Chapter 10

Multilingual, Multimodal Compositions in Technology-Mediated Hybrid Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a series of integrated curricular invitations that sought to unsettle hierarchies of power by creating hybrid spaces that leverage students’ cultural and linguistic resources in the form of multilingual community-based knowledge. The project involved participation from a total of 138 bilingual first graders in two dual language public elementary schools and was implemented, investigated, and revised over a two-year period. The curricular invitations were informed by a conceptual framework that brought together Nieto’s (2009) elements of culture with theories of Expansive Learning. This dual framework assists us in articulating the theoretical underpinnings of each step of the proposed sequence. Teaching implications and future research directions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that children’s out-of-school experiences must be recognized as creative capital that can anchor learning (Wei & Wu, 2009). These epistemic resources include their emergent bilingualism (Brisk, 2006), cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), and multimodal literacy practices (Ghiso & Low, 2013). When provided the curricular space, emergent bilinguals demonstrate multiple and dynamic language and literacy practices (Martínez, 2010; Martínez-Álvarez, Under Review). These creative assets are embedded in the cultural knowledge they mobilize as members of diverse communities in transnational contexts.

Despite the resources bilingual children bring to learning, their social identities are often constructed from a deficit perspective, resulting in literacy curricula that emphasize decontextualized skills to the detriment of a more varied range of communicative practices and semiotic modes.

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(Marsh, 2007). Although the benefits of including multimodality in teaching and learning have been documented, the formal school curriculum continues to marginalize, and at times police, the multifarious world of children’s out-of-school literacies (Dyson, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Siegel, 2012). Even in bilingual programs, there still exists a strict separation of languages and transmission-based models of teaching focused on the mastery of isolated abilities (Soltero-González, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2012). Such practices negatively impact bilinguals by denying them access to their full learning repertoires.

This chapter describes a series of integrated curricular engagements where the worlds of home and school are in productive interaction. Through providing young children with opportunities for multilingual and multimodal composing mediated by technology, the invitations we propose centered students’ community-based knowledge and culturally-situated agency at the heart of their academic inquiries.

THEORETICAL FRAMINGS

In our work, Expansive Learning, one of the concepts within Third Generation of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987), helps us to identify the dual binds, or contradictions, that exist in prevailing deficit discourses in the education of bilingual children, who research indicates actually possess rich linguistic and cultural understandings. Like Engeström (1999), we envision hybrid spaces that promote expansive activities as zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of education, these “hybrid” or “third” spaces are openings for creating teaching and learning relationships more attuned to bilinguals’ ways of knowing (Gutierrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999). Thus, our proposed curriculum involves expanding notions of language and literacy learning while allowing space for ambiguity and contradiction (Gutiérrez, 2008).

The multimodal activities we present in this chapter guide the exploration of students’ funds of knowledge and the recognition of these existing understandings as valuable academic resources for literacy learning. In doing so, the invitations allow for a post-structural characterization of students’ agentive practices in the literacy classroom by involving Butler’s (1998) notion of embodiment, for whom agency is a process of enactment through the materiality of the body. Our bodies inform our orientation toward the world; as Katherine Hayles explains “embodiment is akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational. Whereas the body can disappear into information with scarcely a murmur of protest, embodiment cannot, for it is tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person” (Hayles 1993, p. 156). In this way, children perform race, ethnicity and class within historically accumulated scripts.

Finding ways in which minoritized children’s out-of-school resources can be enacted in the literacy curriculum is key to generating hybrid instructional spaces (Gutiérrez, 2008) more conducive of Latino bilingual children’s agentive behaviors. In later sections of the chapter, we elaborate on how the specific tenets of Expansive Learning inform the various dimensions of our curricular sequence. Part of the expansive learning framework is that collective activity is mediated through artifacts—in the case of our work, the artifacts are digital cameras. In our curricular engagements, we invite the use of a simple technology, photography, as a primary semiotic tool in itself (Cappello & Hollingsworth, 2008; Goldman-Segall, 1998; Luttrell, 2010; Orellana, 1999) rather than as an ancillary to written text, in order to expand modes of representation. The hybrid spaces generated during our work with the use of technology brought children’s languages and places (in the form of their transnational neighborhood and diaspora communities) to the forefront of literacy practices, and rooted academic learning in children’s blended experiences.
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