Curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment for multimodal literacies learning

By Georgina Barton

Introduction

Due to the extensive expansion of modes of communication it is critical that teachers and schools consider this in planning and assessing for learning. Indeed many scholars have explored how schools should embrace the concept of 21st century literacies (Barton, Arnold & Trimble-Roles, 2015; Groenke & Prickett, 2012; Jiménez, Roberts, Brugar, Meyer & Waito, 2017). These studies have illustrated the need to bridge out of school literacies with in-school ones (Barton, Mills & Ronksley-Pavia, under review); addressing diverse cultural and social literacies (Brock & Boyd, 2015); and including digital and design technologies in the classroom (Mills, 2011, 2015).

Curriculum planning for multimodal texts

The *Australian Curriculum: English* notes that students need to "learn to listen to, read, view, speak, write, create and reflect on increasingly complex and sophisticated spoken, written and multimodal texts across a growing range of contexts with accuracy, fluency and purpose" (ACARA, n.d.). Similarly, the *General Capability: Literacy* highlights that literacy involves "students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts" (ACARA, n.d.). As previously stated the increase in the ways in which we communicate is exponential and as such, the curriculum includes a number of content descriptions across the school years that expect students to achieve in multimodality and the design elements. Some of these include:

- Year 1: Compare different kinds of images in narrative and informative texts and discuss how they contribute to meaning (ACELA1453)
- Year 2: Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created (ACELT1587)
- Year 3: Explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image, and salience on composition of still and moving images in a range of types of texts (ACELA1496)
- Year 5 and 6: Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1704)

It is important for schools to consider the ways in which students are already using these literacies outside of school. The research literature has pointed to the fact that students are engaging in a diverse range of multimodal literacies in their everyday lives yet schools are slow to adapt and adopt these practices (Barton, Mills & Ronksley-Pavia, in press).

Effective pedagogies for multimodal texts

Effective pedagogies relate to both the comprehension and composition of multimodal texts. As multimodal texts involve a number of creative processes, valued and known by arts practitioners, a number of approaches to teaching have been recognised. These include:

- practical hands-on and embodied teaching and learning
- multi-modal learning and diverse learning styles
- authentic purposes and audiences
- co-construction of learning
- relationships of trust that are integral to the co-construction of learning in the arts classroom
- balance between agency and direction
- flexibility and responsiveness
- arts-rich opportunities across time and place
- arts-rich teaching and learning environments
- resources for arts making and responses, and
- authentic and purposeful assessment that is integrated with planning, teaching, monitoring and reporting arts learning. (Pascoe, 2015, p. 6)

For Pascoe (2015), hands-on learning is where students are provided a range of materials to explore and express meaning by making connections between somatic, affective and cognitive learning. Students respond to and make new texts authentically for real purposes and values. Such an approach allows teachers and students to co-construct new knowledge as well as value students' prior learnings. A range of skills including decision making, having a voice and agency as well as being responsive are all developed through multimodal text composition.

An appropriate model for effective multimodal text composition is shown below (Barton, 2018). The model includes methods that are age appropriate; address the personal, social and cultural needs of students; and acknowledge that each school context is unique and distinct.

Figure 1: An effective pedagogical model for teaching multimodal texts in classrooms (Barton, 2018)
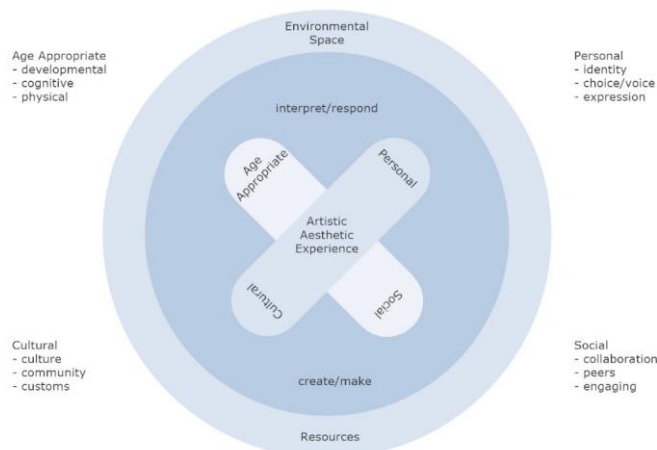
Improving inferential comprehension of multimodal texts

Another area explored in the literature is how students can 'critically read' multimodal texts (Serafini, 2011). Serafini's work explores how teachers can expand the ways in which students interpret multimodal texts by understanding a variety of theories and perspectives. These include through the lenses of art theory and criticism, grammar and systemic functional linguistics, and media literacies. Understanding that there are a number of ways students can 'read' multimodal texts is important in bridging theory and practice. It also improves students' critical reading of texts including inferential comprehension

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) in their study identified that when proficient readers infer, they:

- Draw conclusions from text
- Make reasonable predictions as they read, test and revise those predictions as they read further
- Create dynamic interpretations of text that are adapted as they continue to read
- Use the combination of background knowledge and explicitly stated information from the text to answer questions they have as they read
- Make connections between conclusions they draw and other beliefs or knowledge and
- Make critical or analytical judgments about what they read.

Readers of multimodal texts also use these strategies while interpreting the distinctive elements of each of the modes.

Importance of metalanguage

Building distinctive and rich vocabulary related to multimodal texts is critical for students to understand and construct them. Metalanguage or language about multimodal language enables students to describe and interpret multimodal texts effectively. Table – outlines the other modes and their elements which can support students in discussing each of the modes in their learning and assessment.

Modes	Elements
Gestural/embodiment	High/low potency Positive/negative valence High/low arousal etc.
Visual /image	Line, colour, shape, light, framing, texture, tone etc.
Linguistic /oral and written	Field, tenor and mode, modality, cohesion, layout, grammar, affect, judgment, expression, pace, tone etc.
Sound/aural	Rhythm, pitch, volume, articulation, harmony, timbre (tone quality) etc.
Spatial	Architectonic, ecological, geographic, diagrammatic, organisational

Table 1: The modes and elements

Assessment of and for multimodal texts

Jewitt (2008) explained that:

> "Different modes demand different intellectual work from pupils and this work 'fills up' the concepts to be learnt in different ways. The range of representational resources made available through visual communication (spatial relations, colour, etc.), for example, enable the expression of kinds of meaning that would be difficult, or perhaps impossible, in language (Jewitt et al., 2000)" (p. 84).

It is therefore critical that educators consider ways in which to vary their assessment to meet the needs of their students. Referred to as 'multimodal reshaping' teachers can offer students a range of options in terms of assessment that address the same criteria. It ensures students have a choice and voice and can therefore express their meaning via a range of modes and ensembles of modes.

Varying assessment and options for students has said to empower them and make the students at the centre of learning. Multimodal texts and assessment therefore can be the catalyst in creating authentic and engaging assessment tasks that students write for purpose and with a particular audience in mind.