



Central Queensland
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Changing mindsets: A study of Queensland primary teachers and the visual literacy initiative

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Abstract

“Changing mindsets” is about how teachers are engaging with ‘visual literacy’ — the practices involved in understanding and creating visual texts. The concept of ‘visual literacy’, like other ‘new’ literacies, has arisen in response to changing communication practices in developed, capitalist societies like Australia. This study addresses the ways in which teachers in primary schools are engaging with the visual literacy initiative in the context of the new arts syllabus (Years 1-10) in Queensland.

Using a broadly poststructural approach, this thesis explored the changing mindsets implied by this curriculum initiative from three perspectives. The concept of ‘preservation of self’ (Nias, 1987, 1993) was used to examine the personal dimension of change; the concept of ‘trendy theory’ (Goodson, 1988, 1994, 1997) addressed the social and political agendas that drive curriculum reform; while the concept of ‘multimodality’ (Kress, 2000a, 2000b, 2003a, 2003b) drew attention to the cultural values ascribed to different modes of communication. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 primary teachers from 11 government schools in a regional centre in 2002. The discourse analysis method was used to analyse the data resulting from these interviews.

The data showed that the official discourses featured in the new arts syllabus did not match the discourses used by practising teachers. Although there was some recognition of the significance of the visual mode, most teachers in this study were not aware of ‘visual literacy’. Significantly, the agency exercised by teachers in curriculum reform was shaped not only by their personal identities, but also by the levels of support that they experienced in their working environments. These findings have crucial implications for policy-makers in implementing curriculum change, particularly in the context of the new arts syllabus.

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Declaration

I declare that the main text of this thesis is entirely my own work and that such work has not been previously submitted as a requirement for the award of a degree at Central Queensland University or any other institution of higher education.

Jenny Kay McDougall

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Selected publications and presentations related to this work

- McDougall, J. (2002, December 3). Teaching the visual generation: Teachers' responses to art, media and the visual literacy challenge. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) annual conference, Brisbane, Qld.
- McDougall, J. (2003, May 12). Primary teachers' responses to teaching visual literacy. Invited guest lecture for Professional Knowledge in Context, Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Qld.
- McDougall, J. (2003, September 3). New literacies and new challenges: How primary teachers in Queensland are coming to terms with the 'visual literacy' initiative. Paper presented at the Faculty of Education and Creative Arts postgraduate research conference, Rydges Capricorn International Resort, Yeppoon, Qld.
- McDougall, J. (2004). The 'people part' of curriculum change: How Queensland elementary teachers are coming to terms with the 'visual literacy' initiative in arts education. Proposal accepted by the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, San Diego, CA (April 12-16 2004).
- McDougall, J. (2004). Who says visual literacy is important?: An examination of the sociocultural dimensions of visual literacy as an educational objective. Proposal submitted to International Visual Literacy Association's annual Conference 2004.
- McDougall, J. (2004, May 12). Changing mindsets. Invited guest lecture for Professional Knowledge in Context, Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Qld.

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