

Meaning-Making Across Modes: Visual-Written Integration in UAE Classrooms

In my work as an Arabic teacher in Abu Dhabi, I've observed and implemented several curriculum practices where students create meaning through an integration of **images and writing**. One particularly effective example is the use of **visual essays**, where students are asked to analyze a poem or historical event using a combination of written commentary and symbolic imagery.

For instance, during a unit on Emirati poetry, students are encouraged to select a verse and create a digital poster. They combine their written interpretation with related visuals—such as cultural symbols, color choices, and layout elements—that represent the poem's tone and message. This method of expression clearly demonstrates the concept of **synaesthesia**, as students **shift between linguistic and visual modes** to represent their understanding.

These experiences reinforce what Cope and Kalantzis describe as *transduction*—where meaning is carried across modes to deepen learning. A student might write about the poet's emotion, then depict it through color gradients and expressive typography. Another might sketch an abstract symbol that complements a written analysis of metaphor. This dual expression doesn't just repeat information—it **reshapes it**, activating deeper layers of interpretation.

This approach contrasts with traditional writing tasks, which rely solely on written explanation. Multimodal composition **invites creative agency**, allowing students to use their strengths—whether visual, textual, or conceptual—to build layered meaning. It also supports language learners, who may express complex ideas more clearly through imagery before translating them into academic writing.

In essence, this kind of curriculum work highlights the richness of **integrated multimodal learning**, and how **shifting between image and word empowers all learners** to become designers of meaning—not just consumers of information.