Micro-Paper 51: *Multimodal Critical Consciousness*

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Defining the Term

Multimodal Critical Consciousness (MCC) brings together ideas from critical consciousness, Freire's conscientização, and critical literacies with notions from multimodality and multimodal design to acknowledge the power and potential of semiotic forms of meaning-making as the basis of critical praxis, especially in the case of younger and novice learners. MCC intends to defy existing ideas linking agency to levels of [language] competence, instead thinking of spaces for learners' empowerment.

Multimodal Critical Consciousness uses the different semiotic resources existing in the creation of multimodal messages to overcome the limitations of print-only texts, which may become hurdles for children and beginning [language] learners. In this sense, MCC uses multimodal text design as a means to engage and introduce learners into larger questions about power dynamics and issues of inequity present in language and society. MCC provides, therefore, these groups of learners with tools to participate in deeper conversations about gender, language, inequity, social orientation, race, or socio-economic status. By focusing on the multiplicity of resources existing in multimodal texts, learners (of languages and otherwise) can focus on the meaning rather than on the linguistic features of message creation

The goal of Multimodal Critical Consciousness is to disrupt traditional assumptions of what young and novice [language] learners can do with language, transcending simplistic and reductionist views of language use. MCC intends to help learners gain more agency in their learning process, particularly when it comes to languages, whether to promote empowerment or defy entitlement.

Connecting it to LSLP

We are proposing this term as the consequence of several studies exploring literacy practices in the P-20 context. In our first round of studies, looking at early childhood literacies, we have found that engaging with multimodality provides an excellent entry point to different conversations around different societal issues, as suggested by critical literacies research. Our cross-case analysis of different efforts using critical literacy and multimodality showed that there is a common link between these two elements as part of the construction of a critical mindset in learners, both in early childhood and across different stages in the P-20 spectrum.

Expanding Second Language Research

Although the idea of Multimodal Critical Consciousness is applicable to different stages of literacies research, we are particularly interested in its potential for second language studies and the emerging field of literacies in second languages. MCC, to us, provides possibilities to stop looking at novice language learners (both children and adults) as limited just because their second language competence is lower.

We see MCC as a possibility to expand the communicative repertoires of such learners and turn the language classroom into a truly transformative space where agency and empowerment become learning and teaching hallmarks. This also implies going beyond reductionist views of multimodality as just creating videos and exploring the full potential of the integration of resources for deeper and more meaningful communicative goals, where language users can get more involved with larger issues going on in our world today.

References

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