EDB NET Sections' Regional NET Coordinating Team "seed" Project Experience-Sharing

Theme: Innovative Learning and Teaching Practice in 21st century English Language Literacy Development

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Critical multimodal literacies for English language learners: Why it matters

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Agenda

- ➢ Understanding the context of developing literacy skills in the 21st century
  - Integrating critical literacy principles to enrich English language education
  - Creating multimodal literacy experiences for learners
- ➢ Attending to tensions and complexities
- ➢ Q&A

Understanding the context of developing literacy skills in the 21st century

We live in a world saturated with texts

‘Traditional’ orientations to literacy

- Single (print-based) modality
- Emphasis on decoding and comprehension; normative uses of texts
- Emphasis on one, single ‘correct’ reading
- View of the reader as passive receptacle rather than active agent
- Notions of language* as potentially objective

English language learners….

- have rich literacy lives outside school
- have sophisticated language and literacy practices, including new digital literacies
- may struggle with English when it is presented as impersonal and technical, rather than personal, social and expressive

English language learning must be **authentic** and **engaging** and **empowering.**

Students need skills and knowledge to be language users and language ‘brokers’

English language teaching and learning must reflect and respond to literacy in the 21st century

Integrating critical literacy principles to enrich English language education

What is critical literacy?

“Critical Literacy is more than just understanding what we are reading. We have to look deeper to find the author’s message and to find out why they wrote about the topic. Critical Literacy is about asking questions, looking at different points of view, and asking, 'Is everyone included in what we are reading?'”

(Allan Luke)

Critical Literacy: help students understand how texts work in contemporary society

- "entails **the developmental engagement by learners with the major texts, discourses and modes of information**. It attempts to **attend to the ideological and hegemonic functions of texts**, as in critical pedagogy models. But it augments this by providing students with technical resources for analyzing how texts work (Wallace, 2003). **For example, this might entail the analysis of a textbook or media representation of political or economic life**. But in addition to questions of **how a text might reflect learners' life worlds and experiences**, it also teaches them **how the selection of specific grammatical structures and word choices attempts to manipulate the reader**" (Luke, 2011).

Critical literacy processes

- Noticing and analysing language, images, and other multimodal features in texts
- Locating texts within institutional, social, cultural, political and historical contexts
- Interrogating multiple viewpoints and positioning in texts
- Defamiliarising dominant text interpretations, gaining ‘distance’ fromtexts, adopting ‘resistant’ reading positions
- Understanding our own stances to texts, how our identities and values influence how we understand and interpret texts, i.e. reflexivity

Critical Literacy conceptual framing

Linguistic dimension

- Meaning making and communication systems used in writing

Cognitive dimension

- Mental strategies and processes used to build meaning in writing

Social dimension

- Writing in context, for social purposes, as part of social identities

Critical dimension

- Writing as ideological, as a construction of the social world, or for social critique and social justice

(adapted from Kucer, 2009)

Code breaking Decoding written language and other multimodal elements	**Text participating** Understanding the text, comprehending its meaning.
Text using Knowing how this text is used in context. Understanding how the text features relate to its social function.	**Text analysing** Understanding the Discourses, ideologies and power relations in texts, resisting and challenging texts.

Four Resources Model, Freebody and Luke 1990

Why is critical literacy important in schools?

Critical literacy positions students as active meaning makers

Critical literacy puts students lives and lived experiences at the centre of the curriculum

Critical literacy enables students to adopt multiple perspectives around text production and consumption

…opening up spaces for critical discussions around real-world concerns

JUST DO IT.

An ad about a well-known sports apparel brand

A photo showing dolphins performing in Ocean Park

An image showing a dolphin and the message “I wasn’t born to perform.”

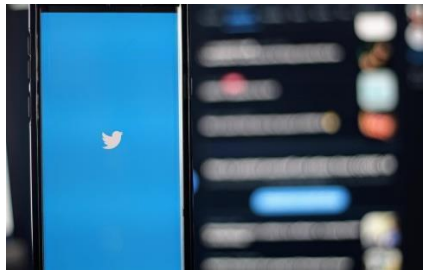
(Source: https://me.me/i/i-wasnt-born-to-perform-no-dolphins-at-the-gulfport-11242498)

Critical literacy empowers students and teachers

(Ira Shor)

Creating multimodal literacy experiences for learners

The visual in contemporary life



Multimodality

Multiple semiotic resources in dynamic interaction with each other

Linguistic Spoken and written language

Visual Still and moving images, colour, shape

Auditory Music, sound, voice quality

Gestural Body language, facial expression

Spatial Architecture, ecosystems, landscapes

print is also visual

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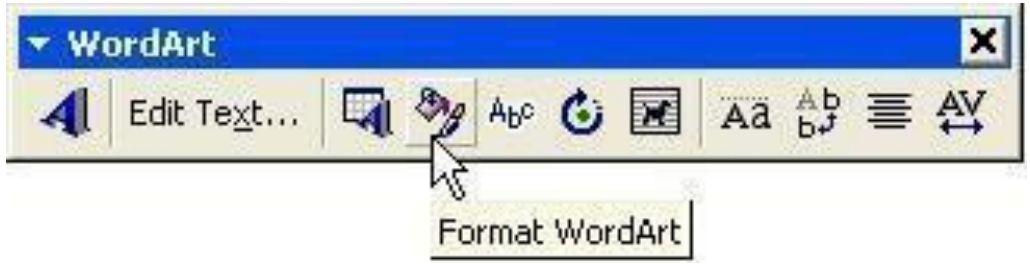

Social semiotics

- Human biology and physiology and the materiality of the world: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch
- Resources used for communication/making meaning in socialcontext
- Systems of signs that have shared meaning within a group or society

Using visual texts… what about ‘the language’?

- multimodality supports learning of language through “message abundancy” (Gibbons, 2009:156)

Any exclusive focus on the ‘linguistic’ significantly narrows communication experience in the classroom… the reality is that multimodality constitutes the majority of texts in social practicein private, professional and industrial lives.

Healy, 2004

How multimodal texts can be included in the literacy curriculum

Visual text analysis

- Representation: who? what? what's happening? where? conceptsor symbols?
- Interaction: what social relationships between participants? withthe viewer? what power relations?
- Composition: design? layout? reading paths?

Example: Visual-verbal interaction

(based on Picturebook Theory, Nicolajeva & Scott 2000)

- Symmetrical: words and images express similar meanings
- Complementary and Enhancing: words and pictures fill each others' gaps, or amplify or complexify meanings
- Counterpointing and contradiction: words and images express different meanings, they collaborate to communicate meanings beyond the scope of either one on its own; words and images seem to be in opposition to each other, and challenge the reader to mediate between them

Visual-verbal **interaction**

The ad of a bank contrasting work and play

Digital tools for Multimodal Writing

- ease of use and free
- involves reading/writing
- multiple modes: linguistic, visual, audio
- ease of sharing and commenting, privacy
- vehicles for range of content and text types within theme

EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL TOOLS:

- *WIKIS*
- *BLOGS*
- *POWERPOINT*
- *INSTAGRAM*
- *ADOBE SPARK PAGE*

Attending to tensions and complexities

Possible challenges

- Collaboration issues: hierarchical / top down approach
- Negotiation of teaching approach, pedagogy and materials for critical literacy (CL has to be learner-centred)
- Mixed understandings of critical literacy – what it is and what isn't
- Deficit view of students' language ability – underestimating students' ability to read authentic and challenging texts

Possibilities: Some good practices we observed in the CR&W project schools

- Teachers created a safe environment for discussion of sensitive/uncomfortable issues
- Teachers drew on identities of learners- experiences, feelings
- Teachers pushed students to think more deeply about language - language used to express meanings and social purposes of texts
- Teachers helped students to connect text to self and text to texts
- Students responded well to the issue-based approach (rather than the traditional language-focused input approach in ESL textbooks)
- The issues and critical literacy themes provided an authentic context for students to respond genuinely e.g. doing a survey, sharing a personal story

The way forward

- Continually **reflect** on practice and problematise the power relations when working with students/colleagues to enact critical literacy
- Create more opportunities/spaces for authentic co-reflections and **professional dialogues** to discuss tensions arising from enacting critical literacy
- Encourage teachers & students to voice concerns and **share ideas**
- Negotiate with colleagues and learners to build an authentic critical literacy **community** in schools
- Ensure critical literacy is **not just seen as an 'add on' programme** to make language learning more interesting and varied, but a way to bring about change

Q&A