Chapter 17

Using Multimodal Literacies to Support Language Development for English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

This practitioner-oriented chapter focuses on ways that teacher educators can foster English Language Development using a multimodal and multiple literacies approach (e.g., Gee, 2003). Specific methods and digital tools that prepare educators to use technology to foster English Language Development are described and specific resources that can be used are identified. Connections to theory and recent related research provide a strong rationale for broader implementation of multimodal and digital literacies into a wide variety of teacher preparation courses and programs across global contexts in online, blended, and face-to-face classes within teacher preparation programs. We focus on both low-tech and high-tech options to address the issues of digital divide and access to technology in the United States and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents ways teacher educators can meaningfully integrate digital supports and multimodal learning within a variety of teacher education courses. English language learners (ELL’s) are increasingly a rapidly growing demographic across the United States as well as globally. The need to provide scaffolding tools and support for language development for the students is not only an academic concern but also an issue of social justice as students in PK-12 and higher education need to be proficient in English in order to communicate within school and in out-of-school contexts. Although our examples focus mainly on our own experiences as U.S.-based teacher educators, ideas and research can be applied to other settings.

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Teacher educators can intentionally and purposefully integrate effective use of emerging technologies across multiple teacher preparation and graduate courses. These teacher preparation courses are not limited to those that that only focus on instruction for English language learners. Indeed, many teacher preparation programs within the U.S. are integrating preparation to teach English language learners across programs and courses. Preparing teachers to work with students and families, as well as create nurturing and academically rigorous environments for all learners, is and will always be at the heart of teacher preparation, especially as the numbers of English Language Learners increase in numbers.

However, with the emergence of novel technology tools every day, the role of teacher preparation programs continues to shift at a rapid pace. Teacher educators must consider meaningful ways that technology integration can be modeled and practiced within teacher preparation. For over a decade, teacher preparation programs have also been tasked with developing technology-savvy educators who are able to incorporate technology-mediated pedagogical practices in their classrooms, as has been evident in teacher accreditation processes for over a decade (e.g., NAEYC, 2009). Nevertheless, the literature suggests that some teachers may still not be prepared to integrate such practices into their teaching. As Lei (2009) has recently argued, “[s]ystematic technology preparation is needed to help them learn more advanced technologies, classroom technologies, and assistive technologies, and more importantly, to help them make the connections between technology and teaching…” (p. 1).

Teacher preparation programs, therefore, have an obligation to not only prepare a cadre of content-knowledgeable teachers (i.e., experts in their own area of specialization), but to also mold these future classroom teachers for what they will be expected to do in their own classrooms, technology-wise, as soon as they exit our programs. Likewise, technology integration into teacher preparation needs to be not simply a matter of making tools and resources available, but of ensuring that such integration is responsive and is potentially going to transform the teaching and learning process (Sandholtz, Ringstaff & Dwyer, 1997).

This chapter focuses on key principles in implementing a multiliteracies and multimodal literacies approach (e.g., Black, 2009; Gee, 2003; Ntelioglou et al., 2014) towards incorporation of additional and appropriate technology tools (e.g., blogging, audio, video, and mobile-based learning) to support language development for English Language Learners across multiple languages and contexts. These multiple contexts include PK-12 classroom settings and within the teacher education programs themselves that aim to provide modeling and demonstration of best practices for technology integration for current and future teachers. The chapter also places special emphasis on the ways in which teacher educators can make use of these ideas to provide preservice and inservice teachers with opportunities to level the playing field of English learners in their classrooms. It is important to keep at the forefront questions of access regarding both mobile tools and computer/laptop/notebook based tools in the classroom. Therefore, we note areas where both low-tech and high-tech multimodal supports can take place for English language learners.

**Organization of the Chapter**

This practitioner-focused chapter is organized in the following ways:

First, we provide an overview of the topic of technology integration within teacher preparation programs with a focus on ELLs and English Language Development. We provide a rationale for the topic, define multiliteracies and multimodal learning approaches in teacher education, and provide a basic
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