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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'
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conference, Brisbane, Qld.

McDougall, J. (2003, May 12). Primary teachers' responses to teaching visual
literacy. Invited guest lecture for Professional Knowledge in Context,
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McDougall, J. (2003, September 3). New literacies and new challenges: How
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McDougall, J. (2004). The 'people part' of curriculum change: How Queensland
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McDougall, J. (2004). Changing paradigms of knowledge: An imaginative response to the concept of multimodality. Proposal accepted by the 2nd international conference on imagination and education in Vancouver, Canada (July 14-17 2004).

McDougall, J. (forthcoming). Research is not a dirty word: The risks involved in trying to overcome the teacher/theorist divide. In P. N. Coombes, M. J. M. Danaher & P. A. Danaher (Eds.), *Strategic uncertainties: Ethics, politics and risk in contemporary educational research*. Under review by Commonbound Publishing.