Chapter 10

Multiliteracies Professional Development Practice: Design and Evaluation of an Online Professional Development Program to Support Inclusive Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The chapter introduces a post-doctoral project which involves the design, implementation, and evaluation of an online continuing professional development program, adhering to a multimodal literacy teaching paradigm, in order to accommodate for inclusive education. The proposed research is based on the development of multiliteracies affinity practice (MAP) framework, an innovative framework drawing on the creative overlap of multiliteracies pedagogy of the New London Group, the learning by design model adapted from Cope and Kalantzis, and Gee’s affinity spaces theory. A design-based research (DBR) methodology was utilized to embark on the research through three phases: the preliminary phase, the prototyping phase, and the assessment phase. Based on the preliminary formative evaluation of the implementation of the MAP framework that draws on Guskey’s five levels of evaluating teachers’ professional development, it is evident that the online professional development program enabled participants to enhance their literacy teaching practices for inclusive teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of this chapter lays in the development of a particular online professional development program (OPD), grounded in the notions of a framework called the Multiliteracies Affinity Practice (MAP). The intention is to propose a pathway for inclusive teaching in the 21st century, through adhering to a changed paradigm for teaching literacy, one that acknowledges the changing nature of literacy education, in respond to the challenges of globalization, disruptive technologies and multimodal communication.

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The MAP, is an empirically driven, pedagogical framework for inclusive teaching and learning, derived from a doctoral investigation into the potential of multiliteracies pedagogy to inform 21st century learning (Savva, 2016a). This framework is utilized in the context of an OPD program designed as part of a postdoctoral research, which will run from 2018, until 2020, at the Cyprus University of Technology. The intention in this chapter is to retrieve answers to critical questions raised with regards to online professional development (OPD) today:

1. How can the paradigm for teaching literacy change in respect to inclusive education?
2. How can OPD become more effective and meaningful, in order to meet the needs for inclusive teaching and learning?

BACKGROUND

The Unique Characteristics of 21st Century Learning

The rationale for this empirical investigation derives from the need to recognize the global imperatives for teaching in a digitally mediated world. 21st century learning reflects the learning experiences required “for students to foster the sociocultural, cognitive, metacognitive, productive, and technological competencies that are essential to function in a 21st century workplace” (Koh, Chai, Wong, & Hong, 2015). This creates both tension and a sense of responsibility among teacher educators to comprehend what 21st century learning supposes, in terms of the knowledge needed to possess and the strategies to facilitate that knowledge (Kereluik, Mishra, Fahnoe, & Terry, 2013, p. 127). A notable recognition in regards to the concept of 21st century is that it “breaks the mold; it is flexible, creative, challenging, and complex” (Kereluik et al., 2013, p. 127). There have been different attempts to define the term, and this often comes in relation to the label of ‘21st century skills.’ But what does this really mean in practical terms?

One useful way to address the 21st century learning context has been the use of knowledge frameworks. Kereluik et al. (2013) offer important insights into the definition of 21st century knowledge, learning, and skills. Their work resulted in a rather comprehensive overview of the field and the identification of three broad categories with three subcategories within them. The three broad categories are Foundational Knowledge, Meta Knowledge, and Humanistic Knowledge (Kereluik et al., 2013, p. 129). Each category represents a different realm of knowledge and within it are overarching categories and subcategories. A more detailed overview of the 21st century knowledge framework proposed by Kereluik et al. (2013) is presented in Figure 1.

There are certain characteristics central to this type of learning: engagement of students in collaborative work and peer support; personalized, student-centered learning experiences; embodied thinking; global citizenship and addressing authentic situations through problem-solving and critical, system thinking; critical stance and meaningful exploitation of the variant information and technological advancements available, through design and redesign of print and multimodal texts.

Teaching Literacy in a Globalized, Digitally Mediated World

A frequently proposed approach that holds great potential to facilitate 21st century learning has been the integration of ICTs in education (Carrington, 2007; Clark, 2010; Morrell, 2012; Nixon & Kerin, 2012;