

Implications of Multimodal Theories on Research and Teaching
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Defining Multimodal(ity)

- as an adjective to describe a particular type of text
- as a theoretical perspective
- as a framework for analysis

Social Semiotics

The systematic study of semiotic resources (modes) and how they function as meaningful entities across various social and cultural contexts.

Modes are:

- socially constructed means for representing and communicating meanings,
- embedded in cultural, political, economic, and historical conventions and uses,
- which are instantiated in particular material and conceptual forms,
- and have specific affordances and limitations determined by their roles in particular social practices.

Multimodal Phenomena

- Are Comprised of Various Semiotic Resources / Modes for Making Meaning
- Are constructed within Spatial, Temporal, Compositional & Structural Dimensions
- Operate across Planes of Content (signifieds) and Planes of Expression (signifiers)
- Conduct semiotic work within particular Social and Cultural Practices

Some Questions for the Video

- How do we represent (visually, textually) what happened in this video?
- What roles do visual images, text, and video clips play in the transcription of this event?
- What analytical frameworks can be used to understand what happened in this video clip?
- What aspects of this “reading” event need to be highlighted during the research process?

Analytical Frameworks

An analytical framework is a set of assumptions, procedures, and techniques purposefully organized and designed to investigate textual, visual, and multimodal phenomena across a variety of materials, sociocultural contexts, and physical and virtual spaces. (from Beyond the Visual-2022)

A Few Additional Thoughts

- Every analytical framework offers different affordances and limitations of what it illuminates and what it overlooks in the research process.
- Every analytical framework draws upon different theoretical lenses and data collection procedures.
- Analytical frameworks need to consider the object of analysis from multiple sites of analysis – including the phenomenon itself production, distribution, and reception.

5 Implications of Multimodal Theories for Research

- Research on multimodal phenomena needs to focus on the processes of representation and communication in particular sociocultural contexts, as much as texts and objects in isolation.
- Analytical Frameworks need to focus on the social aspects of multimodal phenomena, including various discourses, social practices, ideologies, and technologies.
- Research on multimodal phenomena only provides insight into *meaning potentials* based on conventions of use and particular sociocultural contexts.
- Multimodal researchers need to blend critical theories, multimodal perspectives, and ethnographic methods to improve the impact of their research designs.
- Multimodal researchers need to be more explicit in their research designs and analytical procedures for publication.

5 Implications of Multimodal Theories for Teaching

- Enacting a multimodal curriculum requires a **broader definition of text**, and a wider range of available reading materials for students.
- A multimodal curriculum requires *new interpretive repertoires* for understanding contemporary texts.
- A multimodal curriculum requires developing a **critical semiotic awareness** in students.
- A multimodal curriculum requires rethinking the Four Resources Model for use with visual and multimodal Texts. **The New Four Resources Model:** Navigating, Interpreting, Designing, and Critically Analyzing Texts.
- Teachers need to work to **close the gap** between the literacy practices students are required to demonstrate in school and the ones they use every day outside of school.

Critical Semiotic Awareness is an Understanding of...

- how different modes work.
- the affordances and limitation of conceptual and material aspects of particular modes.
- the metalanguage used to identify and describe aspects of texts and textual practices.
- art and design elements used across modes and texts.
- basic concepts of visual grammar.
- narrative elements and structures.
- various theories and approaches for interpreting texts in social contexts and practices from a critical perspective.

Closing the Gap

- Expanding the Types of Multimodal Texts for Student Exploration and Enjoyment
- Consider the Texts Students Read Outside of School and the Strategies Necessary for Understanding them
- Allow Multimodal Compositions to Make Students' Understandings Visible
- Reading = Interpretation Across all Types of Texts
- Writing = Representation Utilizing a Variety of Modes

Some Final Thoughts

- Multimodal research needs to move beyond linguistic models of representation and communication and consider perspectives from art, visual culture, media studies and other domains.
- Research based on theories of multimodality requires expanding the types of analytical frameworks used to make sense of texts, events, and spaces.
- There is a big difference between looking at pictures to decode a word, and looking at visual images to make sense of a text.
- Teachers need to provide opportunities for students to design and construct multimodal texts to make their learning visible in addition to adding new strategies for interpreting texts.

Resources for Further Exploration:

Gonyea, M. (2005). *A book about design: Complicated doesn't make it better*. New York: Henry Holt.

Gonyea, M. (2007). *Another book about design: Complicated doesn't make it bad*. New York: Henry Holt.

Bang, M. (2000). *Picture this: How pictures work*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Callow, J. (1999). *Image matters: Visual texts in the classroom*. Marrickville, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

Callow, J. (2013). *The shape of text to come: How image and text work*. Marrickville, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2021). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. (3rd Ed.) London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Serafini, F. (2014). *Reading the visual: An introduction to teaching multimodal literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Serafini, F. (in press). *Beyond the visual: An introduction to researching multimodal phenomena*. New York: Teachers College Press

van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. London: Routledge.