CAPÍTULO V

CRITICAL LITERACIES AND MULTILITERACIES FRAMEWORK TO EMBRACE PRESERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER'S READING AND WRITING PRACTICES: INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to find out the preservice English teacher's reading and writing practices in embracing critical literacies and multiliteracies. During a two semesters long, in an elective course, we observed, discussed and advocated to them approaching texts, the lesson design and their implementation through the lens of repositioning and empowering them as resistant to social injustices and as guiders of the new generation of a more conscious and independent citizen. The research questions at the heart of this research were: what are preservice reading and writing practices? And how can preservice teachers connect these reading and writing practices to the development of critical literacies and multiliteracies teaching and learning practices? The results of the research showed the way preservice English teachers think, reflect, question and problematize texts to design their lesson plans, in times of the Colombian Peace agreement whose focus is on social education and the reintegration process. Conclusions of this research displayed the need to continue working on reading and writing practices that are part of the student's own realities, to use different texts to provoke self-reflection, consciousness and transformation, and to empower the preservice teachers to be constructors of knowledge and creators of more inclusive school curricula.

Key words: critical literacies, multiliteracies, preservice English teachers, transformation.

MARCO DE LITERACIDADES CRÍTICAS Y MULTILITERACIDADES PARA ADOPTAR LAS PRÁCTICAS DE LECTURA Y ESCRITURA DE LOS PROFESORES DE INGLÉS EN FORMACIÓN: PERSPECTIVAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación cualitativa es determinar las prácticas de lectura y escritura de los profesores de inglés en formación para fortalecer el desarrollo de las literacidades críticas y las multiliteracidades. Durante dos semestres y en el desarrollo de un curso electivo, observamos, discutimos y les apoyamos para acceder a diferentes textos, y en el diseño e implementación de sus planes de clase bajo la óptica de reposicionarlos y empoderarlos ante las injusticias sociales y guiaran a las nuevas generaciones de ciudadanos más conscientes e independientes. Las preguntas de investigación centrales fueron: ¿cuáles son las prácticas de lectura y escritura de los profesores en formación? ¿Cómo pueden los profesores en formación conectar las prácticas de lectura y escritura con el desarrollo de literacidades críticas y multiliteracidades? Los resultados de esta investigación evidencian la forma cómo los profesores de inglés en formación piensan, reflexionan, interrogan y problematizan los textos para diseñar sus planes de clase, en tiempos de los acuerdos de paz en Colombia, el cual se enfoca en la educación social y en procesos de reinserción. Las conclusiones de esta investigación dejan ver la necesidad de continuar trabajando en prácticas de lectura y escritura que hagan parte de la propia realidad de los estudiantes, el uso de diferentes clases de textos para provocar la auto-reflexión, la toma de consciencia y transformación, y el empoderamiento de los profesores en formación como constructores de conocimiento y creadores de currículos escolares más inclusivos.

Palabras Clave: literacidades críticas, multiliteracidades, profesores de inglés en formación, transformación.

This work is the result of a finished research study.

Introduction

Reading and writing are essential language skills not only for school purposes but also for social and personal connections and relationships. Reading enables people to understand and be informed about what is happening around the world, as well as gaining new knowledge and constructing meaning. Besides, reading is said to be the foundation for writing Kondrat (2009) bearing in mind that when reading, the brain starts the preparation to develop high thinking processes, strong fundamentals in texts structure, new vocabulary and expressions, transition, voice and narration. Also, reading is a complex process which requires advanced mental processes in order to understand not only implicit but explicit meaning. Doing that, the reader needs to use not only previous knowledge but also making

connections, asking questions, underling or highlighting relevant information, contrasting and summarizing among other techniques in order to get the meaning, understand and interact with the author.

On the other hand, writing is a process to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences and thoughts to shape them into a text with the purpose to have readers and reactors. Both reading and writing demand concentration, reflection and the use of different kinds of techniques, strategies and frameworks to the purpose of interaction, social and cultural relationships. In these sense, the critical literacies and multiliteracies frameworks stand as two pedagogical and didactic references to help preservice English teachers to cope with reading and writing going beyond printed books to include media, sound, videos, songs, pictures, photos and other means of communication. The multiliteracies framework according to Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey (2003) "requires to have a different manner of thinking about texts and assessment" (p. 623), ways which provide preservice English teachers with the possibility to select from a variety of texts and interact with them in a broad and deep way.

In the same, Doering, Beach & O'Brien (2007) argued "think about which media and modality best represent their ideas and how to format their pages in ways that invite their readers to select those links leading readers to relevant information" (p. 43). These last words framed what this research dealt with in terms of practicing reading and writing critically with the English preservice teachers with the purpose of seeing more than an only way of texts, words and lines but reading and writing inside those different texts, words and lines for meaningful learning and practices in the classroom in the duty to prepare future English teachers under the frameworks of critical literacies and multiliteracies.

Situation or problem

The reading and writing practices in the classroom, as well as the conceptions and methods are changing through the years. Reading and writing language skills were a matter of struggles and non-sense practices. Students did not see in reading anything more than a compulsory practice which in most of the cases used printed texts in order to decode, recite them or to answer questions related to implicit information. A similar situation happened with writing. Students were demanded to write paragraphs, narrative or descriptive texts without any connection to their own experiences, previous knowledge, likes and dislikes.

Moreover, the landscape has changed and today reading and writing practices are not only focused to develop language skills but also to give students the opportunity to interact, experiment with texts, meaning construction and empower them with everyday situations, emancipation and social justice. In the case of preservice teacher's preparation, they are allowed to explore this from a wide variety of texts, experiencing different alternatives to solving problems, approaching meaning, and writing bearing in mind their own context, situations and needs. Preservice English teachers are given the chance to read and write from a critical literacies perspective and under the multiliteracies framework to bridge the gap between the theory and the practice. It means to read the word and the world empowering them and promoting democracy and emancipation (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Even so, future English teachers have to face school realities such as non-motivated students, large classes, social inequalities, injustices, lack of resources, discrimination and peace issues emanating from the Ministry of Education to be included in school curricula, and as such the critical literacies and multiliteracies framework can help them to cope with all of these and more social and policy demands.

On top of that, this research with preservice English teacher's kept in mind the multiple possibilities to introduce them to diverse language, cultural and social realities to make them sensible and generators of changes for more democratic and realistic school context.

As a consequence, the development of Critical literacies and multiliteracies frameworks will contribute not only with the integration of language skills but also with the understanding of the worlds cultural and linguistic diversity (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) as well as with the self-reflection and preparation to conjugate the student's needs and the resources around them, the social appropriation, transforming knowledge (Briceño, Coromoto, Chirinos and Alana, 2018) learning how to face hard situations while transforming reading and writing school practices.

Theoretical foundation

Reading and writing

It is well known, that during the language learning process, students have to deal with the different communicative skills and sub-skills and the exercises and activities closely related to them. Reading and writing at school context are a matter of teaching how to read and write from a linguistic point of view. Learning rules and formulas to express ideas, summarize and describe situations and facts. Moreover, reading and writing at this time are assumed using innovative methods which include student's own experiences, resources, likes and dislikes.

Reading is one of the activities that is developed by human beings all the time. In the school, it is imperative to read, particularly when a second/foreign language is being learned. Reading is not only to decode vowels and consonants, reading implies some stages that allow students have the real meaning of the text, for that is very indispensable to improve this process in the classroom, because if the students have the tools to understand, they are able to comprehend and answer in the appropriate way, Mikulecky (2008) argues:

"Reading is a conscious and unconscious thinking process. The reader applies many strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to have intended. The reader does this by comparing information in the text to his or her background knowledge and prior experience". (p. 1)

It is considerable to make especial allusion to the fact that reading is a process that should include knowledge about culture, that is to say involving students with authentic material and showing them aspects regarding to the cultures that are very valuable in the countries where English is a second or a foreign language, and aspects about life, beliefs, practices and conceptions. Mikulecky (2008) contemplates: "In fact, learning to read and

comprehend a second language requires learning a secondary literacy: alternative cultural interpretations, cultural beliefs about language and discourse, and culture specific formal and content schemata". (p. 2)

Reading brings the opportunity to interact with writing, grammar, vocabulary, structure and social context, Wood (2000) asserts that: "Reading involves getting meaning from written words, where the information travels from the page through the eyes and through the brain of the reader," (p. 24)

One of the challenges that students from college or school grapple with is producing a text with a range of qualities, because students need to revise and check what information they are giving to the reader and if this information is clear and according to the aim of the ideas that they have previously conceived. Urquhart & McIver (2005) state that "writing is a recursive process, which means students revise throughout the process, frequently moving back and forth among the stage" (p. 5). It is relevant to mention that students need to be guided into this process, not only because of its complexity but also because its practice demands knowledge about the language and meaning construction.

The Critical Literacies Framework to Language Education

Critical literacies in language education stands as an innovative approach to dismantle text's power, political and discourse relationships which seem to perpetuate discrimination, inequity and social injustices. In that direction, Janks (2014) states "Critical literacy education focuses specifically on the role of language as a social practice and examines the role played by text and discourse in maintaining or transforming these orders" (p. 349). Through the critical literacy framework former and future language teachers have a clear methodological way to transform and change the reading and writing traditional practices to conciliate class discussions, reflection, agency and action. Doing so, preservice teachers had the chance to prove other ways to see texts and understand texts meanings. At this respect, Janks (2014) affirms "This step is important because our students need to understand the connections between the local and the global, between now and the future, and between "us" and our constructed Others" (p. 350). In that way, students understand and connect reading and writing with their own needs and expectations making relations, contrasting and applied it to their own way of life.

On the other hand, Luke (2012) referring to critical literacy relates it with the use of different technological tools to everyday life but he goes further saying "Critical literacy is an overtly political orientation to teaching and learning and to the cultural, ideological and sociolinguistic content of the curriculum. It is focused on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities" (p. 5). In this part, the critical literacies framework is seen as a key component of the school curriculum design keeping in mind, too, the relevant role and participation of the community around the school practices as a predominant issue in the writing and reading practices.

Multiliteracies

Multiliteracies is a term stated in 1994 by the New London's Group, whose aims were to have a more inclusive teaching and learning process where the modes of communication and school practices were surfing among diverse communicative, linguistic, cultural and technological modes of establishing connections, sharing knowledge and interchanging meaning.

A multiliteracies framework tends for the inclusion of a variety of texts including technologies with which students can interact in a collaborative way as creators in a virtual community to influence and impact their own contexts. (Briceño, Coromoto, Chirinos, and Alana, 2018). To put this skill into practice, it is necessary to make changes to the school curriculum, the teacher's development programs and the future teacher's preparation programs (Schools of education) as well the role of governments in investing more in infrastructure and in the acquisition of advanced technological equipment, providing access or interconnection, internet, video, radio, television, newspapers, etc. Cope & Kalantzis (2006) state "this requires teachers to address the 'increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial [and] the behavioral'" (p. 5).

Furthermore, multiliteracies meaning relates the need teachers have in reconceptualizing and reconsidering literacy and literacy practices as multiliteracies using a global mental process broaden the literacy understanding as well as in rethinking pedagogy (Sandreto and Tilson, 2010). Also, multiliteracies considers all kind of texts including technological tools which in these times are of real use and as a great influence and creator of people's tendencies. (Briceño, Coromoto, Chirinos & Alana, 2018)

Methodology

This was a qualitative participatory action research which looked up for the identification of preservice reading and writing practices in order to know if the practices contribute to the development of critical literacies and multiliteracies. The qualitative research process looks for in-depth understanding of social phenomena within the natural setting (Creswell, 1998). It also relied on the way preservice English teacher's experiences as meaning making constructors and how it affected their preparation as future English teachers. The logic of their behaviors, their way of thinking and the manner to plan and implement their classes had to be analyzed at light of qualitative techniques and tools which helped us to see them as agents of change and young future teachers who had all the capacities and disposition to create and recreate their own theories, conceptions and ways of behaving.

A participatory action research (PAR) consisting of a subset of action research, understood as the "systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action and making change" by generating practical knowledge (Gillis and Jackson, 2002, p.264). The idea with this qualitative research was to break down the meaningful inferences that allow us researchers to understand the complete phenomena by all.

A Qualitative Action Research

The idea of working with AR was to examine the preservice English reading and writing practices in order to know the way to connect them to the development of critical literacies and multiliteracies. The assumptions used was that preservice teachers were resourceful, open minded to changes, hard-working, and contributors to working cooperatively. At the same time, we researchers looked for including them as preservice teachers in their own preparation considering working differently (Watts, 1985) by using the critical literacies and multiliteracies framework. The hoped potential impact of this research dealt with the B.A in English curriculum, the preservice English teachers reflection and implementation of the two frameworks, the preservice assessment and their formation as social agents of change and peace makers.

The research took two cycles during the year of research. In the first cycle we observed the preservice teachers in their practices of reading and writing. Then, we guided them to reflect about their reading and writing practices. By doing that, they read and discussed different texts, reflected on them and then they were moved to the practice: meaning the design of their lesson plans based on the courses they have at school in their practicum. Later on, they had to go to school to implement them. While implementing, they had to observe their students throughout the development of the lesson plans, take notes and inform about their reactions, behavior, attitude, learning process, etc. When reporting in the elective course, they reflected about possible gaps, processes, activities, resources, explanations, instructions which needed to reorganize. The second cycle was to improve non-functional aspects related to the development of the class such as the mentioned before.

Population

The participants of this research were two groups of an elective on critical literacies and multiliteracies course at a state university. They were 55 preservice English teachers. The criteria for the participant's selection was done keeping in mind that the groups were in tenth semester of a teacher's preparation program, they were attending their second practicum at public schools and they had under their responsibility a group of secondary school students whom they could take action and develop the lesson plans with them.

Context of the elective critical literacies and multiliteracies course

The elective course on critical literacies and multiliteracies is a three-credit course in the Bachelor of Arts in English at a public university. This elective course is offered the students in the last semester of their career. This course is pretended to give the preservice English teachers more pedagogical and didactic elements and approaches to practice on their last practicum course at the secondary public schools and as English teachers. This course gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to experience reading and writing from the critical literacies and multiliteracies innovative framework, as well as they use different modes of communication as the technological devices keeping in mind their impact in the improvement of the quality of education (Vanegas, Escalante, Villegas & Piedrahita, 2018).

The instruction and information the preservice teachers experienced throughout the course empowered them to develop agency, self-esteem, respect, solidarity and social justice. (Comber, Thompson, and Wells, 2001; Morrell, 2007). At the end, there were lessons to learn from this experience and multiple possibilities to work with.

Methods to collect data

Observations

A qualitative observation is a method of data collection in which researchers observed within a specific research field. In this case it was observed the preservice teachers reading and writing, participating in debates, discussions, round tables and in their practicum classes. A participating observation was followed since we were a member of the setting in which data was collected. This type of method helped us to have a complete panorama of what was happening in class. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) affirm “the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method”. (p. 92)

Preservice teacher’s materials and artifacts

These are learning and teaching artifacts designed and used by the preservice English teachers with the purpose to let them to design their own artifacts (multiliteracies), reflect upon and display their knowledge and agency and then share with the school student’s they were working in the practicum course. One of these artefacts was a poster and the other the lesson plans. The topics worked to design the poster were: self-esteem, procrastination, drugs consumption, standards of beauty and health habits.

A poster

A poster is a large striking notice picture or message that you stick on a wall or board, often in order to advertise, inform, share meaning, impact and provoke reflection. The participants had to design a poster based on a topic they selected for the purpose to provoke class participation and engagement.

Lesson plans

This second artifact was designed and implemented in the course the preservice teachers had during their practicum. A lesson plan is a teacher’s plan for teaching and learning specific topics. It contained the topic, objectives, activities, evaluation and a homework. The lesson also included the national regulations concerned with the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (standards, the basic learning rights, and the pedagogical

principles and guidelines of the suggested English curriculum) according to the grades (from 6th to 11th), the strategy to evaluate the results and the pedagogical procedures to deal with misunderstandings and mistakes.

Semi-structured interview

After designing and implementing the artifacts, two semi-structure interviews to follow up on the critical literacies and multiliteracies framework issue were conducted in order to understand the meanings participants assigned to their activities; their perspectives, motives, and experiences. From the 55 preservice teachers we selected a sample of 20 by using homogeneous sampling which is a purposive sampling technique. The aim of this procedure was to achieve a sample whose units: (ages, social status, knowledge, gender, etc.) share the same or very similar characteristics or traits (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002).

Focus group

It consists of sub-groups of five preservice English teachers, who seeks open-ended thoughts, feelings, reflections, questions around the use of critical literacies and multiliteracies framework into the English classroom as a way to dismantle power and injustices relationship contained in texts and human relations. The sub-groups spent time reading and taking part of the discussions and activities. The collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views were sources to generate reflection, changes and agency.

Type of Study

According to Glaser & Strauss (1967) grounded theory is defined as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). Grounded theory was the method used to analyze and construct theory with the data collected. This research involved the formulation, development and redevelopment of propositions to come to the theory development. Codes were taken from the data collected, and through a process of concept formation, development and reduction the categories emerged as core concepts.

Work development

The development of this research study took one year and a half in time. The work with the preservice teachers was done during two semesters. One semester more was used to observe and interview them, to analyze data and present results. During the two semesters, the preservice teachers dedicated time to read different kind of texts, analyzing and being prepared to discuss and present their ideas in class. The activities used in class were: presentations in groups, group discussions, round tables, role plays, reading songs, talking about themselves, designing and implementing lesson plans, designing posters, analyzing videos, describing pictures and photographs, etc.

Throughout the development of the elective critical literacies and multiliteracies course, the preservice teachers were exposed to reading and writing on issues that were really part of their life. One of them was the focus group. In the activity, the preservice teachers received texts which topics were the critical literacies and multiliteracies approach for reading, analyzing and then in class using a round table technique or a group discussion they had the opportunity to participate with their own point of views connecting them with their previous knowledge and experiences. At the beginning of the semester they did not feel confident since those were new topics for them. As time passed and more readings and activities were assigned they felt confident reflecting and presenting examples which illustrate what the texts presented as theories.

The activities such as “Do I appreciate myself?” and “all about me” had the purpose of encouraging preservice teachers to speak about themselves and at the same time to reflect on all the positive personal aspects and values they had. Other aim was to reflect about the values and positive aspects they had which allow them to be confident and be successful in life. Through these exercises they realized that much of the times it is easier to find negative than positive things of ourselves. It taught them that every person is important and that we teachers should motivate our students to recognize and appreciate ourselves and others.

Data Analysis

The method used to analyze the data was of constructing grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) while followed the participatory action research. The data was organized in several phases phase I, Planning work development, phase II, data collection and phase III, analysis of data and interpretation.

Graphic 1. Phases of Analysis of Data.

Source: Own elaboration (2019).

The process followed was to start reading the transcriptions of observations. After reading several times, after reading several times, big topics were found in each instrument. Those big topics were: reading, writing, critical literacies and multiliteracies. After that, a process of reading word by word, line by line (Glaser, 1978) started. In the phase I, the planning work development consisted of preparing the preservice English teachers to deal with critical literacies and multiliteracies through group discussions. In the group of discussions preservice teachers took an active participation first reading and preparing the materials and texts, and second contributing with the discussions arguing, exemplifying, contrasting and evoking previous experiences and knowledge with the new one.

During the phase II, the researchers transcribed the observations and the interviews and started the process to code and categorize data. There was a big amount of codes, and it was necessary to reduce data as well as codes and categories to have the ones to answer the research questions

Results

Data and its analysis were clear in showing that preservice teacher's reading and writing practices are strong connected with the abilities and competences they have acquired or learned through their personal and academic experience. The most outstanding reading and writing practices of preservice English teachers are in the table below.

Table 1. Reading and writing preservice English practices.

Reading Practices	Writing Practices	What for?
Underline important parts	Looking for unknown vocabulary and synonyms	To better understand the texts.
Summarizing	Writing on line, on blogs, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, songs and videos.	To be connected, to make friends, to know about what happens around us. To be informed. To have fun.
Asking and answering questions	Writing paragraphs, learning logs, research parts (Academic duties)	
Recite important information	Writing tasks, and exercises	To accomplish university duties, to have a score and pass the semester, to chain previous and new information. To follow directions and instructions.
	Writing for exams and to fill formats	

Source: Own elaboration (2019).

The second question related the connection between the reading and writing practices with the development of critical literacies and multiliteracies was answered by the creation of the following two categories:

Self-reflection and action

For the preservice English teachers, the self-reflection on taking a variety of genre and different modes and kind of texts was outstanding. To let students discussing and empowering them with near realities was an opportunity they profited from and enjoyed. Also, it gave real resources to plan their classes and implement activities that really matter the students. Reflecting on what they were doing, thinking and acting took time and effort on their part given that they did not like to mention personal aspects. It was hard for them to realize and accept other's ideas and ways of behaving. Self-reflection moved them to action and change and promoted cooperative learning.

Improving school curriculum to be more inclusive and democratic

Designing lesson plans was not a new practice for preservice English teachers. This is a routine for them. They have to plan and implement their lesson plans in public schools. The novelty here was the fact that they now are eager to do it thinking constantly about their students. To do that, they started to talk with the school students, to get to know them, and to enquire about their interests, problems and struggles they have in learning English.

Conclusions

Reading and writing should not be only considered as school skills to develop. They should be taken as tools to empower students and future English teachers to cope with social, personal and academically problematic situations. The school and the Faculties of education as institutions in charge of teachers preparation must promote practices which really connect the student's own experiences and knowledge with updated pedagogies. The use of different modes of communication, technology and popular culture should permeate the school curriculum and practices since it makes the connection of the self and the other, the far away and the near, the school and the community, the teaching and the learning process possible. Finally, this research encourages future researchers to continue exploring the critical literacies and multiliteracies and their inclusion in school curricula. It is also necessary to include these frameworks in the in service teacher's development programs since technological advances and multimodal texts require focused practices and developments. Finally, it is necessary as teachers to be open and eager to changes and experiment connecting our practice of teaching with our students own lives and experiences.

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