An English Teacher's Autobiography of Using Digital Multimodal Composing in Teaching Writing to Vocational Students

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Abstract
This study is an autobiography of the author's experience as an English teacher teaching 12th graders digital multimodal composing (DMC). I have been teaching vocational high school students for seventeen years in one of Indonesia's vocational high schools. I am still looking for the best way to develop the writing skills of vocational high school students. I want to alter their perceptions of writing. It is essential to create a fun and meaningful writing process both inside and outside the classroom. Students born in the twenty-first century, the digital generation, and modern students. DMC as the textual practice entails using digital tools to generate text by combining various semiotic modes. Each mode is meaningful and serves a purpose. As a teacher, I can create any digital mode based on my students' needs and knowledge. This study used the narrative inquiry method to explore and reflect on the story of the teacher.
Keywords: Autobiography, digital multimodal composing, vocational high school, writing

Abstrak
Studi ini merupakan otobiografi dari pengalaman penulis sebagai seorang guru bahasa Inggris yang mengajar siswa kelas 12 digital multimodal composing (DMC). Saya telah mengajar siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan selama tujuh belas tahun di salah satu sekolah menengah kejuruan di Indonesia. Saya masih mencari cara terbaik untuk mengembangkan keterampilan menulis siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan. Saya ingin mengubah persepsi mereka tentang menulis. Sangat penting untuk menciptakan proses menulis yang menyenangkan dan bermakna baik di dalam maupun di luar kelas. Siswa yang lahir di abad kedua puluh satu, generasi digital, dan siswa modern. DMC sebagai praktik tekstual memerlukan penggunaan alat digital untuk menghasilkan teks dengan menggabungkan berbagai mode semiotik. Setiap mode bermakna dan memiliki sebuah tujuan. Sebagai seorang guru, saya dapat membuat mode digital apa pun berdasarkan kebutuhan dan pengetahuan siswa saya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode inkuiri naratif untuk mengeksplorasi dan merefleksikan cerita guru.
Kata kunci: Autobiografi, digital multimodal composing, sekolah menengah kejuruan, menulis

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, students learn in a variety of ways. The digital industry and technology were rapidly evolving. Digital technologies enable the creation of multimodal texts that combine various modes of meaning-making such as language, images, sounds, gestures, and space (Hafner and Ho 2020). Because of the proliferation of these texts and the new forms of literacy that they necessitate, there have been calls for the inclusion of digital multimodal texts in classroom practices, including in English language learning contexts (Bradley, Hunt, and Cole 2017; Hafner 2014; New London Group 1996; Mills 2016). "The more exposure and practise students have with multiple genres and registers..., the more likely they are to gain both competency and confidence in dealing with 21st-century texts," it has been argued (Rowsell, Morrell, and Alvermann 2017, p. 158). Students benefit from digital text experiences as early as primary school because they develop a wide range of skills required for engagement with the world around them (Burnett et al. 2006).

Thus, digital multimodal composing has emerged as one approach to addressing the needs of learners, and it is frequently used in the language classroom for various learning purposes in many contexts (Hafner and Ho 2020; Hafner 2014; Shin, Cimasko, and Yi 2020). While the majority found the DMC task more enjoyable, the majority also felt that the essay task allowed them to pay more attention to linguistic form. Jiang (2017), using a multiple case study approach, also documents the experiences of a student who struggled to see the value of DMC projects. While two of the three cases she investigated saw a positive change in their investment, Jia 'considered DMC a distraction from her goal of passing English tests and appeared content to take on the institutionally-prescribed test-taker identity in university' (p. 69). Teachers who want to use the DMC approach should consider some of these perceptions when designing their courses, emphasizing the rationale for using the methodology as well as its benefits for language learning. However, enjoying the process of writing requires attention in order to become accustomed to writing. It is a difficult task for a teacher to turn his students into accustomed writers. Writing classes for vocational high school students, according to research, are extremely difficult. This is difficult when inviting them to write argumentative essays, especially if they enjoy doing so. They occasionally lack consensus and motivation. They still require the completion of the argumentation video task by someone else in order for it to be completed on time and meaningful to them.

Some second language writing scholars are concerned about the ability of DMC to provide students with a sufficient language focus (Manchón, 2017; Polio, 2019). Others, however, respond to these concerns by emphasizing the critical role that language plays in the DMC process. According to Lim and Polio (2020), 'the use of monomodal writing as a pre-multimodal task production step... could address Manchón's (2017) concern that multimodal tasks may not facilitate acquisition' (p. 6). Furthermore, Kim and Belcher's (2020) comparison of students' language produced on traditional essay writing and DMC tasks led them to the conclusion that the 'lack of difference in accuracy suggests that multimodality use does not lessen attention to language' (p. 98). (Though traditional writing was found to involve a more complex linguistic structure, a characteristic difference between written and spoken modes). To such observations, one can add that DMC's strong motivating effect is likely to result in more sustained engagement with the English language learning task and, ultimately, better learning.

In this study, the author, an English teacher, explained how the DMC approach was used in writing teaching for vocational high school students, and how DMC helped vocational high school students enjoy the writing process and meaningful experiences. The research was in the design of narrative inquiry. The majority of DMC studies have been conducted for higher students and pre-service or in-service teachers, as have the majority of the angles in the case study or experimental design. However, research on

teaching DMC at vocational high schools context of narrative inquiry is still limited, particularly in Indonesia

METHOD

This study used the narrative inquiry method to explore and reflect on the story of the teacher who used DMC in English learning. Humans, according to Sikes and Gale (2006), are storytelling creatures who create narratives to describe their activities as well as their past, present, and imagined world experiences. The underlying strength of narrative inquiry is how people utilize stories to help others comprehend their experiences in areas of inquiry where understanding phenomena through the eyes of those who encounter them are critical (Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chick, 2014).

Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1990), is a type of narrative experience, and educational experience should be investigated narratively. The narrative inquiry also emphasizes the importance of narrative as a way of conveying meaning and perspectives. The narrative inquiry design proposed by Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chick (2014) is appropriate for a researcher interested in studying language teaching and learning because it allows us to better understand the inner mental worlds of language teachers and learners, as well as the nature of language teaching and learning as a social and educational activity. Memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, diaries, archival papers, medical records, folk ballads, photographs, drawings, and other visual images are examples of storytelling genres.

Despite its various forms, "narrative is always strongly autobiographical" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is consistent with Elbaz-Luwisch (2010), who discussed the benefits of autobiography. It serves as a platform for teachers' reflection, as well as a communication tool for other teachers' professional development. Sharing an autobiography, on the other hand, can be risky. It highlights the teachers' vulnerability.

The author is a vocational English teacher at one of the public vocational schools in Indonesia. I have been teaching at this school for seventeen years. I taught students in grades 10 through 12, but for this study, I chose 12th graders. Class 12 of Agribusiness of Processing Fishery Products consists of 33 students, 23 girls and 10 boys. This class is a different class. They come from diverse family backgrounds and beliefs. Most of them are used to social media and other digital technologies, but their English skills are standard. Most of them are embarrassed to show their abilities. Meanwhile, 12th graders tend to enjoy writing short texts but have problems when writing long essay texts, which is difficult for them. This makes them lose their enthusiasm for writing and their vocabulary. They still need guidance when writing argumentative essays with the DMC model. When the teacher gives instructions, most of them need time to understand, apply, and complete their tasks in class. Sometimes, the teacher has to give more explanations to those who need them so that the teaching and learning process goes well and successfully.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Students in vocational high schools are not the same as those in high school. They have different materials for different purposes, which correspond to market demands. They are very enthusiastic about participating in new, challenging, and interesting activities, but they quickly lose motivation. They also lack concentration on specific activities. The culprits are monotonous classes, only teacher-centred learning, and students who are not engaged in the lesson or teaching media. According to (Albert, 2011; Hafner, 2017), using multimedia DMC as a place for doing exercises and getting students involved in learning is one way to increase students' motivation and learning interest.

The challenge for the teacher is to improve the focus and enthusiasm of students who tend to lose interest in doing something when faced with or encountering difficulties. Even teachers must be patient in selecting and determining appropriate and effective methods and media to be used in classroom learning so that students are focused, motivated, enjoy learning, and have meaningful experiences. As a result, teachers must find appropriate media and methods for teaching them.

Digital Multimodal Composing in Writing class

I used a project-based learning approach to teach the English course for my Fisheries Department in Indonesia. In class, I use Hafner and Miller's digital multimodal composing (DMC) (2019). In short, this course is intended for students ranging from applied biologists and mathematicians to fisheries. Its goal is to promote communicative competence in English in the scientific domain. In terms of curriculum, the course is built around the project 'English for Fishing,' which involves students in simple simulations, such as an experiment or field study.

Students present their findings in two different ways. First, they collaborate in groups to create digital video documentaries for a broad audience and the general public, which are then uploaded to the internet and shared via YouTube. We offer blog courses in which videos are embedded and students can leave comments, as well as 'sharing sessions' in which students present their finished videos followed by a short Q&A session with the audience. Second, students work individually to re-present their research findings in the form of a written 'report,' which is intended for a specialist audience and will only be read by their English teacher. Classroom lessons within this framework target the language and communication skills students require in a "timely" manner (Gee, 2004). That is, the skill sets are introduced in the classroom "just in time" for students to apply them to their projects. For instance, at the start of the project, students should conduct Internet research to learn more about their topic. As a result, classroom instruction emphasizes 'critical literacy skills,' or the ability to find and evaluate information on the internet. Students apply these skills in the classroom during workshops, identifying relevant and reliable sources to inform their English for science projects.

Visual composition skills are another set of abilities that students must learn as they prepare scripts and storyboards for their videos. In this section, I'd like to show you how to apply these skills in the classroom. Examples should demonstrate that students learn about linguistic and visual strategies. 'Doing' DMC does not imply disregard for language. Instead, it refers to learning how language can be strategically combined with other modes to create meaning.

The goal is for students to develop a kind of "visual vocabulary" that they can combine with other languages and modes to create powerful, engaging, and multimodal texts. The pedagogical strategies used in the classroom are based on the principles of the pedagogy genre (Hyon, 2018). Certain multimodal genres that we are interested in are 'documentaries,' and we use a variety of tasks to promote an understanding of 1) contextual factors that influence genres such as audience, communicative goals, and so on; and 2) textual features of the genre such as how it is usually organized/structured and the type of vocabulary and grammar that is usually used.

The analysis of samples or genre models is an important component of this pedagogical strategy. This type of analysis allows students to see how previous authors or designers used linguistic and multimodal resources strategically to create genre examples. In this course, we use a number of such examples in the form of short documentaries created by professionals and previous course participants. This "model" is thoroughly examined on several levels. First, rhetorical analysis reveals how the genre is organized in terms of its macrostructure to achieve the genre's communicative goals. Second, linguistic analysis demonstrates how particular linguistic features are strategically used to achieve

the genre's goals. Finally, the analysis of multimodal semiotic resources considers how languages interact with other modes such as visual and sound.

Figure 1
Genre-Based Language Learning Materials in Their Classrooms on Engagement

Language focus: Using English to involve the audience

Watch the youtube video @ Free Documentary Short and the questions below.

1.   What do you notice about the kind of pronouns used (I, you, he, she, it, we, they)? How does the choice of pronoun affect the relationship with the audience?
2.   What do you notice about the verb forms (indicative - i.e. the statement form, interrogative - i.e. the question form, imperative - i.e. the command form). How does the choice of verb form affect the relationship with the audience?
3.   What do you notice about the vocabulary used? How does the choice of vocabulary affect the relationship with the audience?

Consider how it works by using examples from the specific subject matter. Students are expected to complete scripts and storyboards for their own digital video documentaries by the fourth week. In preparation, we watched https://youtu.be/jNEFsryes4E a YouTube video of a short documentary (viewed in week two). Then we look at how other languages and modes are used strategically to engage the audience. In terms of language, we examine the language of involvement in the tasks depicted in Figure 1.

Students checked the script, which was taken from the beginning of the YouTube video, and answered language-focused questions after viewing the video once and completing the listening comprehension task. Students are expected to notice the presence of first- and second-person pronouns (e.g., we won't do that then) in the form of questions (e.g., 'why does it stick so well to the fish?'), necessity (e.g., 'Breading requires heat'), and high-frequency informal vocabulary (e.g., 'thinking' as opposed to some low-frequency words like 'trust').

Students learn how to use all of the features of the English language to engage the audience. When it comes to visual mode, we look at a variety of semiotic resources, primarily examples from student videos seen in class. The 'basics of visual composition,' according to the material, are as follows: 1) Images that are narrative versus images that are conceptual 1) Narrative versus conceptual images 2) Interesting audiences: Supply and demand 3) Interesting audiences: Using distance 4) Camera angles 5) Visual coherence

These tasks extend previous work on engagement language into the realm of visual composition, raising students' awareness of the potential for images to create different types of meanings. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the classroom activities involved – that is, watching videos and listening to meanings; analyzing the results in verbal and visual texts – are not fundamentally different from standard teaching procedures.

Indeed, the teacher who reflects on this procedure should be able to identify many parallels with the types of activities they regularly carry out in their own classes. As previously stated, students engage in listening comprehension tasks while watching the video, which includes general and top-down comprehension questions as well as more specific bottom-up tasks. The video also serves as a model for students to analyze in order to understand: 1) the language of engagement; and 2) visual design principles. Only by focusing on visual design will the class procedure take an unexpected turn. However, the emphasis on visual design is fully integrated into the rest of the lessons and snares, with the overall goal of learning how to communicate successfully in English

and through various modes. Once the teacher understands some visual design principles, expanding the lesson in this manner can aid the teacher in the teaching and learning process. It can help students focus on the lesson, motivate them, and create a fun and meaningful classroom environment. Finally, students present their work in front of the class and participate in a peer review. The student artefact is then posted to the class's YouTube channel.

In short, it presents challenges for teachers to improve students' focus and enthusiasm when they face or encounter difficulties. Teachers, too, must be patient in selecting and determining appropriate and effective methods and media to use in classroom learning so that students are focused, motivated, enjoy learning, and have meaningful experiences. As a result, teachers must find appropriate media and methods to teach them.

CONCLUSION

It is critical that students enjoy English classes. When they enjoy it, teaching them to write will become easier. DMC has a significant impact on both students and teachers. It helps the teacher deliver the lesson and changes the students' perception of writing as boring. Teachers and students alike enjoy new, exciting, and meaningful experiences. We wrote an argumentative essay and made a video, but the activity that processed the student artefacts and helped us understand what the message was more appealing. Teachers can freely design digital modes based on their students' needs. It does not always make use of digital video or text. Teachers create modes using digital tools such as the 'youtube' app, as long as they are appropriate for students. With DMC, students can participate in a variety of activities that are tailored to their learning style and preferences, enhancing their ability to write essay arguments and apply them in videos. Today, it is critical to make students enjoy the subject. It will be easier to catch them if they enjoy it.

DMC is not only used for writing lessons but is also used to teach all four language skills. It helps teachers who are confused about designing activities in the classroom. There are still many things to be explored further. This study only explains a small part of it. As I wrote this, I realized I still had shortcomings in teaching. It prompted a reflection on teaching practice since I first taught at the vocational school. It gave me a lot of lessons to become a better teacher and more up-to-date.

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