Beyond Babel: Multiliteracies in Digital Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the importance of the concepts of media literacy, digital literacy and information literacy to understand the multimodal meaning of multiliteracies and their interfaces. An analogy with Babel is used to understand the different ways in which this concept articulates the linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural dimensions in digital culture. In this framework, the question of convergence is highlighted in learning experiences undertaken in formal and informal contexts. To qualify the meaning of this learning for the subject, the article mentions the concept of personal literacy to locate the importance of subjectivity in the interactions that the multiliteracies offer. Finally, in an exercise of representation of the components of the multiliteracies, the article presents a diagram that highlights the importance of mediation and the forms of appropriation that express concepts and experiences in search of a transformative pedagogical practice, as an opportunity to understand the multiliteracies as a condition of dialog, expression and participation in the culture.

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can imply different forms of dialog and mediation. Babel appears to run through any human phenomenon of communication and construction of meanings and given the multiplicity of cultural practices, it is more than ever necessary to deal with its different forms of translation, interpretation and appropriation.

**Babelized Languages and Learning**

Different forms of written, audiovisual, digital language, and so forth, have their codes and specificities and the process for these learning styles is complex, involving basic dimensions and abilities that concern common issues. Based on the specificities of the languages and the media and of that which is common to the different learning processes, we can discuss how the concepts of literacy are intertwined in the multiliteracies.

If the concept of literacy is discussed today as multimedia literacy, as Buckingham says, digital literacy “can be seen as one of the multiple literacies that are required by the contemporary media” (Buckingham, 2005). Thus, instead of the simple inclusion of digital literacy in curriculums, Buckingham defends a broader reconceptualization of what is understood by literacy and by autoliteracy.

In this respect, Rivoltella (2008) also affirms that, more important than including media education in a new school discipline, a transversal approach and attention is needed in the curriculum, so that students can learn about digital culture in an environment in which teachers adopt media and communication as a teaching style. As a style of teaching, digital media involves convergences and this leads us to consider the perspective of multiliteracies.

For the New London Group the notion of multiliteracies:

- is an attempt to comprehend and target the multiple text forms that have resulted from the new technologies and new media forms, through a pedagogy that allows students to comprehend
- and deal with the ‘increasing complexity and interrelationship as different modes of meaning’ (Iyer & Luke, 2010)

For those who defend multiliteracies, the emphasis on the plurality of literacies does not refer only to the various media or modes of communication, but also to the social nature of literacy and its various forms of use in cultures and societies. It is by understanding reading and writing as social activities that some researchers prefer to refer to ‘literacy practices’ instead of simply literacy, according to Buckingham (2005).

In this conceptual expansion, Hobbs (2006) once again presents the idea of media literacy based on the concept of multimedia literacy and on the areas of the emerging syntheses. Situating the terms along with visual literacy, media literacy, critical literacy, informational literacy and technology literacy, the author expands the concept of literacy in its forms of expression and visual, electronic and digital communication, including the respective objects of study and analysis. Reviewing key disciplinary and conceptual traditions of some of the new literacies, the author examines the consensuses and disagreements so that:

* A model that synthesizes this literature is created in order to support the work of scholars interested in investigating how teachers translate the “big ideas” of multiliteracies into classroom practice and to support the development of measures to assess students’ learning (Hobbs, 2006)

From this perspective, the author elaborates three key-ideas for multiliteracies that concern AA (authors and audiences), MM (messages and meanings) and RR (representations and reality), individualizing them in a framework that situates each literacy. This helps identify its applicability and offers a view of the different emphases and aspects of its similarities and differences.

In this reconceptualization and synthesis of the different perspectives:
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