

**Teacher Education Matters:  
transforming lives... transforming schools**

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## Section IV

# **IMPACTING ON PRACTICE... EXPLORING CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS**

**The use of Multimodal pedagogical resources in educational contexts  
marked by social and economic disadvantage: A comparative analysis of Malta and Bataan.**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper initially presents the rationale of the Multimodality in Practice research project launched in 2012. The main aim of the project is to adopt and adapt Multimodal theories (including those of Kress, 2010 and Jewitt, 2008) to the specific needs of practical teaching and learning contexts (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary level classrooms and schools) and to conduct research about the effects these theory-practice links could have on teachers and their students. I draw on my academic role at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta to develop curricular design and development based on educational research that adopts multimodality to investigate various teaching and learning contexts. After a brief introduction highlighting how the project started, the paper will then include a detailed socio-semiotic theoretical background of the original MIRROR Multimodal Framework (designed by Cremona in 2015; also explained in detail in Cremona, 2017a) on which the Multimodality in Practice research project revolves. After this, in view of a multimodal conceptual framework, the chapter will comparatively discuss insights obtained from two of the sub-projects of the Multimodality in Practice research project through which while I collect data, I feel I can serve as a source of outreach to the general educational society on behalf of the Faculty. Insights obtained from my work with foreign language teachers preparing multimodality-based lesson plans in Malta (i.e. on a national level) as part of the Teaching through the Eurovision: a multimodal research project (Cremona, 2016; Cremona, 2017b) will be compared to insights obtained from an experience where together with Filipino teachers (i.e. on a wider international level) I planned a set of multimodal lessons and resources for secondary and primary schools in Bataan (i.e. an educational contexts in the Philippines marked by social and economic disadvantage). In both cases, data was collected through fieldwork in classrooms, observations in schools and interviews with participating teachers. Through the comparative analysis of both sets of data, two main conclusions are drawn up and reported in this paper. Firstly, that multimodal theories can effectively be applicable in both learning contexts. Furthermore, a second equally relevant (and exciting) conclusion suggested by the findings of the paper is that, whereas in both contexts, teachers were working in different cultural realities, frequently at bottom line teachers still in both contexts identify similar and common challenges (time constraints, exam oriented challenges, packed syllabi) and benefits (such as student centred positive remarks) when reflecting on the application of Multimodal theories and resources in their daily classroom practices.*

**Keywords:** Multimodality, Foreign Language Learning, Disadvantaged Learning Contexts

### **Introduction: Answering a pertinent question and setting definitions**

I still recall my first reaction when my PhD supervisor at the UCL Institute of Education [IOE] in London suggested that I should consider reading some material about Multimodality. I instantly looked at him with inquisitive eyes and asked him: 'But what is Multimodality?'

Through readings and thanks to the golden opportunity to collaborate with the most prominent contemporary academics in the field of Multimodality working at the IOE (including Kress 2000; Jewitt, 2009; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; as well as Norris, 2002), I gradually started forming a comprehensive and detailed definition of the term through which I could answer this pertinent question. All these Multimodality related readings and academic experiences – in their way – led to one common definition, namely that Multimodality involves: ‘The use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined’ (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20).

Therefore, those working within the socio-semiotic field of Multimodality work with *modes* which are culturally-shaped semiotic resources having specific potentials through which each can produce certain communicative effects and not others (Stein, 2008). These potentials are called affordances (Gibson, 1979). The contemporary digital generation (Beach & O’Brien, 2008):

increasingly likely expresses ideas using different semiotic modes, including print, visual, and audio modes, and create[s] hybrid texts that defy typical associations between modes and what they traditionally represent (Wood & Blanton, 2009, p. 476).

Keeping this in mind, the traditional distinction between verbal and non-verbal modes, often treating language as a superior mode – when in fact it may not always be the case – is avoided. Aware of such a situation, the definition I have developed, instead distinguishes between embodied and disembodied modes (Norris, 2004).

Embodied modes classify language with other modes like gesture, gaze, or posture which ‘can play a *superordinate* or an *equal* role to the mode of language in interaction, and therefore, these modes are not merely embellishments to language’ (Norris, 2004, p. x).

On the other hand, disembodied modes ‘include among others music, print, layout, colour, clothes and any other mode deriving from the setting or material world where the interaction is happening. These too can take a superordinate role in interaction and at times even ‘overrule’ embodied modes’ (Norris, 2004, p. x).

Aware of the vision of the Faculty of Education, stressing that as members of the Faculty we should ‘develop, promote and implement innovative, cutting-edge pedagogies that help learners thrive in rich, flexible, creative and empowering environments’ (FOE, 2015, p. 2), since my PhD research days, I felt that opting this path as a main area of specialisation was logical in a context [i.e. Malta] which still till then (i.e. in 2010), had not tasted Educational Multimodal research.

### **Moving from what to how questions: Launching the research project**

Therefore, through my PhD research venture, I have managed to develop this definition of Multimodality through which I could collect and analyse my PhD data. Moreover, once I was equipped with this definition, whenever I was asked by colleagues, students, educators or the general public what my areas of specialisation are, each time I mentioned Multimodality, I was faced by reactions always somehow hinting back to the one and only question: But what is Multimodality?

Each time I had to answer, my attempts to explain what I was working on, always started from

the point that basically rather than just re-inventing the wheel, the concept of Multimodality seeks to identify what makes sense for the students when they are out of class, and uses all this for the purposes of teaching curricular topics and subject matter (European Commission, 2011).

Notwithstanding my lengthy explanations of what *Multimodality* means, each time the question came and still comes up, I constantly feel that whoever asks the question would understand better through practical examples of uses of multimodality in classrooms. Based on this reasoning, as a reaction, I started thinking of various initiatives linking theory to practice, through which I felt I could help those asking what Multimodality is, to define the term through concrete and practice-oriented answers. Therefore, from the ‘*what is Multimodality?*’ question, I moved on to the attempt to answer the question: *how can Multimodality be used and applied?*

In this, my role of resident Lecturer at the Faculty of Education was instrumental. My role within the Faculty served as a perfect vehicle which facilitated my intentions and motivated me to explain what the term *Multimodality* and *Multimodal* means, through:

1. Observing various educational context and the presence and/or absence of multimodality within these contexts;
2. launching practical initiatives adopting Multimodal principles within these contexts;
3. investigating and researching critically the possible pedagogic effects, challenges and benefits the application of these Multimodal principles would have on the students and teachers of these particular educational contexts;
4. presenting these research findings in academic papers, conferences or dissertations.

This was how the *Multimodality in Practice* research project originated. Since the time I designed and launched the project, it has been constantly sustained by the principle that: The Faculty of Education values and promotes education both as good in itself and for its practical outcomes, that is, for what it achieves for the individual, for its contribution to social integration and justice, and for its economic value (FOE, 2015, p. 1).

What began in 2012, evolved into a number of initiatives through which as a member of the Faculty of Education I could do outreach in schools and the general society and also through which I could contribute to knowledge in the fast-growing local and international academic field of Multimodality.

### **A Multimodal framework driving the project: The Mirror Framework**

One of the main contributions I feel I have achieved since the launch of the Multimodality in Practice research project is the development of a theoretical framework which I myself have developed, proposed as a critical framework for those working in the field of Multimodality. Since the very early days of the project, I felt that for each initiative I intended to launch as part of the research project, I required a set of steps based on theory which I [and others involved in the project] could follow to ensure that we are indeed adopting and adapting Multimodal lines. As explained in detail elsewhere (Cremona, 2015; Cremona 2017b), this framework – which I call the MIRROR framework – has been developed after four years of continuous research and analysis within the field and includes the following steps:

**Table 1:** An Overview of the Multimodal MIRROR Framework

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**M**onitoring of available texts and choosing the actual texts one can use within the particular teaching/learning context;

- Which are the sources available at hand?
- Which are the most quoted (i.e. the most popular) texts at hand?
- How are they similar?
- In what way do they differ?
- Do any of the available texts possess a particular/special feature which deserves particular attention? Why?

**I**nitial descriptive interpretation (per individual text);

- Which topic(s) are being presented and/or discussed?
- Who is the ideal reader of the text? For who was it originally designed? Which genres are being used to present the text? Which are the implications linked to these particular genres used and how do these implications contribute to set/ effect the students within the particular classroom?
- Which representations do the selected texts appear to imply after a first reading (i.e. the preferred reading)?

**R**epresentational multimodal semiotic interpretation (per individual text);

- Which are the particular sections of the selected texts which appear sequential (i.e. not as separate entities)?
- Identify all the modes – embodied and disembodied (see Introduction Section above\*) - building up the text.
- What representations does the reader perceive through the embodied modes included in the particular text?
- What representations does the reader perceive through the disembodied modes included in the particular text?

**R**epresented social interpretation (per individual text);

- Are particular social features and practices preferred/disfavored by the representation presented by this particular text?
- Are particular discourses preferred/disfavored by the representation presented by this particular text? (See details in Table 2 below)

**O**verview of the representations observed: presenting a detailed write up of the representations obtained per individual text. Later comparing individual trends with common trends derived from texts as a whole (where possible).

**R**eorganising the representations derived from the MIRROR Framework (i.e. those presented in the above-mentioned steps) in the best way to serve the particular learning/teaching context they are going to be applied to.

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### **From theory to practice: Launching a number of initiatives**

The driving principle of the Multimodality in Practice research project thus follows the intertwined MIRROR framework steps and adopts these steps to:

1. observe and interpret contemporary teaching and learning strategies adopted in contemporary learning/teaching contexts;
2. research about the benefits and challenges resulting from the use and/or lack of Multimodality within these educational contexts;
3. propose suggestions based on Multimodal principles through which these benefits may be sustained and strengthened and offering support in cases where challenges are encountered.

Each initiative launched as part of the Multimodality in Practice project starts by looking at the particular context at hand (i.e. classrooms, schools, group of students, teachers, the general society). All the texts available at hand are identified (M: first step of Mirror Framework). The project continuously adopts authentic texts and materials ‘produced for ‘real’, out-of-classroom contexts and for specific purposes’ (Pachler et al., 2013, p.280). One should add that:

‘When people first think of authentic materials they usually assume that we are talking about newspaper and magazine articles. However, the term can also encompass such things as songs, web pages, radio & TV broadcasts, films, leaflets, flyers, posters, indeed anything written in the target language and used unedited in the classroom’. (BBC British Council, 2004, online).

This implies that the definition of text I am applying in this paper includes the concept of multimodal authenticity which Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 20) define as ‘the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic products or events’. Therefore, my definition of text acknowledges and understands the importance of other semiotics apart from language. These include images, pictures and visuals, sound, body language including facial expression, gaze, gesture as well as other disembodied resources such as clothes, colour and distance (Norris, 2002).

After an identification of all the texts available in the particular learning and/or teaching context, the question driving the first step of the Multimodality in Practice research project is: Which texts are the most relevant in this context i.e. which are the resources which make sense for the audience in this particular selected context? Once the most relevant texts are identified, among all the possible texts at hand, then the process first starts by an initial descriptive reading (I: second step of the Mirror Framework), moving on to a detailed interpretation of these texts through a Multimodal (R: third step of the Mirror Framework) and through a social lens (R: the fourth step of the Mirror Framework). This includes looking at the texts and interpreting them in the light of the following social features as shown on Table 2.

Once this socio-semiotic interpretation of these texts is completed, the final two steps focus on the ways these identified characteristics obtained through the first four steps of the MIRROR Framework can potentially and critically be used to lead to more effective teaching and learning. This process is first done by myself as the coordinator of the research project and later repeated again together with teachers who willingly ask to participate in the research project.

### **Learning through the Eurovision**

Since the launch of the *Multimodality in Practice* research project – back in 2012 - I felt that

Answers the question in terms of the following social features and practices:

- Social Identity and Social Groups
- Social Interaction
- Belief and Behaviour
- Social and Political Institutions
- Socialisation and the life-cycle
- National history
- National geography

Adopted from Byram (1993, pp. 36-37)



The attempt to answer the above question also aims to highlight possible discourse types, which may include discourses linked to:

- Class
- Race
- Gender
- Media language, advertisements and promotional culture
- Institutional Discourse: in institutional practices and communications
- Education: an area for reproduction of social relations, representations and identity-formation.

Adopted from Blommaert (2005, pp. 26-27)

**Table 2:** The Social Features the fourth level of the MIRROR Framework.

the Eurovision Song Contest, the popular phenomenon, could serve as a rich pedagogical tool to teach curricular subjects in schools. This feeling was based on the popular reaction of the Maltese towards the festival and on official statistics published yearly that over 95% of the whole Maltese population annually views the Eurovision Song Contest [ESC] (PBS, 2017). Furthermore, over 204 million viewers around Europe view the festival (Eurovision.tv, online), Keeping this in mind, through my post of Lecturer and teacher educator at the University of Malta, encouraged by the mission statement of the Faculty suggesting that as Faculty Members we should design 'programmes that are meaningful to students [...], promoting a love of knowledge, habits of lifelong learning, a sense of joy in discovery and critical thought, as well as nurturing dispositions' (FOE, 2015, p. 3), in 2014 I launched the *Learning through the Eurovision: a multimodal research project*. The project originally addressed educators, teachers and students working within language learning contexts in primary and secondary schools in Malta. The main aim of the educational project is to continuously conduct language lessons which include ESC songs as pedagogical resources through which the effective teaching of linguistic skills [i.e. writing, reading, speaking, listening] and linguistic competences [including grammar] may be initiated and facilitated (Newspoint, 2016). The project seeks to work with language teachers who themselves are willing to participate. On receiving the formal request of interested language teachers, I meet the teachers and during the initial phase, together we identify the curricular content area he/she/they intend to teach through the project. Together, we then design the lesson plans and adapt them according to the needs of the students within the particular language learning context. Once the lessons are conducted, their evaluation leads to critical insights about the pedagogic effects of these ESC songs in language learning contexts.



### *Adopting a multimodal approach: The Mirror Framework*

Since the initial phase of lesson planning, as well as while delivering the lessons, those involved in the project adopt a Multimodal approach. The theoretical multimodal approach adopted, views each ESC song as a collection of modes, which are culturally shaped semiotic resources having specific potentials through which they can produce certain communicative effects on the students (see Kress, 2010) in the particular language learning context. The evaluation of the ESC songs is conducted following the MIRROR multimodal theoretical framework (see Cremona, 2015 and Cremona 2017) that I developed. Following the steps of the Mirror Framework, we conduct this socio-semiotic process:

**M**onitoring available ESC songs and choosing the actual songs to use in class from all those which have participated in one of the 63 editions of the ESC;

**I**nitial descriptive interpretation (per individual song focusing on the message of the text i.e. lyrics);

**R**epresentational multimodal semiotic interpretation (per individual text, i.e. this includes a deeper analysis of the song. Among others this step analyses the content of the song, the linguistic level of the lyrics and the style, genre and arrangement of music);

**R**epresented social interpretation (per individual text focusing on socio-cultural messages implied);

**O**verview of the themes observed: later comparing individual trends with common trends derived from texts as a whole (where possible);

**R**eorganising and presenting the text according to the needs of the students in the particular learning context.

### *Outcomes from this research project: Research findings from language classrooms*

Since its launch (in 2012) the Learning through the Eurovision research project had 54 invites and requests by teachers working in different schools. These included primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions in Malta, Gozo, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Italy, Ukraine and Switzerland. Each time, myself and the participating teachers design a lesson plan for each session. This lesson plan design stage includes the selection and production of Multimodal ESC related texts such as videos, songs, handouts, and the exclusive participation of ESC singers and Malta Eurovision participants.

Later the lesson is conducted by the teacher herself. After this, through an informal 30-minute teacher semi-structured interview, the teachers involved share their critical views, their evaluation and their feelings about their involvement in the *Multimodality in Practice* research project. In this section I will include a roundup of the findings and results derived from the analysis of these teacher interviews. These interviews have been recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed (Creswell, 2013).

To start with, teachers frequently acknowledge that using these multimodal ESC related texts facilitate the task of implementation of the contemporary predominant foreign language methodologies. Put in the words of one of the teachers: “these multimodal ESC related texts serve as an excellent resource through which I find it easier to implement communicative

methodologies and task based activities” (similar idea in Pachler, Evans, Redondo and Fisher, 2013). In the teachers’ views, the multimodal ESC related texts allow teachers to present students the target language through real and authentic contexts (Azri et al, 2014; Widowson, 1990), and this is perfectly in line with the suggestions of the most prominent contemporary language methodologies (as suggested by Willis & Willis, 1996).

Furthermore, while participating teachers suggest that lesson planning and resource preparation is very time consuming and at times very tiring (similar view in Edelenbos et al, 2006), the participating teachers all agreed that these multimodal ESC related texts facilitated student centred learning contexts. Teachers indicate that they feel that rather than themselves being at the centre, just feeding students with insignificant chunks of a foreign language, through multimodal ESC related texts, student themselves end up at the centre, motivated and very often actively involved in tasks through which they can learn better the foreign language (similar idea in Mathukin & Bolgova, 2015).

The FL teachers also suggested that, the fact that the selected multimodal ESC related texts include different genres, topics and styles, serves well to attract more the students’ attention. Linked to this *variety is the spice of life* concept (Barrett, 2009), one teacher felt that these songs should be used with caution so as to avoid situations where students treat these multimodal ESC related texts ‘as the usual stuff’. With this, one other teacher added that ESC songs add variety in class since they are frequently only 3 minutes long. Thus compared to other songs, these ESC songs are neither too long, not too short.

In brief, the participating teachers all tend to suggest that the main strength of the project is the way it manages to value the participation both of students who are keen followers of the ESC as well as of others who are not interested about the contest and its music. Those who do not like it, are still involved by being continuously being encouraged to adopt a critical stance.

#### *Moving on from languages to other curricular subjects*

Having obtained this data, once the project has established itself as a tool for foreign language teachers locally and around various countries, I felt that I had to constantly [for the sake to keep the project fresh and going] keep exploring different venues through which I could explore further the use of Multimodality. Following Barne’s (2015) advice that expanding the perspective from focusing on one subject to focus on more curricular areas can have advantages, what started as a project researching foreign language and language learning contexts, in a couple of months evolved to also address other curricular subjects.

The following are a number of examples of non-language related participants who took part in the *Multimodality in Practice* research project. Throughout time I have worked with teachers of Geography while teaching capital cities or map locations. A number of teachers of History tackled the recent historical developments between Russia and Ukraine and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A group of teachers of Mathematics used the project as a tool when teaching probabilities. A group of Social Studies teachers developed a five-week programme linked to the syllabus topic of tolerance. Through the participants of the Eurovision Song Contest and their songs, these teachers offered students the opportunity to discuss gender, disabilities, race, economic, age, culture and different social backgrounds and tolerance these social features imply.

*Outcomes from this research project: Research findings from contexts other than FL learning contexts*  
Data collected from the latter non-language related experiences indicates that teachers of the

various subjects frequently point out that when evaluating their experience as participants in the project they feel a benefit obtained through the shared lesson planning sessions. Teachers tend to stress that planning lesson plans together helps them increase critical insights about what works and what could work less (Gray & Morton, 2018). Apart from this, they tend to become more aware that teaching their subject with these authentic music materials requires better planning since the teacher needs to first herself/himself be equipped with the knowledge about the Eurovision Song Contest in order to include the 'best' or 'most adequate' ESC multimodal related text for the particular context (Cremona, 2018).

### **The Multimodality in Practice research project:**

#### **An outreach voice by, for and within the Faculty**

Therefore, from the discussion above, one can observe that what started as a personal initiative back in 2010, evolved gradually to an ongoing outreach tool within the Faculty of Education.

Even if at the beginning, some could not comprehend the theoretical and practical effectivity of the Multimodal field of research, gradually, in just three years, what started as a personal initiative gained very strong momentum. Since its launch, the project became disseminated across all the departments within the Faculty through the number of frequent requests from:

- Masters and Undergraduate students who wish to include Multimodality as their theoretical framework in their dissertations. Through this, I feel I constantly contribute to the Faculty's will to be present and influential through education-related research and its dissemination. With this, I also add the very regular presentations at local and international conferences, where abstracts I submit are accepted for presentation at the particular conferences;
- colleagues who ask me to design study units specifically aiming to explain and discuss the use of Multimodality within educational contexts. I have designed at least one study unit for each department within the Faculty;
- radio and Tv stations asking me to produce educational multimodal slots. These air regularly [on a weekly basis] on national radio and TV stations. For these, modestly I obtained the prestigious national Journalism Award in 2017 (IGM, 2017). Through these I feel I am using the media as a platform and opportunity (Viebach et al, 2016) as a means of outreach keeping other academics, educators and the general public updated with the relevance of the Faculty and its effectivity in setting educational policies;
- colleagues within the Faculty regularly inviting me to lead and organize CPDs through which as a member of the Faculty I can contribute in the Faculty's priority to focus not only on Initial Teacher Training but also on lifelong teacher training (FoE, 2015);
- to serve as a reviewer in a number of prominent academic journals which specifically target Multimodality as their main research area.

Therefore, what started as a personal initiative, thanks to the backing of my colleagues at the Faculty, turned out to find very strong footing and ample space at all levels within the Faculty and across all departments.

This encourages me to keep researching further about the field and to constantly think of ways how I can contribute to develop even more the field of Multimodality locally and internationally.

### **Moving on – From local to international: Multimodality in ‘Disadvantaged’ Educational Areas**

Familiarising myself and keeping myself updated with the most relevant and contemporary publications, developments and journal articles within the field made me realize that while the research field is vastly growing and constantly widening, there seems to be a keen call for research about the way Multimodality can effect even the least advantaged educational contexts. Reading Fajardo’s (2016) work made me feel the calling that after almost three years focusing on local and international educational contexts in developed countries, there is a lot I can contribute once I get out of my ‘Multimodal comfort zone’ and focus on other contexts which are viewed or labelled as disadvantaged educational contexts.

And this was what motivated the start of the *Multimodal advantages: the Bataan Case study* a sub-project of the *Multimodality in Practice* research project. Also in line with the Faculty mission statement, this sub-project serves as a means of outreach through which as a member of the Faculty, I intend to:

- contribute to on-going local and international debates regarding education broadly understood and to educational policy making at the local, national, and supranational level;
- be of service through flexibly responding to evolving and changing educational scenarios locally and abroad;
- develop programmes that effectively engage with the shifting social and cultural landscape in Malta;
- provide Maltese policy makers with the evidence and understanding needed to make wise and just educational decisions, thus also encouraging all educational actors to commit themselves to research-led practice;
- seek collaboration and partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders (FoE, 2015, p. 1).

With these aims in mind, in July 2017, I launched this second sub-project of the *Multimodality in Practice* research project. This happened when I visited the *Jose de Piro Educational Centre for Arts in Bataan* (in the Philippines). The centre is located in the village of Pagalanggang, in the town of Dinalupihan, Bataan Province.

‘Poverty in the Philippines remains a predominantly rural phenomenon, which is partly attributable to decade-long problems in agriculture. Agricultural growth has not been sustained for many reasons— bad weather (typhoons), weak property rights (failure of agrarian reform), inadequate delivery of agricultural services, and weak governance’ (ADB, 2009, p.19).

Usually these provinces in the Philippines have very rich natural resources but due to the lack of development in these areas, people living in them experience unemployment, find it hard to study and thus to develop their skills. The area is socially and economically disadvantaged. Rice fields are the main source of income and employment of the people living in Pagalanggang.

In fact, ‘many people in Pagalanggang can only work in the dry season and are unemployed for the rest of the wet season period. Apart from lacking the bare necessities which families require, the area also lacks family oriented recreational parks and places where people may pass their free time. The abovementioned situation frequently forces people to move out of the area with the intention to seek greener pastures. As a consequence, most of the people leaving Bataan end up living under bridges in Manila’ (Jose De Piro Educational Centre History, page 1-2, 2017).

Notwithstanding all this, thousands of children, adolescents and youths living in Pagalangang (Bataan), attend primary and secondary schools found close by, walking distance from the area of the *Jose de Piro Educational Centre for Arts in Bataan*. Schools start at 7.30am and finish at 4pm. In brief, put in Fajardo's words (2016) the educational system may be outlined in this way:

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 requires children aged five to attend kindergarten to better prepare them for their six years of elementary schooling. They then proceed to a secondary education system which has two phases: four years in junior high school and an additional two years in senior high school. The present government argues that the increase in the number of years in basic education will give the Filipino students time to master concepts and skills and keep them on par with their international counterparts (Presidential Communications Development & Strategic Planning 8 Office, 2012). The curriculum for senior high school is designed so that students are able to choose one of three career tracks: academic, technical/vocational and sports/arts. It is the government's way of equipping Filipinos with skills by ensuring relevant, integrated and sustained learning across levels and subjects in preparation for gainful employment and entrepreneurship (Presidential Communications Development & Strategic Planning Office, 2012).

Education sectors in the country, however, argue that increasing the number of years of basic education may help but is not sufficient to improve the quality of education in the country unless perennial educational problems are addressed, such as shortages of teachers and books, overcrowded classrooms, poor assessment of learning outcomes, low-quality text books, high drop-out rates and inadequate teaching methods (de Guzman, 2007; Rubdy 2012; UNESCO, n.d.). Generally, the new K-12 basic education curriculum seems promising but whether it fulfils its goals is yet to be determined" (Fajardo, 2016, pp. 6-7).

While experiencing all this, once they finish their school day, kids in Pagalangang have the opportunity to attend the *Jose de Piro Educational Centre for Arts*. At the centre, each student receives spiritual formation, learns music theory and practice for free and eventually forms part of a children and youth orchestra.

#### *Data collection plan*

Adopting convenience sampling (Patton, 2002), based on the contact I have with the director of the centre, I originally intended to visit Bataan for only four weeks (in July - August 2017). My intention was to conduct a case study (Newby, 2010) based on ethnographic principles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). During my stay, I intended to conduct a number of lesson plans I have designed before going to the Philippines. Through this experience and through teacher reactions, I intended to investigate how Multimodality would effect these disadvantaged learning contexts.

Before going to the Philippines, I was planning that as a proactive reaction to the first experience in Bataan, through the data I would collect, I **intended** to answer two main research questions

1. Is Multimodality being used as a critical pedagogic tool in the selected 'disadvantaged' learning context(s)?
2. Which multimodal suggestions can I offer and/or develop according to the outcomes of RQ1?

I felt this was the way how I could contribute, in a situation where according to the National Legal Framework for Basic Education of the Philippines (2001) there is the call for:

“Introducing new and innovative modes of instruction to achieve higher learning outcomes” (p. 9).

*Preliminary results: Moving from judgmental to understanding stances*

Once I arrived in Bataan, I started spending whole days [from 7.30am to 4.00pm] in schools. I visited classrooms and did 5 one-hour lessons a day.

Without noticing, as soon as I arrived and set foot in the first classroom, I instantly started passing judgemental comments hastily concluding that multimodal theories can effectively be applicable in learning and teaching contexts of both developed and less/non-developed countries. As from day one, I erroneously felt in a position to suggest the conclusion that even if the teachers were working in different cultural realities, at bottom line teachers in both advantaged and disadvantaged educational contexts still identify similar and common challenges. These in my view included the ones identified by teachers participating in the *Learning through the Eurovision* (i.e. time constraints, exam oriented challenges, packed syllabi) and benefits encountered by those working in less disadvantaged contexts.

However, as days started passing, I realized that in Bataan I was experiencing a different culture from what I was familiar to (Garii, 2009). I started observing that the different contexts within the same community were so different, and that instead of rushing to conclusions, I should support students and teachers working in these ‘foreign’ contexts through empathy and understanding rather than through adopting judgemental stances (Stachowski, 2007).

Facing this situation, at the end of the four weeks which I originally planned to pass in Bataan, I was still striving to obtain critical insights about the context. Driven by this factor, I extended my stay by four weeks and even then, the only concrete result I feel I had at hand was just the very important insight that rather than adopting the ‘telling them what to do with Multimodality’ stance, I felt that in this case, I would benefit much more if [at least for the time being] I take the silent observer’s role (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) and first observe what is happening in each situation I have access to.

Looking retrospectively, I now realize that without my awareness, my ‘multimodal comfort zone’ and the knowledge I had perceived through readings and through all the experiences in Malta and around Europe, were simply directing me and leading me to offer as sense of false generosity from my side, causing me to view Multimodality as a tool: ‘given to be received by people, [not as] something to be created by them’ (Freire, 1996, p. 21), thus possibly leading to further oppression of the oppressed.

Through the evaluation of the fieldnotes I wrote in the first days I spent in Bataan and looking at the questions I started asking teachers I was working with, I also realize that back then I was looking at these ‘disadvantaged’ contexts through a very essentialist lens. Gelman (2003) elaborates that:

There are unmistakable benefits to essentialism. It provides a framework for making valuable category based inferences. It encourages a “scientific” mindset in thinking about the natural world, a belief that intensive study of a natural domain will yield even more underlying properties.

Yet essentialism also carries with it serious costs. Most troubling, it encourages and justifies stereotyping of social categories (including race, gender and sexual orientation, Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000). It perpetuates the assumption that artificial distinctions (such as caste or class) are natural, inevitable, and fixed. Relatedly, it poses obstacles to a complete grasp of evolutionary biology, as it implies that each species is fixed and immutable, not allowing for the possibility of evolutionary change over time (p. 297).

Indeed, reacting to this outcome of my research venture, day after day, since my arrival in Bataan, I started feeling that I was treating what in my view was ‘disadvantaged’ and looking at it through an unfair superior lens. Through this unconscious attitude, I was treating whoever was teaching and learning in these contexts as less competent than the subjects and participants in the contexts I was familiar to i.e. the Maltese and European educational contexts I had worked in prior to my experience in Bataan.

Therefore, once I became aware of this, through my observations, my daily presence in schools and my reactions to what I was observing and experiencing, I realized that before hastily offering my multimodal solutions as I intended to originally do, I first needed to question my essentialist perspectives of these ‘disadvantaged’ educational contexts since these were not allowing me to look at the contexts through a non-judgmental lens.

Reading through my original [first week] fieldnotes and going through the lesson plans I had designed, I realized that in order to move from this judgemental stance to a more understanding stance, I required more time and more knowledge. Now that I am aware of all this, in order to avoid judging the situation, I am constantly asking the questions posed by Sadker and Sadker (in Banks & Banks, 2010) which direct me to focus on:

1. Stereotypes: Am I assigning a rigid set of characteristics to all members of a group, at the cost of individual attributes and differences?
2. Invisibility or Group exclusion: Are all racial/ethnic/gender/religious groups equally represented in my views and thoughts?
3. Imbalance: Is only one interpretation of an issue, situation or group of people mentioned?
4. Unreality: The glossing of unpleasant historical events and facts often ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict.
5. Fragmentation: Is a group physically or visually isolated? Through this technique the isolated group is usually represented as non-dominant and as peripheral.
6. Linguistic bias: Does the language used – visibly or in a subtle way – treat different races/ethnicities, genders, accents, ages, (dis)abilities and sexual orientations equally?
7. Cosmetic bias: Through its presentation (i.e. such as its covers, colour, posters etc) does the text give a modern biasfree impression? However, is this just an “illusion of equity”?

Therefore, based on the reflective outcomes of this first eight week-visit in Bataan, I have developed the project in a way to include three further different research phases which I intend to execute gradually throughout the coming years. As the Faculty mission statement suggests, I need to first engage with the world as it is (therefore adopting deeper understanding stances of the educational contexts in Bataan in the first phases) before ambitiously wishing to contribute



(through future phases) through multimodal suggestions about what works and what not in these particular learning contexts.

## Conclusions

Through the outcomes of the on-going Multimodality in Practice research project discussed in this paper, a first conclusion one can reach, is the effectivity of Multimodality as a vehicle addressing multidisciplinary learning and teaching contexts.

Moreover, reflecting on the outcomes of this ongoing research project, one can also conclude two less obvious but equally very relevant conclusions about the working environment promoted by the Faculty of Education itself. The fact that the Faculty of Education enables me and encourages me to conduct this work [i.e. the Multimodality in Practice research project] without fear of endorsing the relatively innovative Multimodal research field, shows that while building on a 40-year old tradition, within the Faculty structures there is still ample space for innovative areas of research.

With this, since the time I have originally launched the project, a second factor I constantly feel is the flexibility the Faculty grants me as an educator and researcher, through which without hesitations, I can allow the data and the research to take me in unforeseen, at times even risky uncomfortable and unfamiliar paths.

And all this clearly suggests, that the way forward the Faculty of Education currently promotes, on the one hand embraces a 40-year old tradition, while simultaneously allowing room for contemporary innovations. This optimistically indicates that rather than being an aging 40-year 'old' conservative Faculty of Education, the Faculty builds on successful experiences yet still allows space for new ideas, new areas of research and new developments.

Indeed as the saying goes... life does begin at 40.

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