

Multiliteracies Performance Assessment Zones (MPAZ): A New Tool to Explore Multimodal Interactions for Virtual Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognition of the dramatically changing nature of what it means to be literate in the so-called “information age” has resulted in an increasing interest among the educational research community around the importance of students developing “multiliteracy” skills and engaging in multimodal learning. Nevertheless, for such learning to be meaningful, requires to reconceptualize delivery strategies and assessment of multimodally mediated experiences. The aim of this chapter is dual: First to introduce an alternative framework for formative assessment of multimodal interactions for learning. Secondly, the intention is to uncover the story of culturally and linguistically diverse students’ multimodal experiences, resulting from engagement in the creation of a student-generated virtual museum during a design-based research implementation. Drawing from the literature, analysis, and evaluation using the framework explained, it is evident that virtual museum-based multiliteracies engagement, benefits pupils’ multimodal awareness, meaning making, and development as active designers of their learning.

INTRODUCTION

Today’s emerging technological achievements seem to be moving towards the realisation of ubiquitous learning as described by Weiser (1991). Nevertheless, ubiquitous learning is not preconceived or a priori; the number of possibilities offered by such learning can only happen through strategies and practices that re-conceptualize the content, processes and human relationships of teaching and learning. Part of the more widespread use of the Internet in the context of digital heritage, was the rise of text-based and online image collections (Terras, 2015), in the form of virtual museums, as information repositories by physical museums.

This chapter introduces an alternative framework for formative assessment of multimodal interactions through engagement in a virtual museum environment. Drawing on the findings from an empirical doctoral investigation into technology-enhanced multiliteracies engagement (Savva, 2016a), a formative assessment educational tool called Multiliteracies Performance Assessment Zones (MPAZ) is developed and elaborated. The intention is to explore impacts upon pupils' multimodal awareness and self-regulation, to determine the extent to which the instructional design framework designed and implemented, could support agile virtual learning pathways in the modern classroom.

BACKGROUND

Multimodal Literacy in Education

Teaching and learning in the 21st century have been characterized by a constant process of change. It is undeniable that the new millennium has introduced new tools for communication and it is the educators' responsibility to determine the value of these tools and how the curricula is affected. It is critical to question, therefore, what kind of pedagogies are appropriate for the 21st century (Scott, 2015) and how much traditional approaches appeal to today's learner. What do we need to change and how feasible is it? It is within this evolving context of learning that educators need to expand their pedagogical repertoires to nurture 21st century competencies and skills (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Scott, 2015; Smith & Hu, 2013). McCoog (2008) in addressing this issue, suggests that educators have a new charge: teaching the new three r's - "rigor" "relevance" and "real world skills".

It becomes apparent that the learning demands and needs of students are challenged in an increasingly digitally-mediated reality (Fleming, 2005, p. 114). In this context, a traditional view of literacy as reading and writing skills (Fleming, 2005, p. 114), becomes obsolete. The nature of literacy pedagogy, research and practice has shifted to embrace the idea of literacy as more of a plurality, discussing about various 'literacies' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 15). This reshaped notion of literacy is aligned with "the exponential growth and adoption of new media and information and communication technologies (ICTs)" (Day & Lau, 2010, p. 111). The latter involve not only spoken and written words, but also images and symbols of all kinds, sounds and music, bodily gestures and movement (all kinds of semiotic resources), and physical and virtual objects. This conceptualization in literacy terms, is defined as multimodal literacies (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 2003, 2010; Walsh, 2009). The term refers to the proliferation of multimodal texts and the significance of all the semiotic resources and modalities in meaning making. Human beings communicate not only in linguistic modes, but also visual, spatial, gestural, and audio. Multimodal literacy or literacies acknowledges that all these systems equally contribute to meaning making rather than be ancillary to language. Kress (1999) argues that language "is necessarily a temporally, sequentially organized mode... the visual by contrast is a spatially and simultaneously organized mode" (p. 79). Norris (2004) observes that "[a]ll movements, all noises, and all material objects carry interactional meanings as soon as they are perceived by a person" (p. 2). In this sense, all interaction is multimodal, including teaching and learning. As O'Toole (1994) observes, "we 'read' people in everyday life: facial features and expression, stance, gesture, typical actions and clothing" (p. 15). Hence, there is a need to understand how the lesson experience is constructed by exploring the functional affordances

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