Chapter 62

Transnational Preservice Teachers' Literate Lives and Writing Pedagogy in a Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Latin@ transnational preservice teachers as they detail their (bi) literate lives through multimodal texts, specifically digital timelines and literacy narratives. Using qualitative methods, the authors examine the ways in which the production of multimodal texts became the medium through which participants could reflect on their own literacy processes through reflection and sharing. Preservice teachers were also asked to discuss their understandings of writing pedagogy and how they envisioned their future classrooms. Most of the Latin@ participants reported multiple language use and a variety of contexts where they learned about literacies. In addition, the multimodal and digital aspects of the assignments assisted students in recalling memories, widening their views of what counts as literacy, and fostering more inclusive writing pedagogy. Providing future classroom teachers with opportunities for engaging in mulitimodal composing along with critical reflection has the potential to transform and disrupt dominant ideologies towards literacy practices and English language dominance. Understanding the complex literacy practices of preservice teachers may also lead to shaping the future of literacy instruction to better serve an increasingly multilingual, multicultural student population.

INTRODUCTION

If we ask students to tell us about their literate lives, and if we listen carefully, if we pay attention, we will approach them not as interchangeable learning subjects, but rather as individuals, each of whom brings a radically different background and a different set of literacy experiences to bear on the tasks we ask them to accomplish (Selfe, 2010).

Recent scholarship on literacy and technology has pushed our traditional understandings of reading and writing to include the ways in which people–students, scholars, elders, teachers, etc.–co-construct literacy in a digital age across diverse multilingual and transnational contexts (Berry, Hawisher, & Self, 2012). However, few studies examine the use of multimodal literacies with preservice teachers and the potential impact of these texts on their future students and writing pedagogy (Clark & Medina, 2000; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011). Like Clark and Medina (2000), we believe literacy narratives are important components of teacher education programs. While not a "panacea for problems of diversity and literacy in teacher education" (p. 72), reflecting on their own literate development across time and on how their own experiences influence their beliefs around literacies and technology can be important mechanisms for fostering multicultural understanding and a more complex understanding of literacy and writing pedagogy.

In an age when students engage with technology more than any generation that precedes them, it is not only fruitful but also imperative for teachers to understand how digital literacy practices shape their own lives and the ways in which digital tools are often the medium through which they acquire various literacies (Miller, Thompson, Lauricella, Boyd & McVee, 2012). Recent scholarship on multimodal composition (Self & Hawisher, 2004; Self, 2010) expands our understanding of texts students use in their literate lives including various semiotic systems such as objects, film, television, food, clothing, Facebook, email, and text messaging. We argue that as students develop these new literacy skills in and out of school, teachers must take up these expanded notions in their writing curricula and thus, preservice teachers must have opportunities to examine and understand them.

This article focuses on the experiences of Latin@ [1] transnational preservice teachers as they detail their (bi)literate lives through digital timelines and literacy narratives. As Selfe (2010) notes in the opening quote, we asked our students to tell us about their lives and we have tried to listen carefully. We examine the ways in which the production of multimodal texts became the medium through which participants could reflect on their own literacy processes as well as those of their peers through reflection and presentations. Additionally, through these activities preservice teachers imagined their future classrooms and the role of literacies pedagogy in them. By critically examining their own histories and literacies in the past and present as related to their future teaching, preservice teachers are able to move closer to political and ideological clarity (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001). We argue that it is crucial to provide preservice teachers spaces for examining how their own experiences shape their literacy narratives and language and literacy practices. In doing so, there is the potential to transform the future of literacy instruction and composition pedagogy to better serve an increasingly multilingual, multicultural student population in an increasingly digital world. We present analysis of the ways in which these multimodal compositions are indicators of language and learning experiences and how coupled with critical reflection, these literacy activities may inform writing pedagogy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Preparing teachers for diversity is a critical component of all teacher education programs.

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