

Multimodality as a Bridge to Required Reading in Secondary Schools



Lydia Gilpin, B.S.E Candidate (Secondary Education: Language & Literacy)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jennifer M. Smith, Texas Christian University

Background

After witnessing, in both personal and professional circumstances, a rapidly increasing trend of severe student disinterest in required canonical readings, I wondered if the Secondary English classroom of today was doing anything innovative to turn the tides of student opinion.

Guiding Questions

- How are teachers engaging today's secondary English classroom with required reading?
- Are there strategies to be found that can be applied as intervention for struggling and disinterested readers?
- What can these findings tell us about the future of English education?

Purpose

Based on the background and the literature review I conducted, I wanted to see what employing multimodal strategies looked like in a typical Secondary English classroom.

Methods

- Literature Review→ I conducted a review of what multimodality means, why it is important for education, & survey of best practices.
- Creating Lessons→ Based on literature review of multimodality, I created two lessons. employing the strategies I saw.
- Implemented Lessons→ These lessons were implemented in a public middle school.
- Reflected on Learning/Teaching→ After implementing both lessons, I reflected on what multimodal lessons mean for engagement in Secondary Education.

Literature Review

Baize (2019)

- Best-practice of students composing “analytical remixes” of canonical themes in place of essay-writing

Cope & Kalantzis (2000)

- Multimodal Framework of Situated Practice (conceptual) to Overt Instruction (guidance) to Critical Framing (contextual) to Transformed Practice (application across modes)

Dallacqua & Sheahan (2020)

- Best-practice of teacher-made text set with both canonical works & graphic novels around one theme

Jewitt (2008)

- Theory article concerning the need for multiple modes to engage the multiple words of literacy students inhabit

Visco (2019)

- Best-practice of students creating “pop-culture pairings” – combining themes of canonical works with items from their cultural lexicon

Lesson Descriptions

- 1) Multimodal stations activity concerning setting and plot development in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (Modes: oral, written, visual)
- 2) Poster-making activity applying knowledge gained from an informational text on censorship (Modes: oral, written, visual)

Table 2

Lessons displaying Cope and Kalantzis' (2000) pedagogical model in practice

Cope & Kalantzis Model In Practice	Situated Practice	Overt Instruction	Critical Framing	Transformed Practice
Definition	Educator utilizes students' prior knowledge to situate new information.	Educator provides explicit guidance towards new information.	Student evaluates newly gained knowledge through one or more critical lenses.	Student synthesizes newly gained knowledge into displays of mastery through multiple contexts.
Use in Lesson #1	Connections to prior knowledge of the term “utopia” in popular culture examples (<i>Zootopia</i>)	Overt instruction on the concept of “utopia”, as well as instruction on the procedures for the stations activity	Warm-up journal asked students what they would include in their perfect society and why, thus asking them to gauge critically what is important to “good” society	Students complete exit ticket about importance of setting to the story, as well as perform multiple group discussions based around newly gained knowledge
Use in Lesson #2	Connections to prior knowledge in the use of both pre-taught material (<i>The Giver</i>) and popular culture references (<i>The Hunger Games</i>)	Overtly instructing on the concepts of censorship, as well as the learning objective of understanding how to interact with informational texts	Warm-up for the day asks students to consider the importance of free speech and security, identify which they find more important, and defend their opinion in the matter	Creating a visual product (the censorship posters) is an example of gained knowledge transforming practice in student display of skills

My Takeaway

If students can see themselves in the ways we instruct literature, perhaps we can push them to see themselves in the literature we instruct.

Challenges:

- Time constraint of 55-minute periods made employing large-scale activities difficult; fostered sense of prioritization in order to make sure students primarily understood the content before interacting with the multimodal deliverable
- Displayed a need for scaffolding from what students are already familiar with to what they did not yet know in order to employ multimodal avenues of instruction

Successes:

- Multimodal instruction increased student engagement by engaging the outside literacies students are already confident in & connecting it to content they do not yet understand
- Changed my personal conception of multimodality; multimodality can be a daily use of multiple modes of instruction & does not have to be only large-scale digital synthesis

References

- Baize, J. (2019). Classics in their own “words”: Analytical remixes in a land of essays. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(6), 625–633. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.942>
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. Routledge, New London Group.
- Dallacqua, A.K., & Sheahan, A. (2020). Making space: Complicating a canonical text through critical, multimodal work in a secondary language arts classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 64(1), 67–77. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1163>
- Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 32(1), 241–267. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07310586>
- Visco, W. (2019). Using pop culture to foster student understanding and engagement. *English Journal*, 109(2), 84–91.