REDESIGNING PEDAGOGY
BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
Volume 10

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Redesigning Pedagogy

Reflections on Theory and Praxis

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface vii  
Foreword by Allan Luke xv  

## SECTION ONE: LITERACY EDUCATION

1. Multimodal Reading and Design in a Cross-Disciplinary Curriculum Theorising  
   *James Albright, Kiran D. Purohit and Christopher S. Walsh*  
   3  

2. Redesigning Literacy Pedagogies: The Complexities of Producing Sustainable Change  
   *Barbara Comber and Barbara Kamler*  
   19  

3. Changing the Literacy Habitus of a Hong Kong Secondary School  
   *Arthur Firkins and Gail Forey*  
   33  

4. Multiliteracies in School and Community  
   *Michael Hoechsmann*  
   47  

## SECTION TWO: RELATIONS OF POWER

5. Displaced Agency: The Obfuscation of Teachers in Globalised Educational Policy  
   *Angela Yongalis-Macrow*  
   59  

6. Snapshots from the Normal (Technical) World: A Case Study of Low-Track Students in Singapore  
   *Masturah Ismail and Tan Aik Ling*  
   73  

## SECTION THREE: REFLECTION

7. Discovering Difference: An Intervention at a Public High School in Post-Apartheid South Africa  
   *Jacqui Dornbrack*  
   89  

8. In-Class Experiences of Teachers and Students During Mathematics Lessons: Case Studies at Primary and Polytechnic Levels  
   *Wong Khoon Yong and Ee Huei Wuan*  
   101  

9. Teacher Conversation and the Negotiation of Meaning  
   *Derek Sankey and Joanne Ng*  
   119
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rethinking the Pedagogy of Teaching: Learning Study and its Impact in Hong Kong</td>
<td>Lo Mun Ling and Ko Po Yuk</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Action Research in One’s Own Science Classroom in Higher Education</td>
<td>Penny J. Gilmer</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SECTION FOUR: MEANING MAKING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Mechanics of Teaching: Weaving in Primary One</td>
<td>Margery D. Osborne, Tan Aik Ling and Dennis Kwek</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Children’s Multimodal Meaning Making: Giving Voice to Children Through Drawing and Storytelling</td>
<td>Susan Wright</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A Cross-Disciplinary Analysis of Science Classroom Discourse</td>
<td>Seah Lay Hoon and Christina Hart</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SECTION FIVE: EVALUATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Constructing a School-Based Formative Evaluation: Issues to Consider</td>
<td>Jeanne Wolf</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SECTION SIX: MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Model Method: Obstacle or Bridge to Learning Symbolic Algebra</td>
<td>Ng Swee Fong, Kerry Lee, Ang Su Yin and Fannie Khng</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Students’ Metacognitive Problem-Solving Strategies in Solving Open-ended Problems in Pairs</td>
<td>Luis Tirtasanjaya Lioe, Ho Kai Fai and John G. Hedberg</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Language of Science: Alternative Lenses to Examining the Learning of Science</td>
<td>Tan Aik Ling and Lillian Soong</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Art and Science of “Recognition of Difference” in Junior Secondary Science Classrooms</td>
<td>Mary Hanrahan</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

Introducing “Redesigning Pedagogy”

Redesigning pedagogy: A simple term, pregnant with nuanced meanings. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, pedagogy is the “art, science, or profession of teaching”. And, the dictionary tells us, to redesign something means to “revise in appearance, function, or content”. And so, when we talk of redesigning pedagogy, we are talking about the creative processes of revising the “appearance, function or content” of the “art, science or profession of teaching”.

In one sense, there is nothing new about redesigning pedagogy. Policymakers have been in the business of reforming education for as long as formal education has been in place, and teachers have always been “redesigning pedagogy” the moment they step into their classrooms. However, there seems to be something about our location in the 21st century that suggests something unique and something particular about pedagogy in the context of society’s “work order”, to borrow a term from Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996), and about redesigning it that we have not quite experienced in the same way before or with the same intensity.

The educational world is abuzz with talk about how schools today are facing new contexts and conditions for pedagogy—disciplinary fields are rapidly changing, there are new kinds of knowledge, new technologies, a new work order with increasing challenges presented by linguistically and culturally diverse students. Some of these changes constitute the new conditions of cultural and economic globalisation, of messy national borders, and of the changing meanings of the nation-state and education’s role in the nation and economy (Torres, 1998). As Gee et al. put so succinctly, “the world has changed and the nature of learning and knowledge is changing along with it” (1996, p. 1). Redesigning pedagogy is thus about the content and form of pedagogy in its context of social change. It is at the same time a creative process, it is a responsive process, and it is a necessary goal.

The National Institute of Education, Singapore, held a conference in 2005 entitled Redesigning Pedagogy: Research, Policy, Practice, which sought to explore these precise nuances of redesigning pedagogy. It brought together researchers and practitioners from around the world, exploring together what pedagogy in the new social and work order looks like and what it means in the everyday classroom. This book presents selected papers from this conference, mostly with a focus on a focus on redesigning pedagogy. The papers are organised around six key themes: Literacy Education, Relations of Power, Reflection, Meaning Making, Evaluation, and Mathematics and Science. There are other common themes interwoven throughout, such as a focus on at-risk students, teacher-researcher collaborations, and so forth. Each of these is firmly grounded in theory, with a commitment to the practice of redesigning pedagogy.

In addition to these six key themes, the book has a strong comparative dynamic, ranging from the theoretical and pedagogical environments of Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Africa and the United States, to the analyses of
multinational organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO and World Bank. It also has a strong Singapore focus, with many authors focusing on the application of broader pedagogical theories in the Singapore classroom, and what that application tells us about scalability and cross-cultural exchange and contributions to the field.

LITERACY EDUCATION

The first set of papers couches their discussions of redesigning pedagogy in the context of literacy education, influenced by the work of Bourdieu, Freebody and Luke. The chapters by Albright, Purohit and Walsh as well as Comber and Kamler focus on teacher-researcher collaborations, on literacy and multiliteracies, and on transformative/turnaround pedagogies for sustainable change. They interrogate issues of inequality of school outcomes and disenfranchised learning, and seek to make transparent the relationships between theory and praxis. Firkins and Forey draw on both Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and Freebody and Luke’s *Four Resources Model* to examine their possibilities and constraints for redesigning pedagogy. And Hoehchmann critically examines the meanings of literacy/multiliteracies and learning, with concrete suggestions for a redesigned pedagogy.

**Albright, Walsh and Purohit** anchor their discussion in multiliteracies, approaching redesigning pedagogy as *transformed practice*. The fundamental premise of transformed practice is that there is a transfer of the practices of meaning making across contexts or cultural sites. Within a cross-disciplinary curriculum, students can “analyse, discuss, recreate and produce texts with particular awareness of language and ideology, using strategies from across disciplines” (p. 14). This approach to knowledge stands in contrast to the epistemological assumptions embedded in an “interdisciplinary” curriculum, where knowledge is seen as a *thing*, devoid of the interactions and contexts that create it. Using Bourdieu’s metaphors of field, habitus and capital, they unpack the processes of knowledge and meaning making, and suggest ways teaching cross-disciplinary multiteracies in a way that develops students’ learning of disciplinary knowledge and discourse. Their article draws on data from a 3-year study in an urban middle school in New York’s Chinatown, where they worked closely with teachers in redesigning the cross-disciplinary curriculum.

**Comber and Kamler** describe a 3-year project involving university professors and teacher-researchers (forming a teacher-researcher network), focusing on the experiences of two male teachers in Australia. Their work on *turnaround pedagogies* and sustainable change similarly emerges from collaborative work between researchers and teachers. One of the primary goals of turnaround pedagogies is changing unequal literacy outcomes, and for such change to be sustainable, they argue that it is necessary to change teacher practice. They talk about generating theories about teaching that make a difference to at-risk children, incorporating notions of children’s *funds of knowledge*, *critical literacy* and *productive pedagogies*. On the basis of these theories, the teachers conducted an
audit of their literacy curriculum and examined the effects of their pedagogical practices on different students (using Freebody and Luke’s Four Resources Model). They then redesigned aspects of their literacy curriculum and pedagogy, as captured in the notion of turnaround pedagogies.

**Firkins and Forey** draw upon both Freebody and Luke’s Four Resources Model as well as Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (the set of dispositions which generate particular practices and perceptions) to describe the processes of pedagogical change in a Hong Kong secondary school. In their analyses, redesigning pedagogy is about the need to “change the habitus” by changing the practices. They describe the work of teacher practitioners and researchers involved in the project to change, from an instrumental focus on literacy towards a critical literacy pedagogy. Bourdieu’s model of habitus provides them with a language and tool by which to analyse the constraints and possibilities of redesigning pedagogies, at the teacher practitioner level, at the level of the institution, and within the context of the national habitus.

**Hoechsmann** weaves together the ideas of Marx, Bourdieu, Gee, Gramsci, Lyotard, Freire and others in addressing key issues about the meanings of literacy, the location of literacy, and what this means for educators. On the one hand, he notes how the meanings of literacy themselves are unstable and in flux, having moved from orality to print and now to multiliteracies. “Schools don’t have a monopoly over learning” (p. 48), he argues, and to teach, “we must be willing to learn and to take seriously the culture of our students” (p. 52). He points to the work of Gee as an example of how the digital world, in which today’s kids live much of their everyday lives, is in fact a complex learning community with its own objectives, practices and principles. On the other hand, he cautions against romanticising these “new multiliteracies”. Instead, he argues for a redesigned pedagogy that combines the new with our existing culture and past—a pedagogy that sees a relationship between new literacies/multiliteracies and print literacy and orality.

**RELATIONS OF POWER**

The next set of chapters focuses on relations of power, at the levels of both policy and practice. One uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interrogate relations of power in redesigning pedagogy and agents of pedagogical change at the level of policy; the second uses ethnography to describe the experiences of the lower-ability recipients of a planned programme.

**Vongalis-Macrow** opens her chapter with a question that really sets the stage for the dialogue throughout this book: When considering the redesigning of pedagogy and education, *who does the redesigning?* Her question is theoretically framed by the work of Giddens and Wallerstein, on education’s engagement with the forces of globalisation. It places the concept and activity of redesigning pedagogy
squarely in the education–politics–power nexus within the context of globalisation and teacher practice. Using the framework of critical policy research and the tools of CDA, she analyses a range of policy texts from the OECD, UNESCO and World Bank with respect to education and globalisation, to demonstrate how policy obscures teachers’ agency so that educational change is not interrupted by the educators. Her conclusion causes pause for thought as we consider redesigning pedagogies and the role of educators: “When answering the question about whose visions and interests drive globalised reforms, it can be seen that critical agents, such as teachers, are anything but core actors in the redesign process. In fact, teachers remain largely obscure agents in policy actions.”

Masturah and Tan describe data from an ethnographic study of Normal (Technical) classrooms, the lowest stream in a Singapore school. Many of the recent educational reforms in Singapore appear to be geared towards the higher ability students. In an effort to examine the results and impact of such an unequal distribution of resources, their study attempts to describe the experiences of the lower-end recipients of a planned programme. Through their ethnographic account of what happens in the classrooms, they find that the social structure of the classroom and teacher-student interaction essentially reaffirms the perception of students in this stream as low ability, thus redefining them as educational problems. They note how there is a mismatch between the needs of the students and the structure of schooling that serves the masses, such that they continue to be disenfranchised within the dominant system of learning and pedagogy.

REFLECTION

In the next series of papers, reflection comes in the form of “critical reflection” and dialogue, “in-class reflection” involving teachers and students, Learning Study with practitioners reflecting on each other’s work, and action research.

Dornbrack continues an earlier emphasis on teachers thinking about their own theories and practices of pedagogy using the framework of critical reflection. Just as the political contexts of education are central to Vongalis-Macrow’s analysis, Dornbrack draws upon Carr and Kemmis to stress the need for teachers to critically examine the political and social contexts of their teaching and how this shapes the work they do as teachers. In the context of a South African educational environment, she poses the question: What are the effects on a post-apartheid high school when a group of teachers are encouraged to reflect critically on issues relating to difference? She conducted a series of focus groups to encourage dialogue around this question, and to surface assumptions about assimilation and issues relating to difference and power.

Wong and Ee discuss the practice of “in-class reflection” as a way to capture meaningful data about classroom teaching and learning from the perspectives of the teachers and students. The important assumption they present is that students
may have different perceptions about the meaning, importance and objectives of particular lessons than do teachers, and may respond to particular learning events differently from what teachers had planned. Thus, this ongoing comparative reflection throughout the lesson can be the basis of redesigning pedagogy, providing a dialogic means by which teachers can assess the impact of their teaching on learning and adjust their pedagogy accordingly.

Sankey and Ng focus on Learning Study as another form of reflection. Using Gadamer’s framework for lesson conferencing, they suggest viewing schools as learning communities. Like Wong and Ee, Sankey and Ng assume that a learning event involves not so much the articulation but creation of meaning. Hence, participants in a learning event may have very different interpretations and understandings of the event. Moreover, the meanings that individuals themselves hold are continually in flux and often change over time. This focus on issues of perception and interpretation, they argue, needs to be a central focus of Learning Study. Student-teachers and mentors need to be aware of their own understandings and interpretations, which they bring into their pedagogy, and how that in turn bears on student learning.

Lo and Ko also discuss the significance of Learning Study with respect to redesigned pedagogical practice. Drawing from Japanese Lesson Study and the work of phenomenographers, they apply the theory of variation to teaching and interrogate teaching differences and student learning outcomes. Because “knowing is a way of seeing”, learning means “changing one’s way of seeing or understanding”. The theory of variation thus accepts variation from both teachers and students, and sees patterns of variation as a guiding principle for pedagogical design through Learning Study.

Gilmer reflects on her own pedagogical practices in two ways: One, she conducted action research in her own science classroom to redesign her own pedagogy and enhance her students’ conceptual understanding and interest in biochemistry; two, she wrote a fictionalised story of her classroom, which she presented to her students for their responses. In so doing, her goal was to develop an interconnected understanding of biochemistry, to draw upon students’ own funds of knowledge into the classroom discourse, and to develop a learning community. Her discussion is framed by social constructivism, cultural-historical activity theory, and Sewell’s theory of structure and agency.

MEANING MAKING

In the next set of chapters, the authors explore various ways in which meaning making occurs in the classroom. In the first, Osborne, Tan and Kwek explore meaning making as it occurs through a pedagogical technique known as weaving. The second paper focuses on children’s meaning making through drawing and storytelling. The third employs the tools of flow of discourse and systemic
functional linguistics to examine classroom discourse and the mediation of scientific understanding.

Osborne, Tan and Kwek examine the practices of weaving by Primary 1 teachers in Singapore; the ways in which they weave between levels of knowledge across and within the disciplines, between everyday and more discipline-specific ways of looking at things, and between individual experiences and more generalisable knowledge, and with what effect. Applying the tools of discourse analysis to classroom transcripts, they note the funds of knowledge that are accessed during weaving, and the wide repertoire of weaving techniques and sources. One of their most significant conclusions is how such redesigned pedagogical practices served to increasingly challenge traditional discourse and meaning-making patterns such as unquestioning respect for authority and disembodied knowledge typical in the socioeducational context of traditional teacher-centred “banking” education.

Wright takes us beyond the traditional and narrow definitions of literacy and numeracy, and demonstrates the importance of taking seriously “the culture of our students”. Where Hoechsmann talks about digital forms of literacy, Wright describes children’s multimodal meaning making through drawing and storytelling. Allowing for multimodal forms of expression expands the meaning-making capabilities of children and, she argues, allows them to represent their perceptions and feelings in ways that may be too subtle or abstract for speech. As such, a redesigned pedagogy would be one that places art at the core of curriculum as a way to give “voice” to children, rather than restrict art to the periphery of meaning making and communication in the school curriculum.

Seah and Hart underscore the important role that language plays in the mediation of scientific understanding. They suggest that classroom discourse and the patterns of language use can both facilitate and constrain students’ developing understanding of scientific concepts. They employ the complimentary tools of flow of discourse (FOD) within a Vygotskian framework and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in order to examine the linguistic and discursive processes of meaning making in a science classroom, and how the teachers’ discourse mediates the students’ internalisation and understanding of such meanings. The FOD framework provided the macro view of what and how the teacher used discourse to mediate students’ understanding (including pedagogical interventions), while the SFL framework provided the micro view of how language operates to achieve that. Attending to classroom discourse using these frameworks, they argue, can thus become the basis of a redesigned pedagogy in the science classroom, towards the improvement of students’ achievement in science.

EVALUATION

The next contribution focuses on the role of evaluation—when we implement redesigned pedagogies, how do we evaluate them?
Wolf describes the processes and results of a formative evaluation of an extensive reading programme in a Singapore secondary school. The primary objective of formative evaluation is to improve practice. Thus, she argues, it is essential that formative evaluation be an ongoing part of programme implementation, allowing it to be responsive to its particular pedagogical contexts. As with Dornbrack, she also alludes to the significance of the larger social context within which learning and pedagogy take place, in terms of its impact on programme implementation and success.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

The next set of chapters is concerned with redesigning pedagogies in the disciplines of mathematics and science. The first examines the model method–symbolic method dilemma often present in the early years of secondary school algebra, and explores new algebraic pedagogies as a solution. In the second chapter, the authors examine the metacognitive behaviours in students’ mathematical problem solving. The last chapter centres on developing a language pedagogy for teaching science.

Ng, Lee, Ang and Khng explore how current algebraic pedagogy can be redesigned to address the model method–symbolic method dilemma in Singapore secondary schools. They draw from four studies to argue that the model method, a visual approach to problem solving used in primary schools, can actually be used as a bridge in the subsequent learning of symbolic algebra in secondary school. This potential becomes their basis for redesigned pedagogy. Although in a slightly different context, their argument has the overtones of Comber’s funds of knowledge—a pedagogy that utilises students’ prior knowledge, rather than seeing such knowledge as an obstacle to acquiring more advanced concepts.

Lioe, Ho and Hedberg describe the metacognitive behaviours of students as they solve open-ended mathematical problems. Using Artzt and Armour-Thomas’s framework, they examine both the regulation patterns and the cooperative levels of the students’ problem-solving techniques. They suggest a redesigned pedagogy that encourages more non-routine and open-ended problems to enhance critical thinking and further develop metacognitive skills.

Tan and Soong address what they believe to be a key obstacle for students in science classrooms—the obscurity of scientific language or jargon. Drawing from the work of Halliday, Lemke, Roth and others, they note that being faced with unfamiliar, and sometimes confusing, language often results in feelings of inadequacy and alienation. Using the metaphor of games, their research examines the rules of the language games in science that players need to learn, the benefits such knowledge has for the players, and how the concept of language games can be used to enhance science literacy.
Hanrahan also places language as central to effective pedagogy in the science classroom, particularly for students from non-advantaged backgrounds. By employing the tools of CDA in her analysis of science lessons by two teachers, she makes visible how effective teachers use language in ways that open science up to new audiences. By analysing teacher talk, she provides descriptions of the kinds of teacher talk that facilitate engagement: They creatively hybridise the traditional genres, discourse and styles of school science in ways which recognise, value and/or accept difference, and which invite and reward active participation by all students. She thus builds a model of access-enhancing teacher talk in middle-year science classrooms.

In this volume, then, the authors explore the various aspects and components of redesigning pedagogy in 21st century classrooms. Their strong focus on theory and praxis, and their broad spread of geographical locations, makes this a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners, and for those interested in broad thematic and comparative issues as well as those interested in more content-specific foci. It is an invitation to cross-cultural and comparative dialogue.

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REFERENCES


FOREWORD

Pedagogy Matters

Sociologist Basil Bernstein (1990) explained that the educational message system works through three media: curriculum, instruction and evaluation. For those of us who have been involved in the making of educational policy and for those of us who work in classrooms, these are the first and final three “levers” we have for constituting educational knowledge, skill, competence and achievement.

Yet the current educational policy debates around school renewal and systems reform pivot principally on only two of these axes: evaluation/testing/accountability and curriculum reform. There are several reasons for this, which can be found in the current conditions for educational governance and political economy. Since the 1980s, there has been a gradual but inexorable withdrawal in the postindustrial West from the social and educational contracts established after World War II. Until the first recession of the 1970s and the first oil crisis of 1972, the unquestioned assumption was that universal state education, educational research and the professional support of teachers would continue to expand. With the ongoing shift from state-subsidised social welfare, health and social services, education is targeting for economic rationalisation. The results have been an international move towards neoliberal educational policy. Its features would be well-known to readers: the marketisation and corporatisation of schools, the tying of funding to standardised test results, the standardisation of curriculum, the increased use of multinational, “teacher-proof” textbooks and materials. One of the key collateral effects of this has been to shift teaching from semi-autonomous craft and self-governing professional work, to an industrial model of teaching where teachers’ behaviour is normed, standardised, centrally surveilled and monitored via testing systems. The reality experienced by teachers in many “advanced” postindustrial states and school systems has been one of death by a thousand cuts in funding, often accompanied by successive waves of government-driven “reform” aimed at generating better test scores. By the late 1990s, many baby-boomer teachers were facing acute “reform fatigue”, and younger teachers were being inducted into test- and examination-driven systems.

A second compelling reason for this shift in policy orientation is the visibility of the stated curriculum. While teachers’ and students’ work in classrooms is elusive and the subject of stereotype and mythology, curriculum content is on the public record and, by its very nature, open to debate and political contestation. Hence, across state systems, what counts as curriculum content is an ongoing point of controversy and dispute: from archetypal debates over Darwinian theory versus religious accounts of creation; to national accounts of invasion, war and genocide; to disputes over the teaching of Shakespeare versus popular media. By their very nature, these debates invite media, public and political scrutiny and discord. Curriculum settlements are hard work for nations, states and provinces—and they become “shock absorbers” for the kinds of social, economic and cultural shift and blending affiliated with globalisation.
There is a third reason why assessment and curriculum debate predominates. Teachers have proven stubbornly professional. Much of the literature on school reform and change, and much of the literature on teachers and teacher education, points to the “durability” of teacher sensibility and practice. As a generation of reformers, we have focused our own analyses and efforts on change and reform. As a result, the principal focus of much educational research of the last 50 years has pivoted on the question: “How and why do teachers change?”—under the operant assumption, probably inherited from Dewey’s (1915) early 20th century Hegelianism, that “change” per se is intrinsically productive. We could readily flip this question on its head and ask: “Why are some pedagogical practices, some everyday instructional techniques and methods so durable? Why do teachers adhere to particular beliefs, practices and curricula in the face of systemic attempts to ‘reform’ and alter these?”

This durability of practice, its logics and rationales, the histories of these practices, their complex industrial and political economic contexts are the Gordian Knot of educational change and reform. From my experience working with government, I have encountered many senior educational planners and policymakers who throw up their hands in despair at teacher resistance to their best and worst planned efforts to push the system in new directions. This is a paradigm case of the axioms about power offered by Michel Foucault (1980): that control over discourses, behaviours and practices in local sites, removed from the ostensive centres of power, by definition struggle against idiosyncratic, unpredictable and yet durable responses from human subjects in local contexts. Teachers and teaching are a model case. Even in the current policy storms, they remain stubborn, resistant to authority, durable in practice and, most importantly, aware of the power and practical logic of their practice. Most teachers remain committed to teaching as a profession rather than a type of deskilled industrial or civil service work.

Pedagogy is ultimately a matter of the teachers’ and students’ everyday interactions. And a well-trained and supported workforce of teacher/intellectuals will always assert its professionalism and make educational choices in classrooms. Hence, systems are left to play the levers of curriculum and testing reform, perceived as their only and last recourses. Meanwhile, regardless of the soundness of the curriculum or the tests, teachers translate (or ignore) the official stated curriculum into local versions of the “curriculum in use” and the “enacted curriculum” (De Castell, Luke, & Luke, 1989).

Pedagogy is obviously the central work and craft of teachers and learners—we build institutions where people are engaged in this form of labour for 5–6 hours per day, with affiliated preparation and training time, homework, and formal and informal systems of adjunct support. Nonetheless, the folklore of schools is that bureaucrats and systems know little about pedagogy, about how to systematically support and enhance it, and about how to set out enabling circumstances for professional teachers to both profess and practise their fields and craft. The national literacy policies in the US and UK, and the push across the countries of the Pacific Rim to move towards models of governance that solely judge them,
further underline the “distance” between educational bureaucracies and the everyday lives of teachers and students.

Pedagogy is not only an absence in policy and research. It is as well a test case of the principal theoretical dilemma of social theory: the relative powers of institutions and people; issues of centralised control and local response; of social structure, in this case the school, and the local agency of teachers and students. If we scan the educational literature, it is divided upon these lines: work that stresses the local knowledge-building work of teachers and students in classrooms, as does the work in this volume, and work that stresses the macro effects of policy changes. The pieces in this volume are living documents of teachers and students, teacher educators and educational researchers at work. And their findings reinforce a key message that is emerging from a decade of research after marketplace reform of schools and universities: that sustainable school reform, that the achievement of intellectual and academic excellence with fairness and equity is only attainable through autonomous professionals exercising their ideas and discourse with and through students, not through more testing, micro-management and teacher deskilling. Those educational systems that emerge strongest in the next decade will be those that learn this lesson, and invest their intellectual and material resources, however limited, in policies that focus upon and support pedagogy.

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REFERENCES


SECTION ONE

LITERACY EDUCATION
JAMES ALBRIGHT, KIRAN D. PUROHIT AND
CHRISTOPHER S. WALSH

1. MULTIMODAL READING AND DESIGN IN A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM THEORISING

A PROBLEM

In the fall of 1999, New York City was at the heart of the now-famous West Nile encephalitis “outbreak” that caused several deaths around the city. In response, city officials decided to spray city neighbourhoods with malathion, an insecticide that kills the species of mosquito which spreads the virus. As teachers in lower Manhattan, working in the densely populated neighbourhood of Chinatown, this situation brought up seemingly rich questions, which were relevant to our students’ lives: How does the disease spread, and what is its etiology? What are some of the ways to respond to or prevent disease outbreaks? Does it make sense to spray neighbourhoods with malathion in the interest of public health? What could we learn about this epidemic from epidemiology and the social consequences of past epidemics? Consequently, we developed a project in which our eighth grade students would learn aspects of the problems associated with controlling diseases like West Nile encephalitis and suggest solutions. At the conclusion of this unit of study, they publicised their work to members of their neighbourhood.

This curriculum was one of our first exposures to problems with school interdisciplinary projects. Good interdisciplinary projects may be clearly outlined and their content authentic but, too frequently, little seems to happen over the course of the work to connect students’ learning to enduring understandings of how disciplinary knowledge works. Near the end of our project, students whose work had seemed to meet the unit’s requirements wrote disturbing reports about their findings. They reflected that they had learnt many “facts” but they had a difficult time fitting all their information together. They did not know the bigger purpose of the project or what they were supposed to be learning. The students were not able to piece together disparate content knowledge and create new ideas.

Classroom incidents such as this questioned our understanding of interdisciplinary pedagogy. Often, educators’ interest in interdisciplinarity is based on the assumption that “life is interdisciplinary”, a rather facile notion that since we use mathematics, reading, science and history to solve everyday problems and, consequently, to be relevant to students’ lives, formal schooling should do the same. When interdisciplinary approaches become difficult to sustain in classrooms, the tendency is to point to the obvious explanations: these kids don’t get it; they...
don’t really understand how to work at this level; they don’t really know how to read and write well enough to take on these problems; they don’t really care…

We want to offer an alternative way of looking at the problems associated with interdisciplinary curriculum. We propose a shift towards cross-disciplinarity: a model based on a Bourdieusian stance towards disciplinary knowledge, subject area literacies and student subjectivities. Our move to a cross-disciplinary curriculum also addresses two major questions:

1. How can inquiry into disciplinary knowledge structures facilitate student learning in different subject areas?

2. What kinds of tools do students need to move from disciplinary critique to design?

We explored curricular examples of cross-disciplinarity in the context of a 3-year research collaboration at a small public middle school in New York City’s Chinatown. This research involved the partnership of a university researcher with two full-time teachers, both of whom had opportunities to develop new curriculum, experiment with scheduling and integrate work in the disciplines. It provided a unique opportunity to research literacy and disciplinary practices over time, with yearly groups of 60 eighth grade students, most of them first- or second-generation immigrants from China.

This study attempts to demonstrate how inquiring into disciplinary structures as a central part of the eighth grade curriculum can promote students’ disciplinary knowledge in humanities, science and mathematics, while developing a sense of critical inquiry and design. At times, classes were characterised by confusion and ambiguity among students. While they became expert in questioning texts in history and English, they had more trouble doing the same kind of critical work in science and mathematics. In other words, we found that inquiry into disciplinary structures, even when cross-disciplinarity focused on visual literacy or persuasion, created different results across disciplines which were strongly influenced by students’ prior experiences with those subjects. Further, while students’ work in progressive reading and writing workshops might have allowed them to question the neutrality and authorship in narrative accounts and recounts, we found the ideology of scientific and mathematical objectivity, that students had learned in and out of school, seemingly made it more difficult for them to readily problematise modes and genres across subjects.

Questioning notions central to interdisciplinarity, we challenge the epistemological assumption that knowledge is a thing—knowledge existing outside of the interactions and contexts that create it. This assumption seems to underlie ideas of theme-based interdisciplinary instruction, in which students learn different bits of information, but are left on their own to make sense of these bits. Information appears to be separate from its formation and application. Contrast this with Foucault’s notion of knowledge as practice in his study of medical discourse:

What one must characterize and individualize is the coexistence of these dispersed and heterogeneous statements; the system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend upon one another, the way in
which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement, and replacement. (1972, p. 34)

For curriculum theory and practice, this means thinking about knowledge in terms of disciplinary power. The epidemic project failed to front the production of knowledge because while students produced interested writing and students may have learned some interesting facts about West Nile encephalitis and malathion, they had little sense of the ways to organise these facts—the knowledge necessary to design and create productive texts that work as public documents.

In most cases, interdisciplinarity stresses on the requirement for a plurality of disciplinary approaches in problem solving, in making connections within and between disciplines and in preparing students for social futures in an increasingly complex world which cannot be addressed by disciplines taught in isolation (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, pp. 352–355). But the assumption that the integrated, organic nature of the “real world” demands an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum seems questionable. Being literate requires awareness of the demands of particular social fields of action. How students encounter texts in and outside school position them as readers and/or viewers through how language and image are structured in texts. Teaching a subject like science, for example, is not exclusively about content. As Lemke (1989) noted, “What we get students to do is talk, write, and otherwise act in the special ways particular to schools and to the specialised subjects we teach” (p. 8). Such a pedagogy includes having students read in ways that specialised subjects privilege: register. Students’ communicative practices cannot be interdisciplinary without a register repertoire—“what people use their language for, what social processes they engage in” (Hasan, 1996, p. 396), an understanding of how language and discourses function is an integral part of learning the “information”. Appreciating register compelled us to consider the inter/intra-literacy demands of school subjects.

SHIFTING TO CROSS-DISCIPLINARITY

Klein and Doty (1994, p. 4) provided a history of emergence of interdisciplinarity in curriculum theorising. Progressive educators have employed the concept in interdisciplinarity to contest the overspecialisation in school subject areas, the fragmentation of knowledge, transmission rather than inquiry-based teaching and the privileging of learning information over understanding and problem solving. Dewey argued that the structure of the disciplines should not dictate curriculum and that learning should be experiential. Interdisciplinarity was also a hallmark of progressive curricular reforms, such as Kilpatrick’s Project Method. Additionally, interdisciplinarity was credited with developing students’ affective as well as their cognitive abilities, respecting student diversity, broadening students’ facility with wider texts and genres, encouraging their creativity and promoting their awareness of and response to social, political and ethical issues. Because of this historical conceptualisation of interdisciplinarity, researchers and teachers have often paired...
it conceptually with curricular and school reform efforts. However, frequently this work is situated within binaristic debates; for example, teachers and researchers conjoin interdisciplinarity with child-centred pedagogy and traditional disciplinarity with teacher-centred curriculum. But effective teaching and learning continue to rely on subject specialisation to construct different forms of knowledge and skills with students.

In response, inter-, multi-, trans-disciplinary descriptors are employed to describe a wide spectrum of curriculum theorising (Scott, 1979). These terms are used commonly to redefine the relation between specialisation in one discipline and work common across disciplines. Thus,

Interdisciplinary teaching depends not so much on the existence of several disciplines as it depends on the existence of a point of view toward the subject matter and toward knowledge in general. Frequently, then, interdisciplinary curriculum is organized around a topic, issue, period, institution, or place, focusing on a theme rather than a particular body of knowledge or skill and on collaborative teaching. (Glasgow, 1997, p. xxiv)

Discipline-based standards are weakened by interdisciplinary and related approaches to curriculum theorising and practice, critics have argued. Students may need to be introduced to disciplinary practices and concepts before they can make cross-disciplinary connections. Further, disadvantaged students’ unfamiliarity with discipline-centred discourses is overlooked in interdisciplinary education. Wineburg and Grossman (2000) argued,

What tends to happen with such curricula is that disciplines become storehouses containing topics for classroom activities; typically, however, only one part of the disciplinary storehouse is raided while another is systematically ignored…. [T]he “disciplined” part of the disciplinary tends to fall away, leaving a body of information without the tools for evaluating its quality or warrant. (p. 4)

If this is the case, Wineburg and Grossman are seemly implying that researcher and practitioners could consider theorising disciplines as lenses for reading the world, as different ways of knowing that are ideological in terms of their particular objects, meanings and values. They are resources that foster and also shape students’ learning. Cross-disciplinarity attempts to provide an overarching framework of meaning to thematically related disciplinary topics (Davis, 1995; Kockelmans, 1979).

A BOURDIEUSIAN PERSPECTIVE FOR THEORISING CROSS-DISCIPLINARITY

Bourdieu’s metaphors (field, habitus and capital) helped us to theorise about how students within each school subject face established structures of expectations and are positioned within various contexts of constrained possibility that shape their interactions with teachers and texts. Teaching and learning in English language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics classrooms do more than employ
arbitrary texts and techniques. In each, commitments are made to different understandings about the kinds of knowledge that are most valued, what it means to know something, what subject positions are available in the pedagogical exchange and what vision is privileged for social relations. Pedagogy is about subject formation. It is an intervention in the lives of students as subjects and in the spaces they inhabit, inside and outside of classrooms. Curriculum and instruction access linguistic and literate markets that represent social fields that regulate particular forms of social and cultural capital (Luke & Freebody, 1997).

Bourdieu defined field broadly as an “area of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Academic and cultural fields are constructed through the contestation by artists, writers, scientists, researchers, teachers and so on across many institutions. Fields span institutions such as homes, schools, universities, publishing, professional bodies and the state. Knowledge production and transmission lies within and between fields, which are tied to unequal and different positions of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 132). Cultural production and consumption of texts within the academic and scientific fields, related domains and school subjects are formed through conflicts over academic rigour, theoretical versus practical knowledge, research versus pedagogy, etc. Bourdieu noted that there is often an unacknowledged or misrecognised complicity in accepting the rules of the game in fields (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991, p. 45). Students, being initiated into various disciplinary texts and text practices, are constructed in this presupposed acceptance.

School subjects are differentially related to the academic and scientific fields. Science classrooms may be more closely connected to the scientific field while humanities classrooms appear to have a looser relation to a number of fields (English studies, history, geography, etc.) The relative autonomy of a field can be measured against its capacity to retranslate and interpret the demands of overlapping and intersecting fields in its own terms, especially within the field of power. Science’s autonomy is reflected in its ability to legitimate existing social relations within itself through a defence of its doxa, reason and value (Swartz, 1997, pp. 126–127). Bourdieu defines doxa as “a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view...” (1998, p. 57). Highly autonomous fields acquire forms of symbolic power to regulate the exchange of capitals within them. Generally, the humanities appear less autonomous and subject to greater outside influence upon the relatively contested value of capitals within them. Two examples of this differential relationship follow: Con<—>Texts, a student-designed Web site that uses multimodal documents to illustrate the music associated with social protest movements, and an Earth Science activity where students designed graphs to represent different interpretations of experimental data about the heating and cooling rates of sand and water. In this second example, negotiating how to represent evidence graphically in a way that could make a certain point (i.e.,
students were trying to use the data to uphold the science concept of specific heat) students took up modes of discourse and argumentation specific to science as a disciplinary field.

Academic and scientific fields construct particular dispositions and habitus. Fields may be conceptualised as structures of provisional balances within which the various forms of power circulate. As fields and the powers that shape them are made explicit, they point to possibilities for reshaping them in different ways. Bourdieu defined habitus as “a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Luke noted that, “For Bourdieu (1986, [with Chamboredon & Passeron] 1991), the basis of learning is the habitus, the derivative, structured and structuring location of learning, sensibility, taste, knowledge, and practice [within the subject]” (1995, p. 11). Habitut is the unconscious dispositions of a person to act in certain ways. Habitut has a limitless capacity for generating concepts, insights, texts and actions. These, though, are constrained by the historically and socially situated contexts of their production. Consequently, in education, the student habitus has a range of actions that lies somewhere between unrestrained creativity and possibility and deterministic conditioning and reproduction, which may lead to new experiences and responses within the fields, domains and school subjects.

Cultural capital can be embodied in knowledge, skills and practices enacted in the hexis or body of the subject. It can be objectified in material goods and institutionalised in academic and professional accreditations. Forms of capital associated with particular fields and disciplines are produced discursively in classrooms. Discourses function as socially accepted associations among ways of using language—of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting—that identify one as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network” or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role (Gee, 1990, p. 14). Pedagogies that are only vaguely aware of how practitioners and students as subjects are incorporated, “enfleshed” in some discourse every time they speak and act (and how such discourses are disciplinary) may not be as effective in helping students understand the values and conventions of capital accumulation available in school subjects, disciplines, and related fields.

MULTILITERACIES

Cross-disciplinarity may provide a way of theorising curriculum that takes into consideration this Bourdieusian relationship between school disciplines and their corresponding social fields. We consider multiliteracies curriculum to be fundamentally cross-disciplinary. Multiliteracies, as first theorised by the New London Group (1996) and later more fully by Cope and Kalantzis (2000), provided an initial framework for curricular theorising and practice that includes situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. This framework helps students locate themselves in texts, learn the tools and “grammars” for understanding meaning making, and eventually use this learning to
(re)construct texts and act on the world. Students presently live in economies and cultures that are “complex, multiple, and characterized by rapid change, uncertainty, and complexity. The teaching of [multi] literacy is an introduction to semiotic economy where identities, artifacts, texts, and tokens are exchanged in predictable and unpredictable ways” (Luke, 2001, p. xiii).

In connecting these two strands—multiliteracies and cross-disciplinarity—Gee (1990), Lankshear, Gee, Knobel, and Searle (1997), and Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997) helped us to conceptualise our curriculum as critical. For instance, considering constructivist teaching and learning in English language and science as pedagogically similar is problematic. Morgan (1997) pointed out that instruction “tend[s] to de-emphasize the positions of students as subject to discourses and knowledge and the power these produce” (p. 110). In the humanities and science curriculum—and to a smaller extent in mathematics—we introduced critical perspectives and modes of analysis. To connect the work in different disciplines, we cobbled together analytical strategies and approaches for purposes of critique and later Design. We taught reading strategies as means of critique that in time connected with notions of Design, where students applied strategies to their own productions. We came to understand multiliteracies’ concept of Design as an integral part of our cross-disciplinary curriculum. Design became a means of assessing students’ learning. The New London Group’s explanation is helpful:

The notion of Design recognizes the iterative nature of meaning-making, drawing on Available Designs to create patterns of meaning that are more or less predictable in their contexts…. It is also important to stress that listening as well as speaking, and reading as well as writing, are productive activities, forms of Designing. (1996, p. 22)

In a curriculum that privileges the role of language and discourse in shaping the school subject, the measure of students’ work was really in their design of various texts—encompassing a variety of auditory, print and visual modalities. That students are incredibly creative, able to draw on diverse uses of language in order to create cultural “productions”, is a foundation of our work (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Willis, Jones, Canaan, & Hurd, 1990). The usefulness of the multiliteracies notion of Design is that it makes the idea of production relevant for work in schools.

Table 1 shows how, in a cross-disciplinary curricular model, certain kinds of critique work might enable students’ competency for Design. We draw heavily on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Fairclough, 1995a; Halliday, 1994; Martin & Veel, 1998) to think about grammars for facilitating design and production. For instance, work in SFL can inform visual critique and design, with emphasis on text production and social uses (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). In visual work, SFL connects to genre-based, cross-disciplinary curriculum (Kamler, 2001; Lemke, 2000; Unsworth, 2001), as students look at the relationship between grammars and the construction of different texts within and among disciplines. Multimodal and intertextual understandings of texts from SFL were used to analyse social issues
related to the production and consumption of texts (Fairclough, 1995b; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Lemke, 2004; Peim, 1993).

Table 1. Connection of critique to design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-Disciplinary Work</th>
<th>Critique Examples</th>
<th>Design Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical language work, e.g.:</td>
<td>In science, students looked at the use of collocations in texts about penguins. They moved from language analysis to a consideration of how language is used in different science genres.</td>
<td>In humanities, students did argumentative writing about historical events (e.g., Japanese internment), using nominalisation and modality to produce effective academic writing.</td>
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<td>- nominalisation</td>
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<td>- modality and mood</td>
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<td>- collocations</td>
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<td>- ordering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigating genres and intertextuality, e.g.:</td>
<td>In social studies, students considered the gaps and silences in texts around Chinese immigration and exclusionary legislation.</td>
<td>In science, students drew on understandings of position and vectors to design water cycle diagrams. Students communicated positions about water resource use through their choices of information, placement of processes, use of size and colour, and organisation of vectors.</td>
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<td>- gaps and silences</td>
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<td>- construction of authority</td>
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<td>- register and modality</td>
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<td>- degree of nominalisation</td>
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<td>- cultural production of texts</td>
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<td>Visual and media grammars, e.g.:</td>
<td>In social studies, students represented ways of reading propaganda from the Spanish-American War. They analysed the use of vectors and placement of participants in the posters to front certain ideas of war and to position the viewer.</td>
<td>In science, students adapted PowerPoint presentations about plate tectonics to interactive, non-linear Web sites that could be navigated by readers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- vectors and positioning in visual texts</td>
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<td>- anchoring; relation of visuals to print texts</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Multimodal work</td>
<td>In humanities and science, students investigated the ways in which textbooks, like online sites, invite particular ways to navigate, and thereby generate particular narratives and ways of reading.</td>
<td>In social studies, students wrote history textbook chapters about Chinese immigration history and racism. Responding to readings from common history texts, they integrated photos, images and print texts to create paper and online chapters or sites that were critical of dominant representations of the Chinese experience in the U.S.</td>
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10
SOME EXAMPLES

In science curricula, the emphasis is so heavily weighted towards “getting the information” out of a text that students do not learn critical reading skills that utilise language and narrative analysis. Students in our class read two different texts about penguins, critiquing how a naturalist essay from The Moon by Whalelight (Ackerman, 1992) differs from a section in a science trade book. In the essay, the processes by which penguins stay warm and survive in the Antarctic is explained through highly descriptive language and active voice. The trade book text, on the other hand, emphasised diagrams and photos that explain the same concept. The emotional language is absent and the penguins are referred to impersonally. In doing a critique of these two texts, we worked with students to determine these textual positionings. The trade book omitted any mention of penguin survival or endangerment, taking up a more “neutral” position. It did not anthropomorphise the penguins.

Finding gaps and silences in texts was an early form of analysis students used when reading historical accounts as well (Peim, 1993). As they read different history texts they looked for the places that referred to the Chinese Exclusion Act and other legislation from U.S. immigration history, uncovering the gaps in these texts around Chinese immigration. Thus, instead of learning about Chinese immigration through a timeline of events, students looked at this history as it is constructed through text and discourse.

These examples illustrate students’ learning of cross-disciplinary textual strategies. In science class they were learning to distinguish environmentalist, narrative writing from “neutral” scientific writing, while in social studies they were looking at the construction of different views of history through the narratives in the text. We began to note how, through teaching semiotic strategies, students might be able not only to reposition texts, but also become critically aware of science and history as disciplines and fields.

Another cross-disciplinary example of students engaging in critical literacy was their work with visual texts. Students critiqued Spanish-American War posters regarding discourses of ace and patriotism through binaries of good/evil, civilised/savage, clean/unclean. After instruction in reading images through a visual design grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996)—specifically the significance of participants/circumstances, vectors, colour, perspective and framing—students reappraised their original critiques.

Similarly, in science, students studying the uses of water represented their learning through water cycle diagrams. Most of these diagrams showed the phase changes—evaporation, condensation, precipitation—students learned about as they studied how water travels through the earth’s atmosphere and lithosphere. These phase changes were shown with similarly sized vectors connecting the different parts of the diagram, although some of the events might take up more time or energy or matter in actual atmospheric interactions. The way students designed these initial water cycle diagrams indicated not only a shallow understanding of different water processes, but also a limited understanding of how to graphically...
show these interactions. These diagrams stand in stark contrast to the graphics students produced after some work with visual grammars. The diagrams show students’ understanding of the importance of different characteristics of water usage through the use of vectors and colours. Instead of showing a few major events, these diagrams showed different levels and types of events. This Design work took students from critiquing other texts to using that critique for the purpose of what the New London Group (1996) calls redesign.

Multiliteracies is a theoretical framework that connects redesign to “transformed practice”, where there is a “transfer in meaning making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites” (New London Group, 1996, p. 35). What does transformed practice look like in school? A group of students designed a Web site, Con<--->Texts, as a part of a competition (the ThinkQuest Challenge), reworking modes of analysis and critique they had used in social studies (the Available Designs). They took what they had learned from working with school texts, and particular ways of thinking about social history, and they put them to work in a new, Web-based context. For instance, they relocated popular musicians (like Naz and Eminem) within discourses of protest in social history.

As teachers worked with students, the cultural capital students acquired—skills and dispositions—and its recognition brought out the significance of linkages between habitus, capital, life trajectory and field. Students’ designed texts display their differential discursive resources as embodied cultural capital in differer academic fields (Luke, 1995). In the case of the Web site design, the construction of the Web site is mediated by students’ available capital and illustrates the laws of conversion of capital within and across different social fields. This is an example of the range and complexity of possible social fields the students could participate in, and the interrelationships between cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital. In the case of students’ analysis of temperature data, the range of possible social fields is more constrained. The ways students were able to make generalisations, create data sets and explain data analysis in the context of a classroom discussion about specific heat and climate are useful discursive practice in the field of academic science and applied mathematics. At the same time, these discursive practices are related to reading popular science and quasi-science texts (such as the El Niño article from Popular Science), but in those situations the ideology of science as a separate field with a certain “mystique” around it (Lemke, 1993) further complicates the connection between school and academic fields.

**PRAGMATIC ISSUES**

The emphasis in constructivist models of science instruction is often on students “discovering” science truths; in social studies, on the other hand, what “truths” students are to discover is less clear. We take this to be an indication of the stronger connection between the academic field—the truth of science—and school discipline in science as compared to social studies. The questions of academic
field, of the types of identities students are to inhabit as they become “literate”,
may be as important as the critical and Design work involved in multiliteracies.

While developing students’ critical and Design practices that worked across
disciplines made sense on a theoretical level and opened up new ways of looking at
curriculum, several areas of difficulty became evident in these classrooms. These
difficulties in understanding reflected students’ uneven transitions to understanding
school subjects in relation to academic and scientific fields and in using critique
and Design strategies in ways that reflect the particular demands of different
subject areas. Learning cross-disciplinarity as a shift in a student’s habitus or
academic dispositions is not an easy process because it contests available ways of
thinking about knowledge production and consumption. Therefore, Bourdieusian
theorising about field, habitus and capital are central to a cross-disciplinary
multiliteracies curriculum.

It is difficult to assess the degree to which students connected critical practices
to the academic and scientific fields or disciplines and school subjects, even when
they can carry out particular strategies well. For example, when discussing the
differences among different science texts about El Niño, many students could
determine gaps and silences in these texts—an important aspect of the intertextual
work, but were unable to acknowledge the ways in which differences between the
texts are not simply a matter of preference, but reflect the demands of academic
versus popular science. So, as much as the critical practices made sense to them,
they did not appear to add up to a full metacognitive reading of disciplinary
differences.

We learned to pay particular attention not only how strategies can be used in
similar ways across the disciplines but also to the ways texts structures and reading
practices differ from one subject to the next. In the context of a group interview,
students showed that they do not always translate critical literacy to an
understanding of how authority, persuasion or argumentation operates differently
from one subject to the next. For example, in another exchange about El Niño,
students struggled to figure out what to do with contradictory notions of reading
science. That is, their experiences of finding real ideological differences—
extressed through emphasis and ordering in the text—among the various El Niño
texts did not match up with their expectations of science as free of “opinion”.
Reading a science text against a humanities text, their emphasis is on uncovering
bias, as though anything other than factual information is somehow skewed, trying
to “brainwash” the reader. The idea that texts may present a phenomenon like El
Niño differently because of disciplinary issues was harder to grasp. Perhaps this is
because students have learned to master, since very early in their schooling, finding
“fact and opinion” in texts. The way this binaristic mode of analysis had taken hold
was evident in many of our discussions with students about texts. It overshadows
other more significant disciplinary differences which students appear to have
limited understanding in their approach to the reading:
Student 6: Also, like, even though science, it has facts, they could also brainwash you, because it’s like they write the articles, but then they could also brainwash you with those facts because they pick certain facts to put in those articles. So it’s like…pretend like if they want you to know like El Niño is really bad. Then they wouldn’t put something that’s really good. Or they will, like what last time James said, they could try to do bad thing…

Student 4: This is just like the Hakim [social studies] text…

The students were not framing the similarity in terms of disciplinary knowledge/practice in the ways authors’ “choices” are manifestations of genre and register. Possibly, students struggle with overcoming traditional categories for reading texts—fact versus opinion, biased versus truth, objective versus subjective—makes it difficult to see how disciplines rhetorically construct opinion or truth or objectivity. Addressing ideological and discursive differences and contesting students’ notions of disciplinary knowledge is central to cross-disciplinary multiliteracies.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the challenges described above, we are excited by the potential of cross-disciplinary multiliteracies for developing students’ learning of disciplinary knowledge and discourse. Students can analyse, discuss, recreate and produce texts with particular awareness of language and ideology, using strategies from across disciplines. Students’ facility in working with academic and scientific representations such as tables and graphs, posters, collaborative responses to narratives that use Flash technology, book chapters, Web pages, and so forth, grew from the semiotic tools they were taught and their personal interest in computer-mediated design.

Multiliteracies-related research is just emerging from the formal discourse of pedagogical theorising. How it may look in practice and issues influencing its implementation need greater exploration. Our research was initiated under this warrant. Multiliteracies pedagogy may be frustrated by traditional print-privileging curriculum and undervaluing students’ online capabilities (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Young, Dillon, & Moje, 2002). We worked within school disciplines while situating curricula in students’ subjectivities as poor urban Asian youth and competent users of Internet technologies. Even in the poor, urban community where we situated this research, it was possible to enact a multiliteracies practice.

As “artful actors within semiotic systems”, these students were able to meld disciplinary knowledge with the strategic employment of design, adapted to the particular discursive demands of a variety of academic tasks (Newman, 2003, p. 50). As teachers and researchers, the open-ended set of cross-disciplinary semiotic tools permitted us to investigate a multiliteracies pedagogy that elided school/non-school and official/unofficial literacy binaries. Some of the humanities
and science curricula engaged students in representational tasks connecting their technical expertise with valued school genres. In this sense, this research attempted to respond to New Literacy Studies’ call (Hull & Schultz, 2001) for research explicitly addressing classroom practice.

The recognition of the generative value of students’ contexts and personal literacy practices needs to be framed within understanding the disciplined nature of knowledge and practice. This cross-disciplinary curriculum in multiliteracies allows us to move away from a limited and even “ghetto-ising” idea of how to teach a linguistic/ethnic minority group like students in Chinatown (Albright, Purohit, & Walsh, in press). The social and cultural capital associated with literate practices in disciplines and their social fields is central in multiliteracies research. Student success in terms of grades, accreditation or personal satisfaction in school is in part determined by how well they can strategically navigate the knowledge, discursive and design requirements as they are introduced in various disciplines.

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2. REDESIGNING LITERACY PEDAGOGIES

The Complexities of Producing Sustainable Change

Early in the new millennium a number of challenges confront teachers, including the demand for continuous improvement, complex and changing communication practices, increasingly culturally diverse student populations, growing gaps between rich and poor, and the impending retirement of the “baby boomer” generation. The difficulties of making change in the face of teacher burnout and cynicism, along with the unrelenting emphasis on normative standards and mandated and/or preferred programmes can be overwhelming for teachers entering the profession at this time.

This particular mix of demographic conditions, changes in communicative practices and the unproblematic insistence on benchmarks calls for new forms of professional development and learning in educational workplaces. Sustaining the next generation of educators, and making a positive difference to students whose poverty, locality, race and linguistic heritage place them “at risk”, requires rethinking dominant contemporary modes of professional development.

Teachers report that most in-service training and development involves induction in compulsory curriculum, occupational health and safety policies, as well as a mix of the latest motivational speakers and their one-size-fits-all solutions (Boyer & Maney, 2004; Comber, Kamler, Hood, Moreau, & Painter, 2004). In many schools there is a lack of opportunity for teachers to engage in serious dialogue about pedagogy and its effects on different students.

To create new spaces for teacher research and dialogue, we developed a project entitled Teachers Investigate Unequal Literacy Outcomes: Cross-Generational Perspectives based around two networks of teacher-researchers in Victoria and South Australia. This 3-year longitudinal study was funded by the Australian Research Council (2002–2004). Our aim was to develop teachers’ research capacities and thereby enhance the potential for long-term and sustainable gains in pedagogical understandings and practices.

Joining a research collective was a significant move in building a professional identity and assembling repertoires of practices for early-career teachers. Having people with insider institutional knowledge and years of practical wisdom, virtually on-tap, plus sympathetic yet critical outsiders from the university proved an ideal set of resources. For more experienced teachers, participating in a research community resulted in renewed feelings of professional self-respect and rejuvenation, and more importantly the renewed motivation for serious critical analysis of what they know and do. Participating in these evolving university and

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teacher-researcher communities and having extended conversations with their in-school mentors gave both early- and late-career teachers the dialogic space to ask questions, check assumptions, test the limits of the constraints and their own potential for inventiveness and innovation. In what follows, we highlight key moves these teachers made, along with their colleagues, in designing and redesigning their literacy pedagogies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We recruited 10 early-career teachers (under 5 years of teaching experience) who were prepared to commit to the 3-year project and participate in the teacher-researcher networks. The teachers ranged from early childhood to high school, and most taught in working-class and poor areas of South Australia and Victoria, including several regional and rural communities. We asked these teachers to select an experienced teacher (over 25 years of teaching experience), preferably from their own school, to act as their mentor and co-investigate the problem of unequal literacy outcomes as it is currently presented in their classrooms. As well as the classroom research, we asked the teachers to conduct in-depth interviews about their understandings of literacy education and socioeconomic disadvantage. The early-career teachers invited the experienced teachers to conduct a retrospective analysis of the field of literacy education from the perspective of more than 25 years of experience. The late-career teachers asked their less experienced colleagues to talk about their knowledge, relevant experience and new ideas for the profession.

Our aim for incorporating the teacher research interviews was twofold. Firstly, we wanted to capture the articulated beliefs and knowledge of the experienced teachers. Because the teaching demographic suggests the baby boomer generation will retire in the next 5–10 years, it is important to document their learning from decades of practice. What did they make of their experience now, looking back? What did they always do despite changing bandwagons in the literacy education field? What questions and doubts did they still have? The early-career teachers in one sense were helping to develop the project historical archive in terms of knowledge about teaching literacy. The interview also provided a space to discuss the kinds of questions that are not easy to articulate in the everyday life of school, where teacher performances might be scrutinised and monitored. As it turned out, early-career teachers got access to both the wisdom and the vulnerabilities of their mentors.

Secondly, we wanted the late-career teachers to have the opportunity to learn about and from their early-career partners. What had brought them into teaching? What did they understand about teaching literacy? What were their questions and passions? While we were keen to respect the knowledge that comes with experience, we were equally keen to explore the different knowledge, energy and ideas that recent graduates bring. We believed the mix was likely to generate productive tensions and perhaps new perspectives on old problems (Kamler & Comber, 2003).
Over 3 years, we worked with the 2 groups of 10 teacher-researchers in each state. In the first part of the project we examined theories about teaching that made a difference to “at-risk” children. We read selected research and theory about unequal literacy outcomes and various attempts to address this problem (e.g., Dyson, 1993; McNaughton, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez. 1992; Thomson, 2002). In the second part of the project, the teachers conducted an audit of their literacy curriculum (e.g., using heuristics, such as Freebody and Luke’s Four Resources Model, 1990), what it made available and its effects on different students. They identified students who were “at risk” and conducted case studies to learn as much as they could about them. In the third part of the project, teachers redesigned aspects of their literacy curriculum and pedagogy, and then analysed and wrote about their designs.

In this chapter, we focus on the work of two early-career teachers, Caleb Petersen and Rob Fuller, working in early childhood classrooms in Victoria and South Australia. Both teachers—as young, male graduates—represent a rare fraction of the primary-school teaching population. Like many graduates, both found themselves in schools located in high-poverty communities some distance from urban centres and which faced complex challenges. We discuss what we learned from them about the complexities of producing sustainable pedagogical and curriculum change in literacy education.

Introducing Petersen and Fuller

Caleb Petersen began teaching in 2002 at a primary school in the southeastern region of Melbourne, approximately 45 km from the central business district. The community forms part of the rapidly developing area known as the South East Growth Corridor. The school was established in 1998 to address population growth from the housing estates within the area and caters for a diverse student population from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

As a recent graduate from Deakin University with a double degree in Primary Teaching and Information Technology, Petersen entered the project in his first year of teaching with great enthusiasm for information and communication technologies. Petersen’s considerable talents in using technology across the curriculum were encouraged by the school and he was given opportunities to initiate and supervise numerous extracurricular activities. However, it took some time for him to use this knowledge to engage disaffected students in his Grade 2 classroom. Initially, his tendency was to focus on parental responsibility—the need for parents of struggling students to do more to support school learning. By his second year of teaching, however, he took responsibility for engaging students more fully.

Rob Fuller also entered the project in his first year of teaching, in 2003, at a primary school in South Australia, approximately 300 km north of Adelaide. He described the town “as ‘tough’, shaped by the nature of its geographical features: extreme summer heat, rugged mountain ranges, and a close proximity to the desert. Its social history has been built upon working-class values, heavy industry and
volatile race relations caused by a legacy of dispossession of Indigenous peoples, resulting in an uneasy tension between black and white within the community.” (Fuller & Hood, 2005, p. 65).

As a recent graduate from the University of South Australia with a special focus in his honours year on critical literacy, Fuller was very keen to put into practice his lively and politicised understandings of literacy with his Grade 2/3 class. But he faced enormous challenges as he not only shared the class with another teacher, but was also given the significant responsibility of being the Aboriginal Education Teacher (AET), which involved working across the whole school in a range of capacities 3 days a week. Like Petersen, Fuller was initially concerned about the disengagement of many students in his class who were neither coping nor engaging with the literacies on offer; but from the start, he wondered how his own practices might be negatively impacting on student progress. While it took some time for Fuller to utilise his rich set of theoretical resources to see his practice differently, power and difference were always big issues for him. In other words, he began his teaching career with an overt social justice standpoint, but without being sure how to make this work in the everyday life of classrooms and staff rooms.

Making Marginalised Students’ Interests Central to Curriculum Redesign

Connell (1993) argued many years ago that improving education for all students involves starting with the perspectives of those who are most disadvantaged and continually asking “how well is the teaching/learning process working—for all the pupils?” (p. 83). Following Connell’s lead, we invited the teachers to think about the literacy learning of the young people in their classrooms who most concerned them. In this way the situation of “failing students” was foregrounded and made central in the research and the pedagogical redesign process, in each classroom, in each duo of early- and late-career partners and in the wider research collectives. In addition, all of the teachers had particular concerns about students who were in various ways marginalised from classroom life and learning. The effect of this collaborative problem solving in the project was to equalise the teachers, despite their vastly different years of experience and despite the differences in their school contexts.

The marginalised students who became the teachers’ focal informants included poor and working class; Indigenous children; ESL speakers; young people living in edge cities, rural and regional locations; children who had been excluded from their local schools; adult students who had dropped out and then returned to school; children in their earliest days of schooling; and young people with learning disabilities. Fuller and Petersen focused on several children over the period of the study. Here we examine their work with children in their Year 2 classes who were struggling with literacy.

Petersen first focused on Willem, a White working-class boy and then Deyo, a Torres Strait Islander girl. Fuller focused on Bill, an Aboriginal boy. In the process, as we will show, both teachers came to learn about their students, about their students’ families, and about the dynamic aspects of Willem’s, Deyo’s and Bill’s
cultural identities. In the remainder of the chapter, we outline key pedagogical moves they made to turn around literacy underachievement, including: contesting deficit assumptions, taking responsibility for students’ learning and expanding their pedagogical repertoires. Our major point here, however, as Connell noted, is that improving the pedagogy for these students improves the pedagogy for everyone. And improving the pedagogy for “disadvantaged students” means learning to think about them outside of deficit assumptions (Comber & Kamler, 2004).

**Appropriating New Metaphors to Contest Deficit Assumptions**

Central to their success in re-engaging students was Petersen’s and Fuller’s capacities to question deficit discourses that circulate in school communities and public spaces about marginalised students and their families. This was not accidental as a key move in our research design was to assemble new discursive resources for teachers to understand cultural difference, literacy, poverty and education differently. This involved questioning habitual, deficit ways of speaking about culturally diverse, poor, working-class students and putting other metaphors on the table that stress teacher responsibility for reconnecting with at-risk students. We explored, for example, Luis Moll’s (2000; Moll et al., 1992) work with teachers as community ethnographers who visited families in order to learn about their “funds of knowledge”. We investigated Pat Thomson’s (2002) idea that all children have “virtual schoolbags” which are full, but that only some children get the opportunity to make use of what’s inside during their school lives. Such metaphors were powerful in encouraging Petersen and Fuller to think differently about the knowledge students already had—to see them as resourceful—and to use these resources to reconnect students to literacy learning.

Fuller was particularly taken by Moll’s concept of funds of knowledge and it shaped his efforts to figure out how to engage his case-study child Bill as a reader and writer. In the following excerpt, written by Fuller and his late-career partner Di, we see them genuinely open to investigating a range of important family and wider popular, cultural practices in which their young case-study child had investments.

Conversations with his parents revealed a number of strengths and interests that were not evident in the classroom, including Bill's strong views concerning social justice and human rights, his active involvement with refugees and his keen interest in outdoor activities (including camping) and sports. In time we learned to make such interests central as our growing understanding of Moll’s theories enabled us to see our practice differently and conceive new contexts for developing literacy learning within and beyond our classroom. (Fuller & Hood, 2005, pp. 67–68)

Petersen was also influenced by Moll to take up a stance as a “community ethnographer” and make a home visit to his case-study child Willem, who like Bill, had family resources that remained invisible and undervalued in the school context. In this excerpt from Petersen’s writing, we also see him take up Thomson’s
metaphor of the virtual schoolbag to think about the interests, strengths and cultural investments that might be hidden away in children’s schoolbags.

Arriving at Willem’s house in the third week of school and stepping foot on his front lawn, gave me more insight into Willem’s virtual schoolbag (Thomson, 2002) than all the time I had spent with Willem at school during the first two weeks…. As a result of valuing Willem’s life outside of school, I began to see some dramatic changes in Willem’s work and attitude to school. He began to write more, the length of his texts increased and he used writing as a vehicle to keep me up to date with his interests in football and the events at home with his “extended family”—to which I was now privy because of my home visit. Impressed by Willem’s progress I began to tailor literacy tasks around his interests and needs, thus creating new situations where Willem could function more productively in the classroom. (Petersen, 2005, pp. 53–54)

These positive metaphors—funds of knowledge and virtual schoolbags—proved generative in assisting these early-career teachers to counter deficit assumptions, reassess their students’ potential and design pedagogies to connect them to the literacy curriculum. However, as Petersen worked with Willem’s passion for football and later with Deyo’s love for Aboriginal dancing and netball; and as Fuller worked with Bill’s expertise in camping, they were doing far more than adhering to the tired old curriculum adage—“starting from where the child is at”. Too often this has meant finding a student interest (basketball, dinosaurs, horses) and using this as a topic, leading to teacher-directed projects—that is, starting where students are at to move them to where teachers are at.

By contrast, what mattered more than anything for Fuller and Petersen was opening themselves to learning about who their students were and how they operated—a move which involved considerable labour on their part and a shift to a more informed, sociological analysis of diversity and literacy. As a consequence, their pedagogic designs significantly impacted on the achievement of their at-risk students—not only improving student attitude and self esteem, but also the quality and quantity of children’s writing and reading.

Breaking Out of Normativity—From Literacy Benchmarks to Engagement

The pressure to achieve the norm is intense for young teachers—their own performance is being assessed for permanency; and their own expectations about what they can accomplish are high. They have little experience about how to negotiate mandated curriculum and have not developed strategies yet for how to close the excruciating gap between expected outcomes and child performance. For Petersen this pressure manifested in his struggle to come to terms with the Early Years curriculum mandated in Victoria—his desire to get it right and be a high achiever in a school where 20 new teachers started the same year as he did. For Fuller the problem of normativity surfaced in his efforts to create common teaching goals and routines with the co-teacher with whom he shared his Grade 2 class.
A significant move for both Petersen and Fuller was finding the courage to move beyond current pressures to make literacy outcomes the centre of their curriculum design. This did not mean they were not concerned about outcomes for their at-risk students. On the contrary, their case study observations made them intensely aware of the extent to which their students struggled with the curriculum on offer and of the difficulty of finding points of connection. But early on, they realised that engagement was the crucial first step.

For Fuller, this meant moving from the traditional “literacy block” format to building contexts that more actively engaged students. Instead of starting with decoding activities, identifying letter patterns and grammatical features of sentences, he used his research-based observations of Bill to create new contexts where a range of literacy practices could be taught as their purpose became evident to learners.

Fuller’s redesign made Bill’s expertise in camping pivotal. Students produced a camping magazine, which incorporated a range of text types across curriculum areas, including product reviews, safety tips, campfire stories and procedures for pitching a tent. The concrete activity of actually pitching a tent and documenting the process with a digital camera allowed students to draw on their “expert” knowledge, while “providing an anchor point for exploring procedural texts and developing vocabulary”.

Specifically, while giving instructions to one another, the children discovered the need for precise language and appropriate word choices in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, the need to give instructions in a logical sequence had also to be taken into account. Later, when drafting written retells, they had to analyse the effectiveness of different word selections and their sequencing of events so that these could be followed successfully by the reader. (Fuller & Hood, 2005, p. 71)

Fuller employed a wide range of strategies to support students, including modelled writing, group construction, brainstorming, small-group and individual writing. Using a digital camera to record important moments in the successful assembly of the tent provided new agency for learners like Bill to discover the power of visual images within the specific context of procedural writing. “As a result of these interventions, Bill exhibited a range of behaviours that indicated a positive shift in his use of literacy for making meaning and, more importantly, allowed him to renegotiate his identity within the classroom” (Fuller & Hood, 2005, p. 73).

Petersen’s curriculum redesign shared a similar goal in making student engagement central. He developed a number of “technology-infused” units that were “sufficiently open-ended to encompass all students’ interests” and that could be “delivered in a manner that provided students with ownership of the process, while using the technology as a selling point” (Petersen, 2005, p. 56). Through this work, he began to shift his focus from outcome to process and extend the contexts for learning within the prescribed Early Years curriculum, while still adhering to its goals.
His unit on the video store, in particular, was crucial in reconnecting the disaffected Deyo as a literacy learner. Petersen described this curriculum redesign as follows:

After viewing a video, students were to present a review of the movie to the class and design either a movie poster to go on our walls or a jacket cover with a blurb about the video...[we] then planned to have our students write their own scripts for a short movie, act it out and film their own movie. Once recorded onto videotape, children would create movie posters and jacket covers and invite others in the class and their parents to watch their own film and review it. Thus, there would be multiple cycles of viewing and reviewing, a great deal of textual, visual and digital work and a tangible end product to take home—an edited video with all their films. (Petersen, 2005, p. 58)

For Deyo, the actual experience of scripting and filming her own movie made a profound difference. Her engagement with the technologies of video production and the process of gathering a cast and crew to help her film her script about a netball championship enabled Deyo to engage in new relationships with peers and with learning. Deyo produced, directed and acted in a video about a netball game which was repeatedly screened at home and became a family favourite. Along with the accompanying written script, this video was the first piece of work completed by Deyo all year, indistinguishable in quality from videos produced by others in the class. Petersen’s interest in the potential for new technologies to turn students around to new literacy practices, and recognition by her family of her skills at school in video-making, were pivotal in shifting her perception of herself as a successful student (Hutchison & Kerkham, 2005, pp. 117–118).

Fuller and Petersen’s curriculum redesigns had a powerful impact not only on their at-risk students and classmates, but on their own developing identities as teachers. They came to see themselves as teachers who could design curriculum and pedagogy that changed student performance and reshaped literate identities. Their students’ progress gave them evidence about the powerful effects of their redesigns and they gained confidence to move outside constricting, scripted approaches to literacy curriculum. They learned how to recognise students’ potential and see them as powerful and resourceful, rather than as in deficit. This is significant learning, indeed so early in one’s career, and the basis for sustainable pedagogical change and renewal.

Taking Pedagogical Responsibility

Another key move that Fuller and Petersen made was to take responsibility for what went on in their classrooms, to acknowledge that it was their job to make a positive difference to the learning of every child. Rather than seeing individual children as problems, these teachers took up the challenge of understanding what made sense to these children and where they already had potential that could be harnessed for school learning.
They became, in effect, investigators and detectives of learners and learning occasions. When they observed and talked with children in different contexts, they were able to think differently about what they could do. Petersen, for example, made spaces for children to talk with him in a different way and for him to observe them in different contexts, by developing outdoor activities and lunchtime games for large groups of children. Fuller paid close attention when, for example, Bill demonstrated leadership qualities and the ability to articulate a key plan in the context of the school camp. By building curriculum around the activity of erecting a tent, he enabled Bill to transfer these capabilities to the school context, thus repositioning Bill as expert. Fuller articulated his understanding about his pedagogical responsibility in this way:

Your priority is finding ways to ensure all kids have success, and making that extra effort to find out whatever it is that makes them tick, whatever it is, that they can feel successful. While it’s important to worry about outcomes, and what is called basic literacy… there’s an acceptance and a recognition that there’s more to it than that, that the notion of benchmarks… really doesn’t accommodate the individual, and the work that we’ve done has been more about kids and not numbers, and it gives me a sense of pride and purpose. At the same time it also makes me feel a little vulnerable because… well it’s undeniable, the stuff that arrives in your pigeonhole reminding you about the LAN [Literacy and Numeracy] Test. (Personal communication, May 6, 2004)

Taking responsibility is a key move in redesigning pedagogy and curriculum and it appears to be contingent upon teachers’ capacity to see children differently. Too often, children’s difficulties are seen as the faults of families or children themselves, and too many blind spots and moral judgements prevent teachers from modifying their approach. As Petersen (2005) and Fuller (Fuller & Hood, 2005) made clear, however, it is the teacher’s job to find out what children think about, do well and have investments in and, with respect to literacy, to see how their communication varies across different sites of practice, even when it may go against the grain of the dominant discourse of benchmarks. Only when their assumptions about Bill’s, Willem’s and Deyo’s capabilities were seriously challenged, did they begin to think about what they could do pedagogically to make a difference to these children’s learning.

Expanding Literacy Through New Technologies

Fuller and Petersen recognised early on that new technologies and popular culture were powerful tools of engagement for all students, not just those who struggled with literacy. They capitalised on the students’ interest and expertise with visual and computer literacy to establish an expanded range of performative, entertaining, collaborative literacy practices within the classroom. While they initially exploited the drawing power of what Petersen called the “wow” factor, they worked quite diligently to engage Deyo, Bill and their peers more deeply in the powerful communicative capacities of multimodal forms of literacy.
It is not insignificant that it was the early-career teachers in the project who were most adventurous and fearless in exploring the potential of multimodal literacies and media: in the process they not only extended the literacy repertoires of their students but of the community of late-career teacher researchers as well. Their own innovations expanded more traditional ways of thinking about literacy teaching as they documented enhanced opportunities for students to talk, collaborate and to develop their expertise in an expanded range of literacy practices.

The camping theme used in Fuller’s classroom allowed full participation by Bill; the digital documentation of the process of putting up a tent provided powerful visual cues for recounting and reconstructing the event in students’ procedural texts. The production of a classroom magazine on camping enabled Fuller to use student expert knowledge and incorporate a range of text types and genres—safety tips, campfire stories, procedures for pitching a tent—and visual media required in the processes of magazine production and development.

Video production in Petersen’s classroom shared similar characteristics, not only in allowing Deyo’s full participation in literacy, but also in introducing her to a wide variety of new technologies which she learned to control, including digital video-camcorders, video cassettes, computer editing software. Engagement with new visual and multimodal practices, in turn, increased her agency as a literacy learner and, like Bill, she became more successful than she had ever been in her schooling career. For both students, a repositioning took place as a result of using technology and the technology opened doors to new literate practices. Positioning students as text producers, as text designers was thus a crucial step in redesigning literacy pedagogies in sustainable ways with long-term benefits for both teachers and their students.

TURNAROUND PEDAGOGIES AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Sustaining inclusive and responsive pedagogies required these young teachers to become highly analytical. They needed to learn how to see motivational and behavioural changes in students, but also to develop new ways of identifying discursive and cognitive shifts. They needed to notice when students took up different positions, practices and literate identities. Indeed, changes in children were often reciprocated in various ways by changes in these teachers’ emerging professional identities. Both teachers and students participated in changed learning communities where problem posing, investigation, analysis, play and tryouts became the norm.

We cannot underestimate the value of their support networks—school-based mentors and colleagues and the university research team—in assisting them to tease out the nuances of classroom life, children’s responses and the deliberately made pedagogical plans.

There’s no way I would be the teacher I am today if I hadn’t participated in the project. The amount of growth that I’ve seen over the last 2 years, just
through conversations we’ve had. The conversations are what I’d be telling new teachers about. You learn so much from them and, as I said before, I probably only picked up about 10% of what’s been put on the table, but that 10% has affected my teaching greatly, and more so the thinking about teaching, and all the theory behind what this could do. (Petersen, personal communication, March 15, 2004)

Professional conversation was critical to Petersen’s development as a teacher. And it is conversation that he recommends new graduates to seek out. Fuller also questioned whether such conversations might be facilitated within school contexts.

It is important to consider the conditions of your workplace, and whether it’s one which can nurture collaboration and is sort of a safe place for people to work together and share ideas and try things out. I get the sense that that’s maybe not so much the way things are done, like people pretty much do their own thing don’t they?… I mean if you think of all those times we sat around and had a yarn around that table in Room 202 [at UniSA], think of how many ideas were generated out of that for each of us. Like can you imagine if in schools, if there was a time set aside for teachers just to get together and thrash out the things that are bugging them, and the problems and the curiosities. And if they could then have this talk about different perspectives, different experiences, to try and help solve the problem. That was perhaps one of the really most powerful experiences. (Personal communication, May 6, 2004)

From our perspective, professional conversations were crucial to developing researcher dispositions in both young teachers. In the right circumstances (such as supportive leadership, collaborative colleagues), a research perspective should sustain Petersen and Fuller’s dynamic approaches to pedagogy. In speaking with them a year after we completed the project, we were struck by how firmly a researcher disposition was established in Fuller and Petersen. They talked about new projects they were initiating; how they were actively participating in strategic planning and bringing theoretical resources to their everyday work.

However, both stressed too about how teaching is not easy; how at times they feel pressure to take up the generic one-size-fits-all pedagogy. Sustaining their confidence and preparedness to do more than simply survive will be contingent on the inside- and outside-of-school professional learning communities that they can access. Yet it is troubling that spaces for teachers to engage in serious intellectual inquiry into literacy learning seem to be shutting down with the insistence on minimum standards and scripted literacy lessons in some places.

Our project fostered a new kind of dialogic space and demonstrated how a teacher-researcher collective might tackle some of the toughest challenges of teaching and learning in hard times. Together teachers interrogated the issue of unequal literacy outcomes, examined the effects of their practices on different students and redesigned aspects of their literacy pedagogy to reconnect their most alienated students. In the process of collaborative practitioner inquiry, early-career
and late-career teachers were supported to make a demonstrable difference to their students, for which they have evidence. They have rekindled their faith in and energy for the political, intellectual and emotional work of teaching.

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REDESIGNING LITERACY PEDAGOGIES

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