

A Workshop on Exploring the Effective Use of Multimodal Texts to Enhance English Language Learning

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Introduction

The science of learning underscores the importance of “*rethinking what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed.*” (OCED, 2010). In the 21st century, learning is shaped by the context in which it is situated in active constructivism. In view of this, classroom learning should encourage students to become ‘self-directed learner’. This means they can monitor, evaluate and optimize their acquisition and use of knowledge. The presence of positive learning attitude towards a learning task remarkably increases the impact on learning. Learning tasks and activities should therefore allow students to construct their learning through active engagement and exploration.

New descriptors of language and literacy criteria are developed within the framework of multi-literacy which is needed for reading and writing in multimodal and digital texts. The changes in digital communication provide facilities for reading and writing to be combined with various aspects of images, sound, music, graphics, photography and films. While the development of multimodal literacy is associated with the growth of digital communication technologies, it is not synonymous with digital. When schools are working on the use of multimodal texts, the choice of

media for its creation should be duly considered by the school context and the learning needs of students.

Multimodal text is a strategic use of two or more communication modes to make meaning and express ideas in language learning. Multimodal text can be paper including books, comics and posters, etc. It can also be digital such as using e-books, blogs, presentation slides and webpages. It can even be a live performance or an event.

A multimodal text can be a storytelling where the story is told using ‘multi delivery channels’ through a combination of media platforms, for example, books, comics, magazines, films, web series, and video game media. According to Jenkins (2011), trans-media storytelling seeks to add something to the story as it moves from one medium to another, not just adaptation or retelling. It enables the further development of the story world through precise insight into characters and plot elements.

To enable our students to design and communicate meaning through rich and potentially complex text, we need to extend their multimodal literacy knowledge and skills. Students have to make informed choices within and across the available communication modes to construct meaning effectively. Creating a digital multimodal text requires a combination of modes such as image, movement, sound, spatial design, gestures and language. Students’ experience of texts should no longer be limited to words on printed pages. Reading and writing could be formed in multimodal ways, combining different modes of communication, including speech or sound, still or moving images, writing and gestures.




Two schools will demonstrate how to incorporate multimodal text to capitalize students’

engagement in reading and writing. While one school is using the story of ‘Charlie and the Chocolate Factory’ to illustrate how reading could be done, another school will show how students compose an e-book about their ‘Dream Job’.

In the presentation of the story of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, the storybook is the main medium. But teachers have added other media such as story trailers, presentation slides and other apps in the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage. The story is told using ‘multi-delivery channels’ through a combination of media platforms including the book, movie trailers, slide presentation and graphics. In composing the e-book, similar media and e-learning devices are used together with pamphlets, study notes and information articles in the learning process.

Incorporating multimodal text to capitalize students’ engagement in reading

Storytelling is commonly conducted in the primary English classroom. Teachers from SKH Tsing Yi Chu Yan Primary School are going to share and discuss with participants on how they incorporate multimodal text to motivate and engage students in reading the story ‘*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*’. Hands-on activities are provided for participants to explore the use of transmedia storytelling as a teaching strategy for reading storybooks. Students should be involved in reading for a variety of purposes. Teachers will demonstrate their lesson flow as follows:

-  Reading to students (Reading Aloud and Storytelling)
-  Reading with students (Shared Reading and Supported Reading)
-  Reading by students (Independent Reading)

When teachers decide on what reading strategies they will use, they will first explore the challenges that students may face when reading the text. For example, if there are many challenges in terms of vocabulary, text structure and required reading skills to decode meaning of the text, teachers may use storytelling, shared reading or reading aloud. The scaffolds given will be considered when planning the reading lessons. Home reading or independent reading will be assigned if there are few challenges and students may have learnt the reading strategies well enough to try and read on their own.

Impact on learning

As observed in the lessons, teachers found that using multimodal text could hold the attention and concentration span of students. It could stimulate emergent readers' interest in reading when sufficient support is given to students. When students are engaged interactively with the stories, it could develop their capacity to respond and give expression to imaginative experiences with increasing understanding. In the process of learning, integrated skills including listening, basic reading skills and skills in writing stories could be developed. To further promote reading across the curriculum, other text types could also be explored using multimodal texts.



Using multimodal text to compose an e-book

Teachers in Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School have tried out using e-learning tools and e-resources including apps and a trans-media platform to connect the reading and writing

experience of students. They have produced an e-book about their ‘Dream Job’. Students first read the information book *“How to be a Sports Star”* and the biographies of famous people in the Reading Workshops. To facilitate the development of holistic thinking skills, students have been engaged in thinking and writing creatively as well as critically about the important qualities of being a successful person.

Students are guided to use reading strategies (e.g. using prediction skill, identifying pictorial and contextual clues) when reading the information book. An authentic pamphlet is also used to help students learn about calories and energy. Students are then introduced to the operation of an app for composing an e-book with features on adding, drawing images and pictures with captions to illustrate the intended messages to readers, and using the recording function to present ideas verbally. On the other hand, teachers have provided students with quality and constructive feedback on the digital multimodal text with reference to the task-specific criteria on the assessment form.

In the workshop, the discussion will focus on the writing process to provide students with support on knowledge and language skills in composing the e-book with the following objectives:

-  To help students process and create information texts by introducing the text features including the topic sentence, fact boxes and captions, and
-  To make good use of e-learning resources using an app for composing e-books, and to create digital multimodal texts

Impact on learning

Students have been provided with a meaningful purpose for the reading and writing activities to express their own ideas in context. In view of students' performance in their writing tasks, they have developed synthesizing and critical thinking skills by connecting the information in different texts and applying the knowledge in designing a menu for a sports player. In the Reading Workshop, students have learnt the reading strategies of using topic sentences to identify the main ideas and supporting details. They also had the opportunity of adding graphics and images, using the skills of reviewing and editing the e-books to further refine their writing.

Concluding remarks

In the process of trying out to use multimodal text to teach reading and writing, teachers in both schools have worked as a team to identify the theme/module to work on. When they choose the reading texts, they have considered the suitability for their students (e.g. an interesting and relevant topic, appealing illustrations, appropriate degree of difficulty in language, use of vocabulary items and sentence structures).

According to the teachers' observation, students have developed an interest in learning English when they are engaged in enjoyable reading activities. The reading skills and vocabulary building strategies have been sustained through using the context and picture cues to guess the reading passage and meaning of new words. When composing the e-book on their dream job, students were engaged in the task as it is meaningful and relevant to their school life. They have consolidated and applied their knowledge of book concept acquired in reading to understand the qualities of a sports star. They have carried out self-directed learning when collecting words from

various texts that they have come across. They can see the connections between their learning experiences and become more motivated in learning English.

References

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