

Foreword

In many ways, texts are an integral part of teaching and learning. For those of us who are language teachers, texts are not only what we use when teaching but they also contribute to our professional development, at times indirectly. The texts we use in the classroom end up becoming highly familiar to us through the act of teaching. In fact, the writer and educator Joyce Carol Oates (in an interview with Phillips, 2003) maintains that “Anyone who teaches knows that you don’t *really* experience a text until you’ve taught it, in loving detail, with an intelligent and responsive class” (p. 32). Texts are fundamental to the experience of engaging with language and literature in the classroom, an experience whose value is intensified by multimodality.

The word *text* derives from the Latin *textus*, referring to the style or texture of a work but originally meaning something woven. In fact, in *Institutio Oratoria*, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian advises orators that after having chosen their words, these must be woven together into a fine and delicate fabric. The weaving metaphor seems highly appropriate when one considers that a text is constructed out of signs that are carefully arranged together to convey meaning while being open to interpretation. Traditionally understood as anything written, *text* has gradually expanded its meaning to incorporate any kind of object that can be *read*, the latter being an activity that is as much applicable to language as it is to other semiotic products.

Engagement has a powerful impact on students’ ability to enjoy the texts read in class and on their capacity for language learning. Engaging students with the texts used in class is one of the main aims of a language lesson; however, achieving this aim can sometimes prove difficult. This is because students might find these texts irrelevant to their lives and interests, or else because there is very little in them that would make students read them for pleasure. Another reason for disengagement might be that students are only expected to read texts that lack a multimodal dimension.

Besides considering the use of multimodal texts in the teaching of language, this book gives a substantial amount of importance to their role in the act of engaging with literature. The use of literary texts in language education has been shown to have a significant effect on students’ engagement. Carefully chosen literary texts speak to students in ways that other kinds of texts might not always be able to do. Literary texts have the potential to tap students’ imagination and to evoke a highly personal response. They ignite pleasure in readers, hone their ability to critically engage with a plethora of ideas, galvanise their empathy, and cultivate an appreciation for literature’s special use of language. L2 curricula that are stripped of any contact with literary texts are probably poorer than ones that capitalize on literature as a means of fostering student engagement. The level of curricular poverty is even more pronounced if the texts used in class are strictly monomodal.

Multimodality enriches the reception and production of texts in the literature and language classroom, and demands the mastery of new literacies. Understood as the combination of different modes of communication in order to relay meaning, multimodality affects how readers engage with texts, most especially literature. Poetry and drama have long been described as multimodal given how they capitalize on the oral, aural and performative dimensions despite sometimes originating as written texts. However, the prevalence of images, film and digital technology in contemporary culture has meant that literary texts are no longer perceived as something exclusively print-based. In addition, it has underscored the significance of a multimodal approach to texts and the deployment of multiliteracies as a means of reading different modes of communication operating in tandem. The amalgamation of different modes helps to improve students' engagement with texts, but it requires competences that transcend the reading of a printed text. The use of multimodal texts in the teaching of literature and language can serve to cater for the needs of students who are expected to be equipped with multiliteracies in order for them to function effectively in the present world.

By focusing on how the reading and creation of multimodal texts can enhance the literature and language learning experience, this volume acts a vital source of knowledge about the benefits that the use of such texts poses to teachers and students. The book shows that literature has a massive capacity for multimodality that can be exploited in the classroom. It emphasizes the fact that multimodal texts can boost student engagement and maximize their ability to develop multiliteracies. The wide range of contributions that constitute this book explore how films, picturebooks, storytelling, hypertexts and other multimodal texts help to consolidate the act of engaging with literature and language. By considering both the reception and production of multimodal texts, the chapters in this book illustrate how teachers and students in different international contexts have managed to enrich the learning of literature and language.

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