


Joint Seminar: December 11, 2008
Adult and Workplace Learning Research Unit
Multiple Literacies Research Unit

ESL and Literacy: Similarities and Differences

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introduction

- There have been significant overlaps between Literacy Education and the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL/ ELL) in Canada.
- not simply of conceptual or academic interest
- detrimental effects on programming

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- “Methods appropriate for immigrant students who are highly literate in their mother tongue are not suited to students with limited or no mother tongue literacy”. (Shohet, 2001, 3).

the proposed study

- conceptual and theoretical linkages (Tight, 2002)
- developments at the level of curricular and instructional guidelines (e.g. Johansson, 2002)
- what is currently missing is an articulation of how teachers and program managers view these linkages from practical and concrete points of view

- How do ESL teachers incorporate literacy instruction into their curricula?

- How do Literacy teachers treat second language learning in their every day practice?

- How do curriculum developers or program managers account for either of these two factors in their conceptual work?

our focus: citizenship

- strategically important in terms of policy development
- much of the conflation due to the common purpose these two fields have historically been put in terms of nation-building

- legalistic and normative aspects
- current debates
- dynamic processes of becoming citizens
- broader debates related to ways of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994)
- articulated throughout current second language education research (Appadurai, 1996; Block, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005; Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 2007).

literacy education and nation-building in Canada

- associated with organized labour and political reform, thanks to influence from the U.K.
- e.g. Luddite movement (early 1800's)
- e.g. women's temperance and suffragette movements (1850's)
- literacy education in the U.S. marked more by individualistic self-improvement movements funded (and controlled) by government

- influence of social democratic and Marxist organizations in Canada
- Farm Radio Forum, the Citizens Forum, Fogo Island, the Centre for Community Studies, the Antigonish Movement, and Frontier College
- government funding (such as the university extension programs of the 1920's and 30's) explicitly designed to counter Bolshevism
- intense ideological struggles (e.g. Workers' Educational Association; Frontier College)

- a systematic approach to adult education in the mid-1950's
- construction of adult orientated collegiate institutes through school districts (most notably in Toronto and Vancouver)
- In the mid-60's, these institutes were rapidly replaced by community college systems in which specialized in adult vocational training

- educational theorists of Dewey's time made few distinctions between childhood and adult education
- this became a hallmark of new theoretical models such as andragogy (Knowles, 1984) and conscientization (Freire, 1970)
- over 35% of all Canadian workers aged 25-64 undergo some form of job-related training each year

- “Frontier College, in providing literacy and citizenship education to laboring immigrant men on the resource frontier, was the quintessential embodiment of the grand project of Anglo-Canadian nation building” (Walter, 2003, 1).

esl/ ell education and nation- building in Canada

- In contrast, Canadian second language instruction has enjoyed little involvement from the labour movement.
- explicitly assimilationist
 - residential schools
 - Egerton Ryerson
 - James Anderson

- provision of ESL/ ELL Education by government started in the 1970's
- linked to major policy shift:
 - bilingualism
 - multiculturalism
- jurisdictional disputes
- major demographic changes in Canadian society

- provision rationalized as a result of the federal government's 1990 Immigration Plan
- document gives prominence to the need to integrate ESL training with “building a new Canada” (p. 3).
- Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC)
- Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)

- The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada noted that English training programs “provide basic language training to adult newcomers... aimed at facilitating social, cultural and economic integration into Canada”.
- Citizenship is the ultimate goal of this process of integration since this status “signifies full participation in Canadian life”. (CIC, 2006,1).

the importance of this research

- Literacy and ESL/ ELL education has crucial economic functions
- Anderson (1983) noted the importance of common media, language(s), discourses and symbols in the construction of an imagined community such as Canada

In a preliminary interview we conducted in August, our respondent noted that “citizenship is extremely important” in ESL and Literacy, but that the poor sense of the boundaries between the two fields hampers the ability to coordinate programming. She noted that “we have to make a lot more connections between different kinds of programs and citizenship”.

conclusion

- nation-building has been the common impetus for much related policy development
- ESL/ ELL literacy students are often the same
- While there are many theoretical differences between ESL and Literacy Education, our research is intended to examine the connections and differences from the standpoint of practitioners and contribute to the production of practical solutions



**please consult myself or Dr. Bangou
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