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Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Examining Support for English Language Learners in Canada through Multiliteracies and Sociocultural Theories for Teaching and Learning

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This research explores multimodalities, sociocultural perspectives in education, and the use of technology across the curriculum. My study focuses on multiliteracies perspectives in teaching literacy and language acquisition because, with a large population of immigrants in Canada, education must reflect the multicultural and multilingual communities that exist within the larger community. In essence, this Master's research focuses on using the theory of multiliteracies and sociocultural perspectives on language learning to understand better how educators teach a target language and explore the use of multimodalities in secondary school classrooms and adult learning contexts in the community.

This Master's research is embedded within and uses some of the data from Dr. Susan Holloway, University of Windsor, and Dr. Patricia Gouthro's, Mount Saint Vincent University research study, The Multiliteracies Project. The Multiliteracies Project is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight grant. The purpose of this ongoing qualitative research study is to explore and analyze the use of multiliteracies, multimodalities, and sociocultural perspectives as pedagogical practices for the teaching and learning of secondary school students and adult learners for literacy and second language acquisition.

Members of the New London Group, Cazden, Cope, Cook, Fairclough, Gee, Kalantzis, Kress, Luke, A., Luke, C., and Michaels, coined the term "multiliteracies" (NLG, 1996; 2000) to expand definitions of traditional literacy to include written, oral, visual, audio, tactile, gestural, and spatial literacy. The theory of multiliteracies also states that cultural and linguistic diversity needs to be integrated into the learning environment and content material. In addition, the use of technologies must be integrated into the lesson material, activities, and assessments. A sociocultural perspective to language learning asserts that student experience, social participation, use of mediating devices (technology), and diverse linguistic and cultural inclusion are vital to natural language acquisition (Gee, 2004; Montero et al., 2014).

Currently, research surrounding multiliteracies and multimodalities is found more so in international research, whereas research conducted in Canadian classrooms has mainly been limited to young learners at the elementary level. Many empirical studies (Ollerhead, 2019; Pires Pereira, 2020; Santori & Smith, 2018) within the field of multiliteracies explore multimodalities, sociocultural perspectives, and the use of technology in the classroom focused on the elementary panel. Additionally, Canadian researchers such as Heydon, 2007; Heydon and O'Neill, 2014; Wilmot et al., 2013 have explored multiliteracies with secondary school students, and Hughes and Morrison, 2014; Robertson et al. 2012; Stagg Peterson, 2012 have focused on exploring multiliteracies with adult learners, but overall only a very limited number of studies have been conducted in this field of research. This current Master's study seeks to address this gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the populations of adolescents and adults in relation to using a multiliteracies theoretical framework and sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition.

Participants in the Master's research included three secondary school teachers and two adult educators teaching English as a Second language (ESL) and one adult educator teaching French as a Second Language (FSL), for a total of six participants. Data collection, coding, and analysis for this comparative case study were conducted through a constructivist grounded theory developed by Charmaz (2006; 2014). Participants in this research study decided how they wished

to participate in the research, including interviews, classroom observation sessions, and document analysis.

This Master's research study revealed three themes: (1) that teaching and learning through a multiliteracies perspective enhances learners' accessibility to language; (2) technology in the classroom encourages and enhances multimodalities; (3) teaching and learning through a multiliteracies perspective encourages diversity and inclusivity in learning environments through scaffolding and critical thinking. Coding and analyzing the research data revealed how teaching and learning through a multiliteracies perspective empowered learners by making learning more accessible. Accessibility and empowerment provide secondary school students and adult learners the opportunities to learn, create, and express their knowledge using various modes of communication rather than restricting their education to reading and writing only. Just as real-life commonly combines multimodal communication (for example, billboards, street signs, verbal communication among people), class education also needs to combine multimodalities and expand literacies. While the theory of multiliteracies does not reject traditional means of education, it believes (as it is also revealed in this study) that opening teaching and learning to include multiple avenues of communication provide an equitable education to learners who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and students who may have learning difficulties and special educational needs.

Additionally, this study reveals that technology in the classroom supports multimodalities during lesson instructions, activities, and student work. Technology in education also extends learning beyond the classroom by making resources available and easily accessible for students. Also, the data showed that technology in the classroom enhances digital literacy and promotes social justice education by allowing learners to think of modern solutions to contemporary social issues. Technology also allows for making learning more immediate and relevant through the use of a standard search engine. Additionally, through interdisciplinary classroom activities and assignments, technology allows for critical reflection on social constructs and social issues and the communication of possible solutions. In such interdisciplinary assignments, learners use inquiry-based learning and project-based learning to learn about cultural and linguistic diversity within their local communities. Using technology to engage learners in inquiry-based learning and project-based learning enhanced their digital literacy skills and action towards social justice by recommending solutions to linguistic barriers in their communities.

Moreover, teaching and learning through the theory of multiliteracies promotes diversity and inclusivity in ways beyond the mere celebration of diversity within the classroom. Multiliteracies in the classroom allow for diversity and promote inclusivity by scaffolding learners' knowledge to teach new skills and promote language acquisition through code-switching. Code-switching allows learners of diverse linguistic backgrounds to understand instructions and build upon previous grammatical knowledge to learn new grammatical rules and functions. It allows learners to move fluidly between their native tongue and the target language. This study reveals that providing learners with various avenues to communicate and create in the classroom and engaging them in content material by relying on their native linguistic knowledge and cultural identity, encourages communication in the classroom, enhances engagement, and affirms learners' identities.

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