Chapter 11
Beyond Babel:
Multiliteracies in Digital Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the importance of the concepts of media literacy, and digital and informational literacy to understand the multimodal meaning of multiliteracies and their interfaces. An analogy with Babel is used to understand the different ways in which this concept articulates the linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural dimensions in digital culture. In this framework, the question of convergence is highlighted in learning experiences undertaken in formal and informal contexts. To qualify the meaning of this learning for the subject, the article mentions the concept of personal literacy to locate the importance of subjectivity in the interactions that the multiliteracies offer. Finally, in an exercise of representation of the components of the multiliteracies, the article presents a diagram that highlights the importance of mediation and the forms of appropriation that express concepts and experiences in search of a transformative pedagogical practice, as an opportunity to understand the multiliteracies as a condition of dialog, expression and participation in the culture.

INTRODUCTION

Upon discussing the concepts of media literacy, digital literacy and information literacy and their specificities in the fields of education and communication (Fantin, 2010), we see that if all media require literacy and if all language needs to be appropriated, we can think of a broad concept of literacy. This concept should be updated according to the demands of social practice and different socio-cultural contexts, and should dialectically consider the micro and macro dimensions of these processes in their specificities and generalities. This leads us to think at the frontiers of the concepts, practices and uses of the multiliteracies based on their multiple faces – written, oral, visual, artistic, spatial, gestural and tactile modes of representation – which reveal their multimodal character and the interfaces articulated in various dimensions of languages.

Given the Babelic condition of human language and its potential for appropriation, this plural condition does not only signify the difference *between* languages, but a "multiplicity of languages *within* language, in any language, Therefore, any language is multiple, since *one* singular language is also an invention(...)" according to Larrosa (2004)

Without considering the merit of the discussion between tongue and language, this Babelized condition of language can also signify encounters, because beyond the confusion and catastrophe that the myth of Babel represents, the plurality of language, more than an excess, can imply different forms of dialog and mediation. Babel appears to run through any human phenomenon of communication and of construction of meanings and given the multiplicity of cultural practices, it is more than ever necessary to deal with its different forms of translation, interpretation and appropriation.

Babelized Languages and Learning

Different forms of written, audiovisual, digital language, and so forth, have their codes and specificities and the process for these learning styles is complex, involving basic dimensions and abilities that concern common issues. Based on the specificities of the languages and the media and of that which is common to the different learning processes, we can discuss how the concepts of literacy are intertwined in the multiliteracies.

If the concept of literacy is discussed today as multimedia literacy, as Buckingham says, digital literacy "can be seen as one of the multiple literacies that are required by the contemporary media" (Buckingham, 2005). Thus, instead of the simple inclusion of digital literacy in curriculums, Buckingham defends a broader reconceptualization of what is understood by literacy and by autoliteracy.

In this respect, Rivoltella (2008) also affirms that, more important than including media education in a new school discipline, a transversal approach and attention is needed in the curriculum, so that students can learn about digital culture in an environment in which teachers adopt media and communication as a teaching style. As a style of teaching, digital media involves convergences and this leads us to consider the perspective of multiliteracies.

For the New London Group the notion of multiliteracies:

is an attempt to comprehend and target the multiple text forms that have resulted from the new technologies and new media forms, through a pedagogy that allows students to comprehend and deal with the ' increasing complexity and interrelationship as different modes of meaning' (Iyer & Luke, 2010)

For those who defend multiliteracies, the emphasis on the plurality of literacies does not refer only to the various media or modes of communication, but also to the social nature of literacy and its various forms of use in cultures and societies. It is by understanding reading and writing as social activities that some researchers prefer to refer to 'literacy practices' instead of simply literacy, according to Buckingham (2005).

In this conceptual expansion, Hobbs (2006) once again presents the idea of media literacy based on the concept of multimedia literacy and on the areas of the emerging syntheses. Situating the terms along with visual literacy, media literacy, critical literacy, informational literacy and technology literacy, the author expands the concept of literacy in its forms of expression and visual, electronic and digital communication, including the respective objects of study and analysis. Reviewing key disciplinary and conceptual traditions of some of the new literacies, the author examines the consensuses and disagreements so that:

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