Reading literature to develop advanced writing competencies: A multiliteracies-based approach

Kate Paesani, Wayne State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/paesani/34/
Reading Literature to Develop Advanced Writing Competencies: A Multiliteracies-Based Approach

KATE PAESANI, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
Overview

- Developing advanced writing competencies: Challenges
- Overcoming challenges: Literacy
- Pedagogical framework: The multiliteracies approach
- Reading, writing, and literary texts
- Examples: Creative writing tasks
Developing Advanced Writing Competencies: Challenges

- Language-literature divide (MLA, 2007)
- Little focus on development of content knowledge in advanced language courses
- Little focus on development of language competencies in advanced content courses (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Mantero, 2002; Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Zyzik & Polio, 2008)
- Lack of coherent frameworks for organizing curriculum and instruction (Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Paesani & Allen, 2012)
Developing Advanced Writing Competencies: Challenges

- **An Example:** “students in their third year of French should be able to put their linguistic skills to use... [This book] **does not focus on skill development and language acquisition**” (Preface, top-selling French cultural studies book)

→ Reflects the assumption that advanced language competencies develop organically through “comprehensible input and unstructured discussion” (Byrnes & Kord, 2002, p. 37)
Developing Advanced Writing Competencies: Challenges

- Limited scope of FL writing tasks & links between reading literature and writing:

  “American students are trained primarily to recall and reproduce factual content, leading to a brand of literacy that emphasizes the consumption of information … [They] perform most adequately at straightforward informative writing tasks (factual reports, descriptions) and least adequately at persuasive and imaginative writing tasks” (Kern, 2000, p. 33).
Developing Advanced Writing Competencies: Challenges

Why focus on writing?

- Allows learners to create and reshape meaning through manipulation of language forms and to consider how these manipulations affect meaning

- Provides time for learners to process and create meaning through language

- Facilitates moving beyond functional language use to create “imagined worlds of their own design” (Kern, 2000, p. 172)

- Creates a context for merging language and literary-cultural content
1. What does it mean to be literate in a given language? What abilities does it entail?
2. What is literacy? Jot down the first three words that come to mind.
What does it mean to be literate?

I googled it
posted it on my blog
and then I IM'd
my friends

Source: Kern (2006)
What does it mean to be literate?

Source: The New Yorker
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).
What is literacy?

- Literacy-oriented instruction encourages learners to interact with the content of texts:
  - Language use
  - Conventions
  - Cultural knowledge

- Through the learning processes of:
  - Interpretation
  - Collaboration
  - Problem solving
  - Reflection & Self-reflection

- Available Designs & Texts
  - = content
  - = what to teach

- Principles of Literacy
  - = learning processes
  - = how to teach

- Pedagogical Acts
  - = instructional activities
  - = application of what and how
Available Designs

LINGUISTIC

writing system
vocabulary
syntax
cohesion/coherence

SCHEMATIC

org. patterns
genre/style
stories
content schemata

Available Designs & Texts
= content
= what to teach

Principles of Literacy
= learning processes
= how to teach

Pedagogical Acts
= instructional activities
= application of what and how
Pedagogical Acts

- **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
Pedagogical Acts: Sample Writing Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situated Practice</th>
<th>Summary sentences, Free writing, Blogging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overt Instruction</td>
<td>Mapping/Outlining, Revising, Teaching genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Framing</td>
<td>Reflective journaling, Peer editing, Analytical essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed Practice</td>
<td>Creative writing, Story continuation, Genre reformulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Multiliteracies Approach to Advanced Writing: Rationale

- “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)

- “we need to provide multiple opportunities for students to compose oral, written, and visual texts on a variety of topics for a variety of intellectual and practical purposes, and for a variety of audiences” (Hall, 2001, p. 204)
Reading to Write: Rationale

Reading in class Writing

at home in class at home

Kern (2000)
Reading to Write: Rationale

Kern (2000, p. 132)
Reading to Write: Rationale

“Writing requires reading for its completion, but also teaches the kind of reading it requires” (Lodge, 1977)

“reading and writing are always socially-imbedded activities involving relationships, shared assumptions, and conventions as well as individual, personal acts involving imagination, creativity, and emotions” (Kern, 2000, p. 111)
Reading to Write: Literature

- Helps students move from reading to writing because it is a gateway to authoring
- Provides opportunities to not only write about literature but to create literature
- Serves as the basis for the study of language forms and conventions in a socially-situated context
- Implemented across curricular levels, literature can help to unify bifurcated language programs
Example 1: Advanced Composition

- **GOALS**: sensitizing students to relationships between form and content; providing experience in creative writing; furthering students’ abilities to speak in advanced ways.

- **ORGANIZATION**: 4 modules, 4 authors and genres (descriptive tales/Delerm; ethnotexts/Ernaux; short stories/Gavalda; **verse and prose poetry**/Baudelaire)

- **INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS**: progression from reading-focused to writing-focused activities; interpretation and use of linguistic and schematic resources in texts to design meaning.
CREATIVE WRITING TASK: students draft their own prose version of “L’Invitation au voyage”

- List of “ten essentials” for writing a Baudelairan prose poem (critical framing)
- Graphic organizer to flesh out ideas and identify key vocabulary and themes (situated practice)
- Initial drafting of the poem (transformed practice)
- Peer review, instructor conferences (critical framing)
- Revision (overt instruction)
- Roundtable during which students present a summary of their poem’s focus and read the poem aloud (situated / transformed practice)
Student Responses (Allen, 2009)

- “roughly one-third of the class felt their confidence in writing had been enhanced” (p. 379)

- “In the beginning, I didn’t understand exactly why we were doing the text analyses, but now I realize that it’s really important to deconstruct a text to understand it. Reading and writing work together to help the writer make the best text possible” (p. 380)

- “approximately half the class remarked that through completing reading and writing tasks in the course, they had greater awareness of how and why stylistic devices are used in texts” (p. 379)

- “I had the opportunity to be author and reader. Sometimes there are things you can’t see in our own work, but you can identify it in the work of someone else” (p. 380)
Example 2: Advanced Grammar & Stylistics

- **GOALS**: studying grammar through texts; linking course to others in the curriculum; developing advanced reading, writing, and speaking competences

- **ORGANIZATION**: 8 units, one chapter in grammar book and 2-3 excerpts of *Exercices de style* (Queneau, 1947) per unit

- **INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS**: progression from reading-related tasks to grammatical analysis and practice to writing-related tasks; interpretation and use of linguistic and schematic resources in texts to design meaning
Creative Writing Task: students create their own “Exercices de style”

- Students tell the same story four time in four different genres
- Matrix of information related to story line (when, where, who, what, how) (situated practice)
- Focus on specific available designs in each text (e.g., formality of tone, inversion in questions)
- Initial drafting of the text (transformed practice)
- Peer review, instructor conferences (critical framing)
- Revision (overt instruction)
- Reflective journaling (situated practice / critical framing)
Student Responses (Paesani, 2006, ms.)

- These writing assignments were very helpful because I had to make myself do better each time, to surpass what I had done previously, to go even further. The adaptation of the Queneau texts was not limited to the simple use of rules learned in the book or in class, but included the personal interpretation one adds to a piece of writing. (2006, p. 626)

- “The Queneau readings and the opportunity to write in a certain style helps me to understand and use grammatical forms we learn… when I read and write, I think I can better understand the aspects of style and tone” (Amy)

- Overall, the reading and writing activities have contributed to my progress in grammar by helping me recognize grammatical structures and by forcing me to think about them. For example, the first time I read an excerpt from Queneau, I read for comprehension. But in studying it, I began to wonder why Queneau used a grammatical structure or a particular word (Veronica)
Thank you

CONTACT: k.paesani@wayne.edu