

#### **4. Multi-Literacy Studies**

*"Historica Fairs as Expressions of Multiple Literacies"*  
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A few years ago, Karen Day, a member of the Education faculty at the University College of the Cariboo, told the following story: she had been reading aloud a series of picture books in her university language arts seminar. One afternoon she held up a copy of Pat Hutchins' *Rosie's Walk*, a book with illustrations and text arranged separately on alternate pages, and asked the class what they noticed. "Every other page is blank," suggested one of her students, apparently confident that the words, not the images, were of principal interest. The student's response lays bare an otherwise muted assumption among most adult readers, some authors, and many educators: that the visual elements in a text may be safely ignored, marginalized, or simply edited out.

Yet, as our recent work with the Historica Fair children and their teachers points out, much of the best academic and creative work depends as much on visual literacy as on verbal literacy. An appreciation of visual culture, an ability to represent research in more than one mode, and ability to explore any subject both verbally and visually, an understanding of how to exhibit the research: these are important skills, skills we increasingly associate with the successful learner.

The National Historica Fair program presents an exemplary case in point. The Historica Fair employs a "project approach" to education. It asks students--in grades four through nine--to research a topic related to Canada's history or heritage. Most of these topics tend to be family of community based. Over a two- or three-month period, students gather a variety of research materials--archival photographs, family documents, newspaper articles, diaries, maps, letters and reports, and so on. While the end result of all this gathering is a multi-media display, a kind of 3D essay, the focus on the documents--and the process of documenting--makes us want to emphasize and value the word "documentation" as more verb than a noun.

At the Centre for Research on Multiple Literacies, we are exploring the theory and practice of integrating multiple ways of learning into activities like the Historica Fair. We see the Fairs as opportunities for (1)Collecting, (2)Selecting, (3)Reflecting, and (4)Projecting research. The successful integration of these skills fosters development of important (and multiple) literacies.

For further resources and information, please see the Multiple Literacies Web site:  
<http://www.cariboo.bc.ca/ae/literacies>

For a case study of a local Historica Fair, please see the PDF: Heritage Fair Project