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"NEW LITERACY" AS A CATEGORY OF MODERN WESTERN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The article explores the concepts of "new literacy", "multimodal literacy" and "media literacy", which are widespread in theoretical and applied studies conducted by Western teachers. The paper also looks at practical media technologies, which are the main tool for working with texts in the Western secondary education. The philosophy of using the methodology of new digital literacy in modern education is based on developing media literacy among school students as a socially-significant phenomenon and increases their chances of successful performance at school. Within the framework of Western studies, students are considered to be viewers rather than readers. In this connection, there is a necessity for new multimodal technologies intended to develop students' reading culture. Multimedia technologies are viewed as computer technologies that provide integration of text, sound, photos, videos, pictures into a single unit. The new trend in developing multimedia literacy in the West is the use of interactive software. Web 2.0 tools allow modern school students to interpret texts they study in a multimedia environment more widely. Multimodal technologies fulfill the task set in the 21st century: studying with the help of the media and studying how to work with the media. According to Western studies, education with the help of multimodal media broadens the concept of text in general and the concept of literary text in particular and includes all types of messages in this concept: verbal, audial or visual (or all of them at once) in order to produce and transfer ideas from one person to another.

Keywords: Multimodality, media literacy, Web 2.0.

1. Introduction

The term "new literacy" appeared in the 1990s in the Western pedagogy. The first scientific definition of this concept was provided by Buckingham in 1993. In his article "Towards new literacies, information technology, English and media education", he pointed out that in order to understand important aspects of the world, one needs a new definition of literacy: a definition "that is not tied to particular technologies or practices" but, rather, "that allows us to look at the competencies that are developed across the whole range of culture and communication" (Buckingham, 1993, p.21). According to the logic of the creator of this term, "new literacy" is cultural competency. Meanwhile, a review of the use of this category in English-language methodologies suggests an apparent connection between new literacy and certain technologies.

The official interpretation of the "new literacy" concept in the Western paradigm is presented on the website of the National Council of Teachers of English (USA). The statement called "The NCTE Definition of 21st Century Literacies" integrates abilities and competencies linked with technological changeability of the society:

> *Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. They are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups.* (Statements. 21stcentdefinition, 2018, sector 1)

2. Problem Statement

Let us consider the attributes of the "literacy" concept. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) includes such terms as mathematical literacy and scientific literacy; documents regulating the activity of modern libraries contain the concept of bibliographic literacy. At first sight, it may seem that the main attributes of the "literacy" concept are connected with specific subject fields. However, there are more general attributes, such as reading visual literacy. In the PISA 2015 DRAFT READING LITERACY FRAMEWORK, namely in the test assessing students' literacy, reading literacy is defined as "understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (PISA, 2015). Most likely, this definition implies elements of reading competencies in the sphere of perception of literary texts. Yet, on the whole, the concept of "reading literacy" is clearly sociologically-oriented, which means that, from the perspective of new reading literacy, a text is in the first place intended for social communication rather than for conveying a literary image.

The concept of new literacy is closely connected with multimodal literacy. Professor Karchmer (2001) (USA), a reading specialist, suggests the following definition of this term: "Multimodal literacy refers to the use of numerous modes to communicate one's message. Text, audio, graphics, and video are

examples of digital media that can be combined to present multimodal messages" (p. 443). In the Western paradigm, development of multimodal literacy in students is based on a few skills, which are described in all corresponding framework documents. Students must be able to:

- • develop the skills of using technological tools;
- • build cross-cultural ties with other people;
- • receive and share information in global communities;
- • create, criticize and assess multimedia texts;
- • realize ethical responsibility demanded in complex technological environments.

3.   Research Questions

Let us have a closer look at the "multimodal technologies" category. In "The Dictionary of basic concepts and definitions of the Applied Internetics" this concept is defined as the interaction between visual and audio effects controlled by interactive programs (Dictionaries. Handbooks. Encyclopedias). Kibrik (2010) considers the notion of multimodality in terms of psychology and neurophysiology and gives the following definition: "multimodality is a type of external stimulus perceived by one of the human senses, primarily by eyesight and hearing" (p. 35). Using the quoted definitions of multimodality and associated with it multimodal literacy, we interpret multimodal literacy as a set of means (software and hardware) that allow users not only to access, but also to create their own informational educational product integrating static (text, graphics) and dynamic (animation, music, video) visualization of study materials.

Modern students are rather viewers than readers or listeners, so there is a necessity for new multimodal technologies intended to develop students' reading culture, which is the basis of all subjects. Reading culture should be developed in the new digital educational environment through "finding transcendental methodologies of teaching the historical-literary course existing "across" the borders of educational stages" (Getmanskaya, 2016, p.280). As we see it, transcendence is directly related to modern multimodal technologies, the level of proficiency in which is virtually the same among school students of all ages. In this context, multimodal technologies are seen in a new methodological light.

The 21st century is viewed by culturologists as the world of "visual screen culture requiring the corresponding level of competence in reading it and special, visual, literacy" (Kolesnikova, 2013, p.136). At the end of the 1960s, the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA) was founded, whose methodological approaches fight the phenomenon, which is usually criticized, namely, mosaic thinking typical of the younger generation. IVLA describes itself as "an interdisciplinary, eclectic, organization of professionals working toward a fuller understanding of the way we derive meaning from what we see and the way we interact with our visual environment" (IVLA). As an illustration of its principles, one can consider the lesson called "Multimedia response to the topic "from fact to fiction" presented on the IVLA website. The target audience of the lesson is students of grades 3−5. According to the aim of the lesson, after reading the book "Diary of a Spider" by Doreen Cronin, students imagine that they are inside the spider's consciousness, who asks them to compose a diary using usual facts from a spider's life and their fantasies about this topic. Students develop the strategy "from fact to fiction" by gathering information about spiders and creating multimedia diaries on behalf of the spider with the help of PowerPoint. The

author of this lesson points out that it can be easily adapted to any living creature, although the main character of the lesson is initially a spider (Multimedia-responses, 2018). The originality of this technology encourages the interest of primary school pupils in the world by creating an environment adapted to the age of students, where fiction and reality coexist. Psychologist Mayer has proved that learning process is more effective if visual and verbal study materials are presented simultaneously and duplicate each other. Text in its multimodal form is becoming one of the most important tools of representation of knowledge in modern education (Mayer & Moreno, 1999).

Another example of the technology of multimodal literacy development is the series of lessons called "Graffiti Wall", which is available on the website of the International Literacy Association (Graffiti-wall-discussing-responding, 2018). In this series work on a text can be conducted both individually and in groups. The teacher splits the text into fragments, and students use symbols, pictures, figures and colors along with words and quotes to create a graphic depiction of their section with the help of newsprint paper, markers and pencils or an online tool. The graphics should represent either development of the plot or all artistic elements used in this extract. After completing the task, students show their graphics to the whole class and explain why they have chosen certain elements. Next, the "journal" of graphics is drawn up, where the images are arranged in logical order. Then the journals are posted on a website or hung on a classroom wall. There is a specially designed electronic interface called "Literary graphics". It contains a set of tools including graphic symbols and quotations that help students to create graphic narratives. The next stage of work could be a class discussion or answering the teacher's questions about the produced graffiti. Using the graphic images, students have to find connections between the storylines and guess what happened before or after the depicted events. At the final stage of working with the text, students write essays analyzing one of the narrative elements. The "Graffiti wall" allows all students to take part in the discussion of the topic of the literary piece, figure out the author's idea, style, storylines and trace evolution of characters. The designer of this lesson uses C. Jung's theory about four ways of comprehending the world: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition, — by paraphrasing them as "observation, analysis, imagination and sensation or emotion".

4.   Purpose of the Study

Communicative methodologies of modern Western education are based on the inextricable connection between the learning process and digital technologies used by students outside of the classroom. Modern pedagogy suggests metaphorical characteristics of application of the digital technologies used by students outside of the classroom during the lesson — it is called "a classroom without walls". The authors of this metaphor are two American scientists, Christel and Sullivan (2017), who have worked for many years as English teachers at school and now are developing a methodology of digital literacy within the system of higher education. The main idea of their theory is that when students use digital technologies when working on a text, classroom walls disappear, and students become a part of generalized global communication.

Why does Western school rely on media technologies when it comes to the creation of texts by students? Kajder (2017) answers this question in her book "Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students" (2010). She says that media tools are not the main problem. The central

question is why these tools are necessary. Primarily they are used to address the issues of reading, writing, communication and methodology. Kajder works in the University of Georgia, she is a nationally recognized expert in the sphere of new literacies and related technologies. Her main idea is that school students read and write every day in real life, so their active writing practices outside of the classroom should be connected with classroom activities, and their real life on the Web should be reconciled with technologies of writing texts used in the classroom. The scientist finishes her book with the following words: "If we fall behind the technologies, which are second nature to Generation Y adolescents, we might forever lose the significance of our subject, which is second nature to all of us" (Kajder, 2017, p.83).

In 2009 Professor Larson (2009) of Kansas State University wrote an article "E-reading and e-responding: New tools for the next generation of readers". In this paper, she changes the content of the definition of text fundamentally. The essential message of this article is that the latest advances in digital technologies prompt one to reassess the concepts of literacy and text. Traditionally, text has been perceived as written messages in the forms of books, magazines, and newspapers. However, nowadays, according to Larson (2009), this concept should be interpreted more broadly. Teachers who want to keep up with the times should take into account that today's students, as readers and writers, are immersed in multimodal experiences and can easily combine modes and media to exchange information. Therefore, there is an urgent need for teachers and researchers to address the discrepancy between the types of literacy experiences students encounter at school (paper, pencil, and print texts), and those they practice in their daily lives outside the school environment (Web 2.0). (Larson, 2009). The analytical summary of the article by Larson is as follows: nowadays, social networking and educational websites are becoming essential tools for students to work on their texts in the Western school.

5. Research Methods

The term "Web 2.0" was first used in 2004 by Tim O'Reilly, a publisher specializing in digital media technologies. The more people use Web 2.0, the better it gets. The term "Web 2.0" basically embraces services that are actively improved by users themselves (Shuen, 2015). In the first place, such services include blogs, wiki projects and social networks. Why are they gaining such importance? Because they are components of the 21st-century literacy; school students live in the media environment and are described as millennials (people of the new millennium) or Generation Y. "Unlike our generation, Generation Y, who were born after 1981–1984, is an Internet generation, a generation of digital natives, a media generation. They have come of age throughout the time period marked by Web 2.0 tools" (Christel & Sullivan, 2017, p.140).

All over the world scientists aim to standardize incorporation of Web 2.0 tools into school practices. In his article "Multimedia: A Technique in Teaching Process in the Classrooms" published in the Thomson Reuters scientometric database Ashvini (2017) writes: "The challenge to educators is clear. We must establish rigorous standards of quality in the products, services, and solutions we offer to our youth. We must prepare our students to master change" (p. 33).

Multimedia literacy and digital technologies are the instruments successfully used by Western pedagogy to analyze literary pieces at school. So, what are the media techniques that help students to

explore world classics? The website of the National Council of Teachers of English (USA) has published a series of lessons for grades 9–12 called "Star-Crossed Lovers Online: Romeo and Juliet for a Digital Age" (Star-crossed-lovers-online, 2019). The teacher sets the following task for students: they have to imagine that Romeo and Juliet live in the modern world and create their own interpretation of the drama. Besides, they have to make a list of technologies that could be used by Romeo and Juliet to change the ending of the play. Students work in small groups and choose a scene from the tragedy that could be changed as a result of using gadgets, create their own versions of the plot and publish them in online communities to get a response. At the final lesson of the series, students read and analyze the book "Romiette and Julio" by Sharon Draper, which is a modern version of Shakespeare's classic drama. In this book, the main characters overcome the prohibition against loving each other by using chats, emails, text messages, etc. In our opinion, this observation highlights sociological and communicative keynotes of the Western methodology aimed at working with a piece of literature. Planned results of the lesson: students share their projects with their classmates and friends via social networks and discuss why they have chosen a particular scene or certain technologies.

6. Findings

Let us try to answer the question of what is behind the teacher's logic that it is necessary to receive feedback on the students' modernized interpretations of the Shakespearean story. Is it aimed at students improving their texts? Probably, but not in the first place. As we see it, the main purpose is the actualization of students in the global communication space. It is where the hidden motive of creation and existence of a student's text manifests itself within Western methodology: expression of one's own self in the global communication space.

Technologies also change the language of communication in the media environment. In the famous book "The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism" Leitch (2018) wrote that the modern language is a multivalent and "gliding" phenomenon. It is a complex term suggesting that the language is constantly changing, and the mechanisms of change are always different. In addition, Western literary criticism refers to the views expressed by such post-structuralists as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who do not consider the modern language as a reliable and stable communication environment, which it used to be earlier (Sullivan, 2017).

From this perspective, a text created by a student put and into the modern media environment represented by Web 2.0 services often loses its authorship and enters the global communication space exactly according to the post-structuralist approach to language as a polyvalent "gliding" substance. It definitely calls for the transformation of the approaches to the assessment of such texts. Besides, the text can be subject to editing while it exists on the Internet as well as the author's or further readers' assessment and criticism.

7. Conclusion

The keynote of the Western communicative methodologies is receiving an online response to the media text created by students. This approach is definitely coherent with the main psychological

characteristics of a school student. The most important thing here is not the quality of the created media text but the opportunity to win recognition from a broad audience with no limitations as to the age, social status or geographical location of its readers. Work with texts receives a very powerful technological momentum represented by Internet opportunities, which are successfully used by Western pedagogy and help to develop multimodal literacy in students. The employed technologies provide the educational process with a new modality: students create their own multitext with the help of media technologies, which become intermediary moderators of a student's thinking process.

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