



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Multiliteracies in tourism education - why bother?
Author(s)	EDELHEIM, Johan
Citation	CATS 叢書, 18, 94-103
Issue Date	2024
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/93799
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	CATS18 (8).pdf



Multiliteracies in tourism education - why bother?

Johan EDELHEIM

Professor of Tourism and Media, Research Faculty of Communication and Media
Hokkaido University, Japan



Multiliteracies in tourism education - why bother?

Johan EDELHEIM

Professor of Tourism and Media, Research Faculty of Communication and Media
Hokkaido University, Japan

Keywords: values-based tourism higher education, multimodality, multimodal literacy, multiliteracies, SoTL,

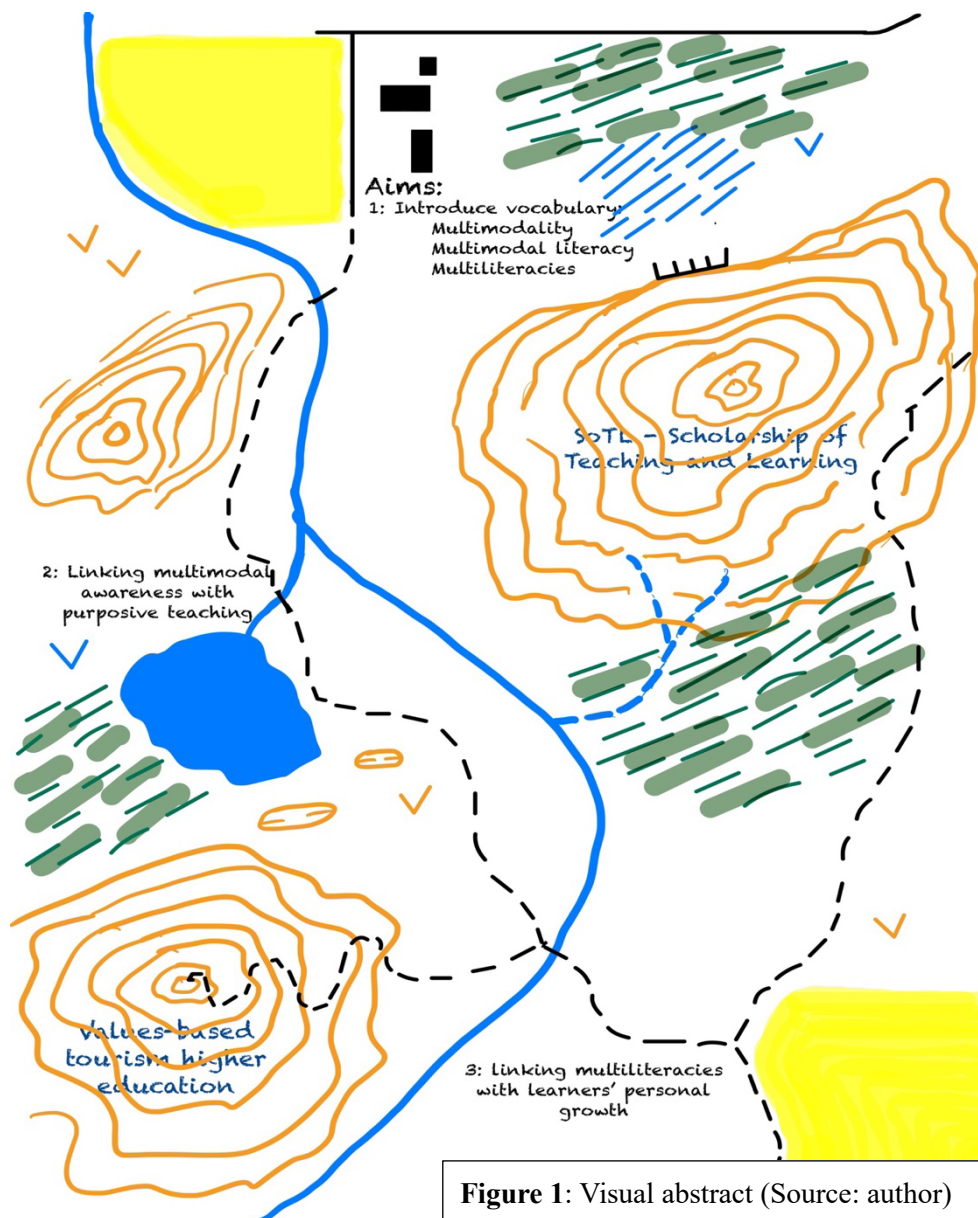


Figure 1: Visual abstract (Source: author)

Abstract:

This manuscript has three primary aims: Firstly, my intention is to give a foundational insight into what multimodality, multimodal literacy, and multiliteracies mean for educators and researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality higher / tertiary education (hereafter tourism education). Secondly, I will also examine how an overt awareness of multimodality can lead to more active and purposive teaching activities and assessments in the field. My final aim is to elaborate why the incorporation of multiliteracies learning is beneficial for tourism graduates' personal growth, regardless of the career path they select after their initial degree.

The argument is mostly conceptual, but it uses empirical examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts in use. It is, however, not an empirical investigation of one learning unit, or one distinct case, and it is distinctly inductive and investigative, not deductive and deterministic. This is a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) manuscript, a reflective investigation by a tourism academic into the nature and rationale of tourism education with an aim to highlight best practice from other fields of study so that SoTL colleagues in tourism education can adapt those insights into their own fields of learning too.

The main contribution to tourism education lies in the introduction of new vocabulary with attached theoretical and practical implications. By moving beyond a restricted perception of 'literacy' to multiliteracies in tourism classrooms, both learners and teachers can enter a new values-based realm of meaning making, and knowledge creation.

Introduction

I am not an accomplished artist; I draw stick figures, and even they look shaky. So, when advocating for multimodality and multiliteracies, I always encounter an inevitable shortcoming—my own visual language leaves much to be desired. However, I have always thought in images, and when considering how to visualise my argument for this paper, I reflected on the visual modes familiar to me and the kinds of literacies that come naturally. Maps came to mind, as I enjoy them greatly and have always been surrounded by them. My visual abstract is, therefore, a map—and, to be precise, an orienteering map. My father is an active orienteer, and my family has spent weekends and holidays attending orienteering competitions nationally and internationally for as long as I can remember. I will, therefore, focus on and *italicise* different sections of my visual abstract—the orienteering map, what each section represents, and how to 'navigate through its terrain'.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning - SoTL

Brown contours on an orienteering map show differences in altitude. The organic shape behind the SoTL text in figure 1 and 2 represents therefore a hill, a metaphoric collection of knowledge.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is the name for the active reflection and publication of teaching and learning practices that academics undertake (McKinney, 2013). SoTL is marginal in most university disciplines, except for, perhaps naturally, in faculties of education where a meta-reflection on the own field of research commonly takes place. This is an unfortunate fact, as all disciplines are engaged in teaching and learning, and a stronger meta-focus on the practices in

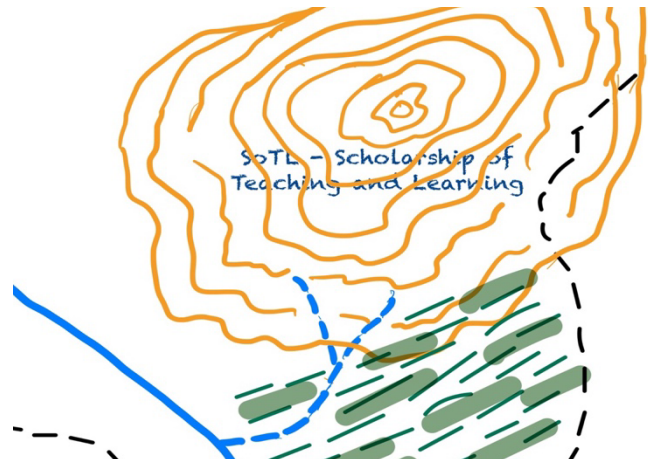


Figure 2: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a metaphorical hill (Source: author)

use should also render better, and more importantly, more enjoyable, learning outcomes for students, and practices for teachers. It is, indeed as McKinney (2013) states, a waste of ‘time, energy, funds and other resources’ not to tap into the wealth of knowledge that exist about ‘what works and why in teaching and learning’ (McKinney, 2013, p. 1).

Blue colour refers to water. Depending on the shape, size, and concentration of blue signs, it can depict lakes, swamps, creeks, and holes in the ground filled with water. Water is necessary for life to exist; it nurtures and creates new life. There is a stream of water running off the SoTL hill and it feeds into a larger creek – this represents the connection between SoTL and other fields of research.

Tourism as a field of higher education is no exception to the rule, there are tourism academics with a strong SoTL interest, and there are currently three international English-language academic journals focused on the field (and a few in other languages too, for example in Japanese), but none of these are ranked very highly in any comparison with other tourism-related journals. Ranking and metrics are naturally no guarantee for quality, but in a neoliberal academic reality, they shape the way especially young academics act, and where they publish. This leads to a vicious circle where less effort and focus is placed on SoTL, and more is instead put on other, more mainstream fields of research (Chick, 2013).

Multimodality and multiliteracies

Black colour is, for example, used to depict roads, paths, buildings, fences, stones, and canyons, and names printed on maps are often also black.

My visual abstract in Figure 3 has some straight roads at the top, and a few buildings representing the aims of the paper. There is also a meandering path leading into the forest from the aims.

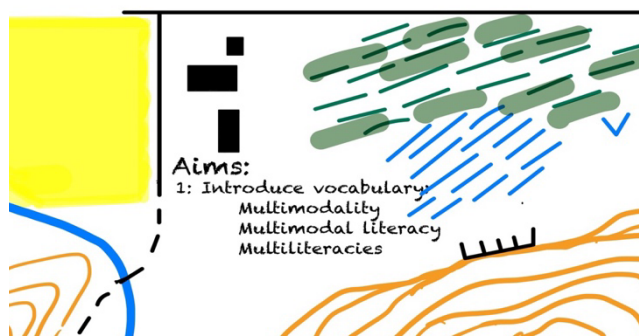


Figure 3: The aims of the paper as metaphorical buildings and roads (Source: author)

Tourism is a multimodal and embodied phenomenon, but it is often investigated and taught using linguistic semiotic modes, such as written text, spoken, or recorded voices, that never fully incorporates this multimodality. In parallel to this multimodality, literacy and literacies are no longer perceived as simply referring to learning how to read and write, but to a wider spectrum of comprehensions of societal codes and norms, and competence in co-designing meaning making (Anstey & Bull, 2018).

All humans communicate using a diverse range of semiotic modes (linguistic, visual, audio, tactile, gestural, critical, to name a few) and early childhood pedagogy is incorporating this naturally into learning activities where words and pictures, music, play, and creation are combined. But teaching in later stages of the educational path turns ever more linguistically textual. Higher / tertiary education teaching and learning is almost solely based on written texts, as if all knowledge would only exist in that semiotic mode (Ross et al., 2020).

Most research on multimodality, and the accompanying preparation for multiliteracies, focuses on early childhood pedagogy. When the concepts were introduced, soon 30 years ago by the New London Group, it was by researchers who were especially interested in language, language acquisition, and childhood pedagogy (Thibaut & Curwood, 2018). Vocational and tertiary education are later fields of investigation, also here research focuses on language learning, but other fields are represented too (Crawford-Camiciottoli & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018).

Research on the education of tourism is mostly bereft of connections to multimodality and multiliteracies. Though, there is a rather wide range of research that has investigated 'literacy' in tourism higher education (Dalgıç et al., 2024). However, this type of research

is connected to different types of literacies that the investigators consider being important for tourism and hospitality graduates, such as financial literacy, digital literacy, or sustainability literacy (Jamal et al., 2011). These types of investigations see the sector as being complex, and highlights cases and topics that need to be comprehended to be 'literate' in their selected field. However, most of this data is yet again presented as linguistic written texts, whereas if examined from a multiliteracies perspective existing studies are still simply referring to one semiotic mode.

Multimodal awareness and purposive teaching

Green colours on a map represent dense vegetation, the stronger the colour, the denser it is. These are areas orienteers generally try to stay away from, it is mostly faster to run around them if it is possible. I have placed purposive teaching close to one of these dense areas in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Purposive teaching as a dense area that paths pass by (Source: author)

Purposive learning offers a didactic approach that prioritises greater goods. An example of this is the distinction between active and passive learning of tourism that takes place in society. Active learning includes formal education, but also information campaigns, guided tours and similar, whereas passive learning comes to the individual through societal norms and practices (Gössling, 2018). Thus, our students learn constantly about tourism and what it *does* or *is*, but only a section of that learning comes from what tourism academics tell them, the rest comes watching influencers and vloggers online, from watching the news or films, or from conversations they have with other members of society. Purposive learning strives therefore to equip students with competences that extend beyond the boundaries of traditional knowledge acquisition. In the context of tourism, this approach empowers students to engage with society critically and become agents of change (Boluk, Cavaliere, et al., 2019). Multiliteracy emerges as a crucial component of this paradigm, as students must be literate in multiple modes to navigate and contribute effectively to an increasingly complex society.

However, multiliteracy is not something actively taught in many schools or even universities. It is a learning component of the Australian school curriculum (Anstey & Bull, 2018), so students who comes through that school system should in principles be

familiar with the concept. Though, what if their lecturers in HE are not familiar with it, and therefore never ask students to utilise it in their analysis of material given? Multiliteracy goes hand-in-hand with reflexivity, the practice of critically reflecting on one's experiences and knowledge (Lea & Jones, 2011). University students must cultivate the ability to engage with material critically, transcending the passive absorption of information. In the context of tourism, Boluk and colleagues find reflexivity to be a tool that empowers students to deconstruct and analyse societal constructs, fostering a deeper and more meaningful learning experience (2019).

To date, the areas of tourism education that have been investigated in a multimodal manner are connected to teaching English for tourism (Palpacuer-Lee, 2018). This kind of teaching is for practical tasks, such as for tourist guides, who will need to convey their messages to a range of audiences using several semiotic modes (Zhang & Cheng, 2023). Thus, if the field is so focused on the practical aspect, why should other tourism educators and researchers bother about multimodality, multimodal literacy, and multiliteracies bother, if their research is not equally practical? The answer lies in the core of tourism – tourism is a multimodal phenomenon, and if it is only investigated using one semiotic mode, then it is never fully comprehended.

Multiliteracies and personal growth

A deep yellow colour represents fields and depending on the season orienteers are asked to respect landowners land by not crossing fields where crops grow. But in the autumn, when harvest is done, fields might become alternatives to paths as to how to get easiest and fastest from one place to another. I have placed personal growth here in Figure 5 at an intersection of paths, next to a field. The metaphor intended is that we are not educating students for specific job tasks (just one path), but rather that they should be able to select the most appropriate route forward themselves.

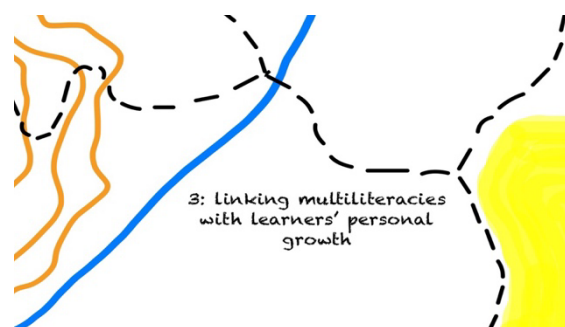


Figure 5: Personal growth: an opportunity to select an own way forward (Source: author)

Multiliteracies in tourism higher education foster personal growth by equipping learners with diverse communication skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness that transcend professional applications. By engaging with visual, digital, and textual modes, students deepen their understanding of complex social and cultural dynamics, enhancing their ability to interpret and interact with the world. This multimodal literacy encourages self-

reflection and adaptability, empowering students to question societal norms, appreciate diverse perspectives, and become informed, active participants in their communities. Rather than focusing solely on job readiness, these skills nurture learners' personal development, promoting lifelong learning and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society beyond their careers.

This manuscript uses the word ‘text’ for all meaning making entities, regardless of which semiotic mode they appear in. The etymological root of ‘text’ comes from Latin and the word “textere”, referred originally to something woven, such as a ‘fabric’ (Barnhart, 1988). This connection can still be seen in words such as ‘texture’. This image of separate threads jointly creating a fabric function as a good metaphor for multiple semiotic modes mutually contributing to meanings that text ‘designers’ (or alternatively ‘prosumers’, as everybody act both as producers and consumers) use for their messages (Anstey & Bull, 2018). For example, a person creating a TikTok posting combines several visual- and audio-texts, together with written and spoken linguistic texts in different sized and coloured fonts, and finishes this off by ‘hashtagging’ keywords, locations and people. Other designers can then repost the original text as is, or with added / amended features. This thick fabric of threads is woven together, and the final text can only be perceived multimodally.

Conclusion

Finally, as this is a conceptual SoTL manuscript, its primary aim is to introduce readers to new vocabulary in the tourism higher education field. There are therefore no separate sections for methodology, results, or discussions, but rather an extended argument that touches on the concepts at hand. My intention is to develop this extended abstract into a full article in the future. I will divide my argument into three parts, firstly introducing the vocabulary and research conducted about the introduced concepts. I will thereafter focus on the users of these concepts: teachers, and learners respectively. My argument asserts that teaching that incorporates multimodality in a functional fashion provides more active and purposive learning experiences for all participants. It asserts also that learners need learning activities and assessments that allow them to practice multiliteracies in safe environments, so that they can continue developing their multiliteracies as they go on with their lives beyond formal education.

As noted in the abstract, this paper’s key contribution to tourism education is the introduction of a broader vocabulary that brings new theoretical and practical insights. Moving from a narrow view of “literacy” to embracing multiliteracies in tourism

classrooms invites both students and educators into a richer, values-driven space for making meaning and creating knowledge. Here, reality is acknowledged in all its natural multimodality, where multiple ways of understanding—visual, tactile, and even olfactory—are encouraged, rather than stripped away to create an artificial “lab” setting.

From an epistemological perspective, knowledge expands beyond traditional text, embracing diverse sensory experiences that contribute to our understanding of truth. This approach encourages students to think critically about different “modes” of communication, whether through words, images, or even sensory experiences such as smell and touch. By exploring these less conventional forms of “texts,” students gain a fuller understanding of the world.

The values-based (axiological) dimension of multiliteracies is especially significant. It challenges the longstanding belief that social sciences can be “value-free.” Even our preference for certain senses—like sight and sound over smell and touch—reflects hidden biases rooted in historical thinking. By adopting a multiliteracies approach, tourism education opens up new avenues for meaning-making that recognise and embrace these values, allowing for a more inclusive and diverse way of creating knowledge. This approach empowers learners and teachers to question traditional limits on understanding, encouraging a holistic view that is both intellectually and personally enriching.

References

- Anstey, M., & Bull, G. (2018). *Foundations of Multiliteracies; Reading, Writing and Talking in the 21st Century*. Routledge.
- Barnhart, R. K. (Ed.). (1988). *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*. Chambers.
- Boluk, K. A., Cavaliere, C. T., & Duffy, L. N. (2019). A pedagogical framework for the development of the critical tourism citizen. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27(7), 865-881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1615928>
- Boluk, K. A., Muldoon, M. L., & Johnson, C. W. (2019). Bringing a politics of hope to the tourism classroom: exploring an integrated curriculum design through a creative and reflexive methodology. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 19(1), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2018.1560532>
- Chick, N. L. (2013). Difference, privilege, and power in the scholarship of teaching and learning: The value of humanities SoTL. In K. McKinney (Ed.), *The scholarship of teaching and learning in and across the disciplines* (pp. 15-33). Indiana University Press.
- Crawford-Camicciottoli, B., & Campoy-Cubillo, M. C. (2018). Introduction: The nexus of

- multimodality, multimodal literacy, and English language teaching in research and practice in higher education settings. *System*, 77, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.03.005>
- Dalgıç, A., Yasar, E., & Demir, M. (2024). ChatGPT and learning outcomes in tourism education: The role of digital literacy and individualized learning. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 34(100481), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2024.100481>
- Gössling, S. (2018). Tourism, tourist learning and sustainability: an exploratory discussion of complexities, problems and opportunities. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(2), 292-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1349772>
- Jamal, T., Taillon, J., & Dredge, D. (2011). Sustainable tourism pedagogy and academic-community collaboration: A progressive service-learning approach. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 11, 133-147. <https://doi.org/10.1057/thr.2011.3>
- Lea, M. R., & Jones, S. (2011). Digital literacies in higher education: exploring textual and technological practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(4), 377-393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003664021>
- McKinney, K. (2013). Introduction to SOTL in and across the disciplines. In K. McKinney (Ed.), *The scholarship of teaching and learning in and across the disciplines* (pp. 1-13). Indiana University Press.
- Palpacuer-Lee, C. J. L. (2018). Multiliteracies in Action at the Art Museum. *L2 Journal*, 10(2), 134-157. <https://doi.org/10.5070/L210235237>
- 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>
- Thibaut, P., & Curwood, J. S. (2018). Multiliteracies in Practice: Integrating Multimodal Production Across the Curriculum. *Theory Into Practice*, 57(1), 48-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1392202>
- Zhang, B., & Cheng, J. (2023). Integration of Tourism Culture in Tourism English Teaching. *Curriculum and Teaching Methodology*, 6(8). <https://doi.org/10.23977/curtm.2023.060803>