

Literacy to Literacies: The Pedagogy of New Time

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Abstract: This article explores the changing perspective on the concept of literacy to literacies and its' implication for literacy pedagogy. The traditional definition of literacy, which refers to the ability to communicate through verbal mode has been replaced by the emergence of the term literacies, encompassing concepts of literacy in various contexts. Literacy pedagogy, however, is still facing the issue related to equity and social justice. Meanwhile, the emergent of new media (Green & Beavis, 2013) and the nature of socioeconomic demands (Gee, 2014) have given a new challenge for literacy pedagogy to reform. The article proposes the integration of new literacies into school curriculum as a respond to the demand of contemporary time which expects individuals to have the ability to design identities, affinity groups, and networks as well as to have the ability to build portfolio. The article argues that basic literacy skills offered at school should encompass the skill to communicate using new media. Additionally, the teaching of new literacies is expected to equally benefit students from both culturally and linguistically dominant background as well as the nondominant ones. The debates on the integration of new literacies into school curriculum revolve around the issue on methodology. The field is widely open to contribution, as the development of new media outraces the development of literacy pedagogy. Therefore, methodologies to teach new literacies at school will always be in need for improvement.

1 INTRODUCTION

Defining literacy is a challenging task as it usually involves contestation and debates due to the political nature it brings. In the perspective of structuralist and linguistic models, literacy, in its singular form, refers to the mastery of translating a sound of speech into a symbolic form of writing as well as interpreting the written words embedded within a socio-cultural setting. Thus, being 'literate' traditionally means being able to write and read (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Gee (1991) elaborates literacy skill as not only the ability to write and read, but the ability to use the language of the dominant discourse, or one discourse that is valued the most among a variety of available discourses. The dominant discourse 'values 'modern consciousness', namely believing that higher intelligence is manifested in the kind of academic language used in research, empirical reasoning, and logical argumentation. Academic language is epitomized by explicitness, analytic skills, logical thought, abstract definitions and generalizations (Gee, 2004, p. 280; Gee, 2012). With this definition,

the teaching and learning of literacy at school is geared toward not only equipping students how to read written symbols but also 'prescriptively' giving students knowledge on grammars, conventions, and values of academic discourse.

The emergence of social constructivism and postmodern education in the 1980s brought a new point of view of looking at literacy. The new term 'literacies,' in its plural form, denotes the broad possible interpretation of the concept. Literacy can be defined in many domains other than language. Literacy also takes many forms (Mills, 2009), such as visual literacy, academic literacy, digital literacy, etc.. The concept of literacy can also be extended from one's ability to perform 'communicative task in society' to one's ability to take meaning and make meaning from one's experiences outside, using multiple ways of communicating (Leander & Boldt, 2012; Gee, 2012; See Heath, 2013). In 1999s, The New London Group (2000) introduced the concept of 'multiliteracies' which refers to the control the ability to communicate in multicultural linguistic settings and using multimodal communication media.

Finally, the changing definition of literacy allows us to draw a conclusion on the concept of literacy, that is beyond the ability to write and read. First, literacy refers to the ability to make meaning and communicate meaning using any possible media. It means that literacy is a meaning-making ability that is not limited to language only (Heath, 2013). Second, the core concept of any literacy lies in its' utility value within the fluidity of social contexts; when social and cultural contexts change, so does literacy and literacy pedagogy. These two definitions suggest that literacy, regardless of any forms it takes, is a tool that should prepare people for future, to be an active citizenry, and to function optimally in society (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Green & Beavis; 2013).

2 CHALLENGES IN LITERACY PEDAGOGY

The major problems of literacy education relate to the issue of identity, power, and equity. Being literate means having a control of the use of mainstream discourse. Meanwhile, Discourse refers to a consensus on how to speak, think, act, be, and believe, in a community, which is used to identify people's membership within that socially meaningful group (Gee, 1991). The teaching of literacy is closely related to championing one identity over another. As Gee (1991) says, the teaching of literacy "puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints, and values at the expense of others" (p. 4). Consequently, the intersection between schooling and discourse might benefit students who come from dominant discourse while putting those who come from non-dominant discourse at risk of feeling a sense of losing their identity as they feel no sense of belonging to the middle-class culture (William, 2005).

Meanwhile, in terms of power and equity, literacy teaching often favours those who are familiar with the dominant culture and disadvantages those who come from culturally and linguistically marginalized background. Scholars (Blake & Bowling, 2011; Gee, 2004; William, 2005) problematize the teaching and learning of literacy, of which manifestation, in form of instruction, learning goals, and assessments, possibly puts students from non-mainstream discourse at risk of experiencing difficulties. For nonmainstream students, the acquisition of this dominant literacy skill is hampered by the incompatibility between home and school literacy practices. The fact that schools demand students to master 'academic discourse' shows that those who

speak academic discourse do better in society and have more chances to gain social prestige and mobility. Addressing these issues requires a kind of pedagogy which cares about building critical consciousness to critique the issue of power; an area of which the current pedagogy is still considered to be lacking.

Nevertheless, seminal works since 1970 have acknowledged the mediating influence of students' cultural background in mastering literacy skills. Research in literacy for 'culturally and linguistically nondominant students' (CLNS) shows that there has been a gradual change in how researchers perceive the cultural and linguistic practices of CLNS at home. The cultural and linguistic practices of these nondominant students had been considered as 'deficient,' then 'equal but different,' until recently seen as 'useful resources' to develop their skill in using dominant discourse: a view known as resource approach. The equity issue favouring those students living with mainstream upbringing has been addressed by efforts to 'build the bridge' between CLNS's home lives and classrooms using resource approach, which sees students' cultural and linguistic practices at home as useful material to develop their literacy skills.

Additionally, other works showing the effort to build the bridge between students' literacy practices at home and school also concern students from the culturally dominant background. The examples are works by Ryan (2005), Wilhelm (2016), and Sullivan & Brown (2015) which suggest that students' literacy practices outside of school, including their interest in reading marginalized genre during leisure time, can be as valuable as literacy practices at school, if not more. The research has indicated the significance of mapping students' literacy practices at home, not exclusively for students from non-dominant culture, but for all students. Students literacy practices outside school is considered important to create a well-informed instruction. Mapping students' literacy practices outside schools is paramount to develop students' overall literacy skills as well as to address the identity and equity issues prevalent in education.

3 NEW TIME, NEW MEDIA

As the development of technology and communication proliferates, there has been a considerable change in the way literacy is conceptualized. The new media has emerged and grown along with the continuous use of the traditional printed ones. New media is epitomized by its various

mode and modality, affordance for presence, social participation, self-personalization, and user-generated content, as explicated by Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, and other forms of digital media (See Green & Beavis, 2013). This new type of communication mode gives birth to 'online literacies,' which is a "socially mediated ways of generating meaningful content through multiple modes of representation to produce digital texts for dissemination in cyberspace" (Alvermann, 2008, p. 9 in Green & Beavis, 2013). The emergence of new media and new literacies bring with them a new challenge for literacy education as new media now play a major place in students' literacy practices.

Meanwhile, in the new capitalist world under the philosophy of neoliberalism, education is seen as a marketplace. Neoliberalism holds the idea that people's gain depends fully on people's ability to afford. In this case, schools, which are usually free or subsidized, should only provide the basic skills (Gee, 2004) to maintain the stability of the market of education. The 'basic literacy skills' refers to the traditional literacy, namely the ability to communicate using written form only. Hence, under neoliberalism, there will be no room for new literacies, consisting on the complex relationship between various communication modes, to be embedded in school curriculum.

The debate on literacy pedagogy in modern time revolves around whether integrating new literacies in school curriculum is possible, if not desirable. According to Gee (2004), there are two options to respond to this issue. First, we can accept schools' neoliberal function by delivering "the basics" while working outside school to provide activities and experiences essential for students' development, or we can fight the neoliberal agenda by making schools sites for creativity where students can gain skills and experiences suitable for success (p. 298).

The latter option is preferable as the primary mission of education is to ensure that students can participate fully in public, community, and economic life (New London Group, 2000). Education has the responsibility to create a literacy pedagogy that will prepare students for their future. Hence, new literacies should be taught at schools, adding to the basic literacy skills that have been taught so far. The issues on the inclusion of new literacies in school curriculum can be categorized into three issues, namely the relevance with current economic demand, the pursuit of equity in education, and the issue on practicality.

3.1 New literacies and Relevance to Current Economic Demand

The dramatic economic change has replaced the nature of work from the old top-down horizontal chain of commands to the post-fordism, namely the flattened-hierarchy emphasizing on collaborative work and initiative. Hence, it requires individuals to be an active participant (New London Group, 2000; Gee, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). In the new capitalist world, "where knowledge goes out of date rapidly, and technological innovation is common" (p. 284), there is a need for individuals to have the ability to design identities, affinity groups, and networks (Gee, 2004; Green & Beavis, 2013).

Additionally, in the new capitalist world, it is important for an individual to be ready for shifting their roles to respond to the unpredictable life trajectories. One's merit, which used to be based on class, is now based on his or her portfolio, comprising their experiences, skills, as well as their ability to make use of their identities when needed (Gee, 2004). The need for the mastery in new literacies becomes undeniable as individuals can benefit from the nature of new media, which allow them to present to network and build social affinity with their peers. New media allows people to "participate and create content, rather than just 'read'" (Green & Beavis, 2013, p. 46).

New literacies can enable individuals to represent themselves through various modes and modalities. Hence, the inclusion of new literacies in school curriculum is the most relevant to the challenge that students will face in this new capitalism, possibly in the future economic demand. (New London Group, 2000; Gee, 2004; Green & Beavis, 2013; Mills, 2009).

3.2 New Literacies and Equity in Education

According to Kalantzis & Cope (2012), equity is a value that contributes to the fairness of society, characterized by the availability of equal opportunities for all people. In relation to literacies, the emergence of new media and new literacies has broadened the conception about literacy learning through a wider discourse acquisition. The binary distinction between school-based literacy practices and home-based literacy practices has been challenged, as scholars have acknowledged "the permeability of the home in accessing literacy" (Pahl & Burnett, 2013, p. 10). There is now a fine line between schooling and education, of which the

former refers to the teaching and learning at one institution, and the latter refers to a vast and rich learning opportunities provided by various media including those outside school (Green & Beavis, 2013). Students might vary in the degree of exposure toward new media outside the school. However, as new media and new literacies emerge to be an inseparable part of people's modern life in new time, there needs to be a reconceptualization on the notion of basic skills for literacy, from 'being able to write and read' to 'being able to communicate using various modes and modalities.' Hence, to achieve equity in literacy education (See Kalantzis & Cope, 2012), the new literacies should be included in school curriculum.

The urgency to include new literacies in school curriculum does not only benefit students who have the least exposure to new literacies, but also those who are familiar with it. According to Gee (2012), the extent to which students can benefit from their early encounter with literacy, either with traditional literacy or the new literacies, depends on the availability of mentoring from and interaction with adults which stimulate their problem-solving skill and innovative thinking. Therefore, although many people get the exposures to either traditional literacies or new literacies, it is only through this mechanism that ones can acquire the advantage of mastering this discourse which can lead them to success in the contemporary world. Thus, the inclusion of new literacies in school curriculum equally provides all students to develop their competence in new literacies.

Additionally, according to Mills (2009), "the intertextual institution of a dominant literary tradition is inequitable since marginalized cultures also have a stake in literacy practice in a multicultural and globalized society" (p. 105). Teaching only the traditional basic literacy skills means acknowledging only one acceptable discourse that is worth valuing: namely the basic academic literacy skills. Meanwhile, teaching new literacies in school curriculum means accepting the popular literacy practices prevalent in current society, needed by people both from marginalized and dominant culture. In this case, scholars (Green & Beavis, 2013; Mills, 2009) are in favour of some level of integration of new literacies in literacy pedagogy.

3.3 The Practicality of Teaching New Literacies

Given the complexity of new literacies interwoven in students' literacy practices in various loose domains, what is needed is a permeable curriculum which

advocates the intersection between teachers and students' literacy practices (Dyson, 1993, in Pahl & Burnett, 2013). However, the suggestion to incorporate new literacies into school curriculum leads to inquiries related to its practicality: first, whether integrating new literacies in school curriculum equals to the reduction of time for teaching basic literacy skills; second, to what extent new literacies can be and should be integrated into school curriculum (Green & Beavis, 2013). The debate emerges as the term new literacies encompasses a complexity and interrelationship of a wide range of modes of communication, including sound, camera-use, gesture, etc. (Mills, 2009, p. 106), which is considered too broad to be included in school curriculum.

Gee (2007) suggests that teaching literacy skills can be done better when integrated as a strategy to solve a real problem, rather than teaching it separately out of context. Drawing on an extensive observation on learning in video games, Gee (2007) proposes a situated approach to teach literacy skills which suggests that the learning of skills should be embedded in a meaningful context where there is an immediate purpose of learning it. The learning of literacies, hence, lies within the integration of numerous ways of producing text, in a real communication context or cultural interactions (Gee, 2007). In higher education, the teaching of literacy can be accommodated by the concept of 'applied learning' through literacy practices experienced during placement, which gives students a chance to acquire multi-modal literacy skills relevant in the desired contexts. Meanwhile, for secondary school students, teaching literacy should be brought with hands-on experience (Blake & Bowling, 2011).

Meanwhile, although the New London Group (2000) acknowledge that new multiliteracies is an ongoing project, they have proposed four components on 'multiliteracies' pedagogy, namely situated practice, overt-instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. These works have been extensively applied, discussed, or even debated (see Leander & Boldt, 2012). Other works (See Mills, 2009) provide alternative ways of integrating new literacies in literacy pedagogy. Research on literacy pedagogy in new media has not yet ended as the development of technology and communication outraces the development of literacy pedagogy. Therefore, works in methodologies to teach new literacies at school will always be in need for improvement.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This article has discussed the key concepts of literacy and the influence of contemporary time in the development of literacy pedagogy. The concept of literacy has changed from traditionally referring to the skill to communicate through verbal and written mode only, to 'literacies' which acknowledges various ways of communicating and making meaning. The major concern on literacy revolves around three dimensions, namely critical dimension, cultural dimension, and operational dimension (Green & Beavis, 2013). While the critical dimension, related to the issue of power, is considered to be lacking praxis, the cultural dimension has been addressed by various scholars endeavouring to bridge culturally and linguistically nondominant students' literacy practices at home and at school. Additionally, in new time, the cultural dimension concerns literacy pedagogy to create a curriculum which emphasizes on the authentic meaning making and full participation in society (Green & Beavis, 2013).

Meanwhile, in relation to its' operational dimension, the emergence of new media and its intensity in circulating in individuals' life gives way to new literacies to be considered as necessary to be integrated into school curriculum. The New London Group's (2000) formulation of four components on 'multiliteracies' pedagogy has invited scholars to adopt, adapt, provide alternatives, or even to critique its' relevance with the current literary practices (See Leander & Boldt, 2012). However, it is also noted that the field is widely open to contribution, as the development of new media is still constantly influencing people's literacy practices.

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