

# Potentials of the Multiliteracies Pedagogy for Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs): A Review of the Literature

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This article presents the results of a review of published literature on the use of the multiliteracies pedagogy to teach English Language Learners (ELLs). Five emerging themes related to the potential benefits of the multiliteracies approach are identified and discussed in this article: (i) student agency and ownership of learning; (ii) language and literacy development; (iii) affirmation of students' languages, cultures, and identities; (iv) student engagement and collaboration; and (v) critical literacy.

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- Multiliteracies pedagogy is based on the need for students to develop a broad repertoire of literacy

practices that are not confined to traditional views of literacy and traditional approaches of literacy instruction.

- Introduced in 1996, multiliteracies pedagogy is grounded in two main ideas: (i) the expanding variety of text forms related to the expansion of mass media, multimedia, and the Internet, and (ii) the increasing importance of linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Multiliteracies pedagogy aims to create learning environments in which the blackboard, textbook, exercise book, and test are augmented, and at times replaced, by digital technologies.
- It supports a multimodal approach where learners move between linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial modes of meaning-making and learning.

### **The study Four components of multiliteracies pedagogy**

- Situated practice is about providing meaningful experiences for students to participate in their own learning by building on their lived experiences.
- Overt instruction occurs when the teacher provides active intervention and scaffolding to help students gain conscious understanding and control of their learning.
- Critical framing helps students to analyse what they are learning from a critical perspective in relation to the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centred relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice.
- Transformed practice occurs when students apply what they have learned in new contexts by transforming existing meanings to design new meanings.



## **The study**

The present study highlights the benefits of engaging ELLs in multiliteracies pedagogy, based on a review of studies that have been conducted among ELL participants or immigrant students in various countries and at various educational levels.

## **The data**

This literature review included 12 studies based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) studies using the multiliteracies framework or other aspects of the multiliteracies pedagogy such as multimodality; (2) studies with ELL participants; and (3) studies conducted within the last ten years.



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## **Findings**

- Five themes emerged from the reviewed literature: (i) student agency and ownership of learning; (ii) language and literacy development; (iii) affirmation of students' languages, cultures, and identities; (iv) student engagement and collaboration; and (v) critical literacy.
- **Student agency and ownership of learning**
  - Multiliteracies pedagogy acknowledges the role of student agency in the meaning-making process and views learners as active designers of meaning.
  - Multiliteracies pedagogy highlights the

transformative effects of an approach to literacy based on student-led, generative, joint activities supported by strategic assistance.

- For example, students can become active generators of their own knowledge and active designers of meaning by critically reading and writing texts through an embodied drama pedagogy.

- **Language and literacy development**

- Multiliteracies pedagogy stresses the need for language and literacy education to take into account multimodal forms of expression and learning.
- For example, drama pedagogy is a very strategic and valuable means of language and literacy learning for ELLs because it affords them the opportunity to explore the specifics of reading, writing, listening, and speaking while expanding this connection to multiple modes of meaning-making through drama.
- For students who have trouble in reading, drama offers an entry point to language and literacy-learning unavailable in traditional classrooms.
- One of the strengths of the multiliteracies pedagogy is that it allows students to integrate language learning with content-based learning.
- The synaesthetic or mode-shifting approach combines different modes to represent meaning in drawing, photographs of clay figures, or captions. Developing students' synaesthetic abilities allows them to engage effectively in disciplinary content and tasks across the curriculum.
- Both conventional print-based and computer-based multimodal composing activities help students expand their literacy repertoire and means of expression.

- **Affirmation of students' languages, cultures and identities**

- By foregrounding topics that can be related to students' own experiences, multiliteracies pedagogy promotes learning that recognises their own knowledge, values their linguistic and cultural resources, and affirms their identities.
- For example, ELLs can research their family history and depict it as a graphic story. The creation and publication of the stories allow the students to share them with their friends, families, and members of their school and local community.
- Multiliteracies pedagogy, which prioritises students' linguistic and cultural diversity, is powerful for multilingual students as it allows them to reflect on and recreate their multicultural and multilingual lives, thereby validating and affirming their identities.

- **Student engagement and collaboration**

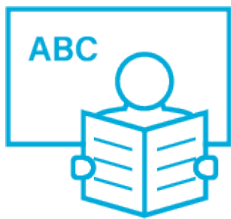
- Multiliteracies pedagogy envisages teachers as facilitators in classrooms that are rich with student-mediated collaborative learning activities.
- Emotional engagement, collaboration, and negotiation are parts of multiliteracies pedagogy.
- Each student is able to offer their own expertise to the group, and contributing their knowledge and skills to the group enterprise helps empower and engage students who might otherwise be marginalised in educational processes.

- **Critical literacy**

- Multiliteracies pedagogy accounts for the development of critical literacy in learners through its critical framing and transformed practice components.
- The process of designing multimodal texts in multiliteracies pedagogy should allow students to critically analyse and interpret the social and

cultural context and the political, ideological, and value-centred purposes of texts.

- For example, teachers could ask the students 'why' questions to help them become aware of their decisions.
- Students can learn how to reject single interpretations of texts and to deconstruct texts based on their experiences and perspectives.



## Conclusions

- Today's students must possess multiple literacy skills that can enable them to utilise the potential of the diverse modes of communication offered by new technologies.
- The potential of multiliteracies pedagogy to equip students with these skills is enormous because of the opportunities it provides for multimodal forms of expression through the technology-based interdisciplinary explorations of texts.
- Multiliteracies pedagogy can be especially powerful for ELLs as it enables students to exercise agency and take ownership of their learning, it supports students' language development by providing them with authentic, communicative purposes for learning and practicing language, it helps students to reflect on and recreate their multilingual and multicultural identities, and it increases student engagement and promotes collaborative learning.
- There is still the need for assessments to be developed

in response to the multimodality of contemporary literacy.

- Apart from the lack of appropriate assessment of multiliteracy practices, there are also other challenges to instantiating a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the ELL classroom. For example, typically, introductory second/foreign language courses that claim to use multimodal strategies do not incorporate the critical framing component of the multiliteracies pedagogy in a systematic manner.
- Additional professional development activities for ELL teachers should provide varied opportunities for them to engage with multiliteracy concepts and pedagogical strategies.