ED 352 633   CS 011 131

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TITLE   Literacy and Diversity: Do We Need Dichotomies or
                Not?
PUB DATE   Dec 92
NOTE   16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
                National Reading Conference (42nd, San Antonio, TX,
                December 2-5, 1992).
PUB TYPE   Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.)
                (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Cultural Differences; Ethnography; *Literacy;
                Perspective Taking; Teacher Student Relationship;
                Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS   Academic Discourse; *Dichotomies; *Educational
                Issues

ABSTRACT
                Theorists, researchers, and practitioners need to
develop a better awareness of the oppressive nature of dichotomies in
literacy research and practice and work to use dichotomies profitably
by moving beyond them. Dichotomies can be convenient generalizations
which make communication possible, but they run the risk of creating
warring camps of opponents who berate each other in different
languages. Dichotomous depictions of literacy, language, and culture
are popular and well institutionalized; however, the use of such
dichotomies fosters a limited view of "reality," leads to repression
of individual and community expression and needs, promotes cultural
bias, creates exclusive discourse that stifles dialogue, and
prohibits critical analysis. Three possibilities for transforming
dichotomies exist: mitigate the opposition created by dichotomies
using a continuum model; emphasize pluralism in the place of
dichotomies; and reformulate the problem. One method of promoting
dialogue from multiple perspectives involves using ethnography as a
teaching and learning tool. Another method of working profitably with
dichotomies is that of using dialectical processes of "methodological
doubt" and "methodological belief." Literacy educators need to
construct new visions of literacy teaching and learning, ones that
value multiple perspectives and approaches. (Forty-two references are
attached.) (RS)

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LITERACY AND DIVERSITY: DO WE NEED DICHOTOMIES OR NOT?

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Running Head: Dichotomies

LITERACY AND DIVERSITY: DO WE NEED DICHOTOMIES OR NOT?

Interior Minister of Lilliput: But you're a Giant!
        A monster sent by our enemies to destroy us!
Gulliver: I'm not your enemy; I'm just different. . . .
Minister: Different! That makes you an enemy!
Gulliver: No, I'm different from you and you are
        different from me. So you see, we're both the same.
        That makes us equal.
        (The Three Worlds of Gulliver, cited in Wilden, 1980,
        p. xlix)

Methods and purposes of education are a frequent subject of debate among professional and lay members of society. These debates, particularly debates about methods of teaching literacy and language skills, often promulgate polarized positions based on dichotomous categories, for example subskills versus holistic approaches (Pearson, 1989), direct versus implicit approaches (Delpit, 1988) and process versus product approaches (Graves, 1983; Hawisher, 1990; Ronald & Roskelly, 1990).

Delpit's (1988) argument that "process" approaches to literacy education foster the oppression of non-mainstream students highlights the dangers of dichotomous thinking. Delpit uses a number of dichotomies to bolster her argument: process versus product approaches, implicit versus direct instruction, mainstream versus non-mainstream students, and the culture of power versus the culture of the oppressed. Although Delpit raises important issues regarding equity and education, we are uneasy with her dichotomies on two counts. First, is she fair in using different dichotomies interchangeably? Is "a process approach to learning" synonymous with "implicit" or "indirect" instruction"? Second, is the use of such dichotomies not in itself misleading? Is every person definitively in or out of the "culture of power"? Are all members of that culture members equally? Are all non-members non-members equally?

In this theoretical paper, we focus on issues of literacy and language learning among diverse populations of students,

exploring the current use of dichotomous theoretical frameworks,
and suggesting ways to transcend the dichotomies that may stifle
progress in theory, research, and practice. Finally, we hope to
encourage dialogue about the effect of dichotomous thinking on
progress in the education of diverse populations.

Defining Dichotomies

Making dichotomies is a process of binary or oppositional
naming. Like all naming, it has its values and dangers. In "Fumes
the Memorious" (1964), Jorge Luis Borges describes a man with a
prodigious memory who has trouble understanding why a dog seen
from the front at three o'clock should have the same name as a dog
seen from the side at six o'clock. Names, and dichotomies, are
convenient generalizations which make communication possible.

However, when dichotomies become oppositional, they run the
risk of becoming "killer dichotomies" (Berthoff, 1990) which
create warring camps of opponents who berate each other in
different languages. In literacy research and practice, the
history of "great debates" has been a history of opposition: oral
and silent reading, whole word and phonics methods, and most
recently, between whole language and subskills approaches (Chall &
Goodman, 1992). Literacy theorists and policy makers have
traditionally used dichotomous definitions to distinguish literate
from illiterate adults, young non-readers from readers, and normal
from learning disabled students. In bilingual and bidialectic
education, debates abound between "English-only" and "English-
plus" perspectives (McGroarty, 1992), and between approaches which
stress standard English and those which accommodate to non-
standard English speakers (Labov, 1969). In classrooms at all
levels, oppositions are set up between teacher and student roles,
right and wrong answers, passing and failing, competence and
incompetence. Finally, student populations have been categorized

using dichotomies according to cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic factors (majority and minority, white and non-white, advantaged and disadvantaged, mainstream and non-mainstream), and ability and competency levels (gifted and regular, disabled and regular, developmental and remedial students).

The Consequences of Dichotomies

Dichotomous depictions of literacy, language, and culture are popular and well institutionalized; however, the use of such dichotomies fosters a limited view of "reality," leads to repression of individual and community expression and needs, promotes cultural bias, creates exclusive discourse that stifles dialogue, and prohibits critical analysis. These limitations combine to stifle "inspired teaching" (Duffy, 1992) and to hinder progress in the education of diverse groups in our society.

First, the dichotomies represented by these depictions are false; dichotomies do not exist in "reality" or in nature (Berthoff, 1990). Rather, dichotomous thinking is part of the epistemological underpinnings of Western culture (Wilden, 1980), codified in Aristotle's Laws of Contradiction and the Excluded Middle (Wolf, 1988), Descartes' mind/body dualisms, and the structuralism of Levi-Strauss and de Saussure. Dichotomies can mask differences that exist within groups. For example, it is unlikely that all teachers who profess to use "holistic" methods do so in the same manner (Cohen, 1992). Nor is it wise to assume that all members of a culture, mainstream or non-mainstream, share similar goals and beliefs (Ellsworth, 1989). Such depictions assume an underlying conformity which represses individual freedom and humanization as people are pressured to identify with one group or another (Freire, 1973).

Furthermore, these dichotomies, particularly cultural dichotomies, represent a biased belief that some groups are

deprived in their language (Bernstein, 1970), their ability to be literate, and their capacity for abstract thinking (Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982). Dichotomous views of cultural groups can result in perceptions of one group's culture as more valuable than another for the development of literacy (e.g., Hirsch, 1980). Cultural customs are often interpreted negatively and viewed as deprivations because they are measured against one cultural norm (Scollon, 1984). Terms such as minority, disadvantaged, and handicapped imply a difference that deprives children of equal status in both school and society. Literacy programs established to minimize differences in children's abilities, such as Head Start and Chapter One, often operate from a deficit or deprivation view (Pellegrini, 1991; Rose, 1988). As long as the dichotomous "mainstream/non-mainstream" view exists, differences will be approached as deficits (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991).

Dichotomous approaches to literacy, language, and culture also discourage an open dialogue about issues of diversity. Instead, these polarized views shape exclusive communities that legitimize and affirm the knowledge and ideology of group members (Swearingen, 1990) and silence the voices of others (Delpit, 1986, 1988; Elbow, 1986; Ellsworth, 1989). In addition, dichotomies encourage jargon-laden discourse that stifles meaningful conversation as slogans and catch-words are tossed about in defense of a group's purpose (Liston & Zeichner, 1987). Finally, clinging to dichotomies can hamper critical analysis of one's own ideas and of new ideas (Berthoff, 1990; Elbow, 1986). Because people often define themselves by what they are not, the dual entities of dichotomy depend on each other for life and allow one group to have power over another and to become the "bearers of truth" (Hawisher, 1990, p. 16).

Ultimately, holding fast to dichotomies can become "a way of

trying to hold the world still" (Zebroski, 1990, p. 178), and
stifling progress. Individuals and groups maintain power through
the use of dichotomies, and those who cannot fit themselves into
one side or another are left out.

Unfortunately, "killer dichotomies" continue to dominate
debates in literacy research and education. In order to move
beyond dichotomies, Gail Hawisher suggests,

> reform [in English education] must demonstrate a balanced
> perspective, a perspective that seeks not only to unite
> binary opposition into productive syntheses but also seeks
> to preserve the rich diversity of knowledge among us.
> (Hawisher, 1990, p. 16)

Although Hawisher's advice referred specifically to English
education, her words have implications for the teaching of
literacy, particularly in a time when we strive to serve the needs
of our diverse students.

Transcending Dichotomies

Constructing New Visions

Because of the divisive effects of dichotomous thinking, it
is important that educators develop alternative ways of dealing
with issues of literacy, language, and culture. To accomplish
this, we must construct new visons of literacy teaching and
learning, and then develop teaching methods that allow us to enact
these visions. Three possibilities for transforming dichotomies,
and examples of their applications to issues of language, literacy
and culture, are outlined below.

Continuum. A continuum is one model which mitigates the
opposition created by dichotomies. For example, orality and
literacy, usually viewed as a dichotomy (Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982),
can be viewed instead as a continuum. Using a pragmatic analysis,
Lakoff (1981) lays out speech and literacy events along a

continuum between poles formed by informal spoken conversation and
the formal written essay. On this continuum, a personal letter,
although written, is more "oral" in style than a spoken lecture. A
continuous view of orality and literacy can reveal the complexity
of the relations between the two. It can also become the basis for
a language and literacy curriculum (e.g., Moffett, 1968).

A second example of a continuum is the concept of emergent
literacy, which has superceded the reading readiness paradigm that
assumes a dichotomy between young "non-readers" and "readers".
From the emergent literacy perspective, young children can have
many reading and writing skills and can act like readers and
writers before they understand the alphabetic code. Although
emergent literacy helps to remove dichotomies, there is a danger
that it fails to avoid the dichotomy by defining itself in
contrast to "conventional" literacy. In order to be more truly
continuous, literacy can be viewed as constantly emerging in
individuals and in groups. For example, new literacy technologies
require the emergence of new knowledge and skills in literates of
all ages.

Finally, in learning theory, Vygotsky's model of learning is
based on a continuum. Dissatisfied with the opposition between
measured competency and incompetency, Vygotsky (1978) developed
the concept of the zone of proximal development, which redefines
learning as a continuum of performance scaffolded by collaboration
with adults.

Pluralism. A second approach is to emphasize pluralism in
the place of dichotomies. Sulzby (1992) talks about "multiple
literacies" in accounting for the range of literacy practices in
the modern world. Literacy researchers have documented the
multiplicity of literacy practices across social groups,
challenging the unity of literacy and the dichotomy between

literate and illiterate (Heath, 1983, Scribner & Cole, 1981). This research suggests that we must be ever more particular rather than general in our characterizations of language and literacy practices.

In language and literacy research, deficit models of home language and culture, which dominated theory in the past, have been replaced with difference models (Labov, 1969; Scott, 1992), although deficit models continue to drive many educational practices. However, difference models of language and culture, like the concept of emergent literacy, can continue to promote dichotomies when "differences" continue to be measured against a single "standard" language or culture.

Re-definition. A third way to overcome dichotomies is to reformulate the problem. For example, Dyson (1988) challenges the view which equates literacy with decontextualized language, asserting that through literacy we recontextualize language in new settings. Likewise, miscue analysis (Goodman, 1976) has redefined our view of errors, going beyond computing reading accuracy to ask what errors reveal about the reading process. Following this lead, emergent literacy researchers looking at children's responses to environmental print went beyond accuracy rate to examine the quality of wrong answers (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). Finally, we can redefine the roles of teacher and student. For example, Graves (1983) urges writing teachers to write along with their students, to voice their own struggles with writing, thereby becoming students, and to allow children, through their writing, to teach what they know.

Enacting Visions of Literacy

New visions of literacy, then, involve transcending the dichotomies which limit our thoughts and actions. We need to develop strategies for theorizing, researching, and teaching that

allow us to enact the new visions of literacy that we construct.
Dialogue among groups of educators is essential (Delpit, 1988;
Shannon, 1990). Delpit claims that "progressive education
movements" (1986) or "liberals" (1988) have silenced dialogue by
refusing to listen to the views of non-mainstream educators and
parents. Weiler (1991) and Ellsworth (1989) echo this concern,
suggesting that movements toward critical pedagogy deny diversity
and silence voices that do not sound forth similar critical goals.
Through dialogue, we can critically examine the purposes and
effects of promoting one method, language, or cultural group over
another. However, in the attempt to look critically, we must be
wary of creating new dichotomies. We must be careful to avoid
assuming that others do not understand our arguments because they
do not agree with them.

One method of promoting dialogue from multiple perspectives
involves using ethnography as a teaching and learning tool.
Traditionally, ethnography has been a mode of inquiry that seeks
to uncover the particulars of cultural experience and the
perspectives of participants. Ethnographic research shows the
multiple facets of literacy and culture (Heath, 1983; Scribner &
Cole, 1981; Taylor, 1983). However, ethnography can also be a
powerful pedagogical tool (Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983). Zebroski
(1990) suggests that we incorporate ethnography into our pedagogy
by collaborating with students to redraw existing boundaries
between teacher and student. As a composition teacher, Zebroski
has his students practice ethnographic writing as a means of
studying the lives and personal perspectives of groups of people.
He argues that this approach allows students to see the world in
new ways, to realize the power and limits of language in
describing experience, to learn unique communication strategies,
and to move beyond the role of student to that of "researcher" and

"teacher." At the heart of this pedagogical use of ethnography is dialogue - between students and informants, between students and students, and between students and teachers.

Another method of working profitably with dichotomies is that of using dialectic processes of "methodological doubt" and "methodological belief" (Elbow (1986). Building on the idea that "contraries" (i.e., dichotomous views) can be used profitably, Elbow claims that suspending disbelief and entering into another's way of thinking, even temporarily, forces us to analyze our own ideas more carefully. He does not propose naive belief at the expense of critical analysis. Instead, he suggests that the two processes, belief and doubt, be used to expose, experience and examine the issues we need to confront in our theorizing and teaching.

Theorists, researchers, and practitioners need to develop a better awareness of the oppressive nature of dichotomies in our field and work to use dichotomies profitably, by moving beyond them. Our dialogue must focus on coming to know and understand the perspectives of others through frequent interaction with others. We must be cautious not to re-establish old dichotomies with new names. Finally, we need to construct new visions of literacy teaching and learning, ones that value multiple perspectives and approaches.

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