

Chapter 15

Developing Intercultural Awareness Through a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

Angela Yicely Castro Garces
Universidad del Cauca, Colombia

ABSTRACT

The language classroom as a space for reflection, interaction, and enactment calls for language teaching and learning that makes meaning and prepares intercultural communicators who value local knowledge, are sensitive to diversity, and are aware of their global community. This work aims to examine the role of a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the development of pre-service teachers' intercultural awareness. This study was conducted with a group of 12 pre-service teachers at a state university in Colombia. It was based on a pedagogy of multiliteracies, through the knowledge processes, approached from a qualitative interpretive case study perspective. The findings indicate that connecting personal experiences to those of others through global literacies and multimodal tasks helped develop intercultural awareness in relation to issues of ethnicity, gender, physical ability, and social class, thus expanding participants' limited nationalist perspective and taking them to embrace a more intersectional view of others.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication and the emergence of new literacy practices have permeated all aspects of our lives. This is why preparing ourselves to understand, tolerate, and coexist in a friendly manner is urgent in this shrinking world where differences are to be seen as opportunities for sharing and complementing each other. Accordingly, “the globalization of the world community inevitably leads to cultural diversity” (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 29). Thus, the integration of teaching practices that foster intercultural awareness through strategic pedagogical practices that consider context and learners' realities is deemed necessary.

In view of that, in foreign language classrooms, it is essential to increase intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011; Chen & Starosta, 1998) to go beyond verbocentric views of language (Álvarez Valencia, 2016a;

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Kress, 2000) and to include diverse literacy practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; The New London Group, 1996) that favor intercultural understandings. A pedagogy of multiliteracies fosters the understanding of the multimodal nature of texts (Álvarez Valencia, 2016b) and global literature as identity cultural markers (Short et al., 2016). This work adds to the multiliteracies engagement to gain intercultural awareness for current and future teaching practices, thus contributing to teacher education that is more context-bound (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) and that values local knowledge (Canagarajah, 2005).

Additionally, the inclusion of multiple forms of reading and writing that favor “alternative and multicultural texts” (Mora, 2011, p. 3), expands our notion of literacy to an inclusive practice derived from the learners’ needs, which can only be possible by considering their own realities, contexts, and life experiences, or what Freire (1987) would name reading the world. Equally, Freire (1987) maintains that “reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (p. 29).

The goal of this chapter is to examine role of a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the development of pre-service teachers’ intercultural awareness. It is based on a pedagogy of multiliteracies, through the knowledge processes, approached from a qualitative interpretive case study perspective.

BACKGROUND

The Intercultural Dimension and Intercultural Awareness

The study of intercultural communication has contributed to the development of interlinguistic and intercultural understanding, helping break social and geographic boundaries and build relationships among peoples of diverse origins. It has also brought about research agendas developed by advocates from different disciplines to advance the foreign language teaching (FLT) field. The terms vary according to the focus that diverse authors give to intercultural studies, including intercultural communication (Coulby, 2006; Hua, 2016), intercultural understanding (Kramersch, 2013), intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993; Bennet & Bennet, 2004; Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002), intercultural awareness, sensitivity and adroitness (Chen & Starosta, 1998), and cross-cultural communication (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Woodin, 2016). Specifically, Chen and Starosta (1998) define intercultural awareness as the “cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence that refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect how we think and behave” (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 28).

Additionally, Kramersch (2009) examines the intercultural dimension as central to the constitution of the subjective dimensions of language users. She maintains that “the subject is a symbolic entity that is constituted and maintained through symbolic systems such as language” (p. 13). Kramersch remarks that these subjective dimensions require particular sensitivity on the part of the language teacher and states that “pedagogies that reduce language to its informational value, be it grammatical, social, or cultural information, miss an important dimension of the language learning experience” (2009, p. 11). That means that language teachers are to create spaces in which the language can be meaningful so that it does not play a mere instrumental role, but becomes an important and intrinsic element of the language learner, with which they can solve real-life situations and live significant experiences.

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