definitions of the following key terms: popular culture, popular culture texts, and literacy. To continue the discussion of the nature of literacy and how the notion of what counts as literate acts is expanding, a brief orientation to the New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective, and its influence on the literacy field is included. Finally, an explanation of possible approaches to integrating popular culture in literacy teaching and learning sets the tone for the critical review of the literature in which some of these approaches are investigated.

Achievement Gap, Literacy Needs & Literate Acts

A report prepared by the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Research and Evaluation Office (Shannon, 2002) claimed the state achievement gap (difference in academic performance on tests among identified groups, such as students of color and students of low income) mirrored the national trend of the past decade - relatively large and unchanged. In her review of research, Shannon (2002)

reported that the literature pointed to two overall reasons for this persistence of an achievement gap: factors outside the classroom (i.e. socioeconomic status, family and personal characteristics) and school related factors (i.e. disconnect between students and school cultures or expectations).

Shannon (2002) also noted that the suggested strategies for closing the gap called for teaching that is culturally responsive and instruction that is effective in increasing students' levels of understanding. This report prepared by the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Research and Evaluation Office highlighted studies by Fouts (2002) and Loeb (2002). These studies claimed certain student characteristics and habits influenced academic performance (as cited in Shannon, 2002, p. 20). For example, students who study longer, watch less television, and have higher educational aspirations score better on Washington's standardized tests.

Also in the report is an Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) analysis of the habits and aspirations of approximately 70,000 grade 6 students in Washington. This analysis revealed that students identified as Black, American Indian, and Hispanic tended to watch more television, study fewer hours, and aspire to lower educational goals than students identified as white and Asian. But it is also stated the reasons for this are not clear, which alluded to possible confounding variables.

Nonetheless, the groups of students who are identified as television prone in the OSPI analysis are also the groups of students (students of color and low income students) Washington state educators are primarily concerned about when addressing the achievement gap (Shannon, 2002). Foehr et al (2005) also identified these same student groups as the most saturated by electronically mediated popular culture.

Currently schools and popular media do compete for influence over children's and adolescents' minds. In an exposition on the history of schooling in the United States, Spring (2005) identified popular culture and public schools as important managers of ideas and cultural values disseminated to children and youth. He claimed in the twenty-first century, the popular media are considered the third educator of children along with schools and the family (p. 4).

It is possible that popular culture, specifically popular media, was defined as third educator by Spring (2005) due to the amount of time children and youth consume media on a daily basis. Young people in the United States spend nearly 6 ½ hours per day using media. According to this statistic, young individuals engage with popular culture texts as much and sometimes more than the amount of time they are required to be present in public school classrooms (Foehr et al, 2005).

Due to growing up during the dawn of completely new interactive mediums of communication and the saturation of their worlds in popular media, young people are typified by academics and sociologists as the Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998) or Generation M (Foehr et al, 2005). The worlds of which this generation moves in and between are becoming more and more digital, which is influencing their lives in a multitude of ways, specifically their literacy acts.

The Generation M is becoming more and more skilled and competent in their interactions with and manipulations of popular culture texts. Much of this interaction is out-of-school, in the social contexts of their lives separate form the classroom (Foehr et al, 2005). These children and youth negotiate boundaries of their contexts while simultaneously negotiating a multiplicity of discourses (Davidson et al, 1991).

With an understanding of literacy learning and teaching broadening, the scope of literacy pedagogy is extending and educators are considering the possible effects of accounting for students' plurality of texts and types of literate acts. In light of students negotiating meaning with popular culture texts as much and sometimes more than the amount of time participating in classroom literacy learning, questions arise in regards to the value of these literate acts for general living, and more specifically, for literacy learning in classrooms. Perhaps recognizing the major educational force of popular culture, and perceiving students' literacy knowledge and skills related to popular culture as useful for literacy learning may be a helpful disposition for educators to have as they search to narrow the achievement gap.

Motivation to Engage

In attempts to delineate the characteristics and causes of the literacy achievement gap currently witnessed in our national schools, Alvermann and Strickland (2004) claimed students' perceptions of how competent they are as readers and writers will affect how motivated they are to learn in the school context. The positioning of self as constructor and negotiator of meaning through various texts is important for motivation to learn (Knapp, 2002). Although research related to popular culture does not generally focus on examining the role of motivation, some findings associated with motivation to read and participate in literacy learning can provide insights into a relationship between motivation and students engagement with literacy tasks.

This relationship between motivation and engagement is affected by variables like students' interests, their power of choice and sense of self-efficacy. Increased motivation for and engagement in classroom literacy learning is also related to the personalization of

learning through a student-driven medium like popular culture. Educators' growing

recognition of the viability of students' competent literate behavior associated with

popular culture texts may prove to motivate students to engage in classroom literacy

learning because the texts are familiar and students know they're capable of negotiating

meaning with the texts of their everyday lives (Dyson, 2003b; Morrell et al, 2004;

Reinking, 2002).

Definitions

   Popular culture. Popular culture is a phrase that leaves much to be understood. It

is also a phrase with meaning that is historically and culturally bound and created. Even

though it is defined by time and place, it is not static or final. Rather, it is flexible and

absorbent of the practices of people's everyday lives.

   For the purpose of this paper, popular culture refers to the everyday culture that is

a terrain of exchange expressed through, but not limited to, the forms of music, film,

sports, comics, fashion, television, advertisement, cyberspace, mass media artifacts,

language, costumes, and values (Xong Hu, 2005). This relates to how Dolby (2003)

understood popular culture as a text received by people and acted on, or a lived

experience that is created by people. The former emphasizes the text, interpretations of

the text, and how individuals receive and engage with the text. The second perspective

focuses on the individuals, their affiliations, and their shared experiences with these texts.

   Popular culture text. A popular culture text is made with print and nonprint text.

The popular culture texts genres may include, but are not limited to,

- televisual and film texts, such as in television shows, films, videos, and DVDs
  (digital video discs);

- hypermedia texts, such as on the internet;

- musical texts, such as on musical CDs (compact discs) and on music television channels;

- comic book texts, such as in comic books, graphic novels, comic strips, and mangas (Japanese comic books);

- trading card texts, such as DragonBall Z, Pokemon, and Yu-Gi-Oh! trading cards;

- game texts, such as in games on the platform of personal computers (PCs), Sony PlayStation 2, Nintendo, GameCube, Xbox, Game Boy, or handhelds (e.g., Palm Pilots, pocket PCs (Hong Xu, 2005, p. 5).

Literacy. Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Hobbs, 1997). This view of literacy posits the students as being actively engaged in the process of analyzing and creating messages. Academic literacy skills include engaging with, producing, and talking about texts that have currency in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education (canonical texts). These are predominantly print-based (Newkirk, 2002).

New Literacy Studies

In the 1980s, the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement began with research who were interested in what literacy looks like in settings outside of school, such as in the home, community and workplace, and in how people used literacy in daily life (Gee, 2003; Hong Xu, 2005). The following interrelated concepts are central to the New Literacy Studies perspective of literacy: meaningfulness in social contexts, domains and Discourses, social institutions and power relationship, critical literacy and changing literacy.

Meaningfulness in social contexts implies the NLS belief that reading and writing are not merely cognitive and psychological process. Rather, they are acts that find meaning only when situated in specific contexts. Literacy is seen as a social practice (Cope & Kalantizis, 2000; Gee, 2003). Domains are like structured contexts, for example, school and home are two different domains that share some commonalities. Each domain has a unique structure and process for doing things. Discourses is described by Gee (1992) as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people" (p. 20). Different Discourse communities value different types of literacy.

Literacy is never neutral and is often reflective of a power relationship between individuals and social institutions (i.e. students and schools). Print-based literacy has dominated the literacy taught at school and is more influential than literacy associated with a popular culture text (i.e. video game literacy) because student movement through grade levels mostly depends on passing print-based, standardized reading and writing assessments. Also, in the realm of popular culture, most students hold the power of knowledge in the various domains, which is reversed from traditional school power structure (Hong Xu, 2005).Critical literacy practices include (1) reading beyond the surface and pleasure of the text (2) situating the text in a sociocultural context, and (3) investigating the meaning of the text to the reader.

Multiliteracies, connotes the belief that literacy is not limited to printed words. Rather, literacy involves other modes of meanings, besides the meanings derived from words. The last key concept of the New Literacy Studies perspective is the idea of

changing literacy. Because literacy is social and cultural, and society and culture

constantly change, literacy practices change.

Approaches to Integrating Popular Culture

Alvermann, Carpenter, and Hong Xu (2003) identified common uses of the term

popular culture and distinguished their definition from mass media. They defined

popular culture in terms of children's everyday literacies. From their research, they

understood children to be critical negotiators of pleasure and meaning; and popular

culture's images, sounds, and symbols as constantly changing. Popular culture texts were

perceived as possible means of enhancement for student learning.

Four general approaches to incorporating popular culture in the classroom are

recognized by Alvermann et al (2003). They didn't endorse each approach, but felt it

important to understand the variety of perspectives. These approaches are briefly

explained here as they establish a basic framework for viewing the various means of and

motivations for incorporating popular culture in classrooms.

In one approach, popular culture, especially television, is seen as detrimental to

young children's development. Popular culture is presented as degrading (low-culture), a

waste-of-time and void of meaning (i.e. annual Turn off the TV week at school). A

second approach to using popular culture in the classroom consists of students learning

how to critically analyze popular culture texts. The texts of popular culture are dissected

and objectified in effort to encourage students from being persuaded by its pleasure. The

third approach is pleasure focused and believes students are entitled to their pleasures

without critique or criticism.

Alvermann et al (2003) favored the fourth approach to incorporating popular culture in the classroom. This approach involved students being self-reflective about their uses of popular culture. Teachers found a balance between allowing student pleasure and guiding students to an expanded view of these popular culture texts through critical viewing and reflection.

Freire and Giroux (1989) spoke of the pedagogical force of popular culture in a similar way. Their comments on the needs of educational reform are highly theoretical and can leave a reader wondering what implementation really looks like; but their theoretical vision of the relationship between popular culture, critical pedagogy and education provided insight into incorporating popular culture into the classroom. Their sentiments were echoed by the research of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) presented in chapter three.

Freire and Giroux (1989) viewed incorporation of popular culture as part of educational reform that created opportunities to connect to the worlds of students, to promote academic achievement, and to prepare students for critical citizenship in a multicultural democracy. Freire and Giroux (1989) strongly supported the fusion, and commented:

> By situating learning with contexts that blur the distinction between high and popular culture, by rewriting boundaries of the so-called disciplines, by linking learning to the revitalization of public life, and by urging educators to become engaged public intellectuals, it is an attempt to redefine both the notion of pedagogy and the terrain of popular culture as part of a wider struggle for democracy. (p. xxi)

Statement of Purpose

An emerging body of research has documented that an allowance or purposeful integration of popular culture texts into teaching provides students with an additional or alternative opportunity to learn about literacy and to demonstrate their literacy skills (Alvermann et al, 2001a; Ranker, 2006; Dyson, 2003b; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Vasquez, 2003). Much of this research is grounded in a sociocultural perspective of learning and teaching, and influenced by critical and culturally relevant pedagogy viewpoints, where students' cultural and linguistic conditions are seen as strengths instead of deficits.

Alvermann and Strickland (2004) pointed to recent research that emphasized the importance of students' multiliteracies and the impact of culture and social trends on students' literacy development. While addressing the literacy needs of students, they advised educators to continue to investigate how the students' multiliteracies, culture and social trends influence their engagement with school learning. That is the purpose of this paper.

Summary

Considering popular culture texts as sources for literacy learning in public school classrooms may be deemed by some as very low priority, especially in light of the current sociopolitical context of public education. Reilly, Schwoch & White (1992) stated that the fixation on quantified measurement of student achievement, the drive for productivity in educational systems, and the concerns of parents and citizens over the quality of public education are all factors that lead to devaluing learning from and with texts outside the canonical texts typically taught in public schools.

According to Dolby (2003), Giroux (1989) and Spring (2005) popular culture has become one of the ultimate transmitters of social knowledge, influence and power. They view the existence of a democracy in the United States hinges upon the wires of popular culture. These wires are alive with cultural, political, and economical charge. The sounds, words, and images of popular culture texts that are personally and collectively negotiated for meaning are critical to a living democracy and imperative to interpret and understand. Some educators and researchers, such as Morrell (2002), attested to the integration of popular culture as means of supporting democracy and learning in multicultural, multiethnic classrooms by stating the following:

> New approaches, such as the critical teaching of popular culture, can help students acquire and develop literacies needed to navigate "new century" schools. Popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society. (p. 72)

Education that incorporates popular culture may assist and expand students' analysis of how they use, find pleasure in, or resist particular pop culture manifestations, and increasingly understand that their reactions are based upon sociocultural experiences (Frost & Hobbs, 2002; Morrell, 2002). This may encourage students to unfold codes and practices in popular culture creation that silence or disempower them and others. The pedagogy that includes pop culture could be including students' cultural texts of life outside school (a.k.a. "youth genre"- T.V., music, video games, and other electronic media) into the classroom as tools to enrich learning (Alvermann et al, 2001; Dyson, 1997).

Identifying popular culture as a possible route of negotiating meaning may be a way to make connections that are relevant to all students in diverse classrooms and may help students acquire and develop the literacies needed to navigate within contemporary society (Mahiri, 2005; Morrell, 2002). Finding effective ways to teach today's increasingly diverse student population is a major challenge. Integrating popular culture into the curriculum may help educators' attempts at connecting and creating learning communities that are inclusive and affirmative, and also facilitate the development of academic and critical literacies for the diverse student body (Evans, 2005; Vasquez, 2005).

An axiom of effective pedagogy is to provide learning experiences that are relevant to students (Nieto, 2002). Popular culture texts may provide abundant opportunities for teachers to create meaningful learning by appealing to experiences that are relevant to virtually every student, regardless of ability, gender, ethnic, or economic background (Foehr et al, 2005; Dyson, 2003; Vasquez, 2003).

Popular culture texts, in their many forms, may provide points of reference that students and teachers could relate to and expand from. Mahari (2005) declared "In this century, more knowledge work in schools will need to involve educators in understanding how students and communities use symbiotic resources for their own ends as well as for the dramatically changing literacy demands of sites beyond school" (p. 3). Educational researchers and theorists, like Mahari (2005) and Morrell (2002), claim that if schools and educators do not meet this challenge then public schools may become irrelevant to the real interests, energies and identity formations of contemporary children and youth.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced key terms and presented a rationale for investigating the effects of popular culture texts on literacy learning of public school students. This chapter presents a history of the formation of popular culture texts, and their influences on the social and political contexts of public educational institutions in the United States. The evolution of popular culture texts affects the understanding of literacy and beliefs about literacy development. Therefore, this chapter will also present the broadening theoretical perspectives on literacy and literacy learning.

Popular culture and school-based literacy learning exist as parallel forces in the lives of contemporary public school students. Throughout the twentieth century, apprehension surrounded each new era of evolution of popular culture and educational reform in the United States. The former brought about critical disdain regarding popular culture's supposedly negative affects on society, while the latter brought about concern for what culture or cultures and values would be distributed by public schools.

Literacy instruction has always taken place within a substantive context of values, and being literate has always referred to having mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is coded (Castell & Luke, 1986). Radical advancement of technology, resulting in more and more ways to communicate to a mass audience, challenged the dominance of traditional print literature and the dominance of schools as managers of ideas and values (Spring, 2005).

In order to fully comprehend these parallel forces and the tension that consistently exists between them, the following sections describe the growth of popular culture, its intersection with public schooling, and the expansion of literacy perspectives and beliefs about literacy learning in relation to the evolution of popular culture texts.

A Brief History of Popular Culture Texts

Pin-pointing the date of origin of specific popular culture texts and their heritage of form is of little purpose for this paper. Rather, the following paragraphs present a general overview of the development of popular culture, which is fairly recent in form. This will provide a sufficient foundation of historical knowledge for the critical review of research offered in the next chapter.

The abbreviated term "pop" appeared in England in the 1950s to describe art inspired by consumerism (i.e. Andy Warhol creations) and then music directed to the young. During this time period, the United States was generating popular culture through its unmatched industrial organization, techniques and production. After World War II, the United States became the creator and arbiter of much of popular culture. Today, it is the greatest producer of popular culture, as well as its greatest consumer (Betts, 2004).

Print

The printing press developed by Johannes Gutenberg in 15th century Germany invented typography - the first uniformly repeatable commodity, the first-assembly line and the first mass-production (McLuhan, 1962). In the hundreds of years since print (typography) arrived in Europe and North America, technological improvements increased the efficiency of producing and disseminating printed materials. The printing press revolutionized the perception of communication and persuaded society into a

hierarchy of print over auditory or visual means of communication. But now, the image is back in the ascendant and this ascendancy started with the development of photographic images.

Photographs, Movies and Comics

A photograph served a dual purpose in the mid-19th century society as a fine art medium and visual preservation of reality for document keeping. In the early years of the twentieth century, photographs gave way to motion pictures. It was at this time that two types of establishments created new commodities for the public: car assembly plants and movie theaters.

Movie theaters became the centerpiece of popular culture by the 1930s, thanks to Charlie Chaplin's initial fame and Paramount Pictures' controlled distribution. The automobile and the film were examples of perfected mass production and became the most significant early twentieth-century technological advancements in the internationalization of popular culture (Betts, 2004).

Comic books also took the stage in the 1930s and became a source of consternation. The sexuality and violence portrayed in comic books, and the growing reader membership of the young, concerned parents and educators, alike. Crime and horror comics in the 1940s and 1950s received the loudest cries of disdain. The Association of Comics Magazine Publishers self-censored itself with a code that was more pro-family for the times (Spring, 2005).

Radio, Music and Sports

The development of sound technology embellished moving pictures with sound, and offered new outlets for music and spoken word to be enjoyed by the masses. Radio

technology became available for private home use by 1920. The radio was the first electronic device to enter the intimate space of the individual, either in the living room or on the dashboard of the car (Betts, 2004).

With this new technological capacity of broadcasted sound and the rise of the recording industry came an increased ability of popular music to spread across the nation. The increased production of phonographic records during this time offered the chance to consume music. Middle class electronic amenities previously reserved for the rich were made more available to the masses during the communication revolution of the 1930s (Haynes, 2005).

Radios became the hub for adults and young people of all socioeconomic levels, as both gathered around to listen to favorite talk and music programs. From the 1950s to the 1990s, many distinct genres of music (i.e. R & B, rock-and-roll, folk, disco, punk, hip-hop, rap and alternative) became popular as media technology and music industry practices increased the availability of their sounds on radio broadcast and later through television (i.e. MTV).

Over time, the long-running radio shows were outrun by sports broadcasting. Boxing was the first sport to be broadcasted. Then in 1921, the first play-by-play baseball broadcast was aired (Betts, 2004). Due to the growing popularity of radio and spectator sports, plus the spectators' demonstration of team loyalty, a symbiotic relationship between broadcasting and professional sports quickly grew. Radio, like television later, helped both generate and satisfy the growing popularity of major team sports.

Television, Animation and Video Games

Around the time of World War II, popular culture inundated the homes of families in the United States as television became the primary source of entertainment; and it has succeeded through popular culture history mainly as entertainment (Foehr et al, 2005). The screened visual experience became the dominant one with the introduction of the private television and the technological changes in transmisson. By the 1960s average daily viewing increased between three and four hours for all ages (Betts, 2004). Movies and television established a mutually beneficial relationship with the extensive introduction of cable television in the 1970s. Approximately fifty premium movie cable channels exist in the United States, today.

As the means of viewing screened images was proliferated, the content form changed, specifically inspired by the sub-industry of animation. In the early days of filmmaking, animation was part of the studio production. It experienced drastic changes with Walt Disney's team approach and increased popularity with the 1937 Disney release of the full-length feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Betts, 2004).

Animation for television consisted of shorter features shown weekly and daily. The successful creators of the *Tom and Jerry* film series introduced a new approach to television animation: the family situation theme. This animation form and content remained popular throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and can be seen in television shows like *The Simpsons.*

The major new force in animation, however, is seen in Japanese *anime*, or television animation. Japanese *anime* first established itself in the United States in 1964 in the form of *AstroBoy*, the creation of Osamu Tezuka in 1963. Tezuka was a cartoonist

producing comic strips and comic books (*manga* in Japanese) before his initiation into television cartoons.

Today, Japanese cartoons are a major force of popular culture, dramatically shown by the wide success of *Pokemon,* in its various media forms. The period of 1996-2001 is regarded as the period of the *Pokemon* phenomenon. The Japanese anime cartoon made its debut on American television in 1996. Its related commercial products had strong presence (and still do) in the every-day-lives of many children in the United States. The most prominent cultural crossover of *anime* at the beginning of the twenty-first century was in the manufacturing of trading cards that children and adults collected (Vasquez, 2003).

Computers & the Internet

In the years following World War II, scientists and technicians decreased the size and increased the range of personal communication systems. As early as 1960, a compact minicomputer took the stage; but it was in the 1970s that the personal computers became a commodity. The term "personal computer" became an official part of popular culture vocabulary in the year 1975 (Betts, 2004). The computer became the machine of the year and the century. When it was complemented with the subsequent development of the internet and the World Wide Web, the personal computer became a window to the world for millions.

With the development of the internet in the early 1980s, the computer became a global information and communication device. The World Wide Web was developed in 1989 by a British computer scientist. Through HTML (hypertext mark-up language) the

internet became versatile due to easy linkage through the Web; and more visually engaging with the addition of graphics (Betts, 2004).

Cell phone, e-mail, improved video game systems, MP3, cable and satellite television, and DVD players are some of the newer additions to popular culture and will most likely see improvements or replacement by advanced technology as time continues. By the 1930s the so-called developed world had been electrified, or as some say, "razzled and dazzled" (Betts, 2004). The rhythm and pace of life, specifically urban life, dramatically changed with the extended use of electricity for the roaring industrial nation of the United States. Electricity charged contemporary popular culture and promoted a nocturnal pattern of existence as hours of entertainment extended beyond sun-down.

It was during this time that social theorists introduced terms to capture the qualitatively and quantitatively different social and cultural environment in the United States. Terms like mass transportation, mass communications, and mass entertainment were attempts by theorists to describe how popular culture created a new spatial/temporal relationship that engaged wider and more diversified audiences and participants than ever before.

<p style="text-align:center">The Intersection of Popular Culture with Public Schooling</p>

Public school educators have never been quick to implement the out-of-school literacies of children and youth into the curriculum (Heath, 1983; Hong Xu, 2005). As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, a tension exists around the juncture of public school education and popular culture texts. This tension may exist because the content and form of popular culture texts can be defined as transient, seductive, boundless, and transformative. It can be viewed as transformative in redefining literacy and the

traditionally established distribution of power in schools (Reinking, 1998). The initial intersections of popular cultures texts in public schools are shared through a brief introduction to media literacy.

Media Literacy

Movies were one of the first texts of popular culture to raise concern about influence on young minds outside school boundaries. In the 1930s, the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) spoke at an annual meeting of the National Education Association. Spring (2005) commented:

> Hays's appearance before the NEA illustrates the complex combination of political pressures and interrelationships between educators and the entertainment world that has had an effect on the content of movies, radio, television, and public schools. (p. 346)

During this time, a movie code was established by the MPPDA that contained values resembling the values taught in public schools. This act of self-censorship led to public acceptance and legitimization that popular culture texts, such as films, should be of moral value to viewers.

In the 1930s, educators had mixed feelings about the value of movies. From one angle, they perceived it as an instructional possibility. Yet, from another perspective, they viewed movies as competition for children's minds. Educators and the film producers, therefore, established a mutually beneficial relationship.

Educators agreed to teach movie appreciation courses in high school classes, which led to audiences culled for certain types of movies – those aligned with morals of

institutional choice. For this responsibility as movie guide, educators benefited from financial support from the movie industry (Spring, 2005).

Popular culture texts, such as mass media, were and are still viewed as inappropriate, tasteless, and worthless, depending on who is asked. Buckingham (1998) claimed antagonism has historically existed between educational aims of United States' schools and values of the mass media.

In the late twentieth century, public schools in the United States began implementing media literacy programs, following the lead of Australia and England. There is a wide diversity of perspectives and approaches in the emerging media literacy movement (Hobbs, 1997). Some proponents contend that media literacy is a viable way to mitigate the potential adverse affects of media and enhance its benefits, a similar approach to the early movie appreciation courses taught in high schools.

Others argue that media literacy education should help youth become critical media consumers as well as empower them as citizens to make informed choices and actively participate in society. Media literacy programs in the United States are still finding ground amidst the changes in standards and minimal acceptance of popular culture as a valid source for learning.

<div align="center">Broadening Literacy Perspectives</div>

Literacy as a topic of interest and study has become decidedly cross-disciplinary and to a lesser extent interdisciplinary as the result of several converging trends during the later part of the twentieth century. In this time, researchers in the field have adopted broader theoretical frameworks for considering how people become literate in a way that helps them function in society and the societal factors that affect literacy development

(Reinking, 1998). It was in out-of-school contexts, rather than school-based ones, that many of the major theoretical advances in the study of literacy have been made.

For the contemporary world, literacy now comes to mean more than just the ability to read and write. It involves, at all levels, the ability to use and communicate in a diverse range of technologies. Since the computer and the Internet became mainstream in the 1990s, its importance and centrality in communication has become unassailable. Today's public school students need to cope with a complex mix of visual, auditory, oral, and interactive media, as well as traditional printed text.

Until the later part of the twentieth century, literacy research was exclusively focused on the cognitive dimensions of students' reading and writing. This focus gave way to a deepening interest in the social dimensions of literacy and literacy development expressed in orientations that ranged from the theoretical, such as socially mediated learning influenced by the earlier work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, to the ideological, such as critical literacy influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (Reinking, 1998).

A broader view grounded in the sociocultural aspects of literacy has also encouraged the convergence of diverse disciplines and perspectives, such as semiotics and social constructivism, in order to analyze how electronically mediated forms of reading and writing might be understood in classrooms, schools and society. An emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of literacy has been a turn toward qualitative research methods, which have moved increasingly into the mainstream of literacy research, thus widening further the lens through which literacy is viewed and consequently how it is defined.

At the turn of the twentieth century, amidst the flare of popular culture texts and the Progressive Movement, Dewey (1938) laid the groundwork for relevant pedagogy. He argued that there is much to learn about successful teaching and curriculum by recognizing the relationship between formal education and ordinary life. He asserted, "From the standpoint of the child the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself" (as cited in Hull & Shultz, 2002).

Freire (1970) believed similarly to Dewey (1938) that in order to make use of subject matter, it must be linked to a learner's everyday life. In order for knowledge to have meaning, it should be derived from the learner's understanding of the world. Freire employed his beliefs in the late 1950s by developing adult literacy programs for rural workers in Brazil. He was influential in defining the philosophy for critical pedagogy, of which critical literacy and medial literacy are connected to.

A Sociolinguistic perspective on literacy and schooling strongly emerged during the 1960s and 1970s through ethnographies of communication that illuminated the fact that how children were socialized in different contexts affects their response to school demands (Hull & Shultz, 2002). Heath's (1983) ethnographic research was pivotal to shaping this perspective.

The recently conceptualized field of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) focuses on an understanding of literacies as multiple and situated within social and cultural practices, and discourses related to power. In this perspective is the New London Group of scholars who have developed a way of discussing the social context of literacy learning, including content and forms of literacy pedagogy: "Multiliteracies is their chosen term that signals

the multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity" (p. 27, Hull & Shultz, 2002).

Summary

In current times, digital technology has increased the number and type of screen-based texts, such as websites, DVDs, email, and so on. Popular culture texts and practices have become wired and wireless and this transformation of communication technologies redefines society. It also simultaneously forces the reshaping of curriculum and pedagogy in order for schools to stay relevant and useful to a diverse and digitally-figured student population. Young people's various text experiences outside of school have leaped over the margins of print technology and continue to push schools out of the central location of knowledge keeper and distributor.

Mobility and accessibility have become key features of contemporary life and have given popular culture distinctive qualities: it is fast-paced and geographically unconfined. The rising public consumption in the 1960s and 1970s of popular culture texts, like TV, movies and comics, continued to dominate print literature and challenged the position of public schools as mediators of knowledge. Along with the rise in consumption came a diverse set of responses to the role of literacy in the United States' society. Broadening perspectives of literacy and literacy learning, in relationship to the evolution of technology and popular culture texts, can impact the nature of students' learning experiences in public school. The next chapter reviews educational literature that examines students' various literate experiences and identifies factors that influence their individual literate journeys.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Children and youth are living amidst major changes, which are creating new ways with words, new literacies, and new forms of learning. It is evident that public school students of the twenty-first century are fervent users of new communication technologies, which include computers, MP3 players, DVDs, video games, cell phones, email, text-messaging, and so on. The amount of time and enthusiasm that young people interact with popular culture texts related to these expanding possibilities of technology are changing the traditional notions about literacy; and also currently challenging public educational institutions to decide what counts as literacy and for the benefit of whom.

The previous two chapters established educational relevance and the historical, cultural and sociopolitical contexts of popular culture incorporation into public schools. Chapter one defined key terms and discussed the rationale for an investigation of the effects of popular culture texts on literacy learning of public school students. Chapter two presented a brief history of the growth of popular culture texts, examined the tenuous and parallel relationship between popular culture and public schools, and described the broadening perspectives of literacy and literacy learning in relationship to the evolution of technology and popular culture texts.

In this critical literature review, the effects of popular culture texts on the literacy learning of public school students are presented. To better understand the nature of a relationship between popular culture and literacy learning of public school students, this review examines the following: students' negotiation of the boundaries of their lives (i.e. family, peer, school, etc.); students' motivation to engage in literacy learning in

classrooms; students' literacy learning while engaging with and negotiating meaning from popular culture texts (in and/or out of school); and the extent to which incorporation of students' skills and knowledge related to negotiating meaning from popular culture texts is beneficial for students, and their literacy learning and development.

When students negotiate the boundaries of their lives, they utilize a variety of resources (i.e. linguistic, symbiotic, textual, etc.) to complete the act as successfully and harmoniously as possible. Often, the resources of students that do not match the cultural values of a public school environment do not permeate the classroom walls (Dyson & Labbo, 2003c; Nieto, 2002). Students' motivation to engage with classroom literacy learning is affected by their sense of resourcefulness -- of their ability to use what they have or know to do something new, or complete a given task. Given what is known from sociocultural theories of education about the necessity of learning to start with what is previously understood, students' abilities to negotiate meaning with popular culture texts may be one of the diverse types of resources of students worth allowing into the classroom for the benefit of their increased engagement for literacy learning in public school classrooms (Mahari, 2005; Miller, 1993; Zull, 2002).

Congruence between Public Schools and Students' Identities, Interests, and
Textual Resources Influences Students' Transitions into School Learning

On a daily basis, students negotiate the boundaries of many contexts of their lives. They move from family and home communities into official school contexts and back again, while simultaneously navigating peer relationships and using artifacts of popular culture. Children and adolescents negotiate meaning and construct identities within the parameters of multiple worlds.

For some students, crossing the boundaries of public school requires a relinquishing of linguistic or cultural tools and resources due to the lack of congruency between these contexts. How students benefit from schooling, or not, is influenced by many things, including the particular individual personalities of students, the values and resources of their world outside of school, and the congruency between these aspects and public school (Nieto, 2002).

Davidson, Phelan, and Cao (1991) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of students' (N=54) transitions between multiple worlds (i.e. family, school, and peers). They intended to describe the interrelationships between these worlds and how the nature of each world affects students' engagement with learning.

The primary data sources for this study included interviews (with students and teachers), classroom observations, student record data and demographic information. Researchers Davidson et al (1991) conducted three in-depth interviews with each student to glean information on students' perceptions of classrooms and schools. Informal conversations and interviews with 10 of the 54 high school students were also conducted by the researchers, as well as interviews with classroom teachers to get their perceptions of students' academic performance and classroom interactions. Finally, observations in classrooms were completed to document interactions in the classroom context.

They found distinctive patterns of boundary crossing behavior and affect on engagement with learning. The typology of boundary crossing they established included the following four patterns of behavior and affect: 1.congruent/smooth transitions 2.different worlds/ boundary crossings managed 3.different worlds/boundary crossings hazardous 4.borders impenetrable/ boundary crossings insurmountable.

Important to note is the fact that students who expressed behavior and affect of Type I and self-identified with that pattern were categorized as mostly white, middle-class to upper-class students, with a range in achievement records. Students associated with Types II, III, and IV identified as primarily minority students. Findings from this research pointed to the fact that students associated with Type III and IV behaviors and affect were found to be less successful in school and classroom climates that were different or oppositional to family or home norms and behaviors (Davidson, Phelan & Cao, 1991).

Davidson et al (1991) described the teachers of students typified as Type III or IV as often blaming failure on students' personal characteristics or forces outside of school, denying the role of school and classroom features, pedagogical style or the expectations and attitudes the teachers expressed to students.   The role of educator, curriculum, and school/classroom climate was underestimated by these teachers for its influence on students' abilities to succeed and connect with the school environment.

The study is fairly complete and patterns of boundary crossing are reasonable. From the article, it appeared the interviews were conducted by the study team. Questions and responses were included in the report. It wasn't clear from the report how many people were involved in interpreting this data. This knowledge would increase reliability of the study. This research was conducted more than a decade ago, but offers a conceptual framework in attempting to understanding students' multiple worlds; and how the potential lack of congruence between these worlds affects students' engagement with the institutional contexts of school.

In a more recent study, Whitlock (2006) used quantitative-qualitative convergence in examining the contextual conditions that promote students' (N=350) sense of school connectedness. Youth developmental theories, in which Whitlock's (1991) study was grounded, conceptualize connectedness to school as the psychological state of belonging in which students perceive that they and other youth are being cared for, trusted, and respected by those that have the power to make decisions.

Survey and focus group data collection occurred in the fall of 2001 and winter of 2002 over a 6-month period. Participants were drawn from three school districts in a suburban community in northeastern United States. The study participants were 83.0% European American and 3.1% low socioeconomic status (SES), 53.5% moderate SES, 37.2% high SES with 5.7% SES unknown. Number of boys and girls was similar, approximately 50%. Surveys that measured variables of school connectedness, meaningful roles, safety, creative engagement and academic engagement were given to 8th, 10th and 12th grade students (N=350). All measures were comprised of closed-ended 5-point Likert scale response format.

Findings suggested that students' sense of school connectedness was strongly affected by opportunities for meaningful input into school policies (p<.01) and the extent to which class material engages student interests (p<.01). Unfortunately the study's sample is lacking ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. The demographic profile of participants was largely European American (83.0%) and moderate to high SES, which limits the potential of applying results to non research participants in more ethnically and economically diverse areas. Whitlock (2006) also recognized that the measures used in this study have yet to be validated on a larger sample.

Heath (1983) conducted one of the earliest and groundbreaking ethnographies of communication, examining boundary crossing behavior and affect, specifically on the boundaries of literacy practices. At the culmination of her long-term research of and participation with three contiguous communities in the Piedmont Carolinas (South Carolina) she identified the specificities of these communities' oral and literate traditions.

Most importantly, she pointed to how experiences in the local school were shaped by these traditions for the benefit or disservice of students' school learning. Most relevant to the focus of this paper, were her findings on how the lack of congruency between community and school literacy practices negatively influenced student achievement for certain students.

During the study, Heath (1983) collaborated with educators of the schools within the Piedmont area town. These individuals became teacher-researchers, learning the communicative habits of the school children and assessing their past classroom behaviors and attitudes. From this work, they realized the need to implement changes in classroom curricula and modify teaching practices to better match the cultural practices and literacy needs of the students.

The teachers incorporated the students' ways of talking, knowing, and expressing knowledge into the classroom, which enabled children from these communities to understand how to make choices among uses of language and literacy, for the benefit of their intellectual development. Heath (1983) used the metaphors of a bridge and building bridges to describe the efforts of the teachers and students in this study. The teachers, identified as learning- researchers, "enabled students to translate and expand knowledge

gained in activities outside the classroom to focus on different aspects of the curriculum and school skills" (p. 355).

The study is credible and trustworthy for its dense descriptions of research methods and means of data categorization. Heath's (1983) field research was prolonged and varied and triangulation maintained through data sources from multiple perspectives (i.e. teacher-researchers, interviews of community members, and artifacts of student work), which adds to its credibility and dependability.

The studies in this section pointed to the fact that congruence between public schools and students' identities, interests, and textual resources influence students' transitions into school learning. Boundary crossing for students who were the minority was found to be a difficult process, for which they were blamed. The role of educators in creating congruence for these students was underestimated (Davidson et al, 1991). But research also supported the notion that students' connection to the public school learning environment, their abilities to succeed and motivation to learn did depend on teachers' purposeful incorporation of students' ideas, interests, and ways of talking, knowing, and expressing knowledge (Heath, 1983; Whitlock, 2006).

Students' Motivation to Engage in Literacy Learning in Public Schools is Influenced by Students' Interests, Power of Choice and Self-efficacy

Children and youth engage in multiliteracies that are linked to their particular life experiences in a rapidly changing, technological world. Literacy development can be shaped and affected by many variables, including perceptions of one's competencies with the resources of their various contexts. Important to literacy development are the feelings of competency and efficacy while engaged in literacy practices. Students' sense of themselves as competent and efficacious can result in increased engagement and

motivation to learn in the school context (Alvermann & Guthrie, 1999). An identity of

self as a competent reader and writer – maker of meaning – is crucial for academic

achievement (Guthrie et al, 2004). The next section is a review of research that examines

variables related to the school context that influence students' motivation to engage in

literacy learning in public school classrooms. The studies are ordered by grade level of

participants, starting with the lowest grade levels.

To better understand students' perceptions of in-school and out-of-school reading

related activities; their conceptions of reading, learning to read, and themselves as

readers; and their responses to learner-centered, meaning based instruction, Knapp (2002)

conducted case studies of Tom and Joshua. Tom and Joshua were two seven-year-old

boys in Kathrin Grant's second grade class who were identified as at-risk readers. Knapp

referred to the work of Lowe et al (1992; as cited in Knapp) that defined at-risk readers as

those individuals who are unable or unwilling to complete the reading process to the

extent appropriate for his or her age. Both students lived with single, working-class

mothers. Even though their demographics and skills seemed similar as they entered

second-grade, Knapp concluded that the boys had very different conceptions about

reading and learning to read.

Knapp's (2002) observations of Tom and Joshua were part of a larger study

conducted by Michigan State University that was examining the effects of school reforms

advocating more meaning-based instruction. Knapp (2002) interviewed and observed

Tom and Joshua in the classroom context for their entire year of second-grade. Means of

data collection included the following: fieldnotes from classroom observations; small

focus group interviews with friends from the class (videotaped); individual student

interviews (audiotaped and transcribed), interviews with the classroom teacher; and related artifacts, such as copies of classroom assignments and students' writings and drawings. The interviews with the students and teacher were conducted throughout the year and semistructured. Knapp had questions prepared, but also allowed children to discuss the things they wanted to talk about in regards to their beliefs and ideas about reading.

The setting of the study was a school located in a small rural/suburban Midwestern community that served mostly a Caucasian, socially and economically diverse population. From the one-on-one interviews with Tom and Joshua, Knapp (2002) learned the boys' home environments differed in regards to access to books and time spent reading independently, or with adults. Tom actively read at home by himself and with his mother, whereas Joshua wasn't as active of a reader as he was active viewer of television and playmate of neighborhood kids. Upon entering second grade, Tom had difficulties decoding words and sometimes avoided reading because it became too difficult. He also wrote about feeling inadequate because of this failure to be able to read like others. Joshua had similar feelings of doubt and inadequacy when asked about reading, and at first claimed the main purpose of reading was to complete assignments and to appear smart.

The text reading-related activities associated with classroom literacy learning were less appealing to Joshua, which Knapp (2002) claimed was due to the practices being unfamiliar and his lack of understanding narrative forms and ways to interact with print. Joshua self-proclaimed he didn't read or get read to outside of school, rather his interests included watching TV, playing with friends and doing karate. On the other

hand, Tom's out-of-school experiences with literate practices (stories shared with adults, print exposure) matched usual classroom reading activities that revolved around print.

To encourage the abilities of both students, Knapp (2002) concluded the teacher presented a variety of ways for the students to participate in literacy acts. According to Knapp's observations and interviews with the teacher, the classroom's literacy learning was based on a workshop philosophy, where literacy learning was an active process. Students were engaged in individual silent reading, partner-reading, oral reading, watching films, listening to tapes or teacher read-alouds, and choral readings. Students also were given the power to choose texts and bring texts from home.

In talking about their textual resources, students gave "commercials" to persuade other readers, and also responded to readings through literature logs, art and class discussions. The classroom reading environment created by the teacher strongly influenced the boys' concepts of themselves as readers. It was a learner-centered, interactive, and meaning-based environment where students were encouraged to experience the power of choice and responsibility for their literacy learning.

Tom and Joshua were affected by certain elements of the environment. For example, Knapp (2002) associated Tom's growth in reading to his ability to choose texts of interest and engage in read-alouds and the related discussions where he could share his own ideas about the text. Joshua was similar in that read-alouds served his literacy growth and engaged him intellectually while enjoying reading with peers. Both boys shared with the researcher more feelings of success and joy when they discussed reading and themselves as readers at the end of the school year.

The study was conducted over a fairly adequate length of time (one year) to get an informed idea of the boys' conceptions. The sources of data were fairly comprehensive (fieldnotes, interviews, and artifacts), and provided various perspectives of the two students. A limitation of the study is that literacy behaviors of Tom and Joshua outside of school are understood only through the researcher's observations and Tom's and Joshua's perceptions of their past and present literacy activities and environments as communicated by them through interviews and in class discussions. Even with this limitation, the study does help one begin to understand some of the complex and interactive influences of students' experiences, ideas, and classroom instruction on their individual journeys toward literacy.

Guthrie, Perencevich, Tonks, and Wigfield (2004) investigated how two reading instructional programs, Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) and multiple Strategy Instruction (SI), influenced third-grade children's intrinsic motivation to read and reading self-efficacy. The researchers' (Guthrie et al, 2004) initial hypothesis that the intrinsic motivation of students experiencing CORI (N=150) would increase more than that of the students experiencing SI (N=200) was affirmed by the results of the pre- and posttest analyses of children's responses to a reading motivation questionnaire. Results showed a more significant increase in children's motivation to read (p<.001) for the CORI group; and a significant increase in reading self-efficacy (p<.01) only in the group that experienced CORI (p. 305).

CORI treatment involved the combination of reading and science as compliments. Teachers provided students with opportunities for choice, collaboration and hands-on science investigations on the focus concepts of plant and animal survival. CORI teachers

constructed the reading instruction around the six reading strategies identified in the National Reading Panel (NRP) Report 2000 (as cited by Guthrie, 2004) as being crucial for reading development and comprehension. SI supposedly just focused on the strategies identified by NRP, but it wasn't explained in as great of detail as CORI, which left some questions about the comparison.

The qualities of CORI classrooms that researchers claimed fostered the increased levels of intrinsic motivation were the following: hands-on science activities directly connected to interesting texts (only print materials referred to); student generation of questions to answer related to current learning; and student selection of books (from collection related to science learning). Description of data gathering (i.e. questionnaire form) and coding was not dense or detailed. The use of a Likert-type scale only offers four choices, which could lead to misrepresentation of the students. Keeping in mind the limitations of the data collection, the study's findings are fairly consistent with other research that shows an increase in students' motivation to read and in reading self-efficacy when students are given the power of choice and opportunities to be active members of the learning community (Knapp, 2002).

Baker and Wigfield (1999) investigated the nature of fifth- and sixth-grade students' ($N = 371$) reading motivation and the relationship of students' reading motivation to reading activity and reading achievement in school. Participants in the study attended six elementary schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic United States. Five of the schools were located within two miles of the inner city and served students of varying socioeconomic status and ethnicity. One of the schools was in the inner city,

with almost 100% of students of African American descent and qualifying for free or reduced-price meals.

The study by Baker and Wigfield (1999) was part of a 3-year longitudinal project funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The project intended to evaluate a reading curriculum that emphasized interpretive responding to literature. Schools included in the Baker and Wigfield study were selected because they were all in the process of changing institutional structure, from a K-5 model to a K-8 model.

Data of the Baker and Wigfield (1999) study were collected as pre-assessments during the fall of the first year, prior to implementation of the reading curriculum. According to the researchers Baker and Wigfield (1999), reading programs in the schools varied at the time of the pre-assessment, but most teachers used a combination of basal and literature-based approaches. In late September and early October, measures were administered by project staff over a 3-day period during the students' regularly scheduled language arts period, in the following order: the performance assessment of reading, *The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ)*, and the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test*.

Developed specifically for the reading program evaluation, the performance measure of reading administered on day one was designed to account for outcome goals of the curriculum (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). It consisted of short stories (two selected from children's literature anthologies) appropriate for each grade level, and that allowed for multiple interpretations of character motives and events. Open-ended questions were attached to each story, with one being an interpretive question and the other being evaluative.

Students were given 45 minutes to read their one assigned story and answer their open-ended questions. Half of the students in each grade (5th and 6th) read one story and half read the other. For both types of questions, students were expected to provide evidence from the text in support of their answers. A scoring rubric was used for this assessment, with two independent scorers who coded and cross-checked student responses.

On day two, *The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ)* was administered along with the *Gates-MacGinitie* Vocabulary test. The *MRQ* had 54 items the children answered on a 1 to 4 scale, with 1 meaning "very different from me" and 4 meaning "a lot like me." Children read the questions on their own and project staff was available to answer questions about the wording of items. The *MRQ* questionnaire was primarily designed to assess different aspects of motivation, with the addition of two questions at the end that were adapted from the Reading Activity Inventory developed by Guthrie et al. (1994, as cited by Baker & Wigfield, 1999). These final questions assessed students' self-reported reading activity.

Vocabulary and comprehension of the fifth-and sixth-graders were assessed by the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* on days two and three. This test was used as a standardized measure of reading achievement for the study (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). The Vocabulary subtest included 45 multiple choice questions related to children's reading vocabulary. The Comprehension subtest contained 14 narrative and expository passages, plus 48 multiple-choice questions about those passages. Students were given 20 minutes to complete the Vocabulary subtest and 35 minutes to complete the Comprehension subtest.

The fourth means of data collection was through the *Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills*, which was administered by the city school system to all students under standardized testing procedures in the spring, prior to the data collections conducted by Baker and Wigfied (1999). Raw scores from this test were by the school system and used by researchers as an additional measure of reading achievement for the study.

Researchers Baker and Wigfield (1999) assessed the following categories of reading motivation: competence and efficacy beliefs; goals for reading; and social purposes for reading. The category of competence and efficacy beliefs included the dimensions of self-efficacy, challenge, and work avoidance. Goals for reading category included the dimensions of curiosity, involvement, importance, recognition, grades, and competition. The category for social purposes of reading included dimensions of social and compliance.

Correlations of children's reported reading activity and dimensions of reading motivation were statistically significant (p<.000) and positive, with the exception of Work Avoidance, which was statistically significant (p<.007) and negative. Dimensions most strongly related included self-efficacy, challenge, curiosity, involvement and social reasons. Relations of motivation to reading achievement were not as statistically significant as those with reading activity.

Even though the sample is a good size and slightly diverse (52% European American, 46% African American, and 2% other ethnicities), there are a few elements of limitation. The sample may not be representative of the populations due to the statistical analysis requirement of only counting fully completed questionnaires. Also, the questionnaires were self-reported which means several factors (i.e. social desirability)

could influence responses. *The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire* items were used according to researchers' (Baker & Wigfield, 1999) theoretical beliefs about motivation. There could be other dimensions of motivation yet to be tested that correlate to or confound these results.

The study showed that reading motivation is multifaceted and the identified dimensions positively correlate to reading activity. It provided possible dimensions of motivation, but is not an exhaustive list. From this study, it appears an intrinsically motivated reader who believes in their capabilities to read is a frequent reader. Frequency is claimed to lead to achievement, but this study didn't show a strong relation. Baker and Wigfield (1999) claimed it is important to understand that not all children or youth are motivated in similar ways.

To investigate general features of reading instruction that were motivating and engaging for students, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) administered a survey to sixth-grade students (*N*=1,765) in 23 schools. Teacher-reported student demographics showed sample population represented 71% European American, 12% African American, 7% Hispanic, 7% Asian American, and 3% other ethnicity, and mostly middle to high socioeconomic status.

According to the data, only 10% of students mentioned classroom reading materials as something they liked about reading instruction, and yet when asked what motivates their reading at school 42% responded that "they were motivated by finding good materials to read and having choice in the selection of these reading materials" (p. 361). When asked to share feelings about positive or negative experiences with reading in school, students directly related negative experiences with assigned reading.

Another relevant finding was in response to the question about the range and diversity of materials students took interest in. The top three choices were magazines, adventure books, and mysteries, followed by books about animals, sports, scary stories, joke books, and comic books (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Researchers commented on the reported differences between home and school reading:

The difference in school reading and home reading was striking. The specific titles suggested that, on their own, students were reading to learn more about topics of individual interest and that there were personal and varied purposes for reading. (p. 366)

Survey participant responses also pointed to students' strong desire for more time to read in class for just plain reading. It was also noted that students reported being motivated by texts connected to popular culture (i.e. biographies of musical artists), but no more frequently than other forms (nonfiction books). Ivey and Broaddus (2001) justified a student survey by wanting to highlight student perspectives. Even though measures were taken to cross-check data classification results, the fact that the data was primarily based on self-administered surveys and reports (teachers' own accounts of their classroom instruction) with little triangulation, lessens the reliability of the findings. Interesting findings from this study to consider, though, are the possibilities of students wanting more time for reading and being motivated to read by getting the power to choose their reading materials.

Oldfather (2002) conducted an interpretive case study that provided insights about the social, affective, and cognitive processes that enable some children to become engaged in literacy activities and prevent others from beginning. The study focused on

5th/6th grade students' thoughts, feelings, and actions when not initially motivated for literacy tasks, and ways in which some of those students were able to become intrinsically interested. Oldfather defined literacy broadly and used it to refer to all literate activity.

This study didn't measure motivation or achievement, but rather attempted to understand and represent students' experiences, directly from their worldview. A purpose echoed in the ethnographic work of Dyson (2003). Data revealed three different patterns of student engagement (or lack thereof). The three patterns ranged from students initially lacking intrinsic motivation, but ultimately empowering themselves into engagement and students who never became motivated. Important to note in relationship to the overarching question of this paper is that Oldfather (2002) concluded from the research "That teachers can draw on students' interests by occasionally employing forms of popular culture in their teaching methods" (p. 250).

The above research indicates students' motivation for and engagement with literacy learning in the school context is influenced by instructional choices and how these choices match the interests and needs of the students. Research pointed to the fact that students are more engaged with literacy activities in school contexts that personalize the experience through students' interests and power to choose the learning materials (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Also, interdisciplinary units, and workshop-based, active classroom literacy learning increased student motivation to engage in the literacy learning (Guthrie et al, 2004; Knapp, 2002). From the research it can also be concluded that students' perceptions and conceptions of themselves as literacy learners impact their engagement and developing relationship with literacy acts in school, as witnessed in the

study of Tom and Joshua, and revealed through the 5th and 6th graders' responses to *The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire* (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Knapp, 2002).

Self-efficacy as a reader is influenced by the texts deemed as relevant to school success and predominantly these are print-based texts (Newkirk, 2002). A major professional curiosity driving this paper is to understand how students' perceptions of themselves as literate are supported as they cross the boundaries of their lives, especially if students sense of self-efficacy and motivation to engage in literate acts possibly revolve around their interest and choice of popular culture texts.

<div align="center">Students Construct and Refine Literacy Skills and Knowledge through
Engagement with and Negotiation of Popular Culture Texts</div>

Engaged literacy learners can be seen inside or outside school. They are identified by their heightened motivation to read and write for different purposes, their utilization of knowledge gained form previous experience for new understandings, and their participation in meaningful social interactions around a literacy act. This section presents research on the specific nature and functions of literacy practices associated with popular culture texts that children negotiate for learning and self-expression. It also provides examination of instructional choices of incorporating popular culture texts into classroom learning, and how these choices affected students' literacy learning dispositions and development.

The following introductory study will set the context for this section by giving the most recent general account of society's "saturation" by popular culture texts, primarily popular media. After establishing the context of popular culture saturation, a set of research studies will describe the kinds of popular culture texts that students have been

observed reading, accessing, appropriating, negotiating, and participating with as literate beings in the new millennium.

Children and youth in twenty-first century United States are claimed to be more appropriately characterized as media saturated, rather than just media rich. In a 2004 Kaiser Family Foundation Study titled, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds," Foehr, Rideout, and Roberts (2005) surveyed a total of 2,032 children and youth, ranging in age from 8-18 years old.

The goal was to find comprehensive patterns of media routines to assess the overall contemporary popular media landscape. Researchers Foehr et al (2005) attempted to document the following: which media young people use and the duration of use; with whom they use media; where media is used; what media genres or activities are preferred; and what relationships, if any, exist between their use of media and their relations with family members or peers, overall contentedness, academic achievement, and other activities.

Data related to recreational media exposure was collected from the nationally representative, randomly selected sample (N=2,032) of 8-18-year-olds. The collection of data was through interviews (N=2,032), self-administered questionnaires of about 40 minutes in length, focusing on details of media use the prior day (N=2,032), and media diaries (N=694) completed for a seven-day period in addition to the questionnaire. This study was a replication and confirmation of research results from a study conducted in 1999 by the same group of researchers. Standard levels of significance were applied at the p<.05 level for the recent study.

Media use by young people was categorized in the following ways: watch TV; listen to the radio; listen to a CD/tape/MP3; use a computer; go online; read a magazine; read a book; play console video games; watch videos/DVDs; play handheld video games; read a newspaper; watch prerecorded TV; and go to a movie. According to the data, 8-18-year-olds spend nearly 6 ½ hours per day using media, during which time they are exposed to more than 8 ½ hours per day of media messages since a quarter of a young person's day is spent using two or more media simultaneously (also known as media multitasking).

Foehr et al (2005) found that on average, "the typical 8-18-year-old lives in a home containing three TV sets, three CD/tape players, three radios, three VCR/DVD players, two video game consoles, and a computer" (p. 9). Important to note is the fact that researchers (Foehr et al, 2005) also found exposure to media types varies in relationship to certain demographics. For example, the data showed that African American youth spend the most time with TV, videos/DVDs, and movies, followed by Hispanic youth, followed in turn by youth claiming to be White.

Similar to earlier research conducted in 1999 by Kaiser Family Foundation, the recent study found young people that spent the least time reading print also had the lowest grades. Also, age is the most common predictor of media exposure. A general pattern is that as children grow older they spend less time with screen media and video games, but have more exposure to audio media and computers (Foehr et al, p. 58).

Since the data is almost all self-administered there is a likely possibility of inaccurate data or misrepresentation, especially in terms of students classifying parents' income or educational levels. Also, the study limited racial identification to categories

of black or white, which could have created over or under representation. From the study

conducted by Foehr et al (2005), it is apparent that young people, specifically 8-18 year

olds, have access to an unprecedented amount of popular culture texts. Data showed that

screened media (TV, videos/DVD, and movies) is mostly consumed by youth who self-

identified as African American and Hispanic. These demographic groups are the same

ones Washington State educational administers identify as needing to serve more

adequately when discussing the current achievement gap (Shannon, 2002). This research

helped establish an overall contemporary popular (media) culture landscape and showed

interesting relationships between screened media use and specific demographic groups.

This relationship should be considered when anticipating the nature of literacy learning of

student groups, bearing in mind the caveat that categories for racial identity identification

used in the research survey were limited and perhaps slightly skewed the results.

The following collection of research studies outlines specific effects of popular

culture text saturation on the literacy learning of children and youth who are supposedly

saturated with popular culture nearly six-and-a-half hours-a-day (Foehr et al, 2005). The

studies are ordered according to the types of popular culture texts, and then organized by

the context (in-school or out-of-school).

Video Games

A video game is a popular culture text designed to engage and entertain – it is a

multimodal experience that captures players of all ages. For the purpose of this paper,

the term "video games" refers to games played on all types of consoles (such as the Sony

PlayStation, Nintendo systems, or Microsoft's Xbox) and computers (Gee, 2003; Ranker,

2006). There are many different genres of video games, similar to the variety of genres

in literature. Some of the video game genres are adventure, driving/racing, sports, "shoot 'em ups", and fantasy/role playing games.

In-School. Ranker (2006) studied an eight-year-old boy's writings and drawings about a Nintendo-64 video game, *Gauntlet Legends* (Midway Entertainment, 2000, as cited in Ranker, 2006). The case study developed during an informal writing group that Ranker conducted twice-a-week, for one hour in an elementary classroom. The eight-year-old boy, Adrian, was described by Ranker as having a thoughtful, analytical disposition. During writing in class, he usually kept to himself and preferred to draw rather than write. Ranker had an established relationship with Adrian, since Adrian had been a student in his class during the school year prior to the study.

During the writing group, Ranker (2006) took an inquiring and observational role, conducting writing conferences with students and giving students sufficient time to write. Ranker did not lead lessons or abide by a formal writing curriculum. He allowed Adrian to develop his drawings and compositions about the video game's narrative elements, specifically plot and character development.

Excerpts of Ranker's (2006) conferences with Adrian are included in the written report, along with artifacts that show his compositions. While working with the video game medium in the supportive environment of the writing group, Adrian showed his main interest was to explore the game, *Gauntlet Legends*, through drawing. Adrian wrote complementary text to his drawings per Ranker's requests.

In Adrian's drawings and writings produced over several sessions, Ranker (2006) found Adrian had a specialized body of knowledge about the video game semiotic domain (a defined medium or space for making meanings across multiple modalities) (p.

24).   According to Ranker, Adrian was a critical learner of the video game design, reflected in his knowledge of the complicated spatial layout of the game's levels. Ranker noticed Adrian's drawings communicated detailed information about the spatial layout of the levels, while his writing (per Ranker's request) about the levels he had drawn focuses on the action of the characters.

Character development in *Gauntlet Legends* was described by Adrian in terms of the characters' powers or special features prior to actual play (rather than following typical literary text style of character development being described throughout the narrative). Characters' features in the game, such as weapons and powers, are decided prior to pushing start. Ranker (2006) concluded, "[This] aspect of the game's design provide the player with opportunities for strategic choices, which enhance player interest, adding appeal and entertainment value (p. 26).

The case study of Adrian and his engagement with the video game *Gauntlet Legends,* presented Adrian's refined knowledge of the game's design and character development that differs from traditional literary text. It also showed how students can utilize other semiotic modes for meaning making within the writing curriculum.

Important to note, is the environment of this case study. Adrian was supported by Ranker (2006) to fully develop his drawings and use them as stepping stones to composition. Ranker's recognition of Adrian's refined ability to read a video game, and his successful composition related to the popular culture text is similar to Newkirk's (2002) findings during his study of video game inspired writings of upper- elementary boys. In both studies, young male students found popular culture texts as catalysts for

creativity and sources of ideas for their own stories, of which they completed with great detail and enthusiasm.

In his book, Newkirk (2002) presented a collection of student stories and interviews from his investigation of over one hundred upper-elementary students, primarily boys, in five New Hampshire schools. During conversations with the students, Newkirk explored the inspirations for their written narratives and their views on violence in their writing.

The primary focus of his research was to examine boys' literacy and the issue of popular culture as source and tool for literacy development inside school. He hoped to find answers to the following questions: How can [educators] learn about, appropriate, and make use of the narrative affiliations of potentially alienated boys? What counts as literacy?

At the time of his investigation, Newkirk (2002) found parody, action, sports, violence, horror and bodily humor to be the genres of choice for young male readers and writers. Popular culture texts such as *Captain Underpants* (book)*, Austin Powers* (movie), *Jackass* (MTV show), and Japanese anime-inspired video games were among the pieces of popular culture referred to by the students interviewed.

Newkirk (2002) found the students to be obsessive composers when inspired by genre of choice in schools. Multimodal respresentations were created by students with passion and the act of literacy was a social event. This study gave insight into the world of literacy genres that captured the interests of young male (and some female) writers and readers. Although the study is thought-provoking and provides photocopied examples of student work, it is lacking detail of data collection and description of methodology.

Similar to other research (Dyson, 2003), from Newkirk's (2002) study what seemed most important was a learning environment that allowed students' popular culture texts inside school literacy learning because this incorporation led to students' heightened motivation and sense of self-efficacy for literacy learning.

　　Out-of-school. In a study of video games, Gee (2003) used previously documented research on literacy development regarding important principles of learning to decipher the principles of learning that undergrid the playing of computer games. By playing a variety of video games for all ages (Pikmin, The New Adventures of the Time Machine, Deus Ex, etc.) by himself and with his six-year-old son, he compared the theory of learning in good video games to theories of learning in cognitive science. From watching his six-year old son, and participating in his own video game play, Gee claimed good video games have certain learning principles built into them and that each principle is relevant to learning in video games and learning in content areas in classrooms.

　　Gee (2003) didn't specify his data collection methods or offer examples of artifacts, so the study's credibility is lessened. He did describe, in length, the process of playing specific video games, and the learning principles he associated with stages and sections of video game playing. In the given space of video games, this study provides a possible framework of learning principles that could be applied to engagement with other popular culture texts.

Japanese anime

　　Out-of-school. Vasquez (2003; 2005) actualized the transferability of Gee's (2003) findings in her ethnography of a Pokemon club and case study of a child in the club. She used Gee's (2003) principles of learning established in the above study to

understand the construction of literacy skills while the children engaged with the popular culture text.

The Japanese anime cartoon, Pokemon, made its debut on American television in 1996. The cartoon and its related commercial products had, and continue to have, a strong presence in the every-day-lives of many children in the United States. The most prominent cultural crossover of anime at the time of Vasquez's ethnography and case study was in the manufacturing of trading cards that children and adults collected (Vasquez, 2003; 2005).

In the ethnography, Vasquez (2003; 2005) described the literacy behaviors of a Pokemon club. Club members were 3-8-years-old, identified by her as culturally diverse, with many being first-generation Canadian.   The study was conducted at a child care preschool and before and after school center located in a lower-middle-class neighborhood. As a participant observer in her six-year-old nephew's world of Pokemon gaming, Vasquez (2003; 2005) studied more in-depth the manner in which he engaged with Pokemon cards and games. Curtis attended the center mentioned above and was a member of the Club.

In the case study, Vasquez (2003; 2005) focused on Curtis' playing of a Pokemon trading card game. To succeed in this game, Curtis had to read the cards – interpret symbols, printed text, value significance, and relationships – to know the value of them. Vasquez attempted to participate in the trading card game and was taught by Curtis during her initial observations for this study in 1996. Through this experience of trying to make meaning of Pokemon texts (trading cards) with the guidance of Curtis (her more-

capable player); and the subsequent years of focused study (with Curtis and the club), Vasquez recognized the multi-mediated, complexity of engaging in the game.

As a means of analysis and categorization of data, Vasquez (2003; 2005) situated her findings from her ethnography and case study of children's engagement with Pokemon text into Gee's (2003) principles of learning and repertoires of skills used during literacy acts. For example, Gee's (2003) Design principle situated "learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core to the learning experience" (Vasquez, 2005, p. 208). Vasquez identified the students' activity of redesigning cards for more value in the game aligned with this principle.

Another comparison of Gee's (2003) learning principles and Pokemon literacy acts was made with the Semiotic principle which stated, "learning about and coming to appreciate interrelations within and across multiple sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, and so forth) as a complex system is core to the learning experience" (Vasquez, 2005, p. 208). Vasquez recorded students creating their cards with aid and use of multiple sign systems through engagement with such resources as books and magazines, videos, and the Internet.

In the intertextual principle "the learner understands texts as a family (genre) of related texts and understands any one such text in relation to others in the family, but only after having achieved embodied understanding of some texts." While designing their own cards, children of Vasquez's (2003; 2005) study engaged with a variety of related texts. To gather information, they read magazines and learned which Internet sites worked well with the information they had previously gleaned from other texts.

In redesigning Pokemon trading cards to increase value, Vasquez (2003; 2005) labeled children's discernment and deliberation in what was included or excluded, and the symbols and text maintained or revised as impressive literacy skill construction. From Vasquez's work, it is apparent that engagement with such popular culture texts is the reading of many symbol systems. The children's participation in the Pokemon learning experience was multimodal and expressive of multiliteracies – different forms of literate behaviors than those traditionally associated with literacy such as reading and writing.

When Alvermann (2001a) conducted research of an after school media club, she found Grady, an African American boy in the ninth grade (identified by school as a struggling reader), was successful in making meaning of various media. Success came as Grady positioned himself as a reader of Pokemon training manuals in order to advance to the next level of difficulty in a video game. Alvermann claimed he demonstrated how "reading a Pokemon training manual involves some of the same information-seeking strategies as reading a chapter in his social studies texts" (p.688).

Alvermann (2001a) discussed the dimensions of the data (i.e. email conversation and one-on-one interactions with Grady). Plus, she discussed at length, the important step she took to reflect on her first assumptions about Grady upon engaging in the study and how these were inadequate depictions of Grady's capabilities as a reader. Alvermann came to understand Grady as an adequate and successful reader of specific popular culture texts.

The study is helpful in giving specific examples of engagement with popular culture texts and the literacy behaviors associated with this engagement, but it is

important to remember that these findings are case specific and can't be generalized beyond Grady. Alvermann (2001a) didn't identify certain categorization of data outside its original collected form, which weakens the reliability of the study. The study is seen as simply another narrative of youth's literacy acts outside of school boundaries.

While doing the aforementioned research project on young people's transactions with popular culture texts out-of-school, Alvermann and Heron (2001c) identified the literacy practices of Robert that were related to his interest in the Japanese anime cartoon, Dragon Ball Z. They claimed Robert's literacies practices were not frivolous, but rather they mimicked "those that language arts teachers try to foster in their students" (p. 119).

Robert found affiliation with others in the media club interested in the anime. Also, he entered Dragon Ball Z chat rooms where the conversations were characterized as character development analyses, predictions of preceding episodes, and general guidance submitted for those less familiar with the popular culture text.

Alvermann and Heron (2001c) left out many details of data gathering and coding, which lessens the credibility. Due to the nature of the single subject study the finding allow a peak into the texts and practices of an individual adolescent. From this insight, more options for facilitating literacy events that are meaningful to students and increase engagement can be considered. Alvermann et al (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) multiple case studies of preadolescences and adolescences literacy acts outside of school also highlighted the multilitarcies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) associated with popular culture texts.

In-school. Researchers Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) studied fanfiction writing of two middle school students, Eileen and Rhiannon, living in suburban upstate New York. Their research was influenced by the theoretical framework of Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and their motivations were to understand the out-of-school literacy practices of the youth; and how these practices intersected within the school literacy curriculum, if they did indeed intersect. From their findings, they claimed it important to broaden conceptions of literacy teaching and curriculum to engage with the multiliteracies of students' experiences and discourse with popular culture texts, like fanfiction.

Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) used three concepts from the Multiliteracies framework as theoretical context and a means of analysis. These concepts, and the findings from this study, relate to other research (Dyson, 2003; Gee, 2003) on literacy, and the general inquiry of popular culture forms and practices as viable literacy resources and behaviors.

The fanfiction written (and illustrated) by these two students were connected to their interest in anime (Japanese animation) and manga (Japanese comics). Based upon the data collected and the Multiliteracies framework analysis, the researchers found the following patterns and themes in the girls' in-depth and extended engagement with popular culture texts, also identified as anime fandom:

1. The girls reported writing fanfiction as a way to have fun, exercise their imaginations, and avoid boredom; researchers also identified it as being a potential means to friendship and affiliation.

2.   Rhiannon characterized fanfiction as a private pursuit mainly outside of

school and researchers confirmed that they had no evidence of either

girl bringing fandom into formal school activity.

3.   Their stories were multimodal by connecting various designs of the

visual, linguistic, audio, gestural, and spatial in one text, while using

comprehension strategies.

Chandler-Olcott and Mahar's (2003) data about fanfiction, and the two students' attitudes

toward school and academic performance from their various perspectives, is insightful

when contemplating fanfiction compositions as possible sources of learning and

application of literacy skills and knowledge.

The motivations and literacy strategies of the youth identified by the study are

also highly valued in transactions with print-based texts that dominate school discourse.

Chandler-Olcott (2003) recognized the need for more understanding on how the literacy

skills associated with popular culture texts can be used to increase students' engagement

and motivation with school-based literacy processes.

Music

Out-of-School. In continuing to investigate the power of popular culture texts'

influence on adolescents' perceptions of reading and themselves as readers outside of

school, Alvermann, Hagood, and Williams (2001b) studied Ned and his understanding of

texts related to the rap group, Goodie Mob. They claimed the meaning-making and

literacy strategies he used in relation to popular culture were legitimate sources of

learning – a repertoire of literacy practices that could serve Ned in school-based learning,

if recognized and built upon.

The positioning of a student as reader and constructor of meaning through various texts is important for motivation to learn (Knapp, 2002). The sense of affiliation and self-efficacy Ned expressed throughout the study was evident in email transcripts documented by researchers. Alvermann et al (2001 b) maintained it was Ned's command of "several multiple and overlapping literacies gleaned through personal, familial, and social interactions both in and out of school that afforded him the opportunity to act like – and, just as important, to be recognized as – a competent and literate person in the media club setting" (p. 8).

In-School. Morrell (2002; with Duncan-Andrade, 2004) presented data from experience as an English teacher in an urban public high school illustrating how the teaching of popular culture can produce academic and social results with youth. He believed the incorporation of popular culture enabled students to make meaningful connections with canonical texts, and it also promoted the development of their academic and critical literacies.

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) gathered qualitative data that showed a curricular unit teaching hip-hop music as literary genre helped scaffold and develop the academic literacies of youth. The researchers believed this unit reflected their philosophy of critical pedagogy in that "it was situated in the experiences of the students, called for critical dialogue, critical engagement with texts, and related the focus texts (poems and raps) to larger social and political issues" (p. 265).

The unit started with a general overview of poetry and the historical/literary periods (i.e. Elizabethan, Puritan Revolution, etc.), which included rap music alongside

the postindustrial revolution in the United States. Then, student groups were assigned a poem and rap song they interpreted with respect to its specific historical and literary period and then analyzed linkages between the two forms. Presentations of this group work were given to the whole class. Students also produced anthologies of original poems on diverse subjects in a variety of forms and participated in a poetry reading. Plus, outside of class time students wrote a critical essay on any song of their choice.

Data presented by Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) focused on the group presentations. They claimed individuals who participated in the unit displayed a facility for textual readings and literary analysis. Students were able to describe relationships between the themes of rap and poem, generate interpretations and synthesize information – all critical skills to refine for academic literacy achievement. In the write-up, the researchers included one of the student's final comments about the impact of this unit: "I guess for me, what I got out of the poetry unit as a whole was this was probably the best thing that I've done in my whole years of school" (p. 266).

Since Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) were co-teaching the unit, there is a high level of subjectivity, and interpretations of success could be motivated by other unidentified factors. A small amount of member checking occurred, as seen in the above quote, but it is hard to tell from the written summary how these were completed. Researchers described data collection and coding briefly, and included transcripts of students' comments from classroom activities, discussions, and feedback. Artifacts like student work before and after the unit weren't provided, which could deepen a reader's understanding of the specific effects of popular culture on literacy development.

The work of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) lacked specificity, but showed how the presence of hip hop in the classroom created a viable bridge between students' worlds for increased engagement and motivation within classroom literacy learning. Hip-hop music and culture was presented as literary substance and relevance to youth that developed an engaging source for developing academic literacy and critical consciousness about society.

Television, Movies, Radio and Sports

In-School. Using a quasi-experimental design, Frost and Hobbs (2003) evaluated the impact of a secondary language arts curriculum that fully integrated media-literacy to determine its effects on students' reading, listening and viewing comprehension, writing, and skills of message- analysis. At the time of its completion, this research was the first large-scale empirical work measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills in the United States (p. 352).

Most relevant to this paper are the results of the research that provide suggestive evidence that incorporating analysis of popular culture forms (i.e. magazine, radio and television) into a language arts curriculum has the potential to enhance literacy skills development. Frost and Hobbs (2003) claimed during the process of the study the following textual-analysis and critical-thinking skills were developed and refined for the treatment group: identifying message design and construction techniques; recognizing how authors express specific values and points of view; comparing and contrasting messages with similar content; noticing when information is omitted from a message; and identifying an author's purpose and target audience (p. 351).

An ANCOVA showed statistically significant differences of $p < .001$ between

groups in the ability to identify main ideas. In comparison with control group, students

receiving the yearlong program of media-literacy instruction demonstrated significantly

greater improvements in their ability to identify message values and points of view in

reading ($p < .001$), listening ($p < .001$), and viewing ($p < .001$) (p. 346). Important to note

that the skills mentioned above are the same meaning making practices that are

associated with print-based academic texts in classrooms. From their findings researchers

Frost and Hobbs (2003) claimed the following:

> Using texts of which students have greater social or linguistic prior knowledge
>
> can help students master analytic skills that combine to internalizing expert
>
> reading practices….Evidence from this research study supports the argument, put
>
> forth by Giroux and Simon (1989) and Cortes (2000), that media-literacy
>
> instruction may help learners better situate themselves in sociopolitical context."
>
> (p. 351)

Frost and Hobbs (2003) identified in their introduction and conclusion the

inherent limitations of a quasi-experimental design, plus the possible confounding

variables they were unable to control for, such as teacher expectations or variance in

instruction. Selection bias was recognized as a threat to internal validity since they were

unable to conduct random assignment of treatment group due to the curriculum being part

of a core course. The control group was a smaller sample size of 89, compared to the 293

in the treatment group. Communities of both the treatment and control group were 97%

white with a per capita mean of US$23, 800. The variables of both race and social class

limit the generalizability of this study. All responses to the pre/posttests were required to

be written, possibly limiting some students' ability to express thoughts in light of weaker composition skills.

Dyson has conducted ethnographies (1997; 2003a) and several case studies (1994; 1995; 1996; 1998; 2001; 2002; 2003b; 2003c) that examines how popular culture permeates classroom walls, increasing its educational relevance to the benefit of literacy learning. Grounded in a sociocultural perspective of development, Dyson (2003a) investigated how children participated in official school literacy events. One of Dyson's (2003a) broad research goals was, "To examine the consequences of – including the kinds of tensions that could result from – children's recontextualization of nonacademic material in school practices for individual and classroom learning" (p. 25). This paper's focus relates to this research aim – the consequences or effects of popular culture texts being permitted as resource and tool for public school students' literacy development. Dyson's (2003a) guiding questions of research were very closely aligned to the questions that guides this paper, which are as follows: What do the textual processes and practices through which children construct a childhood have to do with school literacy learning; and through what means do young children, contemporary kids in media-saturated times, appropriate written language into an already richly productive repertoire?

Dyson (2003a) was specifically interested in the production of written language in the school context, and how children made these events meaningful, particularly by their acts of associating them with popular cultural texts (television, movies, and radio) from the landscape of their everyday lives. She concluded that students' participation and progress in the official literacy events was marked by the borrowing, adapting, and negotiation of these textual materials from outside classroom doors.

Dyson (2003a) observed the instructional quality of a first-grade classroom in a multiracial, socioeconomically diverse, urban public elementary school in the East San Francisco Bay district and found the teacher's integration of literacy and the expressive arts within a readers and writers workshop model, plus the cultural worlds of the students, all presented an opportunity to assess the cultural landscape of a contemporary childhood and determine its link to varied sources of texts. Texts were defined by Dyson as not only a piece of writing, but rather as any organized configuration of symbols (i.e. television show, radio song, or film).

In the ethnographic study of six African American first graders, Dyson (2003a) organized her observations around particular perspectives of each child – each child being a case study. This is the same strategy she applied in earlier research (1994; 1995; 1996; 1998) The unit of analysis "was children's participation in official production events (e.g., doing a "writing workshop book" entry") and in unofficial ones (e.g., those singing a radio song) – the two types of events frequently overlapped" (2003a, p. 19).

It isn't specifically stated how or why Dyson (2003a) selects these six specific students out of the twenty first-graders in the classroom, but from her writings they appeared to be the students that motivated her research. Perhaps her choice in focus was because these students were members of the two-thirds of the students in the classroom that were bused in from another part of the city in efforts of school integration, or maybe it was their firmly established and expressed relationships as self-identified brothers and sisters.

For the course of an academic year, Dyson (2003a) studied the children and their relationships with each other, texts and literacy events (official and unofficial). For 4 to 6

hours per week, she primarily collected data during the morning language arts hour-and-a-half period and stayed for whole days when specific units were taught. Collection of data was completed through various methods over a two year period by field notes of classroom and playground student dialogue, interviews of classroom teacher and students' parents, audio tapes of students' literacy discussions, and artifacts like students' writing.

Dyson (2003a) identified five major kinds of students' appropriations or negotiations: content (i.e. names of stars or lyrics to songs); communicative practices or genres (i.e. enacting superhero adventures or improvising love songs); technological conventions (i.e. graphic displays and symbols [icons of teams and commercial products]); actual lines spoken or sung by characters or singers; ideologies (i.e. gender, wealth, and power). These recontextualization processes shaped the children's entry into school literacy. They made use of familiar media-influenced practices and symbolic material to take intellectual and social action in the official school world.

During the second year of the research, Dyson (2003a) and a research assistant ensured representation of reality through triangulation by interviewing parents of students to confer the students' use of certain popular culture material outside of school. Dyson also interviewed popular culture professionals (i.e. deejay of local hip-hop radio station) to discuss the texts students brought with them into school.

Similar to the research premise of Dyson's (2003a) work, Marsh (1999) conducted a case study in two urban primary classes of 6–and–7–year-olds in England for three weeks to examine the effects of introducing popular culture themes (i.e. Batman and Batwoman) into a socio-dramatic role play area, primarily focusing on the effects on

children's literacy activities. Findings from this small study ($N = 57$) of culturally,

linguistically and socio-economically diverse students indicated that incorporating

popular culture into the classroom can lead to greater involvement in the literacy

curriculum by students whose cultural capital is often not reflected in the classroom

curricula.

Before students used the popular culture-themed role play area, they were fully

informed about the research being conducted, and also discussed with the classroom

teachers possible uses of the literacy resources within the role play area. The article

includes a list of student-generated suggestions, but it is difficult to determine how much

influence teachers had over the ideas about literacy activities. Data was collected through

various means, including participant observation. The findings could have been impacted

by the participation of the researcher in the role-play area – students possibly performing

in ways they would not choose if someone was not watching them.

Computers

In-School. Reinking (2000) conducted a formative experiment using quantitative

and qualitative data collection. The purpose of this study was to investigate how a

computer-based instruction intervention (creating multimedia reviews of books) was

implemented to achieve an increased amount and diversity of elementary students'

independent reading. Data were gathered during 2 academic years in 4 fourth-grade and

5 fifth-grade classrooms in 3 schools.

The schools were selected among six schools contacted by Reinking (2000) that

had expressed an interest in the project and were willing to purchase the minimal

hardware needed to implement the intervention. Proximity, equipment and facilities,

student populations, and expressed commitment to the project were factors of school selection. The third school, Borders, was added during the third year of the study.

Participants in the first year of the study attended Collins School or Hartwig School. Collins School was located in a small, suburban town with students who were predominantly European American, and from middle and upper class families. It was a relatively large school with three or four classrooms of approximately 30 students at each grade level, K-5. At Collins School, there was 1 Macintosh computer in each classroom and a scanner that was shared.

The computer-based intervention at Collins School was implemented in two fourth-grade classes taught by two female educators. Reinking (2000) chose 2 classrooms (one fourth- and one fifth-grade) which were similar to compare the effects of the intervention. These comparison classes were using a commercial computer program, like Accelerated Reader (Henk et al, 2004), that was designed to increase the amount and diversity of students' independent reading. This program awarded points that influenced grades. The points were earned by answering correctly the multiple-choice questions administered at a classroom computer.

Hartwig School was different from Collins in that it was located in a rural area with students that came from blue-collar and professional homes in both the nearby small town and agricultural areas. Here, the student population was approximately 15% African American, with the remainder being predominantly European American. The school had two or three classrooms of 23-30 students at each grade level, K-5. Computer accessibility differed from Collins School with only a total of 12 Macintosh computers housed in a computer lab. The intervention took place in 3 fifth-grade classrooms.

Borders School was added during the third year of the study and was in the same rural district as Hartwig School, with a similar student population. The intervention was implemented in one fifth-grade class and one fourth-grade class. Computer accessibility at Borders was similar to Hartwig. Both Hartwig and Borders schools had several printers and access to a color scanner for digitizing pictures.

During the first 6 weeks of the two school years Reinking (2000) and a university research team gathered qualitative data through observation field notes and interviews with students and teachers, and focus group discussions about independent reading quality and quantity. Also during this time, quantitative data was collected through means of standardized instruments designed to measure students' attitudes toward reading in and out of school that were administered by the classroom teachers. Students also completed a questionnaire created by the university research team to determine the diversity of their reading.

After this baseline data was collected, Reinking (2000) and the university research team introduced students to the concept of multimedia book reviews. The following HyperCard skills were taught to the students: using the drawing tools, copying and pasting graphics, creating buttons and text fields, and linking cards. In January of the school years, students began to create their multimedia book reviews using the review template. For in-depth analysis, Reinking (2000) and his research team identified 4 focus students in each classroom who represented a range of reading achievement and interest.

As the implementation proceeded in the classrooms or computer labs, students worked cooperatively, and teachers became learners as students taught them how to deal with some technological aspect of the activity. Reinking (2002) also found that many

low-achieving students expressed confidence and stronger self-esteem in regards to being a reader immediately from working on the computers; and this confidence had a positive effect on their subsequent engagement in literacy activities. Examples of increased attention were found typically among poor readers and many students became less inhibited, more verbal and more cooperative.

Although the degree to which the intervention and its accompanying technology (HyperCard) positively transformed instruction differed across teachers and school in this study, there was evidence (field notes, interviews, etc.) that the intervention increased student engagement and positive changes in social interactions, especially among low-achieving and low-interest students. This suggests that involving students with multimedia-based challenging literacy activities may provide an impetus to become more involved in literacy learning.

Caveat

Although the study by Kramer-Dahl (2005) was conducted in Singapore, its findings mirror the documented nature of young peoples' literacies when engaging with popular culture texts found in the United States (see Alvermann, 2001a or Vasquez, 2003; 2005). From focus-group data of 10-12-year-old Singaporean youngsters collected over two years, Kramer-Dahl claimed adolescents engaging in out-of-school activities, primarily around popular culture texts (i.e. Japanese anime or manga), displayed special competencies and multiple reading strategies that could be recognized and built upon for school-sanctioned literacy.

Interesting finding from this study is the students' identification of possible difficulties when attempting incorporation of popular culture. They claimed there wasn't enough time to become absorbed in texts like they do out-of-school. Also, school

policies didn't allow toys or other objects into school that were related to their engagement with certain popular culture texts. To expound on the point made by the students the author quoted Buckingham (2003, as cited in Kramer-Dahl, 2005): 'the levels of intense concentration and energy that characterize [the youngsters'] out-of-school engagements with popular texts are at odds with the dullness and earnestness of mechanical teaching' (p. 229).

In terms of the reliability of the study, students may have felt confined by the institutional relationships with interviewers (classroom teachers) and the environment (after-school setting). This could have affected responses in the focus groups. The study points to some issues of concern, voiced directly from students, about the ability to successfully incorporate popular culture into the classroom. This provides a useful critical perspective. Overall, the research provided a global perspective of the relationship between popular culture texts and youthful literacies.

Summary

The quantitative and qualitative research reviewed presented many pieces for better understanding literacy learning as foundational to students' experiences inside and outside school. Some students' educational experiences and negotiations of the school boundaries were found to be hazardous, or even insurmountable (Davidson et al, 1991). According to the research of Whitlock (2006), a student's sense of connectedness with school can be significantly affected by the extent class material engages students' interests. Knapp (2002) claimed the importance of recognizing and accommodating for the literate histories of students to better support their literacy learning growth and development within the school context, and beyond.

Foehr et al (2005) pointed to the fact that habits and interests of children and youth revolved around popular (media) culture. Heath (1983) concluded teachers must find a way to better understand these linguistic and/or literary habits and interests of students; and view them as valid practices of communication in order to facilitate literacy learning for students of diverse backgrounds.

The collection of case studies and ethnographies (Alvermann, 2001a; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Dyson, 2003a; Vasquez, 2003; 2005) revealed the complexity and sophistication of literate acts associated with popular culture texts. They also showed the expanding concepts of literacy and texts, and how in order to be truly literate in today's society, one's skills and knowledge to read all sorts of texts is a benefit for learning inside or outside of school. Teacher's use of pedagogical techniques like critical literacy, critical media literacy, and reading and writing workshop allowed an aspect of students' identities -- as negotiators of meaning with popular culture texts -- to enter the school and permeate the classroom walls, with the effects of increased literacy engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Children and youth negotiate meaning and construct identities as literate beings with the pleasures, practices and resources of their multiple worlds. Most of these worlds are digitally connected in the new information age. Popular culture texts are major artifacts from which individual and societal knowledge is derived. In the past, educators have been comfortable to overlook and not consider present-day cultural products (especially popular culture texts like television) as sources for learning, even though many works of literature which are now considered classic or traditional began their life as popular works created for mass audiences (Hobbs, 1997). Dyson (2003a) implied that contemporary public school students are competent and skilled with a repertoire of knowledge that counts for their present and future:

> There is pleasure and power in learning to craft movement, sound and, yes, written words. But it's the breadth of the symbolic repertoire, the sense of competent agency, and the social sophistication to shift one's actions to suit local conditions that allow children to become full participants in their presents and in their travel into their futures. (p. 3)

Exploring the links between formal schooling and popular culture texts is both an intellectual and political challenge for students and teachers (Reilly et al, 1992). This is prime reason why a historical push-and-pull relationship between public schools and popular culture exists – it's a struggle over what counts as knowledge and who gets to count (Spring, 2005).

Summary of Findings

The review of research presented the complexities of public school students' literate journeys and the effects of popular culture texts on their literacy learning. It showed students' successful negotiation of their worlds relied upon congruency between their identity, interests and resources, and how the context of school supported a sense of self-efficacy in learning. The difference in whether and to what extent young people felt connected to school and able to thrive in school environments was found to be reliant upon how students' differences affected them and were perceived by those with the power to make decisions that impacted their educational opportunities (Davidson et al, 1991; Knapp, 2002; Nieto, 2002; Whitlock, 2006).

Heath's (1983) work established an important reverence for students' literacy competencies formed in all contexts of students' lives. In reference to the changing landscape of communication in contemporary times, she ascertained in the epilogue to her book:

> The bridging metaphor remains viable today, but the span of the bridge and the vehicles that cross it will differ…Its traffic must consist primarily of broad, encompassing integrations of oral and written language around plans and actions and across ages. (p. 376)

From the review of research it is apparent that popular culture texts (primarily in the form of media) are vehicles used proficiently by a diverse range of youth (Foehr et al, 2005). Popular culture texts such as video games, Japanese anime games and fanfiction, and rap lyrics have become the kinds of materials that many children and youth choose to read, have access to, and negotiate as meaning-makers.

Students' construction of identity and affiliations with high levels of engagement and motivation while interacting with popular culture texts was highlighted in the research. Children and youth were found to take great pleasure in the forms and their related practices. The young people were adept at engaging with other resources (i.e. books, magazines, videos and the Internet) to supplement their knowledge of Pokemon artifacts (Alvermann, 2001a; Vasquez, 2003). Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) used the Multiliteracies framework to better understand literacy competencies and found patterns of literacy behavior that emerged from two students' in-depth and extended engagement with popular culture texts, such as the students' creation of stories using multimodalities and making sense of others' creations with a sophistication of comprehension strategies.

Research that focused on variables of motivation to engage in literacy learning and the formation of students' identity as a literate person in the school context showed that only 10% mentioned classroom reading materials as enjoyable and motivating (Whitlock, 2006). The same respondents said their top choices for reading included texts of popular culture (i.e. magazines or comics). Other findings pointed to the fact students' conceptions and experiences of selves as literacy learners outside the school impacted engagement with school-based literacy (Knapp, 2002). The classroom reading environment and curriculum, its' interesting content and congruency with students' lives, influenced motivation and identity as a reader and writer. Findings also suggested qualities of instruction like student-centered content, hands-on experiences, and interdisciplinary texts increased children's motivation to engage and their sense of self-efficacy (Dyson, 2003a; Guthrie et al, 2004; Knapp, 2002).

Research reviewed also provided examples of educators capitalizing on the literacies developed through students' negotiation of popular culture texts. A quantitative study completed by Frost & Hobbs (2003) suggested the incorporation of popular culture texts into a language arts curriculum by means of a critical media literacy program refined students' skills of textual-analysis and critical-thinking – skills associated with success in print-based school learning. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) showed how the infusion of hip hop and poetry in school expanded students' skills of textual reading and literary analysis, plus increased engagement and motivation. Findings from the small study completed by Marsh (1999) also pointed to increased student engagement with literacy practices of school when popular culture motifs, such as Batwoman and Batman, where allowed to enter the learning space. Findings from both Newkirk (2002) and Dyson (1997; 2003a) showed how students' composition activities are densely populated by popular culture texts, from video games to Japanese anime to superheroes to radio love songs. These specific studies showed classroom environments that allowed the permeation of popular culture texts to benefit students' literacy learning.

Classroom Implications

Information gleaned from investigating effects of popular culture texts on literacy learning of public school students outlined in chapter three presents a clear picture that various literate habits of the diverse student population are valid practices of communication. Teachers nurturing explicit and implicit connections with students' everyday pleasures and literate acts can become a powerful pedagogical tool for engaging all students and supporting students' perceptions of themselves as literate individuals in a society of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In the report on the Washington State

achievement gap, Shannon (2002) highlighted the importance of supporting historically underrepresented students to engage in school and increase their literacy learning development.

In regards to how teachers think and feel about popular culture being in the classroom, Marsh (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of preservice teachers regarding the use of popular culture in the primary literacy curriculum in England. Findings indicated that a teacher's disposition or ideology effect their choices of incorporating popular culture in curriculum planning and practice, even if they expressed beliefs in its potential to orientate and motivate children in schooled literacy practices. The study also showed how more teachers found the experience of learning about students' popular culture texts and their incorporation of these texts into the classroom enabled a better home-school connection for student literacy learning.

Marsh (2006) claimed challenging normative practices is necessary to become more aware of the realities of children's literacy lives outside of school. If this doesn't occur then literacy curricula choices could continue to be inadequate in terms of ability to address the complex economic, social and cultural demands of the 21st century. These claims for changes in the classroom literacy learning are strong assertions echoed by other research (Alverman, 2001a; Dyson, 2003; & Newkirk, 2002).

Bean and Walker (2005) also conducted a multiple case study teachers' beliefs and practices surrounding the issue. They found three teachers incorporating a variety of texts, including film, magazines, newspapers, novels, and the Internet. Two of the three teachers said they did so because they viewed introducing a variety of texts as a means to

building and expanding student's cultural capital (Bourdieau, 1996; 1998, as cited in

Bean, 2005). Bean and Walker (2005) claimed these teachers "recognized the

importance of access to the dominant curriculum while broadening the notion of text in

the classroom.

From the research, it is understood that broadening the notion of text and literacy

has important implications for classroom learning and teaching. In so doing, a teacher

adopts an ethnographic approach to literacy teaching, in which the teacher observes and

listens to the literate histories of all students and how they identify themselves as

meaning-makers in their multiple worlds with texts outside the dominant curriculum

(Knapp, 2002; Dyson, 2003a). This is done to make the literacy curricula supportive and

relative to students' experiences with communication genres of the 21st century. Through

her research and her prior work as a school teacher, Vasquez (2005) identified the need

for an ethnographic approach to teaching:

> ['New literacy' pedagogies] go beyond debates over basic skills and best
>
> methodology and are informed by observation and analysis of children's
>
> participatory engagement with texts for which they have an affinity and for which
>
> they are willing to participate in complex learning situations for a sustained period
>
> of time. (p.125)

Another classroom implication resulting from this investigation is that teachers as

learners and students as teachers is a role reversal that happens when popular culture

visits school-based literacy learning. This revised positioning of teacher and pupil affects

normative practices that view a teacher as dispenser of knowledge. Instead, teachers'

facilitating the inclusion of students' popular culture pleasures and literate acts into

classrooms can lead to increased school connectedness and literacy engagement. From the studies of Marsh (1999; 2006) and Dyson (1997; 2003) it is understood that an inclusive and permeable classroom culture in which students' interests are reflected and utilized is likely to stimulate a wealth of literacy activities over a sustained period of time.

Recognizing reading and writing as practices that are socially and culturally constructed and expanding the concept of literacy to include students' pleasures and literate acts related to popular culture texts has the following possible outcomes for classroom practice: (a) learning is increased because practices of literacy are more relevant to students' ways of knowing and interaction (b) various learning styles and the needs of diverse learners are accommodated and (c) creativity and self-expression is developed and supported (Alvermann et al, 2001b; Cortes, 2000; Frost & Hobbs, 2003; Knapp, 2002).

Implications for Further Research

The majority of studies consisted of observational case studies. This is because popular culture in the classroom and its relationship to literacy learning is an emerging interest. A small amount of school-based empirical research is available. Predominantly that which is available is related to media literacy.

Most of the studies reviewed in this paper were quite limited and focused on a small population of people, as is usually true with case studies. Detailed insight into the thought processes of the participants could provide a more comprehensive and realistic look at how popular culture affects their literacy learning. Examining the classroom relevance of literacies shaped by popular culture and the role of popular culture in the

official school literacy curriculum is a growing body of research that could benefit from more growth, especially in terms of quantitative research.

Summary

There is so much to learn about the changing landscape of communication and the new literacies students bring to public schools. It can be overwhelming to educators and require a major shift in perspective about the literacies of Generation M (Tapscott, 1998) Research portrayed teachers who took seriously their roles and responsibilities in educating students of diverse backgrounds as acting like bridges. That is, the teachers assessed the range of literacy skills students already practiced in their multiple worlds and created connections to the learning in public school classrooms.

Teachers acting as bridges for students' literacy learning accept, affirm and reinforce the literacy resources used by all their students, not just those that match the dominant culture of schooling, which are primarily print-based. These teachers can move students further along on their individual literate journeys by capitalizing and expanding on their resources (and their motivation to engage with these resources) for the benefit of their public school educational achievement. Popular culture texts are one of the resources that students interact with daily as they cross the boundaries of their lives. Allowing the skills and knowledge constructed through the engagement with and negotiation of the everyday pleasure and literate acts of contemporary children and youth has positive implications for increasing students' motivation to engage in classroom literacy learning.

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