

Multimodal Literacies: Inclusion, Assessment & Critical Literacies

Format: Symposium

Conference: UK Literacy Association International Conference 2022 (Birmingham)

Presenters:

Jane Catlin (presenter 1)- I am a Teaching Fellow (Inclusion) at Strathclyde University. I am interested in Multimodality and how it can be applied in general classrooms as a framework to rethink which literacy practices are valued and to embrace learner diversity and inclusion. I am particularly interested in drawing as a semiotic sign making option and where it is positioned across teaching and learning. I was previously a secondary teacher of Art and Design.

Emma Van Dinter (presenter 2) – I am a Secondary English Teacher committed to creating student-centred approaches to expand learners' access to assessments. I am researching the practices and effects of multimodality and multimodal assessment as part of my MEd in Professional Practice studies at the University of Strathclyde. I live and teach in Inverclyde, Scotland.

Navan Govender (convener and presenter 3) – I am a lecturer in Applied (English) Language and Literacy Education at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. My research and teaching focus on critical literacies and multimodality, particularly as they relate to issues of (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity and the decolonial turn in literacy education.

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Symposium abstract:

We can learn from others, become transfigured by others, work in solidarity with others, without having to finally "know" others, and speak essential truths about them which they do not wish to articulate for themselves (Campano, Philip Nichols & Player, 2020, 145).

In this symposium, we explore multimodality as a core component of inclusive and social justice-oriented teaching and learning across school and higher education contexts. As such, we understand how multimodality is not just an argument for mode and medium, but also an argument for power, access, diversity, and (re)design (Janks, 2010). It moves to destabilise commonly held assumptions about how knowledge and meaning are accessed, represented, and measured (Kress, 2015). As such we each explore an aspect of multimodality and its impact on our own meaning-making practices: 1) Inclusion, 2) Assessment, and 3) Critical Literacies.

In many ways, these three entry points into thinking about and through multimodality represent the broad range of ways in which the theoretical approach might work in different ways and for different purposes. This is to say that each of our presentations are rooted in very particular social and cultural contexts, and it from within these contexts that we explore certain aspects of multimodality. From its connections to multiliteracies in secondary English teaching, to viewing primary teachers' own pedagogical repertoires through a multimodal lens, and finally to mobilising digital tools for engaging secondary student teachers with place-based critical literacies. These

studies are all situated in Scotland where the national policy and curriculum documents advocate for what's called a 'future proof' definition of literacy, but which still slips between technicist and socio-cultural definitions. Such slippery language within the very national educational framework often means schools and teachers are left to figure many things out on their own. It also means that while recent curriculum changes demonstrate some moves toward increased teacher agency and a broadening of educational outcomes across Scottish schools, without enough clarity and material resources, it becomes easy to fall back into 'the way things have always been done'. But, it's certainly not all dire. Teachers are often creative and innovative in their pedagogies, and so much of the data presented today also asks that we understand how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment work in particular contexts as they are wrought by particular people and communities. That is, the lens through which we look will reveal different possibilities.

As a question of inclusion, Jane Catlin draws on a theory of multimodality to explore possibilities for recognising and understanding the ways in which teachers use non-dominant modes, such as drawing, as part of the meaning-making practices and pedagogical resources in the primary classroom. Similarly, Emma Van Dinter considers how assessment through a multimodal lens opens up opportunities to access and understand the meaning-making practices of secondary English learners, develop conditions for young people to bridge school and everyday literacies, and reveal possibilities to re-imagine how young people might best represent their knowledge and understanding of literary texts or devices. Finally, Navan Govender investigates renewed questions about the role of multimodality within critical literacy practice – particularly in relation to engaging and mobilising decolonial imaginaries (Campano et al., 2020). Reading as a critical and multimodal practice of meaning-making therefore requires re-thinking the what, how, and why of reading itself.

Presenter 1: Jane Catlin

How do Scottish primary teachers use drawing to support inclusive literacy practices?

My research is motivated by a concern that drawing is underutilised and undervalued as a pedagogical tool for learning and literacy. One barrier might be that drawing is often considered to be the preserve of a talented or innately gifted few. Reframing drawing as a highly accessible and versatile mode which can transgress all subject boundaries, could offer teachers creative ways to develop more inclusive literacy practices. Kress, (1997,2003) a leading proponent of Multimodal Theory, critiques the dominance of mono-modal forms, such as the speech or writing, as being a sociocultural-political construct, which is particularly prevalent in western schooling systems. This theory offers a way for educators to rethink children's literacy practices as being a kaleidoscope of modes cooperating across and between each other, regarding each mode as being of equal value and contributing toward literacy learning. As someone from a visual arts background this is indeed an attractive proposition.

In this project, I seek to understand what beliefs and attitudes primary teachers have surrounding drawing and how they positioned it within curriculum and pedagogy. Primary teachers are responsible for all curricular areas and often children's perceived reading and writing difficulties with alphabetic text emerge in the early stages of schooling. Using Thematic Analysis to identify key themes, I conducted semi structured interviews with four Scottish primary schools one of whom worked in a special school. The teachers were also asked to observe and record drawing in teaching and learning over a week, and in a follow up interview discuss what they had observed about its presence across the curriculum. The following questions underpin this project:

1. To what extent do primary teachers think of drawing located as an art practice?
2. What formative experiences did they have of drawing in their own schooling and teacher education?

Presenter 2: Emma Van Dinter

Adopting a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies for Multimodal Assessments in the BGE English Classroom

There is a significant gap of knowledge about multimodal approaches to assessment – what they might look like, as well as their effects on language and literacy learning – particularly in Scottish education. A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) illustrates how a variety of modes, beyond print-based language, are used together to communicate meaning and supports a new way to develop meaningful, inclusive assessment practices.

Current assessment practices used in Scottish Secondary English classrooms limit how pupils are able to illustrate their understanding because one mode of communication is often favoured: writing. Monomodal approaches to assessment focus on one way of communication and meaning-making. This is most often recognised as writing a print-based text, such as a critical essay, in English classrooms. These types of assessments may not be accessible to certain populations of students, such as those who struggle with reading and writing. Further, monomodal assessments limit how educators understand their students' knowledge and skills (Au & Tempel, as cited by Lawrence & Mathis 2020; Delpit, as cited by Lawrence & Mathis, 2020).

In my presentation, I will speak about my conducting a small-scale, qualitative study that focuses on how a multimodal assessment was designed for a poetry unit in a Broad General Educational English classroom. Accompanying the assessment design plan will be examples of teaching and learning resources and final productions of students' work to highlight the use of multimodality across the classroom experience. I will speak on how students interact with the multimodal assessment processes, including the improvements to accessibility and inclusion created by utilising this approach. I will present how adopting a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and multimodal assessments improve how I assess and understand students' learning.

Presenter 3: Navan Govender

Reading Monuments

texts are not monoliths, but rather, exist as a constellation of communicative modes, and critical literacy scholars have recognized the ways that readers' identities condition their engagement with texts [and] to the ways observable practices are animated by rich and textured histories (Campano et al., 2020, 143).

Every year the PGDE English student teachers and I visit a local monument in Glasgow's Merchant City. This monument, the Doulton Fountain, becomes a central text for doing critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2001) as part of learning how to do critical literacies in secondary English and Literacy education in Scotland. As such, we explore how a series of classroom-friendly activities

might enable (student) teachers and young people deconstruct and reimagine texts in relation to (de)coloniality, race/ethnicity, heteronormativity, heterosexism, class, and sustainability. What each of these dominant discourses reveals about possible socially just and transformative action as part of language and literacy learning changes year on year depending on time, space, and people.

In this presentation, I explore the broad range of meanings available in the Doulton Fountain as well as how clusters of multimodal meaning-making produced by student teachers are used to critically read and respond to a range of social issues and dominant discourses. Using critical multimodal discourse analysis, I provide an analysis of the monument itself as well as its use of particular grammars of power. This is followed by a brief analysis of selected examples of multimodal texts collected and produced (i.e., chains of multimodal meaning-making) by student teachers as they resist, reproduce, evade, and transform meanings around and beyond the monument itself. Using these data sets, I hope to explore in more detail the possibilities for multimodality as part of critical literacies and the turn toward decolonial praxis.

References:

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