

The Why, What, and How of Multimodal Literacies

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Foundational Questions

Why Should We Teach Multimodal Literacies?

What do We Teach?

How do We Teach It?

Multimodal(ity): A Brief Definition

- as an adjective to describe a particular type of text
- as a theoretical perspective
- as a framework for analyzing texts, events, & social practices

Multimodal Ensembles

- Texts that operate across multiple modes: (image, language, music, animation, etc.)
- Mode = a socially-shaped, material means for making meaning
- Some modes are temporal (language, music) and some are spatial (image, sculpture) and some are both (picturebooks)

Why Should We Teach Multimodal Literacies?

- The world told has become the world shown - Gunther Kress
- A Shift from Page To Screen
- From Monomodal to Multimodal Texts
- From Static to Interactive Texts

Assertion #1

The texts children interact with today have become more visual, digital, and multimodal.

Analogue-Based Multimodal Texts

Digitally-Based Multimodal Texts

Transmedial Texts

Assertion #2

Because of these shifts, we have to redefine what we mean by "text" & what counts as reading.

Redefining Texts

Text as Written Language

Text as Visual Object

Text as Multimodal Ensemble

Text as Cultural Artifact

The Case for Multimodal Literacy

- Since the texts readers read have become radically different, the **strategies** readers will need are radically different.
- We need to make a shift from supporting “**readers**” to supporting “**reader-viewers**”
- Understanding **how texts work** is as important as deciding **what texts mean**.

What Do We Teach?: A Multimodal Curriculum

Re-Envisioning Reader Competencies

Re-Thinking Analytical Perspectives

Assertion #3

We have to help students develop new competencies for designing, producing, navigating, and interpreting multimodal texts.

Developing Multimodal Competencies

- Call **attention** to various aspects of multimodal texts that often go unnoticed.
- Teach **reading-viewing strategies** in the context of making sense of the texts students encounter each day in and out of school.
- Help students understand how **different modes** work individually and collectively across multimodal texts.

Learning Processes (van Leeuwen)

- Understanding Texts
- Engaging Personally with Texts
- Connecting to Texts
- Engaging Critically with Texts
- Experimenting with Texts
- Reflecting / Reconsidering

Assertion #4

Students need a variety of analytical perspectives from which to consider and interpret multimodal texts.

Analytical Perspectives

- Help readers **approach** visual and multimodal texts in different ways.
- Serve as **interpretive frameworks** to help readers understand what to attend to.
- Provide a vocabulary or **metalinguage** for discussing various elements and features of visual and multimodal texts.

3 Analytical Perspectives

- **Perceptual** - Noticing, Navigating, Naming Elements of Multimodal Texts
- **Structural** – Grammar and Conventions of Visual Images & Multimodal Texts
- **Ideological** - The Socio-Cultural Contexts of Visual Images and Multimodal Texts

Additional Theoretical Perspectives

- Art History and Criticism
- Media and Cultural Studies
- Systemic Functional Linguistics
- Visual Grammar
- Picturebook Theories
- Visual Discourse Analysis
- Multimodal Analysis
- Multimodal Interaction Analysis
- Semiotics and Social Semiotics

Assertion #5

Multimodal pedagogy should be an optimal blend of explicit instruction and student exploration and experimentation.

Pedagogical “Points of Entry”

3 Points of Entry

- **Art Movements:** Various techniques and styles from the history of art criticism
- **Visual Grammar:** A grammar for images based on systemic functional linguistics
- **Design Elements:** Elements used as spatial and linguistic means for organizing texts

Art Movements

- Realism
- Folk Art
- Modern Art
- Surrealism

Questions to Ask

- How does the artistic style add to the theme, mood, or setting of the story?
- What aspects of the artistic movement can be used to better understand the narrative?
- How would your interpretations of the book change if the art style changed?

Visual Grammar

- Developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996)
- Based on Halliday’s (1977) framework of systemic functional linguistics
- Describes grammars and conventions of visual images based on the framework of grammars and conventions of language

Point of View (Positioning)

How viewers of an image are positioned.

Has socially determined meaning potentials.

Provides viewer with their “window on the world.”

May suggest certain power relationships.

Questions to Ask

- Where are the characters located in the image?
- Are objects or people above, below or straight on?
- Where are you positioned as the viewer?
- How does your position as viewer affect your interpretations?

Viewer Interactions

- How is the viewer being asked to interact with the characters in the image?
- **Demand** - requires active response to characters in an image.
- **Offer** - placed in voyeuristic position, viewers look at what characters are looking at.

Questions to Ask

- Are the characters looking at you or away from you?
- How does this affect your relationship with the characters?
- What are you being asked to consider?
- How would your interpretation of the image change if the characters looked at you or not?

Visual Design Features

- Speech / Thought Bubbles
- Upfixes
- Impact Stars
- Motion Lines
- Reduplication

Questions to Ask

- What visual design elements did you notice?
- How did these elements help you make sense of the picturebook or other text?
- What functions do these elements serve? What do they do for the text and for us as readers?

Endpapers: Different Roles of Endpapers

- Connections to Story
- Thematic
- Part of the Narrative

Questions to Ask

- Are the endpapers the same in front and back?
- If they are the same or single colored pages, is there a thematic connection to the narrative?
- If they are different, how do the endpapers add to the narrative?

Some Final Thoughts

- As texts continue to evolve into digital and multimodal ensembles, the strategies readers will need to be successful will have to evolve as well.
- Teachers need to expand their own interpretive competencies if they expect to support their students interpretive competencies.
- Texts are always encountered within particular social practices and contexts, and these practices and contexts influence how we understand them.

Professional Resources

Reading the Visual – Serafini

<http://store.tcpress.com/0807754714.shtml>

Reading Contemporary Picture Books - Lewis

Looking at Pictures in Picture Books - Doonan

Postmodern Picturebooks – Sipe and Pantaleo

How Picturebooks Work – Nikolajeva and Scott

Reading Images – Kress & van Leeuwen

Picture This – Bang

Literacy in the New Media Age – Kress

Practices of Looking – Sturken and Cartwright

Handbook of Visual Analysis – van Leeuwen & Jewitt

Visual Methodologies - Rose

Thank You!

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