Multimodality and Assessment:

Designing for the recognition of the agency of learners

Multimodal social semiotic approaches

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Introducing a multimodal point of view to the diversification debate

Contribute to the debate of diversification of assessment bringing multimodality to the table

Multimodality is already part of the discourse of those who talk about diversification

Backdrop of a multiplicity of interpretations of what multimodality is (sensory channels, skills, ability to learn in different ways)

Gunther Kress

1940-2019

Linguist, semiotician and social theorist

Co-founder of:
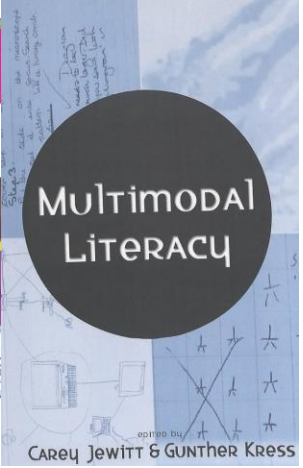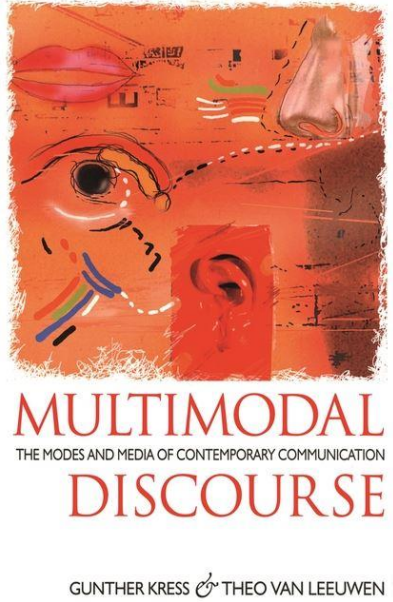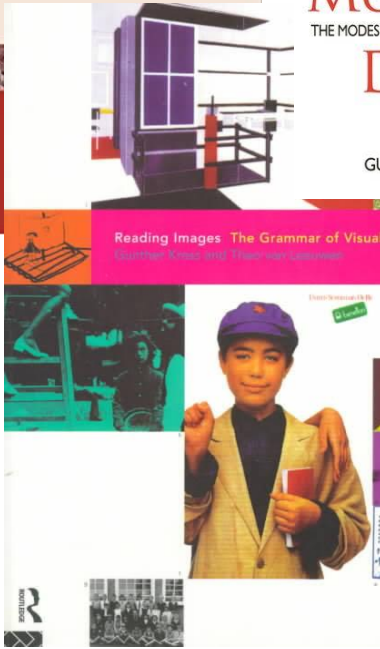
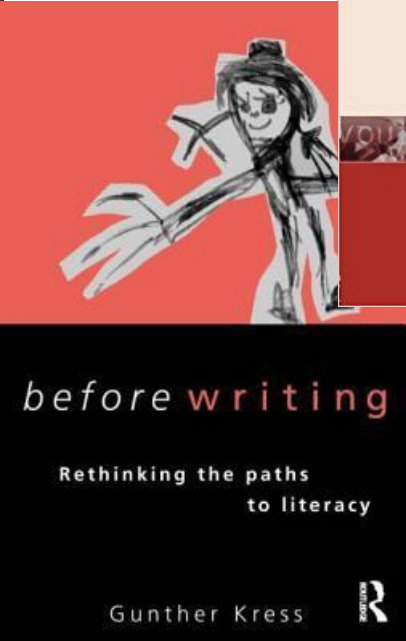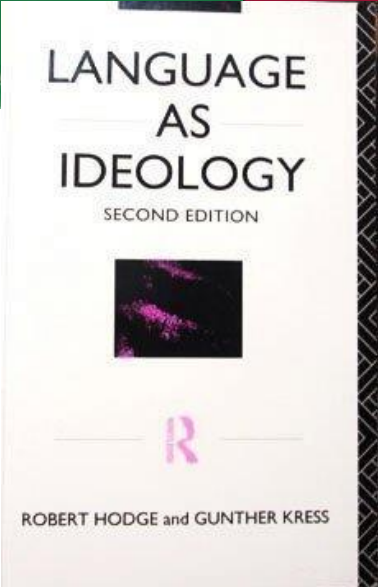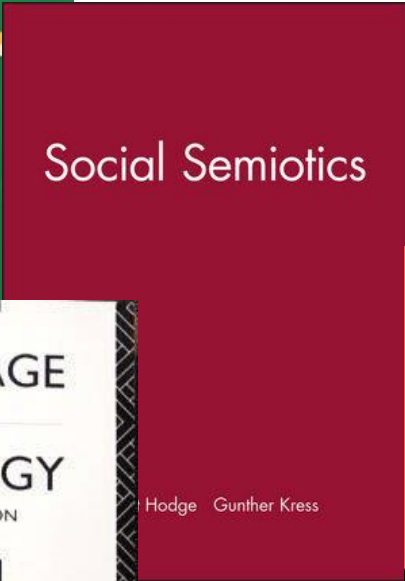Critical Linguistics,

Critical Discourse Analysis

Social Semiotics

Theorist of multimodal communication and representation

Bezemer, J. & Blommaert, J.(2012) Gunther Kress. In C.A. Chapelle (ed), The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics. Oxford. Wiley Blackwell.

A multimodal social semiotic trajectory towards multimodal assessment

# Multimodal social semiotics as a theory for communication and learning

Multimodality describes approaches that understand **communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to all forms of communication people use**.

Social semiotic multimodality 'provides conceptual tools that focus on the inter-connectedness between the people's **agency**, the **technologies** in use, and the **social context of meaning making**.... a social semiotic approach to multimodal communication is **sensitive to the exploration of power relations and how these are materially instantiated**. (Jewitt & Henriksen,2016: 161)

Jewitt, C., & Henriksen, B. (2016). Social Semiotic Multimodality. In *Social Semiotic Multimodality*. De Gruyter.

Jewitt, C. (ed) 2009. *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*

Kress, G. (2010). Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication. Abingdon: Routledge
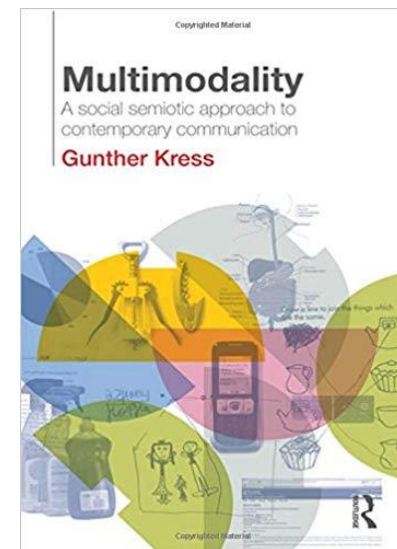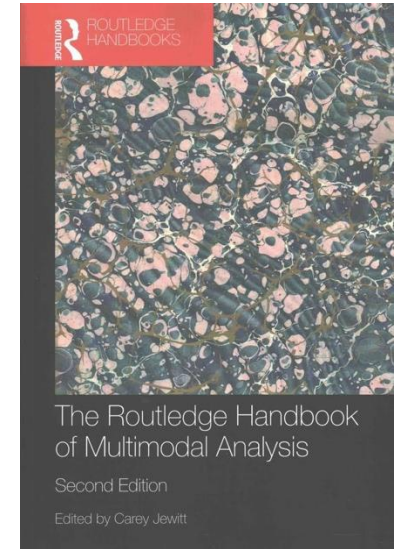
The multimodality of the English classroom

Classroom layout, classroom displays, printed and digital textbooks, assessment criteria, curricula guidelines, syllabi and classroom interaction are all 'multimodal' texts and sites that often give rise to various contradictory discourses about literacy and English as a subject. All these discourses co-exist and come into temporary coherence within the institution of the school in each historical context.

Diamantopoulou, S. (2021). The multimodality of English as a school subject: Mapping meanings about literacy discourses on students' work in the case of a museum and a school project. In Baldry, A., Vasta, N. (Eds.).Multiliteracy Advances and Challenges in Hypermedia Environments. Udine, Italy: Udine University.

Diversifying assessment: a strong HE agenda

- Fairness, inclusivity, empowerment
- Student success
- Equity
- Inclusive/ accessible assessment/ accommodating diversity of the student body
- Catering for diverse skills and learning styles
- Enhanced academic integrity/ less vulnerability to AI associated misconduct
- Wellbeing (especially if the diversification is linked to formative assessment)
- Creativity
- Links to workplace practices and employability

https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Eden-Centre/Assessment-Toolkit/Assessment-methods/Assessment-methods

https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/resources/assessment-compendium/assessment-design/diversifying-assessment/

Diversified assessment as a 'contested concept' with benefits

Key benefits to diversification are:

- student engagement and empowerment,
- Improved learning experience,
- increased performance and
- accurate assessment
- Improved equity

O'Neill, G., & Padden, L. (2021). Diversifying assessment methods: Barriers, benefits and enablers. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *59*(4), 398–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2021.1880462

Designing for diversified assessment

An infinite range of multimodal designs for learning and multimodal texts emerges:

- Visual essays
- Films
- PowerPoints
- Blogs and vlogs
- Websites
- Digital artefacts
- E-portfolios
- Podcasts
- Exhibitions
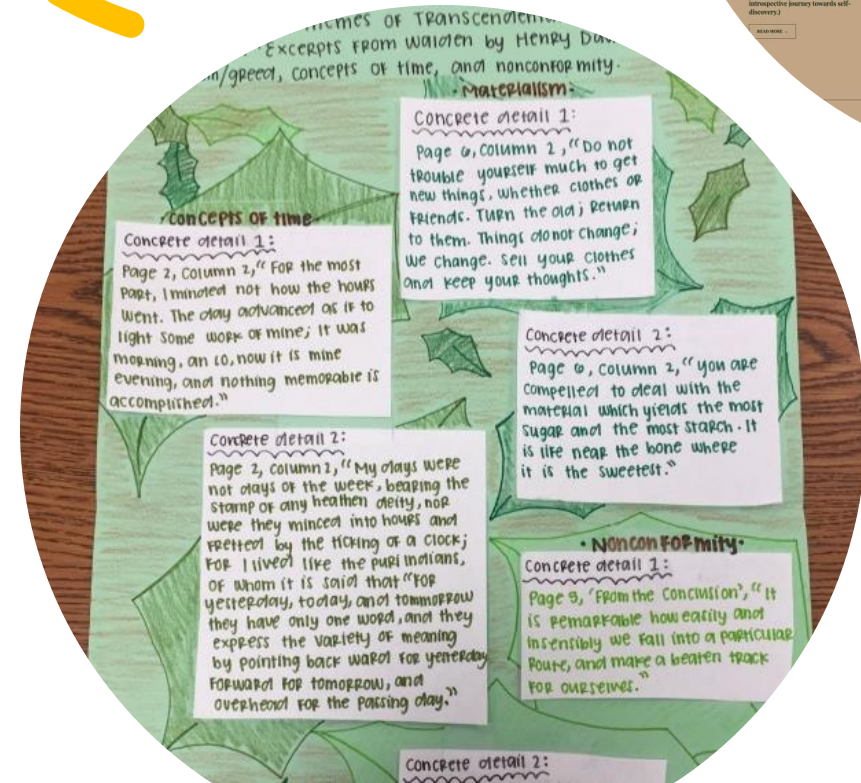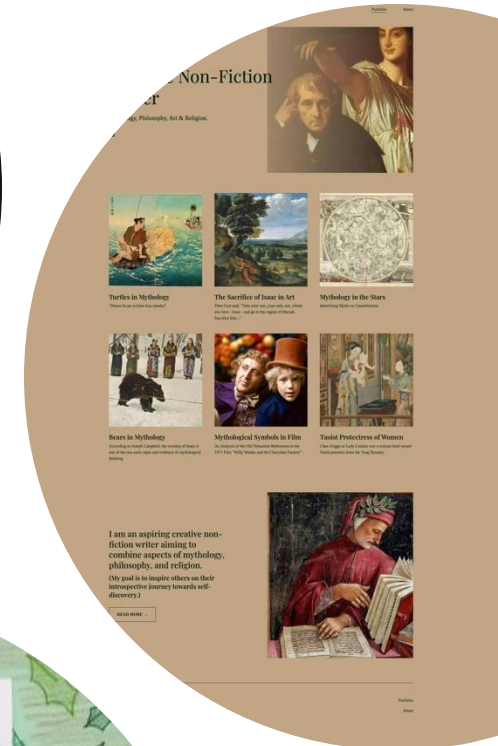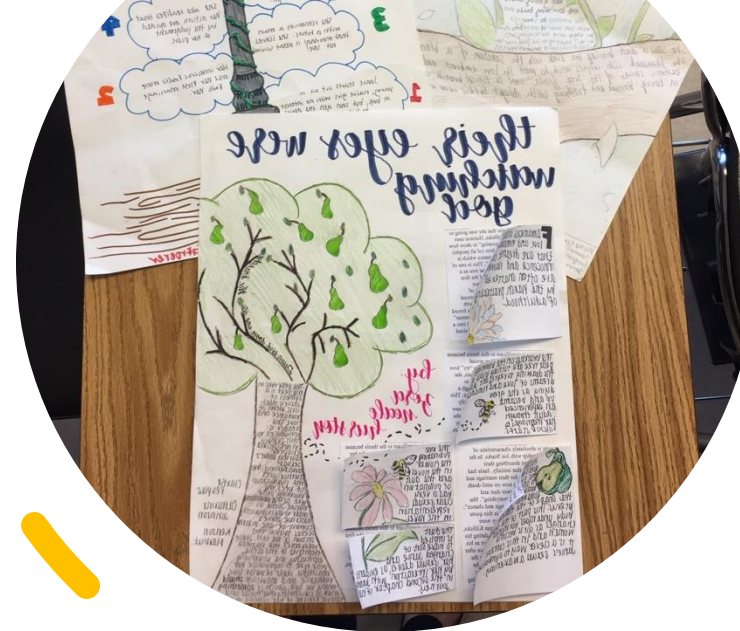
Diversified assessment as multimodal

- Diversification involves multimodal production of more complex texts
- The multimodal texts produced are not aligned with a multimodal pedagogy and the teaching of a relevant metalanguage
- Current assessment rubrics are often not accounting for the possibility of meanings arising in modes other than writing
- The language of multimodality, its epistemological positions and values do not resonate with some of these discourses 'e.g. accuracy, objectivity'

What is multimodal assessment?

- The assessment of multimodal compositions, usually digital.
- Diversity of understandings even within fields that deal with multimodal communication and pedagogy

- Scholars anchored on multiliteracies pedagogies, multimodal social semiotics and sociocultural approaches to learning (Germán Canale, Henning Fjørtoft,, Christoph Hafner, Victor Lim)

Multimodal assessment linked to debates about multimodal composition

- Silseth, K., and Ø. Gilje. 2019. "Multimodal Composition and Assessment: A SocioculturalPerspective." Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice 26 (1): 26–42.

- Godhe, A. 2013. "Negotiating Assessment Criteria for Multimodal Texts." The International Journalof Assessment and Evaluation 19 (3): 31–43.

Multimodal assessment featuring in systematic and critical reviews of relevant literature

- Lim, V.F, Toh, W.& Nguyen,T. (2022). Multimodality in the English language classroom: A systematic review of literature, Linguistics and Education,69

- L. Tan, K. Zammit, J. D'warte, A. Gearside (2020). Assessing multimodal literacies in practice: A critical review of its implementations in educational settings. *Language and Education*, 34 (2) (2020), pp. 97-114,

- Zhang, Y., & Zhu, Q. (2024). *Trends and Future Directions of Multimodal Assessment: A Scoping Review*. Paper presented at the 8th Designs for Learning, Stockholm. August 28-30.

Key concerns within multimodal scholarly work

Multimodal assessment of literacy is linked to studies of multimedia composition as extensions of writing

Teachers tend to assess writing only even if multimodal assessment is used.

Gap between teaching and assessing multimodal literacies.

Questions from the multimodal community

What are we assessing?

How are assessment rubrics accounting for the potential to make meanings in modes beyond linguistic?

How can we teach multimodal composing and the metalanguage of multimodal communication?

How can we accord recognition to the learners' production?

The emergence of a new interdisciplinary field: Multimodal English Language Learning (MELL)

(a). Communication as multimodal

(b). Extended notions of literacy

(c). Language learning as embodied and social

(d). English as global
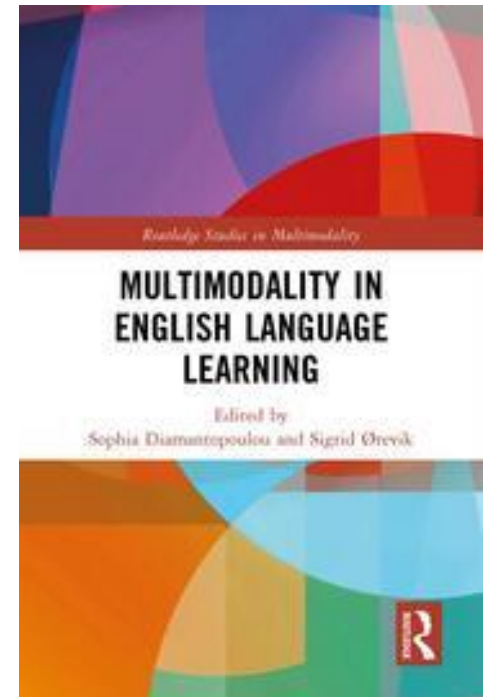
Diamantopoulou, S. & Ørevik, S. (forthcoming). Multimodality in English Language Learning. In Chapelle, C. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* 2nd edition

Diamantopoulou, S., Ørevik, S. (Eds.), (2021). Multimodality in English Language Learning. Routledge.

Multimodality work that converses with research in language assessment

Mari Carmen Campoy-Cubillo, M and Mercedes Querol-Julián

- Assessing Multimodal Listening Comprehension Through Online Informative Videos: The Operationalisation of a New Listening Framework for ESP in Higher Education

Maria Grazia Sindoni, Ilaria Moschini, Elisabetta Adami, and Styliani Karatza

- The Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies (CFRIDiL): Learning as Meaning-Making and Assessment as Recognition in English as an Additional Language Contexts https://www.eumade4ll.eu/

Multimodality in Norwegian Higher Education:
EAL teacher training contexts

Ørevik, S., Skulstad, A., & Diamantopoulou, S. (forthcoming). Multimodal Litera
EAL education. In Querol-Julián, M. and Fortanet-Gómez, I.(eds). *Designing
Learning with Digital Technologies: Perspectives from Multimodality in Education*

The place of multimodality in Norwegian EAL HE

https://jenaconti.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/elever_33272q.jpg

What is multimodality associated with and understood as, and how is it operationalised within the EAL teacher education context in Norway?

What specific understandings of multimodality are foregrounded by the teacher educators participating in the interviews?

How do teacher educators teaching the courses of English in GLU 5-10 report on their **pedagogic and assessment practices** in relation to multimodality?

How do the teacher educators talk about multimodality in relation to the disciplinary aspect of English they represent (English as language, culture and literature)?

Ørevik, S. Skulstad, A. and Diamantopoulou, S. (2023). Researching the place of multimodality in Norwegian EAL teacher education: Reflections on the futures of multimodal pedagogies' Paper co-presented at the 11th International Conference on Multimodality. UCL IOE London (27th-29th September)

EAL teacher education in Norway_ Findings from a thematic analysis of interviews with teacher educators

Overarching themes / Dimensions	Notions of multimodality	Multimodal texts as pedagogical tools	Assessment/ recognition of pre-service teachers' multimodal expression	Multimodal texts for critical thinking and literacy
Theoretical considerations	Identifying and employing multiple modes of expression and communication. Perceiving multimodality as ubiquitous	Naming and employing a range of multimodal genres of text for teaching; genres that entail embodied modes or constitute artefacts	**Acknowledging the lack of theoretical framework for recognition of learning and assessment of multimodal texts/ Foregrounding academic genres to serve formal assessment**	Emphasising the importance of teaching metalanguage or acquiring theoretical tools
Identity issues	Connecting multimodality to own professional identity	Understanding the identity of pre-service teachers and students and learning needs and catering for these through tools for diverse engagement and multisensoriality	**Aiming to empower pre-service teachers and re-mediate power to school students in turn**	Teacher educators' professional interests and conditioning guiding the way of understanding and theorising language and literacy
School practice	**Equation of multimodality to the production and use of digital texts in school practice**	Perceived lack of criticality on the part of in-service teachers in choosing and using multimodal texts in the classroom	**Key themes in pre-service teachers' assessed multimodal production are connected to school practice**	Multimodal text production in teacher education as apprenticeship for school practice

English language learning at the intersection of institutional spaces: Multimodal social semiotics as a resource for assessment

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**IDEAS FACTORY
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

The Report of the Research Project
**A Multimodal Approach to the
Ideas Factory Project's Impact
on Children's Literacy**
Researcher: Sophia Diamantopoulou October 2007

Sponsored by
TATE & LYLE

Introducing cultures of recognition

When we went on the school trip I didant

like it because when I got there my legs

were herting.

what I did like about it was the picters

where great. I liked the picter with all the

zigzags that made stick men. I was trying to

find picters with amazing coulers the picters

where beitiful. I was looking at the picters

so much

that I nearly forgot to do my work'.

© Tate 2006

Agency as institutional positioning

Students' texts as their own designs for learning are **an instantiation of their choice to position themselves in relation to institutional dictates.**

Agency is exercised as an act of defiance or endorsement and compliance with institutional positions about knowledge.

Diamantopoulou, S. (forthcoming). Student agency in the creation of multimodal texts: A political project. In Starc, S. and Komninos, N. (eds) Case Studies in Multimodal Texts in Schools. Peter Lang

Assessing a students' agentive design for their learning

- What semiotic resources have been chosen and what are they significant of?
- What stories do image and writing tell about the student's engagement with the task and the learning experience it recounts?
- What aspects of the teachers' designs for learning have been framed through the student's choices?
- What knowledge has been recontextualized here?
- What is the students' positioning in relation to institutional discourses?
- How have they exercised their agency?
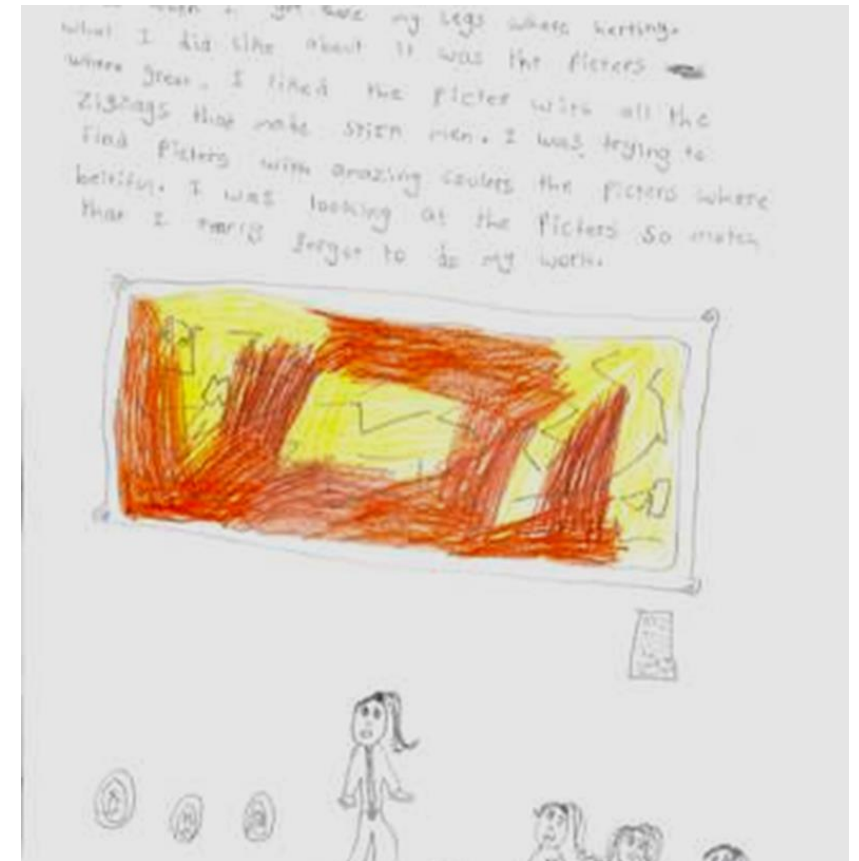
Some considerations on assessment, diversification and multimodality

Cultures of recognition: A matter of values and epistemological positioning

Multimodality does not mean multimediality

Multimodality does not equate to multimediality and digitality

Multimodal assessment as part of multimodal and embodied pedagogies

Values are at the core of diversification and multimodality

The diversification agenda is an invitation to rethink the values underpinning assessment and the pedagogy that it is integrated within

Introducing complexity and digitality into assessment as part of a diversified approach may not necessarily introduce new ways of seeing the learners' work.

Need for one theoretical framework to account for both **designing for assessment** and for **assessing the learners' designs**

Diversification discourse brings our attention more to designing for assessment and less on how the diversified texts will be assessed.

The diversification agenda seems to be more prescriptive of pedagogic designs for assessment is less about the recognition of learning.

Multimodal assessment and diversification in summative assessment contexts

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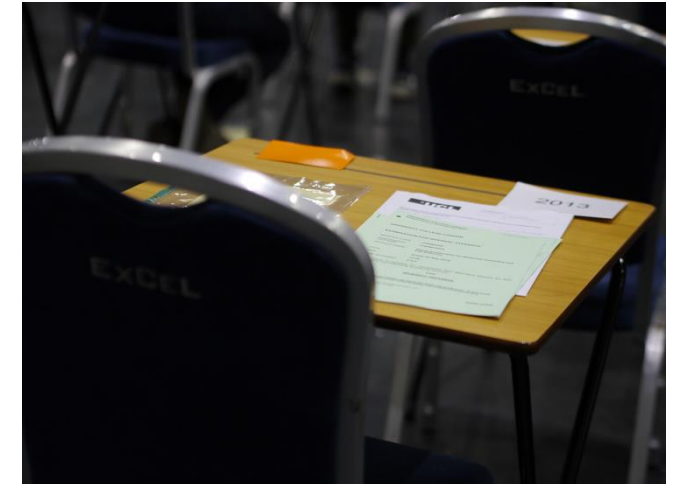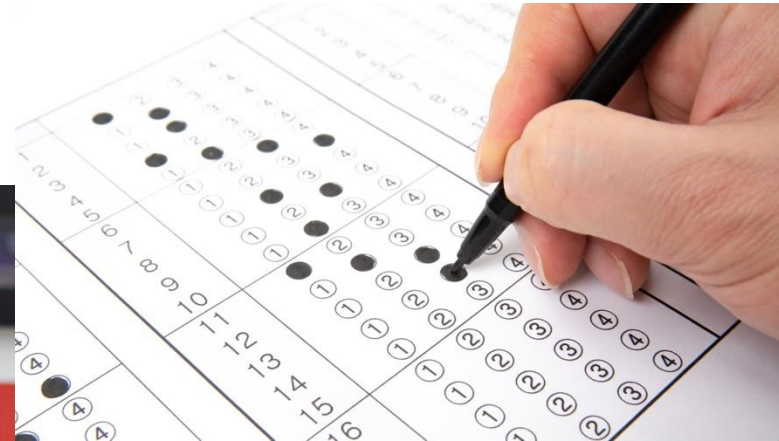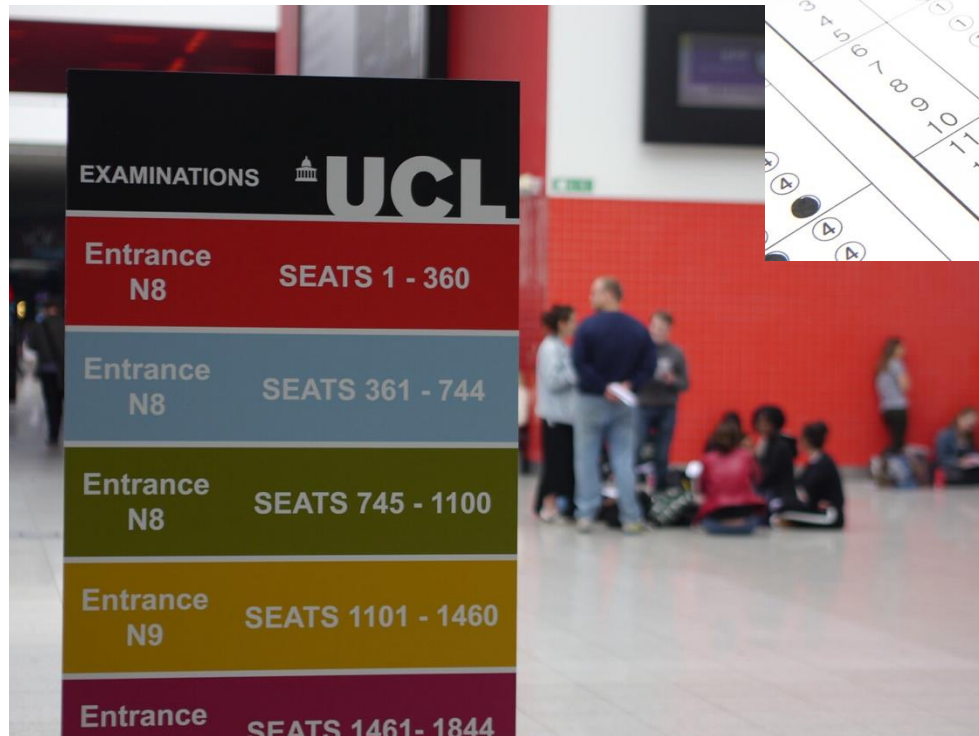
Operationalising multimodality in assessment would require:

-an integrated understanding of communication beyond the four competences

-the creation of rubrics that bring everyone's attention to all modes of communication and the way that they all collectively orchestrate meaning making in an integrated way.

-the teaching of a metalanguage for talking about multimodal texts

Making students' agency visible

Empowerment will come from increasing the visibility of students' agency....

...through pedagogies that make the students' agency visible to all.

Recognising meaning in different multimodal genres

- What are we prepared to assign value to when breaking away from the constraints of specific genres?

- What different epistemological commitment are we expecting learners to make through the use of a range of modes?

https://darecollaborative.net/2015/03/11/playing-beowulf-gaming-the-library/
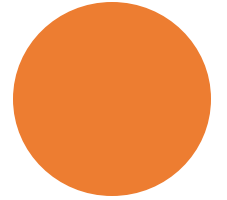
Different possibilities for recontextualizing knowledge

- What recontextualizations of knowledge are acceptable or valorized with the discipline we serve?

- Does the diversification we are striving to achieve still valorise specific dispositions to knowledge and recontextualisations of it?

- Will assessment be diversified enough to acknowledge and endorse the learners' own text worlds?
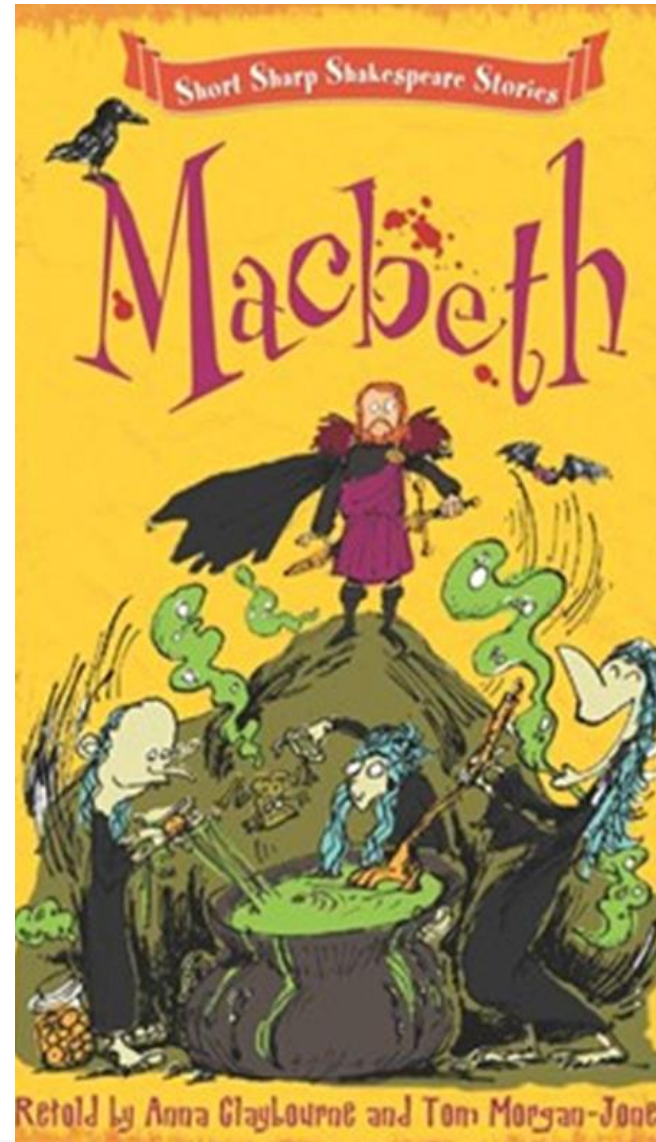
Instigating cultures of recognition instead of measurement of learning

Relevant literature

- Bezemer, J., & Kress, G. (2016). *Multimodality, learning and communication: A social semiotic frame* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.

- Canale, G. (2021). Designing for assessment as recognition of multimodal work. In S.Diamantopoulou, S. Ørevik (Eds.). *Multimodality in English Language Learning*. Routledge.

- Diamantopoulou, S. (2021). The multimodality of English as a school subject: Mapping meanings about literacy discourses on students' work in the case of a museum and a school project. In Baldry, A., Vasta, N. (Eds.), *Multiliteracy Advances and Challenges in Hypermedia Envrironments*. Udine, Italy: Udine University.

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- Kress, G., Bezemer, J., Diamantopoulou, S., Jewitt, C., Mavers, D. (2021). A social semiotic perspective on learning: Transformative engagement in a changing world. In Kress, G., Selander, S., Säljö, R., Wulf, C. (Eds.), *Learning as Social Practice: Beyond Education as an Individual Enterprise.* (pp. 70-102). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

- Ross, J., Curwood, J. S., & Bell, A. (2020). A multimodal assessment framework for higher education. E-Learning and Digital Media, 17(4), 290-306. https://doi.org/10.1177/2042753020927201

Biosketch

Sophia Diamantopoulou is Associate Professor at the UCL Institute of Education, Department for Culture, Communication and Media. Her expertise is in the areas of multimodal communication, multimodal discourse analysis and embodied learning, with a special focus on museums and English language learning.

She leads the Visual and Multimodal Research Forum seminar at the UCL Centre for Multimodal Research and is co-hostess of the international multimodality lecture series 'Multimodality Talks'. She has been the chair of the recent International Conference on Multimodality in 2023 (ICOM-11). Sophia is an editorial board member for Multimodality and Society, Museums and Society and the American Journal of Educational Research.

https://profiles.ucl.ac.uk/49812-sophia-diamantopoulou

https://multimodalforum.org/

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