

Exploring Learning by Design to Nurture Joyful Literacy Experiences in a Grade Eight English Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract

This paper details an example of teacher practices that drew upon multiliteracies theory and pedagogy to engage in reflective pedagogical practice and enact transformative teaching and learning in a grade 8 English Language Arts classroom in Manitoba. The meaning of design is discussed, and the *learning by design* framework is investigated with a focus on knowledge processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Findings affirm teachers as designers, recognize students as creative meaning makers, and celebrate teacher empowerment, student agency, and creativity.

Keywords: multiliteracies, learning by design, knowledge processes, teachers as designers, transformative learning, multimodal meaning making

Introduction

Education can empower people and transform lives. To this end, professors Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2023) urge educators to enact the updated pedagogy of multiliteracies and move towards education justice. They revisit the multiliteracies framework and encourage educators to further apply the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of multiliteracies, considering dynamic student “lifeworld” differences and different “forms of meaning” (p. 5). They further “propose an epistemological theory of learning” and the application of knowledge processes to celebrate teachers as designers, support different learner needs, and enact transformative learning (p. 22). Educators need to take responsibility to nurture inclusive learning environments where diverse learners can draw upon their *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992), learn “the new” and apply “the new” to different contexts functionally and creatively. In this paper, we wondered how the *learning by design* framework proposed by Cope and Kalantzis (2015; 2023) could be applied in language arts learning and how knowledge processes might support student agency and joyful learning experiences in a Grade 8 classroom in Western Canada.

In Manitoba, the current English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum document (Manitoba Education, 2020) recognizes that there are “multiple literacy communities” with each one being unique with its situated practices (p. 5). It also emphasizes the sociocultural aspects of language learning and teaching and considers literacy as “symbolic socio-cultural systems through which human beings create and share meanings,” as well as access and create multimodal texts in different modes like “gestural, oral, visual, and print components simultaneously” (p. 5). This ELA document creates a curricular space for

multiliteracies and offers guidelines for teachers and students to engage with various texts and communicate their ideas in various modes (Kress, 2017). Furthermore, the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (MEECL) officially launched a new *Framework for Learning* in September 2024, promoting multiliteracies for its value in recognizing learner differences and building an inclusive learning environment.

The Manitoba curricular context calls for a broad understanding of literacy and for curriculum development in language and literacy learning and teaching. Thus, teachers must recognize and celebrate learners' *funds of knowledge* in their classrooms. As Gholdy Muhammad (2023) wrote in *Unearthing Joy*, "when students see themselves manifested in our curriculum in diverse and positive ways, we observe their joy" (p. 71). Having choices and seeing themselves as active meaning makers in literacy practices will enhance joyful learning experiences and support learners' differences through utilizing diverse forms of meaning and modes in their learning. It is in this curricular context that we reflect upon the design process of a short story unit in ELA to analyze the lesson cycle (e.g., lesson planning, lesson implementation, lesson outcomes), discuss the learning by design framework focusing on different knowledge processes, explain theoretical connections on multiliteracies especially multimodal meaning making, and end with practical suggestions.

Key Terms and Concepts

This example of pedagogy is situated within sociocultural perspectives toward language and literacy learning (Gee, 1992; Heath, 1983; Street, 2003), especially new literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2001; Larson & Marsh, 2005). This field of scholarship considers literacies as plural and socioculturally and sociomaterially situated meaning making practices. Specifically, we draw upon the theory and pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), recognizing student lifeworld diversity including their *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992) and valuing different modes (Kress, 2017) or forms of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023) to nurture meaningful and joyful learning experiences. The concept of design (Kalantzis & Cope, 2006) guides our pedagogical practices. The *learning by design* framework is an update on the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), which offers teachers and students "a repertoire of knowledge processes" to "orchestrate strategic moves" among various learning activities (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023, p. 24).

From Literacy to Multiliteracies

In Western society, being literate used to mean that people could sign their names in the 17th century and answer simple questions in the 19th century (Heydon et al., 2022). Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argued that the concept of literacy in the 21st century must include "much more than the traditional basics of reading and writing the national language" (p. 170) and take into consideration different cultural contexts for literacies and communication developments in language and technology. Leu et al. (2019) also wrote that "new technologies regularly and repeatedly transform previous literacies, continually redefining what it means to become literate" (p. 327). In other words, literacies are social and cultural practices that can afford opportunities and resources for people to make meaning of their ever-changing lifeworld (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023). The shift from literacy to multiliteracies is crucial to account for all the literacies people use in their daily lives

and what students are able to bring to classrooms. This gives the opportunity for students to joyfully and truly express who they are and what they know, considering that: “Too often, education privileges certain literacies. But children today have genius and, with it, multiple ways of showing meaning” (Muhammad, 2023, p. 37).

In this paper, we recognize the importance of two multis in the concept of multiliteracies, referring to multiple contexts (e.g., community, school) and multiple modes (e.g., written, visual, audio, etc.) in literacy learning to honour student interest, agency and choice as designers of meaning (New London Group, 1996).

The “What” of Multiliteracies: Design and Meaning

Design and literacy practices are interrelated. Cope and Kalantzis (2011) gave the concept of design deeper meanings by considering both human actions and the aesthetic aspects of artifacts. They used “Designs of Meaning,” including three key components: “(available) designs,” “designing,” and “(the re-)designed” to highlight design as “a process of transformation” (pp. 47-48). Later, Kalantzis and Cope (2023) updated their term as “Meaning as Design” and renamed those three components as “found designs,” “design work,” and “designed artifacts” to include a broader view (p. 5). *Found designs* refer to all that is available to individuals who like to make (new) designs, going beyond print-based resources. What individuals can find, or access, also reflects their social, cultural, and even religious contexts. *Design work* refers to the process and action of designing that is situated in context and relates to the designers’ *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992). The ultimate *designed artifacts* are unique in their own way. Learners or designers of meaning have gone through “a process of transformation, as the products of meaning re-enter the world as found designs” (p. 5). In addition, “no two products of newly constructed meaning are exactly the same” (p. 5). Therefore, individuals, including learners and teachers, are active and creative designers making use of what is available, going through the process of designing, and coming up with new designed artifacts with transformed meanings.

The “How” of Multiliteracies: Learning by Design via Knowledge Processes

The original work of the New London Group (1996) described four components of the pedagogy of multiliteracies that aimed to support learners as designers of meaning through “situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice” (p. 88). Kalantzis and Cope (2023) have updated these pedagogical components by situating them within *Learning by Design* (LBD), indicating that it is a pedagogical approach using “Knowledge Processes” (p. 9). There are four main knowledge processes” including “experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying” (p. 9). A knowledge process can be understood as “an activity type which represents a distinct way of making knowledge and of learning” (Kalantzis & Cope, n.d., para. 1). Kalantzis and Cope (2023, p. 9) explained that:

Whichever terminology is used to categorize learning activity types, the essential idea in the multiliteracies approach is that learning is a process of weaving backwards and forwards across and between these different kinds of pedagogical move, as required by pedagogical goals and learner needs.

The four main knowledge processes are further subdivided into eight knowledge processes, namely “experiencing the known and the new, conceptualizing by naming and with theory, analysing functionally and critically, and applying appropriately and creatively” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 187). It is important to note that there is no particular order for teachers to engage these knowledge processes in learning activities, and it is not always possible to include all eight processes in one literacy event. However, when teachers intentionally design learning with the LBD framework, it can promote teacher agency, recognize learner diversity, and transform teaching and learning to support different learner needs. In summary, planning multiliteracies learning with the LBD knowledge processes empowers educators to create more inclusive and joyful learning environments.

In the next section, we provide our professional context, share the design process for a narrative short story unit, and describe how different knowledge processes were enacted to transform student learning in a grade 8 ELA classroom in Manitoba.

Project Context

The teacher who enacted this design in her classroom, Mrs. Doering, is a lifelong learner valuing different ways of knowing and learning. She became a full-time grade 3/4 classroom teacher in 2017, teaching various subject areas in an urban inner-city school in Manitoba. She also taught grade 4 for five years and decided to move up to teach in a grade 7 and 8 class at another urban school. She earned her Master’s degree at the University of Manitoba (UM) in 2023. Dr. Du taught Mrs. Doering and introduced her to the pedagogy of multiliteracies. She also supervised Mrs. Doering’s comprehensive project in which Mrs. Doering discussed her perspectives on multiliteracies and shared her practices. After Mrs. Doering graduated from UM, their pedagogical discussions and collaboration continued, focusing on practical ways to apply multiliteracies pedagogy in classrooms. Their inquiry into multiliteracies took various forms, including reading, writing, documenting, experimenting, and exploring different possibilities for engaging students in multimodal meaning making. In brief, Dr. Du serves as Mrs. Doering’s mentor, promoting the concept of teachers as designers and supporting her professional growth in pedagogical conversations and academic writing projects. Mrs. Doering is a teacher who believes in student choice and engages with pedagogical practices through LBD. This paper shares one of the collaborative inquiries into multiliteracies with Mrs. Doering’s 2023 to 2024 grade 8 class. Students’ backgrounds and cultures in this classroom were diverse, with many being first or second-generation learners in Canada. Many of the families were educated in the Philippines or India. Learners demonstrated eagerness to learn, understand, and apply literacy concepts and demonstrated their creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills throughout this shared narrative short story unit. Please note that while this is not a formal research study, written consent has been gained to share student examples throughout the paper.

In what follows, we first provide an overview of the pedagogical design of the short story writing unit following the concept of *Meaning as Design*, including Found Designs, Design Work, and Designed Artifacts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023). Then, we detail how students engaged in different knowledge processes, which were purposefully woven into the unfolding experience of the unit and analyze the opportunities these afforded for joyful and impactful literacy learning.

The Teacher's Process of Unit Design

Found Designs: Joyfully Sharing Common Language

A wide range of multimodal texts was included in the found designs to prepare for the short story narrative unit. For example, the teacher designer or second author, Mrs. Doering, used the Google platform to share applicable literary terms, concepts, and ideas, accessing short clips, images, and using multiple fonts, allowing students to share similar language and access the same information in different ways. The information students learned about literary devices and elements (see Figure 1 for an example of Google Slides used in class) that construct a short story was written in their notebooks and shared on bulletin boards in the classroom to use when reading, creating, and talking about short stories. This information was discussed in grade 7 with students when they practiced working with different stories and demonstrating their understanding of each part of the plot.

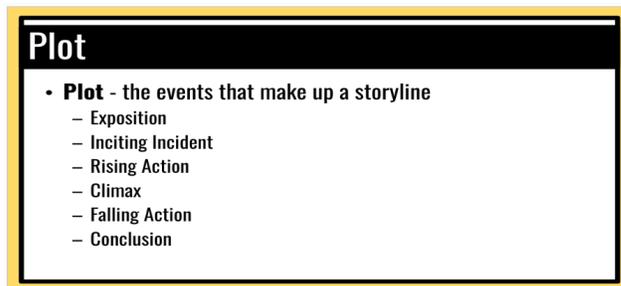


Figure 1. Plot in a Story

The short stories students accessed in class were found using both print and web-based sources. For example, students read stories from the Sightlines 8 textbook (Barlow-Kedves et al., 1999) and viewed stories on various online platforms such as CommonLit (<https://www.commonlit.org/>) and NewsELA (<https://newsela.com/>). Grade 8 student writing samples were also gathered from previous students and other provincial documents to show students' final writing pieces. Hands-on activities such as quick writes, oral storytelling, and (physical and digital) escape rooms have students actively engaged in different stories and give students multiple ways of experiencing different elements of short stories.

Design Work: Driving Design through Student Preferences

The design work considered student interests, learner preferences, and curriculum expectations. Mrs. Doering was fortunate to have the same students in grades 7 and 8. Having the same group of students for two years in a row allowed for the continuous use of shared vocabulary, knowledge, and processes the students were already comfortable with while building and refining what they had already learned. Mrs. Doering continued, through daily sharing circles, to discover students' interests and learn more about them. To begin the writing process of creating their own short stories, Mrs. Doering had students in a circle and started with the prompt, "If he had known what was going to happen, he never would have answered the phone that day." Every student had the opportunity to engage in the creation of a whole-class story, attempting to follow Freytag's Pyramid (see Figure 5).

Once the story was completed, students broke into pairs and used multiple brainstorming strategies (e.g. the SWBST strategy: Somebody Wanted But So Then) to construct their version of the story and created artifacts representing their short story, exploring multimodality and different ways of representing it.

Designed Artifacts: Amplifying Voices to Enjoy the Creative Process

Regarding the designed artifacts, students were given choices to decide how to brainstorm ideas and construct their short stories. Students generated and communicated their ideas through written and visual representations, such as using the narrative plot structure, Venn diagrams, and listing their ideas for possible characters, setting, problems, and solutions. Students created finalized multimodal artifacts of their short stories through different platforms such as stop motion, Google Slides, Jam Board, Minecraft, and typed pieces. These platforms were accessible through school technology and were taught throughout their school experiences.

In summary, the unit design process, guided by the meaning of design, allowed Mrs. Doering to draw upon her own funds of knowledge and student lifeworld experiences to create an authentic and meaningful learning experience. This planning process supports teachers as designers and students as meaning makers. The following section describes what knowledge processes were enacted through the LBD framework of the unit.

Pedagogical Practices via Knowledge Processes

Experiencing the Known and the New: Immerse in Multimodal Exploration

Mrs. Doering situated students' learning goals in the context of “experiencing the known” through sharing circles, daily discussions, book choices, and quick writes. For example, asking quick questions in a sharing circle such as “what is your favourite movie genre?” allowed students to connect with life at home, with their family and friends, and possibly the theatres—extending this question to find out what movie specifically gave new information and extended the possibility of bringing familiarity to the classroom. This values student voices and puts them in the center (Simmons et al., 2015). For this narrative short story unit, it was evident that the students had a strong interest in the horror genre and represented that in the books they wanted to read, favourite movies/ television shows, the responses to some quick writes done in the classroom, and conversations about favourite characters. This relates to one of Manitoba's newly published guiding principles for the design of learning, that is, learning being “authentic, social, and purposeful” (MEECL, 2024c, para. 3). Students entered the grade 8 classroom with common knowledge and terminology shared amongst them. This allowed Mrs. Doering to reference narrative plot structure and literary terms through posters posted in the classroom, notes students had taken, and references to work students did the previous year, such as reading, writing about, connecting to, and demonstrating short story structure. During the last school year, students worked on various assignments to learn and practice understanding literary elements. For example, one assignment had students work in groups to advertise and present multiple short stories, for example: “Pigeon Impossible,” a YouTube short film (Mighty Coconut, 2010) and “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant via [CommonLit](#). This allowed students to demonstrate their understanding, share their ideas with peers, and learn from one another.

Knowing Your Students: Utilizing Sharing Circles and Activating Prior Knowledge

During the sharing circle, Mrs. Doering referenced the narrative plot structure and other literary devices while going around and having students add to the short story creation, beginning with a prompt. For example, she started with an engaging hook, “The screech echoed through the wind...” Students then created a short story while standing in a circle, adding elements as the story progressed. This enforced student listening, engagement, joyful learning, and participation because they wanted to hear other students’ ideas, comment if part of the narrative plot structure did not make sense and add their thoughts when it was their turn. Talking or sharing circles can “build dialogue and create spaces of mutual respect for social discourse,” allowing students to “listen openly” (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021, p. 21). Once the story was completed as a whole class, students sometimes engaged in quick writing to create the story based on how they foresaw it. Many brought in past experiences, including interests that helped construct their identity; sometimes, they added characters from shows they had seen or elements of video games. Students could draw from their *funds of knowledge*, such as home literacy practices and interests, to school literacy work, which values student choice and bridges home literacy with school literacy (Bulfin & Koutsogiannis, 2012; Mills, 2015). Sometimes, the stories made complete sense and followed the narrative plot structure, but sometimes, it was difficult to follow as some students would add new characters at the end of their story or not have a clearly defined problem/solution or setting. These were excellent teachable moments in determining what made a great short story, allowing Mrs. Doering to offer on-the-spot feedback. Cope and Kalantzis (2023) echoed bringing in personal experiences as an integral part of learning to build new learning:

By inviting learners to bring the known into the class and to communicate that known, diversity of lifeworld experience and identity is positioned as an integral part of learning, a reference point of belonging that recognizes learners for who they are, and upon which to build new learning. (p. 15)

Activating prior knowledge is a vital strategy to begin any unit of study. This allows students to demonstrate what they already know from previous years and helps guide the educator on what to focus on for the unit. Based on writing submitted at the beginning of the grade 8 year, Mrs. Doering found it essential to review revising, editing, and peer reviewing as foundational writing tools students needed to work on. A review of short story elements was also necessary, as it was not fresh in the students' minds, and it was important that they had a good grasp of that. For the unit described in this paper, Mrs. Doering learned through previous writing samples and talking with the other teachers that students needed to spend more time editing and revising their work. This process allowed them to slow down, critically analyze others' work and their own and demonstrate skills in revising and editing. Indeed, writing is a process that involves different levels of thinking (e.g. brainstorming, critical thinking) and doing, such as drafting, reviewing, revising, and editing (Calkins, 2022). This project has also highlighted the varied interests in modes of representation (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2017; Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022). Students were encouraged to put effort into the writing process with their peers and then collaboratively create their representation of the short story. The whole class looked at exemplar writing samples provided online from the BC English Language Arts Curriculum documents

(Government of British Columbia, 2024), one that fully met their expectations called “The Night Stalker” and one that exceeded their expectations titled “Be Careful what you Wish For.” Mrs. Doering also used anonymous writing samples from previous grade 8 classes with student permission. Sharing real-life student writing samples is a good strategy to help students see themselves as writers and encourage them to get started. It can “motivate students to listen intently to each student sharing with the goal of incorporating novel ideas into their own compositions” (Lewis, 2024, p. 768).

Responding to Student Learning: Exploring Different Texts and Modes with Joy

To enter the short story unit, Mrs. Doering wanted the whole unit to have different access points for students. Strictly paper-pencil tasks would cause disengagement and not the same level of enjoyment. The first short story introduced to the grade 8 students was “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl, which is an interesting and complex short story. The students spent half a class reading the short story posted in their Google Classroom, and it was evident to Mrs. Doering that they needed more of a visual and/or hands-on approach to this story based on the questions they asked and the confusion that arose. That prompted Mrs. Doering to discuss the story with the students, have them converse amongst themselves, and then bring in an escape room (see Figure 2). The escape room activity focused on parts of the story in smaller amounts at a time through vocabulary work, figurative language, comprehension questions, and creating the narrative plot structure while students worked together in collaborative groups to break out and understand the literary elements of the story connected to the lessons. This type of game-based learning (Nicholson, 2015) can promote active learning, increase literacy engagement, create enjoyment, boost student motivation, and support different learning preferences (Bober, 2010; Gee, 2008; Veach, 2019).



Figure 2. Escape Rooms

Note. The escape rooms were purchased online via Teachers Pay Teachers “[The Tell-Tale Heart](#)” and “[The Landlady](#)”

Conceptualizing by Naming and with Theory: Understand Key Elements

To support students and give them common terminology and structure in their writing, Mrs. Doering provided students with notes about the different literary devices and elements included in the narrative short story plot structure. Some of the notes (see Figure 3) were also shared on the wall and reiterated as one of many lessons on the whiteboard in the classroom so that students could view them when working with a variety of short stories. Written or printed notes with colours and tables (Hegarty, 2011; Salminen et al., 2010) can help students to recall what they know or have learned and can “improve understanding, memory and thinking” (Schraw & Richmond, 2022, p. 81).

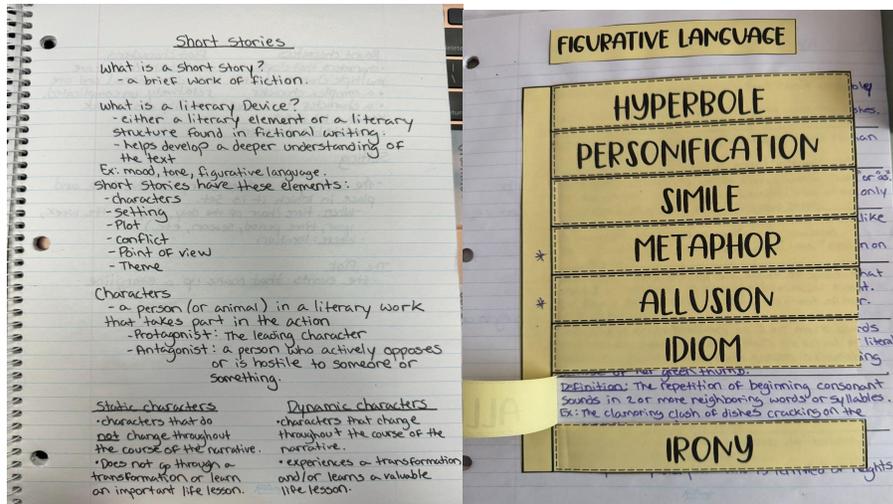


Figure 3. Notebook Example from Grade 8 class

Teaching and reviewing the elements through different forms of meaning (image, text, and speech) ensures that students can use vocabulary to help plan and structure their writing (Jewitt et al., 2016). For this short story unit, it was evident that students used many brainstorming techniques such as listing out their ideas on paper by connecting to different elements of the story such as characters, setting, problem solution or using the narrative plot structure diagram (also known as Freytag’s pyramid, see Figure 4) and mapping out how their story would flow through images, discussions, and writing or multiple modes like visual, oral, and written modes (New London Group, 1996). For example, one student had trouble starting their story; they needed a template to see exactly what they needed to plan out. Mrs. Doering wrote a template on loose-leaf paper to help the student get started and discussed each element with them, so that they could start getting ideas flowing (see Figure 5).

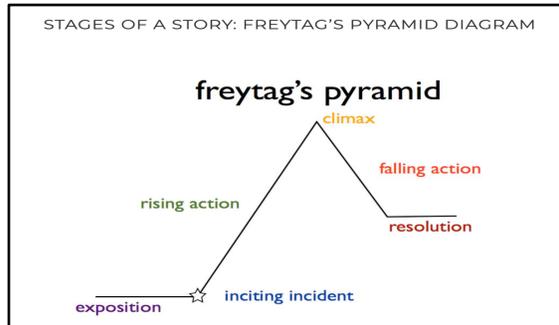


Figure 4. Freytag's Pyramid (Glatch, 2024)

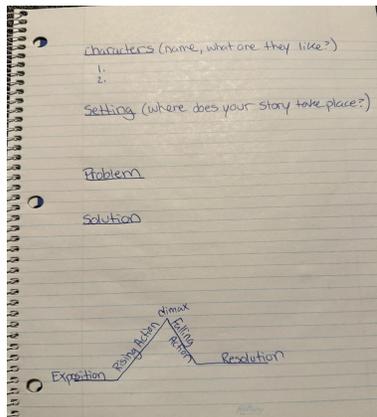


Figure 5. Examples of Story Planning

Note. Mrs. Doering gave students a few suggestions on how to brainstorm their ideas and sat with them to help them brainstorm their story.

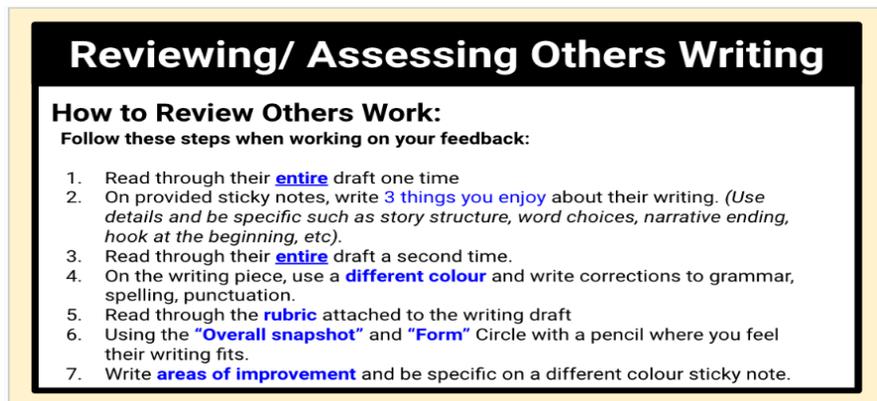
All the students conversed with one another to decide on features in their story they wanted to be included, which point of view the story would be told from, who the characters would be, what setting they wanted to create, what problem they wanted their characters to engage in and what the solution could potentially be. Collaboration took place in both oral discussions and written drafts, resulting in positive effects on the learning process and outcomes. According to the newly launched *Framework for Learning* (MEECL, 2024a, para. 2), the competency of collaboration is significant in learning as it:

facilitates the co-construction of meaning to support collective understanding through the exchange and negotiation of ideas. The process of collaboration demands deeper reflection, an openness to different perspectives, and the sharing of responsibilities and planning. Effective collaboration results in the creation of something better.

Moreover, the competency of communication is relevant here as it “involves interacting with others and allowing for a message to be received, expressed, and understood in multiple ways and for a variety of purposes” (MEECL, 2024b, para. 1). Communicating ideas using multiple modes allows learners to freely express their thoughts in their preferred modes and honours student choice, voice, and agency; thus, it can enhance their literacy engagement (Jewitt & Kress, 2003).

Analyzing Functionally and Critically: Affirm Writer Identity

Once students had a rough draft of their writing, they participated in a lesson about peer review. The lesson took two 40-minute periods, and students were shown research-based information by Dr. John Spencer and information from ReadWriteThink.org. After the discussion about what peer review is, why it is an important part of the writing process, as well as how to conduct it themselves, students practiced peer review on a sample piece of writing in groups of 2-3; they were able to discuss the process, how it went for them, and any confusions they may have still had. Next, Mrs. Doering swapped student writing with another class to coordinate peer reviews. Each group gave feedback on sticky notes and were instructed to provide three things they liked and three things to improve. Students used a different coloured writing apparatus to indicate where changes could be made based on the directions given on the Google Slides show (See Figure 6) and what was taught, practiced, and discussed in class regarding peer reviewing. When writers got their pieces back, they read through the yellow and green sticky notes from the other students in another class and decided how to revise and edit their stories based on peer feedback (see Figure 7). When students knew that other people would read their writing, they felt empowered to create something exciting and engaging as they had an authentic audience and meaningful purpose (Yu, 2024). “Real literacy happens in a community of people who can make meaningful connections. Peer review facilitates the type of social interaction and collaboration that is vital for student learning” (ReadWriteThink, n.d., para. 3).



Reviewing/ Assessing Others Writing

How to Review Others Work:
Follow these steps when working on your feedback:

1. Read through their **entire** draft one time
2. On provided sticky notes, write **3 things you enjoy** about their writing. (Use details and be specific such as story structure, word choices, narrative ending, hook at the beginning, etc).
3. Read through their **entire** draft a second time.
4. On the writing piece, use a **different colour** and write corrections to grammar, spelling, punctuation.
5. Read through the **rubric** attached to the writing draft
6. Using the **"Overall snapshot"** and **"Form"** Circle with a pencil where you feel their writing fits.
7. Write **areas of improvement** and be specific on a different colour sticky note.

Figure 6. Peer Review Instruction

Note. The slide was up for student reference while peer reviewing others' writing.

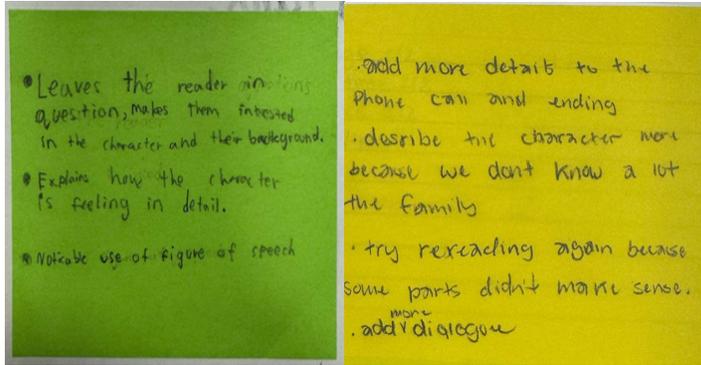


Figure 7. Student Feedback on Writing Example

Note. The yellow sticky notes indicated suggestions to improve the short story, and the green sticky notes were elements of the story that they thought their peers did well.

Applying Appropriately and Creatively: Supporting Joyful and Creative Designers

Once the revision and editing process had occurred, students had to decide how to share their short stories with the rest of the class. They have had the opportunity to use multiple platforms (Jewitt, 2006) throughout their middle school experiences and brainstormed ways they could represent their story as a class. The ideas included using the Minecraft platform (see Figure 8), Google Jam board, Google Slides, voice-over text, stop motion, plasticine scenes (see Figure 10), and video creation. The joy was evident among students, especially when they engaged in the process of using different modes and materials to design, publish, and share this story project with their peers. The depth of this project enabled students to access writing and create meaningful and multimodal pieces while learning, practicing, and engaging in editing, revising, and using literary elements.

Student Sample 1: Having Fun with Story Writing via Minecraft

One example of joyful literacy connected to the knowledge process of applying creatively is represented in Figure 8. This figure gives a snapshot of two students' final published Minecraft piece. They used the Minecraft platform based on their shared interest and knowledge. Choices of representation enhanced students' agency and engagement (Lim, 2024) as it allowed them to develop the scenes of their story, the characters, typed-out portions, kinesthetic movement online, screen recording, and voice-over text.



Figure 8. Minecraft Story Titled "She's Mine."

Student Sample 2: Having Fun Designing and Constructing by Making a Book

Another example that demonstrates joyful literacy learning connected to the knowledge process of applying creatively is seen in Figure 9. These students had the same starting point with the prompt given in the sharing circle. They brainstormed ideas for their literary elements and then decided together on the mode of representation. The final product ended up being a crafted journal made to look as if it were written in the past. They first sketched ideas on a storyboard and wrote elements of the short story on paper. They worked through the revising and editing process and decided they wanted to have a bound journal as their final designed artifact. They developed the pages of their book using different fonts and colours on Google Slides. These were printed out to the size they needed to match their cardboard bookbinding. To create the outside of their book, they used cardboard, paint, hot glue, Sharpie, and velcro for the strap. To bind the book together, they used the school's binding machine. They used different modes (e.g., written, visual, spatial, tactile), tools, and materials to showcase their short story. The joy they experienced throughout this process was also evident in the amount of time, effort, and engagement they had.

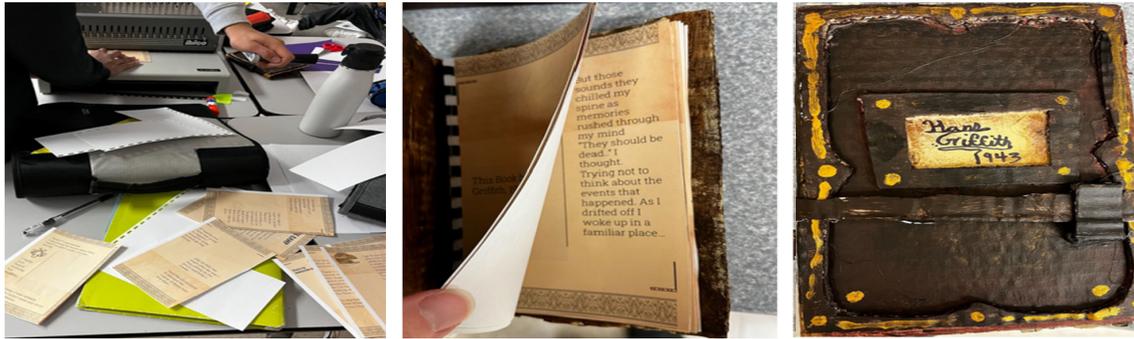


Figure 9. A Book Example

Note. Two students created a book and learned to bind together, “Hans Griffith 1943.”

Student Sample 3: Having Fun Constructing a Diorama

The third example is a creative design using paper, cardboard, and modelling clay. These two students decided to create the last scene of their short story (see Figure 10), leaving the viewer not understanding the constructed scene until the story was read fully to the end. They worked together to brainstorm a structure for their story that defined characters, settings, a problem and a solution. Both students enjoyed using plasticine in their projects and were particular about the details, including the chair being tipped over, the clock on the wall, and the person's specific details, like the vivid facial expression. This helped bring their story to life by adding characteristics and setting a scene for how their story ended. This is also an excellent example demonstrating how students can choose when to use which mode to represent their thinking and story making. This example highlights that commonly found materials can be transformed into meaningful texts to serve a particular communication purpose in a school literacy project.



Figure 10. “Don’t Text and Drive”

Assessment Honours Agency in Meaning Making

When it comes to assessment, students in grade 8 were allowed to use skills they had acquired from inside and outside the English Language Arts Classroom to develop their writing while following a rubric developed (see Appendix), discussed, and agreed upon as a class. The rubric was helpful for students to reference back to during the entire writing project. The rubric also provided a guide for Mrs. Doering (Cope & Kalantzis, 2011) to reference back to at any point during the process. Assessment in multimodal projects can be challenging to conduct and stay valid; however, when it involves students as the co-designers of the evaluation and users, it makes sense and promotes learner responsibility and agency. As MEECL (2024e, para. 1) argues,

positioning learners as active participants and co-designers of their learning enhances self-efficacy, so that they may understand why, how, and when to use effective practices, processes, and strategies. As learners grow in independence and assume greater agency and responsibility for making choices in their learning and well-being, they have the opportunity to engage in flexible, reflective, and critical thinking with a voice in how they live, grow, learn, and work.

Indeed, “planning with the learner, the context, and the ELA curriculum in mind creates opportunities for the co-construction of inclusive learning experiences and assessment practices where the diverse learning needs, abilities, and interests of each learner are met” (MEECL, 2024c, para. 1). Teachers are designers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2011) who also put learners in the center in the design process, and learners are also designers in their learning process.

To summarize the knowledge processes enacted in this short story unit, students began with experiencing the known and the new through found designs and immersing themselves in multimodal meaning making. Students then conceptualized the short story structure, made connections, and shared a common language through naming. Students also analyzed mentor texts and their peers’ writing critically and functionally. Lastly, students applied what they learned appropriately and creatively by composing stories and designing multimodal texts. The multiliteracies approach “makes use of learners’ unique

ways of knowing, being and doing, thereby creating an accessible and more inclusive learning environment that supports the development of languages and literacies in all areas of life” (MEECL, 2024d, para. 4). The *Learning by Design* approach to planning and enacting this short story unit allowed the teacher, Mrs. Doering, to draw upon students’ lifeworld experiences to create authentic and meaningful lessons. The LDB framework empowers teachers and students with agency to design meaning by valuing their backgrounds, choices, and creativity and developing their design sensibilities through different knowledge processes.

Final Thoughts

In this paper, we focus on the how of multiliteracies by describing the ways we enacted the *Learning by Design* approach through knowledge processes. Student lifeworld diversity has been highlighted in their multimodal creations, and teachers as designers and students as meaning makers are celebrated in a classroom. Joyful literacy learning (Muhammad, 2023) is most evident in the knowledge process of applying appropriately and creatively (Cope & Kalantzis, 2011; 2023). We end our paper with practical considerations for those who would like to consider design, use knowledge processes in their teaching, and implement multimodal and transformative learning in their context.

First, we highlight three *Meaning as Design* elements (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023) used in the above short story unit (see Figure 11). Regarding Found Designs, we encourage readers to rethink what can be considered as Found Designs, going beyond physical, tangible, and online texts, to consider what students and teachers have in their *funds of knowledge*. For example, funds of knowledge include texts and practices that are not traditionally recognized at school, such as oral storytelling from Black and Indigenous students and their families, and examples of pop culture (e.g., music, movies, manga), especially those from traditionally marginalized groups. School literacy learning should create a space for students to bring their FULL identities and connect with out-of-school literacies. Regarding Design Work, we encourage readers to pay attention to the process of doing the design, including but not limited to discussions, creations, and interactions with peers, materials, and space (e.g., space considerations, utilization, and negotiations relating to text choice such as space on paper and space on screen). Regarding Designed Artifacts, we want to emphasize that student choice and voice are represented and communicated in different ways. It is also important to note that the success of a student project should not solely rely on the final design, but consider the whole process of designing and account for the challenges students encounter and the ways they are solved.

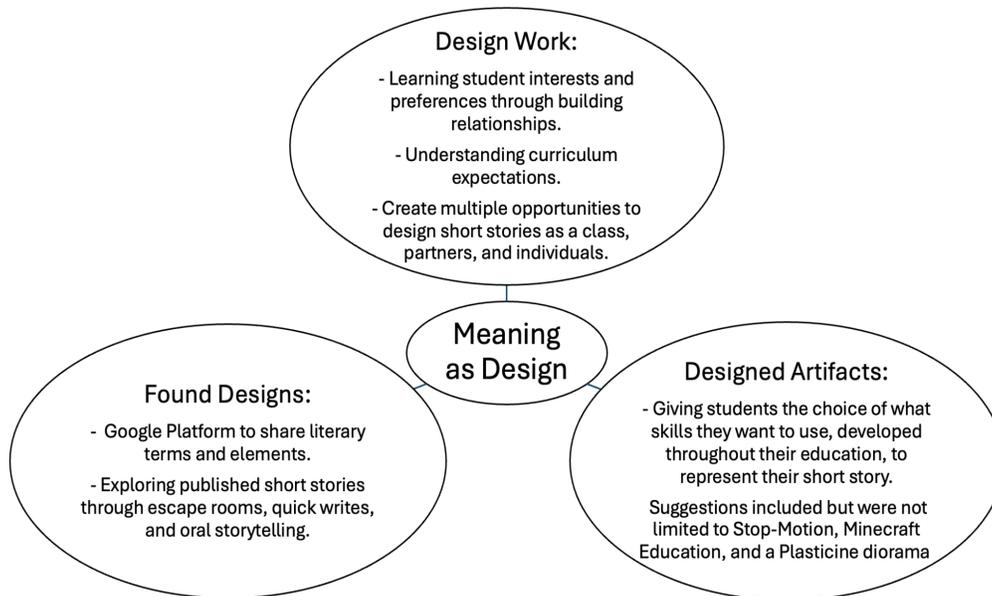
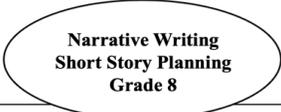


Figure 11. Meaning as Design from Teacher Planning Perspective

Second, we summarize the ways to facilitate knowledge process planning in Table 1. In addition, factors such as time, resources, and scaffolding should be considered in teacher planning. Aspects of motivation, creativity, and alternative assessment are essential elements that can be harnessed through relationship building and creating joyful moments in the classroom context. Reflection can also be built in with guided questions and can be done in multiple modes, such as written, oral, and visual representations. Indeed, learning can be fun even in upper grades like Grades 7 and 8. Practical resources can be found via Mrs. Doering's [Multiliteracies Padlet](#).

Table 1
Knowledge Processes in Short Story Unit

the KNOWN	EXPERIENCING	the NEW	APPROPRIATELY	APPLYING	CREATIVELY
by being in the student's world	by being in new worlds		by doing things the right way		by doing things in interesting ways
Students expressed a common interest in the horror genre. I taught the same students ELA in Grade 7. The prior knowledge was built from our learning in last year's short story unit. Elements such as: - Narrative Plot Structure - Writing Endings - Using dialogue in paragraphs	- Use digital and paper escape rooms to break down the short stories shared into smaller chunks for comprehension. - Share written narrative short stories from previous grade 8 students.		- Transformation of knowledge and understanding to create an engaging narrative short story. - Writing stories using all the literary elements practiced and taught in class.		- Using a sentence stem and what we have learned in class to create a narrative short story. - Multimodal representations allow students to take what has been learned and use their skills in a different setting to create and demonstrate their learning.
					
by NAMING	CONCEPTUALISING	with THEORY	FUNCTIONALLY	ANALYSING	CRITICALLY
by connecting the same type of thing	by connecting different types of things		by thinking about what something does		by thinking about who benefits
- Naming the terminology of the narrative plot structure in already published pieces. - Following the rules of conventions of writing. - Editing and revising pieces of writing. - Adding dialogue into narrative writing.	- Standing in a circle as a class and creating short stories, working through the narrative plot structure, using a given prompt from the teacher.		Conducting peer reviews with other students to share written pieces and gather feedback and suggestions to help revise and edit writing.		The choices students have been given to represent their narrative short stories create robust learning and ways of representation that allow all students to gain confidence in their skills, knowledge, and purpose for narrative writing.

Third, we acknowledge that enacting LBD might involve pedagogical rethinking and perhaps theoretical (re)orientation toward sociocultural and sociomaterial literacies. It takes more than time and tools for teachers to put knowledge processes into action. Local contexts, including curricular context, can also play a role. Teachers should trust themselves and the process, valuing their professional knowledge, and design what they can with what they have based on their students' needs and interests. We hope our paper helps teachers begin considering knowledge processes, keeping in mind that choice coexists with complexity, creativity coexists with manageable challenges, and critical thinking coexists with citizenship building.

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Nicole Doering is a grade 7/8 ELA and Science teacher at Meadows West School in the Winnipeg School Division in Manitoba. She has earned her Master of Education degree from the Faculty of Education in the University of Manitoba. She is passionate about digital literacies and multiliteracies.

Appendix

Task: As a class, we will decide what needs to be part of our final short story rubric.

Think about the elements of a short story we have discussed, viewed, and learned about.

At your table groups, discuss the elements that should be part of your final rubric.

Bring those thoughts forward, and I will type them below.

Collaborative Story Rubric (P19)

Criteria from the students:

- The story should be built from the prompt
- The prompt should fit into your story naturally. The exact words may not be in the story.
- There should be a plot sequence in the story; conflict, climax, rising action, characters, falling action resolution, conclusion, setting (not in this sequence).
- Brainstorm, cloud bubble, storyboard
- First Draft
- Revision and Editing
- Final Draft

R14 Prompt Story Rubric

Criteria from the students:

- Effort
- Dialogue
- Climax
- Rising Action - Falling Action
- Punctuation, grammar, paragraph structure.
- Characters - protagonist and antagonist
- Connection to the story prompt
- Setting
- Creative storytelling
- Originality
- Include a beginning, middle and end

Grade 8 Short Story Writing Rubric

Name: _____ Homeroom: _____ Due Date: _____

Task: Using the provided writing prompt in class, create a creative short story with a partner.

Intent: Work collaboratively with a partner to create an engaging short story that consists of many revisions and editing to create a published piece of writing.

ELA Framework Connection: Learners experiment with different strategies and processes (e.g. finding inspiration, imagining, visualizing, creating a plan, finding focus/purpose, using mentor texts, co-constructing criteria, drafting, revising, editing), creating a variety of oral, print, visual, digital, and multimodal texts for specific audiences and purposes.

Global Competencies: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking

Criteria: Co-constructed with students from both grade 8 classes

Rough draft/s are handed in with the final product	/2
Evidence of revisions and editing is seen throughout the rough draft/s	/4
The prompt fits the story naturally	/2
Effort is demonstrated through the process of writing	/6
Evidence of risk-taking with a final published piece	/2
Modes selected for publishing the piece are engaging and creative	/4

	4	3	2	1
Overall snapshot	The story is expressive, featuring some engaging ideas or language. Form and style help to develop and enhance meaning; some emotional impact	The story is clear and logical; develops a theme, central idea, or problem with some detail. Uses the required form.	The story is direct and complete, with some detail, although ideas are not fully developed, and parts are flawed by errors. Attempts required form	The story attempts at the required type but is seriously flawed by problems in logic, style, and mechanics. May be very short.
Form -Dialogue -Characters -BME -Setting -Sequence	-engaging beginning reveals problem -events follow a logical sequence -setting is clear -characters have individuality -effective dialogue	-beginning establishes problem -events develop logically -setting is clear -characters are described -appropriate dialogue	-beginning, middle, and end are evident -series of related events; focus may wander -characters presented through direct description -dialogue may sound unnatural	series of events without problem or resolution -often loses focus; ends abruptly -focuses on action; characters are rarely described -dialogue is often confusing

Total **/28**

Write down who reviewed your rough draft/s: _____