



Four Lenses for Exploring Multimodal Practice

Introduction: In this project the aim has been to generate and utilise actionable knowledge related to how educational spaces and practices are being reimagined through different conceptualisations of multimodality to inform new avenues for learning, teaching, and assessment.

This final chapter of the Playbook is intended to help frame and enable productive conversations around how to design, support, and assess multimodal learning opportunities in higher education. A content analysis of the institutional research projects exploring multimodality in simulation-based learning, spatial fluency, generative AI, and digital assessments led to the identification of 24 key considerations for effective multimodal practice. These considerations are mapped to and expand upon the four quadrants of the Conversational Framework (see Chapter 2) to provide four lenses for reflecting on multimodal practice that encourage a collaborative philosophy and a holistic approach, bringing together a range of perspectives.

It is anticipated that the four lenses for exploring multimodal practice be used individually and collaboratively by two groups: 1) Leaders, who provide the necessary oversight of practice, ensuring there are sufficient resources and effective systems in place to realise different conceptualisations of multimodality; 2) Education practitioners, who undertake the work of designing and delivering learning, teaching and assessment, and providing appropriate learning support for students. The second category might also include staff involved in supporting students and academics, including learning technologists, technical and support staff, as well as Estates, IT, Student & Library Services, Human Resources, and employability teams.

Setting the scene for productive conversations

Whether you are seeking to develop and implement a new strategic direction for learning and teaching provision and/or wanting to encourage academic staff to think about multimodality in their practice, knowing how to frame productive conversations around the key considerations for multimodal practice will be instrumental in setting the appropriate scene for conceptualising and informing new avenues for learning, teaching, and assessment.

When planning conversations around designing for multimodal practice, at any level, our project work has revealed three foundational principles that leaders and educators need to consider when looking to effectively position and implement multimodal practice: context, transparency and learning ecologies. As a first step, we encourage you to review these principles to help define the parameters for the kinds of conversation you wish to instigate and generate actionable insights related to how different conceptualisations of multimodality might be realised in practice.

Principle 1 – Context: It is important that we are being sensitive to the wider learning context accounting for how our shared physical and digital environments shape and are themselves influenced by our educational designs.

Context shapes and informs the effective integration of multimodal resources in our education settings and contextual affordances are interpreted and negotiated by individuals. Learning designs need to be aligned with the cultural, technological, and pedagogical realities of the learning environment providing an accessible, equitable and relevant learning experience for all students across different modes of study.

Principle 2 – Transparency: It is important that we are ensuring the processes for working with and implementing multimodal practice are clearly articulated, relevant to context, and designed to enable meaningful action in the ways they foster student learning.

Transparency in multimodal education is essential for creating an environment where students can thrive, educators can grow professionally, and the wider community can engage effectively with the educational process.

Principle 3 – Learning ecologies: it is important that we are factoring in how different contexts, relationships and interactions can provide students with opportunities and resources for learning, development, and achievement.

Learning ecologies provide an agile framework for understanding the complex and dynamic nature of learning in the today's increasingly blended learning environments. Learning ecologies highlight the need for multimodal education to be adaptable, personalized, and integrated across various learning contexts to meet the diverse needs of learners.

How to use the Four Lenses

Below you will find a series of prompt statements and associated reflective questions aligned to the core features for each of the Philosophical, Experiential, Practical, and Innovation Lenses. We recommend that the Four Lenses for Exploring Multimodal Practice are used in conjunction with the “Routes to Practice” sections of the thematic institutional research project chapters, to facilitate deeper understanding of the attributes.



Philosophy

The Philosophical lens

Reflecting what people and organisations value in relation to multimodalities in higher education.

Authenticity

Prompt 1: Multimodal learning environments should leverage digital connectivity to extend learning beyond abstract concepts, providing authentic experiences that prepare students for the complexities of their future professions.

Question 1: How does your learning environment utilise digital tools and media to create meaningful, relevant scenarios that develop students' skills and confidence for real-world application?

Prompt 2: Multimodal learning environments should empower students to navigate and negotiate their own learning spaces, recognising the constant change and ambiguity inherent in modern work and life.

Question 2: In what ways does your curriculum enable students to become "constant navigators and negotiators," preparing them for the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of their future careers?

Place

Prompt 3: Multimodal learning environments should balance virtual and physical spaces, providing safe and enabling places for students to practice and develop skills before applying them in real-life situations.

Question 3: How does your learning environment integrate virtual and physical spaces to create safe, supportive contexts for skill development, while also addressing the potential loss of social skills and increased social anxiety among students?

Prompt 4: Multimodal learning environments should consider the tension between individual and social learning experiences, providing discipline-specific tools and training that work across online and offline arrangements.

Question 4: In what ways does your curriculum design account for both individual and social learning needs, while ensuring that discipline-specific tools and training are appropriately integrated across virtual and physical learning spaces?

Flexibility

Prompt 5: Multimodal learning environments should empower students to be self-determined, offering flexibility in media, time, contexts, and formalities while promoting critical awareness of evolving technological and social contexts.

Question 5: How does your learning environment encourage self-determination and flexibility for students, while also developing their critical awareness of the changing technological and social landscape?

Prompt 6: Multimodal learning environments should prioritise adaptability and inclusivity, accommodating students' lives, challenges and diverse needs across different disciplines and professional contexts.

Question 6: In what ways does your curriculum design and assessment approach adapt to the diverse needs of students, disciplines, and professional bodies, while ensuring inclusivity and equitable participation?

Experience

The Experiential lens

Reflecting what people and their organisations know about multimodality in relation to their formative life-wide learning experiences.

Diversity

Prompt 7: Multimodal learning environments should provide a range of content and experiences that reflect the current and future contexts in which students will use their learning.

Question 7: Does the range of experiences (including but not limited to content) available to your students within your learning environment reflect the breadth of possibilities in their present and future work?

Prompt 8: Multimodal learning environments should cater for all our students' needs, reflecting diversity by (universal) design.

Question 8: Are you designing with your students' full diversity in mind, enabling the widest possible range of learners to engage without needing adjustments?

Assemblage

Prompt 9: Multimodal learning environments should be assembled by a variety of stakeholders, including students as co-creators, in a non-hierarchical setting that allows for diverse expertise(s) and represents non-human as well as human agency.

Question 9: Who or what is represented in the design of learning environments in your context, and does this design process make space for multiple voices and agencies, especially students'?

Prompt 10: Multimodal learning environments do not respect traditional boundaries such as classroom walls or traditional academic hierarchies: pedagogic design should reflect this.

Question 10: How does your learning environment facilitate learners (and other stakeholders) to cross boundaries and challenge established hierarchies?

Reflexivity

Prompt 11: Multimodal learning environments challenge learners and teachers to critically rethink their assumptions on issues such as ethics, assessment and learning technologies.

Question 11: How can we empower reflexive innovation, allowing staff and students to challenge their own and others' assumptions?

Prompt 12: Multimodal learning experiences have reflection-and-action built into their design, encouraging staff and students to reflect, evaluate and move forward.

Question 12: Where in your context do learners and/or teachers (1) reflect and evaluate and (2) create change or new practice as a result of this reflection and/or evaluation?

Practice

The Practical lens

Reflecting what people and their organisation do in relation to multimodality in their experience of designing or engaging in higher education.

Pedagogy

Prompt 13: Multimodal learning environments should integrate active, experiential learning opportunities that allow students to explore, experiment, and take risks in simulated real-life situations, while leveraging digital tools and emerging technologies to personalise the learning experience.

Question 13: How does your pedagogical approach incorporate simulated and authentic scenarios that enable students to learn from mistakes without fear of judgment, and utilise digital tools and emerging technologies to tailor content and assessments to individual student needs?

Prompt 14: Multimodal learning environments should adapt to the changing digital landscape, embrace new technologies for content creation, assessment design, and feedback delivery, and address challenges such as AI-related plagiarism and the need for digital fluency.

Question 14: In what ways does your curriculum design and assessment strategy evolve to incorporate emerging technologies for content creation, formative assessment, and personalised feedback, while also promoting digital fluency and addressing ethical concerns?

Culture

Prompt 15: Multimodal learning environments should foster a culture of innovation and adaptability, addressing post-pandemic challenges while embracing the potential of evolving digital tools and multimodal technologies in higher education.

Question 15: How does your institution nurture a supportive culture that empowers staff and students to navigate the rapidly changing educational landscape, while addressing

psychological and social challenges emerging from the pandemic, and mitigating potential bias or homogenisation?

Prompt 16: Multimodal learning environments should balance the shift towards digital and remote learning with the need for social connection and hands-on experiences, reconsidering the role of physical campus spaces and in-person interactions in the learning process.

Question 16: In what ways does your educational approach integrate digital tools and multimodal technologies while preserving valuable aspects of traditional learning, such as practical sessions and interactive activities, and how do you communicate their value to students in the evolving digital landscape?

Connections

Prompt 17: Multimodal learning environments leverage digital platforms and tools to not only foster meaningful connections between students, educators, and industry, but also address challenges of distraction and reduced agency in an increasingly digital world.

Question 17: How does your educational approach utilise digital platforms and tools to create authentic connections to professional practice, and develop students' ability to focus and maintain agency in their learning process?

Prompt 18: Multimodal learning environments should seamlessly integrate employability skills and industry connections into the curriculum, preparing students for the AI-driven workplace while meeting measurable outcome expectations.

Question 18: In what ways does your curriculum design bridge the gap between academic learning and digital workplace needs, and how do you measure the effectiveness of these connections?



Innovation

The Innovative lens

Reflecting what people and their organisations would like to do by incorporating multimodalities in their experience of designing or engaging in higher education.

Change

Prompt 19: Multimodal learning environments should embrace technological innovations as catalysts for positive change in higher education, addressing concerns about workload, equity, and the need for institutional support.

Question 19: How does your institution support and incentivise academic staff to adopt innovative multimodal approaches, enhancing their teaching effectiveness and potentially reducing workload, while also ensuring equitable access to digital tools?

Prompt 20: Multimodal learning environments should foster a culture of continuous adaptation and learning among staff and students, promoting connections across time, space, and various learning artifacts through reflective and dialogic practices.

Question 20: What strategies does your institution employ to guide the transition from early adopters to widespread implementation of multimodal learning approaches, ensuring the change process promotes reflection, dialogue, and the development of critical digital literacies among both staff and students?

Organisation and management



Prompt 21: Multimodal learning environments should be developed through a strategic approach that balances centralised guidance with disciplinary flexibility, ensuring coherent integration across all aspects of the institution's infrastructure and support services.

Question 21: How does your institution balance centralised oversight of multimodal tools with the flexibility required for discipline-specific implementation? In what ways do you ensure coherent integration of these approaches across physical spaces, virtual learning environments, and support services?

Prompt 22: Multimodal learning environments, implemented through carefully managed processes, should involve stakeholder collaboration, piloting, and the development of shared understanding and good practices across the institution.

Question 22: What strategies does your institution employ to pilot, evaluate, and scale up new multimodal and AI-enhanced learning approaches? How do you foster collaboration among different institutional departments and external partners to create a cohesive, feedback-rich environment that supports both staff and student development in this context?

Support

Prompt 23: Multimodal learning environments should provide comprehensive, ongoing support that addresses both technical and emotional needs, fostering a sense of community and belonging while developing digital fluency across diverse proficiency levels.

Question 23: How does your institution design and implement support structures that address the emotional and social aspects of learning in multimodal environments, and provide continuous technical and academic skill development to harness multimodality in higher education?

Prompt 24: Multimodal learning environments should offer tailored, accessible support mechanisms that empower both staff and students to confidently engage with new technologies and pedagogies, maintaining connections to professional learning communities and peer support networks.

Question 24: What strategies does your institution employ to build confidence and competence in multimodal learning, teaching, and assessment across diverse digital proficiency levels? How do you ensure that support systems compensate for the potential loss of in-person mentorship and peer support in increasingly digital and hybrid learning environments?

This chapter has been designed to help you generate reflections and ideas for your own practice in learning, teaching and assessment. Now that you have some more specific ways forward, you may wish to return to the other chapters of the Playbook for inspiration on how multimodality might be implemented through different tools and in different educational contexts.