

Abstract

International and local guidelines for designing distance education materials advise designers to use feedback from students in the redesign of their materials. This study is a response to the researcher's failed attempt to elicit critical feedback from some of her students. It therefore sets out to devise a framework for a critical pedagogic analysis of distance learning materials designed for South African teacher education programmes.

It draws on theorisations of pedagogy, principally from the work of the sociologist of education Basil Bernstein and the applied linguist Suresh Canagarajah, theorisations of mediation, originating in the work of Lev Vygotsky, and theorisations of subjectivity. It also draws on international and local conceptualisations of a knowledge base for teacher education. In the analysis of the selection and organisation of knowledge on the page, the study draws on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and the field of social semiotics to uncover the positions constructed for readers as students and as teachers in each multimodal design.

A pedagogic analysis of distance education materials for pre-service or in-service teachers responds to a series of questions: What elements of a knowledge base for teacher education do designers foreground and background? What is the orientation of the materials to the relationship between knowledge and practice? How is knowledge mediated through in-text activities, pedagogic episodes and scaffolded readings? What roles do linguistic and visual design choices play in the mediation of knowledge? A critical pedagogic analysis interrogates the subject positions that the multimodal designs constitute for ideal readers as students and as teachers. In the study, all of these questions frame a detailed analysis of three sets of materials designed for South African teacher education programmes and, finally, a critical reflection on materials for which the researcher was the principal designer.

The study concludes that a critical pedagogic analysis affords designers and evaluators the critical distance needed for evaluating the mediation of knowledge(s) and the constitution of readers' subjectivities in teacher education materials. As an alternative (or in some circumstances, as an addition) to reader feedback it has the potential to inform redesigning for the original local context(s) of use or reversioning for use in broader regional or global contexts.

Keywords

critical pedagogic analysis; mediation; pedagogy; subjectivity; distance education materials; design and redesign; multimodality; language teachers; teacher education