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Moving across Figured Worlds: the integration of Physical Education, Literacy and the Visual in Cultural Spaces

Abstract

Drawing upon the theories underpinning figured worlds, relational agency and multiliteracies, this paper demonstrates how teacher educators designed and implemented an interdisciplinary approach to enact literacy pedagogies in cultural spaces.¹ This approach, a collaboration between teacher educators in Physical Education (PE) and English, was presented to a cohort of pre-service PE secondary teachers, with an aim of modelling strategies for use in their own teaching.

Engaging with diverse artefacts in local cultural institutions, participants were encouraged to produce oral and written affective, personal and analytical responses. This approach was underpinned by literacy theory, including Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1998). Aspects of multiliteracies theory were also drawn on, particularly in relation to visual, gestural and intertextual elements.²

The collaboration of PE and English teacher educators, and the integration of explicit literacy strategies into PE provided opportunities for all participants to build connections across disciplines and to interrogate preconceived understandings of curriculum boundaries. Furthermore, the approach aligns with the Australian National Curriculum statement that literacy should be integrated into all subject domains.³

This paper explores the ways in which particular 'figured worlds' of learning and teaching were disrupted and reconfigured by participants. Specific strategies implemented by the teacher educators are discussed and the results of these strategies are presented.

¹ Holland et al. 1998, Edwards, 2010, and Cope and Kalantzis, 2000

² New London Group, 1996

³ ACARA, 2011

Introduction

Kalantzis and Cope, two of the New London Group responsible for the conceptualisation of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), have stressed that educators must find a balance between affirming students 'own world of experience' and assisting them to 'travel away' from this world. They argue that education is:

not simply about recognising and affirming difference... Staying where you are is not education. Education is a journey away from the learner's comfort zone, away from the narrowness and limitations of the lifeworld. As much as education needs to affirm identity and create a sense of belonging, it is also a process of travelling away from the familiar, everyday world of experience.⁴

Implicit in this argument is that teachers, like learners, must broaden their 'worlds of experience'. This paper will discuss an interdisciplinary collaboration involving teacher educators from the Physical Education and English disciplines aimed at interrogating preconceived curriculum boundaries. This collaboration culminated in a teaching and learning sessions in which pre-service teachers of Physical Education (PE) utilised artworks and artefacts in cultural spaces to deepen their visual, oral and written literacy skills through affective, personal and critical responses, and in turn, developed their own interdisciplinary approaches to teaching.

Visual and Multi Literacies across the Curriculum

Since the late 1990s, a growing field of research and scholarship has argued that the semiotic shift from verbal to visual modes of communication lends urgency to calls for the systematic inclusion of visual and multimodal literacies across the curriculum,⁵ as students' abilities to read, respond and interpret in linear [or verbal] fashion are no longer sufficient.⁶ The multiliteracies conceptualised by the New London Group as 'dynamic and many-faceted components', supplement traditional literacy and are inclusive of cultural and linguistic diversity and contemporary 'hybrid cross-cultural discourses while acknowledging the 'multiple lifeworlds', communities and identities of students.⁷

The *National Review of Visual Education* (2008) argues that visual education should be located alongside [verbal and linguistic] literacy and numeracy, as an 'umbrella skill' 'with specific and targeted applications across the

⁴ Kalantzis & Cope, 2008: 232.

⁵ Seglem and Witte, 2009, Archer, 2006, Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, and New London Group, 1996.

⁶ Seglem & Witte, 2009, p. 217.

⁷ Kalantzis, 1995, New London Group, 1996, p. 7.

curriculum',⁸ as like literacy and numeracy, it 'has relevance to many, if not all, areas of the curriculum', and that a serious approach to visual education requires engagement in both the discipline-based and interdisciplinary senses.⁹ Similarly, Avgerinou calls visual literacy 'an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and multidimensional area of knowledge'¹⁰ despite the fact that generally these connections are not made explicit in current curriculum frameworks. Davis calls on these types of connections to be exploited, so that engagement with visual and multimodal texts is integrated to enhance and complement a range of disciplines.¹¹

While critical approaches to visual representations have been integrated to an extent with content acquisition in subjects such as English and History, affective responses to visual texts have been largely neglected, despite the capacity for this type of engagement to stimulate deep thought and higher order thinking.¹² It is notable that very young students are adept at aesthetic, personal and emotional responses, but as schooling progresses, opportunities for affective engagement with texts become less frequent as curriculum areas become more discrete. Callow discusses a study in which children were introduced to artworks and invited to use their five senses to imagine themselves within the depicted scene. As there were no right or wrong interpretations, a safe learning environment was created; hence the children became more confident in discussing their responses, moving from affective interpretations to compositional aspects of the artworks.¹³

Currently, particularly in secondary schools, the approach to visual and multimodal literacy is inconsistent across disciplines; linked to this is a lack of professional development and curriculum guidelines for working with visual and multimodal texts for teachers outside the Arts domain.¹⁴ A Queensland-based research study in which practising teachers were interviewed about the significance of visual literacy in their own teaching revealed that the interviewees were 'only vaguely aware of visual literacy' and were mostly unable to articulate how their own teaching practice was linked to the visual mode.¹⁵ In order to provide students with appropriate pedagogy, teachers themselves 'need to know the concepts and related metalanguage' of images.¹⁶

This paper aims to outline a specific approach to the training of pre-service teachers in visual literacy as a means to stimulate oral and written response. Furthermore, via illustration in a PE learning context, this paper highlights the

⁸ Davis, 2008, p. 9.

⁹ Davis, 2008, p.83.

¹⁰ Avgerinou, 2011, p. 7.

¹¹ Davis, 2008, p. 39.

¹² Callow, 2008, p. 619.

¹³ Callow, 2005, p.16.

¹⁴ Wren & Haig, 2006, p. 95.

¹⁵ McDougall, 2007, p. 34-35.

¹⁶ Callow, 2008, p. 618.

ways in which literacies can be integrated across the curriculum to reconfigure rigid discipline boundaries.

Rationale for the Collaboration

All secondary pre-service teachers in the Master of Teaching, The University of Melbourne, undertake a core subject that focuses on literacy across the curriculum. This subject is underpinned by functional linguistics theory and practice in which language and literacy socio-cultural phenomena, and communication is situated in particular contexts and discourse communities.¹⁷ The literacy core subject requires pre-service teachers to identify and analyse the language and literacy demands in their subject areas, and to develop explicit strategies to support their students to meet these demands.

Prior to the workshops discussed in this paper, the cohort of PE pre-service teachers had exhibited strong 'physical literacy': competency, confidence and creativity in a wide variety of physical activities.¹⁸ This was evidenced in their abilities to analyse and communicate about and through different movement forms; however, they expressed a lack of confidence in integrating other forms of literacy in their practice.¹⁹

As current Australian National Curriculum policy mandates that teachers of all disciplines be teachers of literacy,²⁰ it became apparent that authentic and relevant pedagogy and strategies would need to be incorporated into the pre-service PE program. Research relating to the inclusion of language and literacy in PE pedagogy tends to focus on linguistic development through motor acquisition patterns and the communication of rules.²¹ However, there is little research into broader literacy implications for the discipline, and the studies that exist rely heavily on the written word and the production of traditional texts, in the form of activity logs, information brochures and reports.²²

This prompted the Physical Education teacher educator (PETE) to consider broader definitions of literacy and creative strategies to build on the pre-service teachers' existing strengths, and facilitate links to the PE curriculum content areas focussing on personal identity. One such example is Level 10 at which students are required to 'identify and describe a range of social and cultural factors that influence the development of personal identity and values'.²³

¹⁷ Halliday, 1978.

¹⁸ Tinning, 2010, Whitehead, 2010.

¹⁹ Mandingo, Francis, Lodewyk & Lopez, 2009.

²⁰ ACARA, 2011.

²¹ Conner-Kuntz & Dummer, 1996, Maude, 1998, Murata, 2003, McGuire *et al*, 2001 and Solomon & Murata, 2008.

²² Ballinger & Deeney, 2006 and Shimon, 2004.

²³ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, 2012.

It was anticipated that by providing activities that would build on pre-service teachers' current strengths that they would be more confident to adapt these to use in their own classrooms.

Rationale for the approach

An emerging methodology in the world of sport research is sensory ethnography.²⁴ This methodology encourages participants to use their senses to explain their experiences and personal identities through their involvement with sport and exercise. Having a basic knowledge of this methodology, the PETE considered that this use of the senses might be an accessible way to introduce the pre-service PE teachers to pedagogy associated with multiliteracies.²⁵ Multiliteracies theory was developed to encompass the broad range of traditional and 'new literacies' required to make meaning in a globalised, digital world. With no experience in the implementation of sensory methodology, nor background in literacy education, the PETE sought advice from colleagues in the English and Literacy areas.

We decided that an interesting way to incorporate literacy strategies into an already crowded PE timetable would be to embed them within the topic of educational excursions. One excursion involved viewing the Basil Sellars Art Prize Exhibition: an exhibition which focuses on sport in art.²⁶ Encouraged by positive responses from the PE pre-service teachers in regard to this excursion, a visit to the National Sports Museum (NSM) was planned. These two venues provided opportunities for an interdisciplinary focus. The latter excursion included socio-cultural and historical foci, in addition to strategies based on literacy and identity.

We developed a series of learning activities, the aims of which were multifaceted. In removing students from the figured world inherent in the traditional learning spaces of pre-service P.E teacher education, we aimed to stimulate our students to consider the benefits of this particular spatial 'disequilibrium'.²⁷

Further, we asked the pre-service teachers to engage in literacy-based activities and to consider the ways in which they might use their own PE students' memory of physical and sporting experience to stimulate reading and writing. We were thus removing them from the figured world inherent in their own constructions of what the learning in their subject area should consist of. Finally, we wanted to explore and evaluate the extent to which reading frameworks most often employed by teachers in subjects traditionally considered the domains of literacy based pedagogies might stimulate productive oral and written responses in the PE cohort.

²⁴ Piper & Franham, 2007 and Sparkes, 2009.

²⁵ New England Group, 1998.

²⁶ The Basil Sellars Art Prize is a biannual event celebrating the relationship between art and sport, held at The Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne.

²⁷ Piaget, 1970.

Learning context

The participants involved in the excursion were the cohort of 18 pre-service PE teachers, comprising 9 men and 9 women aged between the ages of 22 and 33. The excursion facilitators were the three pre-service teacher educators, one from Physical Education and two from the English/Literacy area. Learning and teaching in preparation for the excursion took place in standard university teaching spaces as did the reflective post excursion teaching and learning during which students presented and reflected upon their work. The National Sports Museum is located within the Melbourne Cricket Ground complex, and is easily accessible from The University of Melbourne Parkville campus. Prior to the excursion, university staff had visited the Museum and met with Museum education officers to view exhibits and to discuss possible approaches to the excursion.

Process and Methodology

Given the specific learning and teaching needs identified by the PETE, co-facilitators drew upon experience of other collaborative interdisciplinary teaching experiences in cultural spaces.²⁸ We constructed a series of scaffolded pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading learning and writing activities informed by reader response theory.²⁹

Pre-reading/preparatory work

Participants were first asked to design a timeline and write a factual piece outlining their sporting histories and identifying a small number of highlights or key learning experiences gained from participation in or observation of sport or physical exertion. The PETE provided a model of this writing piece.

In completing this task, the resources or capabilities students were being asked to present were situated at the decoding and meaning making stages of Freebody and Luke's Four Resources model (1998) or at the Knowledge and Comprehension stages of Bloom's taxonomy.³⁰ This pre-reading activity was an attempt to scaffold and support students and to prepare them for more complex applied and analytical tasks and processes both during and following the excursion. At this stage, the text students were being asked to read and decode was the text of the self or the text of memory.

We asked participants to bring this pre-visit writing activity along with an object or artefact related to their 'sporting memory' to the museum excursion. These artefacts were quite varied and included team photographs, items of sports clothing, medals, programs from sporting events and even x-rays of sports injuries.

²⁸ National Gallery of Victoria *Ekphrasis* program 2009-2013, Ian Potter Basil Sellars workshops, 2012, Ian Potter Museum Indigenous Education and Art workshop 2013, Centre for Contemporary Photography Psychology and English workshop 2013.

²⁹ Munro 2002, Freebody and Luke, 1998 and Bloom, 1994.

³⁰ Bloom, 1994.

'During' reading

At the National Sports Museum, our approach to 'reading' the visual was framed by a series of structured questioning techniques designed to move participants from literal responses or simple decoding practices to analytical, creative, generative and applied literacy practices.³¹ Each level of questioning was imbued with the facilitators' shared belief that the affective domain is intrinsic to this type of response.

After meeting outside the museum, a series of structured questions was posed beside the statue of iconic sporting hero Betty Cuthbert. These were designed to introduce participants to the facilitators' particular methodology and to provide initial opportunities to explore the ways in which the visual might work upon the cognitive and aesthetic domains and stimulate creative oral and written responses. Firstly, participants were asked to look closely at the statue and respond literally to the question: 'What do you see?' Participants identified her gender, her clothing, the muscularity of her limbs, her open mouth and the medium of the work. Responses such as: 'A woman is running and breathing hard. She is in mid stride' demonstrated Freebody and Luke's code-breaking practice. The next level of questioning asked participants to move from literal to inferential responses by responding to the aesthetic, sensory and visceral qualities of the statue.³² Critical analysis of the sculpture focussed upon the way it positions viewers; participants also observed that the Cuthbert statue stands amongst surrounding statues of white male sporting heroes. Participants were then asked to imagine themselves as Cuthbert in order to construct a short internal monologue; the creation of these texts further demonstrated the participants' gradual engagement with each of Luke and Freebody's 'reading' practices.

In the middle of 100,000 screaming fans I experience a moment of calm realisation, almost like being in the eye of a storm, I have just won the 100m gold medal in my home country. (Adam)

Once inside the museum, further short activities were implemented with the aim of supporting participants to complete a more demanding writing task. This task required them to link their chosen object and personal sporting history to an artefact on display. Participants selected museum artefacts including artworks, music, sporting equipment and text used in the titles of NSM exhibits. Through a series of prompts, participants were encouraged to focus upon the physicality of the events depicted. These prompts drew on sensory ethnographic techniques and participants were asked to try to imagine the smells, tastes, sounds and tactile experiences associated with these events. While participants were asked to reflect upon and draw from their own experiences, they were also encouraged to build on these experiences through exaggeration or omission to 'open up new

³¹ Bloom, 1956 in Anderson, Lorin & Sosniak, 1994, Freebody & Luke, 1990, and Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1990.

³² Piper & Franham, 2007, Sparkes, 2009.

understandings by framing the world differently' and to 'imagine different ways of being and rehearse different ways of seeing and feeling'.³³

Working with the visual texts at the National Sports Museum encouraged participants to experience and consider the creative possibilities which can occur out of transmediation, a movement between and among different sign systems.³⁴

After Reading

In order to maximise the impact of the educational activities conducted at the museum,³⁵ participants were asked to complete two follow-up tasks. The first of these tasks was to redraft, and submit for assessment, a copy of their original pre-visit writing activity. In this redraft participants were encouraged to incorporate both the original artefact and that which they had selected at the museum and to use these to produce a creative piece using some of the techniques presented to them by the facilitators.

This extract from participant Clare's writing task illustrates a growth in confidence and willingness to share her emotional experience:

When we were asked to start creating our sporting memory pieces, I found it difficult to start because I was concentrating on describing my artefact rather than telling a story. Once other people had provided examples, it became clear that I was to draw upon my sporting memories to create a story. By walking around the museum I was able to make connections with some of the displays. In particular I was able to make a connection and put meaning to Cadel Evans' bike as I remember watching the Tour de France the year he won the race. This helped me to think about what cycling meant to me and how I could develop my story.

We are exhausted, having ridden through the night but running on an adrenaline rush that is like nothing else. This is the best part, the part where we celebrate the achievement of completing our first 24-hour H.P.V event. I could not have asked for a better group of girls to share this moment with. No one else will understand the excitement; the thrill and the rush of adrenaline that we felt as we proved that females could be competitive and can give the boy's a run for their money. We gained a fan base that year. And became known as the pink team. From then on, wherever we went we were met with: 'Are you the pink team from Maryborough?' (Clare)

Clare's final writing activity was far more emotive than her original piece and she links her artefact, a photograph of the Maryborough team, with the

³³ Misson, 2001, p. 37.

³⁴ Leland & Hurste in Reily, 2008, p. 9.

³⁵ Eakle, 2009.

artefact selected from the NSM, the bicycle of Tour de France winner Cadel Evans.

In the second follow-up task, participants were invited to critically evaluate their visit to the NSM and consider how the experience, in relation to their own oral and written responses, might be significant for their future teaching.

Having a strong background in sport the idea of getting to see the museum was very interesting, but combining it with English, a subject I have always struggled with and often failed to connect with, I thought would be quite a challenge. In the past I would often disengage with English as a subject as I found a lot of the ideas too abstract. In the past I would have always shied away from using English or other subjects I do not feel strong with, I would have always tried to pair a science based subject with another science based subject, both for my piece of mind and an unfounded belief that this would be the best for my student. This activity has made me re-think that. (Tony)

Tony's response was indicative of many of the participants, showing that while they are very confident and competent in the physical education setting, this does not readily transfer to other subject areas such as English. Despite this, Tony has begun to realise that it is possible to make links between PE and English and has gained in some confidence from his participation in the visit and the activities.

For Susie, the visit to the NSM overrode her past experiences of school excursions and has given her the opportunity to integrate PE and literacy-based strategies.

Excursions can incorporate more than one subject and faculty. I have always been of the belief that excursions are for one subject and faculty only, but have realised that this is not the case. Excursions can have meaning and purpose. In my previous experience excursions have had little purpose. We have gone on the excursion and seen some things and that was pretty much it. I learnt that excursions can be constructed to be purposeful for the student and even form part of their assessment. Lastly, I learnt that literacy can be incorporated into the subject of PE. Up until now I was struggling with how this could be achieved. Through this excursion I have seen firsthand and in a practical sense, how this can be achieved. (Susie)

John's comment suggests that the structure of the excursion provided participants with realistic insights into how they could use interdisciplinary pedagogy and strategies in cultural learning spaces such as the NSM.

I loved my time at the National Sports Museum. It was good to be able to talk through our artefacts and our highlighted sporting experiences with classmates as it made our stories more realistic and we were able to experience certain emotions perhaps we didn't even know we had.

Overall I thought it was a great experience and gave me a strong insight into different ways I can incorporate sport and literacy into the curriculum. (John)

Responses such as Rob's are representative of the participants' growth in confidence in working within the literacy domain and in devising similar activities for their own students.

Whilst performing the analysis of the Betty Cuthbert statue I felt very vulnerable sharing my ideas led to high levels of anxiety, but I overcame these with the support of the University staff, as I felt my ideas were valued. In the past I would have shied away from such a task, disengaged and acted like the class clown. (Rob)

Conclusion

It became evident that the physical space and the ambiance of the museum provided the group with ways to contextualise their experiences through a personal connection with the artefacts, and allowed for a very different dialogic exchange to that which they were used to in the sports environment. In essence both the pre-service PE teachers and the PETE were able to use the artefacts (images) to engage in a process of self-making through the act of creating internal dialogues that they were then able to share with others. As Roth *et al* explain, identity is not a stable characteristic, but something that is dialogically, negotiated and realized, within and through activities.³⁶

The participants had entered a new space, or a new 'figured world'. In figured worlds the attention is on 'figures', people and how they interact and participate in these worlds. The significance of figured worlds is in how they are recreated by people's social engagement with each other in localised and temporal spaces that give voice to particular landscapes and experiences. Being in the museum space allowed participants to reposition themselves as learners and through the activities they were given an opportunity to reconceptualise their understanding of themselves and their roles as members of the class and as individuals. It could be argued that the participants did not step too far from their figured world as they were still surrounded by familiar sporting objects and artefacts, yet the space and the roles they were expected to play had altered.

This excursion provided pre-service teachers with realistic insights into how they could use these and similar interdisciplinary pedagogic activities in cultural learning spaces such as the NSM. The creative responses and critical evaluations completed by the pre-service teachers have encouraged the facilitators to consider future possibilities for interdisciplinary projects. One such possibility is completely removing the cohort from a sport-based context, or figured world, by designing excursions involving visual and sensory tasks in

³⁶ Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, & Beers, 2004.

relation to artwork, or artefacts that do not have an immediate connection with sport.

Biographical Statement

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Catherine Reid has more than 20 years' teaching experience in secondary and tertiary institutions, and is the co-author of a number of English and History secondary school textbooks. She is a former member of the VCE English Text Selection Committee. For the past decade, Catherine has been lecturing in Language and Literacy Education at The University of Melbourne, and her particular interests are in visual literacy and literacy across the secondary curriculum. She is currently completing a doctorate examining the representation and positioning of the visual in recent iterations of Australian curriculum documents.

Helen Kent teaches English to beginner teachers in both the Master of Teaching and Teach for Australia programs in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She is also the school partnerships coordinator of the Master of Teaching (Secondary). Helen's research interests include the teaching of multiliteracies, visual literacy and the teaching of Shakespeare in the 21st century.

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