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Sarah-Jane Atkins
University of Wollongong

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CONSTRUCTING VISUAL LITERACY

***An Investigation Into Upper Primary Teachers'
Construction of Visual Literacy Teaching***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

**Sarah-Jane Atkins
Bachelor of Education (First Class Hons)**

**EDUCATION
2006**

ABSTRACT

Comment [DoE1]:

Constructing Visual Literacy: An investigation into upper-primary teachers' construction of visual literacy teaching.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the conceptual and practical construction of visual literacy philosophy and pedagogy within the broader context of effective literacy teaching. More specifically, the study set out to illuminate the key features of visual literacy as a course of study and a dynamic teaching and learning domain, as well as identify teachers' rationale and motivation for instigating educational change within their literacy teaching to encompass the teaching of visual literacy.

The research literature from social change theorists demonstrated that multiliterate practices are required by individuals in contemporary western industrialised society and visual literacy holds a key place within the set of literacy practices needed to be literate in the twenty first century. Furthermore, a large body of socio-cultural theories make claim to where literacy education should be headed, and curriculum developers have attempted to respond to these recommendations. However, the review of the literature identified that there is a paucity of information regarding how teachers should be brought to including visual literacy in their classroom practices. It is in the dynamics of this gap between theoretical intentions and practical classroom outcomes that this research project was located.

Three upper-primary teachers were identified who practically enacted a visual literacy curriculum within their classroom program. The research was an ethnography, with a bricolage of qualitative research methodologies employed to examine the unit of analysis; each participating teacher's conceptual and practical construction of visual literacy teaching. Case study was used as the vehicle for communicating with the reader. Data were largely derived from participating teachers through repeated semi-structured interviews, conversations and participant observations. Valuable data was also derived from field notes, document analysis and my research journal. Through talking to teachers, their personal theory and beliefs related to visual literacy were explored, and factors

which influenced their choice to teach visual literacy were identified. Observations enabled descriptions of teachers' practical enactment of visual literacy teaching. Observations of teachers in their school context, and exploratory conversations highlighted the challenges teachers face in implementing this process of educational change. These findings, reported through the teachers' case studies, provided valuable insights that contributed to the development of a model for constructing visual literacy pedagogy.

This study demonstrates that layered, multidimensional sets of conditions must be in existence for the practical enactment of a successful visual literacy program. Foundational to the practical enactment of a comprehensive and rigorous classroom visual literacy program is a strong theoretical visual literacy curriculum construct, where visual literacy is clearly theorised in published literature, theoretical visual literacy resources are widely available, and the construct is politically supported. Additionally, if the practical enactment of a visual literacy curriculum is to be successful, a change in teachers' personal vision of literacy is necessary. Teachers must re-evaluate what purpose they are trying to achieve with their literacy teaching and learning program so as to incorporate a multiliterate, visual literacy mind set. Furthermore, the presence of key conditions from the socio-cultural classroom context is supportive of the visual literacy teaching innovation: largely collegial support and the availability of resources. Finally, it is advantageous that teachers take an integrated and flexible approach to pedagogical choices and include visual literacy learning experiences from each of Luke and Freebody's (1999) four sets of literate practices. Additionally, this study identifies key components of the socio-cultural learning culture which potentially present barriers to the acquisition of each layer of conditions.

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CERTIFICATION

I, Sarah-Jane Atkins, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sarah-Jane Atkins

June, 2006

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