Multiliteracies: Rethinking What We Mean by Literacy and What We Teach as Literacy the Context of Global Cultural Diversity and New Communications Technologies

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Multiliteracies: The Beginnings of an Idea

In September 1994, the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture initiated an international project to consider the future of literacy teaching: what would need to be taught in a rapidly changing near future, and how it would be taught. We invited some of the world’s leaders in the field of literacy pedagogy to come together for a week in the small town of New London, New Hampshire, in order to consider the ‘state of the art’.

As it turned out, there were multiple ironies in the very idea of New London. One billion now people speak that difficult little language, English, spoken four centuries ago by only about a million or so people in the vicinity of London, old London. The story of the language, and the story of the last few centuries, including its many injustices, is the story of many new Londons. This issue—how the language meets with cultural and linguistic diversity—was one of our main concerns. Then there was the irony of the postcard serenity of this particular New London, the affluent, postindustrial village which sells little more than its idyllic eighteenth century postcard image. This, in a world where the fundamental mission of educators is to improve every child’s educational opportunities—a world which, much of the time, is far from idyllic.

This seemed a strange place to be asking some of the hardest questions we now face as educators. What is appropriate
education for women, for indigenous peoples, for immigrants who do not speak the national language, for speakers of non-standard dialects? What is appropriate for all in the context of the ever more critical factors of local diversity and global connectedness? As educators attempt to address the difficult question of cultural and linguistic diversity, we hear shrill claims and counterclaims about the canon of great literature, grammar and ‘back-to-basics’. These debates seemed a long way from the calm hills of a tourist’s New Hampshire.

Ten people met and talked for that week in New London. Courtney Cazden from the United States has spent a long and highly influential career working on classroom discourse, on language learning in multilingual contexts, and, most recently, on literacy pedagogy. Bill Cope, from Australia, has written curricula addressing cultural diversity in schools, and has researched literacy pedagogy and the changing cultures and discourses of workplaces. From Great Britain, Norman Fairclough is a theorist of language and social meaning, and is particularly interested in linguistic and discursive change as part of social and cultural change. James Gee, from the United States, is a leading researcher and theorist on language and mind, and on the language and learning demands of the latest ‘fast capitalist’ workplaces. Mary Kalantzis, an Australian, has been involved in experimental social education and literacy curriculum projects, and is particularly interested in citizenship education. Gunther Kress, from Great Britain, is best known for his work on language and learning, semiotics, visual literacy, and the multimodal literacies that are increasingly important to all communication, particularly the mass media. Allan Luke, from Australia, is a researcher and theorist of critical literacy who has brought sociological analysis to bear on the teaching of reading and writing. Carmen Luke, also from Australia, has written extensively on feminist pedagogy. Sarah Michaels, from the United States, has had extensive experience in developing and researching programs of classroom learning in urban settings. Martin Nakata, an Australian, has researched and written on the issue of literacy in indigenous communities.
Our purpose for meeting was to engage in the issue of what to do in literacy pedagogy on the basis of our different national and cultural experiences and on the basis of our different areas of expertise. The focus was the big picture, the changing word and the new demands being placed upon people as makers of meaning—in changing workplaces, as citizens in changing public spaces and in changing dimensions of our community lives, our lifeworlds.

We decided that the outcomes the New London discussions could be encapsulated in a single word—'Multiliteracies'—a word we coined to describe two important arguments we might have with the emerging cultural and institutional and global order. The first is about the growing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity. The news on our television screens scream this message at us every day. And, in more constructive terms, we have to negotiate differences every day, in our local communities and in our increasingly globally interconnected working and community lives. As a consequence, something paradoxical is happening to English. At the same time as it is becoming a lingua mundi, a world language, and a lingua franca, a common language of global commerce, media and politics, English is also breaking into multiple and increasingly differentiated Englishes, marked by accent, national origin, subcultural style and professional or technical communities. Increasingly, the name of the game in English is crossing linguistic boundaries. Gone are the days when learning a single, standard version of the language was sufficient. Migration, multiculturalism and global economic integration daily intensify this process of change. The globalisation of communications and labour markets makes language diversity an ever more critical local issue.

The second major shift encompassed in the concept of Multiliteracies is the influence of new communications technologies. Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. Take for instance the multimodal ways in which meanings are made on the World Wide Web, or in video captioning, or in interactive multimedia, or
in desktop publishing, or in the use of written texts in a shopping mall. To find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy.

These two developments have the potential to transform both the substance and pedagogy of literacy teaching English, and in the other languages of the world. No longer do the old pedagogies of a formal, standard, written national language have the use they once did. Instead, the Multiliteracies argument suggests an open ended and flexible functional grammar which assists language learners to describe language differences (cultural, subcultural, regional/national, technical, context specific, etc.) and the multimodal channels of meaning now so important to communication.

The outcome of the New London meeting was a jointly authored paper—we decided to call ourselves the ‘New London Group’—which was subsequently published in the Spring 1996 edition of the Harvard Educational Review: ‘A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures’ (New London Group 1996). Already, the paper has generated enormous international interest.

The Background to Multiliteracies: Why Literacy Pedagogy Has to Change

Dramatic changes are occurring in the domains of citizenship, working life and community life which will have an inevitable effect on the way literacy is taught. The languages needed to make meaning are radically changing in three realms of our existence: our working lives, our public lives and our private lives.

First, in our working lives, we are living through a period of dramatic global economic change. New business and management theories and practices are emerging across the developed world. These theories and practices stress competition and markets centred around change, flexibility, quality, and distinctive niches—not the mass products of the ‘old’ capitalism. The changing nature of work has been variously called ‘postFordism’ and ‘fast capitalism’ (Gee,
1994). PostFordism replaces the old hierarchical command structures epitomised in Henry Ford’s development of mass production techniques and represented in caricature by Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*. Instead, with the development of postFordism or fast capitalism, more and more work organisations are opting for ‘flattened hierarchy’. Commitment, responsibility and motivation are won by developing a ‘workplace culture’ where the members of an organisation identify with its ‘vision’ and ‘mission’ and ‘corporate values’. The old vertical chains of command are replaced by the horizontal relationships of ‘teamwork’. A division of labour into its minutest, deskilld components is replaced by ‘multiskilled’ all-round workers who are flexible enough to be able to do complex and integrated work (Cope & Kalantzis 1997).

With a new worklife comes a new language. A good deal of this change is the result of new technologies, such as the iconographic, text and screen-based modes of interacting with automated machinery. ‘User-friendly’ interfaces operate with more subtle levels of cultural embeddedness than interfaces based on abstract commands. But much of the change is also the result of the new social relationships of work. Whereas the old ‘Fordist’ organisation depended upon clear, precise and formal systems of command such as written memos and the supervisor’s orders, effective teamwork depends to a much greater extent on informal, oral and interpersonal discourse. This informality also translates into hybrid and interpersonally sensitive informal written forms, such as EMail. These are just a few examples of revolutionary changes in technology and the nature of organisations that have produced a new language of work. These are all reasons why a literacy pedagogy has to change if it is to be relevant to the new demands of working life.

But fast capitalism is also a nightmare. Corporate cultures and their discourses of familiarity are more subtly and more rigorously exclusive than the most nasty—honestly nasty—of hierarchies. Replication of corporate culture demands assimilation to mainstream norms that only really works if one already speaks the
language of the mainstream. If one is not comfortably a part of the culture and discourses of the mainstream, it is even harder to get into networks that operate informally than it was to enter into the old discourses of formality. This is a crucial factor in producing the phenomenon of the ‘glass ceiling’, the point at which employment and promotion opportunities come to an abrupt stop. And fast capitalism, notwithstanding its discourse of collaboration, corporate culture and shared values, is also a vicious world driven by the barely restrained market. As we remake our literacy pedagogy to be more relevant to a new world of work, we need to be aware of the danger that our words might become co-opted by economically and market driven discourses, no matter how contemporary and ‘post-capitalist’ these may appear. It may well be that market directed theories and practices, even though they sound humane, will never authentically include a vision of meaningful success for all students.

In responding to the radical changes in working life that are currently underway, we need to tread a careful path in which students have the opportunity to develop skills for access to new forms of work through learning the new language of work. But at the same time, as teachers, our role is not simply to be technocrats. Our job is not to produce docile, compliant workers. Students need to develop the skills to speak up, to negotiate and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives.

Indeed, the twin goals of access and critical engagement need not be incompatible. We might, for example, take fast capitalism at the best of its word and be relevant to that word, yet at the same time we could push that word in the direction of utopian possibility. In the realm of work, we will call that possibility ‘productive diversity’ (Cope & Kalantzis 1997). The diversity of communities and workforces and the multiplicity of discourses can be harnessed as a productive asset. Cross-cultural communication and the negotiated dialogue of different languages and discourses can be a basis for worker creativity, for the formation of locally sensitive and globally extensive networks which closely relate an
organisation to its clients or suppliers, and structures of motivation
in which people feel that their different backgrounds and
experiences are genuinely valued.

Just as work is changing, so is the realm of public life. This is a
second major site of social transformation. Over the past two
decades, the century-long trend towards an expanding,
interventionist, welfare state has been reversed. The domain of
citizenship, and the power and importance of public spaces, is
diminishing. Economic rationalism, privatisation, deregulation and
the transformation of the public institutions such as schools and
universities so that they operate according to market logic—these
changes are part of a global shift.

This shift coincides with the end of the Cold War. Until the
eighties, the global geo-political dynamic of the twentieth century
had taken the form of an argument between communism and
capitalism. This turned out to be an argument about the role of the
state in society, in which the interventionist welfare state was
capitalism’s compromise position. The argument was won and lost
when the communist block was unable to match the escalating cost
of the capitalist world’s fortifications. The end of the Cold War
represents an epochal turning point. Indicative of a new world
order is a liberalism that eschews the state. In just a decade or two,
this liberalism has prevailed almost without exception globally.
Those of us who work either in state funded or privately funded
education know what this liberalism looks like. Market logic has
become a much bigger part of our lives.

In some parts of the world, once strong centralising and
homogenising states have all-but collapsed. Everywhere, states are
diminished in their roles and responsibilities. This has left space for
a new politics of difference. In worst case scenarios—in Los
Angeles, Sarajevo, Kabul, Belfast, Beirut—the absence of a working,
arbitrating state has left governance in the hands of gangs, bands,
paramilitary organisations and ethnonationalist political factions.
In best case scenarios, the politics of culture and identity have
taken on a new significance. Negotiating these differences is now a life and death matter. Now, the perennial struggle for access to wealth, power and symbols of recognition is increasingly articulated through the discourse of identity and recognition (Kalantzis 1997).

Schooling in general and literacy teaching in particular were central parts of the old order. The expanding, interventionary states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used schooling as a way of standardising national languages. In the Old World, this meant imposing national standards over dialect differences. In the New World, it meant assimilating immigrants and indigenous peoples to the standardised ‘proper’ language of the coloniser (Kalantzis & Cope 1993).

Just as global geopolitics has shifted, so schools have to service linguistic and cultural diversity. Their fundamental role has changed. The meaning of literacy pedagogy has changed. Local diversity and global connectedness not only mean that there can be no standard; they mean that the most important skill students need to learn is to negotiate dialect, register and semiotic differences, code switching, interlanguages and hybrid cross-cultural discourses. Indeed, this is the only hope for averting the catastrophic conflicts about identities and spaces that now seem ever ready to flare up.

The decline of the old, monocultural, nationalistic ‘civic’, has left a space vacated that needs to be filled again. We propose this space is claimed by a civic pluralism. Instead of states that require one cultural and linguistic standard, we need states that arbitrate differences. Access to wealth, power and symbols must be possible no matter what one’s identity markers—such as language, dialect and register—happen to be. States must be strong again, but not to impose standards. They must be strong as neutral arbiters of difference. So must schools. So must literacy pedagogy. This is the basis for a cohesive sociality, a new civility in which differences are used as a productive resource and in which differences are the norm. It is the basis for the postnationalist sense of common
purpose that is now essential to a peaceful and productive global order (Kalantzis 1997).

To this end, cultural and linguistic diversity is a classroom resource just as powerfully as it is a social resource in the formation of new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship. This is not just so that educators can provide a better ‘service’ to ‘minorities’. Rather, such a pedagogical orientation will produce benefits for all. For example, there will be a cognitive benefit to all children in a pedagogy of linguistic and cultural pluralism, including for ‘mainstream’ children. When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their abilities to critically reflect on complex systems and their interactions.

And in a third major realm, in our private lives, equally momentous changes are taking place. We live in an environment where subcultural differences—differences of identity and affiliation—are becoming more and more significant. Gender, ethnicity, generation and sexual orientation are just a few of the markers of these differences. To those who yearn for ‘standards’, this appears as evidence of distressing fragmentation of the social fabric.

Indeed, in one sense it is just this, an historical shift where singular national cultures have less hold than they once did. For example, one of the ironies of less regulated, multi-channel media systems is that they undermine the concept of collective audience and common culture. They promote the opposite: an increasing range of accessible subcultural options and the growing divergence of specialist and subcultural discourses. This spells the definitive end of ‘the public’—that homogeneous imagined community of modern democratic nation states.

The challenge is to make space available so that different lifeworlds can flourish, spaces where local and specific meanings can be made. The new multimedia and hypermedia channels can and sometimes do provide subcultural identities the opportunity to find
their own voices. These technologies have the potential to enable greater autonomy for different lifeworlds.

Yet, the more diverse and vibrant these lifeworlds become and the greater the range of the differences, the less clearly bounded the different lifeworlds appear to be. The word ‘community’ is often used to describe the differences that are now so critical—the ‘Italian-American’ community, the ‘gay community’, the ‘business community’, and so on—as if each of these communities had neat boundaries. And as people are simultaneously the members of multiple lifeworlds, so their identities have multiple layers, each layer in complex relation to the others. No person is a member of a singular community. Rather, they are members of multiple and overlapping communities—communities of work, of interest and affiliation, of ethnicity, of sexual identity, and so on.

Language, discourse and register differences are markers of lifeworld differences. As lifeworlds become more divergent and their boundaries become more blurred, the central fact of language becomes the multiplicity of meanings and their continual intersection. Just as there are multiple layers to everyone’s identity, there are multiple discourses of identity and multiple discourses of recognition to be negotiated. We have to be proficient as we negotiate these many lifeworlds—the many lifeworlds each of us inhabit, and the many lifeworlds we encounter in our everyday lives. This creates a new challenge for literacy pedagogy.

Schools have always played a critical role in determining students’ life opportunities. Schools regulate access to orders of discourse, to symbolic capital. They provide access to the world of work; they shape citizenries; they provide a supplement to the discourses and activities of communities and private lifeworlds. As these three major realms of social activity have shifted, so the roles and responsibilities of schools must shift.

Institutionalised schooling traditionally performed the function of disciplining and skilling people for regimented industrial workplaces, assisting in the making of the ‘melting pot’ of
homogenous national citizenries, and smoothing over inherited differences between lifeworlds. This is what Dewey called the assimilatory function of schooling, the function of making homogeneity out of differences.

Now, the function of classrooms and learning is in some senses the reverse. Every classroom will inevitably reconfigure the relationships of local and global difference that are now so critical. To be relevant, learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different subjectivities students bring to learning. Curriculum now needs to mesh with different subjectivities, and their attendant languages, discourses and registers, and use these as a resource for learning.

This is the necessary basis for a pedagogy which opens possibilities for greater access. The danger of glib and tokenistic pluralism is that it sees differences to be immutable and leaves them fragmentary. Insofar as differences are now a core, mainstream issue, the core or the mainstream has changed. Insofar as there cannot be a standard, universal, national language and culture, there are new universals in the form of productive diversity, civic pluralism and multilayered lifeworlds.

The ‘What’ of Multiliteracies

The focus of the Multiliteracies Project is literacy pedagogy, and much more. The ‘much more’ is crucial. The world is changing in startling ways. The ways we make meaning are changing. This means that literacy pedagogy has to change.

In order to bring about meaningful changes in our teaching practices, we need to have a very broad focus. Just what are the social changes we are currently experiencing? How, as educators with a profound social responsibility, should we respond? How are we, as literacy teachers and how are the students in our classes, in a real sense the designers of our social futures?
The starting point for the Multiliteracies Project is an investigation of how texts are historically and socially located and produced, how they are ‘designed’ artefacts. The team decided to propose a metalanguage of meaning-making centred on the concept of ‘Design’ in order to overcome the connotations surrounding the word ‘grammar’ and its frequently passive, rule-governed translation into literacy pedagogy. There are three aspects of meaning-as-Design:

The Designed:

the available meaning-making resources; patterns and conventions of meaning in a particular cultural context.

Designing:

the process of shaping emergent meaning which involves re-presentation and recontextualisation. This never involves a repetition of The Designed. Every moment of meaning involves the transformation of the available resources of meaning. Reading, seeing and listening are all instances of Designing.

The Redesigned:

The outcome of designing, something through which the meaning-maker has remade themselves, a new meaning-making resource. We transform or recreate meaning all the time. It is in this sense that we are truly designers of our social futures.

Two key aspects of the notion of Design distinguish it from the approach to the question of teaching language conventions taken by many earlier traditions of literacy pedagogy: variability and agency. Traditional grammar teaching, for example, taught to a single social-linguistic end: the official, standard or high forms of the national language. The issue of language variability was barely part of the teaching process. And always closely linked this issue of variability is the issue of agency or subjectivity. The language experiences students brought to learning traditional grammars, for instance, were irrelevant; the aim was to induct students into the standard written from through a pedagogy of transmission. School was about the reproduction of received cultural and linguistic forms.
The Design notion takes the opposite tack on both of these fronts: the starting point is language variation—the different accents, registers and dialects that serve different ends in different social contexts and for different social groups. And the key issue of language use is agency and subjectivity—the way in which every act of language draws on disparate language resources and remakes the world into a form that it has never quite taken before. The reality of language is not simply the reproduction of regularised patterns and conventions. It is also a matter of intertextuality, hybridity, and language as the basis of cultural change. In this sense, language is both an already Designed resource and the ground of Designs for social futures.

What, then, is the scope of the Designs of meaning? One of the key ideas informing the notion of Multiliteracies is the increasing complexity and inter-relationship of different modes of meaning, in which language is often inseparably related to other modes of meaning. We have identified six major areas in which functional ‘grammars’—metalanguages which describe and explain patterns meaning—are required: Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design and Multimodal Design in which meanings are made in the relation of different modes of meaning. Particularly with the rise of new information and communications technologies, these different modes of meaning are increasingly interrelated—in EMail, in desktop publishing, in video and in multimedia and hypermedia. This means that literacy teaching has to move well beyond its old, disciplinary boundaries.

In the case of each mode of meaning, our objective is to come up with no more than about ten major Design elements. Following are the key elements of Linguistic Design suggested by the New London Group:

Delivery:

Features of intonation, stress, rhythm, accent, etc.
Modality:
The nature of the producer's commitment to the message in a clause.

Transitivity:
The types of process and participants in the clause.

Vocabulary and Metaphor:
Word choice, positioning and meaning.

Nominalisation of Processes:
Turning actions, qualities, assessments, or logical connection into nouns or states of being (e.g., 'assess' becomes 'assessment'; 'can' becomes 'ability').

Information Structures:
How information is presented in clauses and sentences.

Local Coherence Relations:
Cohesion between clauses, and logical relations between clauses (e.g., embedding, subordination).

Global Coherence Relations:
The overall organisational properties of texts (e.g., genres).

These concepts are not the basis for rules of correct usage that students might learn. Rather, they are concepts that might be used in an educationally useable contrastive linguistics. They are tools which students can use to assess the reasons why particular Design choices are made in particular cultural and situational contexts. They are, in other words, an heuristic by means of which students can describe and account for Design variations in the world of meaning. The aim is to give students a sense of how patterns of meaning are the product of different contexts—particularly in the changing contexts created by new communications technologies and the diverse and intercultural contexts in which language is used.
The ‘How’ of Literacy Pedagogy

The New London Group is also concerned that it is time to review our pedagogy, or learning media. Teaching and learning about the Design of meaning, the project team argues, should include a mix of:

Situated Practice

Immersion in experience and the utilisation of available discourses, including those from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces. For example, being immersed in Designs of meaning that make ‘intuitive’ sense, common sense, or at least something more than half sense. In a learning situation this might be either:

- Designs in the students lives, the students’ own experiences, or

- Throwing students in at the deep end with Designs that will make perhaps only half sense at first, but providing lots of contextual clues.

Assessment: What works. e.g. a problem solved, albeit intuitively, with an expert’s help, by looking up answers, with scaffolded assistance.

Overt Instruction

Systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding. In the case of multiliteracies, this requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the Design elements of different modes of meaning. For example, developing a language that describes how we make meaning and the Designs in those meanings:

- The patterns in Available Designs of meaning: the resources we can find and use to make meaning.

- How we do Designing.
• How meaning becomes Redesigned. How much does new text express voice, experience etc.?

Assessment: Student has a way to describe the processes and patterns of Design in a meaningful way.

Critical Framing
Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular Designs of meaning. This involves the students’ standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context. For example, how a Design fits in with local meanings and more global meanings.

• What is the purpose of the Design? What’s it doing: to whom? for whom? by whom? why? to what effect?

• What’s the immediate social context? (structure, function, connections, systems, relationships, effects)

• What’s the larger social context? (culture, history, society, politics, values)

Assessment: The student shows that they know what the Design is for, what it does and why it does it.

Transformed Practice
Transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites. For example, applying the Design in a different context, making a new Design.

• Transfer: taking a meaning out of context and making it work.

• Adding something of myself/ourselves.

• Intertextuality (the connections, influences, recreation of other texts, cross-references of history, culture and experience) and hybridity (a Design has voice, but where does the ring of familiarity come from?)
• Meaning-making, Designing, that changes the designer.

Assessment: Good reproduction (if that's the game); or the extent and value of creativity in the transformation; aptness of the transformation or transfer to another context (does it work)?

These four aspects of literacy pedagogy do not form a rigid learning sequence. Rather, they are four essential elements in a full and effective literacy pedagogy. The Multiliteracies Project aims to supplement—not critique or negate—the various existing literacy teaching practices. In fact, each of the aspects of the pedagogy represents a tradition in pedagogy in general and literacy teaching in particular. So, Situated Practice sits in the tradition of many of the various progressivisms, from Dewey to whole language and process writing. Overt Instruction sits in the tradition of many teacher-centred transmission pedagogies, from traditional grammar to direct instruction. Critical Framing is in the more recent tradition of critical literacy. Transformed Practice is somewhat harder to place, but its antecedents are various strategies for transfer of learning from one context to another, turning theory into practice, and so on.

One could, in fact, mount a substantial critique of each of these orientations to learning. But our fundamental argument is that all four aspects are necessary to good teaching, albeit not in a rigid or sequential way. And when all four aspects are put together, each is at least softened, and at best transformed by the others. Situated Practice when linked to Overt Instruction is no longer simply situated—in the mindless, populist, commonsense, atheoretical, introspective, liberal-individualist way that many progressivisms are. Overt Instruction when linked to Situated Practice becomes more like teacher scaffolding than teacher-centred transmission pedagogy. Critical Framing when linked to the others becomes more grounded, and less airy-ideological. And so on. Yet, the four aspects of the pedagogy do dialogue with the main traditions in literacy teaching, problematic as each of these may be. This is what we mean when we say our aim is to supplement what teachers
already do. One of our guiding strategies in the Multiliteracies project is not to attempt to bring in some grand new literacy schema as people so often have in the past, but find ways to extend existing traditions and practices of literacy pedagogy.

Putting Multiliteracies to the Test

As it enters its practical implementation and classroom research and development phase, the aim of the Multiliteracies Project is to work collaboratively with teachers in the development of innovative ways to teach literacy, to supplement what they already do and to address the demands of new, multimodal communication technologies and cultural and linguistic pluralism.

From the heart Soweto in South Africa to the tip of Cape York in Australia, teachers and students are experimenting with the ideas floated by the New London Group in the Harvard Educational Review manifesto. So here we are with Denise Newfield and Pippa Stein with their 1996 MA class in English Education at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Denise and Pippa got their students to reflect on the applicability of Multiliteracies in their work as educators, and made a video of each of the students speaking in their work setting. Wilhelm Van Rensburg of Soweto Teachers' Training College explains the importance of access to the language of power, whatever this may prove to be today. Michael Goodman of Grantley College, Johannesburg talks about the knowledge of visual design that is needed to read contemporary media texts. Thandiwe Mkabela, an ESL Adviser with the Gauteng Education Department speaks of the need to retain and reskill teachers as schools admit children from different language backgrounds and different cultural backgrounds. These are just some of the issues that members of Denise and Pippa's class raised as they engaged with the Multiliteracies framework.

Now to the other end of the world, to Bamaga near the tip of Australia's Cape York Peninsula. Bamaga High School is the northernmost High School on the Australian mainland. Some of its
students come from local Aboriginal communities; some are Torres Strait Islanders who set up a new community on Cape York fifty years ago; some are Aboriginal people who had been moved many hundreds of kilometres from Mapoon when mining operations commenced there thirty years ago. Carrie Jones teaches Art and English, and we are collaborating with her on a project funded by Language Australia and the Australian Research Council. She is working with the students on visual design, transforming natural form through successive stages of simplification and modification to create an abstract design. The students examine naturalists’ photographs of animals; they examine traditional Torres Strait and New Guinean art which represents stories about the natural world; they plan their own designs, developing a metalanguage which describes abstraction and narrative; they write stories that give their designs meaning and depth; and they make printed sarongs and designs for sports shoes with their ideas. Here we have both of the focal elements of Multiliteracies: the multimodal connections being made between linguistic and visual design, and the cross-cultural aspects of meaning making. All the elements of the Multiliteracies pedagogy are there, too: basing learning in the students’ own experience (Situated Practice); the explicit teaching of a metalanguage that describes Design (Overt Instruction); investigation of the cultural context of the designs (Critical Framing); and application of the Designs in a new context that the students have themselves created (Transformed Practice).

And now back to South Africa, to Cape Town this time. David Bond works in the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town. He has been trying out the Multiliteracies ideas in the Management Communication Course which is a part of the Associate in Management Program. This program targets mature adults with good work experience, but who have been ‘overlooked’ due to lack of educational qualifications, or discrimination based on race or gender. Here David uses the Multiliteracies pedagogy in teaching a negotiation course. In a Situated Practice angle on business communications, he involves students in negotiation role plays, such as between sellers and buyers or writers and publishers.
Taking an Overt Instruction angle, he works with students as they attempt to analyse and describe the ‘designs of real life practice’ and the dynamics of ‘face to face behaviour’, including the type of language used. Students develop definitions of negotiation, its different stages, and ways to describe the positions of the participants: power, alliances, positions, interests and alternatives. Taking a Critical Framing angle, students look critically at the metaphors that underlie many negotiation strategies, such as ‘negotiations as war’. And taking a Transformed Practice angle, he takes his students beyond academic-type written assessment to real life applications. ‘The real test of any management development pedagogy’, David says, ‘must be evidence of learning to practice in the workplace. It seems unlikely that proof of transformed negotiation practice in the workplace will be in the form of a written essay!’

Back to Australia again, and this time to William Ross High School in Townsville, North Queensland. This is another of the schools with which we are working in our Language Australia/Australian Research Council project. Here Fran Hodges is working with her Year 9 English class on video clips. She starts by presenting the students with the lyrics of a Toni Childs song. All the devices and conventions of poetry are to be found, as well as the specific conventions of song lyrics, such as a repeated chorus. Then she plays the CD. She asks what the music adds to the lyrics and how it does it. Then she plays the video clip. She asks how the imagery of the clip and gestures of the singer add to the meaning of the song. The students have now completed an analysis of the multimodal grammar of the song. Next, the students bring in their favourite songs. Situated Practice: students bring music they relate to in their own life experience and immerse themselves in the music of their friends. Overt Instruction: Fran works with the students as they develop a grammar which analyses the linguistic, audio and visual Design of the songs and their video clips. Critical Framing: students compare the meanings and the cultures they represent—the song of the white woman (Toni Childs), rap, techno, house, reggae, heavy metal or whatever. Transformed Practice: the
students write, perform and make a video clip for a song they have written themselves.

Still in Townsville, but this time crossing what you would expect to be an enormous discipline distance, Annette Hodgen is teaching an electricity unit to her Year 9 Science Class at Ryan Catholic Community School. Situated Practice: students simulate a cyclone shelter—Townsville is in a tropical cyclone region—and face the question, how are they going to survive without electricity? Overt Instruction: they then look at the different ways in which the meaning of electricity is understood—the kinds of domestic meanings appropriate to the cyclone shelter discussion; the written text of a scientific explanation of electricity; and the circuit diagrams that electricians use. Critical Framing: students discuss the different cultural contexts for these various ways of expressing meaning about electricity, and how and why they are different. Transformed Practice: students create an electrical circuit for an alarm. They write an interpretation of this circuit in commonsense language, to explain to their parents or to sell their product. The explain how the alarm works in scientific language. And they draw a circuit diagram so that an electrician might recreate their design.

In 1997, more schools are trying out the ideas proposed in the Multiliteracies project. Researchers around the world are joining us to explore and to test the Multiliteracies schema. And the public dialogue continues. The New London Group will be presenting again at the next International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference at the Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs, Australia, 1-4 October 1997, and will welcome others to join them and present from their own work, be that along similar or divergent lines of thought. Also, from 1997, a Communication and Multiliteracies subject has been included in the distance mode postgraduate course offerings of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies at James Cook University of North Queensland—a course which can be taken anywhere in the world.
In some ways, Multiliteracies is something old as well as something new. Firmly grounded in what teachers have always done, the project does not set out to turn the world of literacy teaching upside down. It is not another one of those perennial educational fads. Rather, the purpose of Multiliteracies is to supplement or extend literacy teaching for our new times. In the words of Werner Paetzold at Sunward Park High School, Boksburg, South Africa: ‘the Multiliteracies Project is very exciting—this is something I’ve been doing for a very long time and now the theory’s become a lot more concrete’.
References


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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Professor Mary Kalantzis is Dean of the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Formerly, she was Director of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies at James Cook University of North Queensland, Director of the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture at the University of Technology, Sydney and a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong. She is a part time Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Chair of the Queensland Ethnic Affairs Ministerial Advisory Committee, whose role is to advise the Queensland Premier on all matters relating to multiculturalism. Her publications include co-authorship of *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia* with Castles, Cope and Morrissey, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988/1990/1992; *Minority Languages and Dominant Culture* with Cope and Slade, Falmer Press, London, 1989; *Cultures of Schooling: Pedagogies for Cultural Difference and Social Access*, with Cope, Noble and Foynting, Falmer Press, London, 1990; and *Productive Diversity*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1997.

Until August 1996, Dr Bill Cope was First Assistant Secretary in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Before that, he was Research Manager and then Director of the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, a position to which he returned at the end of 1996. His most recent book, *Productive Diversity* (Pluto Press, 1997), authored jointly with Mary Kalantzis, examines the economic and management imperative of multiculturalism in the context of global economic integration and locally diverse labour forces and clienteles.

The International Multiliteracies Project, upon which this paper is based, is the work of the New London Group:

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*Norman Fairclough*, Centre for Language in Social Life, Lancaster University, UK
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*Martin Nakata*, School of Education, James Cook University of North Queensland, Australia
MULTILITERACIES:
RETHINKING WHAT WE MEAN BY LITERACY AND WHAT WE
TEACH AS LITERACY THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CULTURAL
DIVERSITY AND NEW COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

Mary Kalantzis & Bill Cope

Dramatic changes are occurring in the domains of citizenship, working
life and community life which will have an inevitable effect on the way
English literacy is taught. The term ‘Multiliteracies’ highlights two,
related changes. The first is the growing significance of cultural and
linguistic diversity and the emergence of multiple Englishes. Immigration,
multiculturalism and global economic integration make these
increasingly critical issues. Paradoxically, the globalisation of
communications and labour markets makes diversity a more critical
local issue. The second change is in the nature of the new
communications technologies. Meaning is made in ways that are
increasingly multimodal - in which written-linguistic modes of meaning
interface with visual, audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning.

These two developments have the potential to transform both the
substance and the pedagogy of subject English. No longer are the old
pedagogies of a formal, standard, written national language of the same
use they once were. Instead, the Multiliteracies argument suggests a
functional grammar which assists language learners to describe language
differences (cultural, subcultural, regional/national, technical, context
specific, etc.) and the multimodal channels of meaning now so
important to communication, especially important with the rise of
multimedia, desktop publishing, EMail, the Internet, and so on.

This paper provides a brief introduction to the Multiliteracies project and
discusses how the Multiliteracies ideas are being implemented and adapted in
places of learning, from South Africa to Australia’s Cape York.

CWCC OCCASIONAL PAPER No.21

ISBN 1 875940 48 0

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