


Chapter 5

Examining the Pedagogical Value of Collaborative Multimodal Storytelling Projects

Armanda R. Stroia

Avram Iancu School, Romania

Daniel Xerri

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5397-0647>

University of Malta, Malta

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, multimodal storytelling is a versatile approach to the traditional way of telling stories. One of its key features is the harnessing of a range of multi-media tools for an immersive experience that brings narratives to life. This chapter explores creative ways in which language teachers can integrate collaborative multimodal storytelling projects into their teaching repertoires. It examines the perceived pedagogical impact of collaborative multimodal storytelling projects, drawing on data collated from teachers and students at a school in Romania, as well as artefact analysis. Analysis of data revealed that despite being perceived as digital natives, few students actually possess the necessary skills to communicate in an increasingly complex multimodal world. By merging insights from multiple sources, this case study aims to foster a deeper understanding of the digital landscape and its potential for empowering learners as effective multimodal communicators.

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INTRODUCTION

The present era is increasingly multimodal, with people navigating a world in which digital technologies foreground the significance of forms of discourse that combine texts, images and sounds so as to relay complex messages (Diamantopoulou, 2021). Undoubtedly, with the “expansion of digital economy” (Delfanti & Arvidsson, 2019, p. vii), we live in an “e-permeated society” (Martin & Grudziecki, 2006, p. 249), where digital tools yield a pervasive transformative impact. This is visible in the ways the digital has merged with virtually every area of human life, profoundly reshaping social and cultural norms, behaviours, and interactions. It is no wonder that multimodal resources are currently in vogue in today’s English language teaching (ELT) landscape, sensitive as it is to the latest trends in the digital arena: the rise of artificial intelligence, app-based learning, and a myriad of digital resources that offer immersive and personalized learning trajectories.

Given that the contemporary communication landscape is highly impacted by multimodality, it becomes imperative to rethink and expand the traditional notion of communicative competence in ELT (Lim et al., 2022). As such, multimodal storytelling is a “pedagogical approach that acts as a bridge between the traditional literacies of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and 21st century digital and multimodal skills” (Donaghy et al., 2023, p. 17). However, despite its appealing potential, teachers encounter several challenges in implementing multimodal storytelling; this is due to setbacks ranging from pervasive myths around digital literacies and students as *digital natives* to a lack of materials and training to guide them.

MULTIMODAL STORYTELLING: TERMINOLOGICAL NOTES

Although digital resources are at the epicentre of any modern teaching approach, is multimodal storytelling a new strategy? First coined in the 1980s, at a very basic level, this term signifies that as human beings, we use many different “modes” or semiotic resources in order to make meaning. In other words, multimodality researchers examine how meaning is generated through the combined use of different semiotic resources (Diamantopoulou, 2021).

The implications for language education are highlighted by Meier (2022), who argues that “multimodal storytelling in educational contexts means that teachers and learners are prompted to bring the communicative functions of text, image, video, and audio into narrative coherence” (p. 10). In other words, in today’s dynamic digital age, multimodal storytelling is a versatile and increasingly popular approach to traditional storytelling, exploiting a range of multimedia tools to create an immersive experience which brings narratives to life, with animated elements and interactive

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