

## USING MULTIPLE LITERACIES TO CREATE A MULTIMEDIA PRODUCT

By

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### ABSTRACT

*This article describes and documents the teaching and learning in a new undergraduate course at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, USA.*

*Students investigate the meaning of literacy in today's rapidly changing, technological world. They explore multiliteracies, ultimately weaving them into a multimedia statement - a mini documentary on a topic of choice. Students learn and use iMovie software to create their final projects. They experience success and satisfaction as well as a newfound understanding of literacy today.*

### INTRODUCTION

*The challenge for the next generation of literacy teachers is to create and implement work that bridges alphabetic literacies and technology to explore the academic and social uses of new electronic media.*

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Indeed, what does it mean to teach literacy today? What do teachers need to know in order to tap fully into the worlds of their students? Faculty at Rowan University have implemented a new course to address these questions and better prepare teacher candidates to function in a multi-literate world.

#### Literacy in Today's World

Literacies in Today's World, an undergraduate course at Rowan University is an inquiry into the new literacies that are transforming traditional understandings of literacy as reading and writing. This course creates a dialogical space wherein students move from traditional alphabetic literacies to an inquiry of multiliteracies. The course aims to expand rather than rely on existing definitions, and looks

closely at interrelationships between literacies and multiple contexts. Thus, it enables students to negotiate the dynamics of language, thought, and social practice.

The course is framed around an essential question: In what ways literacy is negotiated to make sense of today's world and student's place in it? Faculty also present a provocative proposition that students must address and defend across the course: In order to make sense of the world and to take part in the shaping of it, one must recognize the impact of literacies on others and themselves.

More specifically, the course examines the following conceptions of literacy and their implications:

- Literacy as something people do, rather than something that they have;
- Literacy as social practice, rather than as technical skill;
- Literacy as a political process, through its power to construct people as objects as well as subjects;
- Literacy as contextually grounded and

meaningful -- acquired and learned through multiple personal, cultural, academic, social, and political contexts (Cohen, 2005).

## **I-Movie**

Students negotiate new electronic forms as a forum for expressing their situated readings of the world. They create a multimedia product (a mini-documentary using iMovie software) that shows the ways by which various literacies work together to inform their understanding of personal and social worlds. In completing this project, the students become movie makers, and documenters of the world as they see it.

Working collaboratively in small groups, students create an i Movie about a topic which they find meaningful. These mini- documentaries examine various issues. Students use multiple media sources, including Internet footage, still images, music, original footage, and self-recorded voiceovers. Each small group works all of these media in original ways in order to piece together their stories, which are always creative and interesting. Students also make use of iMovie features such as titles, transitions, and sound effects to add emphasis and flair to important aspects of their movies.

The project also has limitations. In making these movies, students and professors alike find themselves logistically ensnared. The iMovie software works exclusively on Macintosh computers, so many of the participants have to learn a new operating system. A five-minute movie can be up to 10 gigs, making storage problematic. Lack of standardization among types of digital images sometimes

makes integration into the iMovie format a challenge. Moreover, at night time and weekends, students also do not have access of the workstations with the relevant software, located in the offices of Instructional Technology.

Determined to solve these logistical problems, faculty and technology experts, under the leadership of Eileen Stutzbach have brainstormed to eliminate many of these obstacles. This collaborative project provides media editing workstations and software in the Library Media Room, Instructional Technology Services and have now pooled resources to add high- end Macintosh workstations to their existing AVID (PC based) editing stations. The library would be open during more convenient hours and the library staff will be trained to use the software, so this lab upgrade will provide an excellent space for future iMovie work.

As the course's finale, students share their movies in class - a mini Rowan Film Festival, and the best documentaries are showcased on Rowan Day, a university-wide celebration of student achievements.

## **Conclusion**

Initially, the students were apprehensive about being able to complete the project. But, in the end, student excitement and pride at their filmmaking accomplishments overshadowed first time fears.

Most important, however, students acquire a useful creative skill, and are eager to put to use it in a right way.

Perhaps more important than a newfound sense of confidence about using technology is the realization of the power of multiple literacy to trigger change.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Susan Browne, Assistant Professor at Rowan University, has much experience as a teacher researcher. Her own research agendas focus on looking closely at critical literacy curriculums and culturally relevant literature in the upper elementary classroom. She has also worked closely with teachers in developing their research areas of interest. As teacher leader in the Philadelphia Writing Project, Dr. Browne has guided beginning teacher researchers across the Philadelphia City School District for many years.



Dr. Midge Madden, Assistant Professor at Rowan University, works with pre-service and in-service teachers as professor of undergraduate and graduate literacy courses at Rowan University. She also has served as reading and writing consultant in New Jersey and Maryland schools as well as in Antigua, Guatemala. She brings much expertise both as faculty and as teacher researcher. Past studies include a critical look at her practice as a teacher of university students as well as a current collaborative work with a fifth grade teacher looking at critical literacy curriculums using the genre of provocative texts. Other research includes work in writing in the elementary classroom, which appears in a recently co-authored book, *Teaching the Elements of Powerful Writing*, published by Scholastic in 2004. Currently, Dr. Madden is working on a new book that targets fluency instruction in fifth and sixth grades, to be published by Scholastic.



Ms. Eileen Stutzbach, MA works as a professional staff member in the Instructional Technology Services Department of Rowan University. Much of her work involves training faculty in new technology and she has become the campus expert in I-movie and PowerPoint productions. Ms. Stutzbach conducts classes for undergraduate and graduate students in the use of new programs. She also serves as editor of the Rowan University technology newsletter, *iTech News*. Ms. Stutzbach has also worked as an Academic Advisor and Career Counselor at Rowan's Career and Academic Planning Center.

