Introduction:
Redesigning the pedagogy of multiliteracies II
for acting in a society with uncertainties

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In 1996,* the New London Group (NLG) proposed the pedagogy of multiliteracies (PoM-I\(^1\)) to cope with challenges and changes expected along with local diversity, global connectedness, restructured workplace and new communication technology. The era of post-Fordism required flexible and multi-tiskilled workers, and market logic had become dominant. Mass media and consumerism were making incursions in private lives, which had become more public and multi-layered. The PoM-I introduced the concept of design in school curricula learners are engaged in semiotic activities to make meaning (designing) and transform discourses (redesigning). Language and other modes (audio, visual, spatial and gestural) can be resources for design (available designs). Four principles were featured in PoM-I:

1. Situated practice, which fosters learners’ semiotic experience of learning in immersion within a community

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\(^1\) In this special issue, we use PoM-I and PoM-II to distinguish and reflect the development of PoM.
2. **Overt instruction**, which are teachers’ scaffolding for learners’ meaning making by introducing metalanguage

3. **Critical framing**, which concerns learners’ reflective and critical practice towards what they have learned

4. **Transformed practice**, where learners transfer and re-create meaning and discourses

Twenty-five years after its genesis, these four principles remain pertinent, but the social semiotic landscapes of many globalized/globalizing societies have rapidly changed since then: it has become more fluid and inevitably interconnected. Technology has evolved in an unprecedented manner. Constant social changes bring uncertainties to every aspect of our lives: power to cause social transformation is beyond individual nations and institutions, with group boundaries increasingly getting blurred and individual agency weakened (Bauman, 2000). As Covid-19 has so forcefully imposed this naked truth to us, no one can escape this inevitable connectedness, nor are agents of transformation instantly recognizable (Latour, 2005). The world is also getting superdiverse (Blommaert, 2013; Vertovec, 2007, 2010) and plurilingual and pluricultural (Castellotti & Moore, 2010; Moore, 2006a) with intensified global flows of human bodies, capitals, ideas and also viruses. This superdiverse sociolinguistic and sociocultural global-scape stands in sharp contrast with the rigid monolingual pedagogical and curriculum regimes deeply entrenched in linguistic purism, English dominant ideologies and a segregationist approach to human communication (Harris, 2013; Love, 2014; Makoni & Pennycook, 2012) in many parts of the world. PoM-I, born in the 1990s, thus continues to evolve (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015). It is against this background that the authors of this special issue have documented these new developments to re-make, re-design and re-imagine PoM through infusing it with the latest scholarship and intellectual movements, vis-à-vis translanguaging and trans-semiotizing theories, new materiality and posthumanist theories, action-oriented and mediation theories.

To capture these new developments with a shorthand, we propose the term pedagogy of multiliteracies II (PoM-II) to highlight the ever-evolving journey of PoM to respond to the spirit of our time. PoM-II focuses on destabilizing, crossing and ultimately deconstructing various boundaries that are sociohistorically constructed. Multiliteracies, as conceived by the NLG, already planted seeds of plurality. At the same time, the plurilingual stance has emerged also in the late 1990s in Europe (Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997/2009; Moore, 2006b; Lüdi, & Py, 2009) and it has evolved side by side with the concept of multiliteracies. In the past two decades, in Europe and in North America, through the works of Cenoz, Gorter and May (2017), Creese
and Blackledge (2010), Bailey (2012), García, Johnson, Seltzer and Valdés (2017), among others, another concept was proposed and developed as the **translanguaging** stance, acknowledging and valuing the spectrums of already hybrid semiotic patterns rather than assuming parallel solitudes of named languages co-existing in society, school, or the classroom. We witness these trends originally developing separately but converging and inter-illuminating in recent times.

While highlighting the importance to decentralize research from the traditional knowledge in the Global North, a growing number of contributions from the Global South provide alternative forms of knowledge production and research (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019). For example, a continuous interrogation towards the coloniality of English (Lin, 1996, 1999, 2006; Lin & Motha, 2020; Shin, 2006 and many others), a recent analysis of the neoliberal politics of Global English (Park & Wee, 2013; Piller & Cho, 2013; Tupas, 2015) and other languages (Sharma & Phyak, 2017; Sohn & Kang, 2021). These contributions facilitate a more critical discussion towards what counts as (named) languages and bi-/multilingualism. They converge to underpin the reconceptualization of language as trans/ language/ semiotizing/ whole-body sense-making (García & Li, 2014; Lin, 2019; Lin, Wu & Lemke, 2020; Makoni & Pennycook, 2012; Thibault, 2011).

All these converging intellectual movements reflect the spirit of our time. They are not content with **multilingualism** since it is often used as mere rhetoric and does not address the deep-rooted (empire and settler) colonialism and racism which constructs hierarchies of speakers through setting up and reifying hierarchies of languages (Kubota, 2016) in the classroom, school and society (with some exceptions, see Fuji-Round, 2015; Konakahara & Tsuchiya, 2020). Pluri- hints at the already hybrid continua of semiotic patterns, and plurilingualism sees languages as continuous with one another rather than as discrete, bounded entities (Moore & Gajo, 2009; Lin, 2019). These semiotic patterns, to varying extents, have however been abstracted and reified (albeit sometimes for “good” pedagogical reasons) as various entities. For example, standardized languages, academic registers, styles and accents frequently get co-opted by policy discourses into a deficit-based stance against minoritized students and international students (Marshall, 2020; Lin, 2020).

PoM-II has also evolved from PoM-I to respond to the emerging techno-agentic dynamic systems where participatory cultures as conceived by the NLG have been redesigned from the inside out by algorithmic regimes and artificial intelligence that actively learn to interpellate users into parallel, segregated, almost tribal ideological bubbles. Our increasing awareness of technologies leads us to define it not just as a background or a tool (as conceived in sociocultural theories that the NLG drew on to propose PoM-I) but as active
intelligent agents interacting with humans. This heightened attention to post-anthropocentric distributed agency, however, must not dilute our recognizing of the importance of:

1. grounding our education work in a dynamic, action-oriented stance, as captured in the Action-oriented Approach (AoA), which draws our attention from communication to action, from mental gymnastics to habit formation, from cognitive processes to emotions and creativity (Piccardo & North, 2019)
2. human meaning making as a through and through plurilingual, pluricultural, whole-body lived experience (Busch, 2017) and an action-oriented dynamic process
3. intercultural mediation and intercomprehension as central to this process and as themes that are largely absent in much of the research arising in monolingual Anglo-speaking contexts

PoM-II thus, as the authors in this special issue empirically show, enhances students’ and teachers’ engagement and agency for developing the pluricultural symbiotic society (Fujita-Round, 2015) envisioned for the super-diverse populations in the present-day and the future. In the next section we shall offer a summary of the articles in this special issue. We organize the majority of the articles into three clusters, each focusing on one aspect of the spirit of our time, as follows: the trans/languaging/semiotizing stance, the new materiality/posthumanist stance and the dynamic action-oriented stance. The special issue ends with a meta-analysis article based on conversations regarding NLG, providing a meta-insight into this historical and inspiring position paper.

**The plurilingual, trans/languaging/semiotizing stance**

Four papers, respectively from Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and France, have tried, on the one hand, to infuse PoM with plurilingual, trans/languaging/semiotizing (TL/TS) principles and pedagogies to counter English monolingualism and English native speakerism in Asia and, on the other hand, to break away from monolingual pedagogies working with international students to create a pluricultural space in a university in France. Underpinning this space is the plurilingual, TL/TS stance that engages students and teachers critically and creatively in content and language learning, utilizing all of their pluri-semiotic repertoires.

Yiqi Liu’s article, “Pedagogy of multiliteracies in CLIL: Innovating with the social systems, genre multimodalities framework,” reported on a case study of the mobilization of the SGM framework (Lin & Liu, 2020) in an English as an additional language (EAL) classroom in a secondary school in Hong Kong.
The SGM framework provides a space where students can critically analyse texts and discourses, looking at “what is the social context?” (social system), “how meanings are structured?” (genre) and “what semiotic resources are utilised?” (meaning-making resources). In Liu’s study, students were engaged in autonomous learning through an English-medium small private online course (SPOC), which was designed by employing the SGM framework and other related pedagogical frameworks: the pedagogy of multiliteracies, CLIL (content and language integrated learning), translanguaging and trans-semiotizing (Lin, 2015). The analyses of learners’ activity logs of the websites and the interview data construe that the program effectively fosters students’ individual agency and critical awareness while improving their academic English skills.

In her article “Designing a modern language course for culturally and linguistically diverse students,” Kiyu Itoi adds a detailed description of a translanguaging dual language (TDL) course, which was designed by the author and her colleagues, drawing on the PoM-I and the multimodality entextualization cycle (He & Lin, 2019). The context in which this course was developed is unique: a bilingual degree program at a Japanese university, where linguaculturally diverse learners were enrolled. Itoi conducted qualitative analyses of the role-play videos the students created and the entries in the teacher’s reflective journal. The results indicate that the TDL course enhances the students’ ability to explore semiotic resources available to them, highlighting learners’ translanguaging practices for negotiation of meaning and co-construction of knowledge. This, Itoi emphasises, could differentiate the TDL course from traditional CLIL classrooms, which are often confined to the target-language-only (e.g., English-only) principle. Instead, teachers (and students) often translanguage for learners’ understanding of subject contents and also for affirming students’ identities.

In their article, “Empowering local bilingual teachers through extending the pedagogy of multiliteracies in Taiwan’s primary education,” Fay Chen and Wenli Tsou provide a vivid classroom example where a locally trained grade 1 Taiwanese teacher fruitfully navigated Taiwan’s official bilingual education mandate, which requires all K-12 teachers to teach academic content through English. They argue that the bilingual policy facilitates an adverse effect on Taiwanese local teachers as it positions the highly experienced local teachers as inferior to English native speakers. Questioning the prevalent English native-speakerism that circulates in the educational policy and societal discourses, Chen and Tsou demonstrate the ways in which the experienced grade 1 Taiwanese teacher creatively used various semiotic resources — including Chinese and English, body language, voice variation, visual aids — to teach mathematical concepts (e.g., sorting). Their classroom discourse analysis shows how translanguaging and trans-semiotizing (Lin, 2019) in the grade 1
CLIL classroom are creative and meaningful for their students’ learning of both content and mathematical English. Through this investigation, Chen and Tsou project a possibility where local Taiwanese teachers become competent Chinese-English plurilingual educators who create new and creative learning possibilities for their Taiwanese young learners.

In her article, “Enseignement du français aux étudiants internationaux: apports du translanguaging et des multilittératies en contexte institutionnel,” Christelle Hoppe presents preliminary results from an intervention-research study conducted in a university department, teaching French as an additional language to international students in France. She reports on the implementation of a pedagogical approach combining translanguaging and multiliteracies and invites readers to reflect on how we can consider international students’ entire linguistic repertoire when teaching them French. Hoppe writes that translanguaging and multiliteracies can contribute to the development of students’ metalinguistic reflexivity and generate dynamic modes of interaction in tune with our digital society.

**The new materiality/posthumanist stance**

If posthumanism, Deleuzo-Guattarian and new materiality theories have been influential in early childhood education and early literacy for some time now (e.g., Hackett & Somerville, 2017; Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Myrstad et al., 2020; Odegard, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017), they have more recently started to take root in language and education research in Canada and elsewhere (e.g., Bangou, 2020; Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2016; Pennycook, 2018; Smythe et al., 2017; Toohey et al., 2019; Waterhouse, 2021). This has offered PoM-I a new impetus to move away from its often text-based orientations to consider the entanglement of both human and material.

Contrasting the Web 1.0 and 2.0 learning environment where NLG initially started, Heather Lotherington, Kurt Thumlert, Taylor Boreland and Brittany Tomin call in their article “Redesigning for mobile plurilingual futures” for the need to reassess multiliteracies pedagogies and language learning in and for the emerging Web 3.0 mobile and networked contexts, where participatory cultures have been recoded from the inside out by algorithmic cultures, artificial intelligence, bots, big data analytics, machine learning, gamification systems and social media technologies. To do so, they provide a conceptual discussion which pushes PoM-I, which was developed under the Web 1.0 tools and environment in the mid-1990s and evolved with the Web 2.0 environment in the early 2000s. As with Web 3.0 environment, where mobility and technology become the norm (as can be seen in mobile devices), they provided a nuanced discussion on how PoM-II can be further advanced based on PoM-I’s “why” (responding to radically changing socio-technical contexts),
“what” (multimodal redesign) and “how” (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice) of multiliteracies pedagogy.

Extending PoM-I through Deleuzian concepts of assemblage and affect, Eugenia Vasilopoulos explores in her article “Academic writing re-designed: Connecting languages and literacy in the assemblage of EAP” the intersection of technology and plagiarism in second language writing in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program in a Canadian university. Bringing rhizo-analysis to PoM-I, Vasilopoulos suggests that limiting the scope of analysis to ways in which international students mobilize their available resources in their meaning making is insufficient to fully grasp how the students create their neoliberalized academic world and identities. Examining the broader educational conditions as an additional analytic layer (e.g., neoliberalized EAP programs in higher education and highly accessible technologies), Vasilopoulos carefully presents how an international student’s (mis)intended meaning in the design process can be (mis)interpreted by her instructors. This multilayered analysis advances our understanding of students’ meaning-making and textual production processes. Through this analysis, Vasilopoulos explains EAP curriculum needs to expand its text-centric orientations to more holistic approaches to better address digital-transnational EAP curriculum realities. Whether leveraging technology in the textual production process should be seen as plagiarism or mediation is also discussed.

In their article “Perspective sociomatérielle sur la pédagogie des multilitératies,” Geneviève Brisson, Magali Forte, Gwénaëlle André and Diane Dagenais suggest enriching the multiliteracies concept at the core of the NLG theory by integrating a sociomaterial perspective. Such a perspective (Dagenais, 2019) aims to include in the analysis of communication, language learning/teaching and literacy practices the material world in which they occurred and cannot be separate from. For these authors, the material world (including objects, spaces, languages used, web sites, etc.) is often considered as a remote backdrop, not fully recognized for the role it plays in the communication dynamics. Adopting a critical and reflexive posture throughout the paper, the authors describe a research project during which youth attended a workshop in a public library in Western Canada to create bilingual and multimodal stories via an iPad application. The sociomaterial analysis of the young participants’ literacy practices allowed the authors to question the notion of design and discuss both its intentional and spontaneous nature.

The action-oriented approach

The action-oriented approach emphasizes moving away from mentalist models of language education to dynamic action-oriented models. The following two articles infuse PoM-I with AoA to create new educational initiatives and
innovative research methodologies.

Amélie Cellier’s article stems from her doctoral work at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris, France) in which she combines theoretical research and empirical knowledge to produce new methods and techniques (Zagre, 2013). In “Proposition d’hybridation de la perspective actionnelle et de la pédagogie des multilittératies: une nouvelle voie pour la formation des migrants en France? Premières mises à l’essai,” Cellier describes a hybrid pedagogical and theoretical framework blending the pedagogy of multiliteracies with the AoA. Focusing on the notion of mediation, she reports on how the blended framework was put to the test in two groups of adult learners taking a course in French as a foreign language. Cellier suggests that the multimodal mediation activities used allowed the students to create an inclusive pluricultural space, resulting from students identifying with one another. Moreover, students also developed their competence to interact in writing and to identify and explain sub-texts, and they improved textual cohesion by taking their readers into account.

Olessya Akimenko, in her article “Activizing’ the pedagogy of multiliteracies: The dynamic, action-oriented turn with languacultural landscape studies,” proposes to draw from the NLG’s PoM and to link it to linguistic landscape research. The author thus contributes to the emergence of a critical approach that she calls languacultural landscape. This approach aims to go beyond the analysis of the social and historical context of linguistic practices observed in different spaces, to orient action and social change. In addition to discussing the concepts at the heart of her theoretical approach, the author puts forward a pedagogical model that operationalizes the theoretical framework of the languacultural landscape to better support students in their critical analysis of the multilingual landscape they can find in their environment.

Meta-analysing the NLG’s founding text

The final paper, “Discussion académique sur le New London Group et les multilittératies: réflexions de chercheurs francophones et perspectives contemporaines,” by Amal Boultif, Myra Deraiche, Simon Collin, Francis Bangou, Jean-François Boutin and Nathalie Lacelle, based on an academic conversation model, presents the perspectives of four Canadian researchers in education on the NLG foundational text and, more particularly, on the concept of multiliteracies. The researchers interviewed for this paper have all mobilized concepts related to multiliteracies in their own work, while adopting different epistemological perspectives. Their readings of the theory developed by the NLG are thus complementary, leading to rich reflections on the contribution and relevance of NLG concepts and approaches in current research, as well as for pedagogical practices.
Acknowledging that the NLG’s PoM-I has been with us for over two decades, this special issue undertook critical reviews of research and pointed out pressing issues and timely directions of research towards PoM-II. Many of the old challenges for literacy education outlined by the NLG (1996) back then persist today, with some of them further heightened with globalization and advancements in technology. Through the collection of both empirical and conceptual papers addressing PoM-II, we have discussed the ways in which old challenges are intensified with new challenges for language and literacy education in the various educational contexts in the world as with new developments in society and information communication technology.

References


