

Teaching literacy in multilingual settings: diversity and opportunity (report)

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Abstract

A number of assessment instruments declared that literacy problems exist among diverse classrooms. Other studies previously conducted also noted and underlined literacy concerns in the multilingual environment. This paper investigated how different sources and experts attempted to explain literacy instruction and challenges in multilingual and multicultural environments. It also aims to identify and explore the realities and perspectives widely experienced by practitioners who have taught in multilingual settings. The researcher also generously shared his thoughts as he combined his wealth of experience to the ideas and views offered by experts. After a critical analysis of the anecdotes and stories mentioned in this paper, helpful and insightful conclusions are offered to assist and guide novice reading and literacy teachers in their quest for information, practices, and strategies. The realities and lessons from literacy instruction in multilingual and diverse learning environments revealed that opportunity, inclusion, equality, and equity are feasible and possible for reading and literacy teachers who are willing to be a catalyst of transitions and innovations.

Keywords: *multilingual setting, literacy instruction, practices, diversity, education*

Literature review

Calkins et al. (2012) authored a book that summarized and explained the Common Core State Standards, which can bring students to literacy skills development. The said book illuminates both the standards and pathways that students can achieve through persistent and realistic expectations. It can also help learners and teachers understand what is indicated and conveyed in the standards and help them attain coherence and central thoughts. Furthermore, the work of the authors can serve as a source for dynamic and productive reforms in the literacy program and instruction in the workplace with colleagues.

The core standards are designed to meet the skills and competencies needed by K-12 learners. The said skills may prepare learners for workplace after completing their academic journey. For each grade level, different skills are expected to be mastered and developed. For instance, in kindergarten, learners have to demonstrate drawing, dictating, and writing in regards to the topics given by their teachers.

Calkins et al. advised reading specialists and literacy coaches to determine and review first the literacy initiatives in their own district before they spearhead and lead in the literacy reforms. It is suggested as well that all competencies and skills being developed have to be aligned to the Common Core. The results of rigorous studies conducted by the authors strongly suggested that reading teachers and coaches have to strengthen teaching and learning in the specific areas in which a school can continuously develop systems and habits of continuous improvement that can be expanded in the future.

The curriculum is mandated to be aligned to the common core not just as compliance but rather a responsibility of teachers and school leaders. Working on the improvement of systems results to transparent, collaborative, and accountable institutional reputation. Teachers in every school have to work collaboratively to skills of children and observe progress in the programs and systems. The

approaches of the reading teachers and literacy coaches should be compared in terms of implementation including the varied processes. In order to follow a clear pathway, the teachers and coaches have to understand the standards and possible resources for literacy education.

Language and reading teachers are encouraged to teach language and literacy in the content area to meet the global standards and expectations. They should follow the guiding principles for facilitation of reading. Teachers who apply their beliefs about teaching are in the right path to enhance instruction (Richardson et al. 2006). Reading and literacy teachers modify their instruction based on current studies; to rationalize thinking, they shape their approach in 10 principles. The principles are supported by theories and explained by research. Teachers have to be flexible in reviewing and analyzing what activities work among their pupils and what tasks do not promote learning.

From the study of Richardson et al. 2006, the 10 principles include (1) reading is influenced by the reader's personal background such as knowledge and experience; (2) communicative arts promote learning and thinking in content areas; (3) literacy has evolved from traditional language arts to multimodal literacy and multiliteracies; (4) reading should be a rewarding activity; (5) critical reading helps learners think and learn logically; (6) meaningful reading should be a lifelong endeavor; (7) teachers should refrain from presumptive instruction; (8) all learners deserve quality and equitable instruction; (9) teachers should use innovation and technology in literacy instruction for inclusive learning; and (10) content reading instruction helps students become independent learners.

Richardson et al. also underlined that good teachers employ appropriate and effective tools for instruction including strategic teaching, relevant tasks, and literacy involvement. Good teachers motivate learners to think independently and decide wisely how to solve problems, digest reading selections, and evaluate the texts. Teachers should provide clear directions to their students by showing them how they can strategically plan and decide for their learning habits and academic plans.

Children from diverse family background bring many resources with them as they learn English language. These resources emanate from their linguistic, social, and cultural settings they have been participating in. The developmental systems approach can be used to examine and organize the multiple sources of resources that English language learners are bringing with them in school environment. Subsystems present within the child such as language, emotion, and motivation tend to interact. The child has to understand the resources by being centered on strength-based orientation as he prepares for language and literacy learning. In order to achieve this, there should be support in maintaining high expectations, valuing competencies, and respecting the richness of their familial and cultural experiences. Using strengths-based orientation can help improve instructional practices that will establish connections between the child's previous experiences and new learning in the classroom. Their previous experiences will serve as wellspring to draw from. Teachers who believe in language learners' capacity to grow reflect this belief by setting high expectations for them, teaching them properly, and viewing social and cultural background as factors to the child's achievement (Roberts 2009).

When children enter preschool settings, they also possess well-formed basic communication system. Of course, this language resource is most likely their native language although some children may be regarded as second language speakers. If children learn English after they have shaped basic primary language foundation, they are called sequential bilingual children, one language follows acquisition of another (Roberts 2009).

In the United States, sequential is more rampant than simultaneous bilingualism among children especially with low income families. The term wellspring is picked to describe the varied and multifarious sources of strength that language learners bring to literacy development. It is a must on the part of reading specialists and literacy coaches to examine these resources provided by the external environment.

Pinell (2006), who is a noted literacy researcher and practitioner, stressed that understanding of learning is the real foundation of becoming a teacher. No matter how good the materials, approaches, and curricula are, if the teacher lacks background of theoretical underpinnings, instruction may not be successful. Theories are the set of understandings and beliefs that the teacher holds to explain learning. Everything in the classroom needs to be anchored on the beliefs and understandings that the teacher is aware of for achievement of learning outcomes and objectives.

Gunning (2019) suggested that language and literacy teachers need to consider and respect diversity in the classroom by providing the needs of all students in terms of literacy instruction. It is also noted that there should be inclusion of students with special needs in the linguistic, ethnic, and racial diversity of the classroom. In school settings, it is advised that differentiation of tasks and strategies should be applied because one size does not fit all. Gunning also identified and described diverse learners who have learning disabilities, who are living in poverty, or who are emotionally and physically challenged. These are among the realities and challenges that need to be explored and understood before designing new materials and revising course syllabi.

On the other hand, Shearer, Vogt, and Carr (2007), explained in their book the importance and place of teaching in linguistically and culturally responsive ways. They elaborated on discussing the concepts of 'how we see the world' and 'how the world sees us' using a lot of contextualized examples. Furthermore, they defined culture as a collection of beliefs, values, and standards that influence people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior with emphasis on what people do. They added that in order to understand the literacies of students, we have to learn about their cultures.

Indrilla and Ciptaningrum (2018) revealed the effectiveness of scientific approach in teaching writing skills. Their research employed a quasi-experimental design. Results of their study disclosed that significant differences in writing achievement occurred when scientific approach was used and it was further discovered that the use of scientific approach was very effective compared to conventional approach in writing instruction.

Learning is effective according to Indrilla and Ciptaningrum (2018) if it allows students to have fun while they are learning. Conversely, the learning setting needs the roles and functions of the teacher to assist and guide the students to achieve the instructional objectives. This further states that the teacher has the roles in the selection of materials and approaches in the teaching of writing.

Students come from variety of backgrounds but not all backgrounds prepare children to be successful in academic setting. Reading specialists and literacy coaches have the responsibility to provide teachers with understanding of how diverse structures and backgrounds shape and support literacy environment. Literacy instruction should be thought in a perspective that acknowledges and celebrates the diverse contexts from which all come. From the very time that schools were established in the United States, educators and reading specialists have debated on the best approaches for teaching literacy and language teachers have employed a wide array of methods, strategies, and materials for reading instruction.

Teachers have to complete professional development course in reading instruction. There is a need for improved instruction. Some researchers emphasized the need for learners to develop problem solving, critical thinking, and language development. Although, in other settings, assessment results improved but data also showed that problems continue with regard to reading and writing instruction (Richardson et al. 2006). A number of educators and policymakers are optimistic in trying to examine how schools can improve. The twenty-first century has been called the information age (Frاند 2000). Even pedagogy has undergone changes and innovations in the past years. In the age of technological innovation and globalization, accountability and standards of learning have to be rethought and re-examined.

Reflections and insights

One of the challenges that literacy and reading teachers face in the classroom is language diversity. Since sending of information is hasty or rapid, both culture and language are able to reach millions of peoples around the globe. In the Philippines, we already have laws and bills about the teaching of multilingual and multicultural education in the classrooms. Indeed, we have to check this phenomenon before we decide to formulate course objectives, design learning tasks, and reflect on learning assessment tools and instruments that we will use in the multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Part of the challenges is being familiar with the language differences in the class, which does not necessarily imply that we have to master the other existing languages in the class. However, what we can do is to find ways like doing scaffolding so that learners will be able to participate and understand the inputs of the teacher and consequently engage in the classroom tasks and activities.

It is imperative that the teacher has to conduct needs analysis to check the congruence of the needs and materials and instruction that will be employed in the classroom. It is mentioned in the materials that variety of instructional materials can help the learners engage in activities and will be supported by scaffolding. If we are handling multilingual children, we have to be flexible and patient as we teach them the competencies and skills they need to master based on the course syllabus and curriculum map. The culture is connected to language, which is why it is swift for learners to transmit and influence their classmates about their own culture. That is another salient aspect or area that the reading and literacy teacher has to look into and monitor. I appreciate a prominent adage that says “accepting differences like opportunities is a celebration of diversity.” We can create opportunities from the differences seen in the classroom.” The cited references and materials talk about literacy teaching in diverse classroom imparted multilingual realities and realization necessary for language instruction in different settings.

Conclusions

Diversity is evidently shown in a multilingual learning setting. Literacy instruction may not be a walk in the park or a slice of cake because how children and students learn may be peculiar and may have diverse needs and concerns. This study sought ideas, insights, and principles from the scholarly resources that were examined and synthesize to form pedagogical perspectives. In literacy instruction, language and literacy practitioners and coaches have to be updated and informed of the changes, transitions, challenges, and opportunities from diversity and multilingualism. Things and events do not stay the same. Each day something new might come and would challenge the language and literacy teacher.

Literacy instruction in a multilingual setting requires a vast array of strategies and approaches that can transform a learning environment into conducive, inclusive, supportive, and equitable venue of learning atmosphere. Teachers need to be retooled and upskilled in order for them to meet the needs of the learners at the same time, improve their capacity to assess and evaluate second language learners. This phase does not stop with proposing a literacy project for multilingual learners but should also sustain and maintain a quality and seamless mechanism for the evaluation and sustainability of the said program. Learners are diverse and unique and they possess diverse and peculiar needs, concerns, and problems that require intervention and analysis. The **realities and lessons from literacy instruction in multilingual and diverse learning environments** revealed that opportunity, inclusion, equality, and equity are feasible and possible for reading and literacy teachers who are willing to be a part of transitions and innovations.

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