

## EDUC 5304G: Digital Literacy Dr. Janette Hughes

### Journal Entries - Week 8 to Week 11

#### Week 7 - Digital E-literature and Digital Poetics

Kajder, Sara. "Meeting Readers: Using Visual Literacy Narrative in the Classroom." *Voices from the Middle* 14.1 (September 2006): 13–19.

Hughes, J. & Tolley, S. (2010). Engaging students through new literacies: the good, bad and curriculum of visual essays



I enjoyed these two readings as I believe visual literacy narratives can play a role in all of our classrooms, not just in English classrooms. Kajder (2006, p. 13) provides a definition of a visual literacy narrative as 'a short, concise, digital video in which students are challenged to meld still images, motion, print text and soundtrack in communicating ideas, insights or discoveries about who our students are as readers and writers'. I included this quote for a few reasons. First, I think this description of a visual literacy narrative fits with what we have been discussing in class and in the Ning, a new pedagogy of multiliteracies that extends beyond traditional print media to include digital literacies. Second, it indicates an alternative way students can communicate their ideas and knowledge. Students with learning disabilities and second language learners who find it difficult to be engaged because of the barriers and challenges that print text presents may now participate and contribute.

The readings point to the limitations in helping to engage our students that are a result of standardized testing. Ontario secondary students are rigidly prepared for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, a standardized test in which students must write a five paragraph essay, a newspaper article as well as answer questions based on readings in include in the test to prove they are literate. A great amount of time is spent in the life of a student during their grade 9 and 10 years preparing to be successful on the OSSLT. The OSSLT itself needs to be revamped as it doesn't reflect the plurality of digital literacy in today's global world. Paul Glister's (1997) general definition defines digital literacy as the ability to understand and to use information from a variety of digital sources, none of which are tested on the OSSLT. The time invested in preparation for the OSSLT distracts us from having our students perform tasks that may engage them in learning, or more specifically, in this case engage them in critical reading and writing.

Furthermore, the readings discussed the effectiveness of the visual narrative. Students are encouraged to be critical readers as they consider elements of design as they choose the best way to

communicate and share their message. The effectiveness of the visual narrative extends beyond the classroom, as the students are preparing the narrative for the 'audience beyond one', writing and creating for an extended audience as it can be shared with family and friends, more easily than print-based text. This ability to incorporate family and peers encourages students to be active designers and producers of information as they share social interest (Hughes & Trolley, 2010). The quote 'once they had a taste of being a transmitter instead of the recipient of information' (Hughes & Trolley, p. 7) and 'butterfly catchers - briefly interacting to study them and offer support and guidance, but releasing them quickly, careful not to damage their own innate beauty of creativity' (Hughes & Trolley, 2010, p. 5) connects the visual narrative to the pedagogy of constructivism, scaffolding for the students, making the classroom less teacher centered and more student centered.

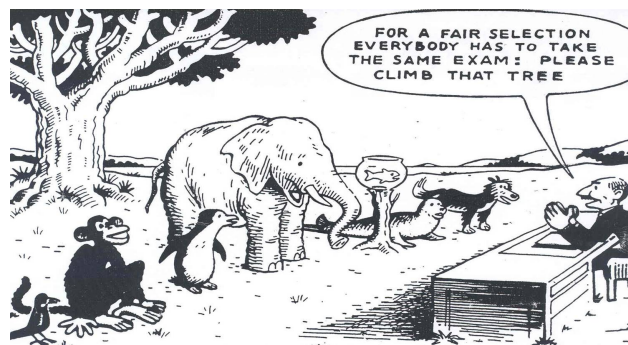


### **Week 8 - Digital Literacies; New modes of Assessment**

Burke, A., & Hammett, R. F. (2009). *Assessing new literacies: Perspectives from the classroom*. New York: Peter Lang. 203 pp

Wyatt-Smith, C. & Kimber, Kay (2009). *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* December, 2009, Volume 8, Number 3 pp. 70-90

Vincent, J. (2006). Children writing: Multimodality and assessment in the writing classroom. *Literacy Volume 40 Number 1 April 2006*



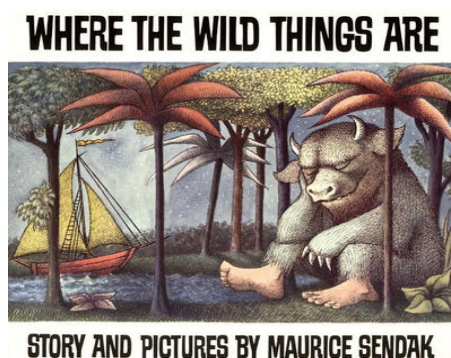
This weeks readings focused on the new challenges of assessing multimodal work that includes print as well as design, images, sound and cohesion of the different modes. Reading books and reading screens are not the same experience, though they may share elements in common (Burke, 2009). Multimodality is the recognition that meaning is made, interpreted, communicated and shared through

many different representations. Each of these different methods of representing meaning, image, sound, gesture, writing, speech, etc. has its own distinctive features that can be called upon in any combination to make meaning (Wyatt-Smith, 2009).

The New London Group (1996) discussed design, visualisation, modes and modal affordances, transmodal operation and cohesion and staged multimodality. It provided 6 possible design elements; linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial and multimodal. The challenges are how to assess this multimodal text. Perhaps one way to meet this challenge is the shared development of terminology in relation to the parts of the multimodal task and assessment. In the Wyatt-Smith article, 3 principle's of assessments are outlined, the first one that language around multimodal assessment needs to be organic, shared and talked about between teacher and students. When I am reviewing with my class for a quiz, a test or an exam I ask the students to come up with what they think will be on the quiz, test or exam. I have also extended this to classroom assignments. With my junior classes, I find I need to develop the first assessment, but if we do a similar assignment a second time, my students are more knowledgeable of what they need to contribute to each part of the assignment and we can make up most of the assessment together.

The second principle is that dynamic tools should be used to assess dynamic multimodal text. Web 2.0 tools are designed or well suited to assessment for learning principles (Wyatt-Smith, 2009). The 3rd principle states that we as teachers should not just focus on the final outcome but the process of how the student reached the final outcome or product. This reminded me of authentic learning and the use of problem based learning as the process in these cases is just as important if not more than the final product.

Vincent (2006) pointed out that before children go to school, or at least until they are in grade 1, they receive information multimodally through television, computers, books or gaming. Children's books rely on images, colours and printed text and it is not until grade 1 that learning becomes monomodal. A good example is 'Where the Wild Things Are', written by Maurice Sendak 50 years ago. The book has only 338 words and through illustrations helps to tell the story of Max, a young boy whose bedroom is mysteriously transformed into a jungle environment in which the 'Wild Things' live. In the early years of school students are encouraged to work in multiple forms such as drama, song, drawings, gestures as well as written words (Vincent, 2006).



The last two weeks overlap. Concern over 'inserting our own meaning on the visual essay' (Hughes & Tolley, 2010, p.10) made me think of the fact that when we view many visuals such as art work, we

impose our own meaning on it as we think about what each brush stroke meant or how come the colour used was the one chosen. We impose our own meaning on it in an attempt to figure out the message the artist intended to communicate. Perhaps this concern could become another teaching moment.

It is difficult to discuss developing a task in which a visual narrative is created without at the same time thinking about and developing the method of assessing the visual narrative. When I taught a grade 9 computer class about using different computer software such as powerpoint, movie maker and photoshop, me and another colleague had to develop assessments that may be considered multimodal as we took into account the different creative tools, such as transitions, background colour, images, type of font, music chosen, etc. It was difficult sometimes to grade because we were grading creativity and beauty is often in the eye of the beholder. Through peer evaluation students were provided various different opinions on their work and what may or may not improve it. This lead to a discussion about what may be visually appealing as well as discussion over the content. Perhaps it was easier for us to do a visual narrative as well as come up with some type of multimodal assessment because we weren't restricted by the curriculum of an English classroom.

### **Journal Entries Week 9 - Gaming and Literacy**

Jones, R. & Hafner, C. (2012). *Understanding Digital Literacies: A Practical Introduction*. Chapter 9 London, Routledge.



This weeks topic is one that I am still sitting on the fence about, the idea of gaming and literacy together. Before taking this class, I struggled to find a connection between literacy and online gaming but readings and discussions in class have begun to change my opinion. Part of my hesitation stems from the idea of using an avatar in online gaming, a make believe person who may make the creator feel disconnected from its avatar's action, thus void of responsibility. Online gaming worlds may also provide environments for unlikely relationships to take place, young children interacting with teenagers and adults. Is this good or bad? It may be good as it can help individuals learn to interact without seeing another individual so barriers are not put in place and in some games, learn how to work together to solve a problem and reach a common goal.

I do believe that playing games of all sorts provides another tool for learning. When we were young and at our cottage with no television set (how did we ever survive!) we passed the time by playing numerous board games and card games. Risk is a good board game that helps to teach strategy, just as some online video games. I incorporate games into my classroom teaching practises as it provides an opportunity for my students to learn while socializing and some thrive on a bit of competition. Many of my students enjoy going old school and will enjoy playing cards and Yahtzee towards the end of a class or after a quiz or a test. One of my future goals is to incorporate some

online gaming into my classroom, such as Minecraft. In a recent discussion with my grade 9 science students when I was introducing the Periodic Table to them, they knew some of the elements because they had used them in Minecraft. It has made me wonder if it can become a useful learning tool for some of my science students. I know that in geography gaming can be a good way to help some of the students learn about maps and GPS.

Not only did the reading discuss promoting new ways of reading and writing in the games, it discussed literacy in online gaming spaces. Video games still provide story structure as well as a visual interface as new methods of meaning making. I think educators need to be careful though and ensure that when using online games as a learning tool, that they encourage critical discussion of the game and the morals of its story with such games as Grand Theft Auto. Some may even have a history lesson in them, such as Game of Thrones.

I liked that the reading included literacy that goes on outside the game through fan interaction, game manuals and fan modification, involving participation and collaboration with others to come up with a solution. Game manuals can be connected with other manuals such as reading and interpreting an auto manual. This can provide another way to help develop cognitive thinking as well as collaboration skills.



### **Journal Entry Week 10 - Online Cultures & Communication**

Jones, R. & Hafner, C. (2012). *Understanding Digital Literacies: A Practical Introduction*. Chapter 8, London: Routledge.

My hesitations with the use of online gaming worlds can be carried over into online cultures and communication. In fact, these topics for me overlap. While perhaps in an online community it may provide an opportunity for someone to overcome shyness and to meet and interact with a variety of individuals from a variety of places, we need to continue to be diligent in educating our students about safety in online communities and social network sites. And is it okay that a much older person interacts with a much younger person in an online community but in a physical environment this may be frowned upon?

I found it difficult to separate out the four components of the online discourse system as they seem to be intertwined. Ideologies or how people think can have a huge effect on how they communicate with other individuals. The reading pointed out that depending on the environment you are in and the people you are with, such as work vs home the ideology we display will be different. I believe that this will then have an effect on the face system or how people get along with each other. If you work in a formal work environment (I don't find my school work environment very formal) than you may refer to

your boss as 'sir' or depending where you are in the pecking order. It may be the same for a young child - adults are often referred to by their last names, not their first but their friends on the playground are referred to by their first name - so age can also be a part of the ideology we display as well as the environment. I found it interesting that the chapter mentioned the 35 year old teacher being friends with a 15 year old in an online gaming environment but in a physical environment this may not be possible on the same level of intimacy.



The third component, forms of discourse or how people communicate, can relate back to face systems as how you communicate can be a result of how you get along. If you develop trust with another individual, you are better able to have intimacy in your relationship, and you will be less formal in how you address each other and therefore your ideology will be different. Furthermore, if you have a level of intimacy, this will affect the media you chose to communicate, whether you chose to text or email, phone or have a face-to-face conversation. If you are in a work environment, you are more likely to send an email to your boss than a text message. I usually chose to send an email when I have more to write than a brief message but I also find emails to be a formal way of communicating, and texting less formal. I phone people when I need an immediate answer, have an immediate concern or have good news to share. Sometimes it makes for a better conversation.

As I was reading the part about what type of media would you use to communicate different types of information, it reminded me of an episode of 'Sex In The City' in which Kerri's boyfriend breaks up with her on a post it. She then carries the post it around with her and shows people that he used a post it. In today's world, it would probably be a text message.



### **Journal Entries - Week 11 - Researching Issues in Digital Literacy**

Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2008). *Researching New Literacies: Web 2.0 Practices and Insider Perspectives*

Hughes, J. (2008). The Performative Pull of Research with New Media.



These were readings that I presented my seminar on. I searched the internet for a definition of a digital researcher and wikipedia defined a digital researcher as a person who uses digital technology to do research, involving collaboration using social media with public input to inform research and knowledge mobilization. Furthermore, a digital researcher has the intent of publishing research findings in an online open access journal or by other social media information exchange formats. Key words that stand out for me in this definition were collaboration, public input(non-expert), and social media(participation).

“Socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 1). When we generate and communicate our meanings, we invite others to make meaning from our communications. For example, when we read someone’s blog, much of the meaning to be made from content has to do with what we think of the writer. Since a digital researcher may use the internet as a tool for research, almost anything online becomes a resource for diverse kinds of meaning making (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008)

Lankshear & Knobel (2008) discussed new ‘ethos stuff’ and again, similar keywords are used; participatory, collaborative, distributive as well as the idea that research in the digital community is less ‘expert-dominated’ and ‘author-centered’. Lankshear & Knobel (2008) discussed a separation of mindsets. One mindset is a contemporary world that is the same only now it has become technologized and sophisticated. The world is a physical material world that is hierarchical and centralized. The second mindset is that our contemporary world is in transition, changing as a result of new internetworked technologies and new ways of doing things because of new digital technologies. This has the potential to create a non-material cyberspatial world, one that is decentered and flat.

When we had the Web 1.0, it was read only and the internet consisted of online encyclopedia’s, personal websites and directories. With the advancement of the Web 2.0 brought the ability to read as well as to write, so individuals all over the world with access to the internet can contribute. We have seen the development of Wikipedia, a dynamic online encyclopedia to which anyone can contribute. It has been debated if wikipedia is as rich in information since it is not only experts who are contributing. ‘Official ‘ encyclopedia’s are produced by recognized experts, its a collection of entries being formally published by a company vs Wikipedia, which is a collaboration, an encyclopedia created by participation rather than via publishing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Do experts make the information more reliable? Or is Wikipedia more reliable since it is dynamic and not static, providing up to date information? And how will the development of the Web 3.0, which will allow us to read, write and execute affect research and information?

Lankshear & Knobel also discuss other collaborative tools the Web 2.0 has given us, such as blog sites and folksonomy or tagging. A blogging site can be very collaborative and participatory, as the example of the Blog Project Runway demonstrated. Started by a single individual to reach out to other fans, the blog site become more than a place to discuss the program, it in fact became something that was a source of information along side the show as the host posted podcasts on the site and viewers/fans used the blog site to 'chat' during the program.

In the Hughes (2008) article, the key points for me where that technology used in her research reshaped her thinking about her research, she reshaped the technology beyond her initial intent, the advantages of digital tools for conducting research and that a change in academia mindset is needed but may take a bit of time. She pointed out that in the processes of video editing and considering different ways of organizing the digital artifacts, that she became familiar with their words, their facial expressions, their gestures and the tone and inflection of their voices in a way that she would not have if the interviews/videos had been transcribed into print (Hughes 2008).



## References:

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