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INCORPORATING KNOWLEDGE PROCESSES INTO EFL PEDAGOGY: A MULTILITERACIES APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to give suggestions regarding activities relating to the 'Multiliteracies' approach created by the New London Group and expanded upon through the Learning By Design Project. What follows is an expounded version of four activities with the theories, rationales, and educational benefits that inspired and guided their selection and/or creation, as well as a brief overview of the recommended procedure for implementing each activity.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the authors' belief that through the disciplined use of 'knowledge processes' based on Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope's (2012) 'Learning by Design Model', a 'Multiliteracies' approach to L2 education can be achieved effectively and efficiently. Moreover, in addition to supporting the Multiliteracies framework, adaptation of the knowledge processes allows an educator to efficiently monitor his or her use of a variety of other core language-pedagogical processes, such as comprehensible input, the building of background knowledge, the need for students to learn through practice and play as well as overt instruction, and the development of linguistic and communicative awareness, through metacognition and critical thinking.

With the aforementioned in mind, this paper aims to suggest practical considerations of knowledge processes from the Learning by Design Model which harmonize with the attitudes and framework of a Multiliteracies approach. Since a Multiliteracies framework according to the New London Group (1996) allows for communal learning experiences in meaningful ways (situated practice), clear, explicit instruction or guidance when necessary (overt instruction), opportunities to develop understanding through in-context learning (critical framing) and assessment of students as they apply their knowledge and skills in new and creative ways (transformed practice), it can flexibly work with the Learning by Design model which also focuses on similar styles and methods for meaning making. According to the Learning By Design model (2012), “Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning”(p.2). As a result, it is clear that the Learning by Design Model and a Multiliteracies framework both operate on the same premises: that classroom learning should make use of various types of comprehensible input, opportunities for meaning-making, and an instructor who remains cognizant of the needs, schemata, and emotions of the students he or she is teaching. Having considered this, we believe that the knowledge processes work well as criteria for balancing a Multiliteracies framework's modes of meaning and their actual roles in the classroom.

Thus, what follows are four activities, one for each of the main categories of the Learning by Design knowledge processes: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying. Some of the activities were created by the authors; others are adaptations from activities provided by the Learning by Design Model or other educational sources. These activities were chosen as

practical examples of how attention to knowledge processes can help to meet all the aforementioned criteria for a strong, supportive learning environment. However, simply choosing activities that match the use of Learning by Design and Multiliteracies is not in itself going to produce more effective or efficient activities. For this reason, the paper starts with the theoretical background for the effective use of the activities, followed by the activities themselves, with an overview of the benefits of each activity and its pedagogical implications.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As previously mentioned, it is our belief that Multiliteracies is an approach that can be used as a reliable template for developing lessons and activities that cater to diverse groups of learners. Additionally, we believe the knowledge processes (experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying) and sub-processes (the new/the known, by naming/with theory, appropriately/ creatively/ functionally, critically) of Learning by Design operate within the Multiliteracies framework and provide teachers with a helpful way of balancing their use of the Multiliteracies modes of meaning in the classroom through meaningful learning experiences and exposure to content through multimodal learning. Below is a brief explanation of the knowledge processes with their connections to the activities included in the following section in order to provide a framework for how knowledge processes can develop activities while working as a balancing system for modes of meaning.

2.1 *Experiencing the Known and the Unknown*

As research and practice have shown time and time again, a student's background knowledge about a topic and a learner's personal schemata have a profound influence on their ability to learn in the classroom (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Vogt, 2005; Burgoyne, Whiteley, Hutchinson, 2013). Accepting this fact, we believe it follows that when adapting a Multiliteracies approach in the classroom, especially through use of the knowledge processes of exploring the known and the unknown, it is important to not simply make use of what the students know to help them approach and learn new information, but aid students in using their prior knowledge of a topic meaningfully through *situated practice* rather than simply attempting to cram the information through rote memorization or in a fashion that causes the new knowledge to be soon forgotten. This type of practice, according to the New London Group (1996), is a factor that is integral to learning, and should not take lightly any of the aspects that make up a learner, whether those aspects be cultural or personal. While this process may be difficult or challenging at times, since not all students may have the same personal philosophies nor is it likely all students will know the same information about a given topic, it is vital to make sure all students understand that what they know, no matter how much or how little, can aid in guiding their learning and mastery of topics whether they be linguistically focused or academic and content-based. In other words, making appropriate use of situated practice will not only provide a more stimulating and helpful way of learning new information and reviewing prior knowledge, but also provide a chance for all students to understand that they are not blank slates even when approaching new topics.

2.2 Conceptualizing by Naming and with Theory

The focus of conceptualizing is on *overt instruction* and the learner's ability to link the basic understanding of an idea or term with a larger concept. When a learner conceptualizes by naming, the learner groups objects or ideas into categories. The focus is on understanding how to classify and define terms by building upon the schema they already have in place. Activities could include the definition of terms, the construction of a glossary, the labeling of a diagram, or the categorization of objects or ideas. Conceptualizing with theory focuses on learners making generalizations such as connecting terms using concepts, concept maps, and/or theories. Exemplary activities could include the drawing of a diagram rather than the labeling of one, the construction of a concept map, or the writing of a summary or a theory that links concepts or other theories.

2.3 Analyzing Critically and Functionally

As the New London Group's research (1996) and other studies and research, such as Stephen Krashen's (1988) ideas and thoughts on comprehensible input, have shown, learners can best acquire and internalize new information when they are provided with multiple outlets for approaching resources, language, and learning materials. Especially when faced with a topic or language that enters new territory, with knowledge or topics learners currently know little about or don't fully understand, it is vital that students be provided a variety of ways of perceiving and making meaning out of the new topic or content. However, beyond internalizing and meaning

making, it is also important for students to practice and explore new ideas and/or thoughts using the knowledge they have. In other words, analyzing content provides students with opportunities to discover the functional purposes of texts, topics, and content as well opportunities for critical reasoning. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), analytic activities have students using higher-order thinking skills in order to compare ideas and deconstruct them for examination in finer detail. The Learning by Design Model breaks down the analytic processes into two types: functional and critical (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004), which is a reminder to teachers of the various lenses one must choose from when designing an activity and its objectives: analyzing what is the purpose of a given text/situation/problem (analyzing functionally) or analyzing what are the repercussions/motives/results of a text/individual's actions (analyzing critically). This process draws attention to the overlap between Multiliteracies and the knowledge processes, highlighting one of the main functions and purposes of analytic skills in the classroom: the opportunity for *critical framing*. Critical framing, as the New London Group explain, allows students to "frame their growing mastery"(86) through use of the knowledge and skills they have gained. Thus, in a Multiliteracies classroom, use of literature circles can provide students with this chance to practice and strengthen their analytical skills towards mastery of the content and critical thinking.

2.4 Applying Appropriately and Creatively

The New London Group (1996) stresses the need for *transformed practice* in which the learner is offered situated assessment that could lead to a transfer of meaning to other contexts. This can be done effectively through the application of knowledge appropriately and creatively within the Learning By Design framework. According to this framework (2012), when applying

knowledge appropriately, learners are expected to apply new learning to real world situations to test the validity of the information they learn. The emphasis is on the 'correct' or conventional way. Activities are focused on the students' ability to display their understanding of information through a structured framework. These activities could include writing a structured essay or solving a math problem by using a specific formula. On the other hand, the application of knowledge creatively involves learners making an innovative or creative change by using what they learn in different contexts.

3. ACTIVITIES USING THE KNOWLEDGE PROCESSES

3.1 Experiencing the new and the known through KWL Charts

As mentioned previously, the knowledge sub-processes of the known and the unknown provide students with opportunities to figure out their base knowledge on a given topic. When covering a topic in class, it is important to help students first discover what they know about a topic, and from there journey into the unknown to answer questions, build new knowledge from previous knowledge, and review what they learn. For such purposes, usage of a KWL chart (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008) can be a beneficial tool for gauging previous knowledge (the known), and help students on their venture into discovering new knowledge (the unknown).

To effectively balance between covering the known and the unknown, teachers would require an activity that allows students to activate prior knowledge about the topic, aid the educator in building an understanding of what students already know about the topic, and ensure

all students take an active part in the learning process to make it more meaningful. Effective and appropriate use of KWL Charts would allow for meaningful learning that achieves all of the above objectives. Implementation and use of KWL Charts may change based on one's intended outcome, but, overall, the concept is to have a sheet of paper with three columns: K (what I know about the topic), W (what I want to know), and L (what I learned about the topic). The boxes can then be filled out by the students in a manner of the teacher's choosing. A teacher may choose to have the students fill out the first two columns on their own, writing down what they know and want to know about the topic before sharing them with the class or a small group. Then, the last column can be filled out as a review of the day's lesson, or as the students learn more about the topic as the lesson progresses. An important tip from Mary Ellen Vogt and Jane Echevarria (2008) for its use suggests that the first box be filled in with what students know through a brainstorm, including points or ideas they mention which may be incorrect, since these mistakes can be clarified and corrected during and after work on the final column.

Proper use of KWL charts can aid in ensuring that no student approaches a topic with an empty mind. Any detail, any fact, any strong guess they have regarding a new topic can aid in scaffolding the knowledge process of the known before exploring the unknown. In guiding all students to see that in most cases they aren't approaching topics with their minds as blank slates, educators provide students with better opportunities to understand that they have a foundation of knowledge to work from, rather than to simply start cramming the information in through rote memorization, believing that they have no previous basis to work from. The goal is more to help all students see that they have at least some piece of information to work from and use it to build

even stronger and sturdier foundations of knowledge, and that this foundation is what they should continue to build starting from the unknown.

The greater the base of knowledge, the more opportunities arise to use other knowledge processes to encounter, analyze, apply materials, build curiosity, and lead to more questions for students to ask themselves and move forward with into the unknown. This process may be challenging if students are unfamiliar with it. Therefore, it is vital for an educator to facilitate the process strongly when it is first being used. It also requires that educators also make use of student KWL charts to build an understanding of his or her students and the schemata and backgrounds they are working from, and from there aid students in learning how they can use their prior knowledge to approach, internalize, and integrate new information and add it to their growing base of knowledge. In this manner, students are never quite aiming for too large a jump over their current level of knowledge. This results in meaning-making opportunities and scaffolding from the known into the unknown, whether it be with topics of review or of exploring new territories and topics, with greater care for students needs through appropriate use of a KWL chart.

3.2 Conceptualizing by Naming and with Theory through Information Text Pyramids

An activity that was taken from Kalantzis and Cope (2012) exemplifies perfectly the connection of *overt instruction* with the learner's ability to link the basic understanding of an idea or term with a larger concept. The "Information Text Pyramid" activity can be done in seven steps. Students create a pyramid shape on paper with six spaces. At the top, the student must use one word. This word must represent a key idea, something that could be expanded

upon. For this example, the main character's name from a story should be used. In the second space, the student must use two words to describe the character (exposition). In the third space, the student must use three words to describe the setting (exposition). In the fourth space, the student must use four words to describe the complication. In the fifth space, the student must use five words to describe the resolution. In the sixth, final space, the student must use six words to give a summary of the events of the story.

The strengths of this activity rest in how it allows students to connect vocabulary (naming) with larger concepts such as narrative and character development (theory) by challenging them to express themselves in creative ways. It could be very useful in extensive reading classes to teach plot and storyline, related to what is known as the dramatic structure (exposition, complication, climax, and resolution). Also, putting limits on the number of words forces the students to express themselves in creative ways, thereby promoting learner autonomy and leading to vocabulary development.

3.3 Analyzing Information Functionally and Critically through Reading Circles

When teachers are adopting a Multiliteracies approach, *critical framing* is vital to helping students think functionally and critically about texts. As a result, Learning by Design's knowledge processes analytic division into these two categories accommodates the need to approach critical thinking in different ways. To provide students with multiple opportunities to explore and analyze texts in a variety of ways, both critical and functional, literature circles can provide students with proactive multimodal learning experiences.

Literature circles are an activity well suited for providing students with the opportunity to build towards mastery through analyzing texts. This activity, which works strongly when used with reading materials, can be conducted in a variety of ways. However, the general idea is that when providing students with a text to read, each student is placed in a group and given a different role and objectives to complete during reading. For example, it may be one student's goal to connect what happens in the text with another event (current or historical) or in the case of reading a fictional text, they may be able to connect events from the text to real world events and ideas. Another student may be tasked with trying to think about the story from the author's view: what about the author's life led to them to write about this topic or have the character handle certain events in particular ways? Once students have completed these tasks (either for homework or in class), students share their analytical findings with other members of their group. The teacher may then choose to have groups share what they have learned or discovered with the whole class. With a reading task that may take several class periods, a lecturer may choose to have students switch their roles from day to day, in order to provide all students with multiple means of approaching, analyzing, and interpreting the information provided in factual and fictional texts.

Effectively, reading circles allow each student the opportunity to become an "expert" on a topic or point in the given text. In the process, this allows all students to bring something different to the table and remain active participants in the learning process. All students can be provided with the opportunity to analyze and think critically about the text, and then contribute to a small group or the whole class's understanding of the text. By providing students with a variety of roles, they receive practice and multiple opportunities to engage with the text through

a variety of lenses and modes. An opportunity that not only provides students with the chance to engage with the text to construct meaning, but also provides them with chances for building mastery of the content, and aids them in developing and strengthening new ways of approaching and deconstructing the information they encounter inside and outside of formal education.

3.4 Applying Appropriately and Creatively through Scene Switching

An activity that applies knowledge appropriately and creatively is “scene switching.” It focuses on transformed practice and also offers situated assessment. This activity can be broken into six steps. First, provide students with the transcript for a scene from a play or movie (The difficulty can depend on fluency level of students.) Then, give the students sufficient time to read over the script and practice and understand the desired language and content, as well as tone, body language, facial expressions, grammar and paralinguistic features to match the roles of the characters in the play. Next, allow each group to present their scene focusing on the features above or other skills of the teacher’s choice. Critique each group’s presentation and their use of the skill/language features being practiced. Then, provide students with time to alter their performances. They must keep the words of the scene the same, but may play around with the presentation of words, body language, and may even choose to add music in order to help them recreate the same scene in a different genre. Critique each group’s second performance for their creativity and accuracy with the practiced skill.

The benefit of scene switching is that students are able to practice a language skill (grammar, pronunciation, phoneme usage, body language, etc.) through a structured use of

transformed practice before applying their knowledge, in a situation that promotes creativity while still in the confines of a controlled situation. The expectation is that the learners are able to move from applying knowledge in a predictable way (i.e. appropriately), based on what they have been taught, to adapting that information for a new or different setting (i.e. creatively).

4. CONCLUSION

Regardless of a classroom's size, teachers of English will encounter diverse learners in their classrooms. With a Multiliteracies approach, all educators can efficiently provide classroom experiences that acknowledge and make effective use of this diversity. By using proper educational methods and adapting them to the needs of each classroom and set of students, educators can allow students opportunities for both explicit and implicit instruction, allow students room to flexibly develop and master their skills, and make use of students' schemata and knowledge to help scaffold learning on what they already know. Through syncing Multiliteracies pedagogy with aspects of the Learning by Design model, educators working in a Multiliteracies classroom can greater ensure quality education for the diversity of their classrooms through proper implementation and practice of the knowledge processes. The end result can be a classroom that effectively manages and supports the diverse classroom, by maintaining a philosophy that all students can learn by receiving comprehensible input which should be provided through a variety of activities that ask them to analyze, interpret, critique, and create with the information in different ways. Additionally, through combined use of these

methodologies, educators not only provide more opportunities for students to succeed, but to develop towards a mastery of the skills and knowledge they have at their disposal. As mentioned in the introduction, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) note that “Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning.” (p.2) This calls for a conscious approach to activity design that touches not only upon traditional means of learning, but utilizes all of the knowledge processes and sub-processes to provide balanced instruction that meets the needs of all students.

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