

Multiliteracies-The Need of the Hour

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Abstract: Identity texts in written, spoken, visual, musical and combinations in multimodal form created by students in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms are shared with multiple audiences viz. peers, parents' teachers etc for positive feedback. Presentation and discussion vis-a-vis transmission social constructivist and transformative approaches to pedagogy result in the affirmation of self in interactions with multiple audiences. In order to address three main influences on education systems viz. linguistic and cultural diversity in the wake of population escalation, recognition of English as the language of economic and social advancement and technological developments facilitating change of global economy from Industrial age to Information age, teachers create interpersonal space for maximum academic development by ensuring optimal cognitive engagement and optimal identity investment on the part of students.

Way back in 1996 to be precise, The New London Group advocated the need to formulate a new pedagogy to serve as literacy pedagogy in tune with the latest contexts of communication and learning viz. linguistic and cultural diversity in the wake of greater population mobility, recognition of English as key to economic and social advancement and technological advancements ushering in Information Age economy. The multimodal and multilingual- the two dimensions of literacies grew in significance. A new pedagogy of multiliteracies was mooted to address the experience of meaning making for negotiating discourse differences.

In media and cultural practices, meaning making was conceived as a form of design or active and dynamic transformation of the social world and its multimodal contemporary forms in which the different modes of meaning viz. the linguistic, the visual, the audio, the gestural and the spatial were integrated. Pedagogy of Multiliteracies envisages pedagogical moves viz. Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing and Transformed Practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiliteracies may be defined as an approach to literacy theory and pedagogy integrating two aspects of literacy viz. linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of linguistic expression. Two significant changes in the global scenario viz. mushroom growth of different modes of communication due to technological developments like Internet, Multimedia and digital media and linguistic and cultural diversity in the wake of migration facilitated the coinage of multiliteracies. Communication patterns (technologically determined) and usage of the English language (culturally determined)

triggered the emergence of a new literacy. Globalization requires interactions between individuals hailing from different cultures. Multimedia has amalgamated sounds and images with text and speech. A pedagogy of multiliteracies was formulated in order to target ‘grasping of multiple discourses’ and forms of representation in both public and professional domains in addition to Reading and writing and enable students to navigate within culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

“The concept of multiliteracies challenges the traditional idea that there is only single correct literacy and supports the notion of multi-modal literacy in which linguistic and cultural diversity is incorporated to create learning conditions for full social participation.” (Osborne & Wilson 2003).

The involvement of students in viewing, creating and critiquing multimodal texts purports to be the domain of Multiliteracies. (Callow 2006).

Meaning making systems enable students to negotiate with linguistic and cultural differences outside schools and colleges. In order to make knowledge meaningful, learning experiences gathered by linking learning to outside life are shared with students. The focus in ‘Multiliteracies’ is on globalization, multiculturalism technological developments, literacy practices in societal institutions and modes of text viz. Written, spoken, Oral, Visual and Interactive expression.

Productive pedagogy focuses on intellectual engagement, recognition of difference and connectedness to the real world in a supportive classroom environment (Education Queensland 2002).

Through the successful blending of multiliteracies into pedagogical practices teachers and students are able to develop strategies to achieve multiliterate outcomes that recognize the diversity of all students and the knowledge they bring to the classroom while making learning relevant to student’s lives (Callow, 2009, Mills, 2006).

Today’s schools are made up of students with increasingly diverse social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, bringing to the schooling environment differences with texts, interests and social identities (Mills, 2006).

By including into the learning experiences teachers create students can develop a sense of identity and belonging and these results are being seen in the level of engagement and performance of the student regardless of their social culture for ethnic background.

The concept of m curriculum has raised the achievement levels of prospective learners in the present knowledge centric scenario exposed to globalization multiculturalism, social change, technological development, and literacy practices. Societal institutions demand that learners negotiate linguistic and cultural differences through a network of meaning making systems. Authentic assessment methods bank on real-life contexts. As part of the teaching process we have alternative portfolio, performance-based and formative assessment.

KEY ASPECTS OF PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

There are four key aspects viz. situated practice, critical Framing overt Instruction and Transformed Practice.

Situated Practice involves learning embedded in student’s own life experiences. Critical Framing enables students to question common sense assumptions in discourses.

Overt Instruction focuses on authentic learning where, according to lives Transformed practice focuses open authentic learning where, according to lives of prospective learners, activities are re-created. It has been renamed ‘Applying’ also. ‘Applying Appropriately’ and ‘Applying creatively’ are two different ways. In the former, knowledge is perceived in a predictable way in a particular situation. Mornings tend to correspond to the conventions of semiotic setting whereas in the latter, knowledge gained from a familiar context is transformed and used in a different context.

Situated Practice was renamed 'Experiencing' by Kope and Kalantzis (2009). They visualised human cognition as contextual and situated and meaning as grounded in the real world of patterns of experience, action and subjective interest. Experiencing may be split into Experiencing The known and Experiencing the New. The former displays experiences, interests and perspectives of the learner and the latter introduces experiments, field work and projects.

LIMITATIONS OF SITUATED PRACTICE

- (i) It lacks proper control as well as awareness of what one knows and does.
- (ii) Learners are not at all in a position to critique learning vis-a-vis historical, cultural, political, ideological or value centered relations.
- (iii) Learners fail to develop reflexive capability to translate knowledge into practice.

Critical Framing: The premise of critical Framing purports to be an investigation of the socio-cultural contexts, purpose of learning and designs of meaning. Socio-cultural contexts flash diverse and globally connected lives where the forces of migration, Multiculturalism, and economic integration intensify the process of change.

Traditional curricula weed out inferior literacies viz. Text types (Picture book or fiction) and items like blogs, emails, websites oral practices and visual literates from the mainstream literacy practices. Inclusion and Exclusion tend to govern the traditional curricula. Critical Framing enables learners to reconceptualize by incorporating template designs on websites and blogs as non-linear reading paths and varying affordances of different modes. Writing may be envisaged as just one part of the multimodal ensemble.

Overt Instruction is, in fact, collaborative efforts on the part of teachers and students for accomplishing complex tasks. It would be erroneous to consider it as transmission, drill and rote-Learning.

Three pedagogical orientations viz. Transmission, Social constructivist and Transformative, nested within each other, enhance thinking ability of learners.

Transmission transmits information and skills; social constructivist constructs knowledge and understanding with the help of teachers and students and Transformative enables learners to acquire insight and critical literacy for reading between the lines of societal dispraises. (Bradford, Brown & Cooking 2000) For effective learning, Bradford et al, 2000 have postulated four different conditions.

- (i) Learning with deep understanding: It entails development of critical literacy rather than simple understanding of the text.
- (ii) Building on pre-existing knowledge: It takes stock of students language and cultural background.
- (iii) Promoting active learning: It focuses on learner's control of learning.
- (iv) Support within the community of learners: It recognizes learning as socialization into particular communities of practice.

Cummins (2001) postulated the academic expert framework. Optimum academic development has overt links with cognitive engagement and identity investment within the interpersonal space of the Learning community. Students' creative outputs are termed identity texts (written, spoken, musical, visual, dramatic or combinations in multimodal form) Students tend to receive positive feedback when they share their texts with multiple audiences (Peers, teachers, parents, different classes, media etc.)

FIVE CENTRAL COMPONENTS OF MULTILITERACY PEDAGOGY

- I) It constructs an image of the child as innovating and linguistically talented.

- II) It takes stock of the cultural and linguistic capital (Prior knowledge) of students and communities.
- III) It promotes cognitive engagement and identity investment.
- IV) It enables students to construct knowledge, Create literature and act on social realities through dialogues and critical enquiries,
- V) It deploys technical tools to support students' construction of knowledge, literature and art, and presentation of their intellectual works to multiple audiences through the creation of identity texts.

APPLICATIONS OF MULTILITERACY PEDAGOGY

- I) Students may incorporate words of different languages (L1, L2, etc.) into technology-supported bi/multilingual dictionaries with the help of peers and teachers.
- II) Students amplify their texts through technology and integrate audio into the texts appearing on the web.
- III) Students create CDs/Web pages/Movies to flash the results of their projects aimed at generating new knowledge.
- IV) Using L1 and L2, students create literature in technology-mediated sister class exchanges.
- V) By examining media reports on contemporary issues, students develop critical literacy and language awareness.

CONCLUSION

Multiliteracy Pedagogy caters to the need of culturally and linguistically diverse students. It helps them to express and expand their linguistic and cultural capital. Identity investment purports to be a tool for planning multilingual curriculum. Through the creation of identity texts and cognitively -challenging collaborative activities opportunities are created for students to transfer knowledge and cognitive strategies across languages.

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