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Using the Multiliteracies Approach to Promote English Literacy in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Higher education teachers who teach English proficiency courses to undergraduates often make the assumption that if learners work hard on content taught to them, they would have acquired literacy in all aspects relating to the language. Do learners' abilities to read well or write well in English depend on their context? To discern the appropriate path for their learners, higher education teachers must be knowledgeable about "language and literacy, be adept at seeking and critically evaluating information and be able to relate these understandings to their daily working knowledge of their learners" (Heydon, Hibbert & Iannaci, 2005: 312). Many definitions of the term 'literacy' seem to focus too much on skill to the exclusion of will (Padak & Bardine, 2004). The concepts of promoting 'engaged learners' and 'literacy empowerment' in higher education contexts should incorporate some of the following aspects: motivation, strategies, knowledge and social interaction. This paper discusses the design and framework of the Multiliteracies Approach advocated by The New London Group and argues that it is a viable teaching strategy that embraces literacy abilities, literacy choices and attitudes. Additionally, it recognizes that meaningful learning can take place if there is bridging between theory and practice.

Introduction

Statistics for the 2005/06 academic session indicate that the student enrolment in public universities and university colleges in Malaysia is 207 913 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). In these institutions of higher learning, undergraduate students take up various types of English proficiency courses such as academic and creative writing, spoken English, public speaking in English, listening comprehension, reading skills and a wide variety of English for Specific Purposes courses. In most public universities, it is not uncommon for university authorities to impose a 2 - 4 unit requirement of English courses as a graduation requirement. In many language service centres or schools, students are often traditionally exposed to the teaching of the four skills to acquire proficiency in the language. In the process of teaching English literacy skills, higher education teachers' misconception that these four skills are the main components in the mastery of the second language has resulted in the assumption that if learners work hard on language skills and course content, they would have acquired literacy in English. As globalization influences rapid technological advancements, literacy demands evolve at a sophisticated pace in today's challenging times. These winds of educational change afflicting educational contexts necessitate that teachers view literacy in a plural sense (The New London Group, 2000). Therefore, this challenges teachers to influence pedagogical strategies where they are challenged to connect real world experiences to their classroom contexts. New and innovative technologies in today's digital era have created changes and challenges in education and these innovations now suggest the possibilities of using new ways of teaching and learning, thereby moving away from traditional teaching and learning.

Concern about the varying levels of English literacy among undergraduates is a topic for discussion by educators, policy makers, employers and concerned citizens in the Malaysian community. In fact, few issues in modern education in Malaysia attract so much attention and controversy, yet produce so few lasting results, as the English communication ability of our linguistically diverse local graduates. Why do many of our undergraduates lack proficiency in English? Why is it that many local graduates entering the workforce still lack competency in English and shun job interviews that are conducted in English? Why have they not been able to empower themselves with good English literacy levels? We believe the way English literacy education is taught at university may be responsible for some of these concerns.

To discern the appropriate path for their learners, higher education teachers must take the initiative and be knowledgeable about “language and literacy, be adept at seeking and critically evaluating information and be able to relate these understandings to their daily working knowledge of their learners” (Heydon, Hibbert & Iannaci, 2005: 312). Many definitions of the term ‘literacy’ seem to focus too much on skill to the exclusion of will (Padak & Bardine, 2004). The concepts of promoting ‘engaged learners’ and ‘literacy empowerment’ in higher education contexts should incorporate some of the following aspects: motivation, strategies, knowledge and social interaction. Within the landscape of the present education scenario, the Multiliteracies Approach may offer a glimmer of hope for university teachers striving to enhance their students’ English literacy skills in preparation for their future workplaces in today’s increasingly globalised era. The Multiliteracies Approach is an integration of multiple forms of knowledge, including print, images, video, and combinations of forms in digital contexts which assist in producing effective learning outcomes as learners are motivated to learn through creative activities created by the teacher using the Multiliteracies framework.

The purpose of the Multiliteracies Approach is to extend literacy teaching for our new times where, as a result of globalization, teachers and learners are challenged to confront existing realities of cultural and linguistic diversity with the rapid development of technology. This approach provides opportunities for undergraduate students to understand and be able to competently use the literacies of a range of texts and technologies so that they can inculcate values such as social responsibility and active citizenship in today’s socially, culturally and linguistically diverse world. This paper discusses the design and framework of the Multiliteracies Approach advocated by the New London Group (2000) and argues that it is a viable teaching strategy that embraces literacy abilities and literacy choices and attitudes. Additionally, it recognizes that meaningful learning takes place if there is bridging between theory and practice.

What is Literacy?

In this millennium, the challenges imposed on us to function at a multiliterate level are clear and distinct from how expectations were laid out in the earlier days. Numerous innovative and creative theories of

language learning have evolved and most have made us feel more enlightened about the many ways we can contribute in society in our private, public and working lives. In the early part of the 20th century, for example, people were considered literate if they had completed a certain grade in school or could sign their name or possessed basic skills of reading and writing. However, these competency levels will not suffice in today's complex society. Indeed, scholars the world over have increasingly pointed out what it means to be literate depends to a large extent on the situation in which a person operates. Below are some definitions of literacy:

“Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script, but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use”.

(Scribner & Cole, 1981: 136)

“Literacy is not just the simple ability to read and write...by possessing and Performing these skills we exercise socially approved and approvable talents”.

(Cook-Gumperz, 1986: 1)

“[Functional literacy is the] possession of, or access to, the competencies and Information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing [in] Which an individual wishes – or is compelled to – to engage”.

(Kintgen, Kroll & Rose, 1988:263)

A global definition of literacy usually states that to be fully literate, an individual needs to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, feelings and thinking in the context of purposeful social activity. With respect to the wide array of what 'literacy' entails, most definitions do seem to indicate a 'common sense' view in stating that being literate in today's world requires much more from a person that it used to in the earlier part of the 20th century. Without a doubt, in today's borderless world, with the mushrooming of global interdependence as an entity, commonalities across cultures are greater than ever (Wilson, 1999). In most educational contexts worldwide, the idea of a student being multiliterate is seen as being a common trait among students as it will help the student thrive in the future where the need to access and use all modes of technology efficiently is deeply entrenched in society's psyche. But in a clearly defined manner, the literacy movement is seen largely to be a gradual

movement away from total reliance on narrow traditional methods of teaching literacy, especially so in universities.

Before educators consider the ‘declining literacy standards’ debate and elaborate the need for a range of evolving literacies which will accommodate the communicative needs of the emerging information and technology, it is perhaps more urgent that they consider the existence of a ‘socially constructed view of the literate person’ (Wilson, 1999). It is also advisable for higher education teachers to start thinking of the word ‘literacy’ in the plural (as ‘literacies’), so that this encompasses the idea of a common ground for teachers and learners to move forward in the debate of what it means to be literate in today’s educational contexts. Higher education teachers working with learners need to be also aware of the various types of literacies that are prevalent in their students’ repertoires of knowledge and language learning, some of which include the following: *Academic literacy* (learned in a school, focuses on dislikes and attitudes needed for short-term and long-term range success in school), *Cultural literacy* (relative to a particular culture/ethnic group which is often based in traditional beliefs about what is important to know), *Functional literacy* (establishes a minimum of literacy knowledge and skills according to the needs of society and focuses on the preparation for varying roles in the workplace), *Personal literacy* (defined by the individual’s own communicative, social, educational or vocational purposes and often involves effective elements of literacy such as reading, writing for pleasure, hobbies, companionship etc.), *Transactional literacy* (based on theories of how readers construct or assign meaning while interacting with texts; responses to literacy tasks depend on a person’s schematic or prior knowledge and background) and *Emergent literacy* (based on developmental theory tracing the approximate stages of literacy meaning).

When higher education teachers are confronted with the extent to which their learners deal with text variety in and outside the constraints of the university classroom, they need to give importance to the issue of having to rethink how literacy gets done in today’s increasingly information-dependent contexts. Within the context of Malaysian universities, this question certainly deserves due consideration as this has yet to be answered comprehensively. How can Malaysian universities offer ESL instruction in a more relevant manner? How can ESL teachers in the higher education sector in Malaysia incorporate multiliteracies in their teaching and learning environments? These questions are necessarily seen to be important initiatives as the technology that young people use outside the classroom demands a whole new range of literate skills that

higher education teachers need to tap into if they wish to see their students having high motivation levels to learn English.

Adopting a Multiliteracies Approach to Promote Learner Engagement

In order to provide opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in their learning environment, teachers have to take into consideration the values, possibilities, pedagogies and constraints of multimodal literacies and multimedia technologies that result in the emergence of new modes and texts. In advocating a broader view of literacy, Heydon, Hibbert and Iannacci (2005: 313) stress that “literacy educators’ perceptions and choices are also formed in and through this triad of the cognitive, discursive and affective which is embedded within social, cultural and political contexts”. In light of this, the term Multiliteracies was created by the New London Group (2000: 9) to accommodate related aspects of the increasing complexity of texts that relates to a major shift related to the influence of new communication technologies.

The Multiliteracies framework puts emphasis on the changing literacy practices, emergent technologies and practices set within the rapidly evolving social and global environment. When technology is used to create texts, the *visual* becomes an integral component in literacy practices to enhance and extend new forms of texts such as websites, PowerPoint presentations, VideoPapers, hypertext stories and interactive poems that combine linguistic, visual, audio and dynamic modes of communication. Similarly, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) highlight the evident fact that the inevitable changes that are rapidly occurring in our daily lives, working lives and public lives will influence the pedagogy for literacy in various educational contexts. They stress that the way literacy is perceived can result in new pedagogies for teaching English which is significantly different compared to the old, rigid and standard syllabus which is heavily teacher-oriented.

Today’s technologically-dependent students are motivated and interested to learn when there is an extensive use of technology incorporated in the classroom as they spend a lot of their time outside class hours to engage in various forms of information and communications technology (ICT hereafter) like hand phones, e-mails, chatting, computer games, digital televisions, DVDs, videodiscs, video-conferencing, iPods,

MP4 players, CD-ROMs and other wireless and fibre optic technologies which help to determine learners' values and lifestyles (Pandian, 2003).

According to Kymes (2005), in classrooms around the globe, students who are equipped with personal motivation and interests are going online to search for information and ideas. Thus, as new ICTs pervade classrooms, teachers as educators are responsible in integrating technology as a supplement when designing their pedagogical strategies for effective learning outcomes. Students' engagement can be observed through working with activities collaboratively, discussing, researching, sharing and learning from each other in an environment that underlies social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Luke, (1997). To be considered multiliterate, students today must acquire a broad repertoire of skills that will enable them to take advantage of the diverse modes of communication made possible by new technologies and to participate in global learning communities. Although becoming multiliterate is not an easy task for any university student, it is especially difficult for students in the developing world functioning in a second language such as English. In their attempts to become multiliterate, these students must acquire linguistic competence in an international language and at the same time develop the cognitive and sociocultural skills necessary to gain access into the social, academic, and workforce environments of the 21st century. They must become functionally literate, able to speak, understand, read, and write English, as well as use English to acquire, articulate and expand their knowledge. They must also become academically literate by showing that they are able to read and understand interdisciplinary texts and have the ability to analyze and respond to those texts through various modes of written and oral discourse.

Designs of Learning in the Multiliteracies Approach for Literacy Engagement

The New London Group (2000) is concerned with the proliferation of information, its circulation in multiple channels, including mass media, and, as well, the ability of education to prepare students for life in the face of unprecedented waves of information. Specifically, they focus on three scenes or phases of life: working lives, public lives (citizenship), and personal lives (or lifeworlds). In their framework, the element of

Design as a form of pedagogy is pertinent to literary practices as it forms the curriculum that decides social futures.

In addressing the question of the 'what' of literacy, we propose a metalanguage of Multiliteracies based on the concept of 'Design'. Design has become central to workplace innovations, as well as to school reforms for the contemporary world. Teachers and managers are seen as designers of learning processes and environments, not as bosses dictating what those in their charge should think and do. Further, some have argued that educational research should become a design science, studying how different curricular, pedagogical and classroom designs motivate and achieve different sorts learning.

(The New London Group 2000: 19)

In line with the proposal by the New London Group, teachers in today's modern times are facilitators in the teaching and learning process where they are the designers of the social futures for learners. To respond to these changes in work, public, and personal lives, researchers associated with the New London Group suggest that literacy pedagogy must integrate new conceptions of design and meaning making. The idea of design refers to the creativity and best ability of the teacher to redesign their activities to suit the needs of the learners' environments, technology, beliefs and texts. Besides that, 'Design' refers the various modes of active and dynamic process of meaning deciphering which involves three basic elements of designs, which are '*Available Designs, Designing and Redesigning*' (The New London Group, 2000).

The Multiliteracies framework accurately fits the puzzle of modern times, in terms of strategically planning effective teaching and learning strategies that suit the future requirements of work, civic and private domains in changing social environment. There are three elements that complement each other. Firstly, the *Available Design* involves

"an order of discourse which is the structured set of conventions associated with semiotic activity (including use of language) in a given social space – a particular institution such as a school or a workplace, or more loosely structured spaces of ordinary life encapsulated in the notion of discourses, intermeshing and dynamically interacting include a mixture of different semiotic systems for instance, visual and aural semiotic systems in combination with language constitute the

order discourse of television. For example, it may involve the grammars of several languages or the order of discourse of many schools”.

(The New London Group, 2000: 20)

Available Designs can take the form of discourses, styles, genres, dialects and voices. A discourse is a configuration of knowledge and its habitual forms of expressions, which represents a particular set of interests. Style is the configuration of all the semiotic features in a text that include language that may represent layout and visual images. Genres are forms of text or textual organization that emerge from a reference to social configurations or relationships of participants in an interaction. “Linguistic and discursal experiences are included in the Available Designs which reflect the idea of continuity in reference to history” (New London Group, 2000: 21).

The second element, *Designing* involves the idea of reading, seeing and listening which transforms the available resources of meaning. *Designing* basically

“...transforms knowledge by producing new constructions and representations of reality... people transform their relations with each other, and so transform themselves...The notion of design recognizes the iterative nature of meaning making, drawing on Available Designs to create patterns of meaning that are more or less predictable in their contexts...Designing always involves the transformation of Available Designs; it always involves making new use of old materials”.

(The New London Group 2000: 22)

Besides that, the productive activities in the forms of designing are vital components like listening, speaking, reading and writing. Available Designs are viewed upon as texts to listeners and readers who interpret other texts in order to connect to the meaning making process.

The final element, *Redesigned*, is a result of *Designing* that produces new meaning which meaning-makers remake themselves. Creativity can constitute the element of the *Redesigned* that depends on the resources for meaning making in Available Designs. The *Redesigned* is founded based on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning making that constitute the unique product of the humans. Eventually, the *Redesigned* is converted to be seen as a new meaning-making resource, which is the Available Design. (The New London Group, 2000: 23)

Language serves as an important medium for teachers and students to derive meanings and this medium is necessary in Available Designs and the Redesigned. The New London Group suggests a metalanguage that communicates meaning based on images, texts and meaning-making interactions. Therefore the primary objective

“of the Multiliteracies Project is to develop an educationally accessible functional grammar; that is, a metalanguage that describes meaning in various realms. These include the textual and the visual, as well as the multimodal relations between the different meaning-making processes that are now so critical in media texts and the texts of electronic multimedia”.

(The New London Group, 2000: 24)

Thus, the metalanguage must integrate with the school curriculum and taxing suitability, which must be able to support a complex critical analysis of language and must be realistic to the teacher and the students. A metalanguage that is flexible and open-ended must motivate students and teachers in relation to possessing the freedom to choose the tool to design it to their needs and requirements as the main

“purpose of the metalanguage should be to identify and explain differences between texts, and relate these to the contexts of culture and situation in which they seem to work. The metalanguage is not developed to impose rules, to set standards of correctness or to privilege certain discourses in order to ‘empower students’”.

(The New London Group, 2000: 24)

The New London Group coined the term Multiliteracies in an article in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 1996 (New London Group, 1996) and extended in 2000 (New London Group, 2000). It emphasised the notion that the understandings of literacy traditionally is now being bridged to related areas which are pertinent to meaning-making and this includes six major modes of meaning areas in which functional grammars, the metalanguages that describe and explain patterns of meaning, are required – *Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design and Multimodal Design*. Luke (2000: 73) stresses the idea of meaning-making that is the Multiliteracies of digital electronic texts are based on “notions of hybridity and intertextuality”. Meaning-making from the multiple linguistic, audio, and symbolic visual graphics of hypertext means that the cyberspace navigator must draw on a range

of knowledge about traditional and newly blended genres or representational conventions, cultural and symbolic codes, as well as linguistically coded and software-driven meanings.

Linguistic modes of communicating meaning are downplayed with the proliferation of multichannelled information and communication technology as in today's era of globalisation, learners experience a diverse form of exposure which The New London Group 2000 classifies as

“...Visual Meanings (images, page layouts, screen formats); Audio Meanings (music sound effects); Gestural Meanings (body language, sensuality); Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces); and Multimodal Meanings. Of the modes of meaning, the Multimodal is the most significant, as it relates all the other modes in quite remarkably dynamic relationships. For instance, mass-media images relate the linguistic to the visual and to the gestural in intricately designed ways” (p. 28)

According to The New London Group (2000), mass media communicates meaning in an unlimited manner which includes not only linguistic meaning but encompasses a wider spectrum that comprise gestural, audio, and visual meanings. Besides, a further relevant example for learners of today will be the shopping mall – it is a place where there is a need for critical engagement as it involves a lot of written text that is not limited to linguistics but a spatial reading of the architecture of the mall and the signs, logos and lighting. The significance of these extra modes of meaning is applicable for reading *Available Designs* and for *Designing* our social futures. Therefore, meaning-making is construed as Multimodal as printed text is a Visual Design and includes desktop publishing (The New London Group, 2000).

The New London Group (2000) cite Fairclough (1992a;1992b) about two important aspects that are vital in describing Multimodal meanings and the relationships of the various Designs of Meaning, that encapsulates hybridity and intertextuality. Hybridity refers to the workings of creativity in the manner of deciphering various modes of meaning through practices and conventions. Intertextuality refers to linguistic meanings, based on texts like discourse, narratives and other vehicles of meaning-making. Linguistic refers to vocabulary, metaphor, structure, delivery and modality. Visual is represented in the form of colour, perspective, vectors, foreground, and background. Audios in the form of voice, music and sound effects. Gestural reflects behaviour, sensuality, body control,

emotion, and kinaesthetics. Spatial gives the idea of the ecosystem, geographic, architectural (The New London Group, 2000).

The Multiliteracies Framework: Bridging Theory and Practice

Within the realm of higher education in Malaysia, Pandian (2003: 40) argues that teachers should be “motivated to create new and creative pedagogical methods”. He points out that as professionals, teachers need to continually keep abreast with the latest developments in their profession. Thus, the Multiliteracies framework is an approach that can be adopted by higher education teachers as a practical pedagogy to address the needs of their students in the present era of ICT. However, the New London Group (2000) caution that any successful theory of pedagogy in a learning environment needs to be based on views about how the human mind works in a society and classroom, as well as about the nature of teaching and learning.

The philosophy that the mind, society and learning are interconnected realms of educational contexts contributes to the notion that pedagogy comprises sophisticated teaching practices. These practices involve the integration of the following processes: “*Situated Practice* that emphasises the world of the learner’s *Designed and Designing* experiences, *Overt Instruction* is used by learners to form an explicit metalanguage of Design, *Critical Framing*, which relates meanings to their social contexts and purposes and *Transformed Practise*, where students transfer and re-create Designs of meaning from one context to another” (New London Group, 2000: 31)

The New London Group (2000) further articulate the point that the construction of the four factors relating to effective pedagogy clearly takes into account the proliferation of multichannelled ICT in today’s era of globalisation. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) give a comprehensive account on the four pedagogies of Multiliteracies. In *Situated Practice* (which is the practical application), it involves an idea of being immersed in experience and it involves the usage of Available Designs where

“designs of meaning are drawn from the students’ own lifeworlds and from simulations of ‘real-world’ relationships to be found in the existential world of Designs, such as workplaces and public spaces. Immersion in Designs of meanings that make ‘intuitive’ sense, common sense, or at least something more than

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half-sense. In a learning context, this might include either or both: the Designs in the students' lives, the students' own lifeworld experiences; throwing students in at the 'deep end' with Designs that are different in some respects as well as similar in other respects to those of their lifeworld experience. These Designs will make, perhaps, only half-sense at first, but with lots of contextual clues provided—for example, cultural scaffolds or bridges to other worlds of meaning”.

(Cope and Kalantzis, 2000: 244)

Assessment is suggested in the form of scaffolded assistance where an expert's help is sought to look for answers while solving a problem, although intuitively.

In the pedagogy of Multiliteracies, *Overt instruction* is the reflecting stage which involves a language being developed for communicating meaning and the Designs in those meanings. The questions constructed can give reference to

“Representational: What do the meanings refer to? Social: How do the meanings connect? the persons they involve? Organisational: How do the meanings hang together? (Designs as morphology) It may also involve developing a language to describe the processes of how we make meaning, such as: the patterns in Available Designs of meaning, that is, the resources we can find and use to make meaning; how we do the designing; how meaning becomes Redesigned. How much does the new text express personal voice? experience and so on (Design as agency)”

(Cope and Kalantzis, 2000: 246)

Assessment is based in the way a student describes the processes and patterns of Design in a meaningful way.

In the Multiliteracies pedagogy, *Critical Framing* concerns the stage of reflecting. This is where it is seen how a design fits with local meanings and more global meanings in terms of cultural and social contexts. Students critically analyze a piece of work using questions in relation to context as in what aspect the meanings fit into the larger world of meaning and ideological as to whose interests are the meanings catered to serve. Besides that, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) stress the aspect of how the Designs should fit the local and global meanings. The questions to be addressed will be

“what is the immediate function of the Design? (what’s it doing: to whom? for whom? by Whom? why?) what’s the structure and immediate context of the Design? (situation, connections, systems, relationships, effects) what’s the larger social and cultural context of the Design? (culture, history, society, politics, values)” (p. 247)

Assessment is in the form determining whether the students know what the Design is for; what it does, why it does it and whose interests does it cater to.

In the Multiliteracies pedagogy, *Transformed Practice* is regarded as the practical stage where the Design is applied in a different context and is remade into a new Design. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2000: 248), the following aspects are taken into consideration:

- transfer: taking a meaning to another, real-world context and making it work.
- voice: addressing one’s own particular interests, adding something of myself/ourselves.
- intertextuality and hybridity: making the connections, recognizing influences and cross-references of history, culture and experience-including different degrees and types of transformation of meaning, from close reproduction to significantly creative change.
- meaning-making: Designing that changes the designer. This means learning as transformation, with the student becoming a new person by able to do new things.

Assessment is seen as whether it is a good reproduction in terms of valuing its creativity in the transformation and taking into account the accuracy of its transformation to another context.

The New London Group (2000: 24) indicated that what is needed to support a pedagogy of Multiliteracies is an “educationally accessible functional grammar; that is, a metalanguage that describes meaning in various realms”. These include the textual and the visual, as well as the multimodal relations between different meaning-making processes that are now so critical in media texts and the texts of electronic multimedia.

The Designs for Learning framework includes various factors to assist in planning effective learning experience and produce learning outcomes. Pedagogical strategies are presented in the form of knowledge processes. Kalantzis and Cope (2004: 39) highlight that “knowing is a way of acting, a way of thinking and a way of meaning. There are

different ways of knowing, and these are different movements or moments in learning process". Figure 1 below (adopted from Kalantzis and Cope, 2004) explicates the Knowledge Processes.

KNOWLEDGE PROCESSES	
Experiencing	The Known The New
Conceptualising	By Naming By Theorising
Analysing	Functionally Critically
Applying	Appropriately Creatively

Figure 1: Knowledge Processes in the Multiliteracies Pedagogy

There are four fundamental ways of knowing, four processes of acting and meaning which include the skills of experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying. Kalantzis and Cope (2004) describe the Knowledge Processes as follows:

1. *Experiencing* is a knowledge process involving learning through immersion in the real, everyday stuff of the world: personal experience, concrete engagement and exposure to evidence, facts and data. There are two, distinct ways of experiencing:

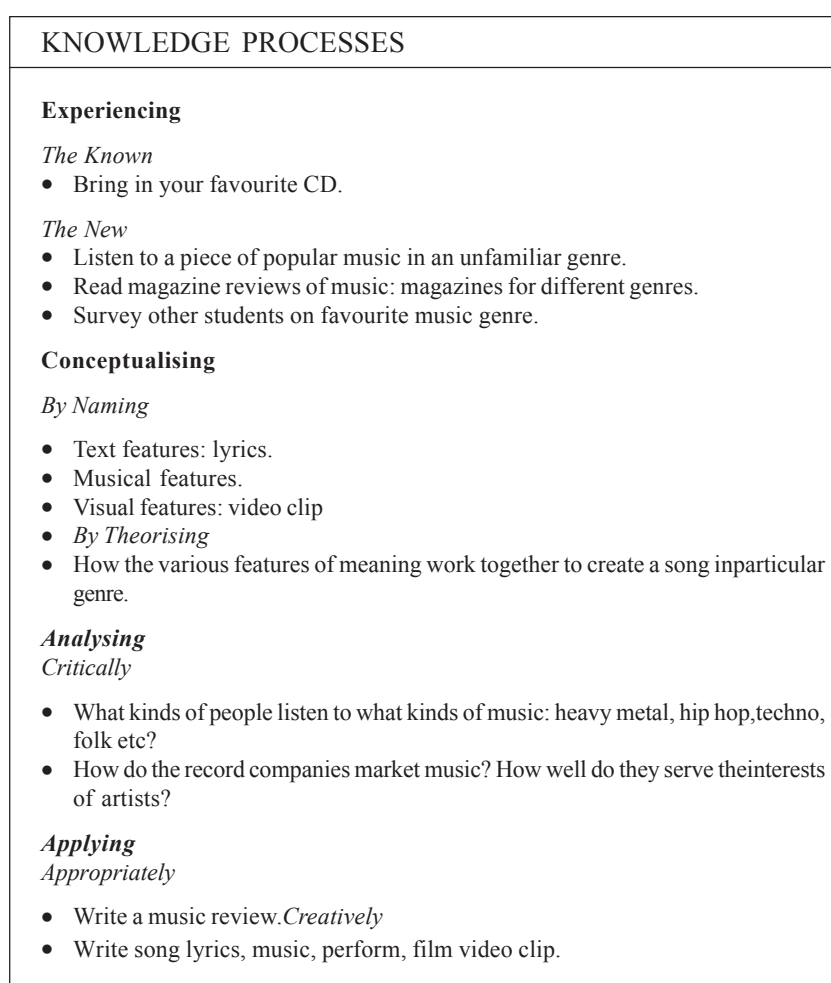
- a. *Experiencing the Known* – is a process that draws on learner life-world experience: building upon the learning resource of prior knowledge, community, background, personal interests, individual motivation, the everyday and the familiar.
 - b. *Experiencing the New* – is a process in which the learner is immersed in an unfamiliar domain of experience, either real (places, communities, situations) or virtual (texts, images, data and other represented meanings).
2. *Conceptualising* – is a knowledge process involving the development of abstract, generalizing concepts and theoretical synthesis of these concepts. It involves moving away from life-world experience along a depth axis – examining underlying structures, causes and relationships, many of which may be counterintuitive and challenge commonsense assumptions. This is one of the primary emphases of the traditional curriculum: teaching abstract concept definitions, rules and disciplinary knowledge frameworks. Conceptualising occurs in two ways:
- a. *Conceptualising by Naming* – is a process involving the development of abstract, generalising terms. A concept not only names the particular; it also abstracts something general from that particular so that other particulars can be given the same name despite visible and situational dissimilarities. In child development, Vygotsky describes the development of concepts in psycholinguistic terms (Vygotsky, 1978; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993a, b). Sophisticated adult thinking equally involves naming concepts (Luria, 1976).
 - b. *Conceptualising by Theorising* – is a process by means of which concept names are linked into a language of generalisation. Theorising involves explicit, overt, systematic, analytic and conscious understanding, and uncovers implicit or underlying realities which may not be immediately obvious from the perspective of life-world experience. Theorising is typically the basis of paradigmatic schemas and mental models which form the underlying, synthesising discourse of academic discipline areas.
3. *Analysing* – is the interpretation of the social and cultural context of knowledge. It necessitates that learners reflect on their work from a variety of critical perspectives and consider, for example, the purpose and function of a piece of knowledge. In the terminology of the Designs for Learning framework, this involves the knowledge

processes of ‘analysing’, ranging across the full gamut from ‘functional’ analysis to ‘critical’ analysis.

4. *Applying* – is a knowledge process involving active intervention in the human and natural world, learning by applying experiential, conceptual or critical knowledge – acting in the world on the basis of knowing something of the world – and learning something new from the experience of acting. Applying can occur in two ways:
 - a. *Applying Appropriately* ... is a process by means of which knowledge is acted upon or realised in a predictable or typical way in a specific context. Such action could be taken to match normal expectations in a particular situation, for instance: objects are used in the way they are supposed to be, or meanings are represented in a way which conforms to the generic conventions of a semiotic setting. Never does this involve exact replication or precise reproduction. It always involves some measure of transformation, reinventing or revoicing the world in a way which, ever-so-subtly perhaps, has never occurred before.
 - b. *Applying Creatively* ... is a process which takes knowledge and capabilities from one setting and adapts them to quite a different setting – a place far from the one from which that knowledge or capabilities originate and perhaps a setting unfamiliar to the learner. It involves taking something out of its familiar context and making it work – differently perhaps – somewhere else.

When teachers plan to use the Multiliteracies Approach, it is recommended that they lay out the plan of their lesson or string of lessons in a template called the ‘learning element’. The Learning Element template consists of core Knowledge Movements and it is a coherent bundle of learning activities and tasks, such as a lesson or a short string of lessons. A Learning Element can be documented as a teacher resource, a learner resource, or both in parallel. It is the equivalent of a textbook chapter or lesson plan. Very often, the question that bothers most teachers is the ‘how’ of teaching effectively. In trying to map teachers’ current practice, the Multiliteracies pedagogy provides for relevant and meaningful avenues for teachers to collaborate online with teachers all over the globe. Sharing resources of learning is always welcomed by ESL teachers as this makes teaching less of a solitary event. The Learning Element then is a template of teaching lessons that have been tried by teachers elsewhere and it provides for a useful and time-saving mechanism for other teachers to

follow as a form of reference. No doubt, the design of classroom practices might need to be altered to suit the learners' needs, context and cultural diversity. However, the pedagogical schemas or mental maps of sample lessons can greatly assist teachers in upgrading their professionalism in teaching. Figure 2 below exemplifies the four Knowledge Movements structured in a classroom with teachers involved in a Multiliteracies project to teach English literacy skills in Townsville, Queensland:



Adapted from Kalantzis and Cope (2004)

Figure 2: A Sample Knowledge Process Model Using the Multiliteracies Pedagogy

Conclusion

In the past, mainstream literacy professionals and university teachers in Malaysia have often failed to accept their role of helping to enhance their students' English literacy skills. However, the growing numbers of local graduates who are currently unemployed means that higher education teachers must begin to critically address the specific English literacy skills of their students. If the way English is taught in universities is not changed, many local graduates will continue to face the following problems: limited success, reduced opportunities for further education, restricted access to well-paid jobs and failure to become full participants in a democratic society. Several local researchers have aptly pointed out that the Malaysian education system must respond to new technological developments in English literacy teaching, economic progress and social aspirations by realigning its focus to promote learner-centred learning and teaching environments (Pandian, 2003; Kaur & Ganapathy, 2006). By contextualizing some of these important issues, ESL teachers need to take more focused efforts to address the issues and challenges faced by educators in order to enhance their learners' English literacy skills. If higher education teachers wish to create successful learning and teaching environments for their ESL learners, then they should create opportunities for students to experience the following operations that place students in a learner-centred situation:

- individual differences in how students learn have to be recognized and catered for;
- teaching needs to focus on securing effective learning;
- important cultural differences as to how students learn deserve recognition.

These precepts provide impetus for the use of the multiliteracies approach in promoting learner autonomy in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) while students work independently to enhance their English literacy skills as a hallmark of the multiliteracies approach is that the teachers' role is that of a facilitator and the learning process encourages learner-centredness with the integration of technology which moves away from the traditional teaching format of passive class listening which has been prevalent in many classrooms in Malaysia for the past few decades. When technology is used in the ESL classroom, more so in higher education contexts, the students become less reliant

on the teacher to create and transmit knowledge; they are more likely to develop into active learners and problem-solvers who thrive in contexts which promote shared learning encounters.

As a nation with strong economic and political commitment to new technologies, the Malaysian higher education sector requires curriculum, teaching methodologies and practices with the dynamic qualities needed to embrace the flexibilities of the cyber age. The emergence of a knowledge society results in a necessity to adopt new approaches to learning in relation to preparing learners to engage meaningfully in the world with new ways that forces educational institutions to 'change and reconceptualise what learning is' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2004: 3). In this regard, we hope that the implementation of the Multiliteracies approach in ESL teaching in higher education contexts will help teachers realize that this approach enhances the concepts of promoting learner engagement and literacy empowerment which results from motivation, strategies, knowledge and social interaction among learners.

Literacy practices in the classroom have to address all aspects of the knowledge dimension for all the students. These kinds of knowledge are constructed and communicated by the Multiliteracies practices and it is the pedagogic dimension of classroom learning contexts that articulate students' access to the intersections of Multiliteracies and learning. This approach promotes classroom learning that includes designing learning which is the designing of learning experiences based on collaborative small group activities, individual independent work and common whole class tasks. The Multiliteracies approach to teaching takes into account the current situation which we are all experiencing all over the globe whereby there is a general paradigm shift of society due to the consequences of globalization, internationalization and the advancement of technology. The incorporation of technologies into the classroom is a valuable learning experience for students as it promotes an important medium of literacy in its own right (Warschauer, 2005: 50).

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