

Chapter 75

Multiliteracies Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

The converging global environment has given rise to a social-constructivist approach to new literacy pedagogical and learning practices. Emergent digital and social spaces have created new literacy or multiliteracies. Support for multiliteracies is an inherently social construct which encapsulates human capital and Information Communications Technology (ICT), including technical and administrative infrastructure, policy and school culture, and teacher training and collaborative support. Several variables intervene in the pedagogical landscape in support of new literacy development in adolescent learners. Students become both producers and transmitters of multiliteracies through transformed practice and by forming social and professional identities, facilitated through authentic learning experiences. ICT is both a literacy as well as the media which support 21st century new literacy development. As socio-economic factors determine the availability and use of technology in the classroom, the hegemonic use of print and the inability to access “digital geographies” creates a digital divide. As literacy pedagogy continues to unfold, creative instruction must be employed in ensuring the development of multiliteracies through providing scaffolding, critical framing, and authentic learning experiences for students and teachers alike. This is explored in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The changing social environment, including the flattening of geographical borders, and educational and labor markets; the multiplicity of communications channels and technologies, and increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, has dictated new approaches to teaching and learning practices, dubbed new literacy or multiliteracies (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee et al., 1996; Cumming-

Potvin, 2007; Vasudevan, 2010). Multiliteracies is the understanding and ability to use language and technology appropriately in various linguistic, cultural and multi-modal communications contexts (Cazden et al., 1996). A reality of multiliteracies teaching and learning is the increasing pivotal role of technology and information communications technology (ICT) mediated-instruction. As technology continues to shape how we communicate, a so-called “digital divide” becomes apparent in

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consideration of the diverse socio-cultural and socio-economic loci and dispositions of various teaching and learning groups.

The real threat of the digital divide (will be)... that...one group (will be) able to muster a wide range of semiotic tools and resources to persuade, argue, analyze, critique and interpret, and another group, lacking these semiotic skills, limited to pre-packaged choices (as cited in Zammit, 2012, p. 206).

The social-constructivist approach to multiliteracies requires a renewable, ongoing approach to pedagogy, undergirded by the instructional principles of scaffolding and critical framing. Scaffolding is the process through which teachers support students' learning, gradually removing assistance overtime until the learner can independently create his own knowledge (Cuming-Potvin, 2007). Critical framing involves providing opportunities for learners to develop the skills necessary to question, evaluate and re-evaluate knowledge based on contextual information, and or in the light of new ideas (Cazden et al., 1996). Critical framing skills are best honed through the use of authentic learning experiences which provide a collaborative working environment where students engage in problem solving and participate in real-world activity as they construct their own meaning and solutions to various social, cultural, and political issues (Koh, Tan, & Ng, 2012).

This social constructivist approach to multiliteracies teaching and learning is necessary in preparing learners to access information as they encounter new literacy across various institutions and social contexts throughout their lives. This approach Cuming-Potvin (2007) notes, is imperative to the learner's "ability to decode, engage in meaningful events, and understand that text and contexts cannot be divorced from social, cultural, and political worlds" (p. 502). This paper will examine some of the issues involved in the ongoing discussion vis-à-vis multiliteracies from

the premise of a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning. The ensuing discussion will explore the role of globalization and information communications technology in adolescent identity formation. Multiliteracies pedagogy will be surveyed through the lenses of authentic learning, multimodal engagement, and universal design of curriculum. Infrastructural, administrative and organizational support for multiliteracies will be discussed from the standpoint of human, technological and social infrastructure, including teacher training, and associated challenges inherent within these vehicles. A look at the use of technology as a literacy in and of itself, as a tool for mediating literacy, and as a factor which may preclude educational equality, will be the final point of discussion.

GLOBAL LITERACIES

Literacy proficiencies and emergent socio-cultural practices become inalienably linked in the global teaching and learning landscape; where literacy is no longer regarded as a set of static or decontextualized skills but as rich in social context and experiences (Refaie et al., 2009; Vasudevan, 2010). Literacy in the 21st century global context means more than ability to maneuver the printed text. The modern definition of literacy expands to digital and digitally mediated literacies and the ability to create and critique texts using a range of media and modalities (Zammit, 2012; Mills, 2009). Multiliteracies provides a more engaging construct of information use, where learners are content producers as well as purveyors of literacy. The multiliteracies construct of active engagement encompasses informational literacy, technological or digital literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, cultural literacy and environmental literacy. Whereas information literacy involves the "ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in a variety of ways" (as cited in Zammit, 2012, p. 206); multiliteracies is a convergent yet expansive

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