

## Chapter 10

# The Relation Between an English Language Textbook and a Teacher's Practice in a Brazilian Public School: A Multimodal Literacy Analysis

**Maria Zenaide Valdivino da Silva**  
*State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN), Brazil*

**Antonia Dilamar Araújo**  
*State University of Ceará (UECE), Brazil*

### ABSTRACT

*Communication has become increasingly multimodal in contemporary society. This fact has prompted reflections on how pedagogical actions reflect these changes. In this chapter, the authors investigate the relationship between the multimodal approach of a textbook and the pedagogy of an English language teacher from a public school in Brazil. The theoretical bases of the study are Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Jewitt (2008, 2009), Bezemer and Kress (2008, 2015), Callow (1999, 2006), among others. The study conducted by the authors is an ethnographic with descriptive and interpretative features. The main conclusions indicate that teacher's manual suggests adopting critical visual literacy, but it was not materialized in the activities. Both, teacher and textbook call students' attention to the images to teach language, rather than to explore critical visual literacy. They seek to develop the written code skill. Finally, the researchers suggest that textbooks should be designed and more pedagogical training about approaches that emphasize multimodal literacies should be promoted.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The changes that have taken place in the way people communicate nowadays are the result of profound social transformations and they have become increasingly multimodal in contemporary society. With the advent of digital technology and its democratization of use in a globalized world, teachers, textbook authors and students have at their disposal a great variety of semiotic modes in which the written and visual are paramount for making meaning in interactions (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). It is now possible to easily find diagrams, photographs, infographics, pictures, and drawings in textbooks as compared to textbooks in the past. Thus, students may not only read but also produce printed texts on the screens of computers, tablets, and cell phones in and out of schools, using a variety of semiotic resources.

This scenario has prompted questions about how and if pedagogical approaches have reflected such changes. It is well known that the school has been given the responsibility to introduce pedagogical approaches that correspond to changes in contemporary society. It is this responsibility that has motivated the authors to investigate the relationship between the multimodal approach of an adopted textbook and the pedagogy of an English language teacher from an elementary public school in Brazil with regard to critical multimodal literacy and students' exposure to countless images in the classroom. The focus of this chapter is to analyze visual resources, particularly images as to their high occurrence in English textbooks and also as to their relevance in conveying meaning in the same way written words do. In addition, images have been recognized to fulfill communicative functions that only the written word was believed to accomplish in the textbook some time ago. Images (pictures, drawings, tables, diagrams) that promote student engagement in the classroom are considered tools for learning in the teaching-learning process and for visual literacy development (Callow, 2008; Kress et al. 2001). And despite the increasing use of electronic media, the reason for analysing a printed textbook is due to the fact that for the majority of public schools supported by the government in Brazil, the only pedagogical resource used to teach English is still the textbook that has been distributed freely since 2011.

It is worth noting that besides analyzing the potential of textbooks to promote multimodal literacy, the critical dimension of literacy was also considered, given that visual texts are "capable of influencing people's feelings, ideas and beliefs", and also "to entertain, inform and persuade in various social contexts" (Callow, p. 75). In order to promote critical visual literacy in an educational system, Newfield (2011) argues that critical visual literacy enables students to reflect on and perceive the implicit meanings conveyed by text producers. Students can understand the social, political, historical and cultural meanings, and their social effects on the relationships of power and domination. Based on this view, the authors of this chapter examined how the English textbook's images and the elementary teacher's practice contributed to the development of students' critical visual literacy.

In an attempt to achieve this general aim, the researchers sought to answer the central question: What is the relationship between the textbook's multimodal approach and the English language teacher's practice with regard to critical visual literacy using an ethnographic methodology and guided by theoretical assumptions concerning multimodality theory postulated by Bezemer & Kress (2008, 2014, 2015, 2016); Jewitt (2008, 2014); Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), and multiliteracies and their social applications based on Callow (2005, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2013); Newfield (2011); and Walsh (2010)?.

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