In Search of the Multimodal Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This presentation provides an overview of some of the issues involved in publishing educational research as a digital web-based thesis. The purpose of this presentation is to offer some guidelines for other researchers who wish to pursue the multimodal publication option and to report on a range of unanticipated affordances in addition to the obvious benefits of ease of use, embedded media, and functionality.

There is a deliberate irony in this title as it is not really about trying to find a multimodal thesis, but rather, trying to write one. To gain a sense of the current state of multimodal theses, it is necessary to revert to a more established term, namely, electronic theses and dissertations (ETD). ETD are more common in disciplines such as the Arts and particularly in Media studies. The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) recently marked their 20th anniversary of publishing and archiving research (http://ndltd.org) and first initiated annual awards for publishing ETD in 2004. Although this site has a searchable database, it is difficult to determine when the first multimodal PhD thesis in the field of Education was published. The PhD thesis which informs this presentation was completed through the University of Melbourne in 2015 and is titled Storyboard: Primary school students designing and making explanatory animations (http://www.brendanpauljacobs.com). The eight participants were girls and boys from grades five and six who chose their own topics and worked on their animations for one hour a week over a period of 17 weeks.

There were both anticipated and unanticipated benefits from compiling and presenting this research as a multimodal thesis. The anticipated benefits were alluded to in the rationale for presenting the research in this format, namely convenience to access and view all of the content. Of greater interest were three unanticipated benefits, namely the ability to include access to all of the data, the inclusion of digital appendices, and the opportunity to observe patterns in the data that might not have been evident without the ability to scroll through pages.

This presentation can be accessed online at http://brendanpauljacobs.com/denver.html.