

## Chapter 21

# Learning the Disciplinary Language and Literacies of Multimedia Composition

**Deborah Kozdras**

*University of South Florida, USA*

**James King**

*University of South Florida, USA*

**Jenifer Jasinski Schneider**

*University of South Florida, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, the authors describe four adolescent students' participation in a digital video summer camp. They describe the students' acquisition of moving-image composition strategies and how these processes are connected to acquiring new vocabulary. The authors examine the camp practices through a lens of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and use this perspective to guide data analysis. Through observations, interviews, and videos, they identify the various activity systems necessary to teach filmmaking, and use examples from one group to illustrate how boundary crossings shift expertise to students. The authors describe the following: (1) the "third space" (i.e., between counselor and student motives), (2) "networked space" (i.e., among different multiliteracy systems), and (3) "shifted spaces" where boundaries are not just crossed, but actually create a shift in expertise or perspective. The authors discover a mediated learning approach that helps students effectively use filmmakers' words as tools. The camp structure is a model of apprenticeship into a discipline through its language and multiliteracies.*

### INTRODUCTION

The following scene occurred during a summer film camp while a group of adolescent boys produced a James Bond-like short film. As they brought their scripts and storyboards to action, a

professional photojournalist from one of the local television stations filmed the boy's process for a feature on the evening news. After observing the students for several minutes, the photojournalist tapped Deborah, the lead researcher, on the shoulder and said, "Hey, did you hear these kids talking? I can't believe the language they're using!"

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4345-1.ch021

Yes, she heard the language the students were using. No, it was not “bad” language. Rather, the students were using *his* language: the language of film.

The man whispered, “These kids are after my job! I can’t believe how fluent they are with the terminology. They sound like university film students! Check them out.” And so Deborah did. This is what she heard from a group of four middle school boys:

**Len:** *I’d like that to be a low-angle shot.*

**Jared:** *Is that what we planned on the storyboard?*

**Len:** *No. But I think the low-angle shot makes you look more cool and powerful, like the hero. You know, how in a movie you see the hero come in larger than life.*

**Ned:** *Yeah, what’s that called...fore...*

**Len:** *Foreshadowing*

**Jared:** *Then maybe we can start with a low-angle shot and then a close-up of me on the phone.*

**Cameron:** *Oh yeah. Like in the script (turns to Ned). Can we see the script?*

**Ned:** *(holding up the script and pointing) Yeah, Jared. Here it is. In the actions, we wrote ‘answer your cell phone looking cool.’ And then in the dialogue, you say, ‘Talk to me.’*

**All:** *Yeah!*

In this scene, the boys used film language with facility and ease. They “sounded” like film students because the discourse of film was at play. However, the discourse was also enacted as the youth worked seamlessly across media and print-based texts to create and compose a multimodal product that reflected their sense of story, character-development, and cinematic knowledge. These boys were not merely “at play,” approximating filmmakers’ behaviors; instead, the boys were actively changing their cognitive stances and conceptions of visual literacy through their use of media tools.

In this chapter, we describe these students’ acquisition of moving image literacies as the

language (Metz, 1974) and syntax (Monaco, 1977/2000) of film and we explicate the complex multimodal processes involved in moving-image composition and how these processes are connected to acquiring new vocabulary. We also trace the students’ language acquisition to the instructional elements of the film camp in which the counselors created opportunities for the students to become fluent with and embody the language and literacies of filmmaking.

## THEORETICAL FRAME

### The Language of Filmmaking and Disciplinary Discourses

Burn and Parker (2003) noted that the “multimodal nature [of film] has been recognized in many different ways throughout the history of film theory” (p. 13). Specifically, they cited Metz (1974) as the film theorist “who wanted to propose a way to analyze film as a language” (p. 13). Metz designated specific elements of film practices (i.e. shots, angles, lighting) as cinematic. Metz grouped other elements that make up a film (i.e. dialogue, music, gestures, action) into a category he labeled as filmic. Burn and Parker (2003) combined both cinematic and filmic elements into a model of moving image literacy, which also considered how these elements combine together to create meaning. *Meaning*, rather than being fixed, evolves. Monaco (2000) argued that film does not have an official “grammar” per se, but is guided by conventions and rules of usage that develop over time and across films. Thus, the syntax and structure of film become part of the Discourse (Gee, 1996) of filmmaking (see Stockman, 2011, for a guide to film school).

So, why do students need to learn the cinematic language of films? We answer this query with insight from Elizabeth Daley (2003), the dean of the University of Southern California’s (USC) School of Cinematic Arts. Daley stated that her

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/learning-disciplinary-language-literacies-multimedia/78606](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/learning-disciplinary-language-literacies-multimedia/78606)

## Related Content

---

### Existential Graphs and Cognition

Caterina Clivio and Marcel Danesi (2018). *Empirical Research on Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric* (pp. 62-70).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/existential-graphs-and-cognition/197978](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/existential-graphs-and-cognition/197978)

### Generative AI and Digital Synthetic Outputs

Aryan Vasa, Aditya Shrivastav, Sunil Sankathala, Kashvi Chaturvedi, Susanta Das and Rizwan Shaikh (2026). *Digital Synthetic Data and Outputs* (pp. 1-30).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/generative-ai-and-digital-synthetic-outputs/394955](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/generative-ai-and-digital-synthetic-outputs/394955)

### Influence of Instagram as a Social Media Platform on Academic Routine and Schedule of Students

Pritesh Pradeep Somani, Ushmita Gupta, Rashmi Mahajan, Vishwanathan Iyer, Nitesh Behare and Meenakshi Singh (2024). *Advancements in Socialized and Digital Media Communications* (pp. 249-263).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/influence-of-instagram-as-a-social-media-platform-on-academic-routine-and-schedule-of-students/337952](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/influence-of-instagram-as-a-social-media-platform-on-academic-routine-and-schedule-of-students/337952)

### Providing Quality Education for Persons With Disabilities Through the Implementation of Individual Educational Programs Managed by the Intelligent Agents in the Sliding Mode

(2017). *Sliding Mode in Intellectual Control and Communication: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 70-76).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/providing-quality-education-for-persons-with-disabilities-through-the-implementation-of-individual-educational-programs-managed-by-the-intelligent-agents-in-the-sliding-mode/180434](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/providing-quality-education-for-persons-with-disabilities-through-the-implementation-of-individual-educational-programs-managed-by-the-intelligent-agents-in-the-sliding-mode/180434)

### Dynamics of Dialogue, Humanity, and Peace in the Metaverse: Towards a Conceptual Debate

Indrani Lahiri, Lipika Deka, Nandini Chakraborty, Kamla Pattni, Monica Lakhanpaul and Anita Punwani (2023). *Dynamics of Dialogue, Cultural Development, and Peace in the Metaverse* (pp. 106-121).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/dynamics-of-dialogue-humanity-and-peace-in-the-metaverse/314993](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/dynamics-of-dialogue-humanity-and-peace-in-the-metaverse/314993)