Pluriliteracies for global citizenship

(working paper)

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Our era is being shaped by **artificial intelligence, misinformation, polarisation, and increasing social division**. These trends present significant challenges in educating learners as **creative and responsible global citizens**. With regard to language education, we need to ask ourselves:

What specific contribution can the modern language classroom make to help learners successfully navigate today's world as informed and responsible global citizens?

How can pluriliteracies contribute to education?

Pluriliteracies Teaching for Deeper Learning (PTDL) is a pedagogical approach designed to promote deeper learning by emphasising disciplinary literacies. Rather than simply teaching facts, it focuses on the specific ways knowledge is constructed and communicated within different disciplines—factual, procedural, and strategic. This approach helps apprentice learners into the discipline, enabling them to think and act more like experts. Becoming familiar with the conventions and practices of a subject is essential, as it directly fosters the development of transferable knowledge, which results from deeper learning that can only be achieved through a focus on subject literacies. This transferable knowledge is crucial for lifelong learning.

In a global world, learners must be able to effectively communicate knowledge across cultures and languages. As a result, an important aspect of pluriliteracies is the ability to be literate in multiple subjects and languages. Communication today is also increasingly plurimodal and hybrid, involving a combination of analogue and digital channels as well as various semiotic systems. Therefore, being pluriliterate also involves the skill to navigate, evaluate, and produce a wide variety of plurimodal texts and text types. We call this textual fluency.

As a whole-school approach, PTDL encourages the integration of subject-specific literacies across all areas of education. By focusing on how knowledge is constructed and communicated within each subject, learners can become pluriliterate, acquiring subject literacies in multiple disciplines and developing the skills needed for effective communication in our interconnected, multilingual, and multimodal world.

In a nutshell, **pluriliteracies** are about equipping learners with the skills to navigate and communicate effectively across multiple disciplines, languages, and modes of communication. It's about fostering **subject-specific literacies**—how knowledge is constructed and communicated within different subjects—while also developing the ability to critically engage with diverse, multimodal texts and sources. Pluriliteracies prepare learners to thrive in a global, interconnected world by making them proficient in both **disciplinary knowledge** and **cross-cultural, multimodal communication**, ultimately supporting **deeper learning** that leads to transferable knowledge for lifelong learning.

How can pluriliteracies transform the modern language classroom?

Pluriliteracies approaches move beyond traditional language teaching by emphasizing meaning-making across multiple languages, disciplines, and social contexts.

Instead of focusing solely on grammatical accuracy, ***Pluriliteracies for global citizenship*** highlights how learners develop textual fluency—the ability to navigate, interpret, and produce diverse text types in ways that are meaningful and contextually appropriate. In the modern language classroom, this also includes engaging with global issues as reflected in both fictional and non-fictional texts—from books and short stories to TV shows and news articles. This broadens learners' ability to understand and engage with real-world topics that are critical for global citizenship.

A key contribution of pluriliteracies is its focus on **pluriliterate language use**, which enables learners to shift between linguistic and semiotic resources (e.g., words, images, digital media) to express ideas, build arguments, and engage critically with information. This helps learners not only master language but also develop deeper

knowledge, strategies, and skills that are essential for active participation in democratic societies. In particular, the language classroom provides a unique space where learners can develop the skills **to engage in meaningful conversations across echo chambers and filter bubbles**. By considering diverse viewpoints, they can identify and **overcome biases** that favour their own perspectives, facilitating constructive **dialogue across divides**. This skill is essential for promoting global citizenship and countering polarisation in society.

One of the most powerful ways this approach supports global citizenship is **through intertextual reading for empathy**—where learners explore multiple (literary and non-literary) texts side by side to understand how different perspectives are shaped. However, each text is underpinned by its own ways of knowing, or epistemological frameworks. To make meaningful connections between texts—and to avoid misunderstandings—learners need to learn how to navigate, relate to, argue with, bridge, or respectfully disagree with the different knowledge systems those texts represent.

This ability is known as **epistemic fluency**. It allows learners to engage with diverse viewpoints not just on a surface level, but with awareness of the deeper assumptions and values that inform them. In this way, epistemic fluency becomes central to fostering respectful dialogue, critical literacy, and deeper intercultural understanding in the language classroom. The language classroom, therefore, plays a crucial role in teaching learners how to engage in **constructive conversations across cultural and ideological divides**, enabling them to contribute to more inclusive and democratic societies.

By engaging in authentic, meaning-making tasks, learners cultivate empathy and compassion—essential for intercultural competence and democratic engagement.

Empathy: More than just understanding others' emotions, empathy in language learning means recognising the limitations of one's own perspective while making an effort to see the world through another's linguistic and cultural lens. This involves epistemic decentering, the ability to step outside one's own worldview and consider different ways of knowing and experiencing reality.

Compassion: While empathy helps learners step into someone else's shoes and understand their experience, compassion goes one step further—it moves learners to

take action. Compassion is about recognising another person's struggle and feeling motivated to help. It builds on empathy but adds a sense of shared responsibility and care. In the context of global citizenship, compassion means not only understanding others, but also being willing to respond—to stand up for others, offer support, and take action when needed. It includes compassion for others and for oneself, and it's essential for building more peaceful, fair, and connected societies.

In the language classroom, fostering compassion helps learners turn awareness into real-world action, making their learning meaningful and impactful. Furthermore, by engaging with global issues through both fictional and non-fictional texts, learners are equipped to critically reflect on current challenges and explore how they can contribute to positive change.

Rethinking argumentation in language learning

A core shift in this pluriliteracies approach is **a rethinking of argumentation pedagogy**. Traditional argumentation teaching often reflects a **competitive, adversarial model**, where learners focus on **winning debates** rather than engaging in **collaborative meaning-making and reaching mutual understanding**.
Instead, *Pluriliteracies for global citizenship* **reframes argumentation as a dialogic, co-constructive process**, where learners:

- Engage in **shared inquiry**, seeing argumentation not as a battle of ideas but as an **exploration of perspectives**.
- Develop **relational argumentation skills**, emphasising listening, negotiation, and ethical reasoning over mere persuasion.
- Learn to **support claims with evidence while remaining open to different viewpoints**, fostering a more **inclusive, democratic mode of discourse**.

This shift is particularly important for preparing learners to participate in democratic societies, where argumentation should not be about **defeating opponents** but rather about **building understanding, finding common ground, and navigating complexity together**.

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How will this affect teaching?

Teachers using a pluriliteracies approach shift from traditional models of instruction toward practices that:
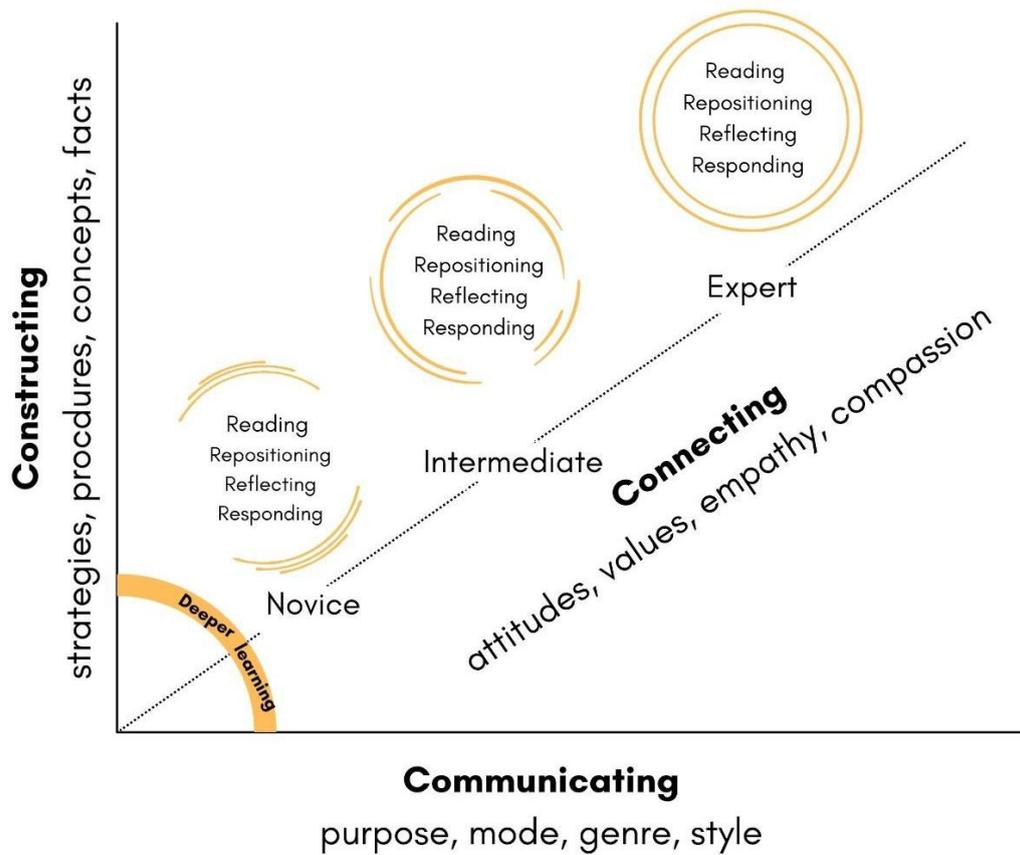
- **Develop textual fluency** by exposing learners to complex, multimodal texts and guiding them in producing nuanced, well-structured discourse.
- **Foster empathy and compassion** by encouraging engagement with a broad range of diverse perspectives, voices, and experiences expressed through literature, non-fictional texts, media, and argumentation.
- **Promote pluriliterate language use**, helping learners navigate multilingual and multimodal communication in real-world contexts.
- **Encourage arguing-for-deeper-learning** by ensuring that learners deeply engage with ideas and diverse perspectives on global issues, **collaboratively rather than competitively**.
- **Create a space for critical literacy**, where learners analyse how language can shape discourse to influence audiences, helping them recognise and resist misinformation.

This approach **de-emphasises linear models of language progression** (often based on grammar) in favor of a **dynamic, recursive model** where learners continuously deepen and expand their pluriliterate repertoire by refining their understanding and cultivating their skills through tailored tasks, practice, scaffolding, and feedback. At its core, this method also supports learners in acquiring **epistemic fluency**—the ability to **work with and critically evaluate different types of knowledge** (scientific, cultural, historical, personal, etc). That way, learners will become aware that knowledge is not fixed but socially constructed, requiring constant questioning and interpretation.


What strategies does this approach promote?

"In the language-as-discipline classroom, deeper learning becomes a reality when teachers and learners engage in learning partnerships to **conceptualise, communicate**, and **connect** with each other in profound ways to understand and argue global issues, translating their insights into local actions that address these imperatives." (Graz Group 24)

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Deeper learning and pluriliteracies for global citizenship

To support implementation in real classrooms, **Pluriliteracies for global citizenship** draws on a core methodology known as the **4Rs**: **Reading, Repositioning, Reflecting, and Responding**. This pedagogical approach is designed to engage learners with complex and controversial global issues through a multi-faceted lens:
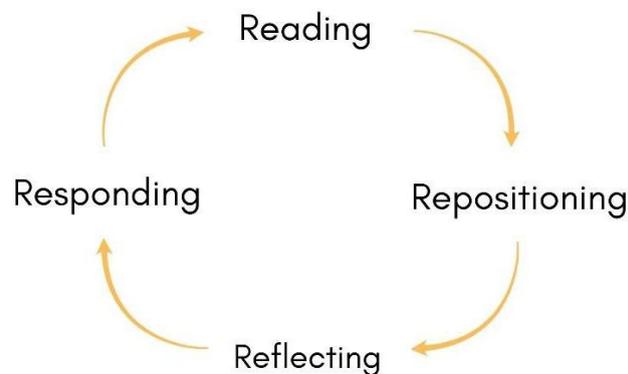
- **Critical Reading** serves as the foundation, where learners explore a wide range of plurimodal texts and text types (from TikTok videos to *New York Times* articles) that introduce them to diverse narratives and perspectives.
- **Repositioning** builds on this by contrasting these texts with others that may present conflicting viewpoints, enriching learners' understanding of the subject matter from multiple points of view/angles. This will help learners understand how language is used to shape discourses and how it impacts audiences. This is vital for learners to develop critical literacy skills that will protect them from misinformation and manipulation.
- **Reflecting** is the third phase, where learners analyse and evaluate what they have learned, examining their own positions and biases. In this stage, a new culture of arguing for deeper understanding is fostered, where learners explore workable solutions and common ground, which is central to enriching dialogue and broadening perspectives. This stage is crucial for cultivating empathic understanding and compassion, defined as the ability to deeply comprehend and emotionally connect with someone else's experiences and problems.
- **Responding** transitions learners from global awareness to local action. This stage emphasizes the practical application of their insights, enabling learners to see the relevance of global issues in their own lives and communities. By encouraging actions such as counter-texting or community involvement, learners are empowered to make a tangible impact, bridging the gap between understanding and action.

These 4Rs are complemented by:

- **scaffolding deeper learning** through questioning, modelling, and collaborative meaning-making;
- **task-based and inquiry learning**, fostering authentic, real-world language use;
- **deep practice**, encouraging learners to engage repeatedly and reflectively with complex texts and ideas;
- **engagement with diverse texts**, including fiction, non-fiction, social media, and audiovisual materials, to foster empathy, cultural awareness, and respectful dialogue across difference.

To implement these principles effectively, teachers use **deeper learning episodes**—structured sequences that move learners progressively through distinct learning phases:

Deeper learning episodes: building blocks

1. Engaging the learner.

2. Setting the context. What is the problem?

3. Establishing relevance: why does this matter to (future or present) me?

4. Mission goals: what can we do about it? What do we need to find out?