

Communicative Language Teaching: Can We Do Better?

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Since the 1980s, theory and practice in second language instruction has been strongly influenced by the assumptions of *communicative language teaching*. This presentation will examine critically some of these assumptions and propose a more adequate framework for language teaching. This framework will reflect the possibilities opened up by multiliteracies pedagogy that builds on the linguistic and cultural foundation that students bring to school and uses technology to amplify the range of language and literacy practices in which students engage. The presentation will describe several concrete directions for implementing multiliteracies pedagogy in linguistically diverse classrooms.

A. What is communicative language teaching (CLT)?

Sandra J. Savignon (2000, pp. 124 – 129):

“The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence.” (p. 128)

“The focus [of CLT is to] promote the development of functional language ability through learner participation in communicative events.” (p. 126)

CLT is associated with a focus on learners’ communicative needs, on learner autonomy, and on negotiation of meaning. It includes attention to form as well as to meaning. The principles of CLT apply also to reading and writing as well as to face-to-face oral communication.

B. However....

CLT is frequently interpreted as identical to the “direct method”; myths and misconceptions abound.

Myths and Misconceptions of CLT

- 1. CLT involves an exclusive focus on meaning**
- 2. CLT requires no explicit feedback on learner error**
- 3. CLT prioritizes listening and speaking over reading and writing**
- 4. CLT avoids use of the learners’ L1 by teachers**

and students

5. CLT discourages use of dictionaries, particularly bilingual dictionaries

C. What is problematic about these misconceptions?

1. In contexts where access to the language is limited, research supports a balance of meaning- and form-focused activities;
2. Corrective feedback for both speaking and writing is useful so long as it contributes to, rather than interfering with, students' access to meaning and use of language; for example, in the context of a sister class connection or creative work by students in the L2, students want their language use to be accurate and effective in communicating their ideas;
3. Extensive reading is strongly related to academic language development in both L1 and L2 (e.g. Krashen, 2004).. A focus on authentic reading and writing promotes academic language learning, cognitive development, and identity investment in the learning process
4. Principled use of the learners' L1 can promote cognitive engagement, identity investment, and target language learning (see Lucas & Katz, 1994);
5. Bilingual dictionary use promotes vocabulary growth (e.g. Lupescu & Day, 1993);
6. Typically implemented, CLT does not prepare students for academic work through L2

D. An Alternative Model: The Academic Expertise Framework

Identity Texts

The **Academic Expertise** framework (Figure 1) proposes that *identity negotiation* is a central component of teacher-student interactions. Optimal academic development within the interpersonal space of the learning community occurs only when there is both maximum *cognitive engagement* and maximum *identity investment* on the part of students.

The products of students' creative work or performances carried out within this pedagogical space are termed *identity texts* insofar as students invest their identities in these texts (written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form) that then hold a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences.

Although not always an essential component, **technology** acts as an amplifier to enhance the process of identity investment and affirmation. It facilitates the production of these texts, makes them look more accomplished, and expands the audiences and potential for affirmative feedback. The fusion of imagination and technology in the creation of identity texts can be appreciated by visiting the Dual Language Showcase site created by educators at Thornwood Elementary School in the Peel District School Board (<http://thornwood.peelschools.org/Dual/>).

Emerging Conceptions of Multiliteracies Pedagogy

On the basis of the collaboration with educators in the project schools, we can articulate in a very concrete way five central components of a multiliteracies pedagogy that prioritize the role of identity investment in learning for deep understanding.

- *Multiliteracies pedagogy constructs an image of the child as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented; individual differences in these traits do not diminish the potential of each child to shine in specific ways.*
- *Multiliteracies pedagogy acknowledges and builds on the cultural and linguistic capital (prior knowledge) of students and communities.*
- *Multiliteracies pedagogy aims explicitly to promote cognitive engagement and identity investment on the part of students.*
- *Multiliteracies pedagogy enables students to construct knowledge, create literature and art, and act on social realities through dialogue and critical inquiry.*
- *Multiliteracies pedagogy employs a variety of technological tools to support students' construction of knowledge, literature, and art and their presentation of this intellectual work to multiple audiences through the creation of identity texts.*

References

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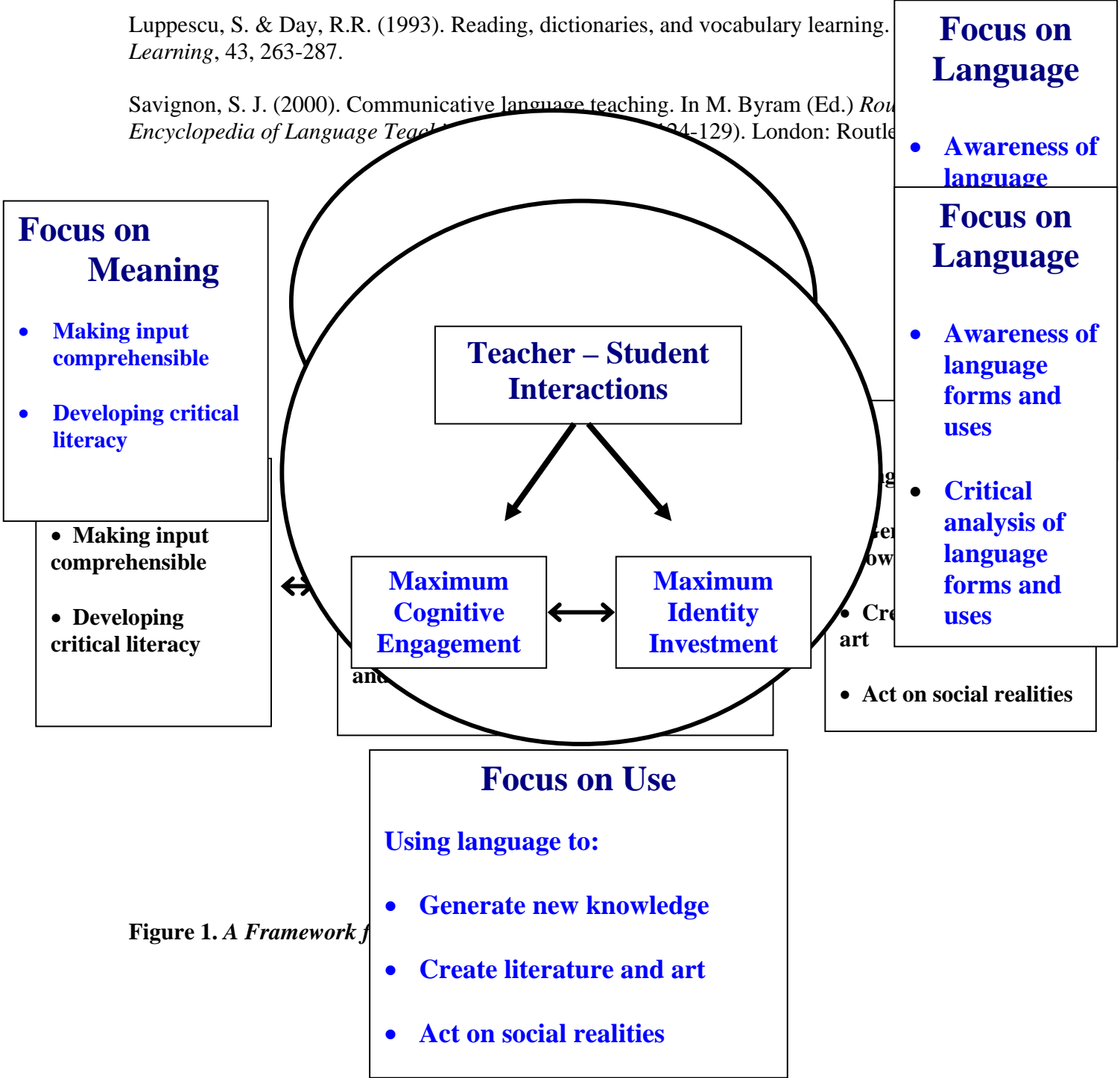
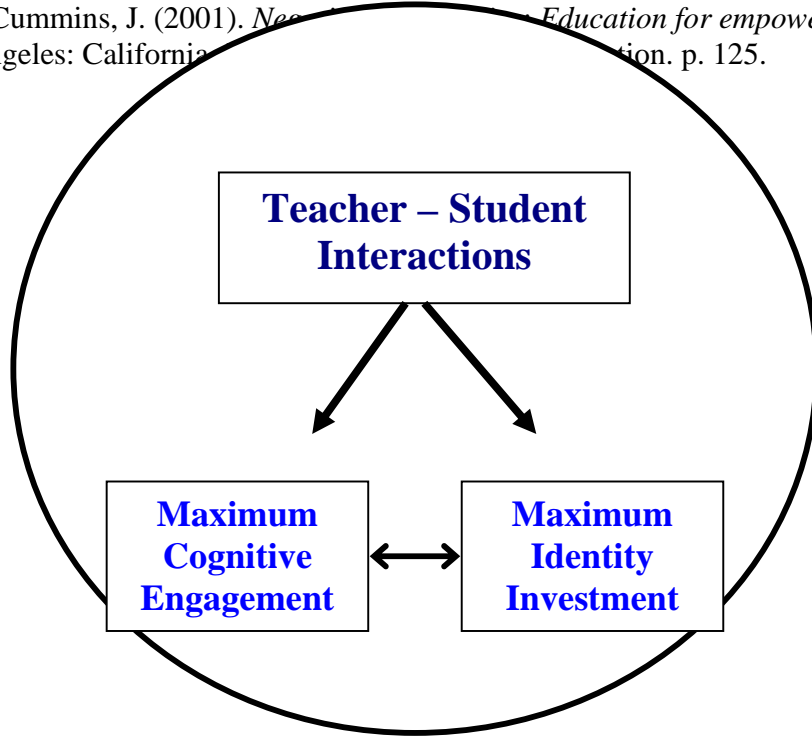


Figure 1. A Framework for

Cummins, J. (2001). *Needs for Education for empowerment in a diverse*
Los Angeles: California Education Commission. p. 125.

Focus on Meaning

- Making input comprehensible
- Developing critical literacy



Focus on Use

Using language to:

- Generate new knowledge
- Create literature and art
- Act on social realities