

SCAFFOLDING, MULTILITERACIES, AND READING CIRCLES

Wendy Cumming-Potvin
Murdoch University

In this qualitative study, that took place in a coeducational government school in Western Australia, I adopt a social-constructivist perspective of learning (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986) to examine reading in an elementary classroom. The focus of this article is Nicholas, a grade-7 boy, who was identified as challenged by the literacy curriculum. The analysis utilizes a multiliteracies framework (The New London Group, 2000) and the four resources reading model (Luke & Freebody, 1999) to interpret Nicholas' progress during reading circles. Results suggest that multiliteracies, which interweave scaffolding, diverse texts, and meaningful tasks, can encourage agency for student learning.

Key words: literacy identity, scaffolding, reading, pedagogy of multiliteracies, reading resources model, socio-economically disadvantaged students, school literacy-assessment

Dans cette étude quantitative, qui a été menée dans une école gouvernementale mixte en Australie-Occidentale, l'auteure adopte un point de vue socioconstructiviste sur l'apprentissage (Rogoff, 1990 ; Vygotsky, 1986) en vue d'analyser l'aptitude à la lecture dans une classe du primaire. L'article porte essentiellement sur Nicholas, un garçon de 7e année, aux prises avec des difficultés par rapport au programme de littératie. L'analyse fait appel à un cadre de multilittératies (The New London Group, 2000) et à un modèle de lecture axé sur quatre ressources (Luke & Freebody, 1999) en vue d'interpréter les progrès de Nicholas au cours des cercles de lecture. Les résultats donnent à penser que les multilittératies, qui combinent soutien à l'apprentissage, textes divers et tâches intéressantes, peuvent encourager les élèves à apprendre.

Mots clés : littératie, soutien à l'apprentissage, lecture, pédagogie des multilittératies, élèves défavorisés, évaluation de la littératie à l'école

Recently, intense neo-conservative media coverage and Commonwealth initiatives such as the National Inquiry into Literacy Teaching (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005) have re-fuelled attacks over how literacy is taught in Australian elementary and secondary schools. The public debate about literacy has frequently taken a simplistic perspective in Australia, focusing on a perceived achievement crisis (Doecke, Howie, & Sayer, 2006; Durrant, 2006) particularly on boys' failing scores in literacy (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Martino & Kehler, 2006). Although the subject of boys' literacy performance is clearly interwoven as part of current educational debate in many English speaking countries (Love & Hamston, 2003), considerations of how boys construct their literacy identity at home and school must be increasingly embedded within discussions of boys' under-achievement. More particularly, the complexity of factors related to student achievement in reading must be interpreted with caution. Although results from the 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey indicated that in all participating Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (except for Liechtenstein), girls outperformed boys in reading, the survey also indicated that the impact of socio-economic and cultural capital remains highly significant for student achievement (see also International Reading Association, 2005).

Transformed global and local learning communities (Carrington, 2001) and increasingly multiple literacy practices make simplified explanations inadequate for understanding student achievement in the twenty-first century. Luke and Elkins (2002) argue that new and multiliteracies must allow students, schools, and communities to navigate unprecedented cultural, social, economic, and political changes. To support boys' as well as girls' educational achievements for the new millenium, Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, and Muspratt (2002) recommend cooperation across schools and pedagogical strategies to promote democratic and purposeful learning, including improved professional development and technological support. Lingard, Martino, Mills, and Bahr (2002) suggest engaging students in tasks of high intellectual calibre that connect the classroom to the world. Such recommendations point to pedagogies for the twenty-first century that

are underpinned by scaffolding and supportive relationships, which draw on children's cultural and intellectual resources.

In light of the debate surrounding the perceived literacy crisis and the call from a number of Australian academics to support students' achievement through a multi-layered lens rather than a deficit model (Alloway et al., 2002; Imms, 2000; Martino, Mills, & Lingard, 2005), I explore in this article how the convergence of multiliteracies, scaffolding, and reading circles in a grade-7 class offered possibilities for literacy development in a supportive environment. I focus on selected results about a grade-7 boy, Nicholas, who engaged with diverse partners in a variety of settings and shaped his literate identity (Anstey & Bull, 2004) as scaffolding unfolded at home and school. I place particular emphasis on a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000) and the four reading resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1999) in my analysis and it is informed by a social-constructivist view of learning, which acknowledges the wider social cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1991) of learning and pedagogy.

MULTILITERACIES FROM A SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE: BOYS IN HOME AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Since the 1980s, scholars in English speaking countries such as the USA, Canada, England, and Australia have used social-constructivist research to investigate literacy practices to understand student achievement in both school and home contexts (Gee, 2003; Heath, 1983; Toohey, 2000; Wells, 1985). Increasing interest in boys' literacy achievement has resulted in researchers closely observing the multiple literacy practices of boys. Gilmore (1986) noted that groups of grades-6 to -8 boys, who were described by their teachers as lacking in ability, played *Dungeons and Dragons*, a game that contains complex expository text, such as interpreting charts and technical information. Because these boys, guided by peer assistance, often read more challenging texts than those used for school assignments, Gilmore concluded that teachers should not limit classroom testing to formal instructional contexts.

As part of a longitudinal study involving socio-economically disadvantaged students and the development of multiliteracies in an Australian elementary school, Nixon (2003) constructed a case study of

Joseph, who was described by teachers as limited in producing literacy output. After examining several of Joseph's work samples, Nixon identified features that were missed by the school's assessment reporting structures. For example, Joseph could integrate visual and verbal text in a playful manner to communicate ideas for technology-driven projects. Nixon reported that school literacy-assessment practices profoundly affect the type of competencies highlighted to teachers and parents and called for an expanded definition of literacy that includes visual representation to assess student achievement.

Using social-constructivist research to investigate boys' literacy achievement, scholars have increasingly investigated informal and formal literacy practices through technology-mediated activities. Using ethnographic methods to examine the multiple literacy practices of early adolescent boys in Canadian schools, Blair and Sanford (2004) concluded that far from being illiterate, these boys were highly skilled in diverse visual and technology-driven activities, often played through guided peer participation in informal settings. Because the boys used material in sophisticated ways, such as scanning websites to look for computer game cheats, comparing statistics about trading-card characters, and reading comic books, the researchers identified common elements to these multiple literacy practices.

Results from such studies reinforce the need for teachers to be aware of and draw on students' out of school literacy experiences to provide scaffolding in classroom pedagogy. More specifically concerning boys' literacy performance, these results point to the limited scope of many school curricula to evaluate boys' literacy as a broad set of practices, including potentially powerful skills such as surfing the net, engaging with computer soft and hardware (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Love & Hamston, 2003), or playing interactive board or videogames. Bourdieu (1991) argued a relationship exists between the type of cultural capital a child brings to school and the extent to which school curricula recognize and build on this capital. More recently, researchers have suggested that a child's literacy identity is characterized by life and school-based discourse worlds that overlap and inform one another (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). The social nature of learning suggests that student success and interest in literacy is dynamic and

dependent on diverse contexts and partners, such as school peer groups, friendship groups, and family (McCarthy, 2001). Thus, although students construct their identities as literacy learners, they benefit from social interaction and tasks that are scaffolded in home and school contexts.

Drawing on a social-constructivist perspective of learning (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986) with a particular emphasis on multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000) and the four resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1999), I tracked the progress of Nicholas, a grade-7 boy, who engaged in literacy tasks during a qualitative study, that took place over one school term. I used a holistic approach to observe Nicholas as he engaged with a variety of partners, under diverse contexts, including reading circle discussions. Within the framework of the study, while Nicholas constructed his identity as a literacy learner (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003), I highlighted the metaphor of scaffolding in his home and school settings.

SCAFFOLDING, LITERACY, AND READING CIRCLES

Scholars have developed the metaphor of scaffolding from social-constructivist theory to describe how adults support children's learning through assistance (Bruner, 1983; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Identifying at least two developmental levels to describe children's learning and capabilities, Vygotsky (1986), in his seminal work, explicated the metaphor of scaffolding. The first or actual developmental level indicates a child's level of mental functioning on an independent task; the second level measures a child's accomplishments with the assistance of others. The zone of proximal development, argued Vygotsky, was the difference between a child's independent and potential levels of functioning, the latter being triggered through scaffolding.

Recently, some researchers have focussed on studying scaffolding in classrooms from a perspective that emphasizes either teacher or task support. Hammond and Gibbons (2001) and Maloch (2002) explored classroom scaffolding as temporary teacher support for children. This generally linear process is characterized by co-operation and a patient adult who assesses progress and adjusts assistance when necessary. The

adult gradually transfers control to the child, who is ultimately able to perform a task independently. Donovan and Smolkin (2002) focussed on the metaphor of scaffolding to explore the level of support embedded in diverse writing tasks for groups of children (from kindergarten to grade 5). The authors concluded that, although context was important, different tasks supported children's ability to demonstrate writing genre knowledge to various degrees. Tasks were plotted on a continuum of descriptors ranging from providing no support to offering a great deal of support.

Some researchers have examined the metaphor of scaffolding from a complementary and interdependent perspective that considers more closely the apprentice's and more experienced learner's engagement when problem solving (Comber, 2003; Paris & Cross, 1988; Rogoff, 1990; Stone, 1993). Rogoff concluded as children learned to problem solve through collaboration and shared understanding with various partners (such as caregivers and peers), cognitive development took place in routine social activities across cultures. Through a process of guided participation, partners creatively and jointly construct new understandings, drawing on their previous knowledge of society's cultural tools (Leont'ev, 1981; Rogoff, 1990). Stone (1993) claimed that the potential for learning within the zone of proximal development was not dependent on fixed attributes of the learner, but rather varied as a function of interpersonal relationships and interaction between participants. Similarly, Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw, and Van Kraayenoord (2003) argued that a phenomenon titled "multi-tiered scaffolding" explicated how a group of elementary school-aged children extended their French second language learning through peer, sibling, and adult-child interaction that spanned diverse tasks, time frames, and settings.

To foster learning environments where students are encouraged to question language and respond critically to texts (Martino, 1999; O'Brien, 2001), scaffolding through a range of literacy strategies has become increasingly important for twenty-first century classrooms. One strategy, known as reading circles (also known through various terms such as literature discussion groups or literature circles), has been described as students collaboratively, critically, and personally

discussing literature, which can involve novels, picture books, poetry, newspapers, or magazines (Sanders-Brunner, 2004). Aiming to deepen students' understanding of texts through discussions about plot, language, or personal experience, reading circles have become increasingly popular in classrooms, with resources focusing primarily on successful implementation and teachers' facilitating roles (Burda, 2000; Daniels, 2002; Schlick Noe, & Johnson, 1999).

Implemented in primary and secondary classrooms, educators have examined reading circles from a framework of social dynamics that views interpretations of texts as embedded in social performance while students construct and reconstruct their identities (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Lewis, 1998; Maloch, 2005). Following observations of teacher- and student-led literature discussion groups in a grade-five and -six class over a year, Lewis recommended that teachers balance the acknowledgment of local and dominant norms with the possibility of allowing students to potentially transform these norms. Examining the participation and identity construction of two African American boys in a grade-three classroom, Maloch (2005) suggested that literature discussion groups offered possibilities for students to engage in the classroom community to enhance cultural capital and learning. Such findings reinforce the importance of teachers offering scaffolding to capitalize on students' strengths, particularly for those students perceived to have less powerful positions in the classroom.

Recently, researchers employing qualitative studies investigating the integration of online components in literature discussion groups have explored challenges and benefits of using computer-mediated technology. Love (2002) discussed the challenges faced by a group of English secondary teachers who incorporated online discussion threads into a novel study with a group of 11 students. Teachers introduced themselves as moderators of the "online discussion tool" and made the expectations about frequency and quality of responses explicit to students. However, Love's interview data indicated that in the online environment, students appeared to focus on responding to teachers' questions rather than other students' contributions. As a result, teachers began to consider the importance of modeling scaffolding for student-

student interaction that aimed for critical, courteous, and articulate online responses.

To connect students' out-of-school, online lives with English Language Arts, Albright, Purohit, and Walsh (2002) used Internet chat rooms with 55 grade-eight students. Teachers invited students to construct and maintain their own chatrooms for electronic book discussions. Although results indicated that students responded in a new melange of spoken and written text, in some instances, they reproduced traditional Initiation, Response, Evaluation (IRE) patterns. Expressing concern about their appropriation of students' synchronous use of chatrooms, the authors caution that this process could be regarded as colonizing an aspect of youth culture. Albright, Purohit, and Walsh also raised broader questions such as how can teachers appreciate and understand the widening variety of textual possibilities and how can schools remain relevant to students who are able to learn on demand and extensively out of school?

As such, it can be argued that further research is needed to explore the processes through which factors such as setting (e.g., informal, formal), relationships (e.g., peers or adult-child) and differences in tools (e.g., conventional or multimodal texts) influence student learning in scaffolded literacy. Moreover, investigating the evolution of scaffolding as students participate in reading circles with a network of partners, settings, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-mediated pedagogy will extend knowledge about children's level of development (see Vygotsky, 1978) from various support structures. Aiming to deepen educators' understanding of scaffolding, I have based this article on a qualitative study that tracked elementary school students' experiences in understanding, analyzing, and adopting critical stances towards texts during reading circles. Blending the study of literature with the use of ICT, the intervention provided tasks to engage students in constructing, applying, and adopting knowledge via supportive relationships.

THE STUDY: FIELD SITE AND METHODS

The field site for my larger study involved an elementary co-educational government or public school, located in the south metropolitan region of

Perth, Western Australia. The socio-economic status of the catchment area was considered middle-class, with families generally being native speakers of English. Families were predominantly dual income parents who were often employed as tradespeople or small business owners.

Using a qualitative research design to study one classroom, I gained in-depth descriptions of participants' literacy practices through a range of data derived from work samples, interviews, and direct observation (involving note taking and audio/videotaping). Patton (2002) argues that the description and understanding of both external observable behaviours and internal states, such as values, attitudes, and perceptions, are possible by entering the world of interacting individuals (Denzin, 1978) or field sites. More particularly, an action research component emphasized collaboration with the selected grade-7 class, consisting of 12 male and nine female students, the classroom teacher (Mrs. Parker) and two parent helpers. To design, implement, and track literacy events involving reading circles, I used a spiralling cycle of four steps involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Costello, 2003) to facilitate and document change in practice. I further used discourse analysis (Lupton, 1992) to examine transcripts on both textual and contextual levels. Speech patterns were deconstructed in terms of micro elements such as the use of grammar, syntax, and rhetorical devices. In addition, macro elements such as subject matter and the manner in which ideologies can be latently produced or re-produced were taken into consideration.

Over several sessions, Mrs. Parker read picture books, short stories, and extracts from novels to the students, while demonstrating various strategies for effective reading with the four resources reading model (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Raison, 2002). The four resources model recommends the simultaneous utilization of four practices that bridge the polarization between the whole language and phonics approaches to reading. Luke and Freebody argued that code breaking or understanding the relationship between spoken sounds and graphic symbols is equally important as text participation through which meaningful knowledge is constructed by creating links with children's personal worlds. In addition, Luke and Freebody's practice of text user describes the reader gaining knowledge about the form and use of texts in everyday life.

Finally, the practice of “text analyst” indicates that understanding the cultural and ideological basis of texts is primordial for students to read critically or between the lines.

Mrs. Parker offered physical and human resources to scaffold student reading comprehension and critical reflection. As students studied the class novel *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 1975), Mrs. Parker audiotaped herself reading several chapters and organized a listening post. She provided an online component, involving a class Reading Web Page for children (and parents) to access literacy material at school and/or home. Once the class Reading Web Page was functional, students accessed reading tasks and tips or sent messages via an electronic notice board. Over a period of one term, the reading circle unit was implemented with whole-class, group, and individual tasks that combined conventional and multi-modal texts. In the school library, students developed their ideas for a class Reading Web Page using the computer program *Inspiration*.

As students read and discussed diverse texts in reading circles, I selected a male focus group, consisting of four grade-7 boys (Nicholas, Art, Kevin, and Martin) for observation. Mrs. Parker had identified these boys as achieving low literacy results and experiencing learning difficulties related to dyslexia or Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. From this group, I report in this article on Nicholas’ experiences.

NICHOLAS: MULTILITERACIES AT HOME

Data collected from direct observation, a parent, and a student interview indicated that Nicholas’ cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) involved complex literacies that overlapped, informed, and sometimes mismatched those privileged at school (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). Nicholas was the youngest of three children, whose father was born in Australia and whose mother (Mary) was born in England. Mary identified Nicholas’ father and herself as not being keen readers. However, Nicholas read at home, predominantly with his mother and sometimes with his father or older sister. Data gathered from the student and parent interviews indicated that although Nicholas read at home, he regularly struggled with reading comprehension.

Although Nicholas wanted to fit in with the other grade-7 students, he preferred reading material that was approximately grade-4 or -5 levels. During his student interview, Nicholas suggested that it was difficult for him to read, which meant that he sometimes gave up reading books. Similarly, Mary commented that Nicholas found reading out loud challenging and preferred outdoor activities. Even purposeful activities, Mary noted, such as consulting the TV guide, challenged Nicholas: "He'll say 'What's on the TV next?' And I'll say, 'Go to the TV guide and read it.' And he'll say, 'Ah, I don't know what this means.'"

However, when using computers at home, Nicholas demonstrated some powerful multiliteracies. Nicholas observed his older brother at the computer and learned how to access and download particular games from the web. In addition, for school research projects, Nicholas could access *World Encyclopaedia* and use the index. Nicholas preferred the computer activity of car racing, whereby he aimed to outscore the computer in games involving little keyboarding and conventional reading. These data support the results of previous research (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Blair & Sandford, 2004; Love & Hamston, 2003) that described boys' literacy practices as complex and inclusive of technology-meditated tasks, such as playing interactive board or videogames, surfing the net, or engaging with computer soft- and hardware.

The theme of cars embedded in simple printed texts, namely magazines, emerged in Nicholas' non-fiction reading. The results of Wilhelm and Smith's research (2005) linked a number of boys' reading interests to highly visual texts that assisted comprehension and helped these boys feel competent as readers. For Nicholas, the magazines *Street Machine* and *Fast Forward* provided textual support in the form of photos; Nicholas read the brief texts, consulted the photos, and asked a family member for help if in doubt about a word's meaning.

Because Nicholas preferred simple texts with which engagement was not encouraged on a critical level, it is not surprising that his view of learning to read emphasized code breaking. During his student interview, Nicholas described reading as "spelling all the words" and learning the "letters of the alphabet." This view of reading appears consistent with the practices of many interventions designed for students

with learning difficulties. Nichols and Bayetto (2004) argue that remedial instruction for these students often focuses on achievement of code breaking skills prior to introducing other forms of literate competence.

When homework was set, Mary helped Nicholas to read the text, discuss vocabulary, and use physical resources, such as the dictionary. Nicholas also commented during the student interview that his mother provided assistance when he read at home:

...when I read I get stuck lots of times so Mum's just sitting right next to me or she's away from me just like doing the washing or something so I just ask what the word means or something. (Nicholas, interview)

These data support the results of Love and Hamston's (2003) research, suggesting that parents typically provide guidance and privilege literacy practices concerned with conventional rather than multimodal texts.

Particularly due to Nicholas' challenges related to dyslexia, Mary appeared determined to play an active role in supporting her son's literacy progress. To support Nicholas and his fellow students in Class 7A, Mary interwove a variety of literacy practices between home and school. At school, throughout the data collection period, Mary assisted during reading circles one morning per week. Interestingly, as Mary assisted in the classroom, she and Nicholas began to read *Tuck Everlasting* at home and school. Sometimes Mary read with or to Nicholas; sometimes they read independently. The pair also began to discuss their favourite parts of the narrative and why the author wrote in a particular fashion, which enriched the meaning-making process.

NICHOLAS: MULTILITERACIES AT SCHOOL

On-going teacher assessment, researcher's observations, and standardized testing, such as the Western Australia Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA), identified Nicholas as being challenged by the English curriculum and experiencing dyslexia. The classroom teacher described Nicholas as being up to four years behind year-level benchmarks in spelling and decoding (when reading orally), yet he was able to read some texts with average comprehension when scaffolded by an effective reader.

In the following discourse analysis, I discuss two audiotaped sequences from Term 3, one of which was conducted in the classroom and one in the school library. These interactions illustrate how Nicholas' position as a member of the class reading community was played out under scaffolded contexts, involving diverse partners and tasks. As well as drawing on the four resources model (Luke & Freebody, 1999), I integrated in this analysis principles from a pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000). *Situated practice* involves providing learning opportunities that connect new concepts to students' everyday lives and practices. *Overt instruction* refers to introducing new concepts through explicit instruction whereby students are encouraged to observe, for example, structures and patterns of language. *Critical framing* consists of encouraging students to search for implicit meanings, which are often linked to the socio-cultural and political worlds in which texts are created. Finally, *transformative practice* refers to students utilizing particular designs from one context and creating innovative forms in a new context.

In Transcript A (see Table 1), Mrs. Parker scaffolded the students by reading a text out loud, while using explicit instruction to model strategies such as re-reading and prediction. The task required students to collaborate in groups, using discussion prompts. Mrs. Parker then provided scaffolding in the form of a written statement: "Everyone who commits a crime should be punished." This discussion prompt provided students with possibilities to engage with a situated or text participant practice by linking the novel to events in the everyday world. As the researcher approached the male focus group, the boys were sharing practical examples, without making links to the prompt. As Part One of the exchange begins, the researcher provided scaffolding by suggesting that the group define the terms crime and punishment as a window into their discussion.

In turns 19-26, as the group discussion unfolded, the scaffolding could be described as multi-tiered. Nicholas distinguished between the notion of entering one's own premises and entering a property with the intention to steal, which would involve crime. However, both the researcher and Martin provided statements and questions for Nicholas to reflect on. Also, in turn 27 as Martin responded to Nicholas' statement,

he introduced another key element that connected crime and punishment, and as such provided further scaffolding.

Table 1: Transcript A: Part One

- 15 Researcher: O.K. Do you know what I'm hearing... I'm wondering if we shouldn't consider...because, just listening to you talk, what we mean by crime and what we mean by punishment... Should we define that first?
- 16 Art: Yeah-
- 17 Nicholas: Hmm hm (nods).
- 18 Researcher: What do you mean by crime? Is it crime? (reads first part of the statement). Everyone who commits a crime... So, what is crime?
- 19 Martin: A crime is when you break into someone's house-
- 20 Kevin: And steal stuff.
- 21 Researcher: Breaking into someone's house-
- 22 Martin: Yeah and goes 'I want you...'(dramatic tone).
- 23 Researcher: O.K so that's a crime... would you say that's a crime?
- 24 Nicholas: Yeah but then... but then...
- 25 Researcher: Nicholas?
- 26 Nicholas: But then a crime could... (pause). But then if you broke into your own house it wouldn't be a crime-
- 27 Martin: I know, that's why you wouldn't get punished.
- 28 Nicholas: But if you broke into a window and that and you stole like a computer---

As the discussion continued (see Table 2), Art provided scaffolding through situated practice by asking a query about a common practice for some young people in Western Australia: riding a bicycle without wearing a helmet. Although the practice is illegal, dissonance emerged as the peers disagreed about whether or not this example constituted a crime. By re-focussing the discussion in turn 44, the researcher provided scaffolding for the practice of "text analyst" or critical framing; the notion of why this practice would be a crime became fundamental. In turn 46, Kevin maintained engagement with the practice of text analysis

by referring to the important notion of legality for determining the criminality of actions. In turn 47, after acknowledging Kevin's contribution, the researcher then shifted the discussion back to situated practice by introducing an example of a smashed window.

Table 2: Transcript A: Part two

- 34 Art: What would... if you like just rode (by bicycle) to your friend's house not wearing a helmet?
- 35 Researcher: O.K. Is that a crime?
- 36 Nicholas: Yeah-
- 37 Martin: No.
- 38 Researcher: Is that a crime?
- 39 Nicholas: Yes, yes it is.
- 40 Researcher: Or is it something else?
- 41 Kevin: Yeah that's a crime.
- 42 Researcher: You think that's a crime.
- 43 Art: It's a crime.
- 44 Researcher: Why is it a crime?
- 45 Martin: I don't know.
- 46 Kevin: Because it's the law.
- 47 Researcher: Because it's against... because it's illegal? It's against the law. O.K., so that's a crime. What about if you threw a ball into ... by accident, you were playing on say ... your front lawn and you threw the ball and it hit the neighbour's window by accident and broke the window?
- 48 Martin: (Laughs). I've done that-
- 49 Kevin: That's not a crime-
- 50 Researcher: Is that a crime?
- 51 Martin: I've done that before-
- 52 Nicholas: No! No! That's an accident.
- 53 Researcher: No? Why? That's an accident?
- 54 Nicholas: But then you would have to pay for it.
- 55 Researcher: O.K, so...

- 56 Nicholas: It's not like you wanted to get into the house and take some stuff.
- 57 Researcher: Mmh.
- 58 Nicholas: It's just like you smashed it by accident.

In turns 56 and 58, a situated practice and text participant focus was maintained as Nicholas used air time to elucidate differences between the intentions of individuals creating accidental damage versus those engaging in premeditated criminal acts. Eventually the researcher guided the discussion back to the notion of punishment, which was introduced as a scaffold in the task itself.

The following week, during an informal task that took place after school hours in the school library, Nicholas and his mother, Mary, logged on to the school website. Because Mary had little experience with ICT, this informal task was designed from a perspective of situated practice so that Nicholas and his mother could engage in online reading tasks. From turn 80 in Transcript B (see Table 3), Nicholas positioned himself as the pedagogical leader by controlling the computer mouse and displaying his knowledge about the avenues for entering the website. The complementary nature of the partnership was highlighted when Mary asked a question about the difference between the internet and intranet (text user); Nicholas responded confidently and added supplementary information about the speed of the intranet. Framed in a context of written text, colour, and images, Nicholas utilized code breaking skills to accurately read the school name from the website (turn 86). As the sequence unfolded, Nicholas used his procedural knowledge (text user) to enlarge the window, navigate to the class reading page, and provide a simple running commentary to scaffold his mother as they sat side by side in front of the computer.

As Nicholas navigated through various sections of the reading web page he attempted to read messages sent by other students via the electronic bulletin board. When Nicholas struggled to pronounce some words, Mary prompted her son with code breaking strategies. Despite intermittent scaffolding from his mother, Nicholas maintained control of the mouse and displayed procedural competency as he navigated from one landscape to the next. Because Nicholas previously used the

computer program *Inspiration* to help design the web page, this informal task could also be viewed as transformed practice.

Table 3: Transcript B

- 80 Nicholas: You can either go on the internet or the intranet (using mouse, begins the process of logging on).
- 81 Mother: What's the difference between the internet and the intranet?
- 82 Nicholas: Well the intranet is just for our school.
- 83 Mother: Oh, is it? OK. (pause)
- 84 Nicholas: And it's quicker (Nicholas moves through the process of finding the school homepage).
- 85 Mother: It's a lot quicker isn't it?
- 86 Nicholas: Beatty (reads from the school website).
- 87 Mother: OK, so that's your own section.
- 88 Nicholas: And then you go into (executes moves with mouse).
- 89 Mother: So, what did you do? You made the page larger?
- 90 Nicholas: Yea. And then you go into reading (clicks on mouse).
- 91 Mother: Circles, oh, yea.
- 92 Nicholas: Make it larger again.

DISCUSSION

Drawing on a multiliteracies framework (The New London Group, 2000) and the four resources reading model (Luke & Freebody, 1999) to interpret Nicholas' progress in literacy, particularly during reading circles, results suggest that multiliteracies and interweaving scaffolding and diverse texts in meaningful tasks can encourage agency in student learning across contexts. As Nicholas engaged in reading circle tasks, it can be argued that the zone of proximal development varied in relation to interpersonal relationships, interaction between participants (Stone, 1993), features of proposed tasks (Donovon & Smolkin, 2002), and contexts of learning.

As such, Nicholas' zone of proximal development during diverse tasks was affected not only by time, partners, and context, but also by

pedagogy aiming to connect teachers, parents, and students through text. This process suggests that scaffolding should be considered as multi-tiered in relation to partnerships, time, context, and pedagogy (particularly to task features, modality, and design). The notion of sustained scaffolding across tasks and relationships at home and school appears fundamental to facilitating students' access to being legitimate (see Toohey, 2000) and confident members of a literacy community, especially for students such as Nicholas, who struggled to fit in.

In a small group reading task framed in formal learning, Nicholas was able to engage with a challenging text (*Tuck Everlasting*) due to discussion prompts that situated the task within the reality of real-life examples. Nicholas extended his engagement via social interaction, which included guidance from the researcher and air time for students to express, validate, and disagree with diverse viewpoints. In an informal task that took place in the school library, Nicholas was able to immediately position himself as the more experienced learner who guided his apprentice (his mother) through landscapes involving colour, illustrations, and conventions and hypertext. As Nicholas and his mother made decisions about the sequence of visiting areas on the website, they tailored the task to suit learning needs. Several days later, audiotaped data indicated that when Mary joined the class in the school library, Nicholas continued to scaffold his mother by sharing procedural knowledge to send messages on the class notice board. However, when Nicholas was unsure about technological procedures, he repeatedly sought assistance only from male classmates.

In this article, I have focused on Nicholas, a grade-7 boy who was identified as struggling with the literacy curriculum, yet engaged successfully with reading circles and other literacy practices extending beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom. On a broader level, I explored the results of his more sophisticated process of engagement through guided participation (Leont'ev, 1981; Rogoff, 1990) and particularly through technology-mediated tasks. Much of the recent public debate about literacy has polarized issues relating to pedagogy and learner profiles. Boys' levels of achievement have been frequently reported in direct opposition to those of girls, resulting in boys being touted as the new disadvantaged (Martino, 2005). Such binary

oppositions dismiss the social factors relating to student development, such as the impact of family and peer relationships and the notion of jointly constructing knowledge through mediated activities. As such, Nicholas' story adds weight to the call for research to investigate boys' academic achievement in ways that reflect dynamic construction of literacy identities at home and school (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Love & Hamston, 2003).

Because learning is mediated through social interaction, student success and interest in literacy is dynamic and dependent on diverse contexts and partners, such as school peer groups, friendship groups, and family (McCarthy, 2001). Just as the participants in the study of Sanford and Blair (2004) developed literacy through guided peer participation in informal settings, Nicholas benefited from social interaction and tasks that were scaffolded in multiple contexts. Nicholas was positioned in a supportive community, with assistance from key members such as his mother and classroom teacher. Scaffolding drew on home and school-based literacy practices that overlapped and informed one another (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). For her part, Mrs. Parker organized a class listening post that supported Nicholas' oral decoding and reading comprehension. She also tutored Nicholas weekly during after school sessions. Nicholas' mother read the class novel with Nicholas at home and at school. However, at home, Nicholas' difficulty in making meaning from the TV guide suggests that dynamic interaction between social and pedagogical aspects of tasks are equally important.

Viewed from a multi-layered lens of literacy for new times (Luke & Elkins, 2002; Nixon, 2003), Nicholas' progress is framed in an individual's history that draws on collective capabilities of a group, community, or society. On the collective level, Nicholas' literacy achievement can be viewed as a historical construction (see Gee, 2003; Martino, Mills, & Lingard, 2005) played out in a socio-cultural, linguistic, gendered, and political community. On the personal level, Nicholas' literacy achievement can be viewed as enhanced through pedagogy that facilitates agency (Anstey, 2002) in learning. The ability to decode, engage in meaningful events, and understand that texts and contexts cannot be divorced from social, cultural, and political worlds (Luke &

Freebody, 1999; The New London Group, 2000) also relate to learners' agency. For post-industrialized societies, such agency links to pedagogy that encourages experimentation with multimodal texts.

Results from this study suggest that multiliteracies, combining scaffolding and diverse texts through meaningful tasks, can encourage agency in student learning across contexts. As Nicholas constructed his identity as a literacy learner through guided participation (Rogoff, 1990), he alternately adopted the role of expert, listened to the opinions' of peers, and shared findings with significant adults. On a broader pedagogical level, through student responses to texts in diverse contexts, multiliteracies can be used to promote dialogue and relationships across home and school communities. Organizing literacy events that draw on students' cultural and intellectual resources in purposeful and pleasurable ways may assist to reinvigorate school curricula (see Alloway et al., 2002; Gee, 2003; Lingard et al., 2002; Sanford & Blair, 2004). However, Lingard et al. point to the difficult task of creating supportive environments, particularly for secondary schools, where professional learning communities are often located within departments, rather than across the school. In this vein, as students encounter multiliteracies across classrooms, institutions, and social contexts, educators will be continually challenged to renew pedagogy through scaffolding and critical debate.

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Wendy Cumming-Potvin currently lectures at Murdoch University's School of Education in Perth, Australia. Her research interests include a socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning, with a particular focus on multiliteracies, boys' education, and communities of practice. In Australia and Canada, her research has involved applying qualitative methods in remote, urban, and diverse socio-cultural contexts.