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MODERN APPROACHES TO WRITING. MULTIMODAL WRITING

The modern concept of writing has been undergoing major changes these days. This process takes place in response to the changing global context, the ever-shifting fluid perspective of contemporary environment, which is driving away from individualistic to a more networked one. This inevitable change implies the need to reconfigure the representational and communicational tools the society has have at their disposal (Jewitt, 2008). It presumes that linguistic and purely textual representations and means of expression are gradually becoming insufficient, given the diversity of cultures we have to interact with in the global society. No doubt, it leads us to the conclusion that the very notion of literacy should be thoroughly reconsidered.

However, with all the heads nodding in unison in response to this claim, there are hardly any changes going on in terms of literacy teaching and learning practices. Schools still ‘preach’ habitual print literacy, closing their eyes to the pressing social, technological and economic factors. This trend is further exacerbated by the powerful move from ‘the medium of book to ‘the medium of screen’.

The focal point here is the shifting focus to representations and ways to activate learning potential, which, obviously, resonates with the ‘trendy’ learner autonomy perspective as well as the focus on out-of-school literacies. These are

comprised in the concept of ‘multi-literacies’ or ‘multiple literacies’ used to meet the emergent demands of the communicative repertoires of the 21 century. Simultaneously, it brings in the complex interaction between global and local literacies (Brant&Clinton, 2006) as well as dominant and secondary discourses (Lemke, 2006).

The main objective of this paper is to raise awareness of the benefits of multimodal means of representation in order to stop separating linguistic literacy from other literacies, divorcing visual and textual, particularly, in the process of language learning.

Multimodality and multimodal studies could shed certain light onto the issues of ‘literacy’ and writing, in particular, in ELT classes. Yet, how can the use of purely linguistic tools support the multiplying claims for creativity and boosting learners’ confidence?

This leads to the conclusion that Multimodality should be applied in the course of developing writing skills, primarily, for a number of reasons:

1. It is visual and tangible.
2. It facilitates emotional engagement.
3. It is creative.
4. It is motivational.

Looking back at the textual representation, it is apparent that:

1. It lacks visual components. It is, primarily, a complex aggregate of abstract ideas that are, at best, separated by punctuation and numbers.

2. In order to cater for ‘emotional engagement’ a variety of techniques from the domains of discourse and rhetoric have to be facilitated. Obviously, a photo or a picture could ensure a more emotional response.

3. The layout of a linguistic text is repetitive and rather dull. How can the scope for creativity be boosted only with the use of discourse features? Does this text really convey the message that should be conveyed? How can the affective factor be implemented into the writing? Apparently, there will be even more response with colours, shapes and a variety of fonts.

Here are only a few of the considerations that might arise and, perhaps, could be among the current concerns of both teachers and students. Considering this, a multimodal perspective could partially explain students' aversion to writing and other related issues.

Therefore, putting Multimodal Writing practices into perspective and, thus, replacing the concept of 'writing' with the notion of 'representing', which, alongside with viewing, resonates with the ELA framework (Ortlieb, et al., 2018), going hand in hand with the concept of 'language arts'. In short, this framework offers a set of the following principles:

1. Any students can be a successful learner;
2. Language learning is not the domain of school, but is successfully shared by students, their parents as well as the local community;
3. Language arts comprise the principles of 'language appreciation', which enables students to develop and apply skills and strategies for predicting, comprehending, composing and responding to a wide variety of texts in numerous contexts;
4. The basic premise of 'language arts' is appreciating linguistic and cultural diversity as well as building and strengthening a sense of community.

Obviously, multimodal perspective will get teachers to reconsider their writing practices in teaching and learning as well as the techniques and approaches they commonly incorporate in their writing classes. WJT Mitchell calls this century the era of 'return to image', which may only partly be true, as this return does not require giving up on textual language, but instead, to explore all possible modalities to their full capacity so as to benefit both teaching and learning.

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