

The Advantages of Visual Analysis in ESL Academic Writing

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3:30- 4:15 p.m.

Thursday, May 8, 2014

MATSOL 2014: Refresh • Reflect • Renew

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Overview of Presentation

- **Introduction:**
Context, Classes, Challenges, and Learners
- **Intervention:**
Analyzing Photographs in Text-Based L2 Writing Classes
- **Conclusions:**
Benefits of Visual Analysis

WR 100 ESL: Writing Seminar

- Topic-based, contextualized, seminars
- Introduction to academic argument for international students
- Writing tasks include summary, analysis, synthesis, and argument
- Frequent work with different kinds of sources
- Students' L1 = Chinese (n = 9), Korean (n = 2), Spanish (n = 2), Arabic (n = 1), Russian (n = 1)
- Topic: Human Rights and International Relations

Course Goals

- craft substantive, motivated, balanced academic arguments with multiple sources
- write clear, correct, coherent prose
- read with understanding and engagement
- plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively
- evaluate and improve reading and writing processes
- express and converse thoughtfully about complex ideas
- demonstrate familiarity with information literacy concepts
 - recognize and read different genres
 - control genre awareness in essays

The BEAM/BEAT Typology of Sources

- "**Background** for materials a writer relies on for general information or for factual evidence"
- "**Exhibit** for materials a writer analyzes or interprets"
- "**Argument** for materials whose claims a writer engages" or which help advance a writer's argument
- "**Method [or Theory]** for materials from which a writer takes a governing concept or derives a manner of working"

Source: Bizup, Joseph. (2008). BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing. *Rhetoric Review*, 27:1, p. 72.

Advantages of Using the BEAT Framework: a shared vocabulary for teachers, learners, tutors

- Foregrounds the student writer's own use of the source, vs. an intrinsic quality of the source itself
- Foregrounds the student writer's own argument, vs. the sources that support it
- Prefigures the research and research writing that students will be asked to do in future classes/ semesters (WR 150: Writing and Research Seminar)

Challenges for Learners in WR 100 ESL

- Writing Challenges
 - Using the BEAM framework appropriately
 - Distinguishing summary from analysis
 - Prioritizing their voice/argument (“I Say”) in an essay with multiple other sources/voices/arguments (“They Say”)

Source: Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. 2nd edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.

- Reading Challenges
 - Finishing, comprehending, and analyzing sophisticated, college-level texts of varied genres
- Language Challenges
 - Many!

Possible Solution: Photographs and Visual Analysis

- Ease reading burden on learners
- Continue topic-based focus
- Provide ongoing new material for discussions
- Help learners distinguish between exhibit and argument sources
- Offer contexts for practicing specific grammatical structures

Other advantages of photographs for L2 Learners

- Activate background knowledge
- Assist in constructing critical pedagogies/
transformative classrooms
- Help learners construct meaning and work on
vocabulary

“To activate and/or build the students’ background knowledge, I posted four large photographs [...]. Then I instructed the students to walk to the photographs, look at them, read the captions, and jot down specific ideas [....] Then, I posted four questions on the overhead projector for quick-write and quick-share activities: (a) What do you learn from this photograph? (b) What is the importance of the large wall? (c) Who are the men in the picture and what are they doing? (d) How will you relate this picture to your life?”

Source: Ajayi, Lasisi. (2008). Meaning-Making, Multimodal Representation, and Transformative Pedagogy: An Exploration of Meaning Construction Instructional Practices in an ESL High School Classroom. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 7: 3-4, p. 216.

Intervention: Analyzing Photographs in Text-Based L2 Writing Classes

- **Background Sources**—earlier course readings on human rights issues
- **Exhibit Sources**—selected photographs documenting/highlighting human rights abuses
- **Argument Sources**—excerpts from two key texts on the role of photography

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.
Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. 1938. Blackwell Publishing. Web. 9 May 2013.

- (Theory Sources)

Mini-Lesson Example: Word Form and Suprasegmental Stress

■ photograph	noun, thing	3-1
■ phot o grapher	noun, person	4-2
■ phot o graphy	noun, subject	4-2
■ phot o graphic	adjective	4-3

Source: Murphy, J., Kandil, M. (2004). "Word-Level Stress Patterns in the Academic Word List" *System*, 32, 61-74.

Mini-Lesson Example: Existential *there is/there are*

- Before: “A tank is in the right of the picture.”
- After: “There is a tank at the right of the picture.”

Source: Astrada, Walter.
“Portfolios: Sexual Violence
in Eastern Congo.” Walter
Astrada, 2008-2009. Web.
26 Oct. 2012. Photograph.



Mini-Lesson Example:

Verb Tenses in Academic Writing

- Previous instruction: the critical present & sequence of tenses
 - Use the present tense for what an author says/writes/claims/thinks/believes/ explains in a text.
 - Use other tenses as necessary for historical events.
 - Ask yourself: Can I add the phrase “in the essay” to this sentence?
- Recycle and extend
 - Use the present tense *or* present continuous tense for what we see in a photograph.
 - Use other tenses as necessary for historical events.
 - Ask yourself: Can I add the phrase “in the photograph/image” to this sentence?
 - Student example:
“The crowd in the picture **is protesting** against an election fraud which **gave** a victory to another candidate who unfairly **favored** only his tribe.”

Examples from student essay:

Susan Sontag in *Regarding to Pain of Others*, claims that photographs are not as objective as people believe because photographs present only what photographers want to show. Photographs are different from written language; they are realistic and direct. People do not need to take any kinds of photography courses to look at a photograph. However, **seeing a photo is different from understanding a photo**. Without an explanation or even a small caption, people may get wrong messages from photographs. **Although a photograph is one of the most effective methods of conveying a message, as we will see from photographs taken in Kenya, Uganda, and North Korea, a photograph cannot always stand by itself.**

A photograph cannot be used alone for persuasion because a photo without any explanations can misguide people. Sontag emphasizes importance of explanation for pictures: “Whether the photograph is understood as a naïve object or the work of an experienced artificer, its meaning and the viewer’s response depends on how the picture is identified or misidentified; that is, on words” (Sontag 29). A picture does not describe or explain by itself what it presents; understanding the message is people’s own work, so an explanation or a caption is necessary to convey a message effectively and correctly. **People might get a clue of what the photograph tries to show without any signs, but that is not strong enough to persuade, and to inform people.**

Source: Astrada, Walter. "Photojournalism: Kenya's Post Election Violence."
Walter Astrada, 2006-2007. Web. 3 Dec. 2013. Photograph.



There are some crowds facing the same direction. Each person has some kind of weapon or shield. It is not clear whether they are trying to harm someone else or to protect themselves. One man at the center of the picture is pulling back a string of a bow trying to shoot an arrow towards something or someone whom he is fighting against. He is also holding a few more arrows with his mouth and the arrowhead seems sharp enough to damage a human being. Perhaps he is an evil man who tries to kill someone with the arrow. On the left side of the picture, one man wearing an orange colored cap is holding a wooden shield. He seems to shield himself from something that was being thrown at him. Another person behind the man with the cap is in the motion of throwing a stone.

On the very right of the photo, there is a big crowd of people but it is not clear enough to tell whether they are coming or running away from something that others are fighting against. Behind the man with a bow, several men are coming with more weapons. People would think the people in the picture as a group of rebels if there is no explanation or information because the photo shows only violence of those people. They are holding weapons and the photo does not even show whom the crowd is fighting against. Absence of opponent makes viewers think that the crowd holding weapons in the photo are assailants. In fact, the crowd in the picture is protesting against an election fraud which gave a victory to another candidate who unfairly favored only his tribe.

Conclusions: Benefits of Visual Analysis

- Allows teachers to . . .
 - Ease learners' reading burden
 - Provide ongoing new material for discussions
 - "Pluralize [our] teaching"

Source: Gardner, Howard. "'Multiple intelligences' are not 'learning styles.'" *The Answer Sheet. WashingtonPost.com.* 16 Oct. 2013. Web. 5 May 2014.

- Allows learners to . . .
 - Activate background knowledge
 - Practice carefully controlling verb tenses and other structures
 - Distinguish between exhibit and argument sources
 - Distinguish between summary and analysis
 - Be aware of differing interpretations

Questions and comments very welcome. . .

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