Chapter 8
Cam-Capture Literacy and its Incorporation into Multiliteracies

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ABSTRACT

It could be argued that the current literacy landscape is changing very quickly (Anstey & Bull, 2004), and that at the heart of this change one may position the notion of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; The New London Group, 1996). The concept of multiliteracies acts to infuse literacy practice with multimodality. This is the 'switching' between the different aspects of meaning and representation - such as the audio, visual, spatial, linguistic and gestural (Anstey & Bull, 2004, p. 83). Yet contrary to these processes, research into mainstream literacy environments has consistently shown that print literacy reading and writing activities still dominate these spaces (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2004). This chapter offers a bridge between the potential misfit between multiliteracies theory and mainstream literacy practice by investigating the use of small cameras attached to computers as educational devices – and this is henceforth called cam-capture. This writing reports on students who have used the cameras to record their thoughts about their literacy classroom activities, and changes in their literacy skills over one academic year. In so doing, the students are using digital technology to represent their ideas and providing a pertinent commentary on current print literacy practice in middle schools through a multiliterate lens.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of multiliteracies as it is used in this chapter is a social movement (The State of Queensland, 2000). Multiliteracies aims to make change happen in the lives of children and teachers in classrooms where the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are being taught and learnt. Likewise, educational researchers are also positioned by multiliteracies as being interested in literacy practice, but not from a dispassionate position – but from the perspective of an activist. It could be said that
Unsworth’s (2001) appropriation and realignment of the multiliteracies movement, does take it to a more neutral position by integrating the socio-linguistic work of Michael Halliday (Unsworth, 2000) with the notion of multimodality. Yet, even though the consequent ‘discursive pragmatics of cyberspace’ that one may derive from Unsworth’s ideas, does open up an exciting terrain for understanding how to use electronic texts in education - these arguments do not figure in this chapter about cam-capture and multiliteracies. The position taken in this writing is that multiliteracies is primarily a social movement, and that it is emptied of meaning if taken away from the tendency to initiate change in certain contexts through textual practice.

The context in this chapter is middle school classrooms – and particularly years 7 to 9 in a medium to low socio-economic area. The middle years of schooling acts as a transitional period in most industrialised countries between the primary and secondary environments. In the primary school, the subject of literacy is heavily scaffolded by close contact with specific teachers that have almost total control over subject matter and delivery (Annadale, Bindon, Handley, Johnston, Lockett & Lynch, 2004). In the secondary context, literacy is opened up through the critical and analytic study of literature, and students learn literacy that is delivered through various subjects where they are asked to read text and respond, usually in the manner of reading comprehension where their specialist knowledge, vocabulary and logical reasoning might be tested. Another common practice that runs through the way in which literacy is organised in middle school contexts is the tendency to stream students, and this streaming is orchestrated through traditional testing procedures, such as reading comprehension, extended hand written exercises and spelling (Millard, 1997). This chapter will take this context, and look to transform it through cam-capture as an application of multiliteracies.

The aims of the chapter are:

- To make a link between multiliteracies and the actual practices of middle school students through cam-capture educational research.
- To position cam-capture as a practical application of multiliteracies, and to explore how it relates to traditional notions of literacy development through testing.
- To analyse the literacy practices of a cohort of middle school students through self-recorded video reflections.
- To develop the notion of cam-capture literacy and to employ it as part of multiliteracies for educational researchers, students and teachers.
- To synthesise the notion of cam-capture literacy with its educational potential to enable evidence-based multiliteracies practices in schools.

**BACKGROUND**

Cam-capture literacy may be understood as a dynamic composite of three aspects of multiliteracies:

**Visual literacy**

Cam-capture involves students being engaged in thinking through visual aspects of their representation. As the students talk, perform and look into the camera they are presenting themselves and their ideas to an audience. This is the primary mode of literacy that cam-capture gives rise to, and it is direct, formative and immediate (Callow, 1999). Cam-capture presents face-on images, similar in kind to portrait photography. A secondary type of visual literacy that one may discern happens when the students discuss a matter of concern in pairs or groups and the recording captures a