
Book Review: Multiliteracies and diversity in education: new pedagogies for expanding landscapes

Editor: Annah Healy

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Reviewer: Janet McDowall

*School of Education
University of South Australia*

This edited book presents the work of eight authors from diverse backgrounds. It addresses aspects of teaching and learning that are inter-related in that they are each founded on a particular pedagogical approach. While it has clear connections with what is generally known as 'literacy', it covers a much broader scope than would traditionally come under the 'literacy' umbrella. This ranges from health and physical education through to arts education, and beyond—that is, areas of teaching and learning that would not traditionally be seen as inherently literacy-related.

To some extent, a reader could dip into the book and explore aspects of particular interest in chapters that can stand alone. However, the initial sections provide foundational framing for subsequent chapters and thus are best read at the outset. They establish terminology and associated ideas that are developed throughout the book from varying perspectives.

The *Preface* (by Annah Healy) introduces themes that are threaded through each chapter. Initially it acknowledges the influence on each of this book's authors of the work of Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope on 'new learning theory' (p. xiii) that preceded the '*Learning by Design* framework for pedagogic practice' (p. xiii) around which the book under review is structured. The *Preface* presents terms that have become familiar parts of the 'literacy' lexicon such as 'multimodal literacies' and 'multiliteracies' but it

situates these terms within the more comprehensive *Learning by Design* framework, introducing new roles of teachers and of students. Such changes are captured neatly in descriptions such as ‘... teachers have moved from provider to co-navigator’ (p. xiii). The *Preface* also indicates the inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in *Learning by Design* pedagogy and introduces the ‘critical framing’ (p. xiv) that is evident in subsequent chapters.

These themes are elaborated in Chapter 1, *Expanding Student Capacities: Learning by Design Pedagogy*, by Annah Healy. Contemporary literacy practices are shown to be part of broader contemporary contexts: ‘The point is that, as society shifts, so do its texts in the ways they are constructed and communicated’ (p. 5). Four ‘Knowledge processes’ (p. 7) on which curriculum can be framed are introduced: ‘... experiencing the known and the new; conceptualising by naming and theorising; analysing functionally and critically; and applying appropriately and creatively’ (p. 7 as cited in Kalantzis & Cope 2004). This chapter argues for integration of traditional discipline areas where appropriate: ‘Segregated and separated curriculum ... narrows the potential to build knowledge and skills’ (p. 10).

A significant strength of this book is the synthesis of theoretical considerations into readable discussions that relate directly to many teaching and learning contexts. In Chapter 1 (and subsequent chapters), explicit connections with educational practice are embedded in the form of detailed descriptions of multiliteracies projects. These cover a broad range of areas of learning and various age ranges and are solidly grounded in theoretical perspectives.

In Chapter 2, *The transdisciplinary potential of multiliteracies: Bodily performances and meaning-making in health and physical education*, Mary Ryan and Tony Rossi argue for ‘the body as text’ (p. 32) and analyse the ‘literacies of physical education and movement in terms of the following modes of meaning: linguistic (the metalanguage of HPE [health and physical education]), gestural, spatial, visual, and audio’ (p. 33). Ryan and Rossi note the absence of health and physical education from ‘the literature related to literacy’ (p. 42). In a section headed ‘Theorising physical literacies’, they claim that previous work in this area has been ‘undertheorised in terms of contemporary views of multiliteracies’ (p. 43).

Chapter 3, *The intersection of Aboriginal knowledges, Aboriginal Literacies, and New Learning Pedagogy for Aboriginal students*, by Karen Martin, explains how ‘Aboriginal worldviews structure Aboriginal knowledges and are expressed through Aboriginal literacies’ (p. 61). Martin discusses the significance of ‘relatedness’, and explains: ‘For Aboriginal people, knowledge occurs in knowing your Stories of relatedness (Ways of Knowing) and respecting these Stories (Ways of Being) and the ways this relatedness is then expressed (Ways of Doing)’ (p. 63). This chapter argues convincingly that ‘learning by design pedagogy holds a number of promises for Aboriginal students and the teaching of English literacy within a new learning model’ (p. 80).

In Chapter 4, *'Art'efacts of knowing: Multiliteracies and the arts*, Mary Ryan and Annah Healy portray the ubiquity and diversity of the arts in contemporary everyday life. They emphasise transformative functions of the arts—visual art, media, dance, drama and music—at both personal and social levels. This chapter includes a series of 'snapshots' of potential projects that focus on particular arts disciplines and could be readily adapted to any level of schooling. Emphasis on critical approaches is particularly noteworthy, as in: '[Critical framing] includes an understanding of how broader social issues relate to the choices we make in our everyday lives, learning, and civic participation' (pp. 83-84). This is a challenging and refreshing approach. It casts a new light on educational areas that, in my experience as an arts educator, have tended to remain somewhat isolated from such considerations.

Karen Dooley, in Chapter 5, *Multiliteracies and Pedagogies of New Learning for Students of English as an Additional Language*, focuses on students of English as an additional language (EAL) in mainstream classes. She distinguishes between difference—'Biological and social variation among people, including gross demographic and life-world differences' and diversity—'The approach we use to negotiate difference' (p. 104). The author reflects on her own experience, providing sensitive discussion of challenges to the thinking of 'liberal multicultural' advocates (p. 108). In reviewing research literature, this chapter builds a picture of complex 'life-worlds' where 'young people are learning not only informal forms of English, but also learning how to use English in the real social practices of online and other communities' (p. 111).

In Chapter 6, *Communities of Learners: Early Years Students, New Learning Pedagogy, and Transformations*, Beryl Exley connects Learning by Design principles with pedagogical approaches as exemplified in a preschool in the Italian municipality of Reggio Emilia. She provides sufficient details to stir the memories of readers who are already somewhat familiar with what have become known as Reggio Emilia approaches, and this section is likely to whet the appetites of those for whom this is unfamiliar territory.

In Chapter 7, *Closing the Gap: A Multiliteracies Approach to English Language Teaching 'At-risk' students in Singapore*, Jennifer Pei-Ling Tan describes educational policies and practices in Singapore over a period of some decades. While this information is soundly situated in the context of Singapore, it has implications for all contexts in relation to maximising opportunities for students. In particular, a multiliteracies approach is shown to 'hold promise and relevance for contemporary societies' (p. 153). As Tan says, 'The multiliteracies framework challenges us to take cultural diversity seriously' (p. 154).

Chapter 8, *Mobilising multiliteracies: Pedagogy for Mobile Students*, by Robyn Henderson, also addresses student differences, but with particular emphasis on student mobility. As Henderson discusses, although residential mobility of school students in Australia occurs for various reasons, it is a matter that needs significant consideration in

relation to literacy learning and teaching. She outlines a potential project for students ‘in the middle years of schooling’ (p. 180), a level which would vary between systems in Australia—with a focus in primary schools in some but in secondary schools in others. The project focuses on water-related issues and incorporates a range of texts from various modalities. Henderson shows how ‘... the situated practice and critical framing components of multiliteracies pedagogy offer ways of using children’s diversity productively, rather than regarding those differences as deficiencies’ (p. 184).

Each of the above chapters includes a ‘Task’ section. The tasks provide opportunities for readers to relate the information in the chapter to their own experience and perspectives. Diagrams are used in each chapter to present ideas in visual forms that embody multimodal principles. The layout is spacious, enhancing readability, and illustrations are used to convey meaning, not as mere decoration. A glossary of terms is provided and this would provide useful guidance for those new to the ‘extensive metalanguage’ (p. 201) of literacy education. The pedagogic principles that are espoused in each chapter are evident in such practices.

Overall, this book has a persuasive flavour. It argues consistently for particular approaches to teaching and learning and it does this very effectively. It does not provide a critique of ‘Learning by design’ nor does it set out to do so. Rather, it presents richly-detailed accounts of pedagogical practices that are well beyond what would be typically be found in the pedagogical literature of many of the areas of teaching and learning that it addresses and that may inspire readers to adapt such approaches to their own contexts. These accounts are presented in tandem with theoretical content that reflects particular contemporary approaches to learning—approaches that take into account much of the complexity of modern life that is impacting on education.

In summary, this stimulating book is most certainly a valuable contribution both to the practical and the scholarly literature. It challenges well-established educational approaches within designated ‘literacy’ fields—and beyond.