

EDUC 172 Part 1-04

We are now going to be moving on to the next section at this course in which we'll start to take a slightly closer look not just at language but at literacy in particular.

Literacy of course extends back for a long time in human history though the term literacy is relatively new.

Strangely enough the word illiteracy preceded the use of the word literacy. Illiteracy meant the inability to write ideas on paper in language and the definition of literacy has changed over time.

So at various points literacy men being able to write your own name not necessarily even the capacity to read. And up to the present day where literacy has diversified immensely so that when we speak literacy we might be talking about multiple literacies - the kinds of ways that we express our ideas in a variety of different modalities.

So we think of digital literacy, kinesthetic literacy meaning the understanding the body and how to do things physically, and those are just two of course. There are many, we speak of information literacy - the ability to find important information and how to use it properly.

We speak of emotional literacy, that is an understanding of emotional states and how to help people navigate emotional states. There are many kinds literacy. At one point I decided to find all those all those uses of a word before literacy, like emotional literacy, to define what literacy was.

I searched through many different academic journals and found over 54 different uses of the word literacy. So when we speak of multiple literacies we might be speaking of a wide variety of ways in which people express what they know so that others can also gain that learning and knowledge.

As we move towards literacy will also be thinking about how the teacher can scaffold their curriculum by becoming aware and critical of the kinds of literacies that they are using in the classroom.

Now typically literacy is presented as a kind reading or writing activity. Print literacy as it is commonly known now. When using print texts, whether that is printed on paper or printed on a blackboard, or even text in a video or what have you, the teacher's job is to basically move from the text to the bigger discourse or understanding that they want students to get.

They need them to get the contexts, they need them to get the concepts, and they need them to be able to frame them within the discourse of the subject they are teaching.

Between the text and the discourse, the teacher must then help students to understand both how the text they are reading is in a particular style, that is still a personal kind of thing what kind of style the text is.

The text is also likely to be within a specific kind of genre, whether that be a text book genre, academic kind of journal genre, a fictional genre, a historical genre that is a kind of factual narrative sort of thing.

And all those genres are then further contextualized within the specific discipline that you are teaching. And we've already discussed how even a single word my take on many meanings, might take on different meanings depending on which discipline it's being used in.

All those different aspects of language can bring students to the discourse that you hope them to be able to participate in and once they get that discourse you understood some of it, you're going to go back to the text to start building from where you left off to look through the language to bring them to the bigger ideas and concepts and then you'll return to the text to read closely.

This is most important. When students are learning they need to learn how to read closely, not to read quickly but to read closely.

So that they see different nuances of expressions and can acquire the different styles, learn the different forms that the genres take, learn the different ways that different disciplines use those forms, so that they can participate in the bigger discourse.

As you go back and forth between the text and the discourse the student develops a sense of the bigger picture that the discourse addresses. And moving back and forth that way one can effectively brings students into a deeper level of understanding.

That is key to the mastery of teaching - the ability not only to support students' language learning but also the ways they use and express themselves with literacy.

In the next part of this will look more closely at this act of teaching which shifts from the text being studied that is the main text of study to the bigger discourse and bigger ideas, and back to the text again... back and forth like a pendulum.

If we think about these different aspects of literacy we can think that we start with the text and for the purposes of this course the word text can apply to more than just a print text. It can apply to the text of watching a soccer game and understanding how the different players are moving, all of them are expressing a more general idea that they've been coached to do.

All of their moves one can read and interpret; other players know when a player runs over to one side of the field they might position themselves in a different spot, make themselves open to get the ball if its passed to them that kind of thing.

So even a game could be a text. Of course a picture is a text. We often say that picture is worth a thousand words

And so in that sense we can see embedded in that expression how a picture itself can act like a kind of text. Same thing might be said of a movie.

A movie can tell a narrative or a story. Stories are all parts of texts. So when we say a text, we might mean a wide variety of different media that are being used, or that we are focusing on in the classroom in order to help students learn the subject matter we're teaching them.

Every kind text, doesn't matter which media or mode it happens to be in, operates according to its own kind of syntax and grammar.

There are visual grammars, there are oral grammars, and all sorts of different ways that we typically express ideas.

Those again have rules that are convention based; they're not hard and fast rules, so they're always able to be bent.

And understanding when rules are being bent usually provides the best kinds of critical discussions to help students understand the differences between one text and another.

As we look closely at it text we start to look at how style influences both the apprehension and expression of a text.

When I say the apprehension of it, we all have a personal style a personal style of reading. So if we have a reading style, we might consider then that our interpretation is different than other people's. Partly because every active interpretation depends on one's life experience and the different ideas that one comes to the text with.

So when we think of style it's not just the style that the author's used in creating the text that we study, it's also the styles that the readers or students bring when they're interpreting the text we've given them.

This can make for excellent teaching opportunity. Have students share their interpretations of the given text and then compare and evaluate those different interpretations.

That's deepening each person's interpretation as they appreciate what the other person sees in the text you're using.

Again we would then think about genre and genre conventions that are governed as it says there by temporal processes. Temporal processes means that genres fix over time but are also quite fluid as has been said earlier.

They hybridize, sometimes they go extinct. But genres are very important, they're the ways that we come to understand how to express ourselves in particular forms for particular purposes.

And finally back to the concept of discourse, which is the disciplinary context in which specific words have specific meanings and in which concepts fit specific schemas of knowledge.

That's a quick little overview again. Maybe I can now show you a graphic that I've develop so you can have a sense of how we move between them as teachers in order to effect the most advantageous learning situations possible for our students.

Here then you can see a graphic which shows a pendulum swinging between the two poles - one the text, the other the discourse, and moving through these different aspects of literacy toward either and.

What we see is a text in in multimedia or multiple modes. We see vocabulary as being key, and then we see the whole world of personal choice, interpretation and what-have-you, style all that involved as one moves towards understanding the genre and how to work with it and bend its conventional rules.

And then how we get from there to the concepts being conveyed by the text within a specific disciplinary context and therefore getting a sense of the discourse of our subject.

We also know, as you might see, that as the pendulum leads ahead, the students tend to follow behind getting in understanding. On the way back it's the students who take us back to the text through their questions and through their understandings.

And as the teacher follows up behind them, answers their questions, we see that flashing word "the bigger picture".

And that every time we do this swing from the text to the bigger discourse and back to the text again, aiding, supporting, and scaffolding our students' literacy and their understanding of how the language is conveying the important meanings we want them to get from our curriculum that each time we do that they get a better sense of

the bigger picture. Their schemas develop, take on more nuance, and are able to become more detailed in their understanding.

As was shown in the earlier graphic this is when they start to acquire expertise in a subject. They need to feel comfortable working within the genres; they need to be able to trust their own interpretations of those genres; and as they get more and more able to do so they become more and more expert with the material we are delivering.

Of course that is our goal. We could not want more than to have our students in the end surpass us with their expertise, add new ideas and new understandings to the field of study that we teach them.

So this is just to give you a quick visualization to keep in mind when teaching, of this constant motion with that we go from the text we are teaching and focusing on to the bigger picture of the ideas, the discourses within our discipline that we want them or need them to acquire, and back to the text, usually because they are asking once they get to the discourse all kinds important even essential questions that will fulfil their need to understand and guided by their questions we go back to the text in order to help them to understand more deeply what the subject that we're teaching means.

Not only broadly and generally but specifically to them. What their personal and individual struggles with acquiring that knowledge are and also their personal insights, how that can be broaden even the teachers understanding of the subject they are teaching.

We need always remain open to the fact that the students, because they bring so many different perspectives to us, will enhance and increase our own understanding.

This is one of the great gifts of being a good teacher, is that our own understandings, our own wisdoms, and depth of intellectual grasp of the subject deepen because ours students ask necessary questions, they force us never take things for granted.

Not taking things for granted is key to being a good teacher. When we read a text quickly it is because we're familiar with the words, and the kinds of language and concepts being conveyed through that text.

Very often because we are familiar we gloss over, we go too quickly to ask important questions: is that true? how was that known? Is that an assumption or is it a factual proof?

We just simply accept them because we're so familiar with it. Students help us to slow down to engage more deeply with the concepts and ideas that a text is saying through its words and therefore to interrogate the text and to open it up, and by

doing so to broaden our own understanding and deepening it too. So keep in mind this little graphic that this is the way the teachers can and should work leading their students to the bigger discourse and by the students questions going back to the text to find out more answers.

By doing so we model what a good reader and writer does, what a good listener and speaker does, but even more so what really good student does.

All of us are lifelong learners and as teachers, as scholars, as contributors to the world of knowledge are always doing this for themselves, and they need to be able to model this kind action for their students and with their students, so that their students can take it on as a learned behavior and become good scholars, scientists, critics, engineers, basketball players, you name it, themselves.

Okay so that's just a quick thing, a schema to keep in mind while you're teaching.