

ROLE OF TEXTS/READINGS IN SHAPING AND CHANGING IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF LITERACY

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Purpose

- To explore the links between changes in teachers' literacy conceptions and assigned course texts

Research Question

How, if at all, do teachers' conceptions of literacy change as they read assigned course readings?

Rationale

- Increasing accountability in teacher education (e.g., Wilson & Youngs, 2005)
 - *Spotlight on literacy*
- Highly effective teacher preparation and professional development (e.g., Grossman, 2005)
 - *Substantial contributions and compatible combinations of pedagogical approaches and resources*

Rationale

- The practice of assigning and discussing readings
 - *Role and efficacy of assigning and talking about course readings?*
 - *Authors' specific perspectives – being literate & teaching literacy*
- Literacy conceptions in teaching (e.g., Hindman & Wasik, 2008; Theriot & Tice, 2009)

Study Perspectives

- Sociocognitive perspective
 - *Sociolinguistics, critical literacy pedagogy, and cognitive psychology* (e.g., Cole, 1996; Gee, 1989; Leu, 2000)
- “Being literate” – value and meaning (e.g., Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1988; Pearson, 2001)
- Teachers’ role in literacy development
 - *Prior beliefs, current knowledge, and ongoing instructional decision-making* (e.g., Engestrom, 1987; Ruddell & Unrau, 2004; Shulman, 1987)
- Teaching teachers to teach literacy
 - *Promising pedagogical approaches & resources* (Grossman, 2005)

Methods

- Research Design
 - *Content analysis*
 - *Part of a larger study*
- Participants
 - *13 students in a Master’s literacy proseminar course*
 - All female
 - 11 Caucasian, 1 African American, 1 Pakistani American

Methods – Data Sources

- **Course Texts**
 - *Creating an Integrated Approach to Literacy Instruction* (Raphael & Hiebert, 1996)
 - *East is East, West is West* (Li, 2002)
 - *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language* (Groce, 1997)
 - *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (Barton, 1994)
 - *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* (Finders, 1997)
 - *Multicultural Issues and Literacy Achievement* (Au, 2006)
 - *Other People’s Children* (Delpit, 1996)
 - *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys* (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002)
 - *What do the Experts Say?: Helping Children Learn to Read* (Flippo, 1999)
- **Written artifacts** - Weekly brief responses; extended response; final paper addressing the question, “What is literacy?”

Methods – Data Analysis

- Emergent coding, constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
- Stratified random sample of 10 percent of corpus
 - *Two levels of coding*
 - 1st - Summarizing; Agreement; Insight; Resistance; Experience
 - 2nd - Descriptive codes
 - *Regular discussions of independent coding until consensus reached on entire sample*
- Applied final coding list to the remaining texts
- Compiled lists of codes in Excel and Word
- Looked for patterns across 1st and 2nd level codes

ORIGINAL DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

<i>Emma</i>	<i>Nettie</i>	<i>Peggy</i>
<p>"I held an understanding that literacy just involved an individual's ability to read and write. Becoming literate just involved going to school and learning as much as you could."</p>	<p>"Coming into this class, I looked at literacy as something very simple. To me, literacy meant the ability to read, write, speak, and listen. The two most important aspects of my former definition of literacy were reading and writing. Literacy seemed to be a very narrow idea. If a person could read and write, then they were literate. They had the ability to communicate with others who speak their language."</p>	<p>"When asked my definition of literacy a few months ago, I said it was reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Literacy is how we comprehend and understand written and oral language."</p>

Results - Self-Reports

Emma

"Through all of the readings and discussion in class, I have seen many different aspects of literacy that I had never even known to be considered literacy. People become literate through different experiences, opportunities, and teachings."

Peggy

"After all the books I have read about literacy and listening to many professors explain their ideas of literacy, I have come to realize that my [initial] definition [of literacy] was lacking. I [now] believe literacy to be a very complex idea that has many different variations according to one's individual point of view, culture, and experiences."

Results

□ Connected culture to literacy

- "I never imagined that culture and literacy could be so intertwined" (Melissa).
- "Li opened my eyes to see beyond my own frame of references of a Eurocentric way of understanding literacy. I can't simply define literacy with a way of interacting and communicating with text in the world. I have to also include that literacy is interacting with the world based on cultural norms and social context" (Adelle).

Results

- "After reading the book "East is East, West is West?" by Guofang Li, I came to a completely new understanding of how much one's culture and home life can affect their views and progress on literacy" (Emma).
- Considered conflicting cultural values
 - "I had never considered how different cultures approach education and literacy, along with family structure and values, and how this might impact an English-as-a-second-language student's literacy education" (Adelle).

Results

- Connected gender to literacy
 - *“The idea of literacy being gendered seems weird, and somewhat unbelievable, but the more I think about it, the more it seems to fit...”* (Hillary).
- Connected social identity to literacy
 - *“Another issue that struck me as interesting was how important it is for boys to maintain their masculine image...”* (Winnie).
 - *“I found it extremely interesting to read about the connection between social status and literacy in junior high...”* (Ginette).

Results

- Connected families’ practices to literacy
 - *“I was surprised, though it obviously makes sense, to read that not all cultures have books for parents to read to children and books that help children learn to read”* (Nettie).
- Connected community’s practices to conceptions of literacy
 - *“Our involvement in living within a particular society shapes our understanding of any text with which we interact”* (Adelle).

Pedagogical Implications

- Considered implications for students’ literacy development
 - *Nature of Literacy Development*
 - *Fostering Literacy Development*
 - *Contexts of Literacy Development*

“For our students to move beyond basic literacy and become culturally literate, we must think of literacy as Raphael and Hiebert describe it: as a social construct” (Doreen).

“Constructing meaning out of what is read is a big part of literacy, therefore knowing how to help students construct their own meaning is an integral part of teaching students to be literate” (Becca).

Pedagogical Implications

- Implications for teachers’ specific instructional activities
 - *integrating literacy instruction with other subject areas*
 - *promoting students’ development through speaking and writing*
 - *making reading relevant to students*
 - *using culturally-authentic discourse*
 - *attending to students’ social uses of literacy*

“Ultimately, for students to become literate members of society, teachers must structure literacy events within meaningful contexts” (Winnie).

Pedagogical Implications

- Implications for teaching diverse students
 - *“This book has really opened my eyes to ways to relate lessons back to students’ culture, language and their relevance to the real world experiences. Hopefully, by preserving these areas of culture, the achievement gap that exists will slowly close”* (Hillary).
 - *“I worry that our society is not progressing at the same rate as our expectations. Expectations for students are at an all time high, yet society still holds certain racial and cultural groups to lower expectations, which causes this achievement gap to retain its place in today’s schools”* (Becca).

Resistance – Authors’ Ideas

- *“At the same time, however, I don’t want to be a teacher who pigeonholes or stereotypes students and the way that they learn based on their cultural or any other kinds of perspectives”* (Adelle).
- *“The fear that I have, though, is that too often stereotypes are used and the actual students are forgotten. This book could help teachers better understand their individual students, but can also do the opposite”* (Melissa).
- *“I am concerned that the structure of Book Club may not meet the needs of today’s diverse learners”* (Sally).

FINAL DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

Emma

“... I have quickly learned that literacy is way more in-depth and comes differently for each person. Reading and writing are definitely key elements of this term, but there must be deeper digging in order for one to achieve it. Literacy involves many variables, standards, abilities, desires, and motivations for each person. Literacy may look or progress differently with each individual depending on their culture, background, experiences, views, or mentality. These factors come together, form a whole, and define their sense of literacy. My definition of literacy can be defined as one’s devotion, ambition, motivation, choice, and right to continuously educate themselves about the world they live in...”

FINAL DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

Nettie

As this course comes to a close, I now think of literacy as a dynamic collection of environmentally sensitive engagements (practices) mediated through culturally driven code systems. The function of these engagements revolves around power relationships as they have the ability to validate or invalidate peoples’ unique ways of seeing and comprehending the world we all share... Literacy is more than a collection of skills. It is deeper than comprehension, and is certainly more complex than any assessment could hope to measure. Literacy is a powerful force that is mediated through four common forms of communication, yet it is woven into nearly every facet of human interactions, reaching into the cultural, the environmental, social, and personal. It is woven through power systems which construct intricate codes to capture, justify, and enforce certain languages of power.

Conclusions

- **Expanded conceptions of literacy to include sociocultural dimensions**
 - ▣ *Role of culture*
 - ▣ *Role of group literacy practices*
 - ▣ *Role of identity*
- **Connected their conceptions to literacy development and instruction**
 - ▣ *Specific instructional techniques*
 - ▣ *Students as individuals*
 - ▣ *Contexts of development and instruction*

Limitations

- Sampling
 - ▣ *One university classroom*
- Course
 - ▣ *Existing structures*
 - ▣ *Specific collection of texts*

Implications

- Underscores the need, promise, and complexity of addressing teachers' conceptions of literacy through exposure to specific course readings

Significance

- Documented changes in teachers' conceptions and connections to assigned readings
- Designing teachers' professional learning experiences

This presentation can be found on:

**Patricia A. Edward's
MSU HomePage**

<http://edwards.wiki.educ.msu.edu/>

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