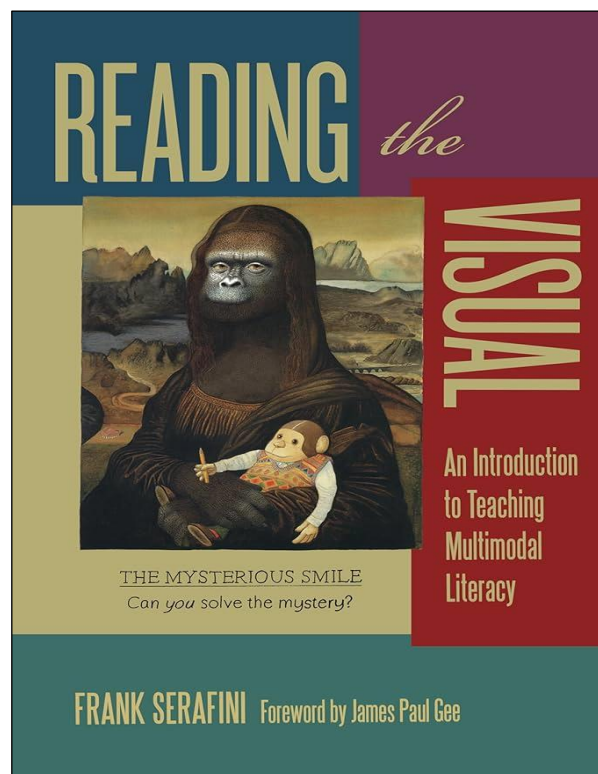


Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy (Book Review)

Rashad Ahmed
Jacksonville University, USA
ORCID 0000-0001-7834-2148



- **Received:** January 27, 2024
- **Accepted:** March 3, 2024
- **Published:** March 11, 2024

DOI: 10.56540/jesaf.v3i1.92

To cite this book review (APA):

Ahmed, R. (2024). Reading the visual: An introduction to teaching multimodal literacy (Book Review). *Journal of English Studies in Arabia Felix*, 3(1), 23–27. DOI: 10.56540/jesaf.v3i1.92

Title: Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy

Author: Frank Serafini

Publisher: Teachers College Press

Year: 2014

Reviewer: Rashad Ahmed

Summary

Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy by Frank Serafini is a 189-page book published in 2014 by Teachers College Press. It discusses the evolving concept of literacy in the age of multimodality. Organized into three parts and framed by a prologue and an epilogue, the book begins with an introduction that sets the stage for understanding the multimodal world and its relevance to educators. The first part lays a theoretical foundation for multimodality, guiding educators in their instructional approaches. The second part presents a practical framework for engaging with multimodal texts, highlighting the significance of picture books in literacy education and exploring how students can interact with various multimodal formats both as consumers and producers. The final part examines ten distinct types of multimodal ensembles, including diverse formats like picture books (postmodern, wordless, historical fiction, informational), illustrated novels, graphic novels, cartoons, comics, advertisements, news reports, films, and digital media. In the closure, a helpful glossary provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of multimodal configurations and visual meaning-making systems.

Evaluation

Building on the foundational work of the New London Group (1996), Serafini, an experienced teacher and literacy researcher, argues for a broader understanding of literacy that encompasses not only text but also visual images and other multimodal elements increasingly prevalent in our digital world. The author emphasizes the need for educators and students to develop strategies for interpreting and creating meaning through various formats like emails, brochures, and SMS, underscoring the shift towards a more inclusive and diverse interpretation of literacy.

Central to the book is the author's compelling argument, highlighted on page 7, which posits that as the world transitions from a text-dominated to an image-dominated mode of communication, our educational strategies must evolve accordingly. The author's assertion is that in a world where an image can convey as much as, if not more than, a thousand words, the traditional emphasis on textual literacy is no longer sufficient. Therefore, he sets out to provide educators with strategies to teach and understand visual literacy or what some might refer to as 'visual grammar'.

This publication stands out for its comprehensive coverage of topics pertinent to twenty-first-century literacies. It investigates the realms of new literacy, modes, text, image, and design, all within the broader scope of multimodal communication. The discussion engages with scholarly debates around terms like 'visual literacy' and 'multimodality', citing the views of John Elkins, Kress, and Cope & Kalantzis. The author, Serafini, navigates these debates with insight, emphasizing the overarching importance of 'multimodality' in capturing the sociocultural aspects of human language. He suggests that 'multimodality' effectively encompasses all previous attempts to define new literacies, drawing on a variety of communicative modes beyond the traditional text (Kress, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2016).

This book makes a significant contribution to the field of education, particularly in the context of our visually dominant, multimodal world. It's a resourceful guide for educators who aim to incorporate visual elements effectively in their teaching. The author brings a unique

perspective to this topic, drawing upon his extensive experience in various fields - as an author, school teacher, illustrator, photographer, educator, and musician. This diverse background enriches the content, making it a multifaceted exploration of visual literacy.

A major strength of this book is its readability and approachability. The author employs a reader-friendly language, making the complex subject of multimodality accessible to a broader audience. This is particularly beneficial for scholars and educators who may be new to the concept. The inclusion of a glossary is a thoughtful addition, assisting readers in navigating the specific terminologies and concepts central to multimodal literacy. The author strikes a balance between scholarly depth and clarity, making this publication an ideal resource for both academic and practical purposes.

Moreover, the book is commendably comprehensive in its approach to the subject of multimodal composition. It provides a detailed analysis of various strategies, starting from theoretical underpinnings to practical applications in educational settings. It's not just about understanding the theory behind multimodality but also offering practical insights and pedagogical frameworks for educators. These frameworks are designed to aid in the teaching of a wide range of visual and multimodal texts – from historical fiction and picture books to websites, comics, graphic novels, and films. The book includes practical elements like lesson plans, text sets, and analysis guides, making it a valuable tool for classroom teachers.

In the conclusion, the author not only provides a comprehensive overview of visual reading but also traces the evolution of multimodal literacy from its roots in concepts like multiliteracies and visual literacy. The author positions this book as a critical resource for understanding and teaching multimodal literacy, encompassing theoretical, curricular, and pedagogical frameworks.

However, the author acknowledges potential challenges the readers should put in mind. While the book extensively discusses the benefits and applications of multimodality, it also points out the need for further editions to address ethical considerations and pedagogical interventions more thoroughly. The author also concedes that integrating multimodal elements into education can increase cognitive load, necessitating the development of specific skills and strategies for both learners and teachers.

In essence, this book, alongside the author's work, *Beyond the Visual: An Introduction to Researching Multimodal Phenomena*, forms a comprehensive resource for a wide range of audiences. From academics and researchers to educators and students engaged in the study of multimodalities and multiliteracies, these works offer insightful, reader-friendly explorations into the field. They not only present foundational knowledge but also open up avenues for further research into multimodality, offering nuanced insights and perspectives.

Disclosure Statement:

I hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of this book review. Thus, I take full responsibility for the content of this review in case of dispute.

Ethics Statement

I confirm that the manuscript has not been created by an AI tool/Large Language Model (LLM). I am fully responsible for the content of the review and am thus liable for any breach of publication ethics.

Conflict of interest: I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding: None

References

- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2016). A grammar of multimodality. In M. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational philosophy and theory* (pp. 1-7). Springer Singapore.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
- New London Group (1996). A Pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1). <https://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/newlondon.htm>
- Serafini, F. (2022). *Beyond the visual: An Introduction to researching multimodal phenomena*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Author

Dr. Rashad Ahmed is a linguist with a multidisciplinary background in TESOL and Composition Studies. He has been granted several awards, fellowships, and scholarships, which included his Fulbright scholarship and the Applied Linguistics Concentration Award. He has a wide range of research interests that involve Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Language Assessment, Digital Literacy, TESOL Methods, Sociolinguistics, and First-Year Composition. Among his recent publications are *Enhancements and Limitations to ICT-Based Informal Language Learning: Emerging Research and Opportunities* and *Peer Review in Academic Writing: Different Perspectives from Instructors and Students*.