

# FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY

## GLIT 6728

### Course format and requirements

The course will be divided into two parts. The first six weeks have prescribed readings designed to provide a framework for the second part. For the first part, the course will be conducted as a seminar in which students are expected to do the prescribed readings for the weekly topics and to actively participate in class discussions. The second six weeks will be about applied literacies with presentations on individual investigations of literacy practices.

1. Part one: For this part of the course each student is required to lead discussion on one of the topics to be examined in class. The student will be responsible for teasing out the key concepts/ideas in the identified key reading, which will then be used to structure the discussion. There are various approaches to leading discussions: through a written response paper that one might choose to read to the group; through selected noting that one might read from; through "highlighting" an interesting article, video, etc s/h found related to the topic. Whatever the format, the focus should be towards a critique of the readings and towards connecting the readings and class discussions to one's personal/political experiences and stances (20%).
2. Part two: this part is hands-on /applied literacies. This part is devoted to individual projects around the notion of multiliteracies. Examples might include Internet diaries, women reading romances, cultural dance, music, language/dialect, videography, visual art, the language of different spaces, etc. This part is about any literacy practices through which one would investigate the relationships of identity, culture, power and meaning (making) and pedagogy. The first half of this assignment is a proposal with an annotated reference list outlining what the project is about (40%). The other half is a formal presentation of the project to the class (40%).

### COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

#### Week 1

1. overview of course (purpose, content, operation, structure and evaluation)
2. overview of critical literacy concepts and cultural studies covered in foundations 1
3. introduction to course topics/concepts and ideological framework

Basic concepts to be dealt with include; discourses, language and power, language as discourse; codeswitching; standardization; literacy of conversation; constructed dialogue; etc.

#### Week 2

##### Defining the standard

The complexity of language as discourse can be uncovered by an analysis of the different uses of the word "standard". It is through the use of what is considered "standard" that we are able to say whether or not individuals are participating fully in a given context. What is the meaning of the standard in given situations and how do individuals come to know what standard is acceptable in a given situation? This week will be devoted to examining the standard as uniform and standard as ideology of consciousness. We will also examine the way standard as ideology is used to foster divisions amongst groups. Corson, Milroy and Milroy provide us with the theoretical basis for the ongoing uses of the standard and its subjective nature while Lowenburg give examples of the limiting nature of standard discourses in the evaluation of students.

## Readings

Milroy, L. & Milroy, D. (1989). Standard English and the complaint tradition. In *Authority in language: Investigating language prescription and standardization*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Corson, D. (1993). Minority social groups: Non-standard varieties and style. In *Language, minority education and gender*. Toronto Multilingual Matters.

Lowenberg (2000). Non-native varieties and sociopolitics of English proficiency and assessment. In Joan Kell Hall and William Eglington (eds.) *The sociopolitics of English language teaching*. Toronto: Multilingual Matters.

## **Week 3**

### Codeswitching and language choice

If language standardization and norms are often marginalizing, how then do individuals deal with relations of power in communicative encounters? Here, we will examine the practice of codeswitching as a vehicle used to navigate relations of power in language. We will examine the use of codeswitching in interpersonal spaces as well as in formal institutions such as schools. Heller provides theoretical tools for understanding codeswitching as a conversational tool and Heller and Myers Scotton provide examples of codeswitching and implications for education.

## Readings

Heller, M. ed. (1988). Introduction. In *codeswitching: anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Heller, M. (1995). The politics of codeswitching and language choice in French Ontario. *Journal of language arts*.

Myers Scotton, C. (1988). Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiations. In Monica Heller (ed.) *Codeswitching: anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

## **Week 4**

### The orality of literacy

In this class we will deal with the interconnections between casual conversation and written expository prose. This will provide an understanding of the dimension and patterns that connect and distinguish a variety of discourses. We will also examine the validity and impact of myths associated with language learning, especially learning how to write and its relation to oral culture. Shirley Brice Heath examines these myths and Deborah Tannen provides examples between orality and written material, arguing that essays at best, are, "constructed dialogue".

## Readings

Tannen, D. (1998). The orality of literature and the literacy of conversation.

Heath, S. (1998). The literate essay: using ethnography to explore myths.

## Week 5

### Gender and language

Language has been considered "man-made" and for this reason many studies of gender and language focused on examining the ways this language helps keep women in subordinate positions. This class will be devoted to an examination of the gendered nature of language use and how it impacts education. Corson provides an overview of current debates in gender and language studies and calls for an examination of policies that can assist change the differences in language use resulting in differential treatment of students. Neilsen provides a synopsis of research literacies that make possible woman centered occasions. Gilbert also provides an example of how ownership in writing can result in gender-biased texts.

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### Reading

Corson, D. (1993). Gender and language policy in education. In *Language, minority education and gender*. Toronto Multilingual Matters.

Neilsen, L. (1988). Knowing her place: Research literacies and feminist occasions. Halifax: Backalong books.

Gilbert, P. (1988). Student text as pedagogical text. In Suzanne De Castell and Carmen Luke (eds.) *Language authority and criticism: Readings on the school textbook*. London: Falmer press.

## Week 6

### Critical literacy

What exactly does "critical" mean in the case of literacy and how might one teach for it? This week is devoted to examining a few case studies on the application of critical literacy. All readings provide examples of how this might look like for teachers.

### Readings

Gee, J. (2000). Critical social literacy for the classroom: an approach using conventional texts across the curriculum. In *changing literacies*.

Janks H. (1991). A critical approach to the teaching of language. Educational review, vol.43, no. 2, pp. 191-199.

Fairclough, N. (1989). Critical discourse analysis in practice: interpretation, explanation and the position of the analyst. In Norman Fairclough, *Language and power*.

## Week 7

### Protect outlines

This week will be devoted to the discussion of topics selected by course participants as focus for their project. Each student will have a chance to focus, clarify or otherwise make progress towards the goals of the project and its content. This week is a "work-in-session" rather than formal presentations and therefore differs from the last weeks of the course.