A Community Perspective on Literacy Education in the Inner City: An Analysis of
Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools

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Abstract

The policy recommendation document, *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*, is explored in this research by applying critical discourse analysis methods. The document focuses on the need to "revision" school resources in the inner city district of East Vancouver, which is considered to be Canada's poorest postal code. This thesis concentrates in particular on how literacy is conceptualized throughout the text, both implicitly and explicitly. This research brings attention to the ways textual forms of governance in the school system are used to reinforce and reproduce dominant ideologies of how literacy is understood and shaped in educational discourses. The conceptual framework of New Literacy Studies is drawn upon to extend and unpack how literacy is positioned in the policy document. A personal narrative is woven throughout this analysis as a way to reflect on and bring attention to community perspectives, which often can be overlooked in discussions of policy making.

Key words: literacy, new literacy studies, critical discourse analysis, policy

Résumé

Le document de la recommandation stratégique, *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools,* est étudié dans cette recherche en appliquant les méthodes d'analyse critique du discours. Le document insiste sur la nécessité de « révision » des ressources d'école dans le centre-ville de l'arrondissement de Vancouver Est, qui est considérée comme étant le plus pauvre au Canada. Cette recherche porte sur la manière dont l'alphabétisation est conceptualisée tout au long du texte, de façon implicite et explicite. Cette recherche apporte l'attention sur la façon dont les formes de gouvernance textuelle, dans le système scolaire, sont utilisées pour renforcer et reproduire les idéologies dominantes sur lesquelles l'alphabétisation est interprétée et formée dans les discours éducationnels. Le cadre conceptuel des *nouvelles études d'alphabétisation* (New Literacy Studies) est utilisé afin d'examiner la façon dont l'alphabétisation se positionne dans le document stratégique. De plus, une narration personnelle est entrelacée à travers cette analyse afin de venir réfléchir et attirer l'attention sur les préoccupations communautaires, qui souvent peuvent être négligées dans les discussions politiques.

Mots clés : L'alphabétisation, nouvelles études d'alphabétisation, l'analyse critique du discours, politique, stratégique

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A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE INNER CITY

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Preface

As a second-generation South Asian teenager, I felt as if I was living in a double world. My Punjabi heritage was something I understood in the context of my home, where I watched Bollywood films, heard stories of the Motherland (Punjab), and spoke a hybrid of English-Punjabi. It was difficult to imagine my world at home as a part of my life at school, where I did not have many opportunities to situate myself or explore identity in my academic learning. I specifically recall flipping through textbook pages in social studies class that overlooked the complexity of the historical underpinnings of our nation, which prides itself on the multicultural mosaic. The history lessons and English essays ignored my experiences, questions and concerns about the diverse community I was living in. Literacy was reduced to worksheets surrounding grammar and punctuation, which did not enable me to express myself. My level of civic engagement was thin and I did not feel invited to think critically about the world around me.

My school locker walls became a zone where my two worlds came together, plastered with the lyrics of many influential hip hop artists. As discussed by Low (2011), hip hop is a space of identity-formation, performance, creativity and political engagement. From Lauryn Hill, to The Roots, to Asian Dub Foundation, my third world fused together the (other) two worlds of my double life, where I could actually see how the complex social issues discussed in the music linked/connected to the world around me as a 16 year old. MC Deeder Zaman of Asian Dub Foundation was particularly influential in my reflections of being a part of a Desi diaspora, because his lyrics addressed growing up in a land different than your ancestors. The political tones of Asian Dub Foundation's lyrics made me reflect on pressing topics such as racism, immigration, and cultural identity. Specifically, the song "New Way, New Life" became an anthem for me. The album described a world of possibility for children of immigrants who

struggled in low paying jobs and faced explicit discrimination, which mirrored my personal

experiences growing up in Canada:

> Working inna de factories
>
> Sometimes sweeping de floor
>
> Unsung heroines an heroes
>
> Yes they open de door
>
> They came a long time ago
>
> But now it seems we've arrived
>
> Naya zindagi! naya jeevan
>
> New way new life
>
> (Zaman, Track 4, 2000).

The lyrics of Asian Dub Foundation and other influential hip hop artists provided me with spaces

of reflection that my schoolwork did not invite me into. I struggled with certain academic

subjects because linear print based forms were favoured in the classroom, and often were not

effective in engaging me. I was determined to merge together all three of my worlds.

My experiences as a young person were fundamental to my later professional and

volunteer work in the community sector of East Vancouver. Between 2011-2014, I worked with

a literacy organization called The Writers' Exchange, located close to the Downtown Eastside of

Vancouver. The organization strives to make literacy fun and accessible for inner city youth (ages

5-18). They achieve this through diverse projects that interact with literacy in a multitude of

ways. There are volunteer mentors who work one-on-one or in small groups with students on

different projects that reflect the interests and questions of participating youth. Programs are

delivered in informal learning settings, such as the literacy centre in the downtown Eastside,

which is blocks away from neighbouring inner city designated schools, and also in formal spaces such as the writing class at the local high school. A key part of this organization's mandate is that they provide youth with many opportunities to publish their work through various media (chapbooks, magazines, newspaper, and blogs, etc.). Being a part of this organization shifted my understanding of education settings and the possibilities that can emerge when the community and the education sector collaborate.

My thesis research is driven by my experience of working with over 200 at-risk youth during my last three years at the Writers' Exchange. My various roles within the organization— as an in-school writing mentor, after-school literacy programmer, program evaluator, summer break coordinator, community outreach coordinator and publishing intern—allowed me to identify and explore some of the complex relationships between marginalization, poverty and literacy in education settings from multiple perspectives. My research is also informed by own experiences as a literacy learner.

The need for literacy curriculum to reflect diversity.

As diversity is rapidly increasing in schools, there is a critical need for curriculum and educational discourses to reflect it. In my own experience of growing up in British Columbia, pages of Social Studies textbooks showed pictures of excited European explorers that were book-ended with celebratory rhetoric of multicultural policy. The mosaic model of multicultural policy has asserted itself as a prominent mark of Canadian identity. The policy of multiculturalism has been argued by many to be a simplistic and problematic means of managing Canada's racial and ethnic diversity (Bissoondath, 1998; Jiwani, 2005; Nayar, 2004; Somani, 2011). In my previous research, I discovered that multicultural policy as reflected in educational discourses has arguably pushed the lived experiences of diverse students to the margins of learning spaces. As an

undergraduate student, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of public records of learning (*Vancouver Sun* articles and the BC Social Studies 11 curriculum) surrounding the Komagata Maru incident of 1914, which has very thin recognition in media and education discourses of the province. This analysis made clear how realities of racial identity and history could be silenced by educational discourses, which can impact a learner's interest, comfort and ability to engage with certain educational materials. Remarkable opportunities can emerge when traditional education structures are challenged and I argue literacy education has the power to do so.

Not your average literacy project.

The programs at the Writers' Exchange take up literacy as a fundamental part of one's wellbeing. There, unique interests, mentorship and community collaboration inform the multi-layered approach to channeling student creativity and interest. An example of this approach is *B.Eastside,* a youth cultural text that fundamentally challenges traditional notions of literacy education:
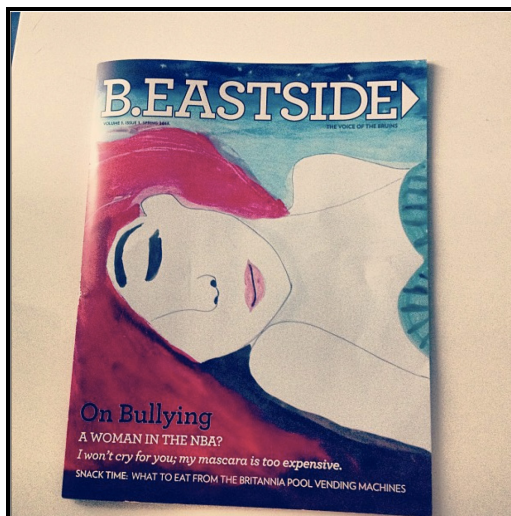
Figure 1. B.Eastside

The inner city high school that produced this magazine is located in the nation's poorest postal code. The challenging socioeconomic conditions of the community have a deep impact on

the literacy skills of the students in the district (Vancouver School Board, 2014). In this thesis, 'literacy' is understood as the ability to engage with and produce a multitude of texts that are context-specific (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1997). As a volunteer co-facilitator in the writing class that produced *B.Eastside* over the course of a school year, I became fascinated with literacy in the context of curriculum design and instruction in contemporary urban education settings.

On the first day of a similar project in another high school known as the media program, my group of students looked at me blankly after Mr. B (the teacher responsible for the collaborative project in the writing class) introduced the yearlong media project. The tension in my group was strong and made me think that my icebreaker 'get-to-know-you' games would barely scratch the surface of their interest and really getting to know them. Attempting to keep the energy of the group up, I enthusiastically asked my small group of students what they thought about the project that had just been introduced. Tim, a grade 12 student who was leaning back in his chair with crossed arms, looked at me and said:

You don't get it. I don't do this writing thing. I mean… I do, but I don't. Yeah I got

notebooks and stacks, but it's about that real life 'ish,' you know what I mean? - I don't

think it will sit well here with these people...

This prompted a follow-up from a grade 11 student, Jess, who explained:

Yeah, but I don't get the point of this. I mean I'm failing my English class, why should I

try to write something for this media project? My writing is bad. I'm only in this class

because the Principal wouldn't let me have a spare block.

I quickly realized that my group wasn't buying-in to this project, because they assumed it was another example of how school projects are confined to the walls of the classroom.

On my first day of the media program, I observed how the traditional understandings of literacy education in school settings have the potential to create exclusionary social frameworks. In turn, this can interrupt students' levels of engagement and the empowerment they might draw from their everyday literacy practices. These exclusionary frameworks take away from the livelihood and self-confidence of young people, particularly those who are marginalized. We can see this happening in the first exchanges I had with my group for the media program. Tim loved writing deeply. However, he was failing most of his classes in his final year of high school and didn't know if college was a possibility. He was hesitant to share what kind of writing he was doing until he realized, through my integration of an 'off-topic' group conversation about the song "Crooked Smile" by hip hop artist J. Cole, that he was being invited to share outside of school interests in this program. The section of lyrics below opened up our conversation:

> We don't look nothin' like the people on the screen
>
> You know the movie stars, picture perfect beauty queens
>
> But we got dreams and we got the right to chase 'em
>
> Look at the nation, that's a crooked smile braces couldn't even straighten
>
> (Cole, Track 14, 2013).

The group spent the rest of the period discussing complex topics such as race, representation and social injustice. As the facilitator of the group, I joined the conversation as a learner. Tim took the lead because he was immediately drawn into our conversation about hip hop, since he identified with hip hop culture so closely. Eventually, he shared with us that J.Cole was a major inspiration to his writing. Given my personal interest in hip hop, this was particularly the best turn of conversation that could have happened. When the students realized that I was 'down' with their interests, the energy picked up.

This conversation opened the door to building a sense of belonging. On this topic, a teacher who collaborated with the organization shared a powerful perspective after her class created a student publication titled *Inspirational Heroes in Our World*. Through a questionnaire distributed after the program was completed, she explained that, "the big ticket items like reading and writing need to be measured against much more basic human conditions like safety, love and a sense of belonging - and many of the children at our school are not as safe and loved and don't feel the same sense of belonging as their same-age counterparts in the rest of the country" (Writer's Exchange, 2014, p. 17).

My group was culturally diverse, as the Vancouver community is. They discussed how race was the pink elephant in the room at their school and how it felt taboo to talk about it. Being a woman of colour, I identified with the concerns, questions and thoughts to which my group was bringing attention. I recall the place of hip hop music in my life as a second generation South Asian teenager, growing up in a country different than my parents as I discussed earlier in this preface. It was difficult to place myself in my school projects when I didn't see people like me being reflected in any class materials across all of my courses. The conversation with the youth in the writing class about "Crooked Smile" made me reflect on pivotal youth cultural texts that were major sources of imagination, expression and social change for me. Asian Dub Foundation played an instrumental role in my understanding of my cultural identity, similar to the ways in which Tim was discussing J. Cole. This conversation paved a road for the many complex topics we discussed in the group over the course of the school year, where it became very clear that there is a critical need for education to reflect the diverse experiences of students in the community, specifically in the context of literacy.

My aim in this thesis is to widen the conversation of literacy education by making visible the critical links between academic research and community practice. Specifically, I will be applying critical discourse analysis methods to the document *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools.* This document is filled with important data and questions surrounding what works best for children who have experienced marginalization and difficult socioeconomic circumstances. I am driven to unpack this policy document as a way to make visible the critical links between academic research and community practice. My experiences of working in the community sector and my own story have inspired me to explore this important area of learning for marginalized young people.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What is Literacy?

Literacy is no longer a static construct from the standpoint of its defining technology for the past 500 years; it has now come to mean a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose and communicate information. (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 5)

Often in traditional academic settings, literacy has been understood as the ability to "decode print-based texts," which can be deeply limiting (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 215). This approach and understanding of literacy connects to the concept of how literacy has historically functioned as a categorical tool that brings attention to the differences between local people of a community or across the nation (Street & Hornberger, 2008, p. 3). The use of literacy as a categorical tool specifically focuses on one's reading comprehension measured by standardized testing. This thesis defines literacy to be the ability to engage with and produce a multitude of texts that are context-specific. I draw from Coiro et al. (2008) above, who situate literacy in the fast pace of the contemporary technological landscape of today. The authors explain that literacy is no longer a static skill defined solely by reading and writing, rather it is a continuous process involving change in the ways one reads, writes, views, composes and communicates information. I would like to extend this definition and understanding by bringing attention to the fact that literacy itself is not solely the ability to read and write, but it also it includes ways of making meaning and critically thinking about the world. This thesis builds its understanding of literacy by drawing on key concepts from texts in the New Literacy Studies tradition and also my personal and professional experience, which emphasizes social and cultural contexts such as poverty.

In the rest of this chapter, I will provide an introduction to an official Vancouver School Board document, *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February, 2014), which will be qualitatively analyzed in this research in order to provide insight and a springboard into a critical discussion of literacy education. I then provide a brief literature review on poverty and education in the Canadian context briefly as a way to develop a deeper understanding of sociopolitical conditions in which this research is situated. I next turn to some of the literature making a case for close policy analysis in education. This literature is particularly valuable because it brings attention to the nuances and complexities of the relationship between policy texts and the role of social research, which is highly relevant to this thesis research.

Finally, at the end of this chapter, I explore my reading method applied to *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools*, which is informed by key concepts in critical discourse analysis methods.

1.2 *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools*

As Program Evaluator for the Writers' Exchange, I was searching for public documents that reflected questions, concerns, needs and ideas of the district that the organization was serving. I specifically was focused on exploring ways to support program expansion, but also was trying to find data and research that demonstrated the 'highest need' schools in our community. I came across the report *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools,* which was filled with important data and also questions surrounding what works best for children in difficult socioeconomic circumstances. This document contains many important concepts and ideas that relate to literacy learning and teaching in the district. I am interested in 'unpacking' this document by applying a critical thematic discourse analysis, to understand how literacy education is taken up as a part of the educational discourse of the Vancouver inner city

community. It is critical to note that this document is being used as a way to widen a discussion surrounding literacy education in marginalized school communities. I am focusing on *how* this area of education works, rather than criticizing *what* works. Specifically, I am interested in making visible the multiple intersecting concepts of this document and how they contribute to the larger picture of literacy education in the inner city.

1.3 Inner City Schools in East Vancouver: Context and Background[1]

The inner city of East Vancouver was the starting point of this thesis. Lin (1999) notes that every community has a different set of social, cultural, and economic resources that influences the development of school-community partnerships (Hands, 2014, p. 74). This inner city is outside of the city's downtown and is shaped by complex conditions and forces that are associated to economic and social disadvantage.

The Inner City Project was first developed in 1988 by the Vancouver School Board in order to recognize schools with high populations of students who were in need of extra support due to the complexity of poverty in the district (Vancouver School Board, 2009). Inner City Schools receive additional support, including the following:

- Additional staff (a Project Teacher, Youth and Family Worker, Student Support Worker and a Neighbourhood Assistant)

- The breakfast program

- All day kindergarten

- 3 junior kindergartens

Together, these additional supports were implemented as a way to contribute positively to the language and social emotional development of students, as well as to increase parent and

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[1] This section is informed by the "Context for revisioning" noted in *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014) on page 1-2 of the final report.

community involvement in schools. This model has remained the same, other than more schools being assigned the inner city designation. Traditionally, the inner city schools have been reviewed every 5 years, with the last review in 2009. The comprehensive review of services and resources examines demographic information within the community to determine where resources are needed most.

Since the inner city schools program was developed and implemented in 1989, there have been a few developments such as increased funding for literacy development, early childhood education and community collaboration. Since 2004, there has been an intense focus on early education interventions, which can be seen in the increased funds for literacy early interventions such as reading recovery, all day kindergarten, and Strong Start Centres (drop-in centres for preschool children and their caregivers). Other areas of focus have included models supporting Aboriginal children, school-community partnerships with businesses and private donors, and nutrition supports. External partners and internal stakeholders came together as a task force during the discussion surrounding the process of "revisioning" resources reflected in this report.[2] The task force met to develop lists of groups and individuals who were to be consulted and also assisted in developing the questions for focus groups and interviews. This diverse group was selected as a way to cultivate informed discussion within the inner city school community, by bringing forward multiple stakeholder experiences and understandings of the district.

In order to understand the report, it is useful to briefly review some of the literature on poverty and also poverty in the context of education.

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[2] External partners include: Human Early Learning Partnership, Ministry of Children and Families, Vancouver Coastal health, Mental Health, Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, Vancouver Parks and Recreation.

Internal stakeholders include: Elementary and secondary principals, elementary and secondary teachers, Canadian union of Public Employees and administrative staff.

1.4 Poverty.

Across the literature, there is a dominant theme that the concept of poverty is difficult to define and is a highly contested area (Raffo et al., 2010, Sarlo, 1996; Sharma, 2012). However, poverty is overall understood as a social and economic issue that should be measured across regions or nations to promote the well-being of communities. Poverty is subjective in nature and is context-specific, while being dependent upon many variables (Flessa, 2007, Raffo et al., 2010, Sarlo, 1996; Sharma, 2012). It can be both absolute and relative (Raffo et al., 2010, Sarlo, 1996; Sharma, 2012). While absolute poverty refers to the access to basic resources such as food and shelter to sustain life, relative poverty refers to the access of goods and activities that are specific to each society at a given point in time (Raffo et al., 2010, p. 5).

Young people are among those who have the highest risk of living in poverty, particularly if they are members of a visible minority and/or come from single-parent households in the North American context (Raffo et al., 2010, p. 5; Sharma, 2012, p. 73). Sharma (2012) draws from Lewis (1966) who explains that the culture of poverty develops as society broadly fails to provide "social, political and economic organization to low-income families" (p. 2). This failure to provide necessary order and organization for low-income families leads to the exclusion of certain groups of people from mainstream society. Many who are already marginalized are unable to participate in social clubs, which Sharma (2012) lists as including universities, banks and other institutions that are dominantly "middle class" (p. 12). It is critical to note the role of stigma in perpetuating the cycle and existence of poverty. Stigma manifests itself in schools and promotes social exclusion of those who may not have access to resources to fully participate in specific social activities, such as extra-curricular activities that require extra money and parental involvement (Sarlo, 1996; Sharma, 2012). Poor students are not only excluded from social

activities, but also from the key economic and political activities of a society or community in which they live.

The Canadian Government has acknowledged the severity of child poverty. In 1989, an all-party resolution committed the Government of Canada to eliminating child poverty by the year 2000 (Sharma, 2012, p. 72). Sharma (2012) also notes that in 2009, a decade after the all-party solution and commitment from the government, among 2.3 million Canadians living in poverty, 28% were children (p. 72). The concentration of poverty within Vancouver has increased in recent years as documented in the final report of the *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014). In First Call's Annual Report Card, British Columbia was noted as having the worst rate of poverty within Canada at 18.6%, and 20.7% if you solely consider children under the age of 6 (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1).

Schools have noted and observed a shift in how poverty is now presenting itself in even more complex ways, including documenting mental health concerns (Vancouver School Board, 2014 p. 6). The Vancouver School Board has developed the inner city school list by using the Social Services Index (SSI), which has been provided by the Ministry of Education (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 7). The SSI is used to identify "numbers of families with children attending the schools who live on income assistance, and the numbers of children in the school who are in care" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 6). It is acknowledged that neighbourhood data and school enrolment are contributing factors and correlate to the outcome of the SSI data. It is crucial to note that within this thesis, poverty is not considered to solely depend on the concept of 'low income' families. Poverty is understood to be a complex multidimensional construct, with various interconnecting and interacting layers that include (and are not limited to) health,

income, education, and marginalization, which will be further explored in Chapter 4 (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4).

Child poverty not only affects future workforce outcomes, but also has a negative impact and relationship to a child's health and education. Children living in poverty are not receiving equal opportunity to thrive to the best of their abilities, which Sharma identifies as a fundamental right that is "promised" by democratic societies (p. 72).

1.5 Poverty and Education: Dominant Themes.

Flessa (2007) explains that the body of research surrounding poverty and schooling focuses mainly on addressing the following question from multiple perspectives: "Where does inequality in educational outcomes (however measured) associated with children affected by poverty originate and, correspondingly, what can be done about it?" (p. 2). As discussed by Levin (1995), poverty has a negative relationship to both receiving an education and also improving education. He goes on to explain that schools are not responsible for poverty and also the fact that they do not have the power to erase it from society.

1.5.1 Theme # 1: Micro/Macro debate. Flessa identifies a major tension in this field, which is the macro/micro debate. This debate stems from a dominant idea present in the Coleman report (1966), which recognizes that variables existing outside of the school walls (such as family life) have a greater impact on student achievement outcomes than any other variable. The macro level of this debate understands that schools do not cause poverty, because it exists outside of school walls, while the micro level believes that there's a reasonable expectation for schools and classrooms to take appropriate action to address it (Flessa, 2007, p. 3). For instance, in the macro-approach literature, a conclusion that is often set forward is that "poverty causes low reading scores," which Flessa argues is not productive and does not leave space for teachers or

policy makers to respond with action (Flessa, 2007, p. 10). Often, the ways in which the relationship between poverty and schooling is discussed in the literature and, I would argue public documents, overlooks the complexities and critical connections between social issues that foreground the realities in inner city schools. This relationship is discussed in simplistic ways that Flessa (2007) claims, discourages the "accurate analysis of policy-amenable" issues (p. 10).

1.5.2 Theme #2: The relationship between neighborhoods and schools. Kohen, Hertzman, and Brooks-Gunn (1999) have studied the relationship between neighbourhood influence and school readiness, and emphasize the social dimension of the relationship as opposed to "individual level characteristics" (Flessa, 2007, p. 11). The answers to these issues and this relationship don't lie in 'society' broadly speaking, or in the school as a self-contained entity. School-specific remedies are also dominant among the literature and reflect this theme, where there is a heavy focus on curriculum (micro-level approach); however these solutions still do not address the complexities and nuances of the relationship between poverty and education. Flessa argues that solely focusing on either/or problems and either/or solutions is not adequate to understand the bigger picture of the relationship of poverty and education.

This thesis seeks to embed the approach of big picture thinking into the analysis. I will not focus on the "what" of problems and/or solutions, rather this thesis seeks to unravel a complex discussion that embodies various elements of social, cultural, political and economic life in relation to literacy education. Policy texts play a key role in governing district cultures and school functioning in the contexts of neighbourhoods. The following section will explore concepts of policy texts in education settings as a way to bring attention to the way that they play a key role is sustaining power of a dominant discourse with a specific focus on accountability.

1.6 Policy Text as an "Accountability Instrument"

Flessa draws on Epstein (1995), who refers to the "rhetoric rut," where it is difficult to move beyond the rhetoric of such topics and translate them into concrete policies and practices, bridging together the school lives and home lives of young people (Flessa, 2007, p. 26). This parallels the work of Nichols & Griffith (2009) who argue that often the "explicit link" between everyday practices in school environments and policy texts is missing (p. 244). Nichols and Griffith's (2009) concept of "accountability instruments" (p. 243) is useful to explore in the discussion of the role of policy texts in education settings.

Canadian education restructuring in the last two decades has had very similar themes as our neighbours in the south, with an intense focus on standards and assessment. Nichols & Griffith (2009) explain that this shift is "supported" by documents that they conceptualize as "accountability instruments." The authors explain that texts are a form of "educational governance" in public school settings, which are policy-mediated settings (p. 241). Policy texts are only effective when those who they address take them up, and as Nichols and Griffith explain, texts must be "actualized" as instructions for specific action (p. 241). For example, the policy recommendations in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* are only useful when they are put into practice and translated into action on the ground. Education policy texts in British Columbia are noted to be a part of a managerial discourse, where there is an intense focus on accountability of School Districts, which in turn "coordinates" education practice in BC schools (Nichols and Griffith, 2009, p. 241). This focus on accountability also acts as "evidence" in that the District is responsible and committed to the functioning and performance of students and educators in its schools. This evidence is delivered specifically by organizing key ideas around performance-based goals, targets, timelines and standardized monitoring procedures (p. 243), which are reflected in the document that I will be

analyzing.

Texts are used as a way to govern specific socio-political aspects of the everyday, and they are only effective if one takes them up. For example, the authors state that texts are instructions for action, such as curriculum. They point out that curriculum is a form of governance for classroom pedagogy, where the text is actualized and practiced in the everyday. Nichols and Griffith (2009) focus on British Columbian public education discourses, pointing to a key document that includes the following (BC Ministry of Education, 2004):

- Efforts to improve student achievement

- Increase provincial accountability and public transparency

- Formulate plans for improvement and development – especially in the context of
    supporting the BC workforce

While they are referring to curriculum standards and testing (p. 243), I argue that educational policy documents such as *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014), can also be seen as an "accountability instruments," (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 243) which make them a key component of contemporary educational discourses that are critical to study. This work is highly beneficial for understanding the context of BC education policy, because the research specifically explores how education policy in BC is inter-textually organized.

Also relevant to my thesis is the work of educational researchers on education policy documents. Lingard (2013) notes that educational research and education policy-making have been seen as two different sites of tension with competing interests and approaches. He explains that social research is only one component of education policy, as there is a contemporary desire for evidence-based policy research. The research that has the most immediate impact on policy is

the research that has been commissioned by policy-makers for a specific purpose, which is framed by a specific problem. Other academic research researches policy document themselves. This is where my thesis research fits in. The research of policy in an academic framework seeks to critically unpack the ideologies of policy, which are often overlooked or taken for granted in the contemporary world (Lingard, 2013). This thesis will be focusing on a policy document that has commissioned research, focusing on a specific problem of resources in the inner city.

1.7 Critical Discourse and Educational Policy Analysis Methods

In order to conduct this policy analysis, close attention is required to the language of the document as well as to the contexts shaping it. This is why I have drawn upon strategies from Critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a "problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement," as described by Fairclough et al. (2011, p. 357). Critical Discourse Analysis methods share a commitment and interest in exploring the many linguistic and semiotic facets of "power, injustice, abuse, and political or cultural change in society" (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 357). There is an intense focus on the critical links between language and society, as a way to investigate the sociopolitical and sociocultural fabric of everyday life. Critical discourse analysis and its methods act as an intervention to make visible what is often taken for granted and overlooked as ordinary or routine (Fairclough et al., 2011). Rather than describing systemic structures in society, critical discourse analysis works to "*explain"* systemic in society (van Dijk, 2001, p. 354).

Fairclough et al. (2011) explain that discourse is "socially constitutive" and also socially shaped. Not only does it constitute situations and objects of knowledge, it also helps produce the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. The influential power of discourse stems from the fact that it contributes to and preserves the social status quo of

society (Fairclough et al., 2011). Fairclough explains critical discourse analysis methods as an analytic strategy that goes beyond solely exploring linguistic aspects of a text (Taylor, 2004).

Drawing upon CDA, in my reading of *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools,* I will explore the framing of the concept of literacy at work in relation to broader sociocultural contexts, while specifically looking at linguistic patterns across the text and their ideological implications. Critical discourse analysis methods align themselves with being on the side of often marginalized groups, which is relevant when analyzing a document discussing an inner city district.

Emphasizing the importance of language in social life, Taylor (2004) argues that critical discourse analysis methods are of particular value when exploring the social language of policy texts. Discourse analysis methods offer opportunities to uncover and focus on marginalized discourses of contemporary society. Taylor draws on the work of Fairclough in order to explain how critical discourse analysis and its methods offer a wide angled approach to exploring linguistic features of a text in conjunction to larger social structures of power at play. Taylor's work explains that values embedded in policy texts can be unpacked through analyzing the following key components (p. 436):

- Whole text organization (structure, e.g., narrative, argumentative, etc.),

- Clause combination

- Grammatical and semantic features (transivity, action, voice, mood, modality)

- Words (e.g., vocabulary, collocations, use of metaphors, etc.)

My analysis of *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014) will draw specifically on whole text organization and words, which have a specific focus on how 'literacy' is taken up by this policy text in relation to theories of literacy. I

am specifically drawn to critical discourse analysis methods for the analysis of the policy

document because there is a commitment to social change by taking this approach. Policy texts

both develop and maintain power relations; therefore, there are many layers and dimensions to

these texts that are worthy of study (p. 436).

The focus of the analysis will be on the ways in which literacy is socially constructed in

the inner city district of East Vancouver. The close readings of the report will analyze the

dimension of literacy and it's relationships to other issues identified in the school district. The

aim is to explore literacy critically while understanding the intimate relationships it has to other

issues in the inner city community by identifying existing patterns across the report, both implicit

and explicit.

The proceeding chapter will present the theoretical framework and a relevant literature

review of New Literacy Studies. Then, in Chapter 3, I will analyze *Re-vision Inner City and*

CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools to explore how literacy is taken up in this

specific text. I will draw upon critical discourse methods as a way to inform my close reading of

how literacy is constructed and understood in this text. I am hoping to contribute to a

conversation that understands literacy as a complex social practice that contributes to one's sense

of empowerment and potential. Solutions cannot be given unless the root of the issue is explored

in-depth by acknowledging tensions, concerns and questions of all stakeholders. The final chapter

will offer my critique on this document, where I draw on key concepts from New Literacy

Studies and situate my own personal and professional experience to explore what another version

of this document may look like. There is a commitment in my research to widen the

understanding of literacy education to include the multidimensional layers of it that have various

historical, social and political facets. Often, inner city districts face judgment and are

misunderstood as a result of exaggerated media (Seidel, 2011, p. 12). This exploration of literacy

can contribute to a discussion of engaging students who are often overlooked and struggle with

the social implications of feeling like they have been pushed to the margins of society.

Chapter 2: New Literacy Studies as a Conceptual Framework

Traditional notions of literacy have often focused solely on the reading and writing skills of the national language (Tan & Guo, 2013). Scholars across the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) believe these static understandings of literacy are inadequate, and specifically so for teaching and learning in the digitally mediated and highly globalized context of contemporary society (Handsford & Adlington, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Tan & Guo, 2013). This chapter will begin with an introduction to NLS broadly, and literacy as a social practice. This is followed by a brief map of the tradition's origins, which will then lead into a broad discussion of how and why literacy education is in critical need of reform. Digital practices of young people today are also explored through various facets of New Literacy Studies, including communication and semiotic theories of multimodality and hybridity of textual practice.

2.1 Literacy as Social Practice

2.1.1 Historical context of New Literacy Studies. Historically, literacy has been conceptualized as the ability to decode print-based texts, which has been proven to be limiting in highly technological and globalized times (Warschauer & Ware, 2008). The epistemological forefront of NLS is social constructivism (Adams, 2013), which is a framework that advocates for a "bottom-up" approach to explore literacy as an interactive and dynamic social practice (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 22). Specifically, this "bottom-up" approach explores literacy as a construct that is connected to various intersecting social and cultural realities of everyday life. Lev Vygotsky, who also advocates for an interactive learning process, is a key figure in social constructivism (Adams, 2013, p. 25). The belief that learning takes place when one is engaging in dialogue and interactions in the learning process with a sociocultural context is an

idea that Vygotsky emphasized. This argument is of critical importance to the discussion of NLS. The continuous learning process, dialogue, interaction and understanding of sociocultural context are fundamental themes that NLS brings attention to in literacy education and research.

The paradigm of literacy as a cultural practice became visible in the late 1970's (Mills, 2010, p. 247). This paradigm connects with the ideas of Vygotsky (1962), who believes language is a system that is influenced and constituted by sociorelations or sociogenesis (Mills, 2010, p. 247). Similar ideas surrounding literacy as a cultural practice are also reflected in the work of education scholars Bourdieu (1977), Freire (1970), and Giroux (1983). All of these scholars advocated for a shift in understanding literacy as a social practice, opposed to a stand-alone cognitive structure that one embodies (Adams, 2013, p. 25; Stephens, 2010). These scholars theorize that it is critical for the study of literacy to include social context, which marked a significant change in the direction of the way that literacy was being studied (Adams, 2013). The emphasis on local context and the 'social' dimension to literacy has brought forward a key argument, which is that there are multiple, socially embedded literacies (Adams, 2013, p. 25). Walsh (1991) argues that literacy is shaped by theoretical and ideological concerns that extend beyond classroom walls (as cited in Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000, p. 3).

Street (1997) addresses the 'problem' (existing dominantly in the West) of what is known as the literacy debate (p. 45). He goes on to map that there are various accounts from experts in the field and his particular interest lays within the social practices that are connected to reading and writing, rather than focusing on the psycholinguistic conflicts involved, which is a fundamental principle of NLS.

Street (1997) gives a brief explanation of the literacy debate that is also supported by Gee (2000). Street draws from Wrap (1997) who addresses the two polarized positions of this debate

(Street, 1997, p. 46). Chall (1967) set the terms of the debate as being:

1. Those who advocated for a code-based approach to teaching reading

2. Those who emphasized the meaning of place in relation to broader social contexts

Similarly, Gee (2000) states that the literacy debate begins with the belief that literacy is a general, self-contained ability to read and write language. The rebuttal to this belief is that nothing about literacy is self-contained or general. Rather, literacy is a complex social structure, which is intimately connected to "identity work" (Gee, 2000, p. 412). "Identity work" as discussed by Gee refers to the relationship between social languages of teenagers and the ways they make meaning. Gee explains that identity work itself is not solely about language, rather it is "fully integrated with specific ways of thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting" (Gee, 2000, p. 413). This specifically connects to my volunteer experience in the media program, where I realized my understanding of the social language of my group allowed them to feel a sense of comfort.

I will connect this idea that literacy is dynamic and fluid across formal and informal settings to the influential models of literacy developed by Street (1997) in the following section. Specifically, I will discuss Street's autonomous and ideological models of literacy that build on literacy as a complex social practice discussed in this section.

2.2 Autonomous vs. Ideological Models of Literacy

If literacy is seen as simply a universal technical skill, the same everywhere, then the particular form being taught in school gets to be treated as the only kind, as the universal standard that naturalizes its socially specific features and disguises their real history and ideological justifications.

(Street, 1997, p. 48)

Street (1995, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2008) has contrasted two models of literacy, one that demonstrates the current state literacy education (the **autonomous** model) and the other that shows the approach that NLS advocates (the **ideological** model). I have created the figure below to demonstrate the autonomous and ideological models of literacy that Street has developed. The arrows of this diagram indicate a top-down vs. bottom-up approach.

Ideological Model

Focus: Context-dependent approach

Power relations

Social practice

Meaning is always contested

Culturally sensetive

Intersections between the role of the text and communication

Focus: uniform skillset that can be measured

Context-free model

Intense emphasis on school-based literacy
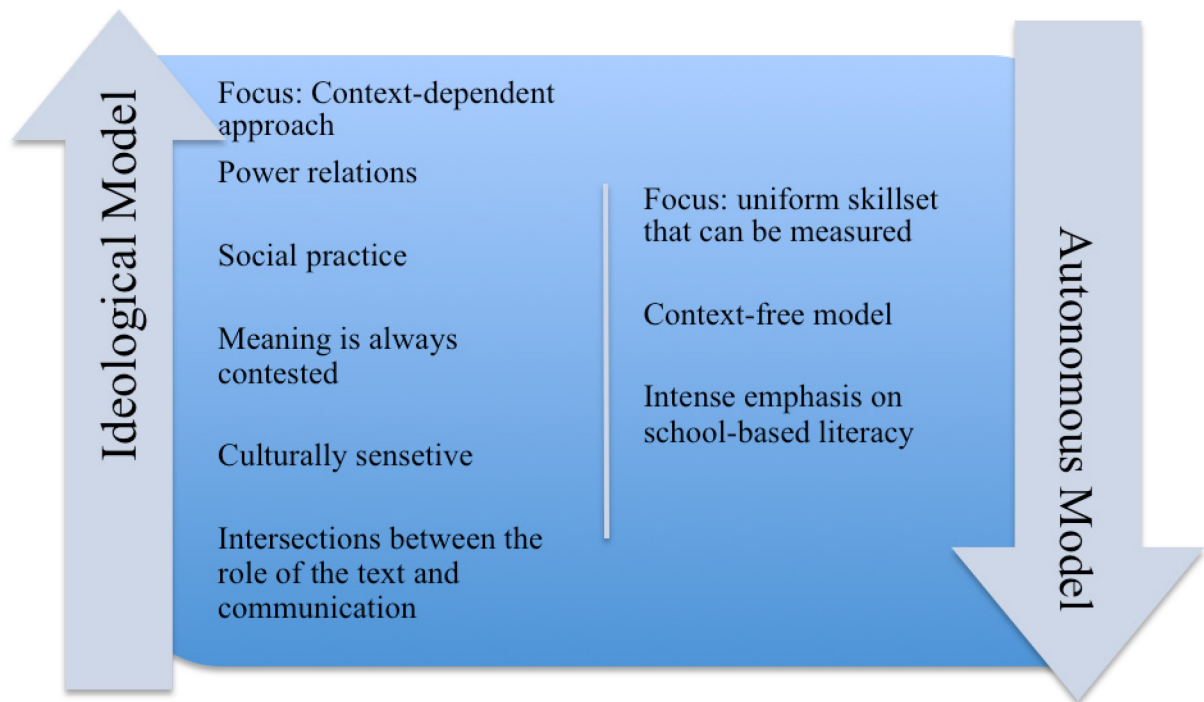
Autonomous Model

Figure 2. My representation of Street's autonomous and ideological models of literacy

Various groups of scholars working in the NLS tradition have concluded that the autonomous model of literacy that is embedded in many literacy programs is not appropriate (Street & Hornberger, 2008). The autonomous model of literacy is neither an appropriate intellectual tool to understand the diversity around the globe of reading and writing, nor a design for practical programs that this global diversity in local contexts requires. Often, this approach masks the cultural and ideological assumptions that are embedded in the way we understand literacy education (Street & Hornberger, 2008). These assumptions often appear to be neutral and

universal in the way they are presented throughout literacy education. The ideological model of literacy that Street discusses, questions power relations between participants, the resources used and/or available, community context, and the overall socio-political, cultural and economic conditions that interact with the learning environment.

Literacy is not simply a neutral or technical skill as it is always functioning within a space that is embedded in "socially constructed epistemological principles" (Street & Hornberger, 2008, p. 4). The autonomous model of literacy suggests that literacy is a "static skill" (Street & Hornberger, 2008, p. 6) that is learned in the school setting, while the ideological model vouches for a context-dependent approach which acknowledges various power relations at play in the construction of literacy as a social practice.

2.3 Literacy in Informal Learning Settings

In order to research literary as a context-dependent, social practice means understanding scholars have explore literacy in out-of-school spaces. Questions surrounding informal learning environments are reflected in Seidel's (2011) book *Hip Hop Genius Remixing High School Education*, where he asks, "[h]ow can students take adults seriously if those adults don't acknowledge the challenges students face during the eighteen hours every day that they are not in school?" (Seidel, 2011, p. 26). For example, the home can be seen as an informal learning space, as explored in the work titled "Different spaces: Learning and literacy with children and their grandparents in east London homes" (Jessel et al., 2010). Authors Jessel et al. (2010) explore the literacy learning that takes place in the home through the exchanges between children of three to six years of age and their grandparents in Sylheti/Bengali-speaking families of Bangladeshi origin and monolingual English-speaking families of mixed ethnicity living in East London. This study reveals that the exchanges taking place between grandparents and grandchildren in the

home are rich discursive learning spaces. The grandparents and children work together and complement each other's cultural knowledge, and there was joint interaction in learning. Specifically, the authors found that new cultural understandings are created as both generations collaborate to create meaning through sharing knowledge and expertise (Jessel et al., 2010, p. 48). This work is an example of how literacy education can benefit by widening our understanding of learning spaces. This can tie directly to the ideological model presented by street, which can also be complemented by the concept of "multiliteracies," where the context-dependent approach is at the forefront of the re-conceptualization of literacy pedagogy presented by the New London Group, which will be explored in the following section.

2.4 Multiliteracies

The New London Group put out an international call to re-conceptualize the meaning of literacy in the later half of the 1990's for the new times of contemporary society, which resulted in the emergence of the concept of multiliteracies (Mills, 2010, p. 250). It is difficult to minimize and contain the definition of literacy when the communication and technological landscape is in constant flux (Mills, 2010, p. 250). The New London Group identified two key reasons for this re-conceptualization: 1) There is a need for a new literacy pedagogy that should be aware of the presence of communication technologies, and particularly the convergence of these technologies and, 2) As a result of increased diversity in local communities, literacy pedagogy should be reflective of linguistic diversity that is a reality due to increased migration and globally networked economies (Mills, 2010, p. 250). The New London Group (1996) emphasizes that cultural diversity is not a new concept, but rather the idea of literacy pedagogy being sensitive and inclusive of diversity is the main idea that they put forth. The four components of multiliteracy pedagogy (New London Group, 1996, p. 5) are detailed in the table below:

1.) Situated practice	• Drawing on the experiences of students in the context of meaning-making in lifeworlds, the public realm, and workplaces
2.) Overt instruction	• Where students develop a metalanguage of design
3.) Critical framing	• Where students interpret the social context and purpose of designs of meaning
4.) Transformed practice	• Students as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures

Table 1. Components of multiliteracy pedagogy

Conventional views of reading and writing are no longer adequate to describe the combination of sign systems students face in the digital worlds they inhabit – through social media, online gaming, and communication websites. Theorists across NLS and multimodal semiotics have argued that stripping down English curriculums to conventional reading and writing skills is actually not reflective of the literacy skills needed in contemporary society today (Mills, 2010, p. 250). An interesting area of this argument is the fact that the New London Group posits that meaning exists in modes other than printed text on a page. Kress (2000) and other theorists of New Literacy studies have argued that language is a multimodal system of representation that is said to be "fuzzy round the edges" (Mills, 2010, p. 250). For example, the discussion of hip hop happened across many high school programs I was involved with. We went beyond discussing rap lyrics and themes in songs. Given the proliferation of social media and the use of various multimedia platforms, many students "follow" their favourite artists. This online participation made students engage with texts much differently, than when I remember going to HMV and buying CD's. The students would discuss the meaning of Tweets and YouTube videos of their favourite artists. Their sense of connectedness to their favourite artists was much different than mine growing up, which called for interesting discussion and engagement. For example, Tim

would talk about J.Cole's interviews he watched on YouTube after the album *Born Sinner* was released. He was drawn into various social issues (specifically surrounding race) because J.Cole's social media was consistently discussing topics in a way that resonated with Tim, which then he shared with the rest of the group in the program. This is an example of how literacy can be "fuzzy round the edges" and not necessarily restricted to print-based forms (Mills, 2010, p. 250).

This pedagogy recognizes that traditional notions of literacy, which often are focused on the reading and writing skills of the national language, are inadequate for teaching and learning in the digitally mediated and highly globalized context of society (Handsford & Adlington, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Tan & Guo, 2013). The New London Group asks, "how do we ensure that differences of culture, language, and gender are not barriers to educational success? And what are the implications of these differences for literacy pedagogy?" (1996, p. 2). If literacy in the classroom does not take a multidimensional and holistic approach, it is linked to furthering the "social marginalization of racial, ethnic and minority youth" (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008, p. 11). This is central to the youth who attend inner city designated schools in East Vancouver.

Though there has been receptive and positive international feedback surrounding the concept of multiliteracies, there have been criticisms and concerns about multiliteracy pedagogy. Concern has been expressed over the pluralisation of literacies, according to NLS scholar Street (1997), in which the approach is becoming 'too' widened. Wagner has stated that through the development of what constitutes multiliteracies, the discipline has created a new category that suggests literacy is a definite construct (Street, 1997, p. 48). Street argues that it is not ideal to associate literacy with a culture where current anthropological approaches suggest fragmentation and hybridity in both domains. Similarly, Kress (1997) believes that the concept of multiliteracies

is that of a paradox; it implies that there is stability in literacy that NLS researchers are trying to reject:

> This paradox only exists if in the first place we assume that language is autonomous, unaffected by the social, and therefore stable. If we assume that language is dynamic because it is constantly being remade by its users in response to the demands of their social environments, we do not then have a need to invent a plurality of literacies: it is a normal and absolutely fundamental characteristic of language and of literacy to be constantly remade in relation to the needs of the moment; it is neither autonomous or stable, and nor is a single integrated phenomenon; it is messy and diverse and not in need of pluralizing (as cited in Street, 1997, p. 49).

This critique by Kress identifies a tension surrounding the study of new literacies; however, it also points out how difficult it is to study an area of social, cultural and political life. Another critique in a large body of education literature, is that multiliteracy pedagogies are not immediately compatible with the agendas of current curriculum (Tolbert & Theobald, 2006). The idea of 'testing' is at the forefront of various discussions, which is emphasized as a prominent measure of academic status (Rodarte, 2006; Tolbert & Theobald, 2006; Tan & Guo, 2013). It is noted by Tan & Guo (2013), that the implementation of multiliteracies is not possible in an 'all at once' approach (p. 29). Their study specifically highlights the contextual relationship that traditional notions of literacy have to systemic foundations of standardized testing within formal school settings (Rodarte, 2006; Tan & Guo, 2013). This study will be further explored when specifically discussing implementation of multiliteracy programs in Vancouver's East Side.

The structure of testing minimizes literacy to be solely focused on language composition and comprehension (New London Group, 1996). There is a tension in current formal education

settings to integrate multiliteracy curriculum. This tension is rooted within two demands. First, there is a need and desire to innovate, and second, there is a requirement to stay within the curriculum parameters, which subscribe to the measureable outcomes of standardized testing. There also is the pressing question of assessment when it comes to the implementation of multiliteracy education that NLS sets forward (Hansford & Adlington, 2008; Tan & Guo, 2013). The plurality of literacies and the integration of mulitiliteracies into current curriculum become even more 'messy' when we consider the relationship that literacy has to the digital shift in contemporary times, which is explored in greater detail in the following section.

2.5 New Literacies and the Digital Shift

The shift in communication information technologies in last ten years has "transformed" literacy practices (Livingstone, 2004; Mills, 2010, p 246). The internet has fundamentally reconstructed identity development within adolescents and has an on-going impact on how one not only asserts themselves in the world, but also how they understand themselves (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008). Digital communication has asserted itself as a prominent power structure in the workplace, recreational and community contexts (Mills, 2010). It is critical to note that it is not necessarily useful to view the relationship between literacy and technology as "effects" or "impacts" (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 219). Rather, authors Warchauer and Ware (2008) explain that the relationship between technology and literacy is more usefully understood in terms of a "broad social ecology" of various forces and conditions.

This recent focus on digital practices has been understood as the "digital turn," which refers specifically to the new attention to new literacy practices in a diverse range of digital environments. Mills identifies the digital turn to be a pun on NLS scholar, James Gee's "social

turn" in literacy research (Mills, 2010, p. 247). The digital turn is largely attributed to globalization and the intensified technological landscape, which has widened the range of access to modes of communication.

The literature on the "digital turn" makes clear that the digitally mediated lives of young people has not only evolved language use and construction, but also the identities of the participants (Handsford & Adlington, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; New London Group, 1996). Online environments are presenting young people with new ways to become participants of multiple communities, where they are not only consuming media, but producing it as well (Handsford & Adlington, 2008; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). Digital media is changing the ways in which young people learn, play, socialize, and act as agents in civic life (Mills, 2010, p. 253).

The everyday digitally mediated lives of young people are constantly evolving and involving environments (Hansford & Adlington, 2008). Texts are no longer experienced as a "singular artifact" (p. 55). For example, a movie is no longer solely a movie. It is more than often paired with a wide array of media goods, such as a website, clothing, social media, stationery, etc. As pointed out by Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012), our lives are "inescapably intertwined" with all aspects of consumer-mediated culture (p. 18). These new forms of communication that are intricately connected to literacy practices require an educational response.

We must be careful when approaching the implementation of multiliteracies strategies to not overgeneralize or overlook students' socio-economic status (Handsford & Adlington, 2008; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). There are dangers and limitations to thinking that the proliferation of information technologies means that all students have access to them. These assumptions can

alienate students, especially those who are in positions of economic disadvantage. All young people do not have the access to the same resources, and scholars sometimes fails to acknowledge this. For instance, Prensky suggests that 'digital natives' are one homogenous group that embodies an active engagement with new media technologies, which not always the case (Hansford &Adlington, 2008, p. 58).

The work of Hansford & Adlington (2008) draws from the work of Jenkins et al. (2006), who focus the discussion of multiliteracies within the participatory culture framework. Jenkins et al. (2006) argue that the internet holds a "hidden curriculum" which opens up a participation gap for some and not others (Hansford & Adlington, 2008, p. 59). This was something that I witnessed in a program I developed called Magazine Mondays in an after-school literacy program. It was for grade 3-7 students in one of the highest needs schools in the inner city. This program was developed as a follow-up to a program the previous term where I realized many of the students did not have many opportunities to practice their computer skills because many of them did not have a computer at home. Magazine Mondays took place in the school computer lab, where the students had time and space to contribute to their online magazine titled *Writers Land*. The aims of this program were specifically to give space to the students to explore their interests and passions through practicing digital literacy skills. By the end of the term there were over 80 entries and multimedia pieces, including drawings, stories, YouTube posts and pictures. I quickly realized how media pedagogies offer an excellent approach to address the evolving communication landscape and the unfamiliarity of multiliteracies in formal education settings.

2.6 Media Literacy as an Educational Response to the Evolving Communication Landscape

An important branch of literacy scholarship dedicated to better understanding new literacy pedagogy is "media literacy." Some of the origins of this scholarship can be found in the work of cultural studies researchers such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, who provide insight into how important and powerful media education can be for young people. Williams and Hoggart used screen education as way for young people to have opportunities to explore what they were consuming beyond classroom walls (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). By engaging with media texts in the classroom, these cultural studies theorists believed that their students would be in a better position to understand their position in the world, including the conditions and factors that contributed to their marginalization and alienation (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 9). What Hoggart and Williams were doing was creating spaces in the classroom to allow students to practice critical thinking. They both recognized the critical disconnect between the lives of their working class students and the traditional educational material that they were teaching (Hoecshmann & Low, 2008). With the context of post-war Britain, these two founding scholars of Cultural Studies came to the realization that the way they were teaching traditional material to their students was ignoring who they were (Hoecshmann & Low, 2008). Williams and Hoggart altered the curriculum to specifically change the way that 'culture' itself was being taught to students. They used working class texts such as popular culture, looked outside of the classroom and rejected the ways that traditional education has taken up 'culture' within in an elitist context. They specifically rejected the way that cultural elitism in schools saw popular culture as "unworthy of study" (Hoecshmann & Low, 2008, p. 22).

Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) raise interesting concerns surrounding the role of the teacher when delivering media literacy education. They draw on the work of Prensky (2001), who argues that students of contemporary times are no longer able to learn in traditional learning

environments (p. 8). He claims that teachers (who often are digital immigrants), are not able to 'catch-up' to their students who are digital natives, therefore are unable to successfully be a media educator. Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) offer a critique on Prensky's claim and explain that the media educator cannot simply know everything about the evolving technological discourses of contemporary times. The media educator must be prepared and trained to bring strategies and concepts to teach, however, Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) emphasize that they must have an open mind towards the media content that young people are immersed in (p. 8).

This immersion is complex. Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) suggest that young people's media consumption is characterized by the following four characteristics (p. 33):

1.) Personalization

2.) Hypersocialization

3.) Networking

4.) Ubiquity

These characteristics of young people's media engagement are useful to understand and consider when developing educational responses to the changing nature of literacy, which will also be applied in the analysis of this thesis.

If we consider the characteristics of young people's media engagement and apply them to the development of media literacy education, developing critical analytical skills is a key component. It has been argued that media literacy education must always involve a particular level of analysis in conjunction to media production opportunities that give students a chance to reflect and engage with their challenges, dreams and visions (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). The commitment to finding social relevance in meaning making in the educational context is at the core of Cultural Studies, which I argue is intricately connected to NLS. This also relates to

dismantling and being critical of structures of power during the social process of learning and teaching.

2.7 Participatory Culture: A Useful Framework for Literacy Teaching and Learning

Central to the work on media literacy has been the idea that the constantly evolving digital landscape has brought forward new forms of participation. This idea has been extensively developed by Jenkins et al (2006). In order to unpack a participatory culture framework, it is useful to understand the shift from mass to participatory culture. Theorists in the Frankfurt School developed the theory of the "culture industry," which understands the production of mass culture to be a construct that acts as a distraction and is a key agent of mass deception (Jacobs, 2007). Jacobs (2007) builds on the framework of the Frankfurt School and asserts that the theory of the culture industry has been replaced by the theory of public culture. He acknowledges the social and historical contexts within the way that mass culture has been produced and the way that it became a culturally structuring force within society. Furthering the discussion, Jacobs draws from the ideas of Adorno and Horkheimer, culture as producing its mass audience by doing two key things (Jacobs, 2007): the mass audience defines and asserts itself through the act of consumption; and, the cultural industry constructs this as a cultural practice, which embodies a particular narrative of choice, which can also be an illusion of choice.

With the invention and on-going development of the internet, the idea of mass culture experienced a social and cultural shift. Technologies began to invite and enable people to produce their own content. This can be seen through the development of social networking sites, gaming, blogs, YouTube and much more (Chau, 2011; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008). New media technologies have complicated the idea of the 'passive consumer by inviting consumers to take an active role in shaping their own narratives of self-choice and

freedom within a neoliberal context. It is here, where the connection to Henry Jenkins' work on participatory cultures (2006b) is of most value to discuss and analyze the cultural practices literacy pedagogies.

There are five key characteristics of participatory culture as taken up by Jenkins et al. (2009), are outlined by Chau (2011, p. 67-72). I argue that they are also beneficial to apply to contemporary literacy education. The key characteristics of participatory culture are outlined in below:

1.) Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement

2.) Strong support for creating and sharing one's project

3.) Informal mentorship

4.) A belief that contributions matter

5.) A sense of social connection

These characteristics are important to keep in mind when considering various elements of multiliteracy pedagogy because there are interconnected areas that are relevant and useful to explore for literacy learning and teaching. The characteristics of participatory culture are not isolated; rather they are elements that intersecting and fluid in the way that they operate.

The participatory culture framework can also be applied to out-of-school literacies in the context of learning environments. This concept of informal learning environments will be explored in the following section and will build on the concept of multiliteracies, by exploring a case study of the home as a vital informal learning environment.

2.8 Critical Literacy and New Capitalism

A final concept critical to understanding new literacies is their relationship to the structuring socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions of a society. Like education, which

"[should be] understood 'within the broader historical, social, and economic conditions that characterize the wider society'" (Giroux, 1983, p. 234 as cited in Adams, 2013, p 25), literacy, needs to also be understood in conjunction to the structuring socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions of a society.

Literacy practices of young people are more and more intimately linked to the changing nature of work as the economy continues to globalize and be driven by rapid technological change. Gee (2000) connects key ideas of language, identity, social class, and the socio-political conditions of New Capitalism to the social practice of literacy. This work specifically argues that literacy is a social skill that is intimately connected to one's identity. Gee interviews teens from different social classes, and they demonstrate how social languages are a key part of the way young people understand and assert themselves in contemporary society. Children who have challenging socioeconomic circumstances often fall further behind in academic literacy after the fourth-grade. Gee explains that if literacy was understood though the NLS framework, we might learn that these children initially did not learn to read in the academic context, which requires that one must be able to "actively" engage with the oral and written social language within "meaningful academic Discourses" (Gee, 2000, p. 413). For example, when one's agency is marginal in the early stages of practicing a social language, it will be challenging to advance in the skills required to actively and critically practice this language.

Gee extends this discussion and states that a deeper understanding of literacy is rooted in the context of society. The socio-political conditions of contemporary society are in constant flux, and are changing how schools are relevant to the acquisition of "dominant Discourses" (Gee, 2000, p. 413). It is critical to unpack the term "dominant Discourses," particularly in the critical connection these have to the literacies of young people who are deemed 'at-risk'. Gee's definition

offers a broad understanding of the term in relation to literacy practice. He explains that dominant Discourses "give one access to power, social goods, and relative freedom from oppression in our new capitalism, global, high-tech world for poor and rich alike" (Gee, 2000, p. 413). By acquiring the dominant Discourses of mainstream society, one can extend the possibilities for themselves in the social and economic domains of an increasingly globalized and technological economy (Gee, 2000). Relevant to the idea of acquiring dominant Discourses in the context of literacy is the idea of adolescent risk. Vasudevan and Campano (2009) argue that it is critical to explore "conditions" and "discourses" that are active in the "social production of risk" (p. 313). The authors focus on the conditions and forces that interact with literacy learning across contexts. By applying this critical sociocultural lens, Vasudevan and Campano (2009) challenge discussions focused on individualized notions of students and families (Vasudevan and Campano, 2009, p. 313) as sole agents in the process of literacy learning.

A key component of Gee's argument here is that "new capitalism," which he defines as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary society, has fundamentally changed the social criteria of a 'desirable' worker. New capitalism is defined by the new highly globalized economy which is "science-and-technology driven" (Gee, 2000, p. 414). It has become a requirement for one to be able to adapt to ever-changing circumstances, as opposed to having explicit knowledge based on past practices. Rather than having a stable identity with essential qualities (as demanded by the old capitalist system defined by mass production), the pace of new capitalism has created "shape-shifting portfolio people" (Gee, 2000, p. 414). Shape-shifting portfolio people embody skills that are constantly being rearranged to adapt to the conditions of new capitalism and specifically, are defined by their projects. The opportunities and the social conditions needed to

be considered a part of this group can be seen as intimately linked to one's literacy practices, which should be included in discussions of literacy education.

One issue that is not fully emphasized throughout the literature is the role of systemic forces such as objectives of regional education curriculum goals and available resources in relation to literacy education. These conditions and forces are intimately connected to the way that literacy is designed and delivered within the classroom. Though the documentary *Waiting for Superman* (2010) explores the American public education context, the idea of multiple administrative stakeholders in the school setting is similar in Canada. There are differing standards across provinces at the Ministry level; then there is the School Board and/or District level; last, there is the hierarchy involved within schools. The amount of bodies involved in public education and the lack a sense of cohesiveness in order to implement the fundamental principles of NLS, which are context-specific to each community. Knowledge transfer from academic research to community practice is key for the integration of New Literacy Studies into schools. The structural challenge of multiple stakeholders can potentially act as a barrier to sustainable reform and I contend is a tension in the connections that academic research has to policy circles. Coiro et al. (2008) also emphasize the need for a system and collective effort in new literacies research as a way to better inform policy makers.

2.9 Conclusion

NLS research has a task in making visible the complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices and challenging dominant stereotypes and myopia (Street & Hornberger, 2008, p. 4). The autonomous and ideological models of literacy, presented by Street, are part of the foundations of NLS. The autonomous model illustrates traditional methods of literacy teaching, learning and understanding, while the ideological model focuses on the direction literacy

education should be moving. Elements of multiliteracy pedagogy and participatory culture are highly beneficial to consider when situating literacy as a social practice that is connected to larger political, cultural and economic systems. In the following chapter, I will apply the conceptual framework presented by NLS to the discourse analysis of *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014) in Chapter 4. Specifically, I will draw from New Literacy Studies to extend discussions in the report and also critique them.

Chapter 3: Analysis

The Vancouver School Board calls for a plan to revise resources in the inner city to better deliver services to students and families in the community. This plan, *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools,* is a document that I intensely explored while I was addressing the literacy needs of the inner city during my position as a Program Evaluator for the Writers' Exchange. I wanted to know where the organization's work would have the most impact and could reach the most students and who specifically would benefit from programming that was focused around one-on-one or small group work on projects that drew on the interests of the kids participating.

This document identifies many challenges and issues in the school community of the district and proposes policy recommendations. Specifically, this document has an underlying focus on the evolving socioeconomic conditions of East Vancouver. The evolving socioeconomic conditions of the community have a direct impact on the programs and other services that the Vancouver School Board coordinates and delivers. This document is a representation of educational governance, and demonstrates a "managerial turn" in education discourse (Clarke & Newman, 1997, reprinted in 2005 as cited in Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 241). This shift in education ideology, according to Ball (1999) is a reflection of how there is heavy emphasis on the

themes of " 'quality,' 'evaluation,' 'leadership,' and 'accountability'" in the ways that issues are framed (as cited in Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 241). Reflecting this shift, *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools,* makes a promising attempt to discuss complex social relations but frames them around themes of quality, academic evaluation, district leadership and the accountability of the district. This document is a textual form of school governance, which demonstrates how educational discourses approach and frame issues in the school community.

In this chapter, I offer a discourse analysis of *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools.* During my time collecting and analyzing data for the Writers' Exchange, I realized that this document has many dimensions to it as a policy text. It identifies a problem: the need for inner city resources to be revised and reevaluated, because poverty itself is becoming more complex and widespread in schools. The close reading of this report will explore the four key elements of the report: 1.) The problem-centred approach; 2.) The role of the literature review; 3.) The use of evidence; and, 4.) The reoccurring themes in the policy recommendations. As discussed in chapter one, I will draw from Taylor (2004), who points out that there are particular discursive aspects of policy texts that uncover a discussion of how power is sustained and reproduced (p. 437). I will focus on two of these and apply them to the four key elements of the document that I have identified above. By drawing on critical discourse methods, I am placing emphasis on the "ideological work" (Taylor, 2004, p. 437) at play in this document. The two discursive aspects I will draw on to analyze each of these elements are:

1.) Whole text organization (structure, e.g., narrative, argumentative, etc.)

2.) Words (use of vocabulary)

This chapter will clearly indicate how each of these discursive aspects contributes to the "ideological work" at play in this document. I specifically will explore key elements of the report by focusing on the two discursive elements of how: 1.) The ways in which the whole text is organized, and 2.) the specific language that is that is used to demonstrate the element. This analysis will be followed by a discussion in Chapter 4 of how literacy explicitly and implicitly is woven throughout the document, applying the framework of New Literacy Studies discussed in Chapter 2. By applying this framework, this discussion will illuminate key intersecting ideas and claims that often get compartmentalized in policy circles.

3. 1 The Problem-Centered Approach in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*

3.1.1 *Text organization*. The research that has the most immediate impact on policy is the research that has been commissioned by policy-makers for a specific purpose, and which is framed by a specific problem. *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* is commissioned research focused on a specific inner city district problem. This problem-centered purpose is a structuring force of this document, which sets up a 'step-by-step' approach to addressing the increased presence of poverty in schools of the district and the implications that it has on the resources. This approach is illustrative of how a policy document is in fact an accountability instrument as discussed by Nichols and Griffith (2009). By clearly stating and addressing the "problem" which guides this policy report, the District is demonstrating how they are taking full responsibility for the revisioning of resources. The opening of this report is very clear in laying out the purpose and rationale for policy change: poverty is presenting itself in more complex ways in inner city schools, and there is a need to better provide resources and services to better serve families and children in the district. This report outlines suggestions for policy and action, specifically to do with the concept of

"revisioning" resources in inner city schools.

The very clearly stated purpose to revision resources can link to the discussion of education policy-making by Lingard (2013). Lingard explains that social research is only one component of education policy, as there is a contemporary desire for evidence-based policy research. This form of accountability is a reflection of the "managerial turn" in education ideology as discussed in the introduction of this chapter (Clarke & Newman, 1997, reprinted in 2005 as cited in Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 241). Positioning the report as a response to changing complex factors that contribute to the community's socioeconomic state has prompted a "what works" framework, which is applied throughout the report. Rather than a focus on the multiple nuances and practices on the ground that interact with the growing concern about poverty, there is a jump to find solutions for these issues. I contend that without a focus on "how" processes are currently working, we cannot fully provide sustainable solutions.

Questions that are posed as "what works" have the potential to discredit and overlook the complexities of how social processes in the school setting are functioning. For example, the problem identified is that poverty is presenting itself in complex ways in schools and that these conditions are impacting the school resources across the inner city. If we solely explore "what works" to address this issue, there is potential to overlook the current social and cultural ecology of what is happening in the district. For example, this approach can overlook the vibrant work already being done in the district that is addressing the changing needs of the community because of the evolving socioeconomic circumstances. The "what works" framework has both strengths and weaknesses in addressing the complexity of poverty and resources in the districts, which will be included across all elements of this analysis.

3.1.2 *Language.* The following is a passage included in the introduction of *Revisioning*

Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver School. I am interested in how the problem-centred approach is driven in the clearly stated rationale as follows:

> The rationale for conducting this comprehensive examination of current services and programs is partially based on **stakeholders'** perceptions that the incidence and complexity of poverty has increased. **Trustees** heard that poverty continues to be concentrated in certain parts of the City, but it is more widespread throughout. **Schools** also report that they perceive the complexities of the children and families they are supporting have increased. **Trustees** believed these perceptions needed to be further explored and understood. (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1, emphasis mine).

I have highlighted key bodies that are the driving forces behind the problem-centred framing of this report. The purpose and rationale for the research in this report is that members of the Vancouver Board of School Trustees have identified that poverty in the district has serious implications for inner city school resources. The Vancouver Board of School Trustees is a key body in upper administration of the Vancouver School District. The language above explicitly acknowledges the complexity of poverty and how this has various implications for the inner city school community and has a pressing need to be investigated. However, we can see that the power for conducting this research is held by higher administration, for example, "Trustees believed these perceptions needed to be further explored and understood" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1).

The purpose for the use of the word "revisioning" is not clearly stated in this report; though not explicitly stated, the language used in this text brings attention to the fact that this review of resources is going to be different in terms of its scope than past reviews. "It was agreed the scope of the review would be more comprehensive than in the past and would resemble more of a 're-

visioning' of resources" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 2). Rather than moving resources, they have made a clear point in using the word "re-visioning." I argue this word refers to a whole new plan to address poverty in conjunction to research, because, as noted above, trustees believe this topic needs to be further explored and understood.

3.2 Poverty as Defined in the Literature Review in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver School*

    3.2.1 *Text organization.* The problem-centred approach calls for a solution-centred response in this text, which is a structuring force in the literature review that is used as evidence for policy recommendations. Given that poverty is at the root of the problem-centred approach, the report dives into a definition of poverty that has been developed by the Task Force. As discussed in the introduction, background and context of this thesis, external partners and internal stakeholders came together as a Task Force during the discussion surrounding the process of "revisioning" resources reflected in this report.[3] Before the report goes into a detailed discussion of resources, the report writers have developed a section titled "Poverty – a Working Description," which is an area that was developed by the Task Force for the purpose of this work. This section indicates that poverty itself has various layers that intersect with one another and

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[3] External partners include: Human Early Learning Partnership, Ministry of Children and Families, Vancouver Coastal health, Mental Health, Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, Vancouver Parks and Recreation.

Internal stakeholders include: Elementary and secondary principals, elementary and secondary teachers, Canadian union of Public Employees and administrative staff.

often can be generational. The following layers have been identified in a list as a part of the definition of poverty (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3):

- *Economic pressures*

- *Impoverished spirit*

- *Food insecurity*

- *Lack of adequate housing*

- *Mental distress/illness/addictions*

- *Physical ill health*

- *Social marginalization, isolation, lack of social network*

- *Little resiliency, lack of alternatives*

While these are all critical elements of what contributes to poverty in the district, the report fails to paint a bigger picture of how exactly these layers are implicated in day to day learning environments. I am particularly interested in how each of these compounding layers intersects with one another and interact with the district's resources, and the complexities of these intersections and interactions cannot be gathered through this list formatting. This textual organization does not provide the critical framing necessary to understand how poverty is becoming more complex as detailed in the purpose of this report's research. It also does not address the multiple intersecting factors at play in the current social ecology of the district, which is often overlooked when trying to conceptualize social issues such as poverty.

This section on the definition of poverty does attempt to work with a multidimensional definition, given that they have identified the elements in the list to be "compounding layers, often generational" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3). The report writers also mention that there is a link between this working definition of poverty and the social determinants of health:

"It is of note that this description has a close resemblance to the social determinants of health, a set of indicators in the area of health and development and for identifying issues about poverty and injustice" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3). The report writers and the Task Force are working with complex discussions of poverty and the social determinants of health. However, the overall text organization in the form of this list does not capture the nuances that are telling of how something like literacy in the school setting is intertwined with these compounding layers that contribute to the health and well-being of the school community.

    3.2.2 *Language*. The formatting into 'points' is also at play in the language of this report. I contend there are keywords in the description of poverty that indicate that report writers are working with a complex definition of poverty. While they do not take the space to make the critical connections necessary to fully address poverty as a social issue in conjunction to revisioning inner city resources, their use of a complex definition of poverty is a <u>start</u> to opening a critical discussion of how poverty is a central issue in the inner city district:

"The rationale for conducting this comprehensive examination of current services and programs is partially based on stakeholders' perceptions that the incidence and complexity of poverty has increased" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1).

> In Vancouver, the perception of those interviewed in the consultation (and supported by data) is that concentration of poverty in some areas is greater than it has been in past years and that poverty is presenting in more complex ways – especially with mental health complications.
> (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1).

It is made clear in the introduction of this report in two places that poverty is presenting itself in more "complex" ways, specifically because it is greater than it has been in the past, is widespread, and also because mental health complications are a contributing factor. This is a

take-home message that the report writers are working with, however, it is not made clear how this complexity functions on the ground.

The discussion of complexity in the working definition of poverty is linked intimately to the concept of compounding layers, (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3):

> Complex, extreme and diverse set of compounding layers, often generational, including:
> • Economic pressures
> • Impoverished spirit
> • Food insecurity
> • Lack of adequate housing
> • Mental distress/illness/addictions
> • Physical ill health
> • Social marginalization, isolation, lack of social network
> • Little resiliency, lack of alternatives
>   (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3).

The list format does not open up a space of critical discussion or summary where there is room to discuss how economic pressures relate to social marginalization and how both factors can interact with physical ill health and housing. Rather than focusing on "compounding" layers, I argue that the format and language used in this part of the discussion of poverty solely refer to "layers" rather than "compounding layers." There is no discussion of *how* these layers are compounding, which means that although the information present, it is not mobilized in a way that is relevant to the revisioning of resources.

3.3 "What Works to Support Education" Literature Review

Broad organizing questions, specifically within a 'what works' framework, guide the literature review used in the report, which is used as evidence for policy recommendations and action. The two main questions that structure the approach to the literature review are (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4):

A.)   What works to support the education of children who come from a disadvantaged background?

B.)   What works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due

to poverty?

The two questions that the report poses overlap, which I argue does not offer a clear picture of

how elements in this literature review can be seen as possible solutions to the issues identified.

Question A is an overarching question addressing education settings while Question B is a

question specifically referring to the space of the classroom. Both questions are in fact trying to

address the same thing, which is how to best support students in a school community that has

difficult socioeconomic circumstances. By focusing the literature through a 'what works'

framework, there is an effort to deliver tangibles that can be translated into policy and action.

This organization of the text again takes away from or eliminates the space necessary for these

concepts to be expanded on.

3.3.1. "What works to support the education of children who come from

disadvantaged background?"

3.3.2. *Text organization.* The first question, "What works to support the education of

children who come from disadvantaged background?" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4) is

addressed with two models. The first model that the report points to is "collaborative models."

The description of this model is organized into a short paragraph, which essentially lists facts

from research that define what this model means.

> Collaboration is seen on a continuum where minimal partnership is colocation, moving to
>
> coordination, collaboration and finally integration. At a minimum partnership involves
>
> information sharing and at the most intense, programs are linked together.
>
> (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4)

This paragraph is a basic explanation of what a collaborative model is. There is no application to the school setting or how this model is relevant to the revisioning of resources.

The second question, "What works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due to poverty?" is organized in a similar manner. The model that the report suggests works to support children who come from a disadvantaged background is the "place-based" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4) approach. A small paragraph provides vague ideas and facts about this model. For instance,

> This approach focuses on building the capacity of local communities, encouraging local networks of referral and support, targeting benefits to economically disadvantaged families. There is a growing appreciation by governments at all levels – both domestically and internationally – of the importance of locating capacity to plan and integrate services as close as possible to the individuals and communities that the services are intended to benefit. (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4)

The text organization in this paragraph is not telling of what exactly place-based means and what it looks like on the ground in the school setting. The vague nature of these two models may be a result of underdeveloped research on current literature. I have witnessed the crucial need for collaborative programming within the East Vancouver inner city community. Through my various roles in the community sector, I quickly realized the impacts of such collaborative alternative programs in the lives of those students who participated. Flessa (2007) argues that solely focusing on either/or problems and either/or solutions is not adequate to understand the bigger picture of the relationship of poverty and education, which the question posed by the report is doing. A key to building sustainable and engaging school-community collaborations lies within the 'buy-in' effect you receive from those involved in the early stages of coordination

(Tan & Guo, 2013, p. 29). There is no mention in this component of the report's literature review of the role of stakeholders and how they are key in organizing and coordinating such activities. I suggest that school-community collaborations are not successful unless all stakeholders are on board and understand the motives and pedagogical design of the programming that is being delivered. Often, alternative ideas that challenge traditional education discourses are not a priority due to the demand of funding issues and political resistance (Seidel, 2011), a topic that is also overlooked in this part of the report. The framing of the discussion surrounding collaborative and place-based models fails to connect the two models together. While I understand that the research surrounding school-community partnerships is underdeveloped (Hands, 2014; Russell et al., 2013), I believe that research in this report could contribute to that area.

I would like to expand on the report's underdeveloped discussion of the place-based model by drawing upon the work of Tolbert & Theobald (2006). These authors suggest that the pedagogy of place-based learning assists in creating an inviting space that connects the community of urban youth to their environment. Tolbert & Theobald's (2006) work highlights that place-based lessons involve a process and are about immersing students in their communities, which foster a sense of pride and positive affect. A particularly compelling part of this argument is that it specifically expands opportunities for student growth (Tolbert & Theobald, 2006, p. 273). This can be reflected in the work of the Writers' Exchange, where programs have sought to bridge gaps in between the community and classroom.

Though I agree with this argument about place-based learning, Tolbert & Theobald's work is exploring a place-based approach within the framework of 'lessons' which I feel is deeply limiting and raises questions regarding the sustainability of such approaches (Tolbert & Theobald, 2006). I strongly believe that a 'place-based' model can foster pedagogically

productive and engaging spaces, however it needs to be applied to a broader approach and not be limited to the scope of an assignment or lesson, especially when considering the district wide issues outlined in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*.

3.3.3 *Language*. To address the question of what works to support the education of children who come from a disadvantaged background, this section in the report includes key sentences and words that are valuable to analyze.

Models for collaboration **have been discussed for decades**, but are **rarely successful**. Some **factors that are essential for success** are outlined: common agenda, shared measureable results, mutually reinforcing activities, backbone support organizations. (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4, emphasis mine).

It is made evident that there have been challenges in the past in successfully integrating collaborative models into schools. These specific challenges are not discussed or drawn upon in this discussion of collaborative models, rather there is a focus on "factors" which contribute to successful models of collaboration in schools that are supporting children from a disadvantaged background. When the report addresses important elements of collaborative models, again we see key information 'listed' off, with little focus on explaining them. For example, the term "mutually reinforcing activities" is used to describe essential factors needed to make collaborative models successful. This term is not clarified or explained, and I argue that if it is not situated directly to classroom pedagogies or school-wide plans, it could cause confusion.

The second model referred to is the place-based approach, as discussed above. The excerpt is taken from a small paragraph described in the report:

This approach focuses on building the **capacity** of **local communities**, encouraging **local networks** of referral and support, targeting benefits to **economically disadvantaged**

families. There is a **growing appreciation** by **governments** at all levels – both

domestically and internationally – of the **importance of locating capacity** to **plan and**

integrate services as close as possible to the individuals and communities that the

services are intended to benefit. (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4, emphasis mine)

The language chosen to demonstrate the importance of place has an intense focus on building

capacity of communities facing challenging socioeconomic circumstances. However, the ways in

which this is discussed do not provide insight into how community building and community

capacity connect to the revisioning of resources. The report does not extend a discussion on why

there is "growing appreciation" from domestic and international governments. This is implicitly

suggesting that there has been political resistance in the past to the integration of alternative

education models in the school setting; however it does not bring attention to any specific

structural barriers (e.g. funding).

There also is no language used to discuss the connection between the two models. I argue

that both collaborative and place-based models are in fact very similar. Both have similar goals of

strengthening the community and have been proven by research to be of value specifically for

vulnerable communities. This critical connection across the report is central to the next section I

will analyze, which is Part B of the literature review in *Revisioning Inner City and*

CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools.

3. 3.4. What works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due to poverty?

3. 3.5. *Text Organization.* This section of the literature review focuses on presenting

research again through the 'what works' framework. By organizing the text around this

framework, the writers make an effort to deliver tangibles that can be translated into policy and

action, which is why the format of a list is desirable. By presenting research in a list format, there

is an effort to simplify and condense qualitative information surrounding strategies and plans of action in classrooms of vulnerable communities. I argue that this approach to demonstrating research and literature is not in fact the most 'comprehensive' way to understand the roots of issues the school community faces. For example, the literature review that is organized under the question "What works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due to poverty?" breaks down four key areas of research noted below:

1. Literacy - including early learning/intervention and culturally appropriate approaches

2. Social emotional growth

3. Parent involvement

4. Attendance

These broad areas of research are identified by the report as a way to justify and support the policy recommendations surrounding the "revisioning" of resources in the inner city, a way to demonstrate accountability by the district.

As discussed by Taylor (2004), social life has become increasingly complex with the fast pace of globalization, and social language reflects this. Specifically, the author points out that the economic and cultural dimensions of globalization have contributed to the "fragmentation" and also the "plurality" of social life, which have implications for policy texts (p. 434). While all of these areas identified in the report demonstrate and reflect everyday realities of social life, the report's approach to reviewing literature is deeply fragmented and does not capture how these areas can be intensely intertwined and so reveal even more about the challenging circumstances in schools and the process of policy making. For instance, by not focusing on how specific processes such as literacy learning or culturally appropriate pedagogies work in the school community in the context of partnerships, the report is not able to point to institutional structures such as current

curricula and pedagogies that are contributing to the current social ecology of the school community that they are trying to revision.

I contend that the constant change and flux in local communities leads policy makers to approach social issues such as the educational needs of students living in poverty in a fragmented manner as a way to manage and control social and cultural plurality. Plurality is beginning to be reflected in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools,* where there are multiple issues identified and poverty is approached as a complex issue with many dimensions. However, the report's structure is fragmented specifically around guiding questions, which compartmentalizes the research so that it can easily be extracted into policy rhetoric and delivered in a clean and organized fashion, as discussed by Epstein (1995) (as cited in Flessa, 2007).

I am especially interested in the ways that literacy is taken up in this literature review and the way that the text is structured. Specifically, literacy is understood as a stand-alone, cognitive structure in this report. Since discourse is constitutive of society and culture and also plays an ideological role in reinforcing dominant beliefs and values of mainstream society (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353), I would argue this document reflects how literacy continues to be seen as a particular type of skill that is not situated in the broader context of social life in contemporary times. Rather, literacy has been taken up as an area that is prominent in the literature surrounding what works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due to poverty.

3. 3.6. *Language.* The following figure reflects my breakdown of how the information surrounding literacy is communicated in the report (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4-5, emphasis my own):

Literacy

The current effective practices involve a systemic approach that is comprehensive
     - it incorporates **early identification** of needs
     - this serves as being preventative

Early intervention is very effective for children who are disadvantaged by poverty and need

one-to-one or small group work focused on their needs

- **frequent assessment** and monitoring are essential

- students need **dedicated time for literacy learning and teaching that is culturally and**

developmentally appropriate

- **early learning** experiences for children are an essential part of healthy childhood development

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Figure 3. Summary of literacy information in the report

We can see that there is a heavy emphasis in the language of the report on the importance

and the need for early intervention methods. This resembles the public institutional report by the

National Academy of Science, titled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,* in which

Gee (2000) explains that there is an intense focus on the "early phonemic awareness," which is

linked to overt instruction as a way to ensure young children learn "real reading" (p. 413). By

"real reading," Gee explains, the report is referring to decoding, word recognition, and

comprehension of literal meaning. This understanding of literacy is highly compatible with

standardized testing and other ways of measuring one's literacy abilities as solely a skill set.

Pedagogies surrounding teaching literacy for this means of measurement are deeply limiting, as they do not allow for literacy to present itself in diverse ways that reflect the students in a classroom. Though culturally and developmentally appropriate approaches are noted in the report, there is a lack of detail of what these may look like. The rhetoric of culturally appropriate approaches to literacy teaching is highly compatible with notions around multiculturalism; however I contend that often this vague language does not explain how this could look on the ground. For example, the report states that "Students need dedicated time for literacy learning and teaching that is culturally and developmentally appropriate" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4). However, there is no discussion of what literacy learning means in the context of being culturally and developmentally appropriate. We see this pattern repeated in the discussion of social emotional growth, where the report states, "[e]ffective strategies include developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 5). Again, there is no expansion or explanation of what "culturally and developmentally appropriate" actually mean in relation to literacy learning and social emotional growth.

Literacy is discussed within a "learning framework" that is often presented in quantitative data that comes from test scores and standardized methods of assessing reading and writing comprehension (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 216). The understanding of literacy presented in the report has a primary focus on how policy can be representative of "practical and measureable outcomes" (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 216). For example, in the breakdown above, we can see "frequent assessment and monitoring are essential" for literacy learning and teaching (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4). This emphasis on accountability is carried through in the third theme I have identified in this analysis, the use of evidence.

3.4 The Use of Evidence

3.4.1 *Text organization.* The fragmented literature review discussed in the previous section leads into district-specific data about poverty in individual schools. The report measures and identifies poverty in relation to the Social Services Index (SSI), which is an instrument developed by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia. Specifically, the SSI index identifies the number of families with children attending the schools who live on Income Assistance and students who are in care. The text brings particular attention to the fact that the SSI is used in this document for two specific reasons:

1) The index is a source of school-specific data that is tracked over time;

2) There is a strong correlation between the SSI and other data derived from school enrolment and neighbourhood information (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 6).

The data presented by the SSI is used to create a list of schools that have the highest needs for resources. Recommendations for policy and action were developed after discussions with the Task Force, which was an iterative process in collaboration with the research team that was commissioned be a part of the revisioning process the report.

3.4.2 *Language.* The SSI is an example an accountability instrument used as a mechanism to provide deliverable and tangible facts to demonstrate stakeholder responsibility. The prominent role of the SSI in this report shows how quantitative data is favoured over the qualitative approach in understanding the complexity of poverty in the district. For example, if we consider the language in the table taken directly from the report below, we see the pattern of the 'list' reoccurring.

Adjusted 5 year (% + #)

Rank		Enrol	SSI %	SSI#	% + #
			5 yr average 2008-2012		Adjusted
1	Sir William Macdonald Community	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
2	Lord Strathcona Community Elementary	528	27.3%	144	171.5
3	Grandview Elementary	166	43.7%	72	116.1
4	Admiral Seymour Elementary	137	45.4%	62	107.4
5	Britannia Community Elementary	177	38.4%	68	106.2
6	Thunderbird Elementary	297	25.2%	75	100.2
7	Queen Alexandra Elementary	190	27.4%	52	79.6
8	Tillicum Community Annex	105	30.3%	32	62.1
9	Hastings Community Elementary	620	7.6%	47	55.0
10	Florence Nightingale Elementary	247	13.9%	34	48.3
11	Lord Selkirk Elementary	608	6.7%	41	47.3
12	Captain James Cook Elementary	338	10.7%	36	46.9
13	Sir Sandford Fleming Elementary	463	8.2%	38	46.0
14	John Henderson Elementary	511	7.4%	38	45.2
15	Lord Roberts Elementary	435	8.4%	37	45.0
20	Mount Pleasant Elementary	187	13.7%	26	39.3
32	General Brock Elementary	225	7.4%	17	24.0

Table 2: Ranking of schools in the inner city

The language used to demonstrate the data is purely quantitative and plays a key role in the

policy recommendations. Based on the information provided by the SSI, schools are ranked into

three tiers based on where specific resources should be. This method of deciding what schools are

'the most in need' is also contentious. "The notable exceptions were from the school

communities of Queen Alexandra and Mount Pleasant. In both cases, the many participants from

the school communities emphasized that the SSI numbers do not adequately reflect the needs of

the schools" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 9). Further in the report, it is discussed that

Queen Alexandra is one of the few schools that does not have community centre nearby and that

the needs of the school are in fact higher than the SSI reflects. The method of the SSI may be of

value to understand quantitative population demographic data, however, I contend that it does not

have the ability to capture and communicate the complexity and nuances in the school

communities, which is what the report is trying to set out to do. For example, if we revisit the

rationale of this report, we see that there is a need to understand and explore poverty and the

relationship that it has to school communities:

> The rationale for conducting this comprehensive examination of current services and
>
> programs is partially based on stakeholders' perceptions that the incidence and complexity
>
> of poverty has increased. Trustees heard that poverty continues to be concentrated in certain
>
> parts of the City, but it is more widespread throughout. Schools also report that they
>
> perceive the complexities of the children and families they are supporting have increased.
>
> **Trustees believed these perceptions needed to be further explored and understood.**
>
> (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 1).

I argue that by reducing the complexity of the needs of inner city schools to solely

neighborhood data about families on income assistance and children in care, we are overlooking

various structural barriers that are elements of poverty in the district. For example, as discussed in

the literature review of this report, poverty is complex and cannot be reduced to solely being low

income. There also is an observation stated in the rationale of the report "…that poverty is

presenting in more complex ways – especially with mental health implications" (Vancouver

School Board, 2014, p.1). It is unclear how the SSI is addressing the complexities and nuances of

poverty, and how it is contributing to a more comprehensive evaluation and revisioning of

resources. The SSI is used as an instrument to demonstrate accountability and transparency in the

methods of gathering this information. The language used when describing the SSI and its results

are not completely fulfilling the goals outlined in the rationale of this document, which works

against its own goals and aims of revisioning resources in the inner city.

3.5 Reoccurring recommendations

      3.5.1 Text organization. The policy recommendations for each individual school are based on the measurement of the SSI results. The report includes a list of schools in highest need of resources (as seen in the previous section) and this list then categorizes the schools into "tiers" based on need. The policy recommendations for resources take into account Task Force discussions, SSI data, and research presented in the literature review. The organization of the policy recommendations is textually organized in the following format:

Policy recommendation for each tier of school that has been determined by the SSI→ context →
rationale → further to this recommendation

Figure 4. Policy recommendation format

This formatting allows for the document to lay out the recommendation, to provide context, to use research and data as a rationale to justify the argument, and to solidify the argument by concluding it with "further to this recommendation" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 11).

      Rather than exploring each recommendation ranked for each tier of school, I am interested in two reoccurring policy recommendations across all schools in the District, which are that all schools need: 1.) Full time literacy specialists and, 2.) Out of school programming. The reason for focusing on these two policy recommendations is because both of these are excellent starting points for a discussion of the intricacies of literacy education in contemporary times in a vulnerable community, which I will explore in the next chapter through the conceptual framework of New Literacy Studies. The following section will explore the language used to discuss the two reoccurring themes of the full time literacy specialists and the need for out of school programming.

3.5.2 Language. Following on from the above analysis of the ways that the recommendations are textually organized, this section will specifically analyze the language of the two reoccurring themes: the need for 1.) A full time literacy specialist and, 2.) Out of school programming.

In the figure below, I have pulled excerpts from the report in the ways that the Full Time Literacy Specialist is described.

Full Time Literacy **Specialist** (Teacher whose **role** is both to work with students and to **initiate collaborative inquiry** with **school colleagues** on **effective literacy practices** for students who live in poverty) (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 10, twice on page 11, emphasis mine).

While staffing in each school will be different based on need, some **foundational positions** will be required to ensure support for **Early Learning, Literacy, Social Emotional support, and attendance** (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 11, emphasis mine)

It is recommended that the **role** of the Literacy **Specialist** be **carefully described** and that the positions become district staff. In the **initial implementation** of this change of staffing it is recommended that Human Resources determine, in accordance with the Collective Agreement, a process to allow current teachers be grand-parents into the roles or organized back into their schools as they choose; and, to allow the grand-parented people be organized back into their schools when they decide to vacate the role in the future.
(Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 12, emphasis mine)

In the area of literacy, for example, there could be consideration of specific goals for kindergarten entrance, reading at grade level by grade three, successful transitions to grade 8, retention of students through grade 10, and graduation results.
(Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 14)

Figure 5. Excerpts from *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*

It is recommended that each school across all tiers have a Full Time Literacy Specialist. There is an emphasis on the term "specialist," which continues to sustain the power dynamics of learner and the teacher. This is implicitly stating that the literacy specialist holds all knowledge necessary in order to improve a student's literacy practices in the inner city. It is noted that the role of this position is full time, which also suggests that the district is focused on addressing the 'problem' of literacy in the district. The need to have a role dedicated to the literacy learning of students is clearly stated and emphasized as a result of SSI data and also reflected in the research of this

report. It is stated that the Literacy Specialist is to be included as a "foundational position" across all schools, as a way to ensure there is support for literacy. In the rationale of this recommendation, we see how the broad areas of research (Early Learning, Literacy, Social Emotional Support, and Attendance) in the report are used as a way to justify the recommendations.

The concern of what this role entails is also implicitly woven throughout this recommendation. For example, as seen, "It is recommended that the **role** of the Literacy **Specialist** be **carefully described** and that the positions become district staff" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 12, emphasis mine). There is a need to clearly identify and explain what the role of the Literacy Specialist is and for this role to be integrated as a stable employable identity in the district by becoming district staff. There is no mention or focus on *how* the district will take responsibility for the professional development training needed for these positions. It is acknowledged that this is a district responsibility, however there is a missing step of how exactly this will be done. We see a managerial control over the discourse in the brief discussion: "In the area of literacy, for example, there could be consideration of specific goals for kindergarten entrance, reading at grade level by grade three, successful transitions to grade 8, retention of students through grade 10, and graduation results." I argue that the vague nature of this role is contributing to a dated conversation about literacy itself as a 'skill' learned in school. Research shows that literacy learning goes beyond the role of the specialist. However, given the difficulty of containing such a daunting and complex task as literacy learning, documents such as this one that work in the confines of structural powers such as provincial government bodies need to demonstrate accountability through measureable outcomes. We also see that the report writers recognize that solely focusing on measureable outcomes is also, in a sense, problematic: "This

concern must be taken into consideration in the implementation of this recommendation so that the focus continues to be the needs of the children, not the assessments and the reporting requirements" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 14). The "needs of the children" in this sentence refers to complexities that are context-specific to a child's learning that cannot be necessarily captured by "measureable outcomes" as identified above. However, this is still not privileged by the text as something that should be at the forefront of policy discussion, as it is textually organized under the "Further to this recommendation" section of the recommendations (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 15).

There also is a brief inclusion of how the Literacy Specialist is a "Teacher whose role is both to work with students and to initiate collaborative inquiry with school colleagues on effective literacy practices for students who live in poverty" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 10). This description is a promising attempt to include collaborative models into literacy learning and teaching, however, it does not outline how or when this happens. Again, we see that there are missing links in the way that literacy is constructed in this report. For example, what does it mean to "initiate collaborative inquiry"? What is "effect practice" in the context of collaborative inquiry? At the root of this issue is the fact that though literacy is recognized in this report as a key element to one's education, it is not clear and not explored in depth as a way to address tangible and also appropriately conceptualized models in the process of revisioning resources in the inner city. The explicit use of the word "collaborative" in the brief description of the role of the Literacy Specialist is not linked to the research of this report, which places emphasis on the importance of collaborative models in the context of inner city learning challenges.

The second reoccurring theme in the policy recommendation is out of school programming. There are many important components in how the text uses specific language to

discuss the theme of out of school programming. Concepts of community partnerships and the place-based approach are used to discuss the theme of out of school programming, which I argue is telling of how this is a very important topic of the report, but remains underdeveloped. Relevant to this analysis is the language used to describe a.) the role of the Community Schools Coordinator and b.) role of research in the report. For example the text reads:

> The position of the Community Schools Coordinator be refocused on establishing, maintaining as opposed to direct program provision in the community in order to bring resources to students and schools (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 16).

The role responsible for coordinating out of school programming is that of the Community Schools Coordinator. "Coordinator" is used in this title, which implicitly states that not only is the person in this role responsible for initiating relationships, but also there is an intense administrative role as well. The recommendation goes on to explain that this role is to be "refocused on establishing, maintaining and evaluating partnerships." Earlier in the report, where we saw the question "What works to support the education of children who come from disadvantaged background?" there was attention brought to the fact that collaborative models have proven difficult to implement over the last decade (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4). There now has been a shift in the understanding of how collaborative models are not only effective but also how they can be sustainable within the inner city community. This is why we see key words such as "establishing, maintaining and evaluating partnerships." Coordinating is not simply about integrating a collaborative model. Models of collaboration are only deemed successful if they are approached as a process, which is key to the role of the Community Schools Coordinator. Also, the text demonstrates that "[t]he position of the Community Schools Coordinator was strongly praised in our consultations" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 16).

Often, if all stakeholders involved in the school processes do not understand key coordinating

bodies or understand their roles, the importance and value of these roles are underappreciated. By

bringing attention to the fact that this role is "strongly praised," there is potential to create a

sustainable model by appreciating and understanding the coordinator role. For example, from the

report:

> We know from research that out of school programming is an extremely effective way to
>
> build children's resilience. Many community organizations have the resources to build
>
> those programs. We need to focus on ensuring the most vulnerable students access the
>
> programs. A model initiated by KidSafe may be instructive here. (Vancouver School
>
> Board, 2014, p. 16-17).

Explicitly, in the rationale of this recommendation, we see the way that research is

organized as evidence and used as justification for the policy recommendation. However, though

this is acknowledged, the research is not used as a way to explain how models of collaboration

are an effective way to build children's resilience. It is important to bring attention back to the

ways in which the literature review was organized around a 'what works' framework. It is here

where I contend that the ways in which we ask questions have a critical impact on what type of

information we are gathering and also placing emphasis on. We also see the continuing theme of

missing links in the discussion of the research. For example, it is noted that out of school

programming is effective, specifically as a way to build a child's resilience. However, this does

not provide us with any insight as to how and why this element builds a child's resilience, or as to

what this contributes to learning and development in the school community. I contend that the

vague nature of the language used to describe 'research' and its role is ultimately used as a tool to

briefly justify claims. Though the report has drawn on relevant literature and research, its

treatment of research is underdeveloped and does not translate to tangible and deliverable

outcomes, which this report is attempting to do. In the following chapter, I draw from New

Literacy Studies as a way to reframe and refocus key ideas of this report to offer an alternative

reading with literacy at the forefront of my discussion.

Chapter 4: **New Literacy Studies**
An Application to the Reading of *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*

The previous chapter analyzed four key elements of *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*, which are*:* the definition of poverty, the "what works to support education" literature review, the use of evidence, reoccurring recommendations. I specifically drew from the work of Taylor (2004) and examined two (out of four) key discursive aspects used to analyze a text, which are: 1.) Whole text organization and, 2.) Language. This chapter will draw on the analysis and apply the lens of New Literacy Studies as a way to broaden and extend the discussion of the key ideas in the report. By applying the conceptual framework of New Literacy Studies, the aim of this chapter is to offer an alternative and more critical reading of some of the key elements of *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools*. I will begin with the conception of poverty and literacy by extending the critiques identified in the analysis chapter. This will be followed by a discussion of relevant areas in New Literacy Studies that are of value to the Literacy Specialist position and out of school programming recommendations, which we also saw as dominant themes in the policy recommendations across all levels of schools in the District.

4.1 Poverty

As seen in the previous chapter, the report writers developed a section titled "Poverty – a Working Description" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3). This section of the report indicates that poverty itself has various layers that intersect with one another and often can be generational. The following layers were identified (in the format of a list) as a part of the definition of poverty (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 3):

- Economic pressures

- Impoverished spirit

- Food insecurity

- Lack of adequate housing

- Mental distress/illness/addictions

- Physical ill health

- Social marginalization, isolation, lack of social network

- Little resiliency, lack of alternatives

While these are all critical elements of what contributes to poverty in the district, the report fails to paint a bigger picture of how exactly these layers are implicated in day to day of learning environments. A key principle of New Literacy Studies is that literacy is context-specific to its environment. Therefore, in order to conceptualize literacy, one must understand the conditions and forces that give shape to a given learning environment, such as poverty. Current literacy education in formal education settings has been labeled "inadequate" for various reasons (Hoecshmann & Low, 2008, p. 10). I contend that the way that poverty is conceptualized and presented in this report is an example of how the context of an environment is often seen as independent from literacy education. At the core of this report is the need to step back and understand the conditions and forces that contribute to the educational ecology of inner city schools in East Vancouver. At the root of this specific need is the condition that poverty is more widespread and complex. One cannot begin to discuss the serious implications of poverty in the school community if there is not attention to the larger picture of how its various variables interact and intersect with one another. I am particularly interested in how these compounding layers intersect with one another and interact with the district's resources. This information cannot be gathered through this list formatting that is attempting to conceptualize poverty. This

approach does not provide the critical framing necessary to understand how poverty is becoming more complex as detailed in the purpose of this report's research and more specifically, how poverty connects to literacy education.

The diagram I have created below (Figure. 6) is an alternative representation of the working definition of poverty developed by the Task Force (p. 3), replacing the list format with a potential model of interaction. The purpose of this diagram is to show the multidimensional nature of this concept and how it intersects with various social, cultural, and economic layers of everyday life. I argue that the compounding layers of poverty (as identified by the report) interact with one another and impact one's sense of self and well-being. For example, economic pressures interact with access to housing, which also can negatively impact one's spirit and livelihood. If one does not have access to adequate housing, often access to food and healthcare are also limited, which can impact a child's functioning at school. These systemic barriers and challenges often present families and children with negative mental and physical health implications, which are also linked to a feeling of isolation and social marginalization. If one does not have access to homework help in the home, homework will not be completed to the best of the child's ability if they need extra assistance. The arrows indicate the explicit links between these compounding layers, which attempt to paint a picture of *how* poverty is presenting itself in complex ways.
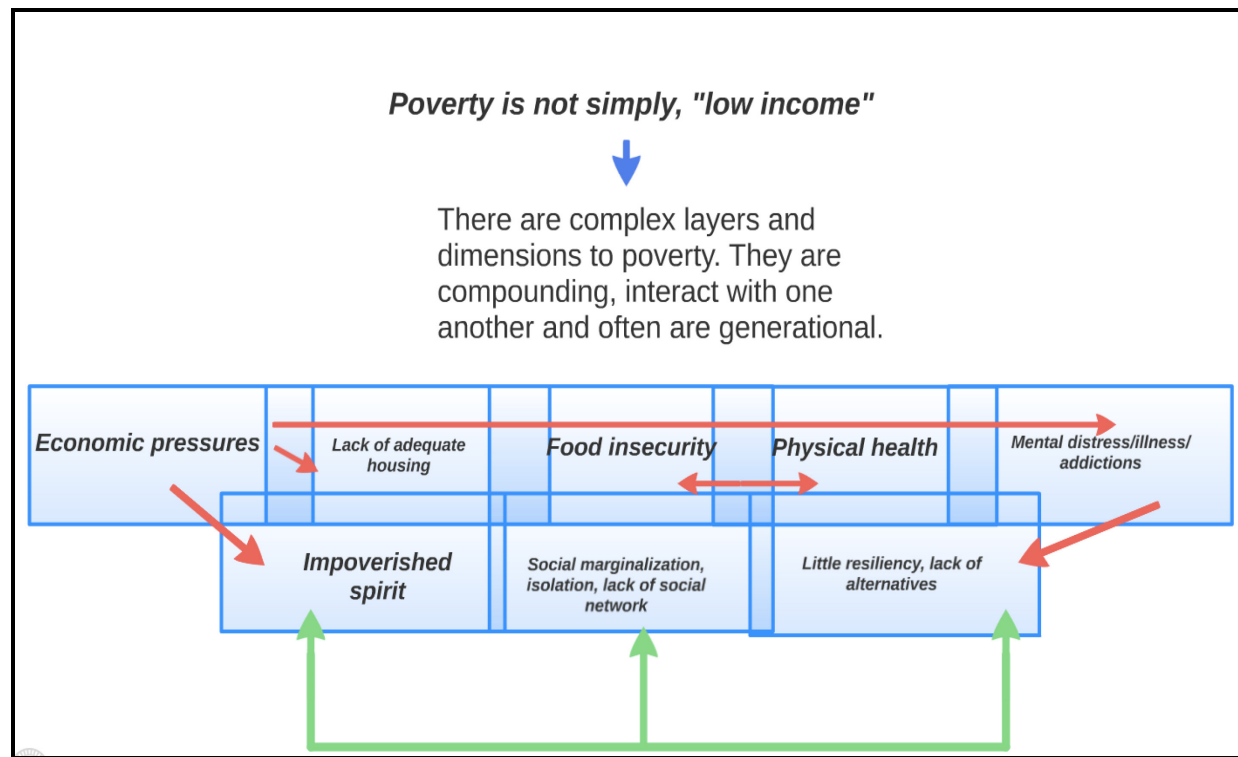
Figure 6. Representation of Poverty

As demonstrated in the above diagram, the indicators of poverty are complex. Income itself is not

fully representative of poverty, and there is a critical link with the social determinants of health.

The social determinants of health are intimately linked to indicators of poverty. This view

acknowledges that one's health and well-being are connected to broader social institutions and

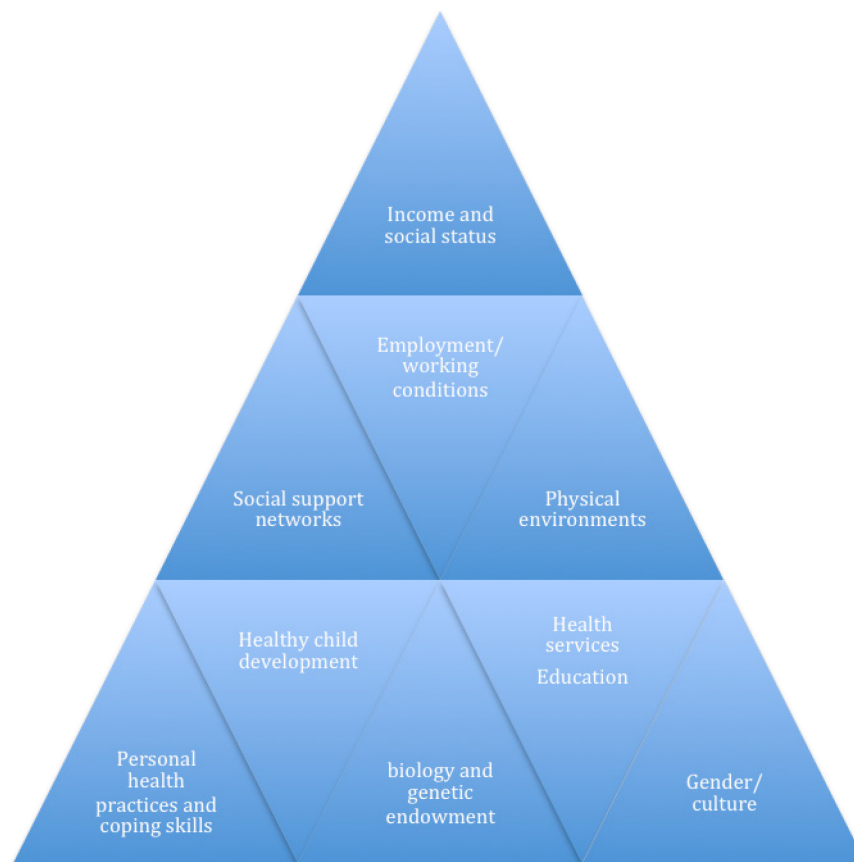practices such as education (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4).

Figure 7. Alternative representation of social determinants of health

The diagram I have created above is my visual representation of the social determinants of

health as explained in the report. The purpose of this diagram is to demonstrate that there are

compounding layers to one's health and well-being as discussed in the report. We cannot

effectively have a discussion about literacy education if we do not begin from the 'ground-up'

and acknowledge broader socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic conditions and

forces that interact with the everyday lives of communities, which this report only begins to do.

The report writers and the Task Force are working with complex discussions of poverty and the

social determinants of health; however the ways that these topics are presented as lists does not

capture the nuances that are telling of how literacy or other concepts in the school setting are

intertwined with these compounding layers that contribute to the health and well-being of the

school community. The diagram above is illustrative of how each of these indicators might work in conjunction with the others. This diagram can relate to Adams' (2013) discussion of critical pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux, who explains that education "[should be] understood 'within the broader historical, social, and economic conditions that characterise the wider society'" (Giroux, 1983, p. 234 as cited in Adams, 2013, p 25). By reducing poverty to a list, we are unable to see how it is critical to understand poverty itself as a force that contributes greatly to the learning environment of students in the District.

4.2 Literacy

Literacy is a dominant topic in the literature review set forward by the report. As seen in the previous chapter, literacy was systemically conceptualized and limited to traditional models of reading and writing. There was a heavy emphasis on early intervention models, needs of students, frequent assessment and culturally appropriate approaches to teaching. New Literacy Studies argue that literacy is highly intertwined with the out of school literacies of young people in contemporary times (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; Coiro et al., 2014; Street, 1997). This field of research is theoretically and methodologically different from traditional literacy research (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008). As we saw in Chapter 2, literacy is a social practice that is ideological rather than autonomous (Street, 1997). As we saw in the report, the ways in which literacy is taken up by the report are more closely aligned with the autonomous model of literacy learning . The focus in the autonomous model of literacy learning is on a uniform skillset that can be measured and can be "transplanted" into environments (suggesting that literacy is context-free), with an intense emphasis on school-based literacy (Street, 1997, p. 50). We can see this approach suggested in the literature of the report, where it is noted that "[f]requent assessment and monitoring are essential" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4). There is, however, an

attempt to acknowledge the importance of the social dimension of literacy in the report, with the inclusion of the statement: "students need dedicated time for literacy learning and teaching that is culturally and developmentally appropriate" (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4-5).

A New Literacy Studies perspective would argue that the inclusion of "culturally and developmentally appropriate" approaches in this report is not sufficient to begin a discussion surrounding the complexities of literacy learning in contemporary times. For instance, there should be a focus on *how* out-of-school literacies could contribute to a child's literacy learning in school. Literacy learning is not a neutral activity that is confined by classroom walls; research suggests that literacy teaching and learning generally must recognize and reflect out-of-school settings such as the home (Coiro et al., 2008; Street & Hornberger, 2008, p. 4). We saw one example of this in the work of Jessel et al. (2011), where the home is a rich learning environment that also connects deeply with one's social emotional growth. This study presented by Jessel et al. is highly context specific, in that it explored the exchanges between Bengali youth living in East London homes and their grandparents, who were not born in the same country. This work specifically draws attention to how children in urban classrooms come from diverse cultural identities and their home lives are a central part of their self-development.

Jessel et al. position the home as a discursive space that is loaded with educational value even though it does not directly address formal curricula. Their work is highly beneficial in relation to understanding diverse communities that often are marginalized, specifically in the inner city. Jessel et al. explain that it is of intense value to recognize how experiences of students can be seen as a way to contribute to their empowerment, rather than "work against" what is expected from them within classrooms (p. 38). It is essential for literacy education to draw on the experiences of students and make family engagement (for parents, siblings, guardians,

grandparents, family friends and other relatives) as accessible as possible. For example, research in this report indicates that family engagement has a positive relationship on a child's success at school. The literature drawn upon specifically communicates that with family engagement in a child's learning process, there is higher academic achievement, increased attendance, and better self-regulatory skills. However, the report does not extend and discuss strategies for actively inviting parents and families into schools to be a part of their child's learning experience. A unique part of my experience working in the community sector with the literacy organization was the high level of family engagement in our programs. For instance, families were invited to take part in special parties that were meant to celebrate children's literacy work. The parties were inviting and exciting for families and took place mainly after school hours, given the busy work schedules of many parents.

In my own personal narrative as a young literacy learner who grew up in a different country than my parents, I described how these formal settings can be intimidating for families that are not familiar with education settings in their child's school community. Vancouver is one of the most linguistically and ethnically diverse cities in Canada, where 25% of the city's population has a mother tongue of Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog or Vietnamese (Vancouver Board of Education, 2014, p. 3). My experience at the parties celebrating the work of the children is one example of how the research areas of literacy and family engagement can be connected and addressed in compelling ways. Literacy can directly correlate to culturally appropriate approaches and involve direct family engagement through various programs and projects in schools.

The literature review in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* identifies literacy, social emotional growth, parent involvement and

attendance as prominent areas used to inform the policy recommendations. As seen in the work of Jessel et al. (2011), literacy learning is highly intertwined between the school and home lives of young people in complex ways. It is critical to bring attention to the fact that a report such as this, which is addressing a District wide problem, is working to reinforce historical understandings of literacy. As discussed in chapter two, literacy has traditionally been understood as the ability to read and write a national language that can be measured by standardized testing, which is reflected in this document (Tan & Guo, 2013, p. 30; The New London Group, 1996, p. 1). In the report, literacy is referred to vaguely as something that must address the early identification of needs, and it is suggested that current effective practices involve a "systemic approach," which requires frequent assessment and monitoring (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 4). I have argued that though these are important areas to understand and explore when considering the problem of poverty identified in the report, the fragmented way the literature review presents information is deeply limiting in addressing the nuances that the report identifies in the first place. The main areas of the literature review in the report are outlined and explained in isolation from one another. For example, one section of the literature review is organized under the question noted above, which states, "What works in classrooms and schools to support children who are disadvantaged due to poverty?" Each identified area is organized in isolation, without any connecting points or further discussion. This suggests that the purpose of the literature review is solely to provide tangible 'facts' that can be easily reflected by policy recommendations in the second part.

Instead, I propose a model that demonstrates the dynamic and interactions between the relevant areas of research that the literature review in *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* discusses.

Figure 8 shows the relevant areas of research that the literature review on literacy in the report refers to. I have represented these areas as interconnected conditions and forces that interact with one's literacy practice. By situating these areas in the literature review in conjunction with the socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions of the school-community, there would be more value for the teachers and other stakeholders whom this report is written for. If we apply a New Literacy Studies lens to the discussion in the literature review of the report, these areas would be seen in conjunction to one another. New Literacy Studies argue that one's

Figure 8. Relevant areas of research in report as interconnected
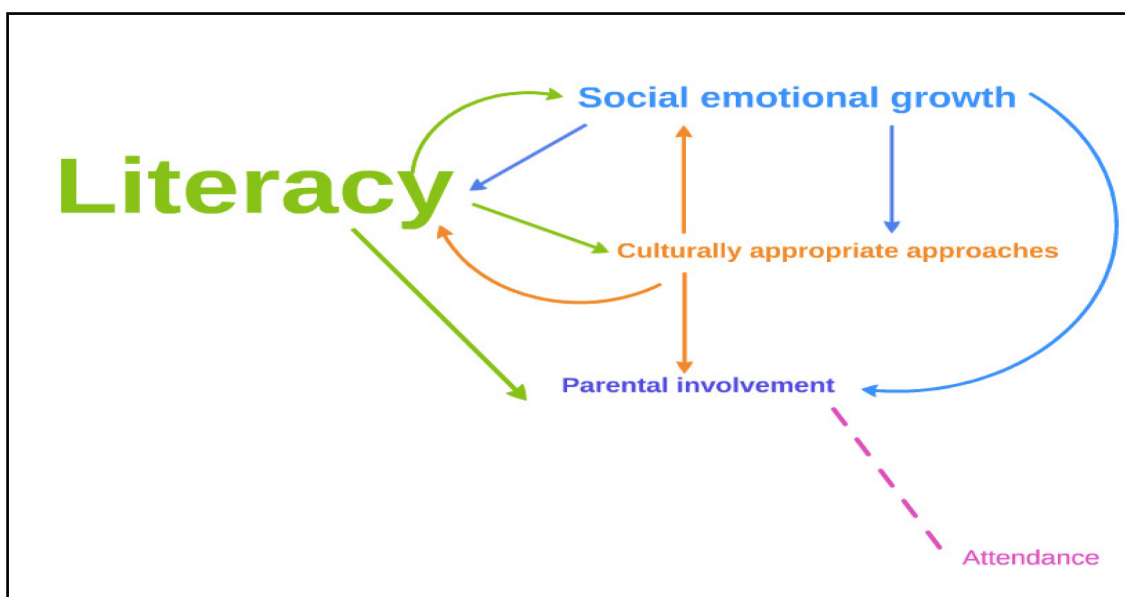
engagement with literacy "pervade[s] everyday life" (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 9). For example, literacy education would be seen as a part of one's sense of self, given the intimate ties that literacy has to expressing oneself. When one has meaningful opportunities to express oneself, I argue that there is space carved out for self reflection. Spaces of self-reflection allow for one to draw on central questions about their identity, the ways they make meaning about the world around them. I suggest that these are the spaces that contribute to positive social emotional health

and learning, as demonstrated in the diagram above. These are the some of the ways in which literacy pervades the everyday lives of individuals, as discussed by Coiro et al. (2008, p. 9).

There are especially relevant areas of New Literacy Studies that I argue will contribute to deeper understandings of literacy. These areas are of particular value for the Literacy Specialist position and development of more out of school programming for students in the district. Given that every school in the district has been advised a Literacy Specialist and more out of school programming, it is valuable to apply a New Literacy Studies lens to further discuss these key policy recommendations.

4.3 Participatory Culture and Multiliteracy Pedagogy as Useful Frameworks for the Literacy Specialist

Elements of participatory culture and multiliteracy pedagogy are highly relevant and useful for a Literacy Specialist in the inner city district. As discussed in the previous chapter, the New London Group raises two key questions that directly tie into the discussion of this document: "How do we ensure that differences of culture, language, and gender are not barriers to educational success? And what are the implications of these differences for literacy pedagogy?" (1996, p. 2). If literacy in the classroom does not take a multidimensional and holistic approach, it is linked to furthering the "social marginalization of racial, ethnic and minority youth" (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008, p. 11). Literacy teaching and learning in the classroom cannot progress to become multidimensional if policy texts do not capture the complexity and fluidity of such forms. When I refer to literacy teaching and learning in the classroom as multidimensional, I am referring to programming that invites an array of media and topics that capture the everyday realities of contemporary society that the students are a part of. If literacy education is governed by restrictive curriculum, it is difficult to structurally push the reach of literacy education to include projects that are highly diverse in their forms.

Significantly, this policy document does not address or acknowledge the current technological landscape. While literacy is understood to be complex and noted to have an intense relationship to the socioeconomic conditions of the community, the report does not acknowledge how digital information technologies are fundamentally challenging traditional notions of literacy and the specific relationship that this has to marginalized communities who may not have direct access to information technologies. An argument put forward by Warschauer & Ware (2008) is particularly useful in the discussion of digital technologies in regards to literacy learning and teaching in learning environments. The authors explain that it is not of value to look at the relationship between technology and literacy in the terms of "effects" or "impacts" (p. 219). Instead, the focus should be to understand how technology is actually reshaping a "broad social ecology" that is interacting with learning in new ways that it has not before (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 219). I would like to extend this discussion and bring attention to the fact that there are many variables at play such as when it comes to the relationship between technology and learning, specifically in regards to one's literacy learning. The complex nature of young people's technology use is difficult to study and contain in a way that can be easily translated into policy rhetoric. When digital media is in the hands of learners, a single topic is not the only thing being explored or learned. The way that young people engage with technology is very complex, because they are not passive consumers of the media. There is intense change happening with literacy learning as a result of the intensified technological landscape. Specifically, there are "revolutionary transformations" in the way young people are learning to read, write, communicate and produce knowledge (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 220). These elements of literacy learning would be of intense value to the Literacy Specialist as proposed in the report.

It would also be of intense value for the literacy specialist to become familiar with the participatory culture framework, specifically in relation to participation gaps for young people living in poverty. Participatory culture has been described as having five main characteristics (Chau, 2011, p. 67-72) as outlined in the list below:

1.) Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement

2.) Strong support for creating and sharing one's project

3.) Informal mentorship

4.) A belief that contributions matter

5.) A sense of social connection

These characteristics of participatory culture can be linked to concepts that *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* begins to outline. It is also important to acknowledge that often, theoretical frameworks are difficult to incorporate when delivering strategies for concrete action. However, participatory culture can be of value if we situate it within literacy education. For example, the online magazine *Rookie* is a space created by young people all over North America. I argue that this is a site of cultural value that has critical information for educators. The internet is fundamentally reconstructing identity development for young people and has an on-going impact on how they assert themselves in the world. Participation in internet communities become actions of discourses of power (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008). There are deep concerns over young people's use of new media technology and the prominent role that it plays in their lives. This is reflected in the media and public policy, where there is an overly stigmatized framework with focuses on the risks involved with digital practices (Losh & Jenkins, 2012). However in the policy document, the issue is silenced altogether.

I witnessed how critical integrating technology into literacy learning is when I developed the program Magazine Mondays. This program, which took place in the school computer lab, provided the students with many opportunities to practice their digital literacy skills in a safe space. The program was one of the highest attended programs of that term, where I had a group of 22 students in grades 3-7. The students were contributing to the program blog called *Writers' Land* and took pride and ownership in their work. I especially experienced the second characteristic of participatory culture, which is the strong support for creating and sharing one's project. The kids were especially enthusiastic when they were able to fully participate in sharing their pieces when uploading their diverse pieces onto Wordpress.

Figure 9. A screenshot of the online magazine made by a student writer entitled Writers' Land

The informal mentorship of the space in the computer lab allowed the kids to walk around and engage with one another about their pieces that they were working on. Often, they would provide

each other with advice on how to solve issues on Microsoft Word or how to find a video clip from their favourite TV show.

Another framework that is relevant to the Literacy Specialist is multiliteracy pedagogy. In the previous chapter, I detailed the key elements of multiliteracy pedagogy. Key elements of multiliteracy pedagogy detail the importance of how literacy practices are strongly linked to drawing on experiences of students in the context of "meaning-making" across spaces (New London Group, 1996, p. 5). Essentially, this characteristic of multiliteracy pedagogy acknowledges that the way that one makes sense of the world around them links to the ways in which not only they practice literacy, but also how they learn literacy skills.

The theoretical foundations of multiliteracy pedagogy, I argue, can be compatible with the ways literacy is framed in specific aspects of this report. A public report with multiple stakeholder perspectives such as *Revisioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources in Vancouver Schools* will not use the same scholarly rhetoric to describe literacy teaching and learning as the New London Group; however, it is of value to understand that the culturally appropriate approaches that the report is referring to, can directly relate to elements of multiliteracy pedagogy such as "critical framing" and "transformed practice" (The New London Group 1996, p. 5). These two elements are highly relevant to the discussion in terms of being inclusive of culturally appropriate approaches, learners are placed as active agents in garnering reading and writing skills, while participating in opportunities through projects to become critical thinkers. I argue that if a student is given opportunities to develop, explore, express and communicate his or her critical thoughts, there are even more opportunities for empowerment. Through merging literacy with opportunities to develop critical thought, students are being invited to take part in discussions as active agents where their experiences are being shared. The

report silences ideas around exercising students' critical thought in conjunction with literacy, which is a limitation to the discussion.

I would like to return to my first day in the inner city high school classroom from the beginning of this thesis. The discussions around race and experience invited and empowered the students in my mentee group to practice their academic literacy skills in the classroom. These students were hesitant to engage in the program because they were self-conscious and felt excluded by their literacy skills. For example, Jess, a grade 12 student in the group, insisted multiple times that she had little to contribute to the media program because she felt that she could not write. Through many conversations surrounding her interests, we quickly realized that Jess was a highly talented painter. As discussed by Vasudevan & Campano (2009), stakeholders (including researchers, practitioners, and policy makers) must consider critical questions surrounding the ways in which adolescents are using language and literacy across contexts (p. 319). When I considered these questions, and was mindful of the space of the project, Jess decided to contribute to the media program with a painting that was accompanied by a reflection piece of writing. The end result was remarkable and was something that she was very proud of. However, the immediate and persistent hesitation from Jess was something that I saw from many students who believed that they did not have something to contribute to the program. Once they understood and trusted that their literacy skills were going to be paired with their interests, many students surprised themselves with what they could produce, which I argue is transformed practice as described by multiliteracy pedagogy.

This report focuses on bringing culturally sensitive approaches to literacy teaching in order to better support the literacy skills of students in the District, which is a principle embedded into multiliteracy pedagogy. For example, situated practice (an element of multiliteracy

pedagogy) draws on the lived experiences of young people as a way to have them 'situated' in their own learning process (New London Group, 1996, p. 5). Critical framing (another element of multiliteracy pedagogy) places emphasis on the learner's interpretation of social context and purpose of design of particular texts (New London Group, 1996, p. 5). I contend that these elements of multiliteracy pedagogy intersect with the culturally sensitive approaches that the District is suggesting. By drawing on a student's lived experience and creating spaces for discussions of critical thought, the District could be successful in fulfilling the shift in approach to become more culturally appropriate.

This is a critical start to the reform of literacy education; however, it can be further innovated by including critical framing and transformed practice. When school programs or projects provide students with opportunities to be self-empowered, social change can begin to take shape. When I refer to social change, I am speaking to engagement with the world around you, in many forms whether cultural, social or political. The following section continues to explore the idea of student empowerment in the context of innovative literacy programming through out-of-school programming.

4.4 Out-of-School Programming

A main theme identified in the literature surrounding poverty and education is that school-community partnerships are highly beneficial. This theme has sparked interest within the VSB and is also reflected throughout the recent final report, *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* (February 2014). It is recommended that the VSB take an active role in developing more place-based work within the district to better support and develop community partnerships, therefore moving community development forward. Current work is being done in the district to this end; however, it is not widespread. The report

specifically focuses on school-community partnerships in two areas, which are 1.) Collaborative models and 2.) Place-based models.

Tolbert & Theobald (2006) argue that place-based pedagogy assists in creating an inviting space that connects the community of urban youth to their environment. Tolbert & Theobald's (2006) work highlights that place-based lessons involve a process, which is about immersing students in their communities that foster a sense of pride and positive affect. A particularly compelling part of this argument is that it specifically expands opportunities for student growth and builds space for multiple intelligences through engaging and participating with their surrounding community, which I argue relates to the context specifics of multiliteracy pedagogy presented by New Literacy Studies. This can be reflected in the work of the Writers' Exchange, where programs have sought to bridge gaps in between the community and classroom by engaging with community partners and spaces by integrating them into different literacy projects. For example, one class publication had students interviewing community members about their diverse jobs and what they found interesting about their careers. Students then wrote pieces on what they had gathered about the nature of work that community member was involved in.

Though I agree with this argument about place-based learning, this literature is exploring place-based within the framework of 'lessons' which I feel is deeply limiting and raises questions regarding the sustainability of such approaches. Place-based pedagogy can foster productive and engaging spaces, but needs to be applied to a broader approach and not be limited to the scope of an assignment or lesson. An example of a lesson would be narrowing down a topic to a single worksheet, such as an analysis or discussion of song lyrics or poetry about a topic in the community. A broader approach would be to build a unit or term based around the community, which extends and builds on various assignments and lessons. For example, students could

volunteer in their communities as a way to not only meet people, but also allow them to develop meaningful experiences outside of the school setting.

In order to engage with community through partnerships, there needs to be commitment from all stakeholders to build programming that is collaborating and engaging with projects over time, as opposed to 'one-off' type approaches. My understanding is informed by conversations with teachers I have had while collaborating as a coordinator of the not-for-profit learning sector. For example, year long projects such as the *B.Eastside* magazine, are highly beneficial because they become a part of school life and school programs for youth. Youth have more opportunities to participate and get used to groups and people who are not necessarily a part of the traditional school community.

School-community partnerships also provide wonderful introductions for students to know more about the community that they live in, while practicing skills such as literacy. Often, parents also are unsure of what resources are available. Many people, whether they are marginalized by poverty or other circumstances often are excluded from choices and opportunities in a city such as Vancouver (Vancouver Board of Education, 2014, p. 4). I argue that accessibility is also key for school-community partnerships and collaboration. Many organizations are doing amazing things within communities and it is key that these programs are accessible to all members of the community, as opposed to a small group. For example, if your center or space is not located within school community hubs, this may be a structural barrier to being accessible to youth who would benefit from services because not all members of a community have access to a car or monthly bus pass.

Russell et al. (2013) emphasize the role of power dynamics in the creation of school-community partnerships, which often is not reflected in the literature. The authors explain that the

responsibility and power for collaborations to take place is highly in the hands of the schools, which could potentially be limiting the reach of community partners and organizations (Russell et al., 2013, p. 279). The purpose of Russell et al.'s (2013) study was to specifically understand conditions that invite collaborative activity between informal and formal learning settings (Russell et al., 2013, p. 261). This connects to The Vancouver School Board's understanding that collaborative models with community partners are of great potential in the classroom, particularly to support children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds within the inner city (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 35). The image in Figure 10 is my representation of how the report positions collaborative models such as the place-based model. There are various components to place-based education. These components need to be carefully understood before attempting to organize a partnership based on this model. There is a clear link between place-based models and collaboration that the District is pointing to. Place-based models are dependent upon elements of collaboration.
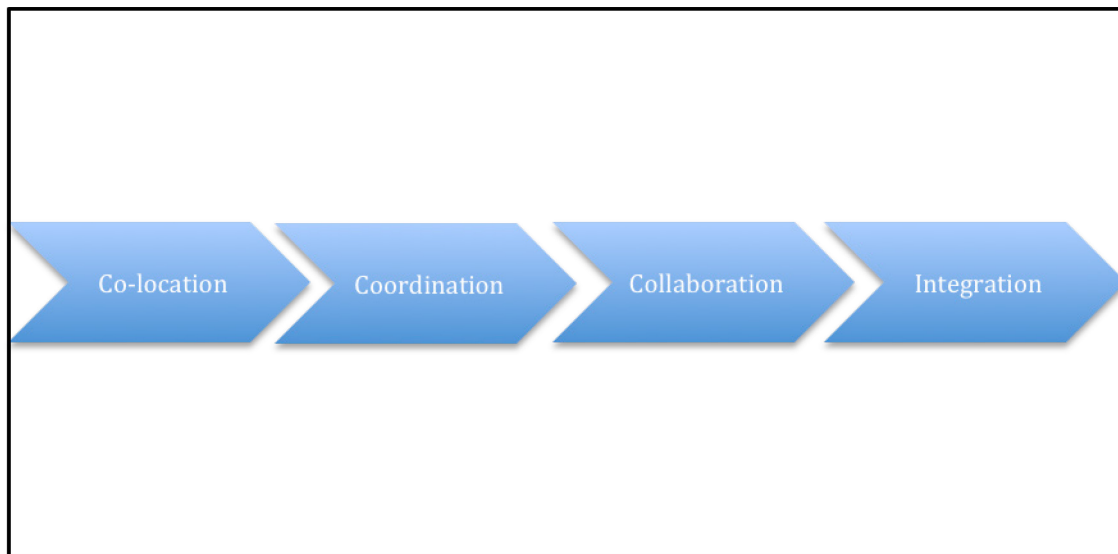

Figure 10. Collaboration model

The model of collaboration is explained as one that has positive connections to social-emotional learning, specifically for vulnerable children. The literature review of the Vancouver School

Board's report suggests that social-emotional learning can be achieved through specific strategies, such as place-based education and collaborative models. Research outside of the report shows that collaborative programming strengthens the educational ecology of the school setting (Russell et al., 2013). Collaboration as a process involves three phases: motivation, the collaboration process, and outcomes (Russell et al., 2013, p. 274). Coordination of such programs is often overlooked and is implicitly implied in the report. The work of coordinating is often undervalued from my experience, specifically in the follow-up of programming, which I would argue links to the figure above in the area of integration. There often are missing links or lack of appropriate follow-up to programs, given the limited resources and time in school communities. The first step to coordinating out-of-school programming and taking part in collaborative models is making sure all stakeholders have a collective understanding of the goals, outcomes and structure of program.

4.5 Conclusion

One summer term when I was the program coordinator at the Writers' Exchange, I visited school sites and did mobile literacy workshops at day camps where there were up to 100 students on site every day. There were boards with the schedule in the main hall where the students could pick what activities they wanted to participate in during that time period. The schedule board for the time period I arrived at looked like Figure 11.

Figure 11. Representation of Literacy as a 'lesson'

The board indicated that there was a major disconnect between the site coordinators and myself in understanding the goals, outcomes and structure of the programming that was going to take place that block. The first day they positioned my team as literacy teachers who were at the summer camp to do a literacy lesson, when really we had designed an afternoon of creative activities that incorporated elements of literacy practice. The majority of students on site were not excited about our program or even slightly interested, given that they read "literacy lesson" on the board. The competition between dodge ball, painting and being outside did not position our program as being fun and inviting, and only four students joined my volunteers and me to take part in a words scavenger hunt that I had prepared.

The program for the day was a long way from a "literacy lesson," as we were set up all around the site interacting with people and objects for a scavenger hunt; however, this was not communicated to the students, which caused a very low turnout on the first day of my visit. This activity was interactive and drew on the experience of the students as a way for them to practice their reading and writing skills in meaningful and fun ways.

Figure 12. Materials for summer literacy activities

This experience relates to the ways in which traditional notions of literacy can be challenged by drawing on principles of New Literacy Studies, which include multiliteracy pedagogy and collaborative methods. It also demonstrates the importance of stakeholder communication and coordination in the context of developing collaborative programs and projects in the district.

Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools (February 2014) is a policy recommendation report with a focus on "revisioning" resources in the inner city of East Vancouver. Critical discourse analysis methods have offered a close reading of this report in the context of literacy education. The need for more out-of-school programming and a Literacy Specialist in schools are two dominant themes across the policy text which both potentially have interesting relationships to the conceptual framework of New Literacy Studies.

My personal experiences of working in the community sector and being a literacy learner myself have driven my interest in merging together the community and education sector as a way to respond to the constantly evolving concept of literacy. There are major advantages in collaborative models in conjunction to literacy education. I have used critical discourse analysis

methods to bring attention to the fact that this document reinforces traditional understandings of literacy, which are proven to be limiting. Critical discourse analysis methods also allowed me to analyze the ways in which questions are asked, and how this plays a key role in the information that is researched and communicated in this report. For example, in various parts of *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver School,* I brought attention to the emphasis of the "what works" framework. I argue that this framework is limiting in that it does not call for an extended discussion that demonstrates the critical links in the research. I have suggested that a "how it works" framework is much more appropriate and useful to explore issues in the school community. The lens of New Literacy Studies has contributed to this analysis as a way to address and confront the changing nature of literacy. Areas of New Literacy Studies such as multiliteracy pedagogy link to discussions of this report, and I contend add more context to general roles identified by the report such as the Literacy Specialist. My analysis also has pointed out that there must be an extended discussion of technology in this report, given that there is a widening gap between differing socioeconomic groups and their access and uses of digital communication technologies.

I would like to see more expanded discussions that describe and address social and cultural nuances in school communities. These are critical connections that need to be forged in policy discussion documents such as *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools* as a way to address the complex social issues they are attempting to address. When I refer to critical connections, I am specifically referring to clear and important discussion that highlights how issues in the school community are interconnected. This is especially needed in the literature review of this document. Several overlapping areas of research are discussed in isolation from one another, which I have suggested is an ineffective way to discuss complex

social issues that interact with various elements of a community.

I am aware of how the discussion I have brought forward can contribute to making this document longer and further extended. However, it is key to begin with a look at the rationale for policy change, as we saw in the introduction of *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools.* There is a need to "revision" resources in the inner city, which I argue can only be done if there is a "ground-up" approach. This ground-up approach can only be taken up if there is a focus on how multiple elements in the community are working as a set of conditions that give shape to the issues and challenges identified in the report. In the long-run an approach such as this works to inform policy in a way that challenges traditional abstract and isolated discussions and can work to address the roots of complex social issues.

This thesis research has broadly focused on whole text structure and use of language as a way to analyze and discuss how literacy has been taken up in *Re-vision Inner City and CommunityLink Resources in Vancouver Schools.* A limitation to this research is that it is a broad discussion that offers an extended discussion that goes beyond the space available in many policy documents. Future research in this area could explore and examine the procedures of how educational policy is developed, as a way to delve into discussions in the ways dominant ideologies such as traditional models of literacy learning and teaching are constantly being reproduced. This could be carried out by institutional ethnographic research and draw on interview and focus group methods.

A more critical approach to education policy research (research *of* policy), specifically about the constantly evolving construct of literacy, could be transferred into more opportunities for literacy education reform. Through this shift in literacy education, student will have more opportunities to question, express and investigate the world around them in meaningful ways. I

contend that these meaningful opportunities, especially in a district with complex social issues such as poverty, can only take shape if the policy work is done from the ground-up. There is a need to innovate and evolve discussions in policy circles surrounding literacy education by focusing on critical connections between social and cultural and elements of the diverse community.

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