Abstract

This paper is to discuss the design and framework of the Multiliteracies Approach proposed by the New London Group. It is to argue that the approach 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 link between theory and practice. Question to be answered is, therefore: How can Multiliteracies approach advocated by the New London Group be used in various educational contexts to empower teachers and learners? How does web literacy endorse the use of relevant and motivating strategies to empower a community of learners?

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1. Introduction

In this millennium, the challenges imposed on us to function at a multiliterate level are distinct and clear from how expectations were laid out in the earlier days. Various inventive 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. Yet, these competency levels will not be adequate in today’s complex society. In fact, scholars have increasingly pointed out what it means to be literate depends to a large extent on the situation in which a person operates.

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According to Scribner & Cole (1981: 136), literacy is not simply to know how to read and write a particular script, but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. 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). Kintgen, Kroll & Rose (1988:263) state that functional literacy is the possession of competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing which an individual wishes – or is compelled— to engage.

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 assortment 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. According to Wilson (1999), certainly, in today’s borderless world, with the mushrooming of global interdependence as an entity, commonalities across cultures are greater than ever.

2. New London Approach & Multiliteracies

Years ago, a congregation of literacy specialists met in New London and advocated a new approach to literacy pedagogy in response to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity and the multiplicity of communications channels. The approach proposed a pedagogy and metalanguage of multiliteracies to broaden exclusively print-based and monocultural approaches to teaching language and literacy (New London Group, 1996). They developed a pedagogical approach in response to changes that were identified and needed to be addressed in literacy education.

The New London Group proposed the term ‘multiliteracies’ to underline what they consider as the two most important, and strictly related changes that they have observed happening in the world: the influence of new and emerging communication technologies on new forms of literacy and growing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity in the world. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) argue that the NLG have realised that “there was no singular canonical English that either could or should be taught anymore” there are new forms of Englishes that have emerged.

There are features of our changing communications environment which suggest that Multiliteracies may gain increasing currency in institutionalised learning environments (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). One major development is the growing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity and the emergence of multiple Englishes—not only the different national variants of English, but increasingly divergent ‘functional’ Englishes (professional, technical); sub-culturally and ethnically defined accents, dialects and registers and interlanguages (Lo Bianco, 2000).

3. Multiliteracies and Communication Technology

‘Multiliteracy’ is considered as microcosmic of the broader notion of a new basics, in which both the traditional content of, and the traditional orientations to, knowledge have been substantially revised. There are features of our changing communications environment which suggest that Multiliteracies may gain increasing currency in institutionalised learning.

Within the literacy paradigm, then, the qualities that will be required by effective learners in future are clearly evident. The diversification of communication environment argues that effective learners will be flexible, autonomous, and able to work with cultural and linguistic diversity. Furthermore, the need for collaboration, and for problem-solving skills, is evidenced by a second major change to the way we must conceive of literacy. This is the nature of new communication technology.

Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written linguistic modes of meaning interface with visual, aural, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning (Gilster 1997 & Mitchell 1995). Moreover, ‘Creator to Consumer’ research suggested by (Cope & Freeman, 2001) assumes that the most recent digital technologies for the creation and dissemination of text require explicit metalanguages along the general lines of the multimodal functional grammar which has developed as a component of the Multiliteracies research, including a capacity to deal with cultural and linguistic differences within and between languages. Within the Multiliteracies paradigm, analysing the structure and social uses of the emerging digital technologies is critical. Most to be noticed, the new technologies, and more broadly the changing social worlds of citizenship and work, require a new educational response (Cope & Gollings, 2001).
Gee (2000) discusses that excellent learners will be autonomous and self-directed—designers of their own learning experiences, in collaboration with others as well as by themselves. According to Cope & Kalantzis (2000), learners need to be flexible, possessing problem-solving skills, multiple strategies for tackling a task, and a flexible solution-orientation to knowledge. Significantly, good learners will also be collaborative, knowing that knowledge is increasingly created collaboratively, whether in work teams, through community development or in scientific research laboratories. They will themselves be good communicators and tutors, and of open sensibility, able to work productively with linguistic and cultural diversity. Effective learners will be intelligent in more than one way, that is, their intelligence may in turn be communicative, numerate, technical or process-oriented, or it may be emotional, analytical, creative or critical. At last, good learners will be broadly knowledgeable, and able to engage with the different interpretative frameworks and contexts of specific information (Gonczi, 2002).

4. Multiliteracies Approach to Promote Learners' Engagement

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 advance at a sophisticated pace in today’s challenging times. New London Group (2000) suggests that these winds of educational change afflicting educational contexts necessitate that teachers view literacy in a plural sense. 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 in education and these innovations now suggest the possibilities of using new ways of teaching and learning. This means moving away from traditional teaching and learning.

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

In order to provide opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in their learning environment, teachers have to concern the values, possibilities, pedagogies and constraints of multimodal literacy and multimedia technologies that result in the emergence of new modes and texts. Heydon (2005) suggests that “literacy educators’ perceptions and choices are also formed in and through this triad of the cognitive, affective and discursive which is surrounded within social, cultural and political contexts”. Therefore, the term Multiliteracies was created by the New London Group 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 interactive poems, texts such as websites, PowerPoint presentations, hypertext stories and that combine linguistic, audio and visual and dynamic modes of communication. In the same way, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) emphasize the evident fact that the inevitable changes that are occurring in our daily lives will influence the pedagogy for literacy in various educational contexts. They argue that the way literacy is perceived can result in new pedagogies for teaching English that is significantly different compared to the old, rigid and standard syllabus which is heavily teacher-oriented.
Kymes (2005) found that students who are equipped with personal motivation and interests are going online to search for information and ideas. As new ICTs encompass classrooms, teachers as well as educators are responsible in integrating technology as a supplement when designing their pedagogical strategies for effective learning results. Students’ engagement can be seen through working with activities, discussing, researching, 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.

5. Multiliteracies Approach and Teachers

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.

Although many teachers acknowledge the Web's potential as an educational tool as well as the Web's motivating power, they also struggle to find meaningful applications of the Web in their educational practices. The Web is a learning tool that differs from other tools used in education because students acquire a great many Web skills in an out-of-school context and also regard themselves as skilled Web users. This is reflected in the perception of many teachers that their students' Web skills are superior to their own, which may result in underestimating the support students need when using the Web for educational purposes. The Web has certain characteristics such as its size, topicality and accessibility, as well as the use of hypertext and non-textual elements that are complicated for users and require specific skills. Many students use the Web quite naturally, but 'Too often, students - and adults, too - mistake their ability to move around the Internet for the skills that they need to navigate and read it' (Burke, 2002).

Teachers must also engage with ICTs at a critical level in terms of pedagogy. For example, if they are aiming simply at a technical level of engagement or providing opportunities for critical engagement, students should be encouraged to use higher order thinking and develop deep understandings. They must also examine their role in the design of the learning environment itself and how this impacts the social and learning relationships that develop in classrooms.

According to Maureen O’Rourke (2002), Australian teachers have focus more on issues of pedagogy than on the technology itself, their use of ICTs has changed. Significant change in student learning outcomes was not in evidence until change in pedagogy occurred. For example, the Internet was used for research during “Literacy Blocks” wherein students were asked to identify facts or summarize from Web sites.

6. Conclusion

This paper argues that a new basic is emerging, and with it a need for skills and attributes far broader and more diverse than those previously thought necessary to effective learning and teaching. Three main contexts should be considered in this respect. In terms of individuals, fostering motivations and attitudes and reducing anxieties are important. In terms of schools, provision of instructional technologies and other resources could help teachers and students to get engaged in newest software and hardware education technologies in the market to be used in teaching and learning process. In terms of instruction, employing ICTs and other instructional technologies will lead to promote learning and teaching. The conceptual model of this paper could be presented in Figure 1.

Multiliteracies Approach will ensure that learning is significant for students, connected to their interests and understandings about the world. As students become multiliterate, constructing meaning as they simultaneously draw on experiential, contextual, and disciplinary knowledge they have developed about the world, they enhance their ability to shape their own futures. Thoughtful, responsive and future oriented teaching is an essential link in this process.
7. References


