


From New Literacies to Multiliteracies: The Language Classroom as a Multilingual, Multicultural, and Multimodal Space

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Abstract

The contemporary communication landscape has evolved, giving rise to intercultural encounters that encompass a diverse range of discourses, modes of communication, and literacy practices. Consequently, literacy has undergone multiple transformations in connection with global socioeconomic, technological, political, and cultural dynamics. Concepts such as new literacies and multiliteracies have impacted education, including the teaching of foreign and second languages. In this paper, we explore how the concept of literacy has evolved in response to the contemporary communication landscape and examine the challenges and opportunities that Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP) presents in foreign language teaching. In this research article, we analyze the complementary relationships among new literacies and the multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal perspectives of multiliteracies, along with the pedagogical approach of multiliteracies in English language teaching. By reflecting on these concepts from different perspectives, we explore how their contribution to language education may help conceptualize and advance their practical application in the field. We reflect that there is a need to go beyond the instructional dimension of a multiliteracies pedagogy by bridging the gap between classroom literacy practices and literacies outside of school. We found that many teachers in peripheral spaces have already bridged the gap between the classroom and their students' funds of knowledge, creating opportunities for localized practices to flourish. Nonetheless, the road ahead shows the need to continue striving to build better meaning-making practices to suit the needs of current multimodal, multicultural, and multilingual societies.

Keywords: new literacies; multiliteracies pedagogy; multimodality; multilingualism; multiculturalism



Artículo de reflexión

Para citar este artículo

Álvarez-Valencia, J. A. & Castro-Garcés, Á. Y. (2025). From New Literacies to Multiliteracies: The Language Classroom as a Multilingual, Multicultural, and Multimodal Space, *Folios*, (62), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.17227/folios.62-22226>

Artículo recibido

10 • 10 • 2024

Artículo aprobado

11 • 02 • 2025

Artículo publicado

01 • 07 • 2025



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Das novas literacias às multiliteracias: a sala de aula de línguas como um espaço multilíngue, multicultural e multimodal

Resumo

O cenário comunicativo contemporâneo evoluiu, dando origem a encontros interculturais que abrangem uma ampla gama de discursos, modos de comunicação e práticas de letramento. Conseqüentemente, o letramento passou por múltiplas transformações em conexão com dinâmicas globais socioeconômicas, tecnológicas, políticas e culturais. Conceitos como novas literacias e multiliteracias impactaram a educação, incluindo o ensino de línguas estrangeiras e segundas línguas. Neste artigo, exploramos como o conceito de letramento evoluiu em resposta ao cenário comunicativo contemporâneo e examinamos os desafios e as oportunidades que a Pedagogia das Multiliteracias (PM) apresenta no ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Neste artigo de reflexão, analisamos as relações complementares entre as novas literacias e as perspectivas multilíngues, multiculturais e multimodais das multiliteracias, juntamente com a abordagem pedagógica das multiliteracias no ensino da língua inglesa. Ao refletir sobre esses conceitos a partir de diferentes perspectivas, investigamos como sua contribuição para a educação linguística pode ajudar a conceitualizar e avançar sua aplicação prática na área. Refletimos que é necessário ir além da dimensão instrucional da pedagogia das multiliteracias, aproximando as práticas de letramento em sala de aula das práticas sociais fora da escola. Observamos que muitos professores em espaços periféricos já conseguiram criar pontes entre a sala de aula e os repertórios de conhecimento de seus alunos, fomentando práticas localizadas. No entanto, o caminho a seguir aponta para a necessidade contínua de construir melhores práticas de construção de sentido que atendam às demandas das sociedades multimodais, multiculturais e multilíngues atuais.

Palavras-chave: novas literacias; pedagogia das multiliteracias; multimodalidade; multilinguismo; multiculturalismo

De las nuevas alfabetizaciones a las multialfabetizaciones: el aula de lenguas como un espacio multilingüe, multicultural y multimodal

Resumen

El panorama comunicativo contemporáneo ha evolucionado, dando lugar a encuentros interculturales que abarcan una diversa gama de discursos, modos de comunicación y prácticas de alfabetización. En consecuencia, la alfabetización ha experimentado múltiples transformaciones en conexión con dinámicas globales socioeconómicas, tecnológicas, políticas y culturales. Conceptos como nuevas alfabetizaciones y multialfabetizaciones han impactado la educación, incluyendo la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y segundas lenguas. En este artículo de reflexión, exploramos cómo ha evolucionado el concepto de alfabetización en respuesta al panorama comunicativo contemporáneo y examinamos los desafíos y oportunidades que presenta la Pedagogía de las Multialfabetizaciones (PM) en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Analizamos las relaciones complementarias entre las nuevas alfabetizaciones y las perspectivas multilingües, multiculturales y multimodales de las multialfabetizaciones, junto con el enfoque pedagógico de las multialfabetizaciones en la enseñanza del idioma inglés. Al reflexionar sobre estos conceptos desde distintas perspectivas, exploramos cómo su contribución a la educación lingüística puede ayudar a conceptualizar y avanzar en su aplicación práctica en el campo. Reflexionamos que es necesario ir más allá de la dimensión instrucional de una pedagogía de las multialfabetizaciones, cerrando la brecha entre las prácticas de alfabetización en el aula y aquellas que se realizan fuera de la escuela. Observamos que muchos docentes en espacios periféricos ya han logrado tender puentes entre el aula y los fondos de conocimiento de sus estudiantes, creando oportunidades para que prosperen prácticas localizadas. No obstante, el camino por recorrer muestra la necesidad de seguir construyendo mejores prácticas de construcción de significado que respondan a las necesidades de las sociedades multimodales, multiculturales y multilingües actuales.

Palabras clave: nuevas alfabetizaciones; pedagogía de las multialfabetizaciones; multimodalidad; multilingüismo; multiculturalismo

Introduction

Are we communicating in a different way today than we did three decades ago? The answer is yes; however, it is more pertinent to ask about the causes of such a change in the current communication landscape and the characteristics of contemporary textual habitats (Álvarez Valencia, 2016a). One overarching question that encapsulates the previous two and serves as a focal point of research and academic debate is how the current communication landscape has shaped the concept of literacy.

If literacy, considered a social practice, is one of the principal channels of socialization and identity construction, and language plays a significant role in how people engage in literacy processes, then it follows that shifts in the way societies communicate and access information have implications for education and, particularly, redefine literacy. Along with the turbulence produced by these shifts come challenges to conventional social institutions (Hawisher & Selfe, 2000) and social activity (Kress, 2010). Likewise, it seems imperative to consider new theories of meaning, language, and communication (Álvarez Valencia & Michelson, 2023; Álvarez Valencia, 2016b; Jewitt & Kress, 2003).

The advent of computers and other technological devices is considered the foremost origin of the recent change in the communication landscape and literacy. The processes of globalization and internationalization have not only boosted geopolitical rearrangements but also technological development. This technological progress has ushered in the electronic era, transitioning literacy into the digital age (Kress, 1997).

Kress (1997) identifies three other aspects that paved the way for a new conception of literacy in light of electronic communications. First, the turn to the visual—a “trend towards the visual representation of information which was formerly solely coded in language” (p. 66). Second, the multimodal turn—contemporary technologies facilitate the combination of various modes of communication such as image, sound, written language, and animation among others. This is exemplified by the displacement of writing as the primary medium of dissemination in many domains of communication, favoring image, and the transition from monomodal texts, which used to be language-centered, towards multimodal texts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Third, the development of convergent technologies. Unlike past technologies, in which appliances were designed to perform one main task (radio, TV, telephone)—‘divergent technologies,’—new devices such as mobile phones are designed so that different technologies converge (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Kress, 2010).

The circulation of convergent technologies has had shaping effects on communication and literacy practices due to their ubiquity, availability, and ease of use (Beetham et al., 2009). Several authors have addressed the role of digital devices on literacy. Reinhardt & Thorn (2019), for instance, explore the influence of digital tools on literacy and affirm that “digital information and communication environments have created conditions under which a multifariousness of literacy practices coexist, some of which have emerged recently in informal, decentralized, and non-consolidated forms” (p. 209). In addition, Semington et al. (2017) engage young learners with literacy through booktubing, an alternative 21st-century digital literacy tool, which fosters participation in literacy spaces. These works present options to involve learners in literacy practices that become meaningful for learning.

Having presented this initial backdrop about the relationship between the communication landscape and literacy, and how they have shifted under the premises of social and cultural mobility, geopolitical processes, and the digital era, we propose a reflective examination of the evolving concept of literacy in the contemporary communication landscape. In doing so, we intend the paper to be informative but at the same time reflective of the current discussions about multiliteracies. Rather than proposing a new theoretical framework, we synthesize existing perspectives on New Literacies (NL) and Multiliteracies (ML), emphasizing the work done in the last decade on multiliteracies pedagogy (MLP) and its implication for foreign language teaching. Specifically, the paper intends to address the following questions: How has the concept of literacy evolved in response to the contemporary

communication landscape? What challenges and opportunities does Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP) present in foreign language teaching?

New Literacies

The NL perspective developed during the early 2000s and built upon the sociocultural tradition originating from New Literacy Studies (NLS). The NLS school had emerged as a reaction to the transmissive, skills-based, psychologically oriented, decontextualized, and dichotomic (literate/illiterate) premises that founded the traditional ideology of literacy (Mills, 2006). Starting in the mid-1980s, NLS proposed that knowledge and literacies were constructions of particular social groups through their engagement in multiple and diverse social practices, informed by specific social, cultural, historical, and epistemological conditions (Baker, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, 2011; Reinhardt & Thorn, 2019; The New London Group, 1996). As a result, literacy denoted a situated social practice (Street, 1995), “something that people do in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 7).

Unlike NLS, the focal vision of NL is the new forms of literacy afforded by both new communication practices and information technologies, mainly digital electronic devices, and their novel forms of social activity that need to be recognized as literacy practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Lankshear & Knobel (2007) distinguish between NL and emerging literacies. Some typical examples of NL resulting from digital technologies include “video gaming, fan fiction writing, weblogging, using websites to participate in affinity practices, and social practices involving mobile computing” (p. 1), while an illustration of emergent literacies—which might have little or nothing to do with digital devices—is Zines: a literacy practice of certain groups who circulate ‘defiantly personal’ texts (graffiti, typed texts, drawn or photocopied images, stickers, etc.) that subvert mainstream cultural discourses and values. In brief, the NL project assumes literacy to be “socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or, as members of Discourses)” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 4).

Literacy practices need to be recognized as social practices that afford meaning-making and meaning exchange. Central to the process of meaning-making is the way in which texts find structure. Lankshear & Knobel (2007) use the term encoded texts to mean the forms in which texts have been ‘captured’ so that they can be transportable and retrievable. As a result, texts are freed from their immediate context of production and independent of the physical presence of the producer. Traditionally, books were the principal medium through which meaning was encoded, but with the advent of the digital age, podcasts, videocasts like YouTube, fanfiction websites, social networks etc., have made available new ways of encoding texts. The authors adopt Gee’s (2001) view of discourse in which meaning-making is mediated by encoded texts that in turn index individual and group identification, identities, and ways of being and doing in the world.

Concerning NL and their ideological and practical nature, Lankshear & Knobel (2007) distinguished between ‘ethos stuff’ and ‘technical stuff.’ The ‘ethos stuff’ regards the new philosophies that undergird current literacy practices, while the technical stuff concerns the literacy practices made available by digital electronic apparatuses. We have grouped the main formulations—as stated by different scholars (Gee, 2001; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, 2011; The New London Group, 1996)—that represent the ‘ethos’ of NL and that, as we will see below, can further be extended to principles of ML:

- NL are participatory, collaborative, and distributed, contrary to conventional literacies that are individuated, author-centric, and characterized by asymmetric relationships between authors/experts and text users. Textual production and publication in the digital age have changed, enlarging the possibilities of dissemination of work through different media and in different modes of communication and genres.

- In NL, the book as the text paradigm declines and is replaced by a multitude of text types created through experimentation, hybridization, and unconventional uses of language, genre patterns, and other affordances of digital devices.
- The affordances underlying new digital technologies require a set of social practices, skills, strategies, and dispositions for their effective use. For example, users of the internet need to learn both the technicalities and the tacit rules of interaction that govern digital spaces such as Facebook, multiuser online games, chat, etc.
- NL enact a different epistemological view, in which knowledge has grown unstable due to promotion of values like inclusion and expertise sharing, and by widening the reach, breadth, and pace of information mobilization. As a result, knowledge and learning emerge from the exchanges of experiences and knowledge that interactants bring along to digital and electronic interactions. In short, the structure of the web lends itself to constructivist environments of learning.
- Digital environments that enact NL render implications for literacy education, in that the school institution is no longer the main center of knowledge production and distribution. NL have de-spatialized, de-temporalized, and de-centralized learning, which have traditionally been anchored in school institutions. As a corollary, the cyberspace has developed into a space that coexists with physical space.
- NL also challenge researchers. In the light of the changes in the way knowledge is accessed, constructed, and disseminated, and the textual habitats (multimodal texts) that have accrued from NL practices, educationalists and researchers are required to re-vision the epistemological principles and methods that have traditionally regulated their fields.
- In connection to the changeability of knowledge, NL are deictic, meaning that they are context-bound and in continuous transformation, trying to keep up with fast technological changes and the burgeoning requirement for new competencies.
- Although several authors have expressed concerns regarding the dangers of what they have called the digital divide, there is agreement that NL are:

more inclusive, more egalitarian, more responsive to human needs, interests and satisfactions, and they model the ideal of people working together for collective good and benefit, rather than pitting individuals against one another in the cause of maintaining social arrangements that divide people radically along lines of success, status, wealth, and privilege. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 86)

- NL are informed by the politics and economic agendas of the postindustrial era, which among others, see products as enabling services rather than commodities. They also value decenteredness, hybridity, collectiveness, continuity, and fluidity, all of which materialize in cyberspace.
- NL impact all spheres of individuals and social groups. The new textual encodings, facilitated by digital and electronic technologies, impact identity construction and performativity of gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-cultural affiliations. Social media, for example, has become a space for the construction and maintenance of social relationships, political activism, and generally identity performance.
- NL practices exemplify the dynamics of the current communication landscape in that textual designs are multimodal and meaning-making is “primarily multisensory, multimodal, emotional, neural, embodied, embedded, and distributed” (Álvarez Valencia, 2023, p. 178).

Several of the tenets of the NL project align greatly with ML. Overall, both proposals agree on the same principles presented above, although the ML approach leans towards a semiotic view, foregrounds prominently the theory of multimodality, and intends to impact educational practice directly by proposing a pedagogical approach.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP): A Multilingual, Multicultural, and Multimodal Perspective

In a seminal paper published in 1996, the New London Group introduced the term multiliteracies pedagogy to address the changing demands and the challenges that literacy education faces in view of the “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies... [in the] context of ... culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies” (p. 61).

ML, as well as NLS and NL, draws on a range of areas of inquiry, mainly critical literacy, discourse studies, genre studies, systemic functional linguistics, gender studies, critical cultural studies, and social semiotics (Jewitt, 2009). Different from previous approaches to literacy, the New London Group designed a pedagogical framework intended to respond to the new communication landscape and textual habitats that stem from global capitalism and the new demands of the workforce (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008).

Research assessing this pedagogical framework in diverse geographical contexts and with diverse populations has been published, mainly discussing how literacy comes closer to classroom practice through a MLP (Kulju et al., 2018; Hong & Hua, 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). Hong & Hua (2020) review the concept of ML in educational settings and analyze how it has converged with multimodality to foster meaningful learning practices that are inclusive of diverse technological tools. Likewise, Kulju et al. (2018) align with the original idea of the New London Group that saw ML as an opportunity to promote diversity by bringing together “not only literacy practices in the school environment, but also those at home and in various other cultural contexts and situations...” (p. 86).

By directly linking literacy to sociodemographic, technological, and communication practices of current multilingual societies—characterized by multilingual and multimodal text design—The New London Group (1996, also Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; 2009) reconceptualized literacy practices, giving way to a ML approach. ML was then proposed as a pedagogical approach (MLP) to literacies that makes the classroom more inclusive of linguistic, cultural, communicative, and technological diversity. The New London Group used the term ML under two important premises: “The multiplicity of communication channels and media, and the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). A MLP offers multiple ways for learners to navigate their changing contexts and realities through awareness of meaning-making processes. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) argue that “mere literacy remains centered on language only... while a MLP, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone, which differ according to culture, and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects” (p. 5). Furthermore, unlike previous paradigms of literacy, MLP highlights the need for a social and culturally responsive curriculum through which teachers and students become agents of change and, therefore, designers of social futures, workplace futures, public futures, and community futures (The New London Group, 1996, p. 65).

Recently, scholars have revisited the concept of ML and explored the diverse contexts where it has been applied (Zhang et al., 2019); they have also addressed its social component and its potential to support specific learning environments. One challenge noticed is the lack of specific guidelines for bringing the concept closer to the language classroom, although a growing body of work focuses on making this integration. For example, Pires Pereira & Campos (2021) propose what they call “focalization of specific narratives”, in which participants are not alien to the narratives being read but they assume an active role in the environments being recreated. Other studies have examined MLP in relation to identity construction (Vorobel et al., 2020), while others have explored issues of gender, or employed it as a pedagogical guide to teach English (Mirhosseini & Emadi, 2022). The many areas that a MLP has engaged with commonly take advantage of technological, social, and cultural spaces, contributing to individuals’ diversity and leading them through learning opportunities that facilitate meaning-making and sense-making.

The MLP project aims to answer questions regarding how the current social context of learning and the consequences of social changes shape the content (what) and form (how) of literacies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009a, 2009b; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Many of these changes in the sociocultural and communication landscape were contemplated above under the rubric of New Literacies. In setting the agenda for the ML proposal, its advocates depart from the analysis of textual practices, modes of meaning, representational resources of screen-based genres, non-linear reading practices, changes in the roles between text producers and consumers, and changes in the ways people produce, process, and transmit meaning in virtual environments, among others.

The Multiliteracies' Pedagogical Approach

In order to account for the 'what' of MLP, the New London Group introduced the concept of "design," which describes both the active process of meaning-making through semiotic resources and the organization structure that stems from the act of designing. Design involves three elements: *available design*, *designing*, *the redesigned*. In literacy practices, meaning-makers make use of *available designs* or semiotic resources to make meaning. For instance, the linguistic mode of communication offers semiotic resources that include inter alia, style, tone, dialects, gesture, lexical choices, etc. Each mode of communication (image, sound, spoken language, etc.) is composed of several affordances that become available to design a text. The process of *designing* involves making meaning by establishing intertextual relationships and articulating features of various modes of communication and discursive practices to create new textual conventions. Finally, the *redesign constitutes* the new meaning flourishing from the creative process of meaning-making.

The MLP draws heavily on the theory of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010), which constitutes the landmark of the current communication landscape. Multimodality features the ensemble of different modes of communication that co-occur and interact purposefully to make meaning. The New London Group identifies six major areas of design that describe patterns or modes of meaning (modes of communication). These areas involve: Linguistic Design (e.g., vocabulary and metaphor, modality, transitivity, grammar); Audio Design (e.g., music, sound effects, etc.); Spatial Design (e.g., layout, spatial distribution); Gestural Design (e.g., behavior, gesture, sensuality, kinesics); Visual design (e.g., color, perspective, vectors); and Multimodal design, which corresponds to the meaning-making that arises from the interaction between several modes.

In a classroom, the modes of meaning outlined above help materialize the four components of MLP: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009a, 2009b; Kalantzis & Cope, 2004, 2008; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). The four components of MLP respond to the 'how' of the proposal: **Situated practices** is the pedagogical action that draws on the experience of meaning-making that takes place in students' life worlds, public realm, and workplaces. This dimension entails that the curriculum considers learners' sociocultural needs and identities, making their "previous and current experiences, as well as their extra-school communities and discourses, ... an integral part of the learning experience" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 85). **Overt Instruction** denotes the processes of conceptualization in which learners build a metalanguage of Design by naming or theorizing about the form, content, and function of Design processes and Design components (modes of meaning). In other words, it is the stage through which the learner is scaffolded by a teacher or expert to raise awareness and control over what is being learned. Through **Critical Framing** learners are engaged in a process of critical inquiry of what they are learning by examining it in relation to "the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice" (p. 86). Finally, in **Transformed Practice**, learners are encouraged to appropriately and creatively apply the concepts learned, involving engagement with meaning by applying it in different contexts or cultural sites to transform social practices.

Recently, however, **Cope & Kalantzis (2009b)** explained that after a decade of revision of the initial proposal of ML, they have reframed these pedagogical components, “translated them into more immediately recognizable pedagogical acts or “knowledge processes” of *experiencing*, *conceptualizing*, *analyzing* and *applying*” (p. 184) (see **Figure 1**). Overall, these terms represent the same formulation that was initially proposed by the New London Group but provide further detail about how to better interpret each pedagogical move. For example:

- *Experiencing* takes two forms: experiencing the known (representations, perspectives, etc.) and experiencing the new (e.g., unfamiliar situations, texts, experiences).
- *Conceptualizing* involves both conceptualizing by naming and conceptualizing with theory.
- *Analyzing* involves analyzing functionally (establishing functional relations, such as cause and effect between texts) and analyzing critically (evaluation of one’s and other’s perspectives, motives, and interests).
- *Applying* involves applying appropriately (applying knowledge to real-world situations and testing its validity) and applying creatively (producing transformation in the world).

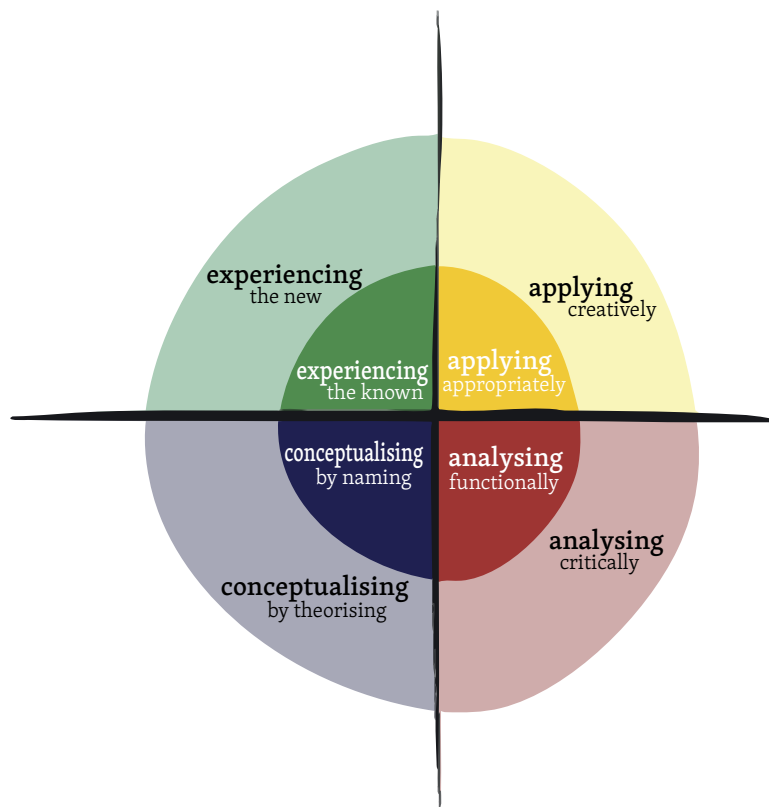


Figure 1. Knowledge Processes of MLP

Source: Taken from Newlearningonline.com (Kalantzis & Cope, 2024).

Cope & Kalantzis (2000, 2009a, 2009b) and **Kalantzis & Cope (2004, 2008)** have also extended the theoretical framework of ML by proposing the concept of Learning by Design. They establish that Learning by Design refers to one of the main features that distinguishes education from everyday learning, namely that while:

everyday learning happens in ways that are relatively unconscious, haphazard and tacit ... [w]ithin education, curriculum is a consciously designed framework for learning a body of knowledge, ...[a]nd within curriculum, pedagogy is the conscious application of knowledge processes to the task of learning. (**Kalantzis & Cope, 2004, p. 40**).

Moreover, the authors state that in Learning by Design, learning is approached in a deliberate (conscious, systematic, and explicit), efficient (structured and goal-oriented), and exophoric (for and about the ‘outsider’ world) manner. Overall, the concept of design involves not only the teachers’ pedagogical designs of learning but also the students’ designed constructions of meaning (Jewitt, 2009).

Cope & Kalantzis (2000, 2009a, 2009b) suggest that in an environment where Learning by Design takes place, five dimensions of meaning come into play (see Figure 2). The first dimension focuses on the understanding of what meanings refer to—Representational Meaning; the second looks at the relations are established between the meaning makers involved in the construction of a text and the text itself—Social Meaning; the third concerns how ensembles of meaning work together—Organizational Meaning; the fourth concentrates on how meanings fit into the larger social context—Contextual meaning; and the last one examines how meanings respond to the interest of meaning-makers—Ideological Meaning.

Dimension	Question to add depth to meaning
Representational	What do meanings refer to?
Social	How do meanings connect the persons they involve?
Organizational	How do the meanings hang together?
Contextual	How do the meanings fit into the larger world of meaning?
Ideological	Whose interests are the meanings skewed to serve?

Figure 2. Five dimensions of learning of MLP

Source: Adapted from Sawa (2019, p. 197).

MLP is still under ongoing development and has been especially applied in the Australian, South African, Greek, and Malaysian contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b; Kulju et al., 2018). Applications are varied; some follow closely the principles laid out by the New London Group, while others have enriched the framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009a, 2009b; Kalantzis & Cope, 2004, 2008). Others have integrated principles of systemic functional linguistics (Unsworth, 2001) or have foregrounded the conceptual elements of multimodality theory (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). One area in which the MLP has grown steadily over the past decade is in foreign and second language education, particularly in English language teaching. This first section has examined how the concept of literacy has evolved in response to the contemporary communication landscape. The next section delves into the challenges and opportunities that MLP presents in foreign language teaching.

MLP in English Language Teaching: Research and Classroom Applications

MLP has contributed to second and foreign language research through works developed across different areas. Blyth (2018) explored students’ subjective experiences and textual engagement through a MLP, while investigating how becoming immersed in a new language might affect or co-construct identity. Other studies have investigated the relationship between MLP and digital practices (Amicucci, 2014) and sociocultural realities (Curwood & Cowell, 2011). MLP has also been used to interpret how communities engage in reading practices and use semiotic resources to make meaning (Areiza et al., 2014; Álvarez Valencia, 2016a; Losada & Suaza, 2018; Medina et al., 2015). A good illustration is the research by Medina et al. (2015), who turned to MLP to help their students critically read their immediate communities as a way to transform their lives. Palpacuer & Christelle (2018) engaged language users in active text and art design through a MLP. They affirm that: “in the process, connections were established between texts, between texts and the participants as readers/viewers and learners, and between texts and potential students’ learning in the L2 classroom” (p. 146). Additionally, Bull & Anstey (2010) implemented MLP in a professional development program which motivated participants to carry out pedagogical changes in their

classrooms. One relevant conclusion of this study is that MLP goes “beyond the discipline of English” (p. 142) and should be an integral part of all areas of education.

The push to go beyond decontextualized language teaching has urged teachers to explore ML to connect language and content and bring relevance and meaning into foreign language learning (Allen & Paesani, 2010). Teacher education has also seen the need to include approaches that account for linguistic and sociocultural diversity in teacher education programs. These programs have adopted a MLP to help preservice teachers develop a broader understanding of literacy practices that are inclusive, ongoing, multilingual, and that combine the old and the new (Rowse et al., 2008). More work, however, is required to make sense of teachers’ literacy practices and understandings, which include multiple modes of communication and a variety of possibilities to enact ML.

Some scholars have drawn on principles of MLP to promote students’ critical engagement and cultural awareness (Angay-Crowder et al., 2013; Boche, 2014; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014; The New London Group, 1996). For instance, Angay-Crowder et al. (2013) implemented the four components (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice) of MLP to teach multilingual kids. Through digital storytelling, they designed multimodal tasks to engage learners in ML and the exploration of their multiple identities. The authors acknowledge that this approach is powerful in strengthening multilingualism and multiculturalism, praising the role of ML for yielding better language learning opportunities and enhancing students’ meaning-making and critical inquiry.

At the local level in Colombia, there have been significant developments in expanding views on literacy towards a multiliteracies perspective. For example, Clavijo-Olarte (2021) advocates for recognizing literacy as a central theme in teacher education programs, emphasizing that literacy, mediated by community practices and various means of communication, becomes a social and a meaningful practice. López-Gil (2024) reflects on the possibilities that multiliteracies bring to language teachers, acknowledging the changing multimodal environments they encounter both during university studies and after graduation. Additionally, Blandón-Ramírez & Colombo (2024), from a critical perspective, reflect upon the role of new literacy studies as social practice in connecting with decolonial perspectives. The authors call for educational and social research in the field that actively involves communities and social organizations.

Several studies in Colombia have explored practical applications of multiliteracies pedagogy, emphasizing community engagement and critical literacy in language education. An interesting study is Nieto’s (2018) project, which applies principles of MLP alongside community-based pedagogies, incorporating local knowledge into curriculum planning to recognize diversity and cultural knowledge as essential to understanding ourselves and others. Her study provides specific pedagogical strategies conceived by practitioners to improve their teaching practices while exploring local knowledge. To do this, they participated in collective activities and connected with members of the community to create more contextualized teaching content. Mora-Menjura (2021) adopts a critical perspective on reading multimodal texts to foster awareness of social issues and develop critical reading skills in English classes. The author uses cartoons to offer an alternative, yet multimodal, approach to exploring literacies while engaging with the social and critical foundations essential to language learning.

MLP has certainly gained traction since its initial proposal (The New London Group, 1996). However, it has been reframed and complemented (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009a, 2009b) in ways that make it more comprehensive and provide greater detail for its implementation. MLP has undoubtedly contributed to language education in many ways, some of which we will reflect on below.

The Transformative Potential of Multiliteracies Pedagogy in Language Education

The previous studies provide meaningful illustrations of how the integration of multilingual, multicultural and multimodal principles in MLP has impacted the language classroom and, in many cases, institutional curriculum.

Michelson & Dupuy (2014), who developed a project based on a MLP in a language class, attest to this by pointing out that “MLP have been taken up both as curricular reform projects as well as instructional techniques” (p. 25). The foreign language classroom and the curriculum have become vehicles to explore students’ realities through context-driven ML practices. The social semiotic perspective underlying MLP affords valuable insights concerning a broader understanding of communication and how people design meanings through a variety of means in particular social settings (Álvarez Valencia, 2023). MLP has provided tools for educators to engage in reflection and build strategies to make their teaching practices more inclusive of multiple languages, multiple cultures, and multiple modes, thus favoring meaningful and contextualized language learning.

Taken together, the instructional components of MLP and the five dimensions of meaning outlined in Learning by Design constitute an important contribution to education. The proposal brings into focus dimensions that coalesce in classrooms and greatly influence learning and teaching, such as the diverse languages or dialects of students, their cultures, and the multiple modes of meaning that they draw upon in communicative practices. It examines the impact and potentiality of digital technologies and text design in pedagogical practice from a broader perspective (cultural, technological, communicational), highlighting the role of meaning-making and how it should be addressed in the classroom.

The broad nature of the theoretical and methodological principles of MLP has made it applicable to a variety of contexts, populations and educational levels. Although it may initially have been conceived as a proposal for early literacy education in the L1, it has been applied at educational levels that range from primary to higher education (Bull & Anstey, 2010), including first language (Hepple et al., 2014) as well as second and foreign language education (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Blyth, 2018; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014), and other disciplines such as social studies (Tricamo, 2021). It has encouraged multimodal curricular planning to support learning beyond school, emphasizing the socio-cultural nature of schooling. This is possible thanks to the wealth of possibilities MLP brings for interaction, real-life communication, and meaning-making in the language classroom.

Reflecting on the work of Kim & Omerbašić (2017), it becomes clear that MLP, with its inclusion of networks and interconnectivity, can offer meaningful ways to enter new communities and explore their literacy and cultural practices. Their study, which invited adolescents to engage with transnational textual and multimodal practices, highlights the transformative potential of stepping into others’ ways of living. While their context is unique and its generalizability may be limited, it resonates with the work of Michelson & Dupuy (2014), who used MLP to reshape learners’ identities and experiences with foreign languages. Both studies remind us of the importance of creating opportunities where language users not only learn about others’ cultures but also embody these practices through rich, multilingual experiences. These approaches encourage us to rethink how learning a language is also about embracing new perspectives and ways of being in the world.

Perhaps, the work of one of the authors of this paper (Castro Garcés, 2022) better showcases the transformative potential of MLP outlined above. This pedagogical experience took place during a semester with prospective English language teachers of a course on understanding and producing texts in English. One of the main objectives was to articulate the principles of MLP with the area of intercultural communication, exploring the process of increasing intercultural awareness in order to develop an understanding of how ML can foster this development. Drawing on the four “knowledge processes” of MLP, the teacher first helped students become immersed in new situations in which they could make global-to-local connections through the exploration of globally-situated narratives—*experiencing*. The stage of *conceptualizing* involved making sense of new concepts and building new knowledge from these experiences. *Analyzing* was undertaken through the evaluation of students’ own perceptions and by enacting their concepts and beliefs. Finally, *applying* was possible through the connection and application of concepts, ideas, and perspectives with the real world around them.

One task that exemplifies the knowledge processes is described here. Preservice teachers were asked to present a narrative describing how their literacy process was mediated by their funds of knowledge. Their first task explored concepts such as literacy practices and funds of knowledge and how these related to their own experiences as the basis for their narratives (*conceptualizing*). After developing that understanding, they wrote, audio- or video-recorded narratives about their cultural and literacy backgrounds. Then, they shared their narratives with their classmates so that the person who received them could read them, watch them or listen to them (*experiencing*). In this way, students could experience the old and the new, acknowledge their own processes, and understand their classmates' literacy journeys. While reading, they took notes on aspects they found remarkable, moving, or relatable (*analyzing*). Thus, the possibility of knowing and scrutinizing specific facts in the stories of their classmates helped develop intercultural awareness. Afterwards, each student chose to represent one of the stories—the feelings and reactions that it evoked—through a comic strip, a timeline, or another visual resource (*applying*). Figure 3 shows Paula, one of the participants, presenting her interpretation of her classmate Manuel's literacy background. This exercise had a dual purpose: first, to engage participants in a narrative that uncovered their funds of knowledge, raised self-cultural awareness, and identified multiliteracy practices. Second, to allow them to understand others' funds of knowledge and develop intercultural awareness through multiliteracy practices. Through this task, students gained new knowledge, fostering empathy and strengthening intercultural connections.



Figure 3. Funds of Knowledge in Literacy: Manuel's story Illustrated by Paula

One of the main conclusions of the pedagogical experience is that through MLP, preservice teachers developed a deeper understanding of others' realities while also reflecting on their own. They leveraged the language they were learning to access global literacies and diverse funds of knowledge through multimodal tasks. In doing so, they cultivated intercultural awareness, moved beyond a limited nationalist perspective to culture, and embraced a more intersectional view of others. Unveiling early literacy practices was possible through funds of knowledge, allowing students to bring their own knowledge and ways of being into the classroom. By doing so, they built meaningful classroom practices that included multiple modes of communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a) and intercultural understandings.

The diverse tasks students completed enabled them to gain local and global knowledge, challenge stereotypes, and diversify their views through different types of engagement (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). They completed the knowledge process components of a MLP by *experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying* the learnings gained from stories and which they engaged with through tasks that motivated discussion on multiple identities. They approached knowledge beyond its informational value (Kramsch, 2009) and avoided essentializing cultural practices.

The pedagogy of multiliteracies fostered critical decision-making because students were required to produce and read multimodal texts that encouraged them to think and rethink about their positions regarding issues involving gender, social class, race, culture, and disability. Through various analyses and discussions, students recognized the intersectional categories (Block & Corona, 2017) that shape individuals and play a role in cultural encounters. They reflected on the multiple layers of culture without allowing subjective experiences (Kramsch, 1993) to impose stereotyped narratives on others. Broadly speaking, the pedagogy of multiliteracies presented an alternative for students to gain intercultural awareness through varied modes of communication and language and cultural practices that began in the classroom and connected with their real-life past and present experiences.

In short, by examining the various studies reviewed and Castro Garcés' pedagogical implementation, we can summarize the multiple contributions of MLP to ELT, highlighting how it has enabled educators to:

- Integrate multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal principles
- Reform curricula and instructional techniques
- Expand understanding of communication
- Promote inclusive teaching practices
- Leverage digital technologies and text design
- Enhance broad applicability in different educational contexts
- Encourage multimodal curricular planning
- Explore new communities and cultural practices
- Reshape identities and experiences
- Adopt an intersectional view of others
- Develop intercultural awareness

While these contributions highlight the significant impact of a MLP on the language teaching field, it is also important to recognize the persistent challenges that must still be addressed.

Work Ahead: Challenges MLP Face in ELT

Despite its growth, the paradigm of ML at the practical level faces multiple challenges that have persisted since its inception. At the core of MLP is the multimodal nature inherent in contemporary literacy and communication practices, which questions the verbocentric tradition in literacy and communication studies (Álvarez Valencia, 2016a, b). Although multiliteracy approaches have challenged the hegemonic verbocentricism of traditional literacy, *Linguistic Design* still constitutes the main semiotic mode in most educational contexts. In several contexts, MLP continues to struggle to raise awareness about the multimodal nature of meaning-making and the ways in which the production, reception, and distribution of information—transformed by new technologies—confront educators with changes in how meaning is made, sent, received, and interpreted (Albers & Harste, 2007).

One of the challenges of integrating ML into the curriculum is moving beyond grammar-focused teaching to foster more meaningful learning (Warner & Dupuy, 2018). One way to create meaningful learning opportunities

is by adapting or developing contextualized teaching materials that cater for students' needs and sociocultural realities. Nevertheless, potential obstacles such as lack of curricular flexibility, teacher training gaps, and standardized assessment practices may hinder this integration. Institutional support is central if MLP is to find a place in the language classroom; yet many educational systems remain resistant due to rigid policies, limited professional development opportunities, and competing pedagogical approaches. The possibility of adopting MLP also depends on the educational level.

As **Castro Garcés (2022)** demonstrated in her pedagogical experience, university contexts may offer greater openness to such pedagogical innovations due to academic freedom and more flexible curricula. In contrast, elementary and high school settings are often subject to stricter curriculum guidelines, heavier reliance on traditional and standardized assessment practices, and less autonomy to implement novel pedagogical proposals. Addressing these challenges requires both institutional support and professional development initiatives that equip teachers with the necessary tools to understand the philosophical and practical tenets of MLP and adapt them to their own teaching contexts.

In many cases, the more philosophical tenets of the ML perspective have not yet been sufficiently considered, while the focus has remained on the instructional dimension. Aspects related to the 'new mentality' concerning epistemological practices—how knowledge is constructed and negotiated differently—and the ontological underpinnings of the shifting conditions of text production and meaning-making in relation to ways of being in the (physical/digital) world (**Lankshear & Knobel, 2007**) often seem overlooked in the implementation of MLP.

The integration of the critical dimension, which is part of the five dimensions of MLP, frequently falls short for several reasons, including the complexities of critically analyzing ideological meanings behind texts, lack of teacher preparation to facilitate critical discussions, institutional constraints that prioritize standardized assessments over critical engagement, limited access to diverse and representative materials, and resistance from educational stakeholders who may perceive critical literacy as controversial or unnecessary.

Although some work on the area has addressed critical issues such as identity construction (**Blyth, 2018; Vorobel et al., 2020**), other areas—including issues of race, ethnicity, gender—remain underexplored, highlighting the need for further research and pedagogical engagement. As **Schroeter (2019)** argues, "updating multiliteracies frameworks so as to better account for the networks of power that circulate in classrooms" (p. 142) is essential to help "accomplished the aims of inclusion and social justice laid out by the New London Group" (p. 143). To this end, Schroeter advocates for pedagogies that explicitly emphasize decolonization and antiracism through Drama as Multimodal, (Post)Critical, and Embodied Pedagogy.

Multimodality plays a central role in ML since there is a direct connection between emergent literacy practices and novel assemblages of communication modes. This connection has given birth to new textual genres, textual habitats and forms of meaning-making and meaning dissemination. However, these new dynamics of text creation and meaning-making have also posed challenges. For instance, **Prain (1997)** criticizes that the five modes of meaning proposed in ML have "opened up an unwieldy number of text types to be addressed in literacy education. This creates a daunting task for formal analysis, requiring tools that the New London Group has not provided" (p. 32). In fact, this limitation is inherited from the field of multimodality, which has been critiqued for the lack of specific methods and procedures for analysis (**Bateman, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Kaltenbacher, 2004**). Furthermore, **Prain (1997)** notes that the theoretical and practical foundations of the design elements are not concrete enough to formulate curriculum frameworks. Others, such as **Jewitt (2009)**, contend that ML studies offer scant analysis of their impact on teaching and learning due to their small-scale, ethnographic, and case-based nature. Addressing these challenges requires further research to develop more concrete analytical frameworks and pedagogical guidelines to help practitioners navigate the complexities of multimodal texts. Moreover, teacher education

programs should include training in multimodal analysis, material design, and pedagogical implementation to enable prospective educators to integrate MLP in meaningful and practical ways.

On the subject of assessment, Warschauer (2010) adds that given the emphasis on literacy as a social practice, it is necessary to question traditional ways of measuring literacy; nonetheless, new forms of measurement should be promoted. Finally, considering that digital technologies are central to ML, Beetham et al. (2009) argue that even though the digital divide may be getting narrower, at another level it seems to be deepening since its impact is more profound on learners who have limited access to digital technologies. This is a reality that was evident during the Covid-19 Pandemic. According to Janssen (2022), around 43% (some 700 million students) did not have internet access at home while about 56 million students lived in remote locations which were not served by mobile networks.

MLP has also brought attention to the need for better teacher preparation to integrate technology into classrooms and for schools to bridge the gap between the literacies occurring inside and outside of school (Albers & Harste, 2007; Baker, 2000). Teachers and students alike are called to assume new roles given these new educational conditions (Villaba & Álvarez Valencia, 2024). By and large, it is possible that some of the challenges outlined above have been overcome in certain educational settings, making the aims of MLP more attainable. Yet, we should not forget that at the practical level, new pedagogical paradigms take longer to settle in peripheral circles of the academy, and they might take even longer to be fully understood, adapted, and adopted. In the case of Colombia, some authors have engaged in the study of ML from a pedagogical perspective (Areiza et al., 2014; Losada & Suaza, 2018; Medina et al., 2015; Nieto, 2018), in attempts to design pedagogical strategies that contribute to language learning. Specifically, Clavijo-Olarte (2007) and Mora (2016) have paved the way for the study of literacy in ELT. Clavijo-Olarte (2007) has inquired into the role of literacy at different levels of education, reflecting on primary school students, preservice teachers', and in-service teachers' understandings of literacy practices and advocating for the integration of school subjects to nurture more meaningful literacy practices. Notwithstanding, the research on ML and the implementation or adaptation of MLP in the Colombian context is still scant (Castro Garcés, 2022). In the field of foreign language education, there is a growing interest in multimodality and its pedagogical applications (Álvarez Valencia, 2021; Fernández Benavides, 2019); however, a clear pedagogical framework such as the one offered by MLP is still lacking.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how the concept of literacy has evolved in response to the contemporary communication landscape and examined the challenges and opportunities that Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP) presents in foreign language teaching. Literacy studies have moved alongside contemporary changes and societal challenges that impinge on educational practice. The ML perspective draws on the condition of contemporary societies, which are marked by a diversity of diversities regarding languages, cultural groups, technological developments, and ways of meaning-making and text design. The philosophical tenets of the initial formulation of *The New London Group* (1996) remain, to a great extent, valid, while the pedagogical processes proposed in MLP have been modified to make them more understandable and to facilitate operability. MLP has been adopted and adapted in several areas of the curriculum, including foreign and second language education.

The field of second and foreign language—widely dominated by communicative language teaching and its multifarious manifestations, including task-based language teaching and content-based language teaching—has gradually transcended verbocentric (language-centered) views of communication. It has moved towards expanded comprehensions where communication is understood as a multimodal and intercultural process. Such understanding has opened the door for other pedagogical perspectives, such as MLP, which are now being

integrated into language courses in diverse ways. In Colombia, the locus of enunciation of the authors, MLP is still relatively new, with a few scholars and teachers exploring this perspective. The conjunction of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multimodality in the ML perspective undoubtedly introduces new elements that are alien to traditional foreign language teaching approaches. With the increasing influence of sociocultural, ecological, and sociosemiotic perspectives in language education, we can anticipate that MLP has the potential to significantly expand our understanding of the relationships between language, communication, culture, context, and identity.

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