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ABSTRACT The argument for a pedagogy which embraces visual and multimodal representation is well established in academic circles (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and a plethora of literacies congregate around the ever-expanding subject English as the prime site for innovation and development. This paper will focus on one exploratory case study from the Economic and Social Research Council InterActive Education Project¹ to examine how working with multimodal texts creates tensions for English teachers as well as creative opportunities for pupils. Questions around what might be an appropriate pedagogy and metalanguage for the new literacies involved were tested against the models put forward by the New London Group. The process has shown that the development of a viable metalanguage for teaching and assessing multimodal texts is highly problematic and is in need of further empirical study. This cultural work is constrained by the current assessment requirements for English in England and needs to be considered against discussions of what definition of English and literacy we need in the 21st century.

Introduction

The key aim of the InterActive Education Project is to investigate the potential of technology to enhance learning. This is worked out within the complex contexts of classroom practice in primary, secondary and further
education phases. Importantly, the project represents a principled and innovative attempt to bring research and practice closer through real collaboration between teachers, researchers and teacher educators. At the heart of the project is the subject design team, where teachers and researchers have focused on the subject and classroom-specific issues of integrating technology in teaching and learning. From this have come ‘design initiatives,’ lesson sequences which incorporate technology in ways that we hope will enhance learning. There are subject teams in maths, music, science, geography, history, modern foreign languages and English.

The paper is split into a number of interconnected sections. First, we outline briefly some of the competing models of literacy pedagogy. Second, we describe the context, background and focus of the Subject Design Initiative (SDI). This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework for teaching multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group (2000). This is the framework used in the subsequent analysis of the design. Finally, the discussion draws on and adapts the model of multimodal design within the multiliteracies framework in order to generate some principles for redesign in the final stage of the project. A brief summary of these developments in approaches to literacy is provided below.

Models of Literacy Pedagogy

During our meetings, one of the central concerns for the English subject team has been the impact of new literacies and new texts on the identity of the subject English. Of course, the definition of English has always been contested and political (Eagleton, 1983; Ball et al., 1990; Cox, 1991; Davison, 2000). However, within views of English and education the conceptualisation of literacy has become increasingly focal to these debates. The anxieties of English teachers in the team reflect the academic debates in terms of competing models of literacy pedagogy.

Arguably, within schools the Literacy Strategy is a predominantly psychological and operational approach which focuses on the individual’s acquisition of basic skills of language competence (see Lankshear, 1997; Davison, 2000). Other models are based in sociocultural theory drawing on the work of Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, their emphasis being on reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). These place more stress on the social context and social practice of literacy and the key terms here are critical and cultural literacy. Critical literacy has gained some currency in Australian schools, at least in some aspects of curriculum wording (Lankshear, 1997). This approach stresses the active critiquing of power relations within texts in the interests of inclusion and social justice. Critical literacy tackles social issues head-on and unpicks the class and power relations in language and in text. Its aim is to empower—both in a critical analytical sense but also in terms of rewriting, transforming and creating texts (and by implication challenging the social and cultural status
A related response to the changing conditions of literacy practice has been a cultural studies approach which emphasises expanding the objects of literacy study, dissolving distinctions between high and low culture and between subject boundaries (Smyth et al., 1999). This may or may not be combined with a critical literacy method. Recently emerging have been approaches termed the New Literacy Studies or the ‘post critical literacy’ movement (Rowan et al., 2002). The New London Group model is the most prominent and is interesting as a composite of different opinions and approaches of educators and theorists in the field. Although their thinking arises out of cultural and critical literacy approaches, the emphasis is firmly on the ‘new’, on changing out-of-school literacy practices, emergent technologies and practices set within the rapidly evolving social and global environment. In this paper our interest in the New London Group model of literacy pedagogy was prompted by its strong emphasis on a world of increasing complexity and diversity in which change is the only reliable constant.

Within English schools there has also been a government-led imperative to integrate information and communications technology (ICT) into all subjects with heavy investment in terms of training and ICT resources. Early interviews and discussions with teachers in the design team suggested that the predominant practice was to add ICT to the existing curriculum diet. However, at the same time teachers showed a sharp awareness that new technologies were already fundamentally changing literacy practices in out-of-school contexts. This might be seen as an opposition between old and new mindsets towards literacy and technology which arise out of the particular authoritative and conservative conditions of schooling (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, pp. 29–31). Reading the work of the New London Group seemed to connect with the thoughts and ideas operating within the SDI team, particularly those that focused on the pace and complexity of change within a technological environment. The ideas also resonated with the need to find a subject response to the realisation that the relationship between English and ICT is an evolving process rather than a static entity.

One key area of interest for the team was the impact of multimedia software and even simple word processing on the relative importance of design within meaning-making. When technology is used to create texts the visual design element becomes much more obvious. A range of modes of communication is made available which can extend, enhance, counterpoint or even replace language. For instance, new forms of texts such as web sites, PowerPoint presentations, VideoPapers, hypertext stories and interactive poems often combine linguistic, visual, audio and dynamic modes of communication. Our understanding of the process of creating such multimodal texts and our ability to analyse these texts is much less developed than our understanding of the conventions of linguistic communication (Kress, 2000). Whilst theories of how we might understand the relationship between different modes are being developed in theoretical contexts (Kress...
in terms of classroom practice, there is little evidence of settled or settling engagement with the idea of an overarching theory of semiotics.

Despite this lack of an analytical framework, engagement with practices involving multimodality has been implicit in the 18 English Subject Design Initiatives. These have included: using e-mail to develop research skills and critical literacy; using digital cameras and PowerPoint to investigate the grammar of still and moving images; the production of a school newsletter and web site; and working with language software and PowerPoint to develop deep understanding of spelling patterns. All of the designs have taken into account both curriculum constraints and assessment requirements. However, this paper will focus on a design initiative at John Cabot CTC which centred on and deliberately explored multimodality and where the teachers were able to take a more experimental approach, pushing against the curriculum boundaries of the subject.

**Developing a Design: context, background and focus**

Contextual factors are essential in understanding the impact of ICT on pupils’ learning (Gee, 1997). These include the professional and curriculum interests of the teacher and the school ethos and facilities. In this case the teachers Adrian Blight and Chris Davies work in an 11–18 City Technology College with a strong emphasis on business, enterprise and technology and which actively supports curricular innovation and the integration of ICT into subject teaching. Adrian and Chris are experienced teachers of English, confident in teaching using ICT and they both see the need for change within the English curriculum. As Adrian commented:

I think the change needs to come now. Because there’s all these other areas that didn’t exist twenty years ago that are surely part of English—as in the multimedia and all the things about websites, web design ... so that’s a big new area that needs to be looked at, and that will hopefully bring about a lot of change.

As a researcher I worked closely with both teachers to develop the design initiative. It is important to describe the iterative process as it shows the development of our trajectory towards a more transformatory mindset in relation to the new literacy involved (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). In the first phase of the design, Chris and Adrian decided to ask their Year 10 pupils (ages 14–15 years) to produce a multimedia story using PowerPoint which they would then use as a basis for a conventional written story for ‘original writing’ coursework. The idea was that the process of planning, visualising and creating a multimedia story would support pupils in producing a conventional language-based version—a typical ‘add ICT’ to an existing practice approach. However, we all agreed in our evaluations that the translation from multimodal story into written language mode had
proved very problematic. The pupils had for the most part completely changed their story idea when they came to write up the work as a language-based text. Part of the problem lay in the teachers’ assumption that the process of working with the technology would provide the scaffolding for the written task. In fact, the preparation for the written task (reading other story models, discussing ideas, planning, etc.) was still necessary and meant that the time taken to produce the piece of original writing required for coursework was increased from five weeks to seven weeks. More importantly, the teachers felt that there was no discernable improvement in the language-based stories as a result, although they felt that the pupils had learned some ICT skills. This suggested that translating from one mode to another is not necessarily productive. Richard Andrews, in his overview of educational research in English, makes the point that most work in English is about translating from text to text. However, transforming across modes adds a new dimension which in this case seemed to require two quite separate sets of creative activity rather than being a liberating interaction (Andrews, 2001, pp. 125–126). Overall we felt that the different demands and conventions of a multimedia text had not been properly acknowledged and explored within the design.

The professional development which took place in the first design in November 2001 was used to inform the planning and teaching of the second design in July 2002. In the second design we decided to work more fully within the multimodality of a multimedia presentation rather than using the multimodal approach as a teaching tool to facilitate the language mode. We chose to pilot the design with a small group of 12 pupils representing a spread of attainment in English.

The main brief was for the pupils to produce a multimedia presentation promoting John Cabot English department to be shown at an open evening for Year 6 pupils and their parents. The focus would be on teaching and researching the literacy involved in creating a multimedia text. The design took place over six double (80-minute lessons) in ‘enrichment time’ after the SATs, when Year 9 pupils at Cabot are involved in a variety of projects. This allowed us to work outside of the usual curriculum pressures.

The Data

All of the 12 pupils were interviewed in pairs before the design to find out about their prior experience of using ICT and their views of English as a subject. They were also interviewed in their working groups at the end of the design to find out what they thought they had learned from the project. A diagnostic test before the design consisted of an unstructured analysis of a web site. This provided baseline data on pupils’ ability in analysing the multimodal features of this text as well as demonstrating their level of functional literacy. Their planning sheets and the multimedia products
provided evidence of the way that they had chosen to communicate in
different modes. In the final lesson the pupils gave oral presentations
explaining their decisions. This provided video data on how far the pupils
had explicit understanding of their meaning-making process. Their written
evaluations of their multimedia products provided another level of evidence
on their explicit understanding of the process. Two digital video cameras
were used to capture the teacher’s whole-class instruction and the decision-
making process of two pairs of pupils, each lesson for all of the six double
(80-minute) lessons. The focus pupils were selected to provide a contrast
in terms of their attainment. Group 1 (Nick and Zack) had gained a high
level of attainment in English (SATs level 6 and 7) whereas Group 2
(Alan and John) had shown an unusually low level of attainment (SATs
level N—ungraded).

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: towards an analytical framework

The iterative process of design is a complex and often disjointed process—
as we began to work with the design initiative the need for further
theoretical clarification became apparent. As a researcher working across
the subject designs I had already collected and analysed data which showed
frequent instances of English and technology clashing uncomfortably.
Evidence from video data of our subject design meetings and post-design
field notes identified recurrent themes within teachers’ evaluations of the
designs as less successful. The main themes were: technological hitches,
lack of technical support, difficulties with the spatial arrangement of the
computer suite and the tension between the need for coverage of curricu-
lum content against the time taken to set up technology, as well as the time
taken by pupils in their exploratory and often time-consuming uses of
technology. In contrast I felt that in this subject design these concerns were
not being voiced and although there were still technical hitches these were
not seriously impeding the work. I have already reported on the contextual
factors which were salient here but there were also differences in the
pedagogical approach. In order to try to understand this I reread the work
of the New London Group on multiliteracies (2000). It seemed very evident
to me that the teaching that I was observing and recording seemed to
connect with the elements of the model of pedagogy put forward. I began
to reflect on designs which I would evaluate as a teacher and teacher trainer
as ‘successful’ and it seemed to me that this model had something useful
to say about an approach to teaching in a technologically rich environment.
As already highlighted earlier in this paper, the New London Group
propose a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the light of changing times:

In this book, we attempt to broaden this understanding of literacy and
literacy teaching and learning to include negotiating a multiplicity of
discourses. We seek to highlight two principal aspects of this multi-

Cope and Kalantzis are careful to point out that the pedagogy of multi-literacies is building on practice that already exists. The model is intended to draw different theories together to form a four-pronged approach to teaching and learning. Although there is a linear progression implied in the four steps it is stressed that the process of teaching and learning is never neatly linear and that these four approaches may overlap and connect in different ways. This appealed to Adrian as a more open and flexible model than that suggested within the Literacy Strategy. The summary of the four strands is provided here:

**Situated Practice:** immersion in experience and the utilisation of available Designs of meaning, including those from the students' lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces.

**Overt Instruction:** systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding of Designs of meaning and Design processes. In the case of Multiliteracies, this requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the Design elements of different modes of meaning.

**Critical Framing:** interpreting the social and cultural context of particular Designs of meaning. This involves the students' standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context.

**Transformed Practice:** transfer in meaning making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites. (The New London Group, 2000, p. 35)

The pedagogical model is closely related to the shift in the type of literacies to be developed. The ‘burgeoning of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies’ is shown to be characterised by multimodality (see Fig. 1). Within the teaching of the design we found this model useful in prompting discussion about the distinction between the medium (in this case PowerPoint) and the modes of communication that it makes available. It also raised our awareness of the different modes at play within the pupils’ work, although we wanted to question the categories and the way that the circle implies equal status between the modes.

Therefore, in relation to the design taught by Adrian and Chris, certain key questions emerged both from the data and from the consideration of
these ideas about multiliteracies. How does the teacher define a multimedia text and how does he highlight and prioritise different modes within it? How do the pupils understand the different modes within their task and which ones do they prioritise? How does the pedagogy of multiliteracies illuminate this process? What is the identity of the subject culture English within this widening out of the concept of literacy? How does the teacher attempt to define and defend his conception of the subject boundary? What connections do the pupils make between the competing discourses of technology and English?

**Method of Analysis: operationalising the framework**

The main focus of the following section of analysis will be on the way that the teachers begin to build a metalanguage for describing the multimodality of the classroom task and the way that pupils made use of this in their
presentations. The way that the teaching seems to connect with the multiliteracies model of pedagogy is also traced within the analysis. The first level of analysis involved analysing Adrian’s opening presentation to pupils in terms of emergent themes. Through repeated viewing of the video data and working with a transcript of the opening lesson, a number of critical moments of uncertainty in the discourse became apparent. These ‘moments’ were categorised under three clear, but interlinked, themes or tensions in the teaching process:

1. The tension between providing a model and a structure and allowing space for creative innovation;
2. The tension between the metalanguage of multimodality and the key terms and concepts associated with English as a subject culture;
3. The tension between the subject boundary of English and other subject boundaries.

In the second level of analysis the way that the pupils negotiated multimodality was tested against a range of evidence, in particular, their finished multimedia products; video data of their working and their oral presentations; and evidence gathered from the diagnostic tests and interviews.

Analysing the Design. Part 1: the opening lesson

(1) The Tension Between Providing a Model and a Structure and Allowing Space for Creative Innovation

Description of the teaching sequence.

(1) Teacher-led introduction: one lesson.

(a) Adrian outlined the task brief to the pupils.
(b) He asked them to write for 25 minutes about the Star Wars web site under the headings of language, images, layout, colours and interactive features.
(c) He led a 30-minute ‘feedback session’ on the pupils’ analysis of the web site. He projected the Star Wars web site onto the whiteboard at the front of the class and he stood to the side of this in order to address the class, writing up key points over the projected web site. He looked ahead to the final presentation where pupils were asked to reflect on what they had produced.

(2) Pupils work on the design: four double lessons and one single lesson. Pupils have access to computers with PowerPoint, art and image manipulation software, e-mail, college Intranet, Internet and digital cameras.

(3) Pupils present their work: one single lesson. Pupils present their PowerPoints to the class and explain their decisions prompted and questioned by the teacher.
Analysis against the multiliteracies model of pedagogy. We suggest that all the elements of the multiliteracies pedagogical model—to a greater or lesser extent—are demonstrated to some extent in this one episode.

Situated practice. The stress on pupils’ life experiences and literate practices within a real-world context are key to the strand of situated practice. The use of the *Star Wars* web site was well chosen as appropriate to pupils’ current interests (the new film had just been released and many pupils had seen it). This model or available design was used to find out how much pupils already knew about the construction of a multimedia text and to immerse pupils in the analysis of a strong model. Adrian made several references to pupils’ past and current experiences and learning (in this episode these references included: a film they might have seen, examples of familiar logos such as the Arsenal logo and school logo, their SAT exam experience, their work in other subject areas, their knowledge of individual teachers).

During the more autonomous phase there was freedom for pupils to immerse themselves in exploratory activity (a feature that was often missing from designs which followed a Literacy Strategy model of pedagogy). Pupils worked intensively and each group organised themselves and the equipment differently and at any one point in the lesson sequence they were all observed to be at different stages. Pupils were allowed the time to make mistakes and to revise and rework. One group was originally working on a space theme but found this too difficult to sustain so abandoned many of the images that they had found.

Overt instruction. In terms of overt instruction, Adrian’s pedagogical strategy is powerfully didactic in the opening lesson but he gestures towards the next stage of the learning where the focus will be on pupils’ autonomy and decision-making. Adrian was concerned to offer students autonomy in their meaning-making. The tension was evident in the way that he directs very strongly but continually pulled back from this impulse (‘these are just ideas you can throw them away,’ ‘I’m not saying that you have to do this’). However, he was still able to make his didactic strategy work in order to offer categories and linguistic terms which formed part of the metalanguage of the design—a crucial aspect of this strand. The strong model of the web site was mediated by the teachers in the feedback session where the metalanguage was highlighted verbally and through writing over the projected web site.

Within the multiliteracies model, overt instruction refers both to the teacher’s instruction and also to the peer support which was observed in the viewing of the video data. What is important to recognise here was the collaborative approach to working with technology between teachers and pupils as there were many instances of the sharing of expertise between pupils. For instance, the teachers supported and facilitated the problem-
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solving and equipment and information needs of each group with minimal whole-class teaching until the final showing of the presentations.

Critical framing. The presentations themselves offered the opportunity for the teachers to draw out and draw together the learning points. In many ways the opening lesson looked ahead to this through teacher modelling of the type of analysis and metalanguage that pupils would be expected to use in relation to their own multimedia products. The focus during the presentations was on how far the products were appropriate for the purpose and context. The pupils were prompted continually to use the metalanguage—‘You are talking about the dynamic slide sequence here aren’t you?’—and pressed to explain how their decisions fitted the anticipated needs of their audience and how they would work in the context of an open evening amongst the many other displays and events on offer.

Transformed practice. It was significant that the possibility of transformed practice remained only implicit in terms of how pupils might transform and integrate their knowledge of English and their knowledge of ICT through working on this project. Nevertheless, the project provided an opportunity for pupils to use their out-of-school knowledge and practices. For example, two pupils—Alan and John—both showed considerable confidence in locating and using images: Alan is a keen watcher of science fiction and both played computer games at home; these influences can be seen in their work. Adrian, the teacher, raised the possibility of transformed practice in relation to their use of colour when he referred them to what they may have done in a recent art lesson. This was corroborated in the pupil interviews when one pupil claimed that they had learned about the meanings of colour in art, so this intervention can be seen as a successful, if incidental, connection. Another example was highlighted when one pupil shared his work with his form tutor, who was so impressed that he then ‘commissioned’ him to produce a similar presentation about the geography department. However, in terms of the multiliteracies model this remains the most problematic of the strands to realise and to evaluate within a school-wide context.

(2) The Tension Between the Metalanguage of Multimodality and the Key Terms and Concepts Associated with English as a Subject Culture

The opening discussion of the home page showed several instances of familiar English discourse: the notion of character; the adjective ‘dramatic’; the implicit concept of setting; theme (‘it’s Star Wars isn’t it? About battles and wars and fighting’), mood, dramatic effect, and finally the mention of the love scene. Alongside this Adrian explicitly highlighted the language of technology that he wanted the class to integrate into this discourse when he
pronounced: ‘this is the homepage for those of you who don’t know,’ ‘Good looking titles, so you mean the actual fonts … so these are key links are they?’

These technical terms were dropped in but when Adrian talked about colour he showed a more expanded approach. He explained:

Colours are really important. Colours equal mood, red equals danger, white equals peace, blue equals calm, you may have done this in some of your other lessons I don’t know, art maybe.

This aspect of the visual mode would not usually be a key resource for meaning-making in English and it is notable that Adrian drew not on his specialised subject knowledge but on simple ‘folk’ associations with colour. Perhaps Adrian betrayed his uncertainty about his interpretations of colour with his reference to the possibility of this being located in another subject area (art). At the same time he was also connecting with their prior knowledge and raising the possibility of transfer from one domain to another, as we discussed in the previous section on transformed practice. He gave several examples of what colours may mean, explicitly appropriating this mode for the task that they were about to undertake. This was presaged with the following: ‘it’s very important when you think of colours for the English department, hopefully you won’t have black.’ He built the multimodal discourse in discussing the screen by showing how the visual mode can create the ‘English subject’ concepts of mood, theme and character.

Maybe evil maybe darkness adding to the dramatic effect that the picture creates [through the representation of character and the battle theme].

A similar instance occurred when Adrian discussed the interrelationship of the language mode and the layout with the class. He pointed out that ‘the language is very exciting and draws you in but what about the layout … the way that it is encroaching into the picture.’ Chris expanded on this theme and began to analyse the vector at work in the image: ‘it stands out because of where it is on the page and the inner light which draws the eye into the middle which is where it’s meant to be.’ Overall the visual mode was the main focus of Adrian’s analysis because he covered the use of different types of image, layout, background and logos. The audio mode, on the other hand, was much less developed with only one mention of the possibility of having a video clip integrated with the audio track of ‘someone teaching’ or a pupil ‘doing a speech.’ (The web site model did not use sound.) In many ways this is unsurprising since the visual has begun to be acknowledged within English teaching in terms of analysis of media texts; however, the audio mode in terms of music and sound would not usually be a focus except as part of a specific media studies unit. The gestural mode is modeled in terms of Adrian’s presentation of the web site.
which looks ahead to the pupils’ presentations of their products. This aspect of the work is familiar English territory in terms of the development of pupils’ speaking and listening skills. Finally, Adrian acknowledged that the mode of language was too complex to cover in any depth at this point when he reminded the pupils: ‘What did we say about language—it’s a big term …’ but it was singled out as an area to focus on. This sweeping treatment of the language mode might be surprising. However, here we see an instance where Adrian’s subject knowledge is very broad but he felt unable to tackle language with the depth that it warranted given the instructional space and prominence that he had already given to the visual.

Overall, audience and purpose were the main concepts which gave coherence to the analysis; the visual and linguistic modes were also shown to be working together to appeal to particular audiences for particular purposes and all this was situated within the real-world context. As Adrian declared to the group:

*Some people have been paid loads of money to create this website they have thought about all these things and when you do yours whether its on a website or PowerPoint that’s irrelevant right now—you’ve got to think about layout.*

(3) The Tension Between the Subject Boundary of English and Other Subject Boundaries

This project is especially interesting because the pupils and the teachers were actively engaged in a definition and representation of English through the task brief. There was also an interesting reflexivity at work and three of the groups interviewed felt that they had learned more about what defines English at John Cabot. From the teachers’ perspective, Adrian raised the issue of how multimedia fitted within the English curriculum at the first English SDI team meeting and this has been a continuing issue for debate for the team as a whole. Within the framing of the task he referred to art, maths, technology and science. He used art to locate the discussion of colour, mathematics to compare their curriculum content, technology to critique the use of non-standard spelling on the web site and to suggest the idea for an English logo in the same way that technology employs the logo of the misspelt ‘Mr Skillz.’ Science was used in relation to the word ‘databank’, which appeared on the *Star Wars* web site (‘databank which sounds to me very scientific and dull’). The references to other subjects point to the fact that this project was connected with a ‘cross-curricular view’ of English. Just as traditional literacy is the medium for all the subject areas, so multimodal literacy is becoming increasingly important across subject boundaries. But which subject(s) should have an overview of how different modes work together to create meaning?
Analysing the Design. Part 2: the pupils’ perspective

Video Data

The video evidence shows pupils working with high levels of engagement. All the groups voluntarily put in additional hours during lunchtime and during some ‘spare time’ in other lessons. The pupils’ presentations showed awareness of the multimodal in relation to audience and purpose in that they engaged with the visual, the linguistic, and the ‘dynamic’ mode (see Table 1). Here we will focus on the contrasting presentations produced by Group 1, Nick and Zack (higher attainers in English) and Group 2, Alan and John (lower attainers in English). Quotations are taken from video data of their explanations of their decisions to the class as the presentations were running.

Group 1 description. Nick and Zack stressed their use of a uniform background because ‘it looked more professional that way.’ The background was blue with two hands clasped in the centre in green. This symbolised ‘pulling information together’ and ‘communication and cooperation.’ They had downloaded large blocks of largely undigested text from the school web site and included headings such as Key Stage 3 Overview 1, 2 and 3 on separate slides and a slide on the National Literacy Strategy. The text came in word by word and this was ‘to encourage people to read along.’ Lists of recommended reading and recommended authors were illustrated with pictures of book covers and pictures of authors downloaded from the Internet. A slide on ‘Homework—that dreaded word’ was decorated at the top with animated gifs of a smiling face which gradually turned into an evil-looking vampire bat (again downloaded from the Web). Their oral explanation of their multimedia presentation was highly articulate and well argued, although Adrian prompted them to consider the density of the text and the word-by-word delivery.

Group 1 analysis. Nick and Zack certainly show an awareness of the status of written text and official versions of English. Their PowerPoint is text heavy in terms of the convention of ‘snappy’ bullet points. They also use PowerPoint in quite a conventional way in terms of the corporate feel of their presentation. However, although they use a template readily available in PowerPoint they give it their own alternative meaning. The template of two hands meeting across the screen is labelled within the software as meaning ‘Teamwork’ but for Nick and Zack it is a graphical representation of the English department and ‘English’, which they define as ‘communication and cooperation.’ In that this is a definition which allows for possibilities and potentials beyond traditional literacy, it could be viewed within the discourse of critical literacy as a transformative move. There is an interesting tension here between this inclusive and open definition of English and their strong reliance on traditional literacy within the PowerPoint presentation that they have made.
**TABLE 1. Working model for the Redesign**

**MULTIMODAL**

Combining the different modes together with appropriate content, structure and tone to suit audience, context and purpose.

**Audience:** Year 6 pupils and their parents.

**Context:** Open evening for the new Year 6 pupils. Presentations set up on individual computers.

**Purpose:** To persuade pupils and parents to go to John Cabot; to promote the department in the community.

**Form:** A PowerPoint stand-alone presentation.

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<th>Audio</th>
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<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
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<td>Posture</td>
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<td>Punctuation (standard or non standard)</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
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<td>Spelling (standard or non standard)</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
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Group 2 description. Group 2 (Alan and John) used the space theme suggested by the Star Wars site and theirs is the most visual of the presentations (Fig. 2).

Slide 1: A space background and a section of the world is visible on the right side. The WordArt text flies in from the left and reads: ‘Watch out!!! Look who’s coming!!! To the CTC English Department!!!!’ An animated red spaceship flies across and hovers on the right accompanied by the sound of a rocket. This is ‘supposed to be funny and makes it more for kids.’

Slide 2: The next slide shows a section of a map of Bristol and again the rocket flies in accompanied by the sound effect and hovers at the centre.

Slide 3: A photograph of the school and this time the rocket is seen to zip across the skyline.
Slide 4: Pupils working in a computer room with the *Word Art* title ‘Students at Work.’

Slide 5: Six cartoon animated vegetables waving and smiling on a dark patterned background. The text then flies in at the top ‘Who are the teachers?’ Next, teachers’ names fly in above each vegetable.

Slide 6: A table of SATs results.

Slide 7: The words ‘Language’ and ‘Literature’ in *WordArt* on opposite sides of the screen with a percentage for each below the heading ‘GCSE [General Certificate of Education] Results.’

Slide 8: A photograph of pupils’ work on a display board. The heading ‘Students’ work’ slides slowly down over the display accompanied by the sound effect of applause.

Slide 9: A picture of space.

Slide 10: The photograph of the school with the rocket flying from the right to the left and out of the screen.

*Group 2 analysis.* Alan and John both scored N (ungraded) in their SATs exam for English and they struggle with basic written and verbal literacy, but they clearly showed imaginative and technical control of the multimodal literacy required to make this presentation. Slides 1–3 were completely unaided and form a striking introductory sequence. However, having completed this sequence they needed the teacher to help with the overall structure and a storyboard at this point helped them to plan the subsequent slides. They show the ability to download and select effective images from the Web; the ability to send and receive files; to animate the presentation for maximum impact; to take appropriate digital pictures and integrate them into the slideshow to present information in appropriate formats. In terms of modality the visual is the strongest—they show understanding of colours, backgrounds, font styles and vectors (note the way that the rocket is controlled and the way that it flies back out to the right). They use an informal and dramatic command in the opening slide ‘Watch out!!!’ and their use of punctuation is intended to emphasise this effect. Their planning sheet for the first slide reads ‘English is out of this world’, which explains the opening shot of space as a clever visual metaphor. They were also the only group to integrate sound effects into their presentation and they have made appropriate choices which reinforce the visual and verbal meanings. Humour is achieved through the multimodal combination of the images of the animated vegetables and the sequencing of the elements—the question ‘Who are the teachers?’ comes in after the vegetables, creating a sense of surprise. This is both a subversive and a pragmatic move. They originally wanted pictures of the teachers but as these images were unavailable they chose the vegetables. The following transcript from the lesson picks up on their decision-making process:

*John:* I don’t know what vegetables has got to do with English
Alan: The vegetables are the brains of the department
John: I don't know what vegetables has got to do ...
Alan: I don’t know what that Mr Blight picture has got to do with Mr Blight

[Alan points at a male cartoon image that John is considering as the representative image for Mr Blight.]
Alan: It’s to show how bright they are. Cos vegetables are ...
Researcher: Not that clever!
Alan: Well the vegetables look friendly at least. They look entertaining

Both pupils show a clear understanding of audience in their demonstration to the class. They state at the beginning that ‘it’s for children and some bits for adults.’ The cartoon vegetables are ‘for kids really’ whereas the SATs results (which are presented in a clear and formal table) are ‘more for the adults.’ Overall the structure, content and tone are appropriate to the audience, purpose, context and form. For instance, in his initial analysis of the web site Alan is barely comprehensible and his comments are generalised and unfocused:

_Easy cKaching [eye catching]_
All different back Grands [backgrounds]
YOU CAN See all sort of think and also picker’s. [things and pictures]
You can go be hind the sensen and sea clips [you can go behind the scenes and see clips]

However, he shows conscious understanding of the _PowerPoint_ product in his post-design written analysis:

_We made the layout for young children eg: spaceship_
Bright colures
The color marched all the way throw.
The images that we hade was to make appealing to Ungar children so that it wood be interesting for them and we did have a bit for adults
_Eg: SAT results_
_GCSE results_
We put the slide in a surten place and order like the space an then the ship hen it goes to Bristol and then to he school and ate it bas it reveres.

In Alan’s awareness of the relationship between the structural and presentational aspects of his text and the specific needs of the audience, he shows knowledge of what Gee terms the ‘Discourse’ of the text (Gee, 1997). This argues for the success, for this pupil, of the _critical framing_ strand of the pedagogy.
Reflections and Redesigns

Kress (2000) argues that we have to rethink language as a multimodal phenomenon (p. 184). However, it is clear that any use of computer technology for research, reading and meaning-making forces a consideration of multimodality. Indeed, the designs within English have demonstrated how important the visual element is to children’s writing with the word processor—they actively seek to make their text visually appealing through using the full range of presentational features and through incorporating images. Memorably, during one of our meetings, Chris Davies labeled the tendency for pupils to spend a disproportionate amount of time fiddling with fonts as ‘obsessive compulsive font disorder.’ The tools offered by computers go beyond language and pupils will naturally use the affordances of the tool, in which case teachers and pupils need a more explicit understanding of the processes of multimodal design. If pupils are working with an understanding of multimodal meaning-making it may allow them to be more focused in their design of word-processed texts (Matthewman & Triggs, 2003).

In order to raise levels of understanding about multimodal design we need to focus more specifically on how to develop a metalanguage for multimodality which is accessible and useable for teachers and pupils. The New London Group model is unfamiliar both in terms of its categories and its linguistic terms. In the spirit of using available designs of meaning we might look towards visual design categories and linguistic terms from media studies and from advanced level (A level) language. (Visual features of texts are termed graphological features in A level language and provide a useful set of features for analysis.) A possible classroom model adapted from the New London Group (2000) model is shown in Table 1. We wanted to highlight the dynamic qualities of multimedia texts which did not seem to be strongly represented in the original model and so we suggest here a dynamic mode whilst omitting the spatial mode, which did not appear to be relevant to this design. All modes are not equally relevant to every act of communication nor are they equally prioritised.

Whilst Adrian’s initial lesson successfully raised pupils’ awareness of visual, audio, dynamic and linguistic modes, it would have been impossible to teach all these modes explicitly within the time frame available. He had to select and prioritise whilst also allowing individuals to navigate their own route through the map he had drawn. There is a particular danger of being overwhelmed by the complexity of the task and the multiplicity of the elements to be taught. Adrian selected a few recognisable categories that he could highlight and talk to and he gestured to where the pupils would need to rely on what they already knew from prior experience and prior learning. It might also be said that Adrian’s focus on the visual limited the amount of overt instruction time that could be given to the language mode.
This suggests that we need to take into account which modes will be privileged as well as which modes require more explicit teaching and development. For instance,

One might say the following with some confidence. Language-as-speech will remain the major mode of communication; language-as-writing will increasingly be displaced by image in many domains of public communication, though writing will remain the preferred mode of the political and cultural elites. (Kress, 2003, p. 1)

This pronouncement by Kress must give us pause here before we simply advocate a turn to multimodal literacy within school English. Whilst we might value within this design the clear empowerment of the pupils Alan and John, these pupils are still in need of teaching which addresses their low levels of attainment in traditional literacy. It is likely that speech and writing will remain highly valued modes. Attention to the multimodality of writing itself, in the sense of the look of the page and the design of the text, have already become increasingly important but these design skills will be needed in addition to traditional literacy skills. There is also a question mark over how much explicit teaching is needed in relation to visual literacy. Bolter (1998) discusses the construction of visual literacy as ‘natural’ involving inherited visual abilities in relation to a perceptual experience. He suggests that some visual texts (for instance hypertexts) might be more in need of explication than other visual experiences. This is an interesting but highly contentious point which could be investigated further.

Overall, within this design Adrian sought to tie pupils’ multimodal explorations to the domain of English and his discourse registers several indicators of anxiety about retaining a subject identity within this technological medium. The key marker of English subject culture evident here is communication to an audience as represented in Nick and Zack’s appropriation of the teamwork template. This communication function of English goes some way towards giving coherence to examining the way that pupils have selected and worked in different modes. Kress & Leeuwen (2001) also take an approach to multimodal communication which is based on practices and resources which could give a basis for further empirical work.

I have attempted to suggest in the analysis of the teaching sequence and discourse how Adrian and Chris addressed all the elements within the multiliteracies model (which was not the case within other less successful subject designs). However, the elements of critical framing and transformed practice were less securely demonstrated. Ironically, Adrian’s pedagogical approach (and by implication the multiliteracies model) is in conflict with the Government’s National Literacy Strategy model. Put briefly, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8, and 9 (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2001) recommends dividing each lesson into four parts: a word or
sentence-level starter, an introduction, a development and a plenary. It is not difficult to imagine how this highly structured and formulaic approach which breaks up the lesson time with planned interventions linked to stated and repeated objectives would have disrupted the compositional pull of this design task.

A further tension emerged in relation to assessment. Although all of the pupils created successful presentations there is no satisfactory way of assessing their multimodal work within formal assessment systems for English in England. Alan and John (Group 2) are the most interesting case here as according to current criteria for assessment they would achieve a low grade despite their clear level of achievement in terms of the multimodality of the task. Their oral presentation to the class of their PowerPoint could be assessed for speaking and listening according to National Curriculum criteria for Key Stage 3. However, they would struggle to achieve even a Level 1 as the most that they do is to ‘convey simple meanings to a range of listeners’ but they do not ‘begin to extend their ideas or accounts by providing some detail’ (DfEE & QCA [Qualifications and Curriculum Authority], 1999a, p. 55). There is not enough evidence of sustained written language to assess them for writing. They could however be assessed at Level 5 for a strand within the ICT National Curriculum level description: ‘They use ICT to structure, refine and present information in different forms and styles for specific audiences and purposes’ (DfEE & QCA, 1999b, p. 41). By contrast the work of Group 1 would achieve much higher grades because of the greater weight of text and because of their articulate and confident oral presentation. This, despite the fact that their presentation actually showed far less understanding of how to effectively combine text, sound and image. In fact we felt that their PowerPoint was too dense in terms of text and would not have been suitable for the context, audience and purpose.

This fourth tension between the learning outcomes and the available assessment criteria was temporarily set aside for the purposes of this design, but in terms of sustainability of further exploring this wider concept of literacy it is the greatest limitation for the teachers. Even in this design case it was only negotiable because the teachers were working within a culture which supports curricular innovation and because the teachers themselves were willing to experiment outside of curriculum demands. It also involved a small group of pupils who were engaged in enrichment activities post their end of Key Stage SATs. These teachers are confident enough to set aside the Literacy Strategy model of pedagogy but they cannot ultimately ignore formal assessment requirements.

Maybe we’ve tricked them into learning a bit more about all audience and purpose and information and things. But perhaps bear in mind that they’ve got to do exams on these things. They need to know
specifically what it is they’ve learned as well. So I might do it a bit more English-based\textsuperscript{12}.

Subsequent redesigns focusing on web sites have needed to make the activity of multimodal design a tool for learning something else rather than valuing the web sites in themselves. Therefore pupils have created web sites to help them to access and revise their set literature texts.

It is our contention that the current curriculum is limiting creativity with technology in terms of both the curriculum content and the current model of literacy pedagogy. The government Literacy Strategy does not take into account the need to adapt teaching and learning styles to ICT-rich contexts. To illustrate the problem we note the terms in which David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, recommends the Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9 to teachers:

\begin{quote}
Most of all it equips pupils for the world in which they will live and work—a world which places a high premium on the written and spoken word, where reading and writing permeate every aspect of life, and where pleasures often derive from good discussion, excellent books and the power of writing. (DfEE, 2001, p. 5)
\end{quote}

Clearly this posits a very traditional view of literacy and the English subject culture and one which was reflected in the pupils’ responses to the question of what English is for. It seems that as the present curriculum stands, multimodal meaning-making is not situated within English. Given the increasing importance of this literacy in work and leisure contexts we wonder where and how it should be developed within the curriculum.

But as English educators our main concern is about the response of the English subject culture. We need to ask: What is English about, if it is not about teaching the literacy needed for the digital world of the 21st century? But we also need to continue to work on defining that literacy, and considering and testing out an appropriate pedagogy and metalanguage in the classroom.

\begin{quote}
As the form of communication changes, so will the form of what is learnt. One kind of communication will encourage the memorising of details, another will encourage pupils to reason about the evidence, and a third will lead them towards an imaginative reconstruction of a way of life. (Barnes, 1976, p. 15)
\end{quote}

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NOTES
1. The work reported in this paper is part of the Economic and Social Research Council-funded research project, ‘InterActive Education: teaching and learning in the information age’. See the project web site for further information: www.interactiveeducation.ac.uk
2. The paper is written from the perspective of Sasha Matthewman, who is a researcher and teacher educator. This is to set the paper within the context of the work of the English team and to give the research context for an academic audience. The collaborative nature of the design work and the contributions of the teachers to the thinking are acknowledged in the authorship credits.
3. The English subject team comprises six teachers from three primary schools, eight teachers from five secondary schools, one teacher from a further education college, two researchers and one teacher educator/researcher.
5. A City Technology College is an independent institution funded by a combination of business sponsorship and government grants. CTCs, while delivering the full National Curriculum, focus on teaching science, mathematics and technology and have an ethos of high ICT use and curricular innovation.
6. James Gee’s foreword discusses ‘context’ in terms of coordinations, trajectories and Discourses and in relation to the concept of critical literacy.
8. This has been a recurring feature in many of the earlier designs within the project, suggesting that technology is often seen as being a pedagogic strategy rather than a pedagogic tool.
9. The Standard Assessment Tests for English are national written examinations of attainment in reading and writing, centrally involving responses to the study of a Shakespeare play. They take place at age 14 at the end of the first three years of secondary schooling.
10. SATs refers to the standard assessment tests taken at age 14 in English schools. A level 5 or 6 would be the expected average.
11. Brian Cox, who headed the working party for the National Curriculum, suggested five models of English teaching: personal growth, cross-curricular, adult needs, cultural heritage and cultural analysis (Department for Education and Science, 1989).
12. Chris Davies from post-design interview.

REFERENCES


DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (DfEE) (2001) *Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9* (London, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office [HMSO]).


