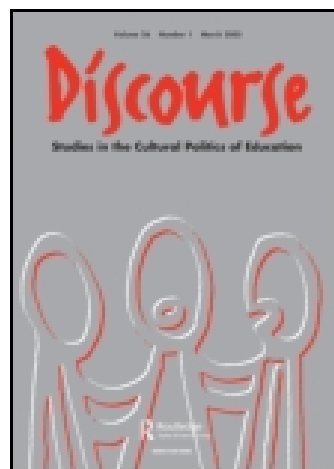


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Multimodal composing in classrooms: learning and teaching for the digital world

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Multimodal composing in classrooms: learning and teaching for the digital world, edited by Suzanne M. Miller and Mary B. McVee, New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (Simultaneously published in the UK), 2012, 161 pp., US\$35.52 (Fishpond), \$40.80 (book depository), ISBN 978-0-415-89747-1

Transforming teacher pedagogy in ‘new times’ with ‘new literacies’ can be daunting for teacher educators and teachers alike. However, *Multimodal composing in classrooms: learning and teaching for the digital world* positions readers as ‘insiders’ in the process of the pedagogical renewal of teachers and teacher educators who have accepted the challenge to embed transformed pedagogies into their teaching praxis.

Grounded in the tenets of ‘new literacies’ in ‘new times’ and following the nexus of the New Literacy Studies (NLS), the text offers insights into the pedagogical transformations of participants, who have had the courage to reflect metacognitively on their pedagogical designs to move towards thinking and teaching in a multimodal way. This text provides teachers, teacher educators and students, whose stories are shared, a ‘voice’ around the transformation of linear, print-based, literacy pedagogy towards a more ‘multiliteracies’ epistemology. Instead of viewing the conceptualisation of ‘multimodal’ as an ‘add-on’ to current practice, involving the use of technology, or ‘integration’ of digital resources, the teachers in these chapters transformed their own ideologies and ways of thinking to explore the affordances of multimodal design across the curriculum.

The authors within the chapters of this text share their research stories in a supportive way to encourage readers to have the courage to take risks and experiment with multimodal literacies through digital composing and design. Their stories highlight the benefits of a multimodal approach to literacy, including increased academic rigour, student engagement and curriculum connectedness. The stories inspire readers to rethink literacy and literate practices in ‘new times’ in response to emerging technologies, diverse learners, globalisation and shifting information structures within a digital global economy. The participants’ research stories also highlight the changing shift in teacher identity and praxis from ‘information giver’, to co-participant, collaborator or co-constructor in the learning process and the distributive knowledge that results in reinventing what constitutes effective pedagogies through a more transactional approach to new literacies.

The chapters emphasise the shift of focus from the technical aspects of the technology as ‘knowledge’ to an expanding view of knowledge as shared, distributive, transactional and fluid in relation to new literacies, transforming ideology from viewing new literacies as ‘technology’ towards a more complex and rich notion of multimodality.

Readers are introduced to learning not only about the theory of multimodality and multiliteracies but also about practical application of the theory to a range of teaching contexts, including the following:

- using multimodal approaches across the curriculum to maximise meaning and engagement with poetry in a teacher education course;
- developing a metalanguage for visual grammar within video narratives;
- examining how images, sound, movement and shot types contribute to the meaning and the complexity of multimodal design;

- pedagogically transforming teachers to a ‘New Literacies stance’ and its effect on students’ literate identities;
- multimodal composing through a music video with narrative writing;
- digital video composing by students as part of literature studies in eleventh grade;
- digital composing in fifth-grade science lessons, using multiple sign systems; and
- digital video composing within history.

The studies involve students exploring not only what they can do with text, in the traditional literacy sense, but also how they can shape meaning through text based on multimodal design and multiple sign systems.

The contributions and transformations of the teachers and students in the research stories are synthesised, with researchers proposing a ‘multimodal literacy pedagogy’ as a framework for designing pedagogical change, based around multimodal theoretical perspectives. With minimal jargon and gentle reassurance, the research stories within each chapter give narrative voice to the participants. Through highly engaging recounts of their pedagogical transformations across a range of contexts, the contributing authors support readers who themselves may be subject to anxiety or discomfort about technological change and the personification of multimodal pedagogies.

The text illuminates participants’ lived experiences and situated learning and, as a result, makes an important contribution to the study of multiliteracies and multimodal design, gently scaffolding readers towards pedagogical transformation, without distancing them through academic jargon or elite scholarly discourse. The text, therefore, has the potential to impact greatly on transforming the epistemologies and teaching practices of practitioners in the field, in addition to contributing these ‘voices’ to scholarly research around the underpinning theories of multimodal composing.

Multimodal composing in classrooms: learning and teaching for the digital world provides hope, encouragement and honest reflection, supporting other educators to embody multimodal design pedagogies and to embrace the learning of ‘new literacies’ in ‘new times’. The aim of the text is to contribute to the ongoing work in the area of new literacies in three ways: to explore ‘socially situated pedagogical practices’ and ‘socially situated learning’; to ‘explore the affordances and limitations of multimodal composing for twenty-first century teachers and students’; and to ‘extend new literacies research and practice in areas of identified need in areas of significant need’ (p. 5).

In addition to this, the text has the very real potential to transform readers’ pedagogical practices in relation to multimodal composing and multiliteracies as a result of engaging with the research stories of its participants. This text, by its design, will appeal to multiple audiences, including researchers, teachers and teacher educators with an interest in reconceptualising and catering for the literacy and learning needs of diverse students in ‘new times’.

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