In the Classroom: Putting Multiliteracies into Practice: Digital Storytelling for Multilingual Adolescents in a Summer Program

In this article, it is demonstrated how the authors created a context in which digital storytelling was designed and implemented to teach multilingual middle school students in a summer program. Tasks and activities were designed to align with the four components of a multiliteracies pedagogy (i.e., situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice) in order to engage the students in exploring their multiple literacies and identities by using multiple semiotic modes and resources (e.g., texts, images, and sounds). The digital storytelling lesson shows that multiliteracies practices can be a powerful venue for second-language learners and teachers.

Authors: Tuba Angay-Crowder, Jayoung Choi & Youngjoo Yi

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- In this article it is demonstrated how the theoretical concept of multiliteracies can be applied to a pedagogic practice.
- It is described how 12 adolescent multilingual students were engaged in the multiliteracies practice of digital storytelling (i.e., multimedia composing that consists of texts, images, and sounds to tell stories) during a summer program.
- The Digital Storytelling Class was designed in order a) to examine how a theoretical framework (i.e., multiliteracies) could be translated into teaching multilingual adolescents; and b) to create a context in which students could explore their multiple literacies and identities using multiple semiotic modes and resources.

Multiliteracies

- The term multiliteracies addresses the multiplicity of communication channels and media and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity.
- The multiliteracies theory of pedagogy integrates four components: a) situated practice; b) overt instruction; c) critical framing; and d) transformed practice.
- Situated practice is an immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their background and experiences.
- Overt instruction includes active interventions on the part of the teacher and other experts that scaffold learning activities and allow the learners to gain explicit information.
- Through critical framing, which involves both cognitive and social dimensions of literacy pedagogy, students step back from what they have learned, critique their learning, and extend and apply their learning in new

contexts.

  - Transformed practice involves students' transfer, reformulation, and redesign of existing texts and meaning-making practice from one context to another.

Digital storytelling

- Digital storytelling can provide students with rich opportunities a) to explore, express, and reflect on themselves; b) to enhance critical thinking; c) to foster academic achievement; and d) to build leadership skills.
- For multilingual adolescent students, digital storytelling can provide an opportunity to design multimodal narratives that represent and reflect on their sociocultural identities and their lives.

The study

The digital storytelling class took place in a traditional classroom and a computer lab for 90 minutes twice a week during a four-week summer program, and 12 students in Grades 7 and 8 were carefully selected to take part. All the students were children of immigrants and spoke a language other than English at home.

Designing and conducting the digital storytelling class

- The class was designed and conducted for a total of seven sessions.
- **Building a foundation for digital storytelling (Sessions 1 and 2)**
    - During the first week, situated practice and overt

instruction were employed to teach the students 'what digital storytelling is,' 'how it can be created,' and 'why students need to consider their purpose and audience in digital storytelling.'

- In the first session, a needs analysis was conducted in which students reported their preferred out-of-school activities, their use of technology, and their L1 proficiency.
- The students brainstormed potential topics for their digital stories based on initial conversations about their interests.
- The students were challenged to reflect critically on their topic selection and to reframe their choices while raising questions that helped them think harder about whether their topics could serve their purposes and entertain their audience.
- Also, overt instruction was offered that aimed to scaffold learning activities and give students explicit information about the nature of digital storytelling.
- After an initial free writing phase, the students filled out a storyboard template while carefully considering multiple modes (e.g., narration, images, audio) for each slide so that they could express their meaning effectively and creatively in their digital stories.

- **Writing narrative for digital storytelling (Sessions 3 and 4)**
  - The second week centred on strengthening the students' narratives of their digital stories.
  - A series of situated writing activities were implemented in class, such as responding to writing prompts, outlining a narrative, composing a structured essay based on their outlines, and participating in individual writing conferences.
  - For example, students were asked to respond to 'What message do you want to convey to your

audience?'
- **Orchestrating text, image, and sound (Sessions 5 and 6)**
  - The primary tasks during the third week involved selecting appropriate images and sound, modifying linguistic text, and recording a narration.
  - The students were lead to reflect critically on their process of composing, from writing print-based narratives to selecting and orchestrating both linguistic and non-linguistic modes for a digital story.
  - Students were asked questions such as, 'What effect does this image or sound have on your overall meaning?'
  - Students' insertion of narrative or text in their first or heritage language and their consultations about their projects with parents and other adults in their communities were indications of transformed practice at work.
- **Reflecting, sharing, and celebrating (Session 7)**
  - During the last week, students celebrated their final productions by reflecting on the whole process of creating digital stories and sharing their projects with an audience.
  - Students were asked questions such as 'What was it like to make the project?'
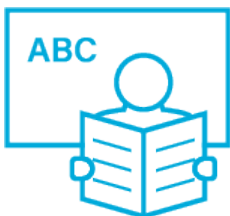
Conclusions

- Engaging students in multiliteracies gives us some valuable insights into what counts as literacy learning

and teaching and how we reframe literacy pedagogy in classrooms.

- Both conventional print-based and computer-based multimodal composing practices seem to help students expand their literacy repertoire and means of expression.
- Digital storytelling can develop students' leadership skills as they work as a team, set goals, manage time and resources, and construct a positive identity.
- Providing specific guidance to students throughout the digital storytelling process and creating a collaborative environment in which both students and the teachers learn from one another are essential to an efficacious multiliteracies pedagogy.