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Literacy and Conceptual Appropriation in One Page:

Behind the LSLP Micro-Papers

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As a research assistant and mentor, I have learned that developing a sense of appropriation (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999) and ownership (Clift, Brady, Mora, Stegemoller, & Choi, 2006) of a research project is a daunting task. Novice researchers doubt their own potential as researchers and worry that they cannot meaningfully contribute to the interpretive (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) endeavors of the studies. Developing one's agency as a researcher, then, is a necessary first step to develop strong research. This essay will share an account of a research team's conceptual appropriation process along three research studies (S Castaño & Orrego, 2015; Chiquito & MA Gómez, 2015; Mejía-Vélez & Pulgarín, 2015) by creating our own web-based publication. I will share our beginning and rationale behind the publication, its setup, and some lessons learned in the voice of our researchers.

The Genesis: Building from the Ground Up

At the Literacies in Second Languages Project (Mora, 2015), we want to engage in the use of literacy frameworks in second languages (Uribe & Gómez, 2015) to make sense of today's language ecologies (Mora, 2014) and the emerging forms of literacy practices in the cities. Our project, built from a grassroots orientation (Mora, 2015), features 15 preservice teachers involved in two major studies about urban literacies (Chiquito & MA Gómez, 2015; Mejía-Vélez & Pulgarín, 2015; Mora, M Castaño, N Gómez, Ramírez, Mejía-Vélez, & Pulgarín 2015) and gaming literacies (S Castaño & Orrego, 2015; Mora, S Castaño, Hernandez, & Orrego, 2015), in addition to a group of seven teachers who are pursuing (4) or just finished (3) their master's degrees.

Leading such a diverse group has one large advantage: Their unbridled enthusiasm. These students have showed a great deal of interest in learning about literacy, a nascent topic of inquiry in Latin America at large. They

have been very open to propose topics of discussion in areas such as children's literacies (Cañas & Ocampo, 2015), social media (Zapata, 2015), and other areas including critical literacy, storytelling, and multimodality. However, due to their age and lack of research experience, most of these researchers had not fully appropriated the different concepts and frameworks comprising our project. As their mentor, I wanted to foster the needed appropriation (Grossman, et al., 1999) and ownership (Clift, et al., 2006) levels to develop research projects with a strong conceptual and methodological base. I did not just want them to read the literacy scholars, but to help them envision themselves as literacy scholars.

"Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Flattery"

In life, I am a firm believer in serendipity. Opportunities may arise from the unlikeliest places. Around the time I was chartering LSLP, I also joined the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID) as an affiliate researcher. CID holds one small publication called Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue (http:/centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/publications/).The goal of these publications, as outlined on their site is to "provide some of the assumptions and history attached to each concept for those unfamiliar with it." From my experience writing some of these key concepts (and after asking the CID Director, Dr. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, for her consent), I started wondering if this could be a good way to introduce my students to literacy scholarship, as corollary to my "first rule": Don't ever use a term that you can't define in your own words. From this rule and my writing experience, we created the LSLP Micro-Papers (http://www.literaciesinl2project.org/lslp-micro-papers.html).

Transcending Knowledge Consumption; Embarking into Knowledge Production

The idea behind the LSLP Micro-Papers is quite simple: We intended to develop an organic (Gramsci, 1971; Ives, 2006) conceptual base to support our research. Our team did not just want to simply replicate the articles we read or to simply replicate the lead researcher's words. If we intend to be scholars, it was imperative that all researchers developed their own voice early on. As their mentor, I wanted for all of them to take stock on the key elements of our conceptual framework, "the city as literacy" (Mora, 2015;

Mora, et al., 2015), our view of ethnography (Heath & Street, 2008; Ramírez & Mora, 2014) as our approach to field work, and the foundational elements of our research lines (http://www.literaciesinl2project.org/our-research.html). In this sense, the Micro-Papers are a requirement for all LSLP researchers at some point of their experience in the project.

Structure. All Micro-Papers follow the same structure and ground rules. No paper should be longer than one page and they should state their definitions in their own words. There is a requirement of 2-3 references to ensure quality of scholarship, but all authors are cautioned against using in-text citations. All Micro-Papers begin with a 2- to 3-paragraph description of the chosen concept (Defining the Term), followed by an explication of how the concept applies or expands our research lines (Connecting it to LSLP) and some brief ideas for how this concept can be useful in second languages (Expanding Second Language Research). As of this writing, we have written 36 Micro-Papers, with several more in preparation. Although our researchers have authored most of the papers, we have welcomed a number of submissions from doctoral students and faculty in U.S. universities. At our university, I have used the LSLP Micro-Papers as a resource in my preservice English courses and in my graduate seminar on literacies and some professors in our program have also used a few of these papers in their own courses. Micro-Papers topics range from key concepts that inform our frameworks (e.g. multimodality, metrolingualism, polylanguaging, superdiversity), online and digital literacies (including entries about online reading, Pinterest, and social media), text design (intertextuality, transmediality), and children's literacies, to name a few.

Our Achievements, as told by LSLP Researchers

We published our first round of paper in September, 2014. In that time, the experience has greatly enriched our research team. In this section, I would like to point out four major achievements from this endeavor. I will now open the floor to some of the LSLP researchers who have authored Micro-Papers so that, in their words, they share what they learned as the result of writing these documents. These vignettes shall serve both as evidence of the experience and a better conclusion than anything I could draft to bookend this article:

I learned that my knowledge is worthy of sharing with the world as well as the little details that I need to be aware of when writing for publishing in the academic field – Maryori Giraldo, BA Candidate in English-Spanish Education

By writing a micro-paper I learned how to summarize a part of my study that could be shared with others in order to learn from and with them. – Julián Zapata, M.A., English teacher

I learned how to summarize, sum up, organize and scope big ideas into one meaningful page clarifying topics of interest for our research team. – Tyrone Steven Orrego, B.A. Candidate in English-Spanish Education

I learnt about something I was doing with my class mates in Italy, but I had not known that it actually happens a lot in Europe and that it was a studied phenomena. Besides I learnt how to express better my ideas and to organize them in order to be coherent. – Tatiana Chiquito, B.A. Candidate in English-Spanish Education

First, I've learned to get more self-confidence on writing in English. Also, I feel a big responsibility when I wrote this kind of texts because I know that people are going to look up the content, which demands me, take my time to create information that can be useful for others. Reading in English is another ability that I've developed through writing micro papers because when you're going to talk about a topic, it requires to read documents related to it and search the main authors too. Finally, I think, when you have the possibility to express your thoughts and others can read them, you get more motivation for doing better next time and for keeping work hard on you passion, in my case, languages and pedagogy. – Sara Uribe, B.A. Candidate in English-Spanish Education

Writing the micro-paper I learnt to trust on what I have learnt, but I also learnt to recognize what I need to study more. I learnt to summarize the content of what I have and need to say about my research process. The micro-paper helped me to realize if I really knew what I was doing and what I wanted to do during my research process and also if I need to reconfigure some aspects about my research. – Gloria Gutiérrez, M.A. Candidate in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages and English teacher

Writing the Micro-Papers is an opportunity to face what we really understand about those topics that support the research we do in the group. Micro-papers allow us to concentrate on those main aspects that are part of the concepts, without going by the branches losing the essential issues. Micro-papers could be used as a reference for those who need a clear idea of a specific concept. – Claudia Cañas, M.A., English teacher

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