Chapter 15

Toward a Participatory View of Early Literacies in Second Language Contexts: A Reflection on Research From Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will introduce a pedagogical framework to engage with literacy practices in early childhood contexts and English language learners (ELLs), based on the commonalities across three research studies carried out in three schools in Medellín, Colombia. In this chapter, we argue that developing strong pedagogical proposals for PreK-5 spaces entails breaking the traditional compartmentalization of children’s practices between in or out of school and carefully integrating multimodality and critical literacy in our curricula. Besides the explanation of our pedagogical framework and its link to our current research, the chapter also provides some insights for early childhood teachers working with ELLs around the world to draw from these frameworks and transform their curricula. Although language context may differ, there are developmental commonalities across the board that practitioners and teacher educators can draw from, regardless of whether the children are in English-speaking contexts or not.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3955-1.ch015
INTRODUCTION

Early literacy research in second language (or L2) contexts is, in many ways, an emerging topic. Researchers and practitioners still need to learn more about second language learners’ appropriate literacy practices and their realization in and out of school. We also need to carefully consider how children at the PreK-5 level develop agency in the texts they read and write in their second language. A common, yet unfounded, assumption is that young learners cannot engage critically or multimodally with texts, something that several literacy scholars (e.g. Dyson, 1997, 2002; Kuby, 2013; Lau, 2012; Serafini, 2010, 2011; Vasquez, 2014) have debunked over the years. Instead, the invitation for practitioners is to engage as early as possible with different genres of texts and critical consciousness (Luke, 2016; Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, Burke, & Herrera, 2008).

For the past two years, our research team at the Literacies in Second Languages Project (Mora, 2015a) has drafted a framework for early literacies for second-language learners in a context like Colombia’s. This framework, an expansion of three distinct research studies (Cañas Mejía & Ocampo Castro, 2015; López-Ladino, 2017; Rodríguez Martínez, 2017), encompasses a pedagogical proposal that rethinks the early childhood curriculum by implementing conceptual underpinnings from contemporary literacies research (Mora, 2017). This chapter, therefore, is an invitation for researchers and practitioners in second languages (Mora, 2013) to transform (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) their own contexts through more equitable (Luke, 2004) practices that incorporate children’s realities and personal practices (Cañas & Ocampo, 2015). We argue that, despite some language and contextual differences, international educational settings do share developmental commonalities, whether the children are in English-speaking contexts or not, that practitioners and teacher educators can draw from. Our chapter, therefore, provides a more global perspective to the discussions on second language learning, one that remains necessary and relevant in the fields of language and bilingual education.

BACKGROUND: A REVISED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR PRE K-5 CHILDREN’S LITERACY PRACTICES

Our pedagogical framework weaves the main concepts that the first four authors have developed in their individual studies with a composite revision of the different articles all authors first reviewed separately. The composite framework from our studies calls for a new way to face literacies in early childhood contexts that transcend words to empower students’ voices in the classroom, as the main participants in the learning and teaching processes.

Conceptual Underpinnings: A Summary

Three concepts provide the opening elements to introduce our pedagogical proposal. First, ideas from Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (Cañas & Ocampo, 2014; Kitson, Fletcher, & Kearney, 2007; Mills, 2006), as a call to rethink and critically (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) transform classroom practices. Second, the concept of multimodality (Albers & Harste, 2007; Cohen & Uhry, 2011; Jewitt, 2008; Mejía-Velez & Salazar Patiño, 2014; Mora, 2016; Walsh, 2010), as the need to look at reading and writing, not just as print words, but as the integration of modes (synaesthesia, Cope & Kalantzis, 2012) to represent how information should appear in the classroom. Infusing multimodality in the curriculum, we argue, al-