Developing foreign language literacy through literature

Kate Paesani, Wayne State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/paesani/20/
DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LITERACY THROUGH LITERATURE

Kate Paesani
Wayne State University
Overview

- Defining literature and literacy
- The role of literature in undergraduate FL programs
- Literature, literacy development, and the multiliteracies framework
- Pedagogical strategies
- Conclusions & Discussion
How do you define the following concepts: LITERATURE and LITERACY?
Jot down the first three to five words that come to mind.
What is literature?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com):

1. writings in prose or verse; especially : writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest
2. an example of such writings
3. the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age
4. the body of writings on a particular subject <scientific literature>
5. printed matter (as leaflets or circulars) <campaign literature>
What is literature?

Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes (1991):

- **Serious literature** = literary in style; more conventions; non-formulaic (e.g., canonical prose, poetry, theater)

- **Entertainment literature** = formulaic, more predictable; less dense (e.g., westerns, science fiction, romances)
Canonical Literature = a group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a field (www.dictionary.com); a collection of works and authors who have a general seal of approval from academic and cultural establishments.
Broad Definition = “short and full-length works of fiction, poetry, and drama, regardless of a particular work’s popularity with readers or stature in the eyes of literary critics and scholars” (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 244)
Characteristics of Literature

- authentic representation of language and society (Schofer, 1990)
- reflects the cultures of which it is a product and the contemporary culture’s responses to it (Schultz, 2010)
- compelling, evocative, creative and memorable (Shook, 1996)
- feeds creatively on every possible style and register (Lazar, 1993)
- unique in its purpose, approach, and use of language (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009)
- characterized by specific devices (conventions) such as metaphor, imagery, alliteration, double-entendre, etc. (Widdowson, 1975, 1992)
- multiple meanings / density of ideas (Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes, 1991)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional / Historical View of Literature &amp; Instruction</th>
<th>Literacy-Based / Contemporary View of Literature &amp; Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading literature as the ultimate goal of language learning</td>
<td>Reading literature to foster language learning and cultural literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary text as a fixed object of study, cultural artifact</td>
<td>Literary texts as multidimensional, interpretatively realized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Readable” (Barthes, 1970)</td>
<td>“Writable” (Barthes, 1970)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Criticisms of CLT

“...the pedagogy of communicative competence still reflects the strong structuralist leanings of its audiolingual predecessors – it focuses on student recall of information rather than on analysis of that information” (Swaffar, 2006, p. 247).
Criticisms of CLT

“Communicative teaching programs have largely succeeded in their goal of promoting learners’ interactive speaking abilities. They have tended to be somewhat less successful, however, in developing learners’ extended discourse competence and written communication skills—areas of academic ability that are extraordinarily important in academic settings” (Kern, 2000, p. 19).
Criticisms of CLT

“because of [CLT’s] propensity to separate language and content, particularly literary-cultural content, such a focus may unintentionally sustain the long-standing bifurcation of FL programs into language courses and content courses with all the attendant negative consequences” (Byrnes, 2006, p. 244).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INTRODUCTORY / INTERMEDIATE FL COURSES</strong></th>
<th><strong>ADVANCED FL COURSES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of functional abilities to communicate everyday needs, thoughts</td>
<td>Development of analytical and critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on language forms &amp; conventions</td>
<td>Focus on cultural &amp; literary sensibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of personal opinions and familiar ideas</td>
<td>Expression of new ideas, analysis and synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom organized around language</td>
<td>Classroom organized around content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional texts (ads, weather reports, stories, menus, etc.)</td>
<td>Literary texts (poetry, prose, drama, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative, supportive, small group environment</td>
<td>Serious, lecture- and discussion-oriented learning environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LITERACY

“A PERSON WHO WON’T READ HAS NO ADVANTAGE OVER ONE WHO CAN’T READ.”

~Mark Twain
Literacy is the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use, and ideally, the ability to reflect critically on these relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic – not static – and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge (Kern, 2000, p. 16).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLT Approach</th>
<th>Multiliteracies Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on language: practicing</td>
<td>Focus on language: the interrelationships between words,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocabulary and structures</td>
<td>phrases, discourse, and the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing personal experiences</td>
<td>Personal readings (interpretation) of texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; writing as separate</td>
<td>Reading &amp; writing as complementary processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic skills</td>
<td>Language use relative to specific contexts, communities, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use relative to specific</td>
<td>Meaning shifts and is context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning is fixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- **Curricular Components**
  - = instructional activities
  - = application of what and how

- **Available Designs & Genre**
  - = content
  - = *what* to teach

- **Principles of Literacy**
  - = learning processes
  - = *how* to teach
Curricular Components

- **Situated Practice** = experiencing
  - Spontaneous, experiential learning without conscious reflection

- **Overt Instruction** = conceptualizing
  - Explicit learning / instruction of skills and knowledge needed for competent participation in activities

- **Critical Framing** = analyzing
  - Relating meaning to social contexts and purposes

- **Transformed Practice** = applying
  - Application of new understandings, knowledge and skills to use knowledge and produce language in creative ways
A Template for Teaching Literary Texts

1. **Pre-reading** to access background knowledge and make predictions about the text (e.g., predicting)

2. **Initial reading** to develop global comprehension of the facts or major events of the texts (e.g., semantic mapping)

3. **Detailed reading** to link meaning with language forms and vocabulary used in the text (e.g., syntactic or word relationships)

4. **Critical reading** to explore rhetorical organization and genre features, evaluate knowledge gained from reading, or explore cultural concepts (e.g., critical focus questions)

5. **Knowledge application** to demonstrate textual interpretation through production activities (e.g., story retelling)
Conclusions

- Literature as dynamic, socially-situated, and open to multiple interpretations
- Language as a tool for meaning design; reading and writing as interdependent acts of communication
- Literature and language as complementary parts of a holistic curriculum that develops foreign language literacy
- Multiliteracies pedagogy as a framework for merging communication and literary analysis at all curricular levels