

DIASPORIC LITERATURE, CONSTITUTING A UNIQUE POLYPHONIC TEACHING STYLE

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, in which the political debates have plagued the current social affairs, including education, literature appears to be the ultimate solution to formulate a culturally unprejudiced educational curriculum. It has the power to establish a unique interpretive community with shared global prototypes, based on a political- liberated syllabus, to unite the diverse human societies. Respectively, a pragmatic educational program must be defined that respects the multi-culturally structured identities. Apparently, newly-fashioned diasporic identities experience a sense of hybridism. This cultural fusion enables them to appreciate a wide range of culturally diverse literary texts, reflected in the polyphonic teaching approaches. Diasporic perception of literature is liberated from chronotopic socio-cultural paradigms and constructs a novel polyphonic educational domain, based on mutual respect and pluralism. This study aims to investigate the role of diasporic literature, in educational curriculum designing, in language acquisition, in order to generate a polyphonic teaching style, by infusing the controversial literary theories and teaching methodologies.

Key words: diasporic literature, multi-cultural curriculum, cultural interaction, heteroglossia

1. INTRODUCTION

The pivotal role of literature in generating a fruitful education is verified in educational curriculums. It generates a rich ground of contingency and diversity that enables the curriculum designers to provide a demanding educational domain that would produce flourishing talented learners. On the whole, literature endows individuals with a unique knowledge that contributes in generating motivation, in learners; eventually, it eradicates the discriminative social stratifications and creates a universal communal. This is intensified when diasporic literature is implicated in educational syllabus. Its multi-perspective temperament, fashioned by diverse socio-cultural paradigm ensures the collective satisfaction of a wide range of learning communities; it also helps to exterminate the politically and culturally prejudiced educational policies. However, employing an appropriate teaching methodology and selecting the most beneficial material for the class is an intricate task. Diasporic literature that has emerged from the cultural adjustment and assimilation of the migrant communities, associated with the host culture, advocates a sense of a collective cultural affirmation; thus, it glorifies the mutual respect and tolerance. Therefore, it promotes the critical thinking values and allows the marginalized voices to be heard, within the social context of a classroom, no matter what type of teaching strategy is employed, for acquisition of language. This essay attempts to scrutinize the power of diasporic literature, in planning a polyphonic teaching style, based on the concept of Bakhtinian heteroglossia. As the diasporic literature has the power to challenge the fashioned socio-cultural paradigms of a community, its role could be extended in different levels of language acquisition, whether the intended acquired language is a mother-tongue, second or foreign language.

2. DIASPORIC LITERATURE

According to Faist (2010), "... approaches linked to the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism refer to phenomena that occur within the limited social and geographic spaces of a particular set of regions or states. (p.14). Apparently, to elaborate on the definition of diasporic literature, one must define diaspora, initially. Nonetheless, providing a simple definition for discursive concepts is an intricate task. The word 'diaspora' is originated from the historical experience of dispersal of Jews

from their homelands and their scatterings around the world. Nevertheless, it has been used interchangeably for different contemporary conditions such as the dislocation of different groups of immigrants and their settlement all around the world, forcibly or by will; there are various causes of this dislocation including financial and political ones. There is always a yearning for returning to the original homeland that is mixed with a desire to become part of the host culture, by assimilation. The literary texts that are produced in this context are a fertile ground of creativity, transcending the borders of time and geography. As a result, diasporic identities are regarded as competitive individuals who had the courage to experience and bestow a unique type of insight that defies their present conditions. Diasporic context is the true manifestation of a heterogeneous, polyphonic society; this diversity is interwoven in its literature and forges unique types of identities. However, according to Ibsen, there must be a will to participate in the process of education, "how a text interprets reality may challenge our own prejudices and fixed opinions about other cultures. In the effort to perceive a situation from another point of view, learners will have to detach themselves, at least temporarily, from their own criteria and expectations" (1995, p. 144). To detach from one's constructed identity is very difficult, since many diasporic individuals, insist on preserving their identities; furthermore, they feel a sense of moral obligation toward their ancestral heritage. This would impede the educational procedure.

The mobility of identity, amid integrity of subjectivity which is depicted in diasporic literature could be utilized in formulating a multi-dimensional teaching methodology that celebrates the diversity and hybridism of contemporary era. The diversity of educational planning could be attained by employing multicultural curricula; since, according to Nieto, a successful multicultural program is "primarily a set of beliefs and a philosophy, rather than a set program or fixed content" (2010, p. 249). As a part of the multicultural education, the diasporic literature which is the field of fictional polyphonies, established by socio-cultural stratifications could be applied to generate an atmosphere of humane tolerance. Unfortunately, the main obstacle in existence of lack of interaction among diasporic communities and host cultures is the totalitarian perspective of the dominant culture that seeks to contain all the dissident voices, within its affirmed structural frame. Implication of diasporic literature in the educational curricula, even in the host culture, would enhance reaching a mutual respect and universal confirmation, among different cultures. Nieto suggests that the manifestation of the impact of a multicultural program could be depicted as "tolerance; acceptance; respect; and, finally, affirmation, solidarity, and critique" (2010, p.249). These qualities are already seen in dislocated individual who have experienced the complexities of mutual interaction, in a context, full of lingua-cultural alienation. By inserting the diasporic literature, in the universal educational programs, tolerance and respect is rooted among individuals of different societies and eventually, this would lead to acceptance of cultural diversities. By employing the critical thinking values, this shift of attitude toward the cultural diversity would be insightful and prolonged.

Banks believes that the major objective of multicultural education is generating a sense of freedom that would guide the students to developing new insights and skills for active participation, in a society. He stated that "multicultural education promotes the freedom, abilities, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries to participants in other cultures and groups" (1999, p. 23). This all could be practiced by diasporic literature, in order to produce a polyphonic teaching style that benefits distinct set of educational strategies to obtain the educational goals, by employing the multiple intelligences that learners bring to the class. Frequently, the instructors of language classes employ certain prearranged set of teaching methodologies, established by the possible reflective demands of the class; these include text oriented, teacher oriented, or in recent years the communicative styles of teaching that depends highly on the interaction of instructor and audience. This would confine the teaching techniques to latitude of pre-established methodologies that marginalize the talents and capacities of a wide-range of students who have entered the educational system with disparate arrays of prior mental schemas. Polyphonic teaching style includes utilizing diverse scope of materials, in a newly formulated teaching strategy, that promotes the multicultural appreciation of the educational contexts. By introducing new teaching strategies (like implication of appealing diasporic literary material, in the curricula) that respect the multiple interests and talents of learners, a fertile ground of creativity is generated. However, planning multicultural educational curricula is not a simple task,

since there are many obstacles such as prejudiced perspective toward the process of education that is sometimes juxtaposed with unconscious preference of instructors toward certain curriculums and methodologies that would subtly ignore the dissident, marginalized voices of minorities, in multi cultural classes. Diasporic literary materials which are the true product of infused perception would be beneficial in these classes. According to Tabatabaei Lotfi (2013), primary evaluation of students, utilizing the multiple intelligences of learners, employing multi- dimensional schedule, group construction based on the tendencies of the students, Challenging the pre-established literary canons and encouraging the participation of the students in the process of education from designing the materials to the final assessment are practical methods that facilitate the educational goals. "In moving toward a flexible syllabus in literature classes, the most important issue is to give the students the opportunity to be active, in the process of development of material for the class which will hopefully increase the motivation of the students, continuously, during the course. Giving space to students in preparation of the material does not mean to ignore the authority of the teacher; the teacher must move in a presumed direction to achieve the accepted standards and objectives of the class. Accepting to have a flexible curriculum means that the teachers must be willing to experience more flexible and modern policies of teaching, instead of applying traditional systems, by creating a good relation with students"(p.329). Among one of the flexible teaching strategies that would gratify the demand of multi-cultural exposed audiences is utilizing the diasporic literary texts; theses texts are the product and the social reflection of the need of students to be heard and noticed as unique individuals.

3. DIALOGIC INTERACTION OF POLICIES

Diasporic societies are appropriate exemplum of dialogic interactions; a diversity that contained in a holistic image of a diasporic, multicultural society. Diasporic individuals are unique subjects who are capable of cultural tolerance and respect, an attitude, which our politically plagued societies lack. This could be compared to the notion of heteroglossia by Bakhtin. He suggested that the linguistic stratification of individual utterances that are combined to formulate a language could be originated from the socio-cultural stratifications. In this regards, a diasporic context experiences distinct type of linguistic disciplines that is manifestation of the socio-cultural stratifications. This is represented in the diasporic literature and as a result this genre is the field of continual social struggles; it contains many dissident voices that strive to be heard. This section of the study attempts to scrutinize the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia and its resemblance with diasporic context and literature. It then could be applied to formulate a polyphonic teaching method that respects the cultural diversity and generates a communal interaction.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his influential essay 'Discourse in the Novel', elaborates on the complicated polyphonic nature of the novel as a literary text and suggests that the hidden ideological and social dominant power is depicted in linguistic discourse of the novel. According to Bakhtin, the heteroglossia or the diversity of the stratified social voices in the novel paves the way for understanding the true nature of power relations, within a society. He stated that, "these heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it"(1981, p. 262). This diversity is depicted in diasporic societies, and is applicable in the educational system, to expose learners to a multicultural structure of thoughts. The diverse internal stratification of voices is a prerequisite aspect of the novel, "the novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (Bakhtin 1981, p.263). The dialogism of dissident languages, in a novel that are combined and contained within a holistic cluster, could be employed in educational approaches to ensure the creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Bakhtin believes that the dissident heteroglossia of the novel might facilitate a sense of universal union, "thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (1981, p.271). The existence of diversity in diasporic contexts that enjoy a certain

internal stratification would create a union, in spite of heterogeneity. Hence, these diasporic communities would diverge the pre-assumed stereotypical pictures of migrants, and highly distinctive and contingent identities are fashioned in these societies by various factors such as social class, language, education and financial status. This distinguishing feature of diasporic contexts enriches the linguistic atmosphere and promotes cultural diversity. The present cultural diversity of diasporic contexts promotes diversity of responses that enrich and deepen the individual diasporic experiences. This could be compared to Bakhtinian dialogism, “therefore, [the speaker’s] orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse....The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that defines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker...constructs his own utterance on alien territory...” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 282). Accordingly, the intersection of different socio-cultural paradigms, manifested in heteroglossia of social and not necessarily national languages, would result in creation of a unique domain that benefits the co-existent of various socio-ideological communities. Designing a multicultural curriculum, based on this contingency, would eventually generate cultural tolerance and respect in racial, ethnic and gender issues. Bakhtin believes that social stratifications, becoming more complicated in a diasporic context, have the power to manipulate the linguistic system of a community. If the language has the power to dissect and inflect a society, then it has the power to unite man. Tabatabaei lotfi suggests that, “some think of literature, as an irrelevant source for educational aims. Nonetheless, literature can bestow communal knowledge and insight, as well as being didactic, since it is the reflection of man’s strife to achieve truth. Additionally, if it is practiced in the right contexts and by the means of proper methodology, it is a constructive material for educating the real life’s linguistic competence” (2014, p. 672). The appealing point about teaching the diasporic literary texts, for linguistic purposes is that not only the linguistic functions and structures are scrutinized from different pedagogical methods but socio- cultural codes of the texts are exposed. This discovery is a pragmatic activity, in which the participants of the class may have the chance to talk about it; having a mental –schema being focused, in the class would increase the self-confidence of the students. Diasporic literature that is the authentic manifestation of diaspora could be employed to heighten the cultural tolerance among its practitioners. In this regards, if diasporic literature is utilized appropriately and with the aim of a proper teaching method that reveres the individual differences and interests, the assumed objectives of the class are gratified.

4. INFUSING TEACHING METHODOLOGIES AND BAKHTINIAN POLYPHONY

Creating a constructive educational plan is obtained by not only having motivated students but it is partially dependent on an effective teaching methodology and a skillful teacher. In the current multicultural world that demands interaction of multi culturally exposed individuals, diasporic literature could be the key, for bridging the gaps. The widespread cultural distance is more sensed when individuals are exposed to new lingua-cultural situations. By selecting various teaching methodologies that respects the individual differences and preferences, under the supervision of a skillful instructor, the educational goals are achieved. Teaching methods must combine different strategies and introduce the learners with wide range of literary material. In this way, a polyphonic teaching context is generated that respects and benefits the cultural diversity.

Nieto suggests that, “Socio-cultural and sociopolitical perspectives are first and foremost based on the assumption that social relationships and political realities are at the heart of teaching and learning. That is, learning emerges from the social, cultural, and political spaces in which it takes place and through the interactions and relationships that occur between learners and teachers” (2010, p.4). This verifies the role of context, in the process of learning; this is intensified in a diasporic context.

Diana Slade states that

We are not simply bearers of cultures, languages, and histories, with a duty to reproduce them. We are the products of linguistic-cultural circumstances, actors with a capacity to resynthesize what we have

been socialized into and to solve new and emerging problems of existence. We are not duty-bound to conserve ancestral characteristics which are not structurally useful. We are both socially determined and creators of human futures. (Kalantzis & Slade, 1989, p. 18)

This is also restated by Nieto, All cultures operate in synergy, creating new and different forms that borrow from and lend substance to one another. In other words, the multifaceted, contested, and complex nature of culture sometimes is not taken into consideration in culturally responsive pedagogy. Because cultures never exist in a pristine state, untouched by their context, any approach to meaningful and effective pedagogy needs to take into account how students' languages, cultures, and other differences exist within (2010, p. 153).

The multicultural educational curricula guarantee the glorification of subjective difference and diversity. This is affirmation of Bakhtin's polyphonic concept of language. Infusing the multicultural system of education and heteroglossia would generate a new perspective toward teaching methodology. As identity is a dynamic quality of individuals and consciously or unconsciously it is refashioned in social interactions, the assimilation of diasporic communities and their impact on the cultural identity of host community is inevitable. This paves the way for employing diasporic literature in education.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to scrutinize the role of diasporic literature in creating a polyphonic teaching methodology, by infusing the multicultural approaches of education and Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Literature has the power to establish a unique interpretive community with shared global prototypes, based on a political- liberated syllabus, to unite the diverse human societies. Accordingly, a practical curriculum is established that is appreciated by a wide range of culturally diverse individuals; this could be also reflected in the polyphonic teaching approaches. Diasporic perception of literature is liberated from chronotopic socio-cultural paradigms and constructs a new polyphonic educational domain, based on mutual respect and pluralism.

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