

Images, politics and multiliteracies: Using a visual metalanguage

■
Jon Callow

Over a period of 10 weeks, a Year 6 class in south-western Sydney had been learning about the theme of democracy, both in terms of the Australian systems of government and also in their own school context, where they were promoting themselves for election in the role of school Environmental Officer. Part of their studies focused on the persuasive role of images in political advertising. In a small group discussion about the various political pamphlets the students had studied, the question was asked about the types of pictures politicians might select for their advertising.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | What sort of pictures would they choose? |
| Kyle | Portraits. |
| Abeer | They would probably take ten before they chose them. |
| Mike | They [would] probably take photos of them helping people and orphans and things. |
| Researcher | Why? |
| Mike | It gives the impression of them caring and helping. |
| Researcher | Why would they do this? |
| All | To get people to vote for them. |

The practical application of what have been termed 'new literacies' or 'multiliteracies' involves students in viewing, creating and critiquing multimodal texts – texts which can include spoken, written, visual, aural and interactive aspects (New London Group, 2000; Unsworth, 2001). The need for these types of literacies is apparent not only for pragmatic reasons of employment in the future, but in the need for students to be informed and critical participants in the political realm of their communities and countries, particularly in communities that experience political marginalisation through low socio-economic status. Powerfully persuasive images and multimedia need to be met with equally powerful tools for discussion, critique and analysis. One aspect of the multiliteracies concept is the use of a visual metalanguage to assist in this task.

The role of images is particularly salient, given our move to a more 'visual culture' (Mirzoeff, 1999). The inclusion of visual literacy in the school curriculum is both an exciting and confronting challenge. While Australian educators have taken on aspects of literacy such as critical literacy, genres and functional grammars to varying extents, the current theorising on the nature of literacy not only broadens the notion of text to include visual, multimodal and electronic hypertexts (Garton, 1997;

Snyder, 1997) , but also sees some educators in the field calling for a broader re-theorisation of what literacy might or should mean in the new millennium (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2000a; Luke & Elkins, 1998; Semali, 2001). However, this re-theorisation of literacy needs to be accompanied by practical classroom curriculum ideas and pedagogies, which teachers can implement in current contexts. At the same time, these ideas and pedagogies need to be shaped and critiqued in response to ongoing research by informed practitioners and research partnerships. With this in mind, this paper presents research on the inclusion of a visual metalanguage into an integrated curriculum learning environment within the framework of a social justice agenda. It will be argued that the inclusion of a metalanguage, combined with relevant and challenging content and teaching approaches, scaffolds the students enabling them to make sophisticated and critical interpretations about their own work and the work of others.

Theoretical considerations

Visual literacy needs to be considered in the wider context of the work on multiliteracies. Educators and researchers alike are noting the need to address the increasingly visual nature of our global and technology based cultures (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Bearne, 2003; Brice Heath, 2000; Downes & Zammit, 2001; Kress, 2000b; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001), as well as deepening students' understanding of more traditional visual texts, such as children's literature and information books (Anstey & Bull, 2000; Arizpe, 2001; Unsworth, 2002).

In line with the explicit social justice agenda, the paper considers two key elements as crucial – the use of a metalanguage in teaching about visual texts and the wider pedagogical frameworks used in literacy education. Currently influential in the area of multimodality and visual images is theory drawing primarily on the areas of linguistics and semiotics. Seeking to analyse and critically view visual images, researchers have extrapolated from work in systemic functional linguistics and developed a visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; O'Toole, 1994). The benefits of such an approach includes consideration of the social and cultural context of visual texts, and a commitment to the broader field of 'critical literacy' in education (Luke, 2000; New London Group, 2000). The practical application of this metalanguage in the classroom has been developed more recently, where educators are using some of this visual grammar in classroom contexts (Callow, 1999a; Callow & Zammit, 2002; Stenglin & Iedema, 2001; Unsworth, 2001; Zammit, 2000).

Literacy pedagogy necessarily sits within the wider context of educational pedagogy. This research project took place within a wider research project focusing on engagement and pedagogy with students whose communities are classified as low socio-economic status (SES). This

wider project is the 'Fair Go Project' (FGP) from the University of Western Sydney, and it developed a research partnership with the Priority Schools Funding Project (PSFP) to work with public schools in south-western Sydney. The PSFP is underpinned by principles of social justice and equity, with a view to eliminating the achievement gap in learning outcomes for students adversely affected by socio-economic situations (NSW Department of Education and Training: Equity Programs Directorate, 2004). Traditionally, students from these areas show low retention rates at school, poor academic achievement and early disengagement with school in general (Fair Go Team, in press). Informed by research into authentic and productive pedagogies (Hayes et al., 2000; Newmann, 1996), the FGP argues that when students are 'strongly engaged they are successfully involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and they have passionate, positive feelings about these tasks. Put another way, engagement is when the cognitive, the affective and the operative are occurring together at high levels' (Fair Go Team, in press, p. 12). Pedagogies that feature student engagement, intellectual quality, relevance, supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference enhance educational outcomes for all students, including those from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds work. One facet of the overall project was to explore the role of visual literacy in engaging students and enhancing their overall school experiences.

With this definition of engagement, the pedagogy and associated learning activities around visual literacy considered the affective impact of engaging with images, as well as the cognitive and operative knowledge and skills. Appropriate pedagogies for teaching literacy should not only involve meaningful and challenging learning experiences that develop students' repertoires of literacies (Ailwood et al., 2000; Unsworth, 2002), but also be enjoyable and culturally relevant. Teaching about visual literacy should provide students with a sound understanding of visual and multimodal texts (including their attendant grammatical and contextual features) and also carefully support these learning experiences with appropriate modelling and scaffolding. The concept of scaffolding literacy learning draws on the view that learning about language is an active, social semiotic process, where language is a powerful and ideologically infused resource (Halliday, 1978). Implicit here is a social constructivist model, where the 'teacher and students are seen as actively engaged in the process of negotiating understandings' (Hammond, 2001, p. 21). There is a strong body of work in literacy teaching that demonstrates the application and value of scaffolding approaches in literacy teaching, for first and second language learners (Disadvantaged Schools Program (N.S.W.) Metropolitan East Region, 1994; Gibbons, 2002; Hammond, 2001; Jones, 1996; Van Kraayenoord et al., 2001).

A critical literacy aspect is particularly relevant to a social justice

agenda. Unsworth (2001) suggests moving students from informal, tacit knowledge to transformative knowledge. Transformative knowledge is an understanding that what appears to be a 'natural' view of the world is 'actually a view produced by particular combinations of historical, social, political influences, and that alternative combinations of these influence could produce different views' (Unsworth, 2001, p. 19). Therefore, teaching students about how texts work is entwined with learning about the social, political and textual structures, and also with the ongoing learning relationship between teacher and student. If this learning relationship is informed by socially just and equitable principles around language and education, then the literacy learning should also reflect a pedagogy with intellectual quality and rigour, equally committed to high cognitive, operative and affective dimensions of engagement.

With the previous elements in mind, this paper reports on a classroom where a variety of texts (written, visual and multimodal) were integrated around the topic of Democracy. Students were scaffolded in their learning about multimodal and visual texts, including aspects of visual design and grammar, as well as critical analysis regarding the use of images in politics and election advertising. It will be argued that the combination of these factors facilitated a deep understanding of visual texts for students as well as building their critical literacy skills and enhancing their engagement with literacy learning.

The research context

As part of the FGP, the researcher worked with the teacher of this Year 6 class at a suburban public school for the duration of their work on democracy. The class consisted of 28 students, with 60% having English as a second language. Whilst including work on issues of equity and productive pedagogies (Ailwood et al., 2000; Fair Go Team, in press), the research project also focused on the inclusion of visual literacy as part of the literacy program for the term. The partnership involved shared planning of a unit of work, including some specific visual literacy lessons, and then the shared teaching of these lessons, usually once a week, when the researcher visited the class. In addition to regular face to face discussion, email correspondence was set up to allow the classroom teacher to share other observations and comments about the learning experiences. This collaboration was also used to plan or modify future lessons or directions in the class program.

The work on democracy was part of the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) topic for the term. English was integrated into this program, where students were involved in reading, writing, talking and listening activities, the use of technology, as well as viewing and creating visual texts. The unit of work built up the field knowledge of the story of Australian democracy and how the electoral system operates. Students were involved in creating an election pamphlet for the position of the

Environmental Officer in the school. This pamphlet included written text (testimonials, lists of jobs that would be accomplished, etc.), as well as visual features (photographs of the candidates, headings, clip art and layout of the pamphlet as a whole). Fortuitously, a national election was taking place at the time of the work, providing many examples of posters, pamphlets and news stories.

Data was collected over the 10 week period of the unit. As well as post-lesson discussion with the teacher, video tapes of some lessons were made to complement observational and interview data. Students were asked to comment on their completed work, with specific questions about the processes they used, why they thought their work was effective, and some questions about the truth value or reliability of political pamphlets in general. These discussions were completed in small groups and transcripts of the interviews were coded, focusing on their use of specific visual terms, as well as their comments about the believability of political pamphlets. Their final products were also analysed in terms of the type of shots and angles evident in their photos.

Specific visual concepts and visual grammar terms were taught as part of the visual literacy focus, using the application of systemic linguistics to visual images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This functional semiotic model has three metafunctional aspects that combine to describe a visual text. They are:

- The representational aspect, constructing the events, participants and objects involved, as well as the circumstances in which they occur. In an 'action' image, there are often lines that lead the eye, such as objects or parts of objects such as arms or legs, the side of a building, a path, or even the suggested gaze of a character's eyes. These are referred to as *vectors*. For example, a character, such as Little Red Riding Hood, is shown running (outstretched legs) down the trail (visual line) through the woods (circumstance or setting). Some representations may be conceptual or symbolic, without action or movement. A portrait of an attractive model might suggest beauty, or a fresh food display may suggest health and vitality.
- The interactive aspect, which describes the relationships constructed between the viewer and what is viewed. These can involve power relations, emotional reactions and issues of objectivity and subjectivity of an image. This relationship is construed by aspects such as angles (high, low or eye level), whether a represented participant is looking at the viewer or not (demand or offer), the use of shot lengths (close, mid or long), and the use of colour to suggest feelings or mood.
- The compositional aspect, which is concerned with the layout and information value among the visual elements in an image. The layout of a page includes the use of salience to draw a viewer's

Activities and discussion prompts to explore application of the representational	Activities and discussion prompts to explore application of the interactive	Activities and discussion prompts to explore application of the compositional
<p>Picture Book Are the characters doing things in the picture? Tell me what's happening. Are there any strong 'action lines' or vectors in the picture? (such as a character's outstretched arm or leg) Re-draw the same picture to show different actions by the characters. How do the pictures tell you where the story is happening? Does the picture make you think of an idea or concept? (For example, what it means to be powerful or weak, rich or poor, plain or beautiful, kind or mean.)</p> <p>Factual texts: What information is the image presenting? Show me on the page/screen where you found that information. Does the image classify or order the information to explain a concept? Has the illustrator/designer used labels or captions? What types of images are used? (diagrams, photos, graphs, etc.)</p>	<p>Discuss how angles position the viewer when looking at an image. Have a student stand on a chair and look down on the class – what effect does this have? How does it feel to look down? How does it feel to be looked down upon? What about eye level? Draw a character or person using different angles (high, low or eye level). How does it change our reaction to them? What is the effect when they are looking directly at you? (demand/offer)</p> <p>Point out shot lengths and framing in books, advertisements or videos. Close up or long shot? – discuss how much we get to see and how it makes us feel about the person.</p> <p>Look at how colour is used in an information book, a story or a web site. Is colour used to make a character feel a certain way? Is colour used to create stereotypes? Read a series of books (e.g. the Spot books by Eric Hill) and compare the use of colours for the characters.</p>	<p>Screen or page layout: What things can you see on the screen/ page? What part catches your eye first? (salience) What parts are on the left and the right? Top or bottom? Why do you think they are there? Web site: Which part of the screen would you click on to find information about your topic? Why?</p> <p>As a precursor to designing their own visual or multimodal texts, cut up some of the texts you have been viewing (pamphlets, junk mail, factual text spread) either using a photocopied version or digitally. Have students re-arrange the elements and justify the choices for their layout.</p>

Table 1. Suggested activities (adapted from Image Matters (Callow, 1999a))

attention to an element on the page (such as size or colour), the reading path to which the viewers eye might be guided on the page, and the valuing of elements by placement on the top or bottom, left or right of the page. (Callow, 1999b; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Unsworth, 2001)

Suggested activities and discussion prompts to illustrate the application of the functional semiotic model in the classroom are shown in Table 1.

From this model, the interactive aspect feature of angles (used to construe power relationships) and the notion of shot distance (to create viewer rapport) were chosen to be the most relevant features to concentrate on for this unit of work. This focus related explicitly to the curriculum content of democracy and elections, and to the work on persuasive texts linked to the election campaign. Generally the researcher introduced these specific visual features in lessons during the weekly visits, while the classroom teacher then built on or followed up the concepts during the rest of the week.

In order for the students to produce not only an effective pamphlet for their campaign, but also to develop critical viewing skills and a visual metalanguage, careful scaffolding of the teaching/learning activities was required. This sequence involved contextualising their work in what they had learned about democracy, introducing the concepts of visual images being used to persuade, modelling the specific features of a political pamphlet, discussion of the use of these features to persuade the viewer/voter, and finally creating their own work, using the scaffolded learning experiences to guide them (Downes & Zammit, 2001).

This particular teaching approach was complemented by Fair Go Project's work on student engagement. In planning the unit with the classroom teacher, she made particular mention of the need to connect the concepts about Australian Democratic practices to students' own experiences and contexts, such as school and family structures, in order for them to engage with the more abstract concepts about democracy in general. In the context of a very supportive classroom environment, this planning provided intellectual quality and contextual relevance with a recognition of the difference for these specific students.

According to the classroom teacher, the students had very little previous experience with learning about images, or using an explicit metalanguage to describe them. As part of assessment prior to the unit, the Anthony Browne picture book 'Zoo' was read to the students. Children's literature is rich source of visual images, and one with which all the students were familiar. After discussion of the story, two images from the book were chosen. One showed a low angle shot of the father, staring menacingly down on the viewer, while the other image showed a high angle shot of the young boy sitting in a bare room, with the shadow of

bars cast over him. Students were asked to comment on the effectiveness of each image. Tables 2 and 3 map their responses to either the representational, interactive or compositional metafunctions for each image.

The most commonly mentioned features come under the representational category. This metafunction is linked perhaps to the most

Table 2. Response to picture book image – Low angled mid shot of father looking down at the viewer with angry expression. Clouds in sky behind him form horns on his head.

Feature mentioned by students as making the image effective	No. of Student comments related to this feature of the image (total no. of students participating 21)
<i>Representational</i>	
Expression of man / his emotions	19
Use of symbols, e.g. clouds as horns	16
Size of the man, e.g. big guy	10
Facial features, e.g. nose & eyes	9
Location – Background	2
His stance (standing tall)	1
<i>Interactive</i>	
Angle (low)	8
Close up	5
Use of Colours	3
Demand – man looks directly at viewer	1
<i>Compositional</i>	
Size of element / figure. e.g. he fills page	1
Salience of element, e.g. man takes attention as main element	1

Table 3. Response to picture book image – High angled long shot of the young boy sitting on the floor of a cage with shadows of bars cast on him.

Feature mentioned by students as making the image effective	No. of student comments related to this feature of the image (total no. of students 21)
<i>Representational</i>	
Expression/body position of boy/his emotions, e.g. folded arms, head down	20
Use of symbols, e.g. bars, shadows	14
Location – in cage/jail	11
<i>Interactive</i>	
Colours	4
Shot type, e.g. long	0
Angle (high)	0
<i>Compositional</i>	
Size of element/figure	0
Salience of element, e.g. boy as main figure or bars as main element	0

‘common sense’ understandings of image, i.e. describing the people or objects in an image and the actual events or activities that they are involved with, as well as the circumstances or location of that activity. Although some students mentioned angles and shot type for the first image, none commented on this in the second image. On reflection, some follow-up interviews with students about their responses might have allowed them to demonstrate other interpretations of the image which showed understanding of interactive or compositional features. As well, some comments about the size of the man could have been interpreted as both representational and interactive elements. However, these initial written responses seemed to suggest that while most students were quite able to interpret physical and symbolic ‘actions’ within

with image, they did not possess a more extensive metalanguage for visual texts, which allowed them to describe more than the simple ‘happenings’ of the pictures.

In order to develop an integrated approach to teaching visual literacy, the teaching/learning activities of the unit included the following:

- sorting of photos into categories such as friendly/unfriendly, trustworthy/untrustworthy
- sorting photos according to the purpose for which they might be used, e.g. for a fashion advertisement, an information book or CD ROM, family holiday photos
- viewing and sorting images according to the use of angles to create power relationships, and shot distance to suggest intimacy or detachment. These included a variety of political images, which were numerous, given the election campaign
- deconstructing a political pamphlet by annotating the various features such as the title, type of photos, type of information included, etc., as well as the type of written texts that were included, such as testimonials
- re-constructing a political pamphlet using the computer to manipulate the images
- designing their own political pamphlet for the role of Environmental Officer in the school.

The final activity became one of the key texts students were to create. As well as developing their understanding of the visual features, designing a political pamphlet related to their own school, making a stronger connection between the more abstract concept of democracy and the students own life experiences. The activity also encouraged ownership of the task, personalising it for each student. All these aspects also supported the concepts of student engagement involving high affective, cognitive and operative, argued for in the Fair Go project.

As students worked on their pamphlets, they had to include elements such as their name, the purpose of the pamphlet (to campaign for Environmental Officer at the school), two digital photos, their qualities, jobs they would do and testimonials from other students. Using the digital camera allowed them to experiment with their photos, and re-take any that they were not happy with. After completing a rough copy on paper, students then used a desktop publishing program to layout their pamphlet, complete with digital images, and clip art.

An important point to note about the above activities was the strong scaffolding for students not only in the visual elements, but in the continual reference back to the purpose of the task, that of creating a persuasive text. At the same time, discussion about the use of images to persuade was also linked to the truth value of political advertising. This critical literacy aspect was crucial, not only in exploring the electoral and

democratic processes, but also in understanding the constructed nature of any election advertising and what questions might need to be asked when viewing the material and deciding how one might vote. As a result of this work, issues such as photo location, shot length and angles, and how political advertising uses image to influence potential voters were analysed.

Representing yourself – making an impression

The understandings that students already came with regarding the actual happenings in an image were further developed by talk about and design of their own photos. As they worked and discussed their own photos in particular, it was clear that they had thought about the circumstances or location of the shot, as well as what they were doing in the image.

When asked why he chose a particular photo (See Figure 1), Julian (NB – pseudonyms for names and school have been used) explained:

Julian	It shows that I'm caring about the environment.
Researcher	Why? What are you doing?
Julian	I'm inspecting the plants



Figure 1. Julian's pamphlet.

Other students made reference to the fact that they chose trees and plants to be in the background to show the natural environment, as Environmental Officer was the job they were promoting themselves for.

One student linked the choice of location to the type of shot she had used:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Rachael | I picked a mid shot so people could like see your face and the background as well ... |
| Researcher | And what background have you chosen? |
| Rachael | Flowers. |

While most photos showed them just standing in the environment, some students showed themselves picking up paper or ‘inspecting’ the plants. Nearly all the students included a photo of themselves with younger members of the school community. While it could be argued that some students were simply emulating their peers in having similar photos, the comments many students made showed more agency in their choices. Having analysed and critiqued the political pamphlet, they were aware of the purpose of this type of photo. When asked about the effect of having them standing with a group of younger children, some commented that it made them seem friendly, approachable and able to communicate with people. One girl suggested that having a photo of her with younger students showed that she could ‘be friendly with people not only my age but also those who are younger and older’. The combination of this more critically oriented understanding, combined with the active use of the digital camera, the choice of their own photo setting and observed enjoyment of the task also demonstrated high levels of the affective, cognitive and operative fields, supported the Fair Go Project’s concept of student engagement.

Interacting with the viewer – shot distance and angles

Of the 21 students, 14 chose to use a mid-shot for both the individual and group photos (see Table 4). From student responses in small group discussions, it was clear that many of them had chosen to use particular shot lengths for a purpose. One reason was recognition, so that the people who were voting for them could recognise their face and also their personality.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Researcher | Why did you choose a mid shot? |
| Sally | Because if I had a long shot, people wouldn’t have been able to see my face very well, which shows my personality and facial expressions. |

Being able to view the photos immediately when using the digital camera allowed students to quickly see the result of their shot choice, and to change it if they so desired. Students also commented that a mid-shot allowed the background to be seen, further reinforcing the purpose of the pamphlet. The familiarity with which they used the metalanguage (long, medium or close shot) was important, but the articulation by the majority of students as to why they chose them is more significant here.

The use of angles was limited almost exclusively to the use of eye

Table 4. Type of shot employed in student photos.

	Individual photo No. of students using this aspect (21 students total)	Group photo with other students No. of students using this aspect (18 students total)
Long shot	6	4
Mid shot	14	14
Close up	1	0



Figure 2. Low angle shot from pamphlet

level. While most students did not comment on this, one student noted that she ‘used a mid shot eye level so that it’s like we’re just the same, it’s just going for the job.’ She was trying to suggest an equality and identification with those who might vote for her. Only one student chose to use a low angle shot. When questioned, he explained that he did so because he wanted to appear more powerful (see Figure 2).

While the variety of shot choices was fairly limited in the photos themselves, what was significant were the students’ explanations of what effects they thought their particular choices engendered.

Critical literacy

Students were also asked about their understanding of political pamphlets and whether they thought that specific photographs were chosen in order to present politicians in a positive fashion. When asked whether they thought a politician chose to include some pictures and leave others out when designing a pamphlet, most agreed with the statement. They were also asked about the types of photos that politicians would include. Here students drew on the ideas developed about persuasive and powerful types of photos. Their responses to the types of images that they thought would be used by politicians included:

- Happy pictures
- Strong and nice
- Friendly ones
- Angry face (‘they know he’s tough, serious’)
- Helping people.

Many of the students also identified that even if the politician was

not necessarily friendly, they would still use these types of shots in order to persuade voters.

One student also drew on the visual metalanguage to further explain her point:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Researcher | What pictures would they choose to put in, do you think? |
| Joanne | Well, it depends on their character and what they are like. If they were like a good person they would choose a friendly shot, and if they wanted to seem dominant and powerful, they would have a close up shot or a mid shot looking powerful. |
| Researcher | What if they weren't a very nice person, do you think they would put some nasty looking shots in? |
| Joanne | No, they want to appeal to you. |
| Researcher | Ok, so even if they weren't a nice person, they'd probably use what sort of shots do you think? |
| Joanne | They'd probably try putting friendly pictures or, if they couldn't, powerful pictures. |
| Researcher | Why would they put friendly pictures, because they are trying to do what? |
| Joanne | They are trying to attract you and persuade you to vote for them. |

The comments from students about the 'truth' value and constructed nature of political pamphlets showed a significant understanding regarding critical literacy practices, particularly in regard to images. Whilst only a beginning in many ways, their understanding and application of the visual metalanguage, combined with explicit discussion about actual election advertising, showed engagement with some of the key issues of critical practice, such as how a viewer is positioned, how that position might be constructed visually, and the ability to articulate a critique about information presented in the media. This type of understanding arguably demonstrates a development towards a more 'transformative' knowledge about visual and multimodal texts (Unsworth, 2001, p. 19).

Conclusion

This research into the introduction of a visual metalanguage as part of an integrated unit on Australian Democracy suggests that it not only provides students with a rich vocabulary to describe images, but also supports more critical interpretations about their own work and the texts they encounter in the wider social and cultural contexts. Integrating this semiotic knowledge with appropriate pedagogies around literacy and student engagement further supported students in understanding, applying and enjoying their learning in this classroom.

The initial assessment around the students' metalanguage suggested that there was common sense knowledge about the way images repre-

sented actions in a narrative, with some initial understanding of interactive aspects in terms of power relations in image construction. The development over the unit of work and subsequent observation and assessment of specific visual elements, such as shot choices, angles and the importance of setting for persuasive images showed most students were not only able to use the metalanguage, but to understand how it applied to their own work, as well as to texts they were viewing. This application was particularly important when dealing with a critical interpretation of political pamphlets. Many students' comments about the why a particular shot would be used, in either their own work or in a political pamphlet, shows that there is a more transformative knowledge being demonstrated. In simple terms, they understood that someone had made choice in creating an image in order to influence the viewer.

The issues of pedagogical approaches is also a key aspect. The introduction of the visual metalanguage was contextualised in the Human Society and Its Environment theme on Australian Democracy. The teaching and learning activities for these students provided a variety of sample texts to explore, including various 'hands on' activities, in order to manipulate visual texts and scaffolded students in the initial stages of learning. Support was then gradually withdrawn to allow students independence in developing their new skills. The learning activities were varied and involved a variety of operative skills (sorting images, using the digital camera, manipulating images on screen, etc.), cognitive demands (interpreting images in context, justifying the choice of angles and shots, analysing political pamphlets, etc.) and high affective engagement. The affective aspect would be the combination of purposeful activities around images with negotiated learning situations, which 'bring about mutually stimulating and enjoyable emotions associated with classroom work' (Fair Go Team, in press, p. 14). It can be argued, then, that the literacy pedagogy of explicit teaching and modelling was enhanced and complemented by the broader pedagogies around student engagement.

The significance of this work is shown not just in the particular achievements of this classroom, but also in the demonstration of some key principles. If students are to develop a variety of thorough and powerful multiliteracies, they need access to some type of metalanguage that includes specific grammatical, contextual and cultural understandings. This needs to be combined with a critical literacy that provides the questions and tools to assist them in both enjoying and critiquing what they see, hear and view. As demonstrated here, a pedagogy that includes both explicit teaching, scaffolding and student ownership is another key factor. Complementing this is a focus on student engagement in the classroom, which involves developing relevant, challenging and intellectually rigorous learning experiences, particularly for students from traditionally lower academically achieving backgrounds. The inclusion of

these elements has the potential to improve the quality of learning not only of multiliteracies but the deeper understandings that lead to challenging and engaged learning for all students.

References

- Ailwood, J., Chant, D., Gore, J., Hayes, D., Ladwig, J., Lingard, B., et al. (2000). *The Four Dimensions of Productive Pedagogies: Narratives and Findings from the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study*. Paper presented at the American Education Research Association Annual Conference, New Orleans.
- Alvermann, D.E. & Hagood, M. (2000). Critical media literacy: Research, theory, and practice in 'new times'. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(3), 193–205.
- Anstey, M. & Bull, G. (2000). *Reading the Visual – Written and Illustrated Children's Literature*. Sydney: Harcourt.
- Arizpe, E. (2001). 'Letting the story out': Visual encounters with Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel*. *Reading Literacy and Language*, 35(3), 115–119.
- Bearne, E. (2003). Rethinking literacy: Communication, representation and text. *Literacy*, 37(3), 98–103.
- Brice Heath, S. (2000). Seeing our way into learning. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(1), 121–132.
- Callow, J. (Ed.) (1999a). *Image Matters – Visual Texts in the Classroom*. Marrickville, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Callow, J. (1999b). Reading the visual: An introduction. In J. Callow (Ed.), *Image Matters – Visual Texts in the Classroom*. Marrickville, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Callow, J., & Zammit, K. (2002). Visual literacy: From picture books to electronic texts. In M. Monteith (Ed.), *Teaching Primary Literacy with ICT*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. South Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Disadvantaged Schools Program (NSW). Metropolitan East Region. (1994). *Write it Right: Resources for Literacy and Learning*. Erskineville, NSW: Disadvantaged Schools Program, Metropolitan East Region, NSW Dept. of School Education.
- Downes, T. & Zammit, K. (2001). New literacies for connected learning in global classrooms. A framework for the future. In P. Hogenbirk & H. Taylor (Eds.), *The Bookmark of the School of the Future*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Fair Go Team. (in press). *School is For Me: Pathways to Student Engagement*. Sydney: NSW Dept. of Education and Training.
- Garton, J. (1997). New genres and new literacies: The challenge of the virtual curriculum. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 20(3), 209–221.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Baltimore: University Park Press.
- Hammond, J. (2001). *Scaffolding: Teaching and Learning in Language and Literacy Education*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Hayes, D., Lingard, B. & Mills, M. (2000). Productive pedagogies. *Education Links*, 60.
- Jones, P. (1996). *Talking to Learn*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

- Kress, G. (2000a). A curriculum for the future. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(1), 133–145.
- Kress, G. (2000b). Design and transformation: New theories of meaning. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. South Melbourne: Macmillan, 153–161.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 448–461.
- Luke, A. & Elkins, J. (1998). Reinventing literacy in new times. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(1), 4–7.
- Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- New London Group. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. South Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Newmann, F.M. (1996). *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- NSW Department of Education and Training; Equity Programs Directorate. (2004). *Support Document Priority Schools Funding Program 2005–2008*. Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training.
- O'Toole, M. (1994). *The Language of Displayed Art*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Semali, L. (2001). Defining new literacies in curricular practice. *Reading Online*, 5(4).
- Snyder, I. (1997). *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Stenglin, M. & Iedema, R. (2001). How to analyse visual images: A guide for TESOL teachers. In A. Burns & C. Coffin (Eds.), *Analysing English in a Global Context: A Reader*. London: Routledge, in association with Macquarie University and the Open University.
- Sturken, M. & Cartwright, L. (2001). *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Unsworth, L. (2001). *Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum: Changing Contexts of Text and Image in Classroom Practice*. Buckingham, England: Open University.
- Unsworth, L. (2002). Changing dimensions of school literacies. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 25(1), 62–77.
- Van Kraayenoord, C., Moni, K. & Jobling, A. (2001). Putting it all together: Building a community of practice for learners with special needs. *Reading Online*, 5(4). Available: http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=vankraayenoord/index.html.
- Zammit, K. (2000). Computer icons: A picture says a thousand words, or does it? *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 23(2), 217–231.

Copyright of Australian Journal of Language & Literacy is the property of Australian Literacy Educators' Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.