1

Working with Diverse Students

Some Important Issues

Prereading Questions and Activities

The questions and activities listed in the beginning of each chapter throughout the book are meant to help you think about the important issues addressed in a given chapter. It is likely that you may not be able to answer or complete them fully. Nevertheless, by trying your best to reflect on the questions and carry out the activities, you will be more critical about what you will read.

- After reading Peter's challenges in the chapter "About the Book" (Box 0.1), you were asked to give him some suggestions. If you were able to provide suggestions, how do you know they would work? If you found it difficult to provide suggestions for Peter, what could be the reason? Would you feel more confident providing suggestions for Peter if you had sufficient information on the students' cultural, linguistic, and developmental backgrounds?
- What is your own definition of literacy? Do you think that how you define literacy will influence what you choose to emphasize in teaching your content area? Why or why not?
- What is in a label? Why are labels used to describe different student populations important for educators? Do you think the label you use to describe a student will affect the way you interact with that student? Why?
- Do you know what conceptual frameworks are? If not, research them. Do you have any experience in using a framework to guide you to do something? If so, what is the advantage of having a conceptual framework?

Topics to Be Addressed in This Chapter

- Importance of teacher knowledge of language and literacy development
- Critical discourse analysis (CDA) conceptual framework

- Transformative pedagogy (TP)
- Evolving definition of literacy
- Reconceptualization of labels for diverse learners

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Understand the importance of teacher knowledge on language and literacy development in effective instruction.
- Become familiar with the CDA framework and TP and understand the advantage of using them to work with diverse students.
- Know that the words you choose to describe your students can influence your attitude toward and interaction with them, and exercise extra caution when using words and labels for diverse students.

Importance of Teacher Knowledge on Language and Literacy

Box 1.1   Peter's Challenge – Understanding the Nature of Student Language Difficulties

Two weeks after Peter had his first encounters with his Period 2 geometry class, the guidance counselor sent him an initial report from a language specialist regarding one of his students, Andrea. Andrea was not yet officially classified as a student with a particular kind of language impairment. However, since he came to the school district two years ago from Albania, he had had persistent difficulties in academic learning. He was referred to the specialist at the end of eighth grade. The report came to the high school counselor recently, and it contains some of the following information: "Student shows signs of dysgraphia … He has trouble organizing his thoughts … He seems to have impaired phonological memory … He has trouble understanding and producing complex syntax … He also exhibits difficulties in finite verb morphology …"

Peter read this report several times; he still did not understand some of the terminologies used by the specialist. What frustrated him most was that he had no clue how to provide specific instructional support for Andrea in his geometry class based on these linguistic and cognitive issues reported by the specialist. If he had to wait for the official disability classification report, the development of an **Individualized Educational Program** (IEP), and the assistance from a special education teacher, Andrea would fall further behind …

Peter is between a rock and a hard place. He is supposed to teach ninth grade math, yet the issues that he has to deal with in Andrea's case are far beyond his content area. To be able to help Andrea move forward in geometry learning, Peter must have sufficient knowledge of Andrea's linguistic and cognitive characteristics and know how to provide effective strategies to support him in learning the math content. This is indeed the challenge of teaching diverse students in the inclusive classroom environment.

However, if Peter were knowledgeable about Andrea's linguistic characteristics in the specialist's report, he would have an inkling of Andrea's condition; that is, he might have specific language impairment (SLI). He would have more effectively addressed Andrea's specific issues and utilized some of the instructional strategies recommended for students with SLI such as focusing on developing Andrea's skills in comprehending and producing complex sentences (which are prominent in academic texts; in this case, math reading materials). He could do this by modeling how complex sentence are used and scaffolding Andrea to recast the modeled complex sentences in his own production. Peter's experience reminds us that teachers must develop in-depth knowledge of their students' language and literacy development regardless of what content area they teach. There are at least three important reasons to do so.

Interpreting assessment results from specialist reports

As shown clearly in Peter's case, teachers need to have the ability to interpret specialists' reports and utilize the information to help their students learn. Reports from specialists often include language and literacy assessment results that contain terminologies about students' linguistic characteristics such as phonological abilities, fast naming, phonological memory, letter knowledge, alphabetic principle, sight word knowledge, pseudo word decoding, orthographic ability, morphosyntactic knowledge, and metalinguistic awareness. (Don't worry about these terms at this moment; you will know them after reading this book.) If teachers do not understand the relationships between these skills and the role each of these skills plays in students' learning, they are unlikely to help their students succeed in the content-area learning.

Identifying students' linguistic needs

In addition to knowing how to interpret the assessment results from specialists, teachers need to develop abilities to identify their students' linguistic difficulties and needs, and know how to address them in instruction and assessment. To simply wait for the specialist's assistance will not meet students' immediate learning needs (e.g., Soodak, 2003).

In the classroom environment, students need to have proficient language and literacy skills to function well in various content areas. In other words, language and literacy skills are the basis for content learning. Often, when students have difficulties learning a content area, they are also likely to have difficulties processing information (for example, being unable to comprehend what the teacher says or what is written in the text). Research in the past few decades clearly indicates that learners with linguistic processing difficulties often have challenges in processing meaning from texts

efficiently. Most students who are identified with learning disabilities also have reading disabilities (e.g., Kavale and Forness, 1985). Thus, teacher knowledge of language and literacy development is crucial to improving students' academic performances in any content area.

Moreover, teachers' knowledge of their students' linguistic characteristics matters greatly in how they can provide focused instruction. There is clear evidence that students with difficulties in reading, for example, can significantly benefit from teachers' **intentional teaching**[1] (Moats and Foorman, 2003; Moats and Lyon, 1996). Even students with good literacy skills make rapid progress with teachers' intentional instruction (Moats, 1994). There is also evidence that when teachers are trained and have mastered specific linguistic knowledge, the reading scores of the students taught by these teachers also increase (e.g., McCutchen et al., 2002; Moats and Foorman, 2003; Spear-Swerling and Brucker, 2003) and reading comprehension improves (Carreker et al., 2007). If you are a teacher who wants to make a serious difference in students like Andrea, you must make efforts to understand their language and literacy developmental characteristics and know how to respond to their challenges in your content area instruction.

Meeting teacher education professional standards

Peter's inability in providing effective instructional support for students like Andrea draws attention to the problems in teacher education. It is a commonly recognized fact that many teacher education programs have not prepared teacher candidates well in knowing how to provide effective instructional support to help their students improve language and literacy skills (e.g., Bos et al., 2011; Joshi et al., 2009; Moats and Lyon, 1996; Moats, 1994). In response to this situation, many teacher education professional organizations now require teacher candidates to be efficient in their knowledge of students' language and literacy development. Some education professional standards also require language and literacy to be taught across the curriculum such as the Common Core State Standards (http://www.corestandards.org) adopted by 45 states. Moreover, the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), which is now required by many states for obtaining teaching certification, asks for teachers to demonstrate competence in modeling academic language use in their classroom teaching (http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa).

Given these three reasons, teachers in any content area must develop knowledge and skills to be successful in teaching students with a range of abilities.

Your Turn

- Can you find *more* reasons why teachers need to have knowledge of their students' language and literacy development?
- It is a common misconception that teachers who teach math will not have much problem with students' issues related to language and literacy because math is a universal language. What is your take on this misconception? How do you address this misconception in reference to the Common Core State Standards (http://www .corestandards.org)?

- Locate a language assessment report of a student who has been identified as having a specific kind of language impairment and try to interpret it. What questions do you have?
- Identify 20 difficult words and complex sentences from a textbook in any subject area (you can decide a grade level). Discuss how these words and sentences can affect students' understanding of the content.
- Research the learning and teaching standards in your state and discuss how you can meet these standards by adding your knowledge on language and literacy development.
- Familiarize yourself with the Common Core State Standards (http://www.corestandards.org) and the edTPA (http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa). Identify the areas that require teacher knowledge of their students' language and literacy development.

Critical Discourse Analysis Conceptual Framework

In order to respond to the complexity of students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and abilities, it is important to have an overarching **conceptual framework** that can guide your instructional and assessment practices. A conceptual framework is like a road map or a compass that can point you in a general direction without getting sidetracked. In other words, with a general direction, you tend to be more focused on the important issues related to teaching diverse learners, and you do not waste time doing irrelevant things. Moreover, a conceptual framework can provide you with a basis to think about what you do and what it means. It can also assist you to connect and organize all related important ideas and to make these ideas easy to articulate. The advantage of having a framework is that it can help you predict the outcome of your actions, explain your rationale, become confident in your teaching, and minimize the impact the "trial and error" and "play by ear" practices tend to have at the expense of student learning.

The important conceptual framework used to guide your understanding of diverse language and literacy development and to direct you in working with diverse students is **critical discourse analysis** (CDA). CDA is based on the writings of many prominent and influential thinkers such as Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, and James Paul Gee. It is beyond the scope of this book to review the work that leads to CDA. For important literature on CDA, please refer to the recommended further readings at the end of this chapter. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of language and literacy, and it is particularly relevant to teaching diverse students. The appeal of CDA is that it is highly sensitive to cultures and classroom variations. This framework views language and literacy not as an isolated cognitive behavior, but as a form of social practice. It utilizes a learner's existing **funds of knowledge**[2] as resources of teaching and learning. It focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk; that is, discourse is always tied to status and power relations, and it helps students develop critical thinking abilities. The essence of CDA is that it encourages teachers to analyze not only what is present in what students say and write, but also what is left out (e.g., Rogers, 2011), and that it encourages teachers to build a human

relation with students and their families, to learn from their students, and to discover the resources students bring to the classroom so that students can be empowered to learn (Powell and Rightmyer, 2011).

Your Turn

- Some have criticized the CDA framework and referred to it as a chimera (i.e., something that is hopeful but impossible to achieve) (Edwards, 2010, p. 26). What is your take on this criticism based on what you have read so far? If you think that the CDA framework will not work in a diverse classroom, what is your alternative proposal to reach diverse learners?
- Comment on the following statement: "To become truly effective educators, we must 're-invent' ourselves as teachers. We must value the cultural knowledge of our students and families, and learn from those we serve" (Powell and Rightmyer, 2011, p. 5).
- Interview a student and fill out the following information:

  Student age
  Student grade
  Student gender
  Student developmental ability/level
  Student academic performance status
  Student ethnicity/race
  Student linguistic background
  Student hobbies and strengths (e.g., what the student does well)
  Number of siblings
  Number of people in the household
  Family print-related environment (e.g., Does the family have books and newspapers around? Does the student have internet access?)
  Parent education level
  Parent profession
  Parent ethnicity/race
  Parent cultural origin
  Other (include more information about the student and his or her family)

  Based on your interview, compile a profile about this student. What does this student's profile tell you about this student? Especially, what kinds of funds of knowledge does this student bring to academic learning?
- Discuss why understanding your students can help you empower them in their learning.

Transformative Pedagogy

A pedagogy that supports the CDA practice in diverse classrooms is **transformative pedagogy** (TP). The fulcrum of TP is that education has the potential to transform or change an individual over time. No matter what language and literacy backgrounds

or abilities students have when they enter schools, the educational experiences they get in school should facilitate the achievement of their full potential. TP contains four important elements: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (New London Group, 1996).

Situated practice stresses that knowledge should build on students' experiences in real-world contexts, not in an isolated environment (e.g., Lave and Wenger, 1991). Teachers need to help students make intuitive links with their prior knowledge (e.g., funds of knowledge) and lead them to the new topics (Mills, 2010). Learners do not learn well if learning activities are not meaningful to them and if they are not motivated. Therefore, effective teaching must consider the affective and sociocultural needs and identities of all learners (New London Group, 1996).

Your Turn

Support or dispute the following quote by using a concrete example.

> human knowledge, when it is applicable to practice, is primarily situated in sociocultural settings and heavily contextualized in specific knowledge domains and practices. Such knowledge is inextricably tied to the ability to recognize and act on patterns of data and experiences, a process that is acquired only through experience, since the requisite patterns are often heavily tied and adjusted to context, and are, very often, subtle and complex enough that no one can fully and usefully describe or explicate them. Humans are, at this level, contextual and sociocultural "pattern recognizors" and actors. Such pattern reorganization underlies the ability to act flexibly and adaptably in context, that is, mastery in practice.

New London Group, "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures," *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1) (1996): 60–92.

However, situated practice is only the starting point of TP. If learners are left only at the stage of situated practice, school subject knowledge will not be obtained effectively. The New London Group (1996) expressed several concerns regarding situated practice. First, even though the immersion of learners in rich contexts can lead to knowledge mastery, learners vary significantly from each other in their experiences and some may even pursue "wrong" leads in their contexts. Second, much of the context immersion early in life such as that surrounding language acquisition is possible largely due to human biology and maturation in conjunction with adult socialization. However, in the school environment, context immersion alone is not enough to acquire academic language and literacy; learners must be taught overtly. Third, situated practice does not necessarily lead to conscious control of what one knows and does. Fourth, situated practice does not automatically make learners critique what they are learning in terms of historical, cultural, political, ideological, and value aspects. Finally, situated practice will not guarantee that learners will put their knowledge into action. Learners may be able to articulate their knowledge in words; they may not be capable of enacting their knowledge in practice.

Thus, it is clear that situated practice must be co-practiced with the other components (i.e., overt teaching, critical framing, and transformative practice) to ensure authentic learning.

Your Turn

Reflect how you acquired your first language(s) and your school language (academic language). Discuss the different nature of the supports you receive from your parents (at home) and your teachers (in school) as well as the different learning contexts.

Overt instruction guides students by using explicit instruction. It is different from teacher-centered direct instruction (which merely transmits knowledge from an expert to a novice). In contrast, overt instruction provides explicit instruction that can most usefully guide the learners' practice through utilizing students' funds of knowledge and scaffolding (Mills, 2010). Effective overt instruction must be enacted concurrently with other TP elements in a seamless way rather than as separated components (New London Group, 1996).

Your Turn

Compare an example of traditional direct teaching and an example of overt teaching. Discuss the differences in terms of students' learning.

Critical framing encourages students to interpret the social contexts and the meaning associated with texts. It encourages learners to explore alternative ways to read texts, to second-guess them, and to question the motives of the author. According to the New London Group (1996), the goal of critical framing is to help students to frame their growing mastery in practice (from situated practice) and gain conscious control and understanding (from overt instruction) based on the various perspectives (e.g., historical, social, cultural, political, ideological). Most importantly, teachers must help students to denaturalize and make strange again what they have learned and mastered. In this way, students can gain the necessary personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned and constructively critique it, and go on to the next step (transformative practice).

Your Turn

Read the following quote and discuss why it is important to include the component of critical framing in the teaching and learning process:

the claim "DNA" replicates itself framed within biology is obvious and "true." Framed within another discourse in the following way, it becomes less natural and less "true.": Put some DNA in some water in a glass on a table. It certainly will not

replicate itself, it will just sit there. Organisms replicate themselves using DNA as a code, but that code is put into effect by an array of machinery involving proteins. In many of our academic and Western discourses, we have privileged information and mind over materials, practice, and work. The original claim foregrounds information and code and leaves out, or backgrounds, machinery and work. This foregrounding and backgrounding becomes apparent only when we reframe, when we take the sentence out of its "home" discourse and place it in a wider context. Here, the wider context is actual processes and material practices, not just general statements in a disciplinary theory …

New London Group, "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures," *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1) (1996): 60–92.

Transformed practice means that true learning transpires when students not only draw on their life, cultural, and community resources (situated practice), use knowledge appropriately (through overt instruction), and know how to critique what they have learned (critical framing), but also demonstrate a significant level of creativity and innovation and are able to put meaning to work in other contexts and to transfer existing meanings to design new meanings (Mills, 2010). According to the New London Group (1996), the key in transformative practice includes three aspects: juxtaposition, integration, and tension. It used the following example to illustrate the three aspects:

imagine a student having to act and think like a biologist, and at the same time as a biologist with a vested interest in resisting the depiction of female things – from eggs to organisms – as "passive." The student now has to both juxtapose and integrate (not without tension) two different discourses, or social identities, or "interests" that have historically been at odds.

Your Turn

Read the following quote and identify the elements of juxtaposition, integration, and tension.

how can one be a "real" lawyer and, at the same time, have one's performance influenced by being an African American. In his arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court for desegregating schools, Thurgood Marshall did this in a classic way. And, in mixing the discourse of politics with the discourse of African American religion.

New London Group, "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures," *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1) (1996): 60–92

With the guidance of CDA and the practice of TP, you will have a better chance of reaching diverse learners in your classroom by taking advantage of their funds of

knowledge and by better motivating them to learn school literacy. Most importantly, you are likely to turn challenges into teaching opportunities and maximize your students' learning potential. Box 1.2 suggests the important components in implementing CDA and TP in your classroom teaching. You will have opportunities to apply them later in the book.

Box 1.2   Important Components in Implementing CDA and TP

- Discover your students' strengths, talents, funds of knowledge, and learning needs through a variety of methods such as observations, conversations, interviews, visiting families, talking to parents, and personal stories. Provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their funds of knowledge.
- Build on their funds of knowledge; provide responsive instructional support to meet your students' learning needs through situated practice, overt teaching, critical framing, and transformative practice.
- Help your students transform their learning by juxtaposing and integrating both their funds of knowledge and newly acquired knowledge.

(At this moment, these components may look abstract. Do not worry; you will have more opportunities later to develop the ability to use them.)

Your Turn

- Propose one concrete classroom instructional or assessment strategy for each of the four components in TP and share your strategies with your classmates (Note: be prepared to explain why you think your strategies will work.)
- Collect a student's writing sample in a content area and try to analyze it with the steps suggested in Box 1.2 and then try to propose some instructional strategies by using the four components in TP. Discuss why this kind of practice may empower students.

Evolving Definition of Literacy

The word "literacy" has taken on new connotations in the twenty-first century. Traditionally, literacy has been regarded mainly as the ability to read and write. As times have changed, the definition has also begun to shift from its narrow focus to encompass a range of other important areas. First, it is now generally agreed that literacy is a social and cultural practice rather than a context-free cognitive achievement (e.g., Diaz and Makin, 2002; Larson and Marsh, 2003; Street and Lefstein, 2007), and the beliefs of a culture and its **habitus** (the lens through which people interpret and relate

to the world) play a central role in students' literacy development process and their approach to academic learning.

Your Turn

Select an article about a "controversial" issue and ask your students to discuss it (if possible, video- or audio-record the conversation). Observe the different habitus your students bring into the debate and discuss how your students' different habitus shape their approaches to literacy learning, including academic learning.

Second, the rapid development of information and multimedia technology has extended the meaning of literacy to a wider range of elements (e.g., visual, auditory, and spatial) than written words alone (New London Group, 1996). As Mills (2010) rightly points out, we are experiencing "a broader historical shift from textual culture of print, to one in which the visual mode is salient, assisted by novel technologies ..." A case in point: even the famous *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is now going out of print after 244 years and has changed to an online-only version with multimedia components (Bosman, 2012).

Reading and writing on the internet and through multimedia modality (**hypertext**) requires different ways of interacting with texts. When reading through multimedia, readers move away from the narrow, linear, print-only expectations of reading to a multidimensional and interactive context (Sutherland-Smith, 2002).

Your Turn

Observe a child's (student's) reading in the multimedia mode (e.g., surfing the internet) and in the conventional print mode (print text). Compare his or her reading characteristics in the two modes. What have you found?

Third, language is a social construct and never neutral (Freire, 1983). The texts students read are positioned. This means that writers shape texts based on their **positioning** (where they are in the world and where they are standing and how this position enables them to see and not see). A writer's positioning includes many aspects such as their beliefs, values, attitudes, social positions (e.g., age, race, class, and ethnicity), and experiences (e.g., education, languages, and travel) (Janks, 2014). Because a writer's positioning may be different from a reader's positioning, it is very crucial for students to develop critical literacy ability. **Critical literacy**, the ability to critique texts in different formats, to challenge the status quo, and to question authorities has been widely recognized as just as essential as the ability to decode texts (Kim, 2012; Stevens and Bean, 2007). With the easy access to information, students' ability to critique texts is

ever more important, and critical literacy should be a part of every student's literacy pathway (Martello, 2002).

Your Turn

Read a fairy tale such as "Snow White" and ask yourself the following questions:

- What position does the writer construct for each of the characters?
- Which character does the writer want you to side with?
- How well does the writer use language to make an emotional impact on you as a reader?
- If you are asked to rewrite this story, what will you change based on your positioning?
- How does this exercise help you see the writer's positioning and your own positioning? What is the significance in identifying your own positioning in reading and learning?

As our society and technology keep moving forward, it is likely that the definition of literacy will continue to change. Thinking of literacy as an evolving concept encourages you to negotiate the digitalization of print in the classroom, school, and society. Treating literacy as an evolving concept also allows you to see cultural and linguistic diversity as a valuable resource for engaging students in new digital media, not as consumers, but as critical and creative producers so that students with different backgrounds and abilities can draw from a broader range of resources for making meaning.

In essence, being literate in today's society means being able to engage in a range of literacy practices and drawing on different sets of skills in different domains. Not being able to negotiate diverse modes of literacies will certainly prevent students from accessing a full array of choices.

Your Turn

Explain why the word "literacies" is used instead of the word "literacy."

Reconceptualization of the Labels for Diverse Students

The well-known German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer once cautioned us to be very careful in choosing our words. Whenever you use a word, don't use it lightly. You are not just using any tool that you could throw away when you are finished with it. On the contrary, you are positioning yourselves in a direction of thinking that precedes you and proceeds beyond you. Gadamer's advice contains two important messages. First, our words carry us as we think and express ourselves. Second, it is a worthwhile

exercise and discipline to listen to our words, think about what we do with them, and contemplate what they do to us (Gadamer, 1993). If the kinds of words we use do influence our perception and action as Gadamer suggested, then teachers need to be extra cautious in using accurate and positive terms to describe their diverse students. Below are a few commonly used labels that warrant scrutiny.

Second language learners vs new language learners

Frequently, students who are learning a school language other than their heritage language or home language are labeled as second language learners (L2), such as English as a second language (ESL). In this book, these learners are generally referred to as **new language learners** (Ln learners). L2 learners will be used only when we are sure that the students we refer to are indeed learning English as a second language. The use of the general term Ln instead of L2 reflects the nature of many students' language learning experiences; that is, they are learning English not as a second language, but as a third or even as a fourth language. Although learning a second language may share similar characteristics with learning a third or fourth language, the complexity involved in learning two, three or more languages may be new and different (e.g., Wang, 2008).

Moreover, the term Ln learner recognizes the fact that although many children who enter our school system may go on to become fully bilingual or multilingual, some will stop before that point and will step in and out of different languages at different ages or stages of their school career (Gregory, 2008). Essentially, all children, whether or not the home language is the same as the school language, will have to learn the academic language as a new language.

Furthermore, although other terms such as "additional language" are used in the literature, the advantage of using the term "new language learning" foregrounds the fact that a student does not merely add a language (as the term "additional" implies) to her linguistic repertoire, she is in the process of making the new language part of her new self.[3] In addition, she is learning many new aspects associated with the new language. For example, she has to learn new conventions of communication, learn a new way of thinking in the new language, and develop a new linguistic and cultural identity.

Your Turn

What is your take on the argument for substituting the terms "second language learning" and "additional language learning" with the term "new language learning"? If you are not convinced by the idea, what term do you think best captures the nature of the student population who are in the process of learning English? Alternatively, you can also interview a student who is in the process of learning English and ask him to help you identify the *new* aspects that he has to grasp in learning English.

Bilingual vs multilingual

Traditionally, people who speak more than one language are labeled according to the number of languages they speak: bilingual (two languages), trilingual (three languages), or quadrilingual (four languages). However, some researchers suggest that it may be more accurate to use the word *multilingual* to describe people who know more than one language (e.g., Wang, 2008 and 2011a). Hoffmann (2001) suggested that the term *multilingual* is a more authentic term than *bilingual* or *trilingual* because it clearly distinguishes the macrolinguistic level (bilingual or trilingual) from the microlinguistic level (monolingual). Moreover, Martin-Jones and Jones (2000) provide additional reasons why it may be more accurate to use the term *multilingual* than *bilingual*. First, many people have more than two spoken or written languages and language varieties within their communicative repertoire. These include the languages and literacies associated with their cultural inheritance, the regional variety of dialects spoken in their local neighborhoods, and some form of "standard" language (such as "standard" English).

Second, the term *multilingual* signals the multiplicity and complexity of the communicative purposes that have come to be associated with different spoken and written languages within a group's repertoire. Third, the term *multilingual* takes into account the fact that in any linguistic minority household or local group (for example, among speakers of Welsh, Gujarati, or Cantonese), there are multiple paths to the acquisition of the spoken and written languages within the group repertoire, and people have varying degrees of expertise in these languages and literacies. Finally, the term *multilingual* is more useful than the term *bilingual* because it focuses attention on the multiple ways in which people draw on and combine the codes in their communicative repertoire when they speak and write.

In this book, unless the specific numbers of languages are actually referred to (*bilingual* or *trilingual*), the word *multilingual* is used as a generic term.

Disorder vs difficulty; symptoms vs characteristics

Students who have difficulties in processing linguistic related information are frequently labeled as having *language disorders* and show certain *symptoms*. Although the words *disorder* and *symptom* are commonly used in clinical literature and medical settings to describe a disease and an abnormal condition, it is important to avoid using them in educational settings because they sound negative and as if they require an action to *cure* them. Such a conception can affect our approaches to helping students. For these reasons, the word *disorder* can be replaced conceptually with *difficulty* and the word *symptom* may be replaced with *characteristic* in the classroom environment. *Difficulty* implies a challenge that calls for additional and different support, and *characteristic* indicates that students exhibit different attributes that require different instructional methods to promote development. Disabilities such as various language impairments are not diseases and thus cannot be cured, but the conditions can be improved with continuous support. The term *disorder* is occasionally used in the book when the intention is to describe a clinical situation or to refer to a conventional usage (e.g., children with autism spectrum disorders) or to quote research findings.

Delay vs deviant

There are debates on whether children with language impairment (LI) show deviant language acquisition patterns compared to children with typical development (TD) or whether they demonstrate similar language acquisition patterns to children with TD, but with a slower developmental rate (Paul, 2007). There are two opposite positions. One position sees the language acquisition pattern of children with LI as deviant. The evidence cited by the supporters of this position is based on the error patterns and grammatical features shown by children with language impairment that are not usually observed among children with TD. For example, the word-order errors and the grammatical structure features shown by German children with specific language impairment (SLI) are rarely observed among German children with TD (Grimm and Weinert, 1990; Hoff, 2009). However, current research evidence suggests that most children with LI follow the universal sequence of language development with a few subtle differences and with a slower rate (Fletcher, 2001; Paul, 2007).

Some researchers argue that if the **mean length of utterance** (MLU)[4] rather than age is compared between children with LI and children with TD, there is a similar tendency in language structure (except with a protracted rate); that is, a 4-year-old child with LI has a MLU equal to that of a 2-and-half-year-old child with TD. For example, some children with developmental dyslexia have a reading ability lower than would be expected on the basis of their IQ. These children do not appear to have a discrete difference but rather are at the low end of the normal distribution in reading skills (Hoff, 2009; Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2004). Some also argue that the differences exhibited by children with LI are the result of their limited ability in reading performance (Fletcher, 2001). Some contend that the different representation shown by children with LI such as children with SLI is because these children have limited ability in processing information under the pressures of real-time language production, rather than representational deficiency (e.g., Bishop, 1994; Fletcher, 2001).

People-first language

The 1997 Public Law 101-336 (The American with Disability Act of 1990) recommends using **people-first language** in referring to people with disabilities. For example, the law suggests using "children with autism" instead of "autistic children" and "children with language impairment" instead of "language-impaired children." Using people-first language encourages respect for people with differences or disabilities. As our society moves forward, the terms and labels we use evolve as well. Thus, we need to constantly evaluate the words and labels we use.

The bottom line in choosing words

Having discussed choosing appropriate words to describe your students, I do not mean that you jettison some of the above terms entirely. Sometimes, labels do have a role in helping you communicate with other professionals (Paul, 2007) and in

evaluating research focused on different student populations. The point of discussing label use and word choice is that you need to be cognizant of the words you use, because words can move one to action or stop one from taking action, and words can also evoke emotion (Edwards, 2010). The choice of words will make you do things differently. If you choose the term *language disorder*, you are likely to *correct* the *symptom* in your instruction. If you choose the words *language difficulty*, you are likely to realize the areas of need and turn them into teaching opportunities. Similarly, if you conceptualize some of your multilingual students as English as L2 learners (whereas they are simultaneous multilinguals), you are going to waste your time in focusing on the wrong areas when providing support.

Your Turn

- What is your opinion on the labels used to describe children with various abilities in the school setting? Explain your position.
- Suppose you are going to have a conference with a parent who has a child with language-related difficulties. Think about the words you plan to use to describe this student. Why do you decide to choose these words and phrases?
- Compile a list of words, terms, or labels that are used to describe people with disabilities by the general public. Discuss how these labels will affect your perception about people with disabilities and your way to interact with them.

Summary of Key Points

- There are three main reasons why teacher knowledge of language and literacy development can help reach diverse learners:
  - Know how to interpret disability classification reports from specialists.
  - Know how to identify issues with students in terms of their language and literacy characteristics and provide effective instructional support to help them learn the content area.
  - Fulfill the requirements of professional teacher organizations.
- The critical discourse analysis (CDA) conceptual framework and its companion pedagogy, transformative pedagogy (TP), are proposed for working with diverse learners. The essence of CDA is that it encourages you to analyze not only what is present in what students say and write, but also what is left out, and that it encourages you to build a human relationship with your students and families and to learn from your students and discover the resources (funds of knowledge) that students bring to the classroom so that students can be empowered to learn. The four components of TP (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice) can help you turn your students' needs into teaching opportunities by tapping into their strengths.
- Literacy is redefined to include not only the reading and writing process, but also the processes of digital literacy and critical literacy.

- Commonly used labels are scrutinized for their suitability in education settings. Emphasis is placed on using people-first language.
  ○ *New language (Ln)* learners is suggested to replace *second language (L2)* learners and *additional language* learners
  ○ *Multilingual* is recommended to replace *bilingual* or *trilingual*.
  ○ *Difficulty* is proposed to replace *disorder*.
  ○ *Characteristic* is advocated to replace *symptom*.
  ○ *Delay* is used to replace *deviant*.

Key Terms

Conceptual framework
Critical discourse analysis (CDA)
Critical framing
Critical literacy
Evolving definition of literacy
Funds of knowledge
IEP (Individualized Educational Program)
Habitus
Hypertext

Intentional teaching
Overt instruction
People-first language
Positioning
Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)
Multilingual
New language
Situated practice
Transformative pedagogy
Transformed practice

Notes

1. Intentional teaching means that a teacher carries out a teaching activity with specific goals in mind for his students, and organizes his teaching to accomplish the goals by using effective instructional strategies.
2. Funds of knowledge refer to the knowledge (or cultural capital) that students accumulate in the home and community environments (Moll et al., 1992).
3. Throughout the book, "she," "he," "her," "his," "him," and "her" are used interchangeably to avoid gender-biased language, and at the same time, to avoid the cumbersome use of "she or he," "her or his," and "him or her." However, "he or she" is used when the context requires.
4. Mean length of utterance (MLU) is used to measure children's language production. It is calculated by collecting 100 utterances (one utterance represents one idea) and then dividing the total number of morphemes by total number of utterances.

Recommended Further Readings

Edwards, J. (2010). *Language Diversity in the Classroom*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
Gregory, E. (2008). *Learning to Read in a New Language*. Los Angeles: Sage.
Janks, H. (2014). *Doing Critical Literacy: Texts and Activities for Students and Teachers*. New York: Routledge.

New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures, *Harvard Education Review*, 66 (1): 60–92.

Powell, R. and Rightmyer, E. C. (2011). *Literacy for All Students: An Instructional Framework for Closing the Gap*. New York: Routledge.

Rogers, R. (2010) An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education. In R. Rogers (ed.), *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (pp. 1–20). 2nd edn. New York: Routledge.

Snyder, I. (ed.) (2002). *Silicon Literacies: Communication, Innovation and Education in the Electronic Age*. New York: Routledge.