

Pluriliteracies



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Abstract

The concept of pluriliteracies (commonly used in the plural) builds on earlier work in biliteracy, new literacies, multilingual and multimodal literacies, and plurilingualism. It emphasises the hybridity of literacy practices in situated sociocultural contexts and highlights the need for merging (rather than separating) literacy practices between languages. The first part of the entry presents the key features of a pluriliteracies approach, including the continuous interplay of multiple languages, scripts, discourses, dialects, registers, and technologies. It also explores the efforts to translate theoretical insights into major pedagogical innovations and changes, stressing the role of pluriliteracies in critical pedagogies that promote students' and teachers' cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural engagement and agency. The second part provides concrete examples of how pluriliteracies can be used to promote deeper learning (e.g. plurilingual focus on disciplinary literacies, enhancement of textual fluency). The final section emphasises the role of pluriliteracies in supporting

students and teachers with the competencies needed to become responsible global citizens.

Keywords

Pluriliteracies · Plurilingualism · Hybridity · Sociocultural contexts · Critical pedagogies · Engagement · Deep learning · Global citizenship · Digital literacies

Definition

Pluriliteracies can be defined as approaches that recognise and promote the hybrid nature of literacy practices rooted in situated contexts. These approaches advocate for the integration of plurilingual and multimodal literacy practices across various disciplines, highlighting the continuous interplay of multiple languages, scripts, discourses, dialects, and registers. Pluriliteracies go hand in hand with pedagogical innovations that enhance the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement of both students and teachers to equip them to actively contribute to responsible global citizenship.

Introduction: The Origins of Pluriliteracies: From *Multi-* to *Pluri-*

It is not always easy to distinguish between terms that appear similar—such as multiliteracies and

pluriliteracies—especially when both prefixes relate to the idea of ‘many’. One way to grasp the difference is to remember that *multi-* emphasises the number of separate elements, while *pluri-* emphasises the interconnectedness among those elements. The prefix *pluri-* has been adopted in various fields to highlight the dynamic and integrated nature of concepts and has increasingly been used to replace prefixes like ‘bi-’ or ‘multi-’. For instance, bilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to use two languages rather proficiently, and multilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to communicate effectively in more than two languages. As for plurilingualism, it refers not just to the ability of an individual to use multiple languages, but more importantly, to interrelate and interconnect these languages as part of a unified communicative repertoire (Council of Europe, 2020).

Similarly, the term pluriliteracies, introduced by García et al. in 2007, builds on earlier concepts such as biliteracy, multiliteracies (see ► “[Multi-literacies](#)”), new literacies (see ► “[History of New Literacies](#)”), multi- and plurilingualism, multimodal literacies (see ► “[Multimodal Literacy](#)”), and critical literacies (see ► “[Critical Digital Literacy](#)”). The term highlights the importance of having numerous, hybrid, dynamic, and adaptive literacies as tools to navigate an increasingly complex social, cultural, and technological era.

Being pluriliterate today thus means being able to juggle numerous literacy types in a fluid way, depending on the context, situation, and needs. It goes beyond producing or understanding multimodal communication; it also implies being critical—that is, questioning, challenging, or transcending power structures, social norms, and ideologies that are embedded in communication and in the languages and tools used to communicate.

Given the number and types of literacies that have emerged (due in part to the rapid technological advancements and the immense volume of information individuals must deal with to date), supporting students on the path to developing pluriliteracies should become an essential part of teachers’ agendas throughout the educational curriculum. Although the term pluriliteracies remains

relatively new and is seldom found in today’s curricula, its emerging importance suggests that we should definitely give it more attention.

Pioneering Pluriliteracies: Insights from CLIL Research and Practice

A group of researchers known as the Graz Group (including among others Oliver Meyer, Do Coyle, Ana Halbach, Kevin Schuck, and Teresa Ting) and who are working for the European Center for Modern Languages at Graz have proposed a framework called Pluriliteracies Teaching for Learning (or PTL). PTL puts subject literacy development in more than one language at the core of learning. This approach focuses on helping learners become literate in content subjects and also communicate that knowledge across cultures and languages (see, e.g. Meyer & Coyle, 2017). The members of the Graz Group stress the fact that language is the key to developing and increasing conceptual understanding and that the focus on language—and plurilingualism—will ultimately lead to deeper learning. Acquiring subject literacy in more than one language helps learners construct knowledge, leads to shared learning and interactions with others, and contributes to developing creative, responsible global citizens (see, e.g. Coyle & Meyer, 2021, 2023). The Group has also worked on helping teachers put pluriliteracies into practice. *A deeper learning companion for CLIL: Putting pluriliteracies into practice* (Coyle et al., 2023) offers concrete examples and lesson plans for ‘deeper learning episodes’ in disciplines such as chemistry, physics, or geography. All the examples are illustrative of the three following key principles: (1) an explicit focus on disciplinary literacies in all subjects of schooling (focusing on subject-specific ways of constructing and communicating knowledge), (2) pluriliterate language use (communicating knowledge across cultures and languages), and (3) textual fluency (being able to communicate across plurimodal channels and semiotic systems and being able to critically evaluate sources).

Navigating a Multiliterate, Multicultural, Multilingual, and Hypertechnological Era: Supporting Pluriliteracies

Single narratives—be they linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, methodological, technological, etc.—create blind spots. They limit our understanding, hinder innovation, and narrow the path to inclusion. And despite pluriliteracies being a rather complex construct, it may be considered an imperative one to prioritise in educational reform efforts. It is essential for individuals to ‘make meaning’ across multiple languages, cultures, and modes of communication. Digitisation today enables plurimodal and pluriliterate learning and invites us to reconsider our learning spaces and biases. Larsen-freeman (2018) invites us, for instance, to see classrooms as porous. Our learning spaces are welcoming many different types of learners (school children, university students, asylum seekers, seniors, refugees, distance learners, etc.) with varied linguistic backgrounds and learning goals. This diversity reflects the realities of current multilingual societies. It highlights the need for inclusive and adaptive approaches that can also be used, for instance, to support refugee education, to help heritage speakers, and to contribute to the revitalisation of indigenous languages. The boundaries between classroom and society are porous and, as suggested at the start, this entails the following needs: (1) to juggle numerous literacy types in a fluid way, depending on the context, situation, and needs; (2) to be critical and challenge power structures, norms, and ideologies; and (3) to transcend monolingual biases. Many people today grow up and use multiple languages for a variety of purposes. In addition, numerous educational and language policies invite us to promote and implement linguistic and cultural diversity, to be more equitable and inclusive and to integrate technologies in a human-centred way that helps safeguard human cognition (see, e.g. Rehm & Way, 2023; UNESCO, 2023a, b). Fostering pluriliteracies is one promising path to meeting these key recommendations.

To concretely illustrate how pluriliteracies can take shape or be trained, imagine a classroom

where students are working on a project that involves exploring environmental issues across different regions of the world. Students can begin by reading an article on local environmental initiatives (in the language of schooling). They can then be guided by the teacher to identify key ideas and terms, linking these to their knowledge of other contexts (other environmental issues, other key terms related to these issues, other texts, or testimonies in other languages). In doing so, the teacher can highlight similarities and differences between contexts, cultures, and languages by encouraging students to recognise those similarities and differences in terminology, concepts, problems, and initiatives that are taking shape worldwide. Students can then be invited to work collaboratively on a poster, a blog, or a video to share with peers from different linguistic backgrounds. This task would call for linguistic mediation (reformulating, paraphrasing, illustrating complex ideas to make the content accessible and relevant to others). This could be followed by a plurilingual-friendly discussion about how environmental practices differ across cultures, drawing from their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see ► “Intercultural Literacy”). The discussion would foster social and cultural mediation, helping to bridge gaps in understanding between peers, irrespective of their origin. Students could also synthesise their findings into a multilingual digital presentation to raise awareness of environmental issues in their community—and beyond—thereby making students active global citizens. This final production would require mediation between modes (e.g. written texts, visuals, speech, and all this in different languages) and also require cognitive flexibility (clarifying ideas, adapting them for different audiences).

In all the tasks listed above, a range of generative AI technologies could also be used, when relevant. For instance, *ChatGPT* can provide suggestions for organising a digital presentation. It can also translate a text excerpt into another language or simplify the content of a technically complex section to make it more accessible to less specialised audiences. *Copilot* could be used

to summarise key ideas in language A from a text written in language B. Similarly, an AI subtitle generator like *Happy Scribe* can create a first draft of subtitles in various languages, which can later be proofread and edited as needed to ensure accuracy. *DALL-E* could generate images tailored to the specific needs of the presentation. In all cases, however, it is crucial to critically assess the results generated by these AI tools to ensure quality and appropriateness.

For their final presentation, learners could also be encouraged to analyse and critique possible inequality, injustice, and power dynamics in the issues addressed and sources covered; acknowledge how social, historical, and cultural contexts have played a role in environmental issues; and advocate for change.

The pluriliteracies example suggested above could be implemented in a disciplinary context (science class, or language class), could be co-supervised by teachers from different disciplines, or could be carried out in community contexts other than classrooms (local community event, intergenerational project, digital or virtual communities, etc.). The activities and tasks proposed would not only develop participants' pluriliteracies by enabling them to read, write, and mediate across languages and contexts. They also align with modern pluralistic approaches recommended notably in Europe and actively train mediation, one of the four modes in which the CEFR model organises communication (see Piccardo, 2023). Participants are seen as true social agents who engage in a combination of receptive, productive, interactive, and mediation activities to co-construct meaning/knowledge and communicate beyond linguistic or cultural barriers. Various literacy types are intertwined and agency is activated at every stage (be it individual agency, collective agency or by-proxy agency—i.e. when relying on human or technological help or to complete the task).

Knowledge building and sharing today often requires mediation among diverse actors, sources, tools, and spaces—including digital spaces—to facilitate collaboration, integrate multiple perspectives, and co-construct understanding across contexts. These new ways of learning and

teaching naturally foster pluriliteracies: users are being exposed to multilingual and multimodal content and are given opportunities to interact and collaborate in spaces that blend text, visuals, and audio and that integrate technological affordances.

In a way, pluriliteracies both reflect the complexities of globalised communication and knowledge and serve as essential pathways for accessing and contributing to it. Pluriliteracies can be challenging to navigate because they require adapting to constantly evolving languages, tools, and cultural contexts, as well as integrating multiple modes of communication and perspectives. They are nonetheless essential for fostering deeper learning and developing richer, more nuanced knowledge and communication, making them worth actively exploring in education.

Cross-References

- [Critical Digital Literacy](#)
- [History of New Literacies](#)
- [Intercultural Literacy](#)
- [Multiliteracies](#)
- [Multimodal Literacy](#)

Competing Interest Declaration The author(s) has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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