Assessment practices in the post-communicative era: A multiliteracies perspective

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ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN THE POST-COMMUNICATIVE ERA: A MULTILITERACIES PERSPECTIVE

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Overview

- Background
- Multiliteracies framework
- Assessment in a multiliteracies framework
- Sample multiliteracies assessments
BACKGROUND
Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World
MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages

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Profession 2007

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2007 MLA Report: A call for change

- Language, culture, and literature should be taught as a continuous whole in programs that situate language study in cultural, historic, geographic, and cross-cultural frames; that systematically incorporate transcultural content and translingual reflection at every level; and that organize the major around explicit, principled educational goals and expected outcomes. (2007, pp. 5-6)
Responding to this call for change: Implications for instruction and assessment

- Importance of context
- Centrality of L2 narratives across the curriculum
- Integration of modalities
- Integration of language and literary-cultural content
- Use of language as a tool for creative and critical thought
What is literacy?

[T]he 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 those relationships . . . 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)
Seven principles of literacy

(Kern, 2000)

**Interpretation**
Writers and readers engage in a double act of interpretation.

**Collaboration**
Audience impacts what writers decide to say or not say, readers bring motivation and experience to make writers’ texts meaningful.

**Conventions**
The way we write and read texts is not universal, cultural conventions play a huge role in how we carry out both activities.

**Cultural knowledge**
Writing and reading function with specific cultural systems. For those operating outside a given cultural system, misunderstanding and being misunderstood by those operating within the given system is highly likely.

**Problem-solving**
Writing and reading involve figuring out relationships between word, between larger units of meaning, between texts and worlds.

**Reflection and Self-reflection**
Writers and readers think about language and its relation to the world and themselves.

**Language use**
Literacy is more than knowledge of writing systems, vocabulary and grammar. It requires knowing how to use language both in written and spoken contexts to create discourse.
Key elements of multiliteracies-based teaching: Available designs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LINGUISTIC</th>
<th>SCHEMATIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>writing system</td>
<td>formal schemata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocabulary</td>
<td>genre / style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntax</td>
<td>content schemata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohesion / coherence</td>
<td>stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kern, 2000)
ASSESSMENT IN A MULTILITERACIES FRAMEWORK
Literacy-based assessment

“What is evaluated constitutes the de facto curriculum, and how it is evaluated reflects the de facto philosophy of learning and teaching, regardless of what the teacher or course description says. Thus reading tests that only measure recall of factual content in effect define reading as a factual recall task. Grading essays on the basis of the number of grammar errors sends the message that producing error-free sentences is what foreign language writing is all about.”

(Kern, 2000, p. 267).
A literacy-based approach assesses learners’...

Focus is on evaluating learners’ ability to use language as a tool of creative and critical thought.

- knowledge of syntax and vocabulary to fulfill particular communicative functions within the larger context of creating and interpreting meaning

- analyses of texts and contexts and the new understandings generated by those analyses

- ability to reflect on relationships
  - form and function
  - language and culture
Literacy-based assessment: 4 characteristics

1. Linking linguistic form and meaning

2. Drawing on students’ knowledge of language, culture, and conventions

3. Integrating rather than separating communicative modalities; examining multiple perspectives of student performance

4. Being consistent with and contributing to teaching practices
Challenges

1. Focusing on available designs from multiple perspectives in various assessment types
2. Identifying appropriate means of assessing students’ understanding of cultural conventions and knowledge
3. Horizontal and vertical articulation of assessment
4. Students’ own motivations and L2 learning histories
5. Instructor buy-in to align teaching and assessment practices
Questions? Comments?

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- Related forthcoming publication in Fall 2013:
THANK YOU