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## Student Academic Literacy Practices in a South African Vocational Web Design Higher Education Course

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*Student academic literacy practices in a  
South African vocational web design  
higher education course*

**Lynn Coleman**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the Master of Research (MRes) Degree**

The Open University

September 2009

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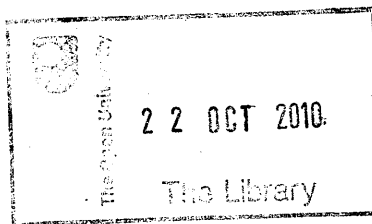
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# Contents

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Abstract.....	vi
1 Introduction and Research Aims.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Contextual Environment of the Web Design and Development Course.....	2
1.3 Research Questions.....	4
1.4 Dissertation Structure .....	5
2 Review of the Literature.....	6
2.1 Academic Literacies Research.....	7
2.2 Academic Literacies as a Critical and Transformative Perspective .....	10
Literacy practices .....	11
Transformative focus .....	13
Multiliteracies and multimodality .....	14
2.3 Academic Literacies: South African Contextual Realities .....	15
3 Research Methodology .....	18
3.1 Research Design .....	18
Academic literacies research and ethnographic methodologies .....	19
3.2 Data Collection.....	20
Sampling.....	21
Sources of data.....	21
3.3 Data Analysis.....	22
3.4 Ethical Considerations.....	23

4	Describing the Data .....	26
4.1	Generating Fieldnotes .....	26
	Relationships in the field.....	26
	Focus of observation.....	26
4.2	Conducting Interviews .....	27
4.3	Analysis Process .....	28
4.4	A: Academic Environment and Literacy Practices .....	29
	Physical environment, infrastructure and organisation.....	29
	Academic literacy practices .....	31
4.5	B. Textual Production and Literacy Practices .....	34
	How texts are produced .....	34
	How texts are used .....	38
4.6	C. Developing a Professional Identity .....	40
5	Interpretation and Discussion.....	42
5.1	Representing the 'Academic' within the University Of Technology .....	42
5.2	Constituting the Academic from the Professional.....	43
5.3	Student Academic Literacy Practices.....	45
5.4	Synthesizing comments .....	46
6	Conclusions .....	48
6.1	Implications.....	48
	Value of the study.....	48
	The WDD course.....	48
6.2	Validity .....	49

6.3	Limitations of the Study .....	50
7	Bibliography.....	52
8	Appendices.....	61



## **Abstract**

This study explores and describes the academic literacy practices of students completing a vocationally orientated web design and development course at Hoerikwaggo University of Technology, a higher education institution in South Africa. The research study proposes a more inclusive conceptualisation of academic literacies to accommodate the multimodal and digital texts produced by students on the course. An academic literacies research perspective is used as a conceptual framework for the study, accepting an understanding of literacy as being constitutive of the sociocultural environments and practices in which reading and writing is used. In keeping with the methodological perspectives espoused by academic literacies research, an ethnographic oriented approach was used. Data collection was primarily informed by participant observation activities and semi-structured interviews with student participants. Thematic analysis of fieldnotes and interview transcripts was used as the main data analysis tool. The analysis of the study highlights the primacy of the multimodal text and its influence in shaping the academic literacy practices in the course, along with the ways in which digital technologies, foregrounded in the professional domain of web design and development, mediate the nature of these literacy practices. Overall the study confirms the awareness, in much research in the academic literacies field, of the need to recognise and respect the distinctiveness of literacy practices in different academic contexts.

## **1 Introduction and Research Aims**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In the higher education (HE) academic environment lecturers, university management and education departments often anecdotally associate successful learning as being synonymous with written assessment. Similar connections between written assessment embodied by the academic essay, and the demonstration of academic success have been established in theoretical and empirical terms (e.g. in Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006 and Lea, 1999 and 2004). Academic success recognised through written assessments is commonly referred to as academic literacy. However, increasingly within vocationally oriented courses in HE, like graphic design or drama, academic success is demonstrated through the production of a range of written and non-written assessments that do not necessarily conform to the prescripts of an academic essay. What form therefore does academic literacy take in HE environments where written assessments are not prioritised? This research study seeks to address this question and is concerned with describing the academic literacy practices of students in a Web Design and Development (WDD) course at a South African (SA) University of Technology (UT), where the assessment outcomes typically take the form of multimodal digital text.

This research adheres to an academic literacies research perspective and therefore regards literacy as constitutive of the sociocultural environments and practices in which reading and writing is used (Street, 1995; Gee, 1996 and Barton and Hamilton, 1998). As literacy is implicated in various contexts besides schooling, multiple literacies are deemed to exist. In addition, such a conceptualisation of literacies acknowledges its multimodal nature, i.e. including various combinations of the verbal, visual, audio, gestural or spatial modes (New London Group, 2000). ‘Literacy practices’ which Barton and Hamilton (2000:7) describe as “Social practices in which literacy has a role” is used as a key theoretical concept to explain the nature of

academic literacy practices within the research site. 'Literacy practices' therefore is a productive way of accounting for how the sociocultural aspects of the disciplinary environment of web design and development as practiced in the WDD impacts on the type of texts produced and how academic success is demonstrated in this specific academic environment.

## **1.2 Contextual Environment of the Web Design and Development Course**

The main educational aim of the WDD course at Hoerikwaggo UT (HUT), is to develop graduates with technical competence able to work in the professional web design and development fields, producing multimedia products such as websites. Website production is commonly referred to as web design, a somewhat ambiguous term, open to multiple interpretations and perceptions about what exactly it means. A ubiquitous distinction made in this broad and fluid professional environment by the professional community and the literature in the field, is to differentiate between technical and visual components involved in the production of a website (Nelson, 2009; Krunic et al., 2006; Krug, 2000 and Lynch and Horton, 2001). The visual component involves the framework for the 'look and feel' of the website and includes consideration of all graphic and visual elements that make up a website including page layout, navigation, visual hierarchy and colour scheme. Professionals tasked with this component, often called 'web designers', have to work with and implement XHTML and CSS\*. Web developers on the other hand, work with programming and technical components required to build a functional website. This might include the use of specialist dynamic scripting languages and database programming like PHP, MySQL, Flash, Java and JavaScript.\* An important caveat is that these role identities are not homogeneously constituted, with each grouping consisting of a range of sub-groupings often dependent on technical expertise, choice of programming or web authoring tools used or the work context that might define these roles in very specific

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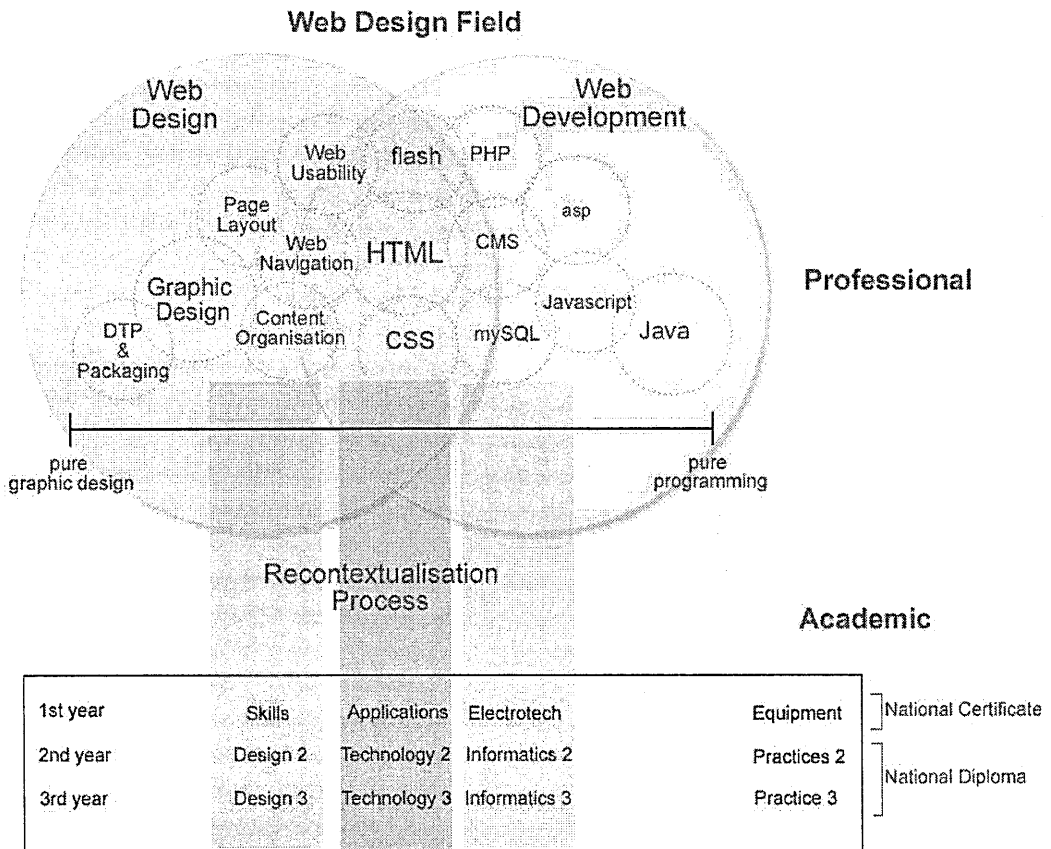
\* See Appendix 1: Glossary of web design and development terminology

ways. The professional field of web design and development can be seen as performing a regulatory function as it informs the particular character of the WDD course curriculum.

The concept of ‘recontextualisation’ is used to describe the process whereby knowledge is “... selectively appropriated from fields of practice and re-shaped and relocated, to make up the curriculum within a particular educational context” (Bernstein, 1996 in Moore, 2004:2). Diagram 1 on page 4 illustrates the recontextualisation process in relation to how the professional understanding and knowledge of the web design field is appropriated into the WDD curriculum.

The epistemological differences which underlie the main distinctions in the professional environment of WDD, between web design and development and as illustrated in Diagram 1, are appropriated into the WDD course. The course curriculum supports, along with some members of the professional community, the notion that the roles of web designer/developer are incompatible with each other, evidenced by the scepticism dealt to those individuals who claim a dual identity (McKenzie, 2006 and Nelson, 2009). Through the recontextualisation process, the WDD curriculum reproduces the design/development divide through its subject allocations and content. However, the course is geared towards the development of graduates with more web design competencies, albeit with a strong technical focus. The course therefore inhibits the hybrid space where the two areas overlap. The WDD course further recognises academic success predominantly through the design and production of functional and visually pleasing websites.

Diagram 1: The recontextualisation process of web design from the professional to academic environment at HUT.



### 1.3 Research Questions

Proposing a broader conceptualisation of academic literacies to accommodate the multimodal disciplinary environment of web design and development where written assessments and texts are not privileged, this research study seeks to address the following research questions;

1. How is 'academic' constituted in the literacies of the web design and development course?
2. What are the student academic literacy practices in the web design/development course?

#### **1.4 Dissertation Structure**

In Chapter 2 an overview of the academic literacies research literature and key theoretical concepts used in the study is presented. The research design and methodology adopted, along with the data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations used in the study are described in Chapter 3. The presentation of collected data and the analysis and interpretation thereof is contained in Chapters 4 and 5. The conclusions of the study along with limitations and future research possibilities are presented in Chapter 6.

## **2 Review of the Literature**

The research study described in this dissertation proposes a more inclusive conceptualisation of academic literacy to accommodate the multimodal and digital texts produced by students in the WDD course. The study represents a unique opportunity to investigate and describe student academic literacies in a vocationally orientated course located in the multimodal and digital disciplinary context of web design and development at a South African University of Technology.

According to Lillis and Scott (2007) the field of academic literacies research has developed steadily in the past 20 years and focused almost exclusively on the HE environment through the work of Lillis (2001, 2008), Lea (1999, 2004, 2007), Street (1984 -2006), Baynham, (2000), in the United Kingdom (UK), Gee (1996, 2000), Chiseri-Strater (1991), Davidson and Tomic (1999) and Turner, (1999) in the United States (US) and Thesen (1997 - 2007); Angelil-Carter and Moore (1998) and Leibowitz, (2004) in South Africa (SA), among others. Many of these research engagements, Lea (2004) contends, have focused particularly on institutional or disciplinary contexts, while paying specific attention to the verbal mode of reading and writing. Increasingly, scholars have extended their investigation to include 'new contexts of vocational and professional studies' (Lea and Stierer, 2000 and Satchwell and Ivanič, 2007), while accommodating varied disciplinary traditions, like, nursing ( Baynham, 2000), varied writing practices, such as reflective writing, (Crème, 2000) as well as multimodal communication practices that make provision for the inclusion of additional modes to the verbal such as the visual, gestural or spatial when considering meaning making (e.g. the work informed by the New London Group(2000) and Kress, (2003) such as Abbott, (2002), Thesen,(2001), and Archer, 2006). Additionally, the steady shift to screen-based technologies, (Snyder, 2001 and 2002) resulting in the increasing use of mediating digital technologies within the university (McKenna and McAvina, 2007; Goodfellow and Lea, 2007; Goodfellow,

2005), have also been researched from an academic literacies perspective. This study contributes to this extended realm of academic literacies research by exploring and illuminating the academic literacy practices of students in a WDD course, where written assessment forms are not prioritised.

The questions I explore in the Chapter are a) as a conceptual framework, what value does academic literacies research bring to this study, and b) what key theoretical concepts from academic literacies are useful to this research.

## **2.1 Academic Literacies Research**

Generally, academic literacies research<sup>1</sup> has been described as a field of inquiry focusing almost entirely on writing, within the HE sector. Lillis and Scott (2007) note that this is in part because, within this sector, student written texts have remained the main artefact of assessment practices. In addition, reading and writing have remained a core activity associated with learning in academic settings, resulting in the continued emphasis placed on writing by academic literacies research, rather than other forms of academic communication practices. Recent research into literacy practices in the Further Education (FE) sector in the UK (see Ivanič et al., (2007) for a detailed discussion of the Literacies for Learning in Further Education study) has sought to extend the meaning of academic literacies to include learning in post-school education more generally (Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007). A valuable contribution made by this research has been its articulation for the rightful recognition as 'academic', of the knowledge and understanding underpinning more practical activities, and broadly associated with academic communication practices such as creating leaflets in a childcare or hospitality course (Satchwell and Ivanič, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup>The terms academic literacies or academic literacies perspective are often used interchangeably with academic literacies research, although such usage can mask great variations in the meaning of the term as will be explored in more detail in this Chapter.



As a field of study, the academic literacies range is expansive, which, when trying to pin down its scope and meaning, provides many vagaries. On one hand, its expansive character has accommodated a fluidity of meaning, allowing many activities and investigations to reside comfortably under its banner, for example Thesen's (2006) research into the lecture as a genre associated with academic literacies. On the other hand, this has inevitably led to the confused, conflicted and often contested use of the term. As Lillis and Scott note there is "Considerable fluidity and at times confusion in meaning attached to the phrase" (2007:6).

In general, different uses of the term are associated with different ways of understanding and problematising the taken-for-granted activity of student writing. A useful heuristic offered by Blommaert et al. (2007) is to distinguish between the practical and theoretical ways in which academic literacies is used. Thesen and van Pletzen (2006:10) and Lillis and Scott (2007:6-7) expand this suggestion into a more detailed and nuanced explication of the various ways in which the term is used.

On the practical side, the term *academic literacy* is used to indicate its location in HE and its endeavour with what students need to do; namely, to demonstrate competence and acquisition of a particular set of reading and writing activities associated with academic study (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006:10). Hence, the tendency is for the term to be used referentially for reading, writing or texts associated with the academic context (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Additionally, Lillis and Scott suggest that academic literacy can also be used to indicate a range of courses specifically aimed at assisting students to meet the reading, writing and text-producing demands of the university, highlighting its instrumental focus through the concentration on "...student acquisition of required linguistic, rhetorical or cognitive structure" (2007:6). This focus is often enacted through courses like English for Academic Purposes (EAP) – used in the UK or SA (see Turner, 1999 and Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006) - or in the initial focus on Composition Studies in the US (Chiseri-

Strater, 1991). This usage could be linked to what Lea and Street (1998 and 2006) have associated with the study skills model of student academic reading and writing.

*Academic literacies* is also used to signal a theoretical and methodological field of study that locates itself within a critical sociocultural and political paradigm, seeking to understand student learning in the predominantly HE context, through an understanding of student writing and other communicative engagements (Curry, 2007; Lillis and Scott, 2007; Lea, 2004). In general however, this use of academic literacies is commonly framed by its emphasis on the socially situated nature of reading and writing, a derivation from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996 and Barton and Hamilton, 1998) notion of literacy as social practice (Lea, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006; Lillis, 2003 and Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001). Academic literacies have therefore been foregrounded as a “...social practice perspective for understanding student writing in higher education” (Lea and Stierer, 2000). For some, academic literacies denote an understanding of the specific disciplinary-informed “rhetorical practices, discourses and genre” (Lillis and Scott, 2007) or reading and writing within the discipline associated with what Lea and Street (1998 and 2006) have termed the “academic socialisation model”.

Academic socialisation according to these authors is premised on the acculturation of students “...into the disciplinary and subject based discourses and genres” with student success demonstrated by the extent to which students are able to “...acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking and using literacy that typified members of a disciplinary or subject area community” (Lea and Street, 2006:369). For commentators, a major concern of this approach, which Lillis and Scott (2007) identify as having a normative focus, is the presumption that these disciplinary discourses are seen as relatively fixed, and once students have acquired the literacy ‘ground rules’ they can be reproduced unproblematically (Lea and Street, 2006). Thus implying that

the research agenda concentrates on how these rules can be acquired, rather than on their critique.

Other researchers have adopted academic literacies research to take a critical view of writing and other communicative practices acknowledging and challenging the dominant ideological, sociocultural and power structures embedded in its use in academia (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006 and Lillis, 2003). For Lillis and Scott (2007), this is indicative of a more transformative approach associated with the use of academic literacies. This critical and transformative agenda has framed much of the research associated with this perspective and its contribution to current understanding of academic literacies and educational practice is widely recognised (Crook, 2006, Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001 and Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). It is therefore widely accepted that the use of the terms academic literacies research or perspective signals the adoption of this critical and transformative agenda to a greater or lesser extent. This latter perspective is identified as an apt conceptual framework and deserves further explanation.

## **2.2 Academic Literacies as a Critical and Transformative Perspective**

Academic literacies' historical roots lie with the NLS which proposed a social theory of literacy (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996 and Barton and Hamilton, 1998). This theory suggests that literacy cannot be considered separately from the social conditions in which it takes place. NLS researchers proposed and developed some core theoretical ideas defining their approach to the notion of literacy. These include literacy events and literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Barton, 1994 and Street, 1994, 1995), the plural conceptualisation of literacy (thus literacies), the recognition of the existence of multiple literacies and, fundamentally, dismissing a monolithic conceptualisation of literacy (Street and Street, 1991 and Street, 1995). The social theory of literacy, while acknowledging the existence of many literacies, recognises

that literacies are not automatically regarded equally. Literacies are always positioned in relation to social institutions and power relations that strongly determine and sustain which literacies are valued in which contexts (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič, 2000). Central to this conceptualisation, the NLS's major contribution to the theorisation of literacy was its challenge and criticism of the dominant conceptualisation of literacy as being an individualised, technical and cognitive ability associated with reading and writing. Instead, it offered a sociocultural conceptualisation of literacy that prioritized the sociocultural practices informing any act of reading and writing (Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Maybin, 2000 and Lea, 2004). Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy encapsulates this challenge and opposes the binary distinctions of literate/illiterate, where illiteracy is defined in a deficit relationship to that of literacy. Here literacy is singled out as that associated with school and education institutions. Such a deficit model of literacy creates an artificial, negative and socioculturally destructive association between people assumed to possess the required cognitive and technical abilities of reading and writing and those who do not (Street and Street, 1991). The ideological model of literacy therefore acknowledges that other literacies exist alongside school literacies, and argues that literacies are defined by the sociocultural practices and ideological relationships between each other (Street, 1995; Gee, 1996). It is this view of literacy that is privileged in an academic literacies perspective and in this study.

### *Literacy practices*

Literacy practice, regarded as central to the NLS approach to literacy (Barton and Hamilton, 1998 and Tusting et al., 2000), is the key conceptual device informing the empirical activities of this research study. Literacy events and literacy practices account for both the practical, observable and abstract, yet culturally mediated ways in which literacy is utilised in a range of contexts. Literacy events and practices are however distinguishable from each other. Literacy events are seen as empirical and

observable activities where literacy has a role, usually involving written text or where reading and writing is central to the activity (Barton, 1994) e.g. writing a letter to the local council or producing a website for assessment purposes in the WDD course. Literacy practices account for what people do with literacy and include associated values, feelings, attitudes and social relations. For Barton and Hamilton, practices are the "...cultural ways of utilising literacy" (1998:7), thus how the WDD course environment informs the way student websites are produced. Therefore as Ivanič et al. argue, literacy practices are inscribed with "...values, belief, 'possibilities for selfhood'..., conceptions of literacy, intentions and power relations..." (2007:706). Literacy practices indicate accepted ways of doing things, regulate appropriate and inappropriate activities and can be created by situations and context (Barton, 1994). Similarly Street (1991) observes that not only are literacy practices embedded in ideology and vice versa, but different practices can position us differently in social spaces, providing a link with identity. Tusting, et al. (2000) draw attention to the fact that literacy practices are also used to refer to 'textual practices' which are culturally recognisable patterns for constructing texts. The recognition of these practices thus requires the identification of the values, beliefs and power relations that sustain them (Tusting et al.,2000:213-214). Literacy practices do therefore act as inclusionary or exclusionary devices that signal and regulate membership, identity and discourse. The argument articulated here suggests that the concept of literacy practices embodies the notion of literacy as social practice. Literacy practice attempts to signal that specific language uses mediated via spoken or written texts do not exist in isolation. Rather they are integrated with what people do in the social and material (i.e. their practices). Lillis (2008) contends that literacy practices therefore propose a way in which reading and writing activities and the social structures embedded in these activities are connected.

In the next section, a complementary issue is examined – namely the transformative agenda implicated in academic literacies research and how this agenda provides both

theoretically and methodologically<sup>2</sup>, a generative argument that can be utilised as a conceptual framework in my research study. The examination is premised predominantly on the recent, critical evaluation of academic literacies research undertaken by Lillis and Scott (2007) with specific focus on what the authors identify as its ‘transformative focus’.

### *Transformative focus*

The transformative agenda of the academic literacies research perspective is highlighted by an “...interest in meaning making set alongside a critical ethnographic gaze focusing on situated text production and practice” (Lillis and Scott, 2007:13). This is enacted through a research agenda that favours practice above text and in so doing dislodges the text artefact as linguistic object and primary focus, in favour of redirecting the gaze towards the practices in which the texts are embedded (Lillis and Scott, 2007). This does not, however, suggest that the detailed analysis of texts should be abandoned, rather that the analysis of text and practices sit in a symbiotic relationship to each other and that this conceptualisation should frame the methodological and research focus. Thesen and van Pletzen also note that an academic literacies research methodology encourages approaches that do not attempt to read practices off texts, but rather attempt to establish what they mean to their users (2006:13). This redirection onto practices allows the research to favour the voices of those producing the texts, often students (Lea, 2004). The reprioritisation of student understanding and experience of their own literacy practices without making prior assumptions about which practices are either appropriate or effective (Lea and Street, 1998) represents an important realignment of the power differentials involved in academic literacy practices in any given context. It also resonates with a further point identified by Lillis and Scott (2007) – namely the insistence on not only identifying conventions, but also on problematising them, especially as they relate to student

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<sup>2</sup> The methodological implications associated with using an academic literacies perspective, mainly associated with using ethnographic approaches, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

interest and experiences. As a result, issues of power, authority and inherent contestation over meaning making and the value of including wider representational resources for meaning making are brought to the fore and accommodated as part of this transformative focus (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Important shifts towards the recognition of other communication practices have increasingly been accepted within academic literacies as previously noted, primarily as a result of this agenda.

*Multiliteracies and multimodality*

Academic literacies research has acknowledged the plurality of literacy with compelling arguments for the inclusion of a range of meaning making practices, particularly the visual, into the social practice account of literacy (Thesen, 2001). Contributing to these debates and formative to the NLS is the work of the New London Group (2000) around the notion of multiliteracies and the pedagogy of multiliteracies, the social semiotic perspectives of multimodality advanced by Kress (2003) and Kress and Jewitt (2003) and the consideration of the literacy practices associated specifically with screen based technologies (Snyder, 2001 and 2002). A common thread linking these somewhat varied theoretical positions, is the recognition that meaning making and communication practices are mediated in multimodal ways. Thus, literacies and literacy practices cannot be said to consist of only the verbal mode, but rather includes various combinations of the visual, verbal, audio, gestural and spatial modes. This leads Satchwell and Ivanič to conclude that “Even the simplest written texts are always multimodal, consisting of linguistic, visual and material modes” (2007:305). Researchers in HE have provided interesting accounts of the increasing multimodal nature of academic literacy texts and practices. Specifically in the South African HE context, the inclusionary potential of incorporating diverse student discourses into existing academic literacy practices through the incorporation of multimodal pedagogic frameworks is regarded as encouraging (Archer, 2006 and Bond, 2001). This body of research provides a

constructive theoretical base from which to explore the academic literacy practices of the WDD course located predominantly in a multimodal and screen based disciplinary context where non-written practices are privileged.

### **2.3 Academic Literacies: South African Contextual Realities**

Access and equity in relation to staff and student participation are key discourses in the SA HE landscape (Moore et al., 1998 and Ramphela, 2008). These discourses, which for Maassen and Cloete (2002) also raise questions specifically about who (in terms of race, gender, socioeconomic differentials) this access is for, are enacted through various academic development and support initiatives aimed at students and staff alike. These initiatives focus primarily on accommodating an increasingly diverse student body who are increasingly being perceived as being ‘underprepared’ (Thesen, 1997) for the academic demands required in HE. Despite these efforts<sup>3</sup>, which have had varying levels of uptake, commitment and success at different institutions, overall student course completion rates have been alarmingly low.<sup>4</sup> Even more significant are the continued racial disparities evident in these rates (Scott et al., 2007).

It is against this backdrop that academic development practitioners have recognised the potential and acknowledged the impact of NLS for academic literacy practice in SA (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). The NLS was generative in understanding students' experiences of transitions and access in the academic environment of HE both generally (Thesen, 1997 and 2007; Gough, 2000; Leibowitz, 2004) and within specific disciplinary contexts (Archer, 2006 and Coleman, 2006). As evidenced elsewhere, the study skills approaches to academic literacy conventions (Gough, 2000) has also been called into question by the more critical academic literacies

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed overview of the historical review of some of these initiatives at a particular institution see the Angelil-Carter (1998) volume and Ramphela (2008: 196-226).

<sup>4</sup> Scott et al (2007:12-17) report on the first post-Apartheid cohort completion rate study on South African HE. The results suggest that only 30% of all first time entering students in 2000 (globally for all institutions including universities and technikons - now universities of technology) graduated after 5 years i.e. in 2004.



agendas. Not surprisingly then, given the various levels of diversity inherent in South African society and replicated in HE student bodies, issues of identity and writing have been a central focus of academic literacies research, particularly making use of Gee's (1996) concept of discourse (Thesen, 1997, Paxton, 2004, Jacobs, 2005 and Coleman, 2006). Using an empirically informed understanding of the repertoires of discursive resources that students bring into the existing academic environment, Archer has argued for more transformative pedagogic frameworks that can effectively accommodate students' often multimodal practices into the existing literacy practices (Archer, 2006). Through an analysis of a poster containing visual and written material, created for a Communication Course in Engineering, Archer is able to provide evidence of how students were able to "...present complex conceptual frameworks in the visual mode with more competence than in the written mode" (2006:147). SA researchers have therefore acknowledged the need to consider and embrace the potential of other communicative modes especially the visual as an additional means whereby students can demonstrate their learning, while recognising that such inclusion must be matched with an appropriate assessment framework (Thesen, 2001, and Archer, 2006).

Additionally, SA researchers have identified particular methodological qualities of the academic literacies perspective that resonate with the access and equity agendas seen as imperative in promoting inclusive participation for all in HE and more broadly in society at large, most notably its focus on the student experience and "...bringing the locus of interpretation closer to students" (Thesen, 1997: 507). Such research has also sought to acknowledge the many identities, discourses and practices that students bring to the academic environment and how these have contributed to shaping students' encounters with academic literacies in their courses (Moore et al., 1998:13 and Archer, 2006). These aspects underscore the transformative focus generally valued within the academic literacies tradition. Transformation within the SA HE context is commonly taken to mean the fundamental change from past

discrimination and fragmentation in the system to one that promotes the equal access to and success within quality educational provision for staff and students alike (Ramphela, 2008). In a similar vein, academic literacies provides a powerful mechanism for researchers and practitioners to challenge prevailing dominant discourses of student deficit symbolised by labels such as 'underprepared' common in SA HE contexts.

In this chapter I have highlighted the value of using the academic literacies perspective as a conceptual lens for this study. Its usefulness as a perspective is summarised by its ability to:

- Establish a theoretical link between texts and their sociocultural embedding, through the concept of literacy practices
- Accommodate a broader range of academic communicative practices that recognise more than just written texts as a way to demonstrate academic success
- Provide methodological direction that allows for students' experiences and interpretation of academic literacy practices to be foregrounded.

In this way the discussion has provided the necessary theoretical basis from which to empirically explore the research questions linked to this study, namely

1. How is 'academic' constituted in the literacies of the web design and development course?
2. What are the student academic literacy practices in the web design/development course?

The next chapter describes the methodological approach informing this research study through the explanation of its research design, data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations.

### **3 Research Methodology**

This chapter delineates the overarching methodological approaches informing this research study. The research design, data collection and analysis techniques and ethical considerations of this study are described.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design takes a qualitatively informed and interpretive epistemological position using an ethnographically oriented methodology. Maxwell (2005) argues that the common conceptualisation of research design as an essentially linear and sequential series of steps is not a valuable approach in qualitative research. Rather, he proposes an interactive model of research design that, while having a definite structure is equally flexible. The researcher is allowed to reassess the impact of the different research components on each other on a continual basis, "...research design is treated as a real entity, not simply an abstraction or plan" (Maxwell, 2005:3). In addition to being guided by Maxwell's interactive model, the methodological frameworks informing academic literacies research are seen as equally important. In this respect it is noted that academic literacies research, especially in the UK, has to a greater or lesser extent adopted methodologies "...explicitly located in ethnographic traditions" (Lillis, 2008:354). Similarly, Green and Bloome (1997) have highlighted the value of using ethnographic approaches in educational settings through their notion of ethnography-in-education that allows educational researchers to use ethnographic methodologies to address educational questions and concerns. Thus coherence between the epistemological approach informing the research design, the theoretical framework of the study and the contextual setting of the research site is established.

*Academic literacies research and ethnographic methodologies*

Green and Bloome have suggested that "...how ethnography is practiced or how researchers engage in ethnography is determined by the field and discipline" (1997:185). In this respect, academic literacies research advocates and strongly encourages research approaches and methods which foreground the perspectives, experiences and interpretations of those using and creating texts. As a result of this distinct interest in the relationship between the production of texts (literacy events) and the context and social practices in which the text is produced (literacy practices), ethnography and ethnographic methodologies are seen as being valuable for enhancing context-sensitive approaches to the study of academic writing (Lillis 2008:358). This research is regarded as *ethnographic* as its scope is a small scale, single setting study, attempting to investigate academic literacy practices primarily through participant observation within the context of the WDD course. This study's ethnographic orientation is distinguished from what Green and Bloome (1997) calls "doing ethnography" often aligned with anthropological studies and involving a more in-depth and longer term engagement in the research context and the production of a detailed and 'thick' narrative (referred to as an *ethnography*) describing the social phenomena investigated. Using Green and Bloome's (1997) heuristic levels to distinguish different ways in which ethnography can be used, this research would be located more appropriately between "an ethnographic perspective" and using "ethnographic tools" denoting that the research focus is guided by a social theory of literacy while including multiple data sources centred around participant observation activities.

Using the academic literacies perspective on ethnography offered by Lillis (2008: 353), this research study inhabits a productive space between *ethnography as method* (focusing on talk around text, while usefully directing the researchers attention beyond the text, towards a consideration of the writer's perspective of the text) and *ethnography as methodology* (the use of multiple data sources and a sustained

involvement in the context of literacy production, while exploring and tracking the dynamic and complex situational meanings and practices embedded in and created by academic writing). In order to devote the necessary focus on literacy practices as prescribed by Lillis's (2008:353) notion of *ethnography as deep theorising*, that attempts to challenge the distinction between text and practices, a longer period of engagement in the field is required. Therefore it is appropriate that this research study occupies a transient space between ethnography as method and methodology.

A commonly cited concern associated with ethnographic research relates to the role and location of the researcher, especially in relation to her participant observation status. Some of these objections which deal specifically with the notion of objectivity and the pursuit of bias free outcomes are addressed in Chapter 6. Within the fieldwork period however, participant observation requires an acute awareness and constant sensitive negotiation of the researcher's role, status and impact of the context and participants. This can prove to be a daunting task especially for a novice researcher and therefore might preclude the use of a broadly ethnographic methodology that includes participant observation activities.

### 3.2 Data Collection

A case study approach is used to guide the main data collection activities of this study. Merriam explains that a qualitative case study "...is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (1991:xiii). A 'bounded phenomenon' could be identified as either a programme, person, process, social unit or institution (Merriam, 1991:xiii). The case in this research is defined as the social unit consisting of the third year WDD student cohort. Specific focus was placed on one instance of their textual production during the field work period namely the Instructional Design assignment<sup>5</sup> (for the brief see Appendix 3). The prescriptions of

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<sup>5</sup> Initially the assessment selected for consideration was a group based project that integrated all the subjects of the course. Due to various delays associated with finalising the prescriptions of the brief, along with the unsuitability of the textual requirements

the assignment, that students work in pairs, directed the recruitment strategy for selecting interview participants.

### *Sampling*

Theoretical or purposive sampling, also referred to as non-random sampling (O'Leary, 2004 and Mason, 2002) was used to select the case and interview participants. This form of sampling involves the construction of a sample that is meaningful theoretically and therefore allows the researcher to select the context or phenomena regarded as pivotal in answering the research questions (Mason, 2002). As the study attempted to answer the questions *How is 'academic' constituted in the literacies of the web design and development course?* and *What are the student academic literacy practices in the web design and development course?*, it was deemed appropriate to select the third year cohort as their final year status was most likely to embody the full range of academic literacy practices associated with the course. For the interview participants, the following criteria was used: representativeness in respect of the demographics of the cohort in relation to race, gender, secondary schooling backgrounds and overall academic ability as defined by assessment results. (Appendix 4). In addition students' willingness to participate in the study and their availability also served as a selection factor. Initially four interview pairs were selected. However one pair was excluded because both participants were unable to attend the scheduled interview. Efforts to recruit another suitable pair proved unsuccessful as most students had, at that stage, already left university for their June/July vacation period.

### *Sources of data*

Both the case study approach (Punch, 1998) and ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) are characterised by the use of multiple sources of data. This research included the use of participant observation using fieldnotes, semi-structured

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of the submission that would occur during the field work period (i.e. no digital text was required) a more suitable assignment was selected.

interviews (Appendix 5 for sequence outline) with each interview pair, documentary sources that included written and digital assessment texts (digital CD Rom, digital scans of the visual diary, digital version of mood boards and a written design conceptualisation report) and various curriculum documents (such as learner guides, assessment briefs, lesson outlines, lecturer notes and tutorial tasks). Documentary sources were used to provide the necessary contextual background to understanding the research context, supplement and validate fieldnotes produced during classroom observations and help illustrate where necessary the specific nature of academic literacy textual practices in the context.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis of the interviews and participant observation activities (especially the production of fieldnotes) was the main data analysis tool used in this study. The thematic analysis sought to identify significant themes that are depicted through rich descriptive narrative reflective of both the interpretive and ethnographic research traditions. While the assessment texts produced by students are used to illustrate how specific literacy practices were enacted, the scope of the research study and dissertation precluded a more detailed textual analysis, possibly using Fairclough's (1992) framework for critical discourse analysis. An alternative approach to the data collection and analysis could place a stronger emphasis on the textual artefacts, using a more structured version of the 'talk-around-text' approach to elicit the participants' perspectives of the text. However, with the focus of the study on student literacy practices, both the data collection and analysis approach is justified, acknowledging a core feature of academic literacies research, namely, the value of linking texts to practices (Lillis, 2008 and Barton, 2001).

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance to conduct this research was sought and obtained from the Open University's Ethics Committee before conducting the fieldwork. The main ethical concerns associated with this research study were those of informed consent, privacy and consequences for future research. This was tempered by the fact that I was a lecturer in the department until September 2008 (prior to when I became a full time MRes student) and had taught the cohort of students who became the participants in this study. As such I occupied a unique and at times ambiguous role of course 'insider' and also objective research 'outsider'. This dual role impacted on issues related to researcher reactivity and reflexivity which are addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Informed consent is premised on the acceptance that the researcher must provide information about the research purposes and procedures to enable participants to freely decide if they want to participate or withdraw from the study (Snyder, 2002 and Paul, 2003). In order to gain consent from all participants in the study, a multilevel approach was used that involved e-mails and face-to-face discussions with all related participants including the Head of Department, course co-ordinator, lecturers and the students I wished to observe and interview. Lecture staff were asked to sanction my being a participant observer of their lectures through the completion of consent forms. Students provided their consent to these activities in person after an introductory presentation about the research was made to them in class. Interview participants completed the necessary consent form (see Appendix 6 for ethical clearance and consent documents).

Privacy distinguishes between what is deemed public or private in relation to space and information consumption, introducing the idea of confidentiality and information secrecy (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, privacy is also "...defined in terms of specific audiences that are or are not regarded as having



legitimate access to information of particular kinds” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:212). The typical translation of privacy into its practical application in research is through the promise of anonymity and confidentiality to participants. In this study, privacy has been dealt with in that, firstly, the identity of the institution, the course and individual participants has been protected by the use of pseudonyms. During interviews with students, the choice of pseudonyms to be used in the final dissertation was negotiated. Because of the high level of familiarity between lecturers and students in the course, the identities of the interview participants were not disclosed to lecturers. Care was also taken in the dissertation presentation to delink assessment examples from specific participants. It is hoped that together, these measures will assist in preventing all participants (particularly lecturers) who read the report from identifying each other and student participants. While all requests for copies of the final dissertation will be honoured, it might be deemed necessary to exclude certain information that might allude to the specific identities of participants.

Of particular importance is the issue of consequences for future research. This assumes that the researcher will ensure that the research conducted is not found to be objectionable by those being researched and/or by gatekeepers to the extent that it affects access to the research site in the future (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As I am hoping to use the same context for my future PhD research, it has been crucial to ensure that participants in the research context, especially key gatekeepers like the HOD and course co-ordinators, do not find my research activities and presence in the academic environment objectionable in any way. In the management of my relationships with the lecturers, it has been crucial that they not view my participant observation as a covert means of evaluating their teaching. When asked about my impressions of their teaching during the course of the fieldwork period, I have diplomatically attempted to affirm their pedagogic practice without suggesting an evaluative motive. Linked to privacy concerns, the need to describe the research context in a sensitive manner was regarded as essential. Thus only the contextual information deemed valuable for enhancing the understanding of the academic

*Chapter Three – Research Methodology*

literacy practices of students was included. The inclusion of factors that might have brought the department or institution into disrepute was avoided, although this did not preclude taking a critical stance towards the data.

The next chapter presents a detailed description of the data collected in the study.

## 4 Describing the Data

This chapter presents a more detailed explication of the data collection and analysis methods employed, providing the rationales for choices made before outlining the main data themes that seek to address the research questions. The main data sources used in this study were fieldnotes generated from participant observation activities and semi-structured interviews with student participants.

### 4.1 Generating Fieldnotes

#### *Relationships in the field*

Using Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) continuum that describes the different ways in which participant observation relationships can be constructed in the context, my activities oscillated between what the authors describe as participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant. These positions were determined in principle by my specific contextual location on particular days (i.e. a certain subject classroom, informal discussion with particular staff members etc.). Having previously taught the Design subject, the current part-time lecturer asked me to co-facilitate an evaluation and feedback session with students, moving my role to one defined as participant-as-observer in this case. In another classroom encounter where the lecturer was more apprehensive about my participant observation role, I adopted a more observer-as-participant role, simply sitting in the back row of the class while I observed the activities. However the longer I stayed in the field the more my participant role became accentuated.

#### *Focus of observation*

The third year cohort that acted as the primary case for this study became the main focus of my participant observation activities over the five week fieldwork period. During this time I attended each formal subject's class on at least three occasions, was

present in their computer laboratory during informal (free periods and lunchtime) sessions, had a desk assigned to me in the staff office area and participated in formal staff meetings and I also had numerous informal discussions with academic staff who taught on the third year course. My fieldnote collection approach can be characterised by the production of chronological records of my experiences, descriptions of the physically observed aspects of events (including the use of sketching and visual documentation using photographs), along with the creation of analytical memos and impressions about specifically selected aspects from the field. For presentation purposes, selective segments were typed up verbatim from my fieldwork journal, preserving the accuracy of my initial observations and impressions. I also collected various documents and texts in different multimodal, print and digital forms drawing on assignment briefs, screenshots of software interfaces used by students and curriculum artefacts. These data sources allowed me to construct an understanding of the nature of the academic literacy practices in this context. I also attempted an instance of collaborative data collection in an effort to ensure that I captured authentic student participants' voices in the description of their learning environment in the WDD course<sup>6</sup>. I believe that student engagement in this activity might have been enhanced had I adopted a more sensitive approach to the timing of the activity (after a more prolonged period in the field) and conducted the plenary discussion outside of class time without the lecturer present.

## **4.2 Conducting Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of six students (three pairs) working in pairs to complete a specific assignment. Using interviews allowed me to tap into the participants' perspectives of the WDD course setting and their experiences of completing the Instructional Design assignment. Interviews, while providing access to participants' own words and insights, were always filtered through the interviewer's interpretive perspective. Triangulation with additional

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix 7 for a more detailed description of this exercise.

sources, as was the case in this study, assisted in raising the levels of validity associated with the analysis and interpretation of accounts presented. These additional sources also helped to offset the acknowledged shortcomings of once off interviews that are unable to provide extensive understandings of literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Each interview was digitally recorded and, following the interview the recordings were reviewed. I also made notes of my initial reactions. These impressions were filtered into subsequent interviews allowing me to adjust and rephrase questions, while also serving as some preliminary data categorisations. Verbatim transcriptions were then personally produced with limited attention paid to labelling events within the transcript; rather the overall goal informing the process was to produce a smooth easy-to-read record of the interview. As the focus of analysis was student perceptions of their learning context and text production practices, this transcription method was regarded as appropriate. If the analysis had focused on student language use requiring conversational or discourse analysis, a more detailed transcription approach would have been appropriate.

### **4.3 Analysis Process**

Informed by Maxwell's (2005) interactive model of qualitative research, an iterative relationship between the data collection and analysis was maintained. I was also guided by some data analysis suggestions made by Barton and Hamilton (1998) resulting from their Lancaster local literacies research. The authors suggest the use of inductive and deductive reasoning and the "...constant cycling back and forth between data and theory" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:62). An inherently symbiotic relationship between theory and analysis was developed that directed the data collection (fieldnotes), helped to inform initial interpretations (themes in fieldnotes) that once again directed either further data collection (interviews informed by interpretations from fieldnotes) or renewed considerations of the theory and so on. As a starting point to both data collection and analysis activities, some themes evident in the literature were initially considered, namely, literacy practice, nature of

multimodal literacies and academic literacy practices and texts. Manual coding of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts was undertaken. Initial themes were evaluated and reorganised resulting in the final themes of this study namely; A) Academic environment and literacy practices, B) Text production and academic literacy and C) Development of professional identity.

#### 4.4 A: Academic Environment and Literacy Practices

This theme examines the specific nature of how the academic environment of the WDD course is constituted in relation to the physical setting and infrastructure and through its academic literacy practices. The interaction between the physical and sociocultural practices embodied in the literacy practices fashions how the notion of 'academic' is constituted for all participants in the course. It further informs the nature of the academic text required and how students construct these academic texts within this context (specifically explored in Theme B).

##### *Physical environment, infrastructure and organisation*

Classes are conducted in two main settings; the primary computer lab, assigned to second and third year WDD students, also shared with the Film course, which is housed in the IT Centre and two additional 'flat' classrooms located in two different buildings on campus. Students however spend up to two-thirds of their time on campus in this shared computer lab. The lab is a sterile, characterless room, dominated by three rows of computer terminals that extend across the room. It is perpetually dimly lit, even during formal classes, as the main windows are covered to block out most of the natural light and the main source of light in the room emanates from the turned on monitor screens. Most of the classrooms walls including the labs are devoid of any written or visual texts and materials even though large areas of the walls are assigned to notice boards.

The floor plan for all the classrooms follows the classic traditionalist layout that assigns the lecturer to a front position with the rows of individual student seating directed toward the lecturer, white board or projector screen. The only classroom that uses a round table layout is for the Design subject, where students always work in groups during class.<sup>7</sup> (Image set 1 below)

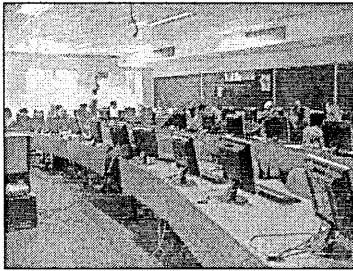
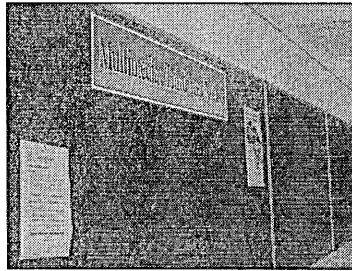
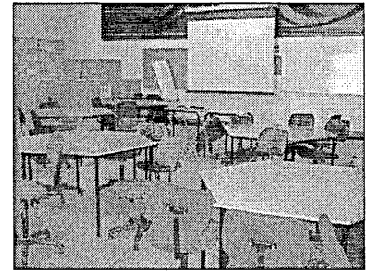


Image Set 1 Computer lab



Student notice board in lab



Flat 'Design' classroom

While the course timetable allocates the use of the computer labs to various WDD cohorts, these rules are not strictly enforced resulting in a constant stream of second year and Film students into formal third year lecture periods (FIELDNOTE 1-Appendix 8). The research participants expressed somewhat mixed feelings towards this arrangement with some citing it as a major factor determining whether they work in the labs or at home. (QUOTE 1-Appendix 9).

Curricula organisation and structures are fluid and informal with each lecturer allowed to implement their own personalised approach to classroom management, pedagogic strategies and assessment practices (FIELDNOTE 2) (QUOTE 2). Students seem acutely aware of this fragmentation, describing the course as 'disorganised' and 'chaotic' (FIELDNOTE 3). It would appear that these arrangements are used to students' own benefit, thus allowing the classroom periods to be used to complete a range of personal and academic activities (FIELDNOTE 4).

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<sup>7</sup> During the fieldwork period the subject lecturer experimented with using a semi-circle layout for the classroom and positioned herself within the semi-circle, rather than in the front of the configuration.

*Academic literacy practices*

The verbal, visual and spatial modes are foregrounded in this environment. Student academic activities are mediated via the computer and most of their time is spent either looking at, reading off or pointing to the screen. Academic related tasks (like attending a lecture, completing an assignment and searching for tutorial or interface examples) are interspersed with non-academic activities, such as visiting social network sites like Facebook, sending mobile text messages or e-mails to friends, in a seamless way that at times makes it difficult to distinguish what might be legitimately excluded from the academic realm (FIELDNOTE 5 and QUOTE 3).

The traditional or conventional sense of reading and writing within an academic context as mediated via written artefacts has limited currency in this academic context. In general minimal student writing occurs during class time. The most note taking or writing occurred during a Design session. The least amount of writing happens during the Technology class in the lab, when virtually none of the students took any notes. Typically though, students will listen to the lecturer, often with hands folded in front of their chests and with their gaze directed towards the lecturer who is usually in the front of the class (FIELDNOTE 6). Students rely more on the visual to gain information than on the written. A limited number of written, printed notes are provided – one lecturer used video animations to explain software procedures in class (FIELDNOTE 7). These predominantly visual texts become the bulk of the after class resources students use when completing text production activities. They learn how to use a specific tool or to perform a technique by watching. Lecturers will commonly connect their own laptops to the data projector and demonstrate how to complete a task in this way (FIELDNOTE 8).

The technical subjects, dealing with programming and 3D motion graphics, use interfaces that demand a high level of spatial awareness e.g. for the MySQL programme to work, students first produce the relationships between various variables in a workbench interface, typing in descriptor codes and arranging graphic variables on screen (Image 2). Most of this spatial manipulation and awareness is



mediated via the mouse tool on the computer. The main assessment demands for these subjects require the production of error free programmes or fully functioning animations (Appendix 10). When written submissions are required, these usually take the form of short answer, theory-based tests performed online. Thus the bulk of the text production demands, associated with the technical subjects, resides in the realm of typing programming code or commands, or the manipulation of visual, spatially oriented interfaces (Image 3).

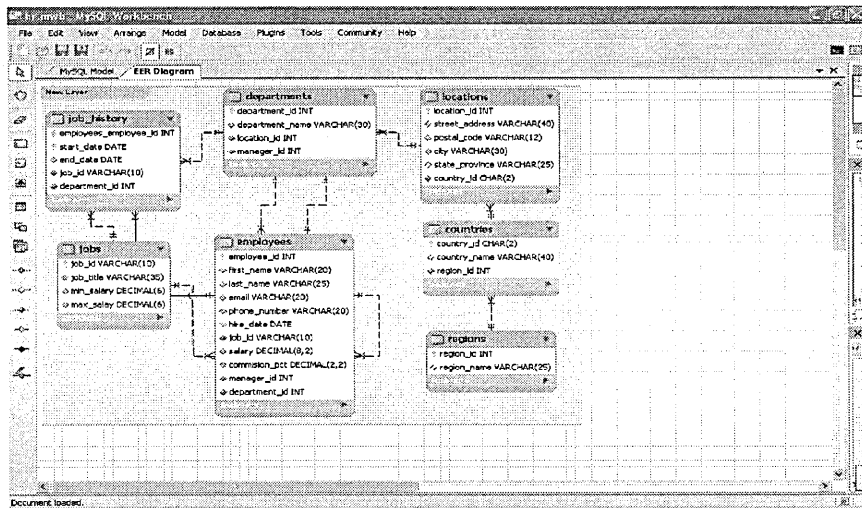


Image 2 MySQL workbench interface screenshot

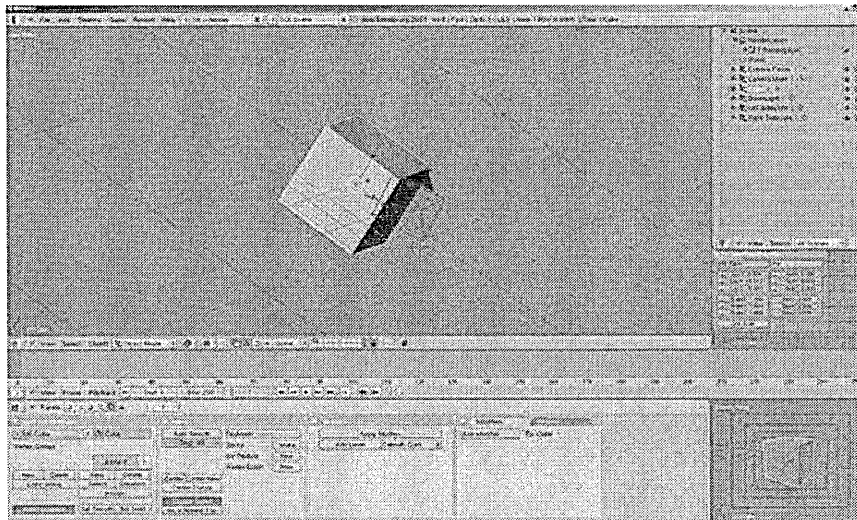


Image 3 Blender 3D motion graphics interface

These visually- and spatially-oriented literacy practices are not confined to students. The typical presentation mode for lecturers is the use of the computer and data projector either to show PowerPoint slides, animated videos providing examples of how specific software tools should be used, or demonstration of procedures required from a software package or coding interfaces. One lecturer takes the class attendance register electronically using his laptop and a word document (most ask students to sign a paper based sheet). No formal textbooks are prescribed and most resources are found online by lecturers and then supplied to students via the Blackboard learning management system. When students are required to complete their own research tasks this is achieved primarily via the internet. Access to the required academic resources is therefore gained via the digital platform of the computer reinforced by the fact that most resources (both written and visual) are made available to students via Blackboard. Downloaded or copied resources are accessed visually off the screen, rather than printed. It is uncommon for reading to be encouraged in the technical and programming related subjects, with lecturers and students preferring a visual demonstration mode (FIELDNOTE 7 and 8). Written and print-based materials are predominantly used or prescribed in the Design and Professional practices subjects (FIELDNOTE 9).

The academic environment is generally an informal environment, mediated by lecturers' idiosyncratic personalities and pedagogic styles that acts to regulate the level of freedom students have. Students are aware of how the different classrooms, subjects and therefore lecturers, imply different academic practices (QUOTE 4). Subject and/or disciplinary knowledge is mediated primarily via the lecturers, with their version or impressions of how the subject should be taught and its application in industry being privileged. There seems limited disciplinary coherence or centralised course co-ordination provided to guide or inform lecturing practices. During the fieldwork period, no formal course meetings relating to curriculum matters or course organisation (besides the one integrated assessment meeting) took place or was alluded to by staff.

Another distinguishing feature of the literacy practices in this context is their strong communal and collaborative character. Students are constantly seen to be consulting with each other and their lecturers, or relying on their peers to act as evaluators of their work. While this was mostly encouraged in a formal way in the Design and Practices classes, through the use of group work and interview role plays (FIELDNOTE 10), students consult with each other about their work constantly (FIELDNOTE 11). This practice was often cited as a central reason for working in the lab environment rather than at home (QUOTE 5).

#### 4.5 B. Textual Production and Literacy Practices

This theme explores and explicates the text production and complementary literacy practices in the case study by focusing specifically on a specific assessment (Appendix 3) produced during the fieldwork period. The assignment required the production of a range of written, verbal, graphic and digital texts which documented the conceptualisation, planning and design processes culminating in a technically functioning digital product i.e. a website or CD ROM. In order for students to produce all these texts they had to integrate their Design and Technology subject knowledge and competence. Therefore this assignment was illustrative of the typical text production and literacy practice in the WDD course. To unearth the underlying literacy practices associated with this task, this theme considers how these texts were produced and how students used a specific text, the visual diary (VD) to inform the production of the final digital text.

##### *How texts are produced*

This specific assignment required various texts to be submitted incrementally. The texts included oral presentations that also served as opportunities for students to receive feedback and critique from the lecturer and peers (FIELDNOTE 12). Through written tasks and presentations students explicated and justified their design decision

making across a range of indices including target audience, analysis, conceptualisation, the nature of the digital resource and the interface and navigation design (FIELDNOTE 13). Generally students were able to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the design and production processes involved in creating the texts.

The written submissions were described by students as adhering to a broadly essay type structure, implying the use of continuous prose as opposed to bullet point descriptions. While displaying basic rhetorical structuring to advance a particular argument, these texts however vary in their stylistic and structuring features and are characterised by their minimal or non-existent use of referencing conventions (see examples below).

Example 1

Conceptualization

Resource Aim

According to the knowledge and a little research that we made over the internet we found that visuals have much impact on grabbing a person's attention into learning or reading than the plain texts. For this assignment where we have to choose a chapter from a book we decided to take a learner guide manual that teaches people about the first aid undertaking procedures on infants and kids. With this resource we are aiming to make the intended audience learn about the topic/subject easily, to achieve this we planned to make the audience learn through looking and a little bit of reading. The overall design will let them learn very quickly and effectively.

Content Scope

We took this chapter in a first aid manual from a learner guide published by the Medical Education Center. This chapter is a summary of basic procedures that you should follow when a certain problem occurs on a child. Like when the child is choked, how to treat wounds and prevent infections, when the child is drowned. On infants they outline treatments such as C.P.R and on how to perform these stages in protecting an infant.

Production Team

We are doing this assignment in pairs and we have assigned the roles equally to meet up with the deadline and a success of this project. We have split the responsibilities according to the potentials of the two, I Nedo Mashishi will be taking care of the overall design of The Cd-Rom and do the administration work while my partner Ike Marilele will be doing the research that we need and scripting and animations.

Production Timeliness

We started on the project trying to get the inspirations and the resources last week (12 May 2009)

Design motivation

As we have chosen to design an educational CD ROM to educate about first aid on infants, we have also chosen the colors and the symbol that represent the emergency or medical practitioners. By entering on the site you will feel that you are in a medical CD ROM. We have come up with simple and clear design which also represents child hood theme and medical. We didn't want to make a complicated design that will lost the users, because our target audience maybe not have too much knowledge of computers: e.g people who work in a day care and grand mothers who take care of the baby during the day, when there mother went to work.

Example 2

**Reference Group**

The target audience forms part of the following reference groups:

- Formal : These are students that have a clearly defined structure on the course they want to follow to pass the subject well.
- Primary : Pupils in the same class at school, who<sup>share</sup> has daily contact with each other.
- Aspirational : They aspire to be knowledgeable on the study material<sup>topic</sup> and make their parents and themselves proud.

**Marketing Strategies**

Students associate with the reference groups for the following three reasons:

- Information : CD-Rom is very informative on the specific subject of physics.
- Reward and Punishment : If they do not study the course material or go through the CD-Rom step by step then they will not pass the subject well enough.
- Identification Influence : A student aspires to be in the top of his/her class for that subject.

*(Cant, M.C and Brink, A and Brijball, S 2002:page 36-37)*

**Culture/Sub-culture**

The learning culture forms part of two the three forms of learning, namely Formal and Technical learning. These learners can either have varied common social, political, historical or economic environmental factor or all. The two most likely would be social and economically environmental. They form part of a school or learning program and thus socialize with students interested in the same subject.

**Age Sub-culture: 16-18 (youth)**

- Autonomy: Learners who hope to lead active lives in the field of science and physics.
- Connectedness: Hopes to one day make a difference in the world.
- Personal growth: Value the achievements within their studies and own capabilities.

*(Cant, M.C and Brink, A and Brijball, S 2002:page 48-50)*

**Social Class**

Their social class lies between "Middle-Class" and the "Upper Social Class". The majority will lie in the "Middle Social Class". Educated in a formal education system where people/students are more likely to buy the product in order to further their knowledge on that subject. They are also technologically orientated. *(Cant, M.C and Brink, A and Brijball, S 2002:page 66-67)*  
LSM (Living Standard Measurement)

A substantial period of text production time was devoted to what students described as 'research'. Students' research activities predominantly comprised of using the internet to source and evaluate appropriate images, design ideas and templates, sample code and/or action script and finding solutions to code or scripting errors (QUOTE 6).

Evidence of these research processes was commonly enacted through the construction of a VD (Appendix 11) and when presenting draft interface designs, where students had to account for the inspirations underlying their design concept. Because students completed the assignment in pairs, some division of labour occurred with the conceptualisation/design tasks being roughly separated from the more technical tasks. The overall production process was characterised by a highly consultative and collaborative ethos, especially when technical difficulties were encountered, or when one partner had to take over the responsibilities of their absent partner (QUOTE 7).

*How texts are used*

In the process of designing and producing the main digital artefact for the assignment, students were required to submit a series of print based written and visual texts. Pedagogically these texts were meant to support and scaffold the production of the digital artefact, providing formative feedback moments where the lecturer could provide constructive critique and, in so doing help improve the overall quality of the final submission. Generally the pedagogic intentions behind these texts were not always enacted by students, illustrated most vividly by how they used the VD. Two of the pairs interviewed produced visual diaries purely to fulfil the assessment requirements, finding the production of this print based text to be disconnected from the predominantly digital practices and modes demanded specifically from the final digital submission and more generally in the other WDD course assessment (QUOTE 8). The VD was therefore produced 'retrospectively' - with students first producing a sample digital interface on computer using Photoshop (Image4) and then sketching a version of it in the diary (Image5). The supplementary printed off screenshot version of the initial digital design was often included in an attempt to 'prove' coherence between the initial sketched idea and the digital enactment. Therefore, contrary to its intended use, the VD did not serve to document

students' concept development progressively, moving from the written, paper-based medium before being transferred into a digital mode.

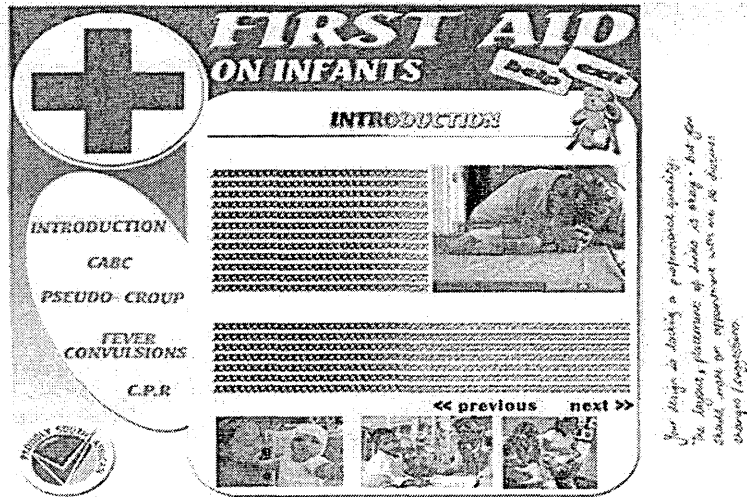


Image 4 Initial interface design completed in Photoshop and then printed out and pasted into the visual diary.

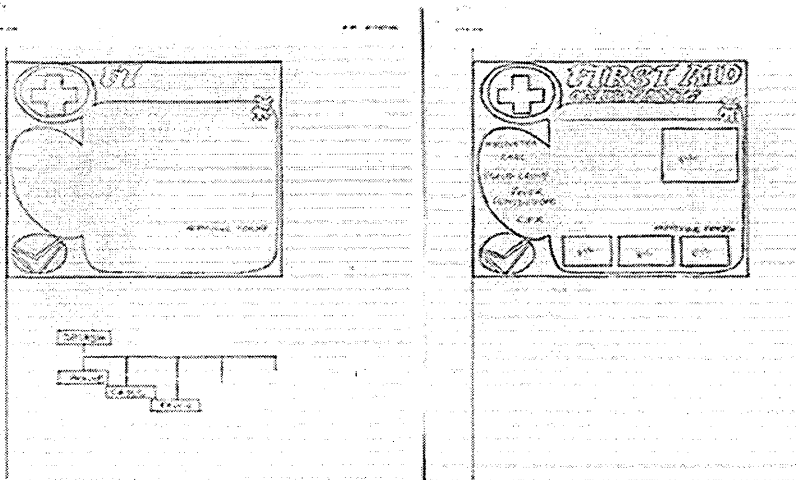


Image 5 Sketched ideas done retrospectively and strongly mirroring the concept already captured digitally.

In contrast to this rather ubiquitous practice, another pair used the VD in a manner more closely aligned to the pedagogic intentions. They used a more 'hands' based production process of drawing and graphically illustrating their conceptual ideas rather than relying on the digital platform of the computer and internet as the main source of inspiration and ideas. In addition the VD was also used as the main conceptual guideline informing the subsequent digital production processes. They



felt the use of this process helped ensure a strong correlation between their initial idea and the final digital version as noted below in the Images 6 and 7 (QUOTE 9).

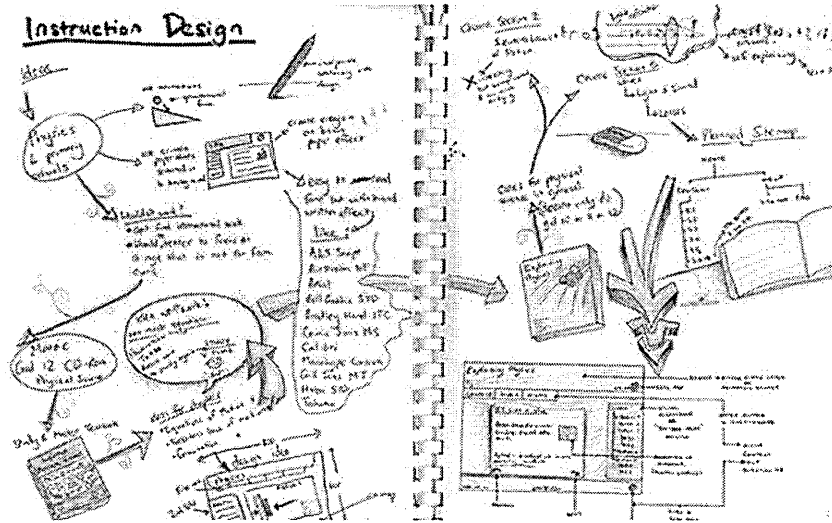


Image 6 Initial concept and ideas sketch with interface idea captured in the bottom right hand corner

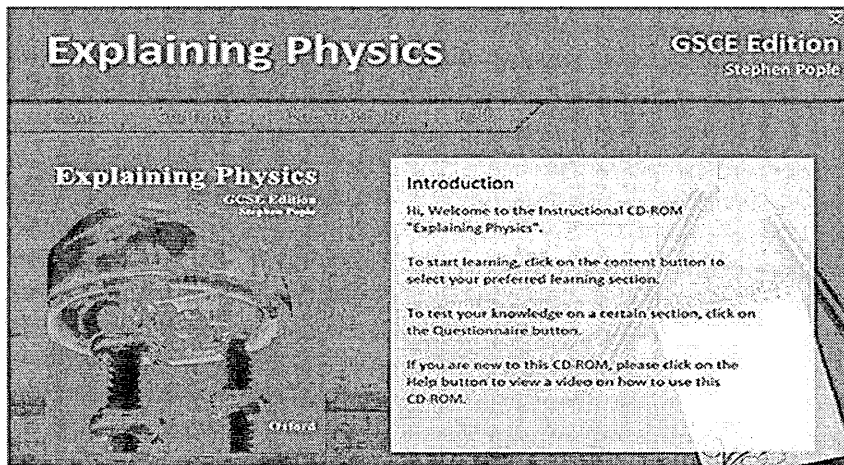


Image 7: Final version of the digital product that bears close resemblances to the sketched interface.

#### 4.6 C. Developing a Professional Identity

For many student participants the main purpose of their academic activities and practices are to develop a set of competencies to enable them to fulfil a specific function in the broader professional website design environment. As noted in the

Introduction, this environment is complex, fluid and dynamic, bringing together a range of at times competing disciplinary areas (like graphic design and programming) and competencies (e.g. within programming areas like JAVA and PHP). Participants however displayed an acute awareness of the inherent subtleties, complexities and contextual realities operating in the professional arena (QUOTE 10).

This nuanced awareness of the professional environment was tempered with concern raised about the lack of clarity and perceived fragmentation in the professional identity being espoused via the WDD curriculum. This concern was voiced by both lecturers (who were able to uncover tensions, gaps and inconsistencies in the curriculum construction FIELDNOTE 14)-and students (who while happy to identify with a specific professional role predominantly that of web designer, do not ascribe this selection to the influence of the course) (QUOTE 11). Many believed that the only way to consolidate a suitable professional identity was to continue studying in their field or through specific industry related experience (QUOTE 12).

## **5 Interpretation and Discussion**

This research study posed two questions; “How is ‘academic’ constituted in the literacies of the web design and development course?” And “What are the student academic literacy practices in the web design and development course?” A key theoretical issue revealed by the analysis is the contextualised nature of the academic literacy practices, drawn strongly from practices perceived by participants to be relevant to the professional domain of WDD. The main focus of this chapter addresses the questions noted above, highlighting the nature of the contextualisation unearthed by the analysis process.

### **5.1 Representing the ‘Academic’ within the University Of Technology**

As an accredited National Diploma course, located at Hoerikwaggo UT, the WDD course’s academic nature gains legitimisation. Additionally, the diploma qualification status, signals the WDD course’s applied and practice-based knowledge focus, as opposed to the theoretical and analytically informed agenda prevalent in traditional universities in SA. The curriculum acts as a secondary mechanism through which the academic basis of the course is represented. Curriculum practices that define the subjects and their content composition, time table arrangements and assessment practices are all clearly evident in the WDD course context. In many respects, apart from some innovative assessment practices, noted by the Instructional Design example, and the informal interpersonal relationships cultivated between lecturers and students, the regulatory mechanisms inherent in the course curriculum resonate strongly with typical curriculum practices in HE. A core characteristic of the UT sector is the interrelationship between professional and academic domains. This relationship is present in the WDD course with the professional domain fulfilling a central role in the academic recontextualisation process, shaping and reconstituting the literacy practices valued at the level of the course curriculum and individual participants.

## **5.2 Constituting the Academic from the Professional**

The professional domain acts referentially to inform the appropriateness of literacies in the WDD course. The data analysis suggests three specific ways in which literacies relevant to the professional domain are manifested in the academic context.

Firstly, the analysis reveals that academic success and competency is demonstrated primarily through the production of a functional, aesthetically pleasing multimodal digital text. The incorporation of academic writing as part of this text production process is peripheral. Its inclusion sanctioned primarily through regulatory HE discourses that promote the use of written text as a core mechanism to demonstrate academic success and one emphasized by existing academic literacies research (Lea, 2004 and Lillis, 2001). This peripheral status was most evident in the nature of the academic writing produced in the ID assignment (pages 35-36) where rudimentary academic stylistic and structural features were used, but also in the relegation of the mainly written tasks to the non-technical subjects in the course.

Secondly, the nature of a common academic activity namely, 'research' has been adapted to accommodate the literacies privileged in the professional domain. 'Research' for lecturers and students therefore becomes a practice predominantly mediated via the internet and revolves around the collection and evaluation of multimodal digital texts. Thus for the lecturer, Ivan, it informs and directs the chosen approach to teaching software packages like Blender, having obtained the open source package online, along with the numerous video animations used as a key pedagogic tool in his classrooms. For most students this reconceptualisation of research as online 'search' becomes the foundation of all text production activities. In a social theory account of literacy, the literacies implied by this contextualised notion of research would be recognised by the academic community, along with the acknowledgement of the applied use of research within the course. Therefore the

specific way in which research was reconstituted to match the values of the profession and academic setting of the course is shown.

Finally, mirroring the web design / development distinction in the professional domain, similar differentiations between the design and technical subjects in relation to how literacy practices are defined and used are evident. The Design and Practice subjects retain a more hybrid mixture of academic and professional practices, resulting in the incorporation of academic writing criteria alongside a range of communicative practices privileged in the professional domain. For these subjects, the commonly implied definition of academic literacies, which sees reading and writing as a core activity associated with learning in HE, is maintained. The analysis also highlights the inclusion of oral presentations, visual paper based texts (e.g. the visual diary), along with the final ID assessment text indicative of the multimodal digital text which is the mainstay of the professional domains' textual practices. These subjects therefore display some openness to accepting a broader view on literacies as representative of a range of communicative practices accommodated in HE (Lillis and Scott, 2007).

The Technology and Informatics subjects tend to rely more heavily on the visual and spatial modes emphasised in the professional domain, with reading and writing fulfilling a supplementary function in the text production practices. The analysis suggests that reading and writing have an ancillary role – allowing students to access the necessary multimodal content required to produce the programming code or animations which are the main textual artefacts of these subjects, rather than as an integral part of its textual and literacy practices. Thus similar to Ivanič et al.'s (2007:706) contention that "...written language may be relatively constitutive of or ancillary to a literacy event", the same could be true of an academic literacy event.

### **5.3 Student Academic Literacy Practices**

Within the WDD course, students have to negotiate multiple and fluid literacy practices that can be regarded as both academic and what Satchwell and Ivanič, (2007:304) call “vernacular literacy practices”. The analysis which focused on academic literacy practices revealed that they are informed and influenced by the different subjects, the physical environment of the different classrooms, individual lecturers’ pedagogic styles and the professional domain, in particular how students (and lecturers) internalised the web design and development distinction. Literacy practices are not consistent – they are both communal and collaborative, yet shaped by individual lecturers rather than by academic convention or the curriculum. Thus in one class students would be required to function with their computer monitors turned off and listen to the lecturer, while in another class in the same venue, they might be participating in a range of personal and academic online activities, while selectively following the lecture being presented. Students further ‘adapted’ to the different literacy prescriptions imposed by the assessment and textual practices of subjects, resulting in the production of essay-type writing in some instances, and the production of programming codes for others. The literacy practices associated with the visual diary text are illustrative of how an individual student’s particular internalisation and interest in a specific aspect of the WDD domain, namely web design, revealed itself. The student’s practices consciously foregrounded the paper-based graphical production privileged by the Design subject’s pedagogic intention. This was in contrast to the more common practice used by the cohort, of producing digitally mediated, and retrospectively conceptualised visual diaries that merely fulfilled the assessment requirements.

The communal and collaborative nature of student literacy practices in the WDD is regarded by all student participants as a positive aspect of their learning environment. Thus illuminating the particular sociocultural ways in which literacies are used and valued in the WDD, consistent with literacy practice research (Barton

and Hamilton, 1998). It also connects and supports the social practice perspectives on understanding literacy, highlighting how literacy use is mediated by the specific contextual realities evident in the course, rather than as a decontextualised, cognitive ability (Street, 2003, and Barton, 2001).

#### **5.4 Synthesizing comments**

Addressing the first research question, the analysis highlights how academic and literacies are enacted in the WDD course. The academic nature of the course is forged through an ongoing recontextualisation process involving the HE institution and the professional domain. The professional domain's influence, while clearly evident in the contextualised practices in the course, rest upon the course's underlying academic basis. It could thus be argued that the meaning ascribed to academic in the WDD course and HUT is similar to the one used by Ivanič and Satchwell, where 'academic' is regarded as being "...concerned with learning a subject, and demonstrating learning of it" (2007:102). The interrelationship between the HE institution and the professional domain and the academic recontextualisation process that results, therefore provides the foundation upon which all student academic literacy practices in the WDD course are enacted.

When considering the second research question, the primacy of the multimodal text and its influence in shaping literacy practices enacted through pedagogic and assessment activities is evident in the WDD course. Academic literacy practices are strongly mediated by the relationship between digital technology and the status it has in the disciplinary and professional environment of the web design field. The increasing ways in which digital technologies have mediated learning and textual production in universities have previously been claimed (Goodfellow and Lea, 2007, Synder, 2001 and 2002, McKenna and McAvina, 2007). Convincing arguments about the legitimacy of multimodal texts in academic settings, in relation to their use and pedagogic potential, have been articulated by the New London Group (2000), Kress

and Jewit (2003), Satchwell and Ivanič (2007) and Archer (2006) in the South African context. The analysis also confirms the contention articulated in the broader field of academic literacies that the disciplinary environment acts to shape the academic literacies in particular contexts (Lea and Street, 2006 and Lea and Stierer, 2000). What is perhaps interesting in this research context is the strong shift towards practices interceded by the 'screen' embodied by the computer and the internet with a clear distancing and possibly even rebellion from print based practices, seen by student attitudes and approaches to producing the visual diary text. Suggesting that even in academic settings "The visual and material characteristics of texts are shaped by social purposes and practices" (Satchwell and Ivanič, 2007: 305).

The next chapter considers the implications of the research along with outlining issues relating to validity, the limitation of the research and possible future directions.



## 6 Conclusions

An academic literacies research perspective was used to inform the research activities of this study. It set out to show how student academic literacy practices are socioculturally constructed and mediated within the specific context of a web design and development course at a South African University of Technology. This final chapter considers the implications of this research for understanding how student academic literacies are constituted and enacted in the broader context of the web design and development course. The chapter also discusses the issues associated with research validity, the limitations of the study, along with how this study might inform future research.

### 6.1 Implications

#### *Value of the study*

The study has proven valuable in highlighting the benefits of using ethnographic methodologies to allow the research to tap into the participants' and especially students' experiences of their academic literacy practices. The interpretations support existing research that highlights the sociocultural ways in which literacies are enacted in academic settings. It is hoped the research will contribute to broadening the understanding of the range of academic literacy practices, particular in relation to multimodal textual production, within HE and specifically the university of technology sector in SA.

#### *The WDD course*

The WDD course seems to be in a process of shaping its practices around the academic and professional domains with the study suggesting that while design based subjects tend to be retaining their link to the academic domain, the technical

subjects seem to be moving away from it. As the shaping process is being conducted, both communally and individually hybrid literacy practices seem to be generated. It might be desirable for some action to be affected at either the level of policy or curriculum to help create more coherence in the literacy practices. Such an intervention could help to create a space for less distinction and more alignment between the subjects in relation to their literacy practices. Furthermore it might encourage a more inclusive understanding of the multimodality of the academic literacy practices with all subjects open to using the full range of communicative practices available in the course. Thus not only should the visual and spatial be integrated alongside the written, as is currently the case with the design based subjects, but the inclusion of the written alongside visual and spatial modes should also be encouraged in the technical subjects.

## **6.2 Validity**

Maxwell (2005) contends that research validity is associated with ensuring the credibility and plausibility of research descriptions, interpretations and conclusions. The validity of this study was addressed in the following ways; firstly, method triangulation was used as a means whereby interpretation checking could be undertaken. Secondly, as case study and ethnographic methodologies preclude the making of external generalisations, the conclusions drawn are regarded as only applicable to the case setting and to the broader contextual realities of the WDD course. Finally, the issue of researcher reactivity, i.e. the influence of the researcher on the setting and participants and the impact of this on data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), was dealt with by considering it from the epistemological position of qualitative and ethnography methodologies. This position maintains it is impossible to eliminate the influence of the researcher, noting that data 'contamination' by the researcher does not constitute a breach of validity. Rather the researcher's position in the setting can be an invaluable source of particular kinds of data as was my experience in this study. Due to my previous history with the course

in addition to my participant observation activities, I gained access to a range of honest and revealing accounts from participants that might have been denied to other researchers with no direct relationship with HUT or those using different methodologies. Aligned to research reactivity is the acknowledgment of the reflexive character of ethnographic research which suggests that as researcher you cannot separate yourself completely from the research context or your perspectives on the social world of the research which you are a part of. Indeed, my history with the course allowed me to capture and describe the nuances of the context, while developing an acute awareness of the world view of the participants.

### **6.3 Limitations of the Study**

As the fieldwork period was limited to only five weeks, it was unable to fully capture the depth and richness of the academic literacy practices. A longer stay in the field might have provided the opportunity to develop more confidence in my role as participant observer and therefore seek to create possibilities for equalising the relationship between the researcher and the researched through the inclusion of more collaborative data collection moments. The research has shown in a plausible manner the influence of broader institutional and professional domains on student academic literacy practice, while recognising the need to expand the study to specifically accommodate these factors. The limited fieldwork period, along with constraints imposed by the dissertation scope, meant that I was unable to undertake detailed textual analysis. While the study addresses the 'what' and to a lesser degree the 'how' of student academic literacy practices in the WDD course, it does not consider the 'why', which would have enabled a more critical discussion of the issue of power, status and identity and thus contributed to a more transformative agenda associated with academic literacies research, particularly in the SA context. These limitations, however, provide the direction for future research possibilities, notably my PhD work. For my future research, I would consider in more depth the institutional conditions informing academic literacy practices in similar HE contexts. Such a study

would make allowances for the inclusion of more case studies to accommodate a broader range of courses where multimodal and digital textual productions are privileged within vocational academic contexts.

Overall the study has confirmed the awareness in much research in the academic literacies field of the need to recognise and respect the distinctiveness of literacy practices in different academic contexts. Such awareness can contribute to a genuine understanding of the multiple ways in which students not only negotiate, but also gain access to, the academic and professional literacy practices in UT courses.

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*Appendices*

## **8 Appendices**

# APPENDIX 1

## Glossary of web design and development terms

### **Blender**

Blender is a 3D graphics application released as free software . It can be used for modelling, UV unwrapping, texturing, rigging, water simulations, skinning, animating, rendering, particle and other simulations, non-linear editing, compositing, and creating interactive 3D applications.

### **CMS**

In the context of a Web site a Content Management System is a collection of tools designed to allow the creation, modification organisation and removal of information from a Web site. It is common for a CMS to require users to have no knowledge of HTML in order to create new Web pages.

### **CSS**

Cascading Style Sheets – are used with XHTML to define and style how the web pages will look in a website.

### **Flash**

Flash is a programme owned by Macromedia which produces high quality animation and interactive graphics for the web.

### **HTML**

Abbreviation for Hypertext Mark up Language. It is a cross platform programming language which is used for creating websites, including text, images, sounds and animation.

### **Java**

Java is a programming language that is specifically designed for writing programmes that can be safely downloaded to your computer through the Internet and immediately run. Using small Java programmes (called "Applets"), Web programmers can include functions such as animations, calculators, and other fancy tricks.

### **JavaScript**

This is a programming language that runs on a client's browser, which makes a page more interactive. Java Script can do things such as make animated images, pop-up windows, cause an image to change when your mouse rolls over it, etc.

### **MySQL**

This is a database which is commonly used with web pages. It can allow viewers to look up specific information from a large quantity of data stored in the database. Example: A website has a "look up a member" text area. The viewer can search by last name, and find a single name or list of names out of all of the names stored in the database.

### **Photoshop**

Photoshop - produced by Adobe is regarded as the most popular graphics editing software in the world. Photoshop is used widely in the desktop publishing and graphics design industry as well as the web authoring profession.

### **PHP**

PHP which stands for Hypertext Pre-processor, is a general-purpose scripting language that is especially suited for web development. PHP generally runs on a web server and is a server side scripting language used normally on Unix-based systems.

### **XHTML**

Extensible Markup Language is a cross platform programming language which is used for creating websites, including text, images, sounds and animation.

## APPENDIX 2

### Overview of the web design and development course

The overall purpose of the three-year web design and development course is to suitably equip new graduates to be part of a team engaging in a process where a dynamic and interactive multimedia presentation (either web based, or in the form of a CD ROM) will be designed, planned, developed and published or produced. The intention of the qualification is to develop the necessary professional practices for those wanting to become multimedia technologists. Based at a University of Technology the course is primarily aimed at preparing the graduate for industry and takes a mostly practical focus – with applied knowledge being central to the programme.

The course runs over three years and the final qualification is a National Diploma (currently level 6 on the South African Higher Education Qualification Framework. A degree from a traditional liberal arts university would be rated as a level 7 qualification). The course itself is made up of four core subjects (offered in all three years of the diploma) which students have to take concurrently. In any given year, if a subject is failed, the student will be required to repeat the subject and pass it before being allowed into the following year.

Technology	Design	Informatics	Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on the development of interactive websites using PHP and MySQL.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailed exploration of web and CD ROM based design.</li> <li>Focuses on how design decisions are made and the processes it entails.</li> <li>Research into audience needs reinforcing the notion of design as a communication strategy within multimedia will be reinforced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides essential foundations in concepts and practices that are used to produce multimedia applications</li> <li>Multimedia concepts covered – networks, CMS, 3D modelling using Blender, embedding movies using Flash timeline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps to facilitate a smooth transition between tertiary education and the work environment.</li> <li>Exposes learners to entrepreneurship and workplace skills (CV writing, interview skills, professionalism in the workplace, understanding the industry)</li> </ul>

Each subject is allocated the same number of periods on the time table. However, individual lecturers are allowed to use this allocation as deemed appropriate.

- 3 class periods (allocated for theory or lecture type activities)
- 3 practical periods
- 2 tutorial periods
- 2 individual consultation periods

#### Assessment Practices

- Each subject implements its own personalised assessment regime and practices that range from theory tests, technical and research reports, creation of interactive digital products, presentations and creating a paper based visual diary.
- Students can complete assignments individually, in pairs or in groups. They also complete an integrated project that draws together the subject matter from three of the subjects, namely Design, Informatics and Technology. This is a group project and is completed over a 3- to 6-month period. The project attempts to simulate a real world web design and development problem and is usually assessed in relation to industry based standard in relation the quality of the final product being produced.



## APPENDIX 3

### Multimedia Design III (MIVSD030) Communication and Media Design 3 Due Date: 10 June 2009 @ 12pm

**Produce an interactive multimedia based instructional / educational resource.**

For this assessment you should work in pairs.

#### Guidelines:

1. **Select a chapter** from any appropriate print based instructional / educational resource
2. **Design, develop and produce** an interactive electronic version of the selected material
  - o Your design and development of the final product must accommodate the intended learners
  - o Include a written summary of the quality assurance mechanisms used in the design and production stages (support your summary with copies of the design/developer quality check sheet and user observation sheet or questionnaire)
3. **Conceptualize you resource appropriately**
  - o Considering your target audience
  - o Scamp and storyboard your concept and website / CD ROM and include this in your submission via a visual diary
  - o The electronic instructional / educational product **must include** the following elements
    - o Text (content, information, basic inclusion of writing & structural considerations)
    - o Images (photographs, diagrams, illustrations etc...)
    - o Animations
    - o Interactivity (questionnaires, MCQ's, test etc...with appropriate feedback)
    - o Sound (optional if appropriate to content and learners)
4. **Produce a brief (1 page max) contextual overview** or synopsis for your instructional / educational resource
  - o Place your chapter in context (where does it fit in relation to the rest of the textbook or instructional material)
  - o State who your intended learners are and how the design, multimedia elements, language and structure supports the learners and how you tested the final product
  - o Comment about additional features that would normally be included in the product (if you were completing a total resource rather than just one chapter) e.g. how to use the material, navigation, help, rationale and objectives for the resource
5. You may **produce your product as either a CD ROM or Website** (maybe intranet if you are considering bandwidth issues). Any appropriate software can be used. Ensure that your design accommodates the limitations and strengths of your chosen medium. Please hand in your completed product on CD ROM.
6. **Include a copy of the original chapter** from the print based material with your submission.

#### Assessment criteria and weighting

1.	Conceptualization process Detailed, comprehensive and informed conceptualization process followed.	15
2.	Instructional Design strategies Careful attempt to incorporate ID strategies evident, multimedia inclusions are appropriate & correlate strongly to the learning objectives.	15
3.	Overall concept, design & presentation The design reflects a clear correlation between content and learners, high level of technical quality. Presentation of an uncluttered, simple and consistent design and layout.	10
4.	Quality assurance considerations Application of suitable evaluation mechanism at both design/development & user levels	5
5.	Contextual Review Chapter is clearly described and contextually located, chapter presented as part of 'total' product, careful and succinct writing style.	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>50</b>

# **Target Audience Analysis and Conceptualization**

**Due Date: 22 May @ 12pm**

---

## **Guidelines**

- **Target audience analysis**
  - Provide a detailed analysis of your intended audience
  - Outline the various salient characteristics of your audience
  - Indicate how the various design elements and strategies employed in your resource correlates with the audience profile you have outlined.
  
- **Conceptualization**
  - Provide a brief written overview of your intended resource that highlights the following aspects of your design conceptualizations
    - Resource aim, content scope, production team, production timelines, technology motivation
    - Design framework, motivations for the look and feel of the resource, testing and piloting considerations
    - Storyboarding, scamps and visual diary development

## APPENDIX 4

### Interview selection outline

#### Web design and development 3<sup>rd</sup> year cohort

Full time students	26
Part time students	3
TOTAL	29

Race			Gender		
Black: African	15/26	58%	Female	9/26	35%
Black: Coloured	11/26	42%	Male	17/26	65%

#### Whole course group 2009

96 full time students

Race			Gender		
Black: African	46/96	48%	Female	27/96	32%
Black: Coloured	44/96	46%	Male	69/96	72%
Other	4/96	<6%			

In the body of the dissertation the term *Black* is used in an inclusion fashion incorporating apartheid defined categories of African, Coloured and Indian. HUT's administrative records however record 'race' using apartheid categories which is a requirement of the Department of Education. These categories have been used here.

#### Interview participants

Louise	High performer	Black: Coloured Female	Passing all subjects
Roxy	Above average		

Jigga	Just passing/average	Black: African Male	Both failed one subject
Bongani	Just passing/average		

Richard	Failing	Black: Coloured Male	Failed two subjects Failed one subject
Steven	Above average		

#### Selected participants not interviewed

Interviewee 1	High performer	Black: Coloured, Male	Passing all subjects
Interviewee 2	Average	Black: African, Male	Failing one subject

Interviewee 3	Just passing/average	Black: African, Male	Failed one subject
Interviewee 4	Just passing/average	Black: African, Female	Passing all subjects

Performance indicators are based on student's first term (Jan- April) official assessment results, averaged over the four subjects in the course. The indications do not take into account subsequent assessments for each individual subject. When students received a mark above 48% this was regarded as a subject pass.

## APPENDIX 5

### Interview Sequence Outline

Main Themes	Sample Questions
Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation</li> <li>• Ethics – if you don't want to answer a question, confidentiality, selection of pseudonym               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consent form</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an evaluation</li> <li>• Research interest               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students reading, writing and texts production activities in the course</li> <li>○ Interest in what you have to say – so no right or wrongs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Learning Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the learning environment of course?</li> <li>• How do you find the environment?</li> <li>• What are the positives and negatives of the environment?</li> <li>• Are there any differences between the subjects?</li> <li>• What do you do in a typical week?</li> </ul>
Assessment Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me a bit about the Instructional Design Assignment?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What you did</li> <li>○ What aspect you enjoyed most? <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Why?</span></li> <li>○ What aspects you least enjoyed?</li> <li>○ What parts/aspects of the course as a whole enabled you to complete the assignment?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Web Designer / Developer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you understand the difference between these two roles/functions?</li> <li>• What role do you think you would fulfil?</li> <li>• Do you think the course promotes any specific role? Why?</li> </ul>
Wind down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions for clarity?</li> <li>• Any other contributions, issues to cover or to add?</li> <li>• Any questions for me?</li> </ul>
Thanks	Expression of thanks

## APPENDIX 6

### Consent Documents



## MEMORANDUM

### HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND MATERIALS ETHICS COMMITTEE

---

**FROM:** John Oates, Chair, HPMEC **Email:** j.m.oates@open.ac.uk  
**TO:** Lynn Coleman, research student **TEL:** 52395  
CREET / IET  
**CC:** **DATE:** 10 May 2009  
**SUBJECT:** **Ethics application:**  
Student academic literacy in a South African professional web design and development higher education course. **Ref:** HPMEC/09/#573/1

---

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 21st April 2009, is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee, subject to satisfactory responses to the following:

You are asked to:

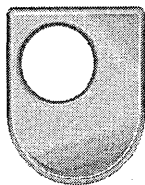
1. Note that you will need to gain consent from students to being observed, and you should ensure that students are aware that they are free to not participate, and if they do participate, that they may withdraw at any time without penalty;
2. Give details of how you propose to select the sub-sample for the interviews.

So that the completion of ethics approval can proceed, please respond regarding these two points.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates

Chair, OU HPMEC



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Multimedia Technology Programme  
Information Technology Department  
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8 May 2009

5 (a)

**Dear Multimedia Technology Lecturing Staff**

**Research Study: Student academic literacy in a South African professional web  
design**

**higher education course**

My name is Lynn Coleman and I am currently completing a Masters in Research degree at the Open University in England. I have been in contact with the Head of the Department of Information Technology, Bennett Alexander, about the possibility of conducting my research into student academic literacy practices with students completing the National Diploma in Multimedia Technology, the course you teach on.

I am writing to you to request your involvement in my project. The main approach to my data collection will be the use of participant observation and individual interviews with a selection of students. I will specifically need your assistance by allowing me to conduct participant observation that will enable me to observe student interactions during normal structured classroom and unstructured time during the course. I do however need to assure you that your full consent to my participant in any of your classes will be obtained before any observation will take place. The proposed data collection phase of the research is **mid May – mid June 2009**, when I will be located in the department.

While a thorough and open discussion about the research study and my specific role and data collection methods will be undertaken when I arrive in Cape Town at the start of May, I would like to highlight the main aims of my research. The research aims to explore and describe student academic literacy practices (i.e. their reading, writing and text production practices) in the context of a vocational professional qualification such as the Multimedia diploma course. It is hoped that the study will contribute to understanding new and emerging higher education literacy practices while acknowledging the contextualised ways in which these practices are framed. As limited research has been conducted on student literacy practices in contexts like those of the Multimedia diploma course, the research presents a unique opportunity to understand and contribute to international debates about the new ways in which students are reading, writing and producing texts in higher education. Through an understanding of these practices, more responsive and suitable curriculum development

initiatives can be commissioned that could help to improve both participation and retention rates within your course and your institution.

My research has the support of the Head of the IT Department and your domain leader, Wendal Koopman. I hope that you feel able to assist and willing to participate in the initial open discussion meeting at the start of May 2009. Should you wish to contact me before hand to discuss any aspect of my study please feel free to contact me via e-mail at [L.Coleman@open.ac.uk](mailto:L.Coleman@open.ac.uk), I will be more than happy to provide further details or answer any further questions you might have.

I look forward to meeting you all in May 2009.

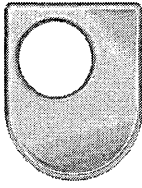
Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lynn Coleman', written in black ink.

**Lynn Coleman**

Research Student, Institute of Educational Technology

**[L.Coleman@open.ac.uk](mailto:L.Coleman@open.ac.uk)**



Lecturing Staff  
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14 May 2009

To: Staff Participants in  
**Student Academic Literacy in the Multimedia Technology Course**  
**Research Study**

**CONSENT FORM**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. The study is being carried out as part of my Masters in Research degree at the Open University. It is being undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the university's ethical guidelines and the ethical and other relevant guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.

For the ethical guidelines governing the conduct of this research to be met, all staff allowing me to be a participant observer in their classrooms are required to give consent to this participation. This consent process will ensure that you understand the process you are involved in, the nature of the research project and the ways in which the data will be collected, analysed and reported. I would be grateful if you could complete the consent form printed on the reverse of this page.

I am happy to discuss any queries you may have and thank you for your assistance.

**Lynn Coleman**



**CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM**

I understand that my participation in this study will involve my giving consent to the researcher being present in my formal academic classrooms. This will enable the researcher to observe students' reading, writing and text production practices as part of their course in Multimedia Technology at CPUT.

I understand that the researcher may compile various observations of these practices in the form of field notes and may or may not engage in informal discussion with me. Additional documents like lecture notes, student learner guidelines, curricula documents, assessment briefs and submissions might also be collected by the researcher.

I understand that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. I am aware that I can ask questions at any time and that I am free to discuss any concerns with the researcher or the researcher's supervisors at the Open University, Dr Robin Goodfellow (R.Goodfellow@open.ac.uk) or Dr Mary Lea (M.R.Lea@open.ac.uk).

I understand that all reasonable attempts will be made to keep my identity anonymous in the study and in any future publications. Should any references to informal discussions be included in the study or future publications, these may be used anonymously. I understand that if I say something that I do not want used in the study, I can ask for it to be excluded.

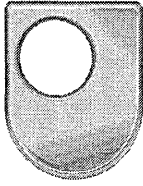
I  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Print name)

consent to participate in the study being undertaken by Lynn Coleman (Institute of Educational Technology, Open University).

Signed:  
.....

Email: .....

Date: .....



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11 June 2009

Student Name

**Student Academic Literacy in the Multimedia Technology Course**

**Research Study**

### **CONSENT FORM**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. The study is being carried out as part of my Masters in Research degree at the Open University. It is being undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the university's ethical guidelines and the ethical and other relevant guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.

For the ethical guidelines governing the conduct of this research to be met, all interview participants in the study are required to give consent to their participation. This is to make sure that you understand the process you are involved in and that research participants are not exploited. I would like you to think about this and discuss any questions with me before giving your consent by completing the consent form printed on the reverse of this sheet.

Thank you for your assistance.

**Lynn Coleman**

## INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I understand that my participation in this study will involve being interviewed by the researcher about my reading, writing and text production practices and general learning as part of my course in Multimedia Technology at CPUT. I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and that the researcher will also write notes summarising the contents of the interview. I understand that a transcription of this recording will be available to me subsequent to the interview should I wish to check any factual inaccuracies.

I understand that information obtained from the interview will be analysed by the researcher in conjunction with information gathered during her observations and participation in classrooms on the Multimedia Technology course at CPUT (including assessment work I might have submitted).

I understand that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. I am aware that I can ask questions at any time and that I am free to discuss any concerns with the researcher or the researcher's supervisors at the Open University, Dr Robin Goodfellow (R. Goodfellow@open.ac.uk) or Dr Mary Lea (M.R.Lea@open.ac.uk).

I understand that the information I give in the interview will be used anonymously in the study and in any future publications and that every effort will be made to ensure that comments cannot be attributed to me personally. Quotations from the interview may also be used anonymously in the study and in any future publications. I understand that if I say something that I do not want to be used in the study, I can ask for it to be excluded.

I

\_\_\_\_\_ (Print name)

consent to participate in the study being undertaken by Lynn Coleman (Institute of Educational Technology, Open University).

Signed:

.....

Email: .....

Date: .....

**Collaborative Data Collection Event**

Sequence of data collection process

- Consulted with lecturer regarding using section of her classroom time to conduct discussion with students about their learning environment
- Approached students in small groups during their lab sessions about preparing something

**Task Idea**

**AIM:** I want to represent your understanding and views of your learning environment in my research report. I want to ensure that your voice is captured and represented in my dissertation

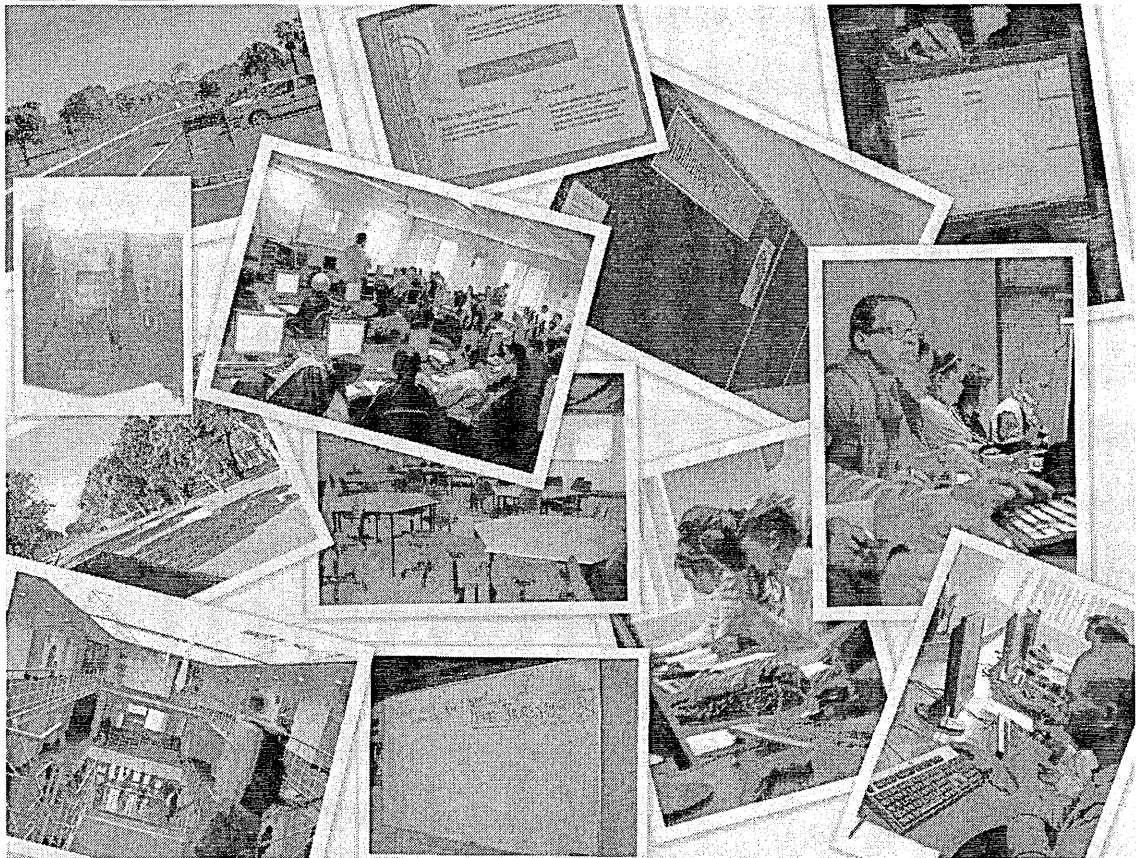
**TASK:** Think about your study and course environment.

How would you describe your learning environment to someone who has never been here? Would you use words, images, sound or create a collage. We will have a short discussion and presentation of your discussion (21 May 2009)

- Sent students an e-mail reminder of the discussion
- Class discussion held on 29 May 2009. I created a collage of photographs I had taken during the week and used it as a basis from which to represent how I saw their learning environment and open up the discussion to elicit their views and representations of their context. The presentation and discussion was recorded

**Fieldnote of the presentation**

Asked students who had brought along something to show – NONE. A student mentioned that he thought they would contribute verbally and that they would just come and provide their impressions. I went over the instructions/guidelines I had given them on Monday – stating the different media formats they could have used. I then displayed my PowerPoint with the first slide being a shot of the campus entrance view to highlight the location of the instruction in Cape Town. Students waited until I finished and I asked them for their comments / impressions. The discussion was recorded.



Graphic collage produced and presented to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year cohort for discussion and comment

## **APPENDIX 8**

### **Fieldnotes from participant observation activities**

#### **FIELDNOTE 1:**

Still a constant stream of students entering and leaving the classroom while the lecture is continuing, also students having conversations with each other. (25 May 2009)

Students from other courses come into the class and talk to their friends while 'class' is going on. This is a constant activity throughout the class it would seem. I seem to be the only person noticing the Film students moving in and out – I'm irritated by this movement but the lecturer and students don't seem to see it. (1 June 2009)

#### **FIELDNOTE 2**

##### **Patterns**

Different lecturers 'command' different engagement from students.

- Sameer: class is more structured, they tend to work on the task he sets, he will regulate their behaviour more, asking questions, using standard checking phrases, the students response in ritualised/accepted fashion
- Ivan: less structured, students almost unaware of his presence, recognise they are in a class, but very informal relation exists. Class is more distracted, noisier. Students often continue their own work/activities. (26 May 2009)

#### **FIELDNOTE 3**

Small informal chat with students before the class started. I joked that I was taking the class that morning. Asked how things were going, if it was test week. Roxy mentioned that this was test week, but it was shifted to the following week. She then mentioned how disorganised the course was and how nothing happens as planned. She also described the course as chaotic and at one point exclaimed "I hate this course". Oliver interjected that the course was "spontaneous" and in an animated way described that things happened on the spur of the moment, when the lecturer gets an idea about an assessment, it is implemented and they get told: "You will have a test". (5 June)

#### **FIELDNOTE 4**

While Ivan is presenting his lecture, the students are browsing the internet or on Blackboard. Ivan shows a video of a tool he wants to illustrate. Students aren't really 'watching' the video – there seems a sort of 'selective' viewing i.e. their focus is on their personal computer monitors and they pay selective attention to the video on the projector screen. Can't see anyone following the step-by-step demonstration on their own PC's. Carl takes a cellphone call during the lecturers' clarification input. Craig who seems to be following the descriptions via the video asks a question (I can't see his monitor so unsure if he is following along in the package). (1 June 2009)

## **FIELDNOTE 5**

Students all have Microsoft Windows open but few are in the actual package. They aren't following the steps being explained. Rather they are busy with other computer or online activities. No note pads or physical writing is taking place. (25 May 2009)

---

While waiting for lecturer to come around to help individual students, they are surfing other websites. If specific general point needs to be raised, lecturer will verbally explain a concept while walking down the various rows. Two students are working through the error code (reading the code) and trying to work out what the errors mean and what they didn't do correctly. Now that they have these errors, they start to search the internet for resources for another subject. (27 May)

---

None of the students have the software interface open, but majority busy with their PC's – all of this while the lecturer is explaining concepts related to lighting and how the photographer adjusts the lighting. (1 June 2009)

## **FIELDNOTE 6**

Students rely almost exclusively on 'listening' and watching in lectures. Notes are placed on Blackboard or students simply copy files from the lecturer.

Students sit behind PC monitors faced towards the front of the class where white board, projector screen and lecturer are located. The PC monitors are switched off. Students are listening to the lecturer, no pens/paper in front of them. (21 May 2009)

## **FIELDNOTE 7**

Lecturer starts session with theory overview using PowerPoint. Lecturer starts to play video clip of tutorial to explain an aspect of (the) software package. The video clips are interspersed with brief comments made by the lecturer (he raises one or two consolidating points) and then introduces (a) new tasks/tool options and plays another animated video clip. (25 May 2009)

## **FIELDNOTE 8**

Sameer is showing students via his computer and data projector how to solve a specific problem. Students weren't able to follow from his verbal commands. Student then follow from checking Sameer's screen explanations. (27 May 2009)

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## FIELDNOTE 9

Task today: Lecturer presents students with printed out version of article about portfolio development/design. They are meant to read through the article and extract the key points from the article. Students have to work in groups of four. Except for Charles's talking, the rest of the class are engaged in the reading tasks. Some of the students are taking notes as they read, others just read silently from the page. The two students to my left are reading aloud and extracting the core points from the article. While reading is happening, the class is almost silent. The lecturer is busy cutting out pages (task instructions) for the next activity. (29 May 2009)

## FIELDNOTE 10

Student task in Design class

- Present your learning outcome, sitemap and multimedia elements to the other pair sitting at the table
- Assist the other pair by giving feedback on their ideas

Students are engaged in the task – explaining what they will be doing, using notes or diagrams to explain ideas. Also using actual textbook (on which the digital product must be based) to point out specific content areas. (22 May 2009)

## FIELDNOTE 11

Students will consult with each other, looking at the screen or gathering around (a) person who is doing a particular tasks, sometimes the person watching might take notes (possibly of the steps/procedures to be undertaken) or just admire the persons task or image being created. (21 May)

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Now observing students 'unstructured' period. Most 3<sup>rd</sup> year students working on their blender assignment due today. Everyone 'glued' to their PC monitors, but a lot of discussion and co-operating existing between students. Lisa is acting as a 'tutor' showing two other students how to do a certain function and make their model work. The same engagement is happening to my right especially between Craig, Richard and Carl – they are working individually, but constantly checking with each other if they are applying the tool correctly and asking for advice. The lecturer is in the class, so also helping out. Very few students are actually working 'ALONE' without any input from their peers. (25 May)

## FIELDNOTE 12

In this session Nadine asked me to act as a co-evaluator. Student would have the opportunity to present their conceptualisation assignment / submission to both of us and we would offer some advice and guidance on their work. (22 May 2009)

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Students are presenting their digital versions of the Instructional Design interface. I think this is a critique/feedback session. The pairs have to present and defend the first version of their interface. The rest of the class then provides feedback to their pair on the merits of their work. (29 May 2009)

### FIELDNOTE 13

A student pair shows the jpeg of the main menu page. Both students contribute to the presentation. The student points to the projector screen directly to explain how the navigation works...Nadine offers minimal input, mostly students are offering feedback and suggestion on how to improve the layout design. (29 May 2009)

### FIELDNOTE 14

Informal discussion with Ivan in the staff dining room. Started with Ivan but Sameer was also in the room. I basically asked him about his subject, what it entailed and whether he thought it was preparing students for industry and for what role it was preparing students. Ivan's descriptions suggested that the process of compiling the syllabus was rather ad hoc. It involved some industry consultation, but basically he was 'forced' into teaching the subject and had inherited some of the content and was therefore forced into teaching a topic like Blender. He isn't sure how the topic fits in with the rest of the course offering. At this stage Sameer joins conversation, along with Ted (another course lecturer) they all account for the male component of the staff and are responsible for the technical / programming leg of the course. The discussion turned to the design/development distinction in the course. Interestingly, their perception is that the course isn't helping students to become web developers either. From this discussion Ivan is clear that his subject is basically a tools' based focus – i.e. design tools Blender, Flash, HTML and CMS (which are front-end tools). We debated the classification of students as web designers. Whether this was an accurate description given that the curriculum failed to provide the core conceptual knowledge associated with pure design. They used the label web design because web development wasn't accurate. Rather students float in an unnamed or ill defined middle ground. This confusion is felt by lecturers who feel the course focuses too much on tools and doesn't sufficiently develop student's logic or knowledge of programming or development concepts...

#### *Impressions*

- No driver to enact change or tap into interest / enthusiasm of lecturers
- No direction for curriculum innovation
- They see themselves/curriculum/ subjects as placing limits on students, acknowledging that what they are doing at the moment isn't beneficial to students. (9 June 2009)



## APPENDIX 9

### Interview Quotes

#### QUOTE 1

*The physical environment ...is not very conducive to me. Sometimes the labs can get very noisy, disruptive, especially during your own lab time when you have a lecture...it's noisy, I can't really work in that environment, so I usually take my work home. (Louise, 17 June 2009)*

#### QUOTE 2

**Steven:** It would be better if she gave each brief 3 weeks before the deadline  
**L:** How do the other lecturers do that?  
**Richard:** Ivan does it like that  
**Steven:** Sameer  
**Richard:** He just says next week  
**Steven:** He is like ok, there are marks that are due  
**Richard:** Ok in the next two weeks  
**Steven:** And he will say we will have it anytime next week and we wont even know what the percentage is or the weight is for the project and then he will just say its for marks  
**Richard:** His assignments are like more on the spot, like you will be doing some work at that point and then we will say, oh ok – time to research people  
**Steven:** What is also different is that we will write exams for his subject  
**L:** Is there a big distinction between the way Sameer's subject – the way everything is put together and the other one  
**Richard:** Yes I believe that in his class the way he conducts his class – monitors off and I'm speaking – so we have to pay attention, so what he does is slides and then he will give his assignments and we have to study on that, that will be our exams

#### QUOTE 3

*Software we usually use in the course like Blender, sitting in front of computers and he will be teaching in front of the classes. And it depends if we will concentrate or we will be doing our, other stuff and he gives us lots of time to research when he is teaching – you can research on what he is teaching, download tutorials and all that stuff, he also gives us the resources – the websites where you can go and find those things, you know. (Bongani 18 June)*

#### QUOTE 4

**Steven:** In Nadine's class we will work mostly in groups, sitting at the round tables. Annelie will be you say something, that guy will say something, or listen to Annelie lecturing. Sameer – not so much participation, unless you doing practical work.  
**Richard:** Or if he is running through a concept and then we don't understand something then you will ask and he will ask if anyone else needs an explanation and then he will explain.  
**Steven:** Ivan class is also a practical class, although that there are few activities that are practical  
**Richard:** There's not much there

**Steven:** To me I think the least participation is in Ivan's class, because Ivan doesn't ask for attention.

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**Steven:** Tuesday we have Sameer – everyone would pay attention there because he would have the screens off – Ivan doesn't necessarily do that, he just talks and if you not listening then that is your own thing. Tuesday we have Sameer and we also have Annelie, which we have to attend otherwise we will get 1% subtracted

**Richard:** Here submissions are like for industry, no late submissions – if it's late its zero.

**Steven:** In her classes you have to participate – she takes note of that.

#### QUOTE 5

*That is also another reason why I come here instead of working at home...when you have a design and you know that you have your classmates who will give their input and help you, you know you can ask others. (Roxy, 17 June)*

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**Richard:** We have small problems that we need to solve; it's not on your own. You can do it on your own, but there will be small groups, they try to solve the problems in that group, the group will outsource it to another group. So it's very interactive and lively

**Steven:** You won't struggle on your own for a long time unless you are at home, but then you will have someone's phone number. And they would have gotten that answer from someone else. Or they would have researched it, if you didn't have the time.

#### QUOTE 6

*I researched lots of pictures that we were going to use for the actual CD ROM and we coded (Jigga, 18 June)*

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*With the research I mean going online and looking for examples of the visual breadcrumbs, and then downloading fla (flash extension) versions so that I could open it up, edit those versions. And then also some explanation of how the code works. Basically understanding how the code works and then implementing it in our CD ROM. (Steven, 18 June 2009)*

#### QUOTE 7

*When we started off we split up the work. I did the visual diary and all the rough drawings and he did the documents. And I would go through his copy of his final design and then I would transfer that design to Flash.*

*But it didn't work out as planned; he got very ill, so I had to cover up for that. (Steven, 18 June 2009)*

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*I did a lot of the documentation, the written, the essays, and he was going to do everything on design and I must just try to search for the right images and so I did that. I put it in a folder and then I gave it to him...*

*We worked together – well I won't have any problems doing it and he would suggest changes. (Jigga 18 June 2009)*

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**Roxy:** We started off with finding a book first of all (Louise: Yes) individually, and then coming back with what we found and then we decided ok, that will be best and from there we decided which chapter to use. And then from there we both worked on designs, with the visual diary just to get that done, and from there we split the load. You do content, you do design, you do the coding part – the Flash, (and) you find images...like that

**Louise:** We worked on that together, we had to because of time, we worked together. Because normally what works between the two of us – you go into your own separate corner and you do what you have to do and then you come back and we reformulate. But with the actually putting the Flash together, one person will do the work, but we will sit together. (17 June 2009)

#### QUOTE 8

*This was our first visual diary and the mood board. So we sat and played around with the visual diary and came up with and we gave that. After that I don't know we didn't really use the visual...because in your visual diary that is normally the first thing you have to do, you come to the visual diary and you have to come up with it, but in actual fact we were so lazy. We don't really spend a lot of time thinking about it. So you just come up with, any design that's good enough to put in because you just have to talk about it, when in actual fact you going to change that design (Roxy, 17 June 2009)*

#### No 9

*I had the idea for the design, so I had to do the visual diary and I did all the steps in my brain to where I got to the idea – I drew those stuff (L: Ideas you talking about the visual ideas, the theme, the layout) – Yes. But even the 1<sup>st</sup> ideas I came up with I drew that down and then I drew the changes that I made and why I made those changes and then the final design. (Steven, 18 June 2009)*

#### QUOTE 10

**L:** What do you understand by being a web designer? What does it entail?

**Louise:** Coming up with the layout of the thing

**Roxy:** Capturing the intention of the audience

**Louise:** At the company that I did my information interview, the girl was a web designer, knows absolutely nothing about programming. So all she does is in Photoshop – she does the whole layout and everything and just cuts it up and then she gives it to the programmer. And they do the other work basically (inaudible) She doesn't even put in content.

**Louise:** From what I understand a web developer does the programming part, like PHP and the coding Ja

**Roxy:** I think, if you a web developer, a developer in the company who just does the development. He just gets the basic Photoshop layout and then he does all the

coding and adds some Flash stuff and does the security, the login and stuff like that. Whereas the designer would just be trying to get the clients (pause) view behind

#### QUOTE 11

**L:** What role or function do you most feel comfortable with?

**Steven:** Design – I enjoy development

**Richard:** Design

**L:** The course in your view is it promoting any specific role – design / development?

**Richard:** No

**Steven:** promoting – primarily – a jack of all trades

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*I think the course gives you a general overview of everything so that if you need to do the whole package you will be able to. Maybe not do everything, but you know what should be done. You know what I mean. (mmm) And then with coding even though I don't understand it, I will be able to read the code and know this is why you did that. (Roxy, 17 June 2009)*

#### QUOTE 12

**Bongani:** It prepares you to chose where you fit in – and then if you are interested in all those things then you can, you have to go and study again. If you want to be a developer, then go and learn web development, because you saw how to develop  
**Jigga:** It teaches the basics.

**Bongani:** In order to be called a web developer you have to go and study again as a web developer and then you will study other code because (like what) – like ASP, and then we don't have JavaScript, you have to learn by yourself, there are some forums and then you go and get some materials, you ask your friends and then you learn all those code

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**Louise:** I would like to specialize in something. I did ask the HOD if they would ever offer something like that. Maybe as a BTech specialising in either design or development, cause I would actually like to do something like that. At the moment the course is basically preparing you for both

**Roxy:** I think it's just too general, because I mean if you go out against someone who just studied web design. Who will have more knowledge? Or someone who went and studied web development or programming. Although you have a general sense of everything, you have not specialised. That is also where the problem comes.

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**Richard:** Sameer told us that we are still at that point where WDD students can't be described as a web developer or designer because –

**Steven:** We need a fourth year where you can do either web design or development. So we won't sit in their classes and they won't sit in ours.

**Richard:** You like have designers and developers and we sit below that – we know enough about industry standards to design and we know industry standards to develop, but we don't know as much as they know.

## APPENDIX 10

### Assignment Brief (Technology)

**Subject Name** Applications 3

**Subject Code**

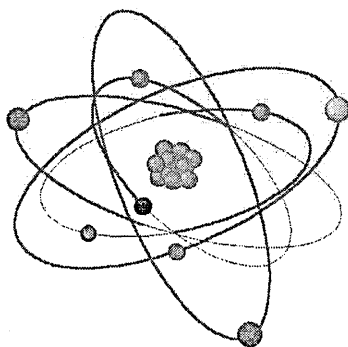
**Due :25 May 2009**

Assessment 1 of 3 (20% of Final year Mark – This Terms assessments comprises 20% of year mark)

You are to mesh model an atom and animate it for a duration of 30 seconds

Due date end of day 25 May 2009 @15:30

While THIS picture is not particularly more accurate for any one atom, it shows you a more complex pattern detail. Atoms have electrons going around them in "rings" which are certainly in all three dimensions.



The stuff in the nucleus (middle) are neutrons and protons, for effect make it appear as if they pulse (grow bigger and smaller)

#### Assessment criteria:

1. Modelling an accurate representation of the above image
2. Getting the nucleus to shrink and grow
3. Modelling electrons to spin around the nucleus in 3 dimensions
4. Allowing the model to animate for 30 seconds (you control the frame rate and duration)
5. Use of appropriate colours
6. Use of appropriate materials
7. Quality of product

#### Implied Assessment criteria

- Ability to meet deadlines
- Ability to use and select appropriate tools
- Ability to research possible solutions to a problem
- Ability to implement a solution
- Ability to produce an artefact based on given specification
- Ability to substantiate chosen solution

Hand ins will be conducted via webct(Blackboard) as your blend file as well as your Quicktime file zipped together

The assessment rubric is attached below in an excel format

## Visual Diary

The visual diary is an assessment text used exclusively in the Design subject of the WDD course. It was originally appropriated from its use and application in the Graphic Design Diploma course at HUT. A visual diary is required for all digital text production assignments in the subject and is a primary means whereby students demonstrate their design conceptualisation process. The intention is that students visually document the progression of their design ideas from concept to final product.

### Characteristic elements of the diary

- Paper based, usually in the form of an actual book containing blank pages that can range in size from A5 to A3
- It precedes the digital design process acting to inform and direct the initial digital text production processes. It is meant to visually capture the main inspirations and design ideas informing the digital text
- Includes mostly visual elements; including drawings, sketches, collection of other texts from other sources (print or electronic) that can be pasted into the diary
- Written text can use used for illustrative purposes, to annotate an inclusion or to summarise an idea or concept (often this will be hand written and incorporated into the overall visual layout to complement the theme or ideas being communicated)
- Includes storyboards of the proposed digital interface – this should preferable be hand drawn with the necessary dimensions (in pixel size) indicated for elements that make up the interface design. Colour choices, gradient use, location of images, image sizes, header and footer dimensions, location of logo's or corporate identity elements, and font choices are also included. The intention is that students use this storyboard to inform the creation of their first digital version. Often students will include a printed version of this initial digital version. This draft version does not have to 'match' the final interface that students will produce for the assignment, taking into account that once the digital design process starts changes can/will be incorporated.
- Includes a draft site map of the proposed website or CD ROM indicating the content organisation, site hierarchy and overview of the content scope for the final digital product.

*(Compiled in consultation with the Design subject lecturer and E. Simon, Graphic Design Department HUT, July 2009)*

*Images included below are from the research assessment text.*

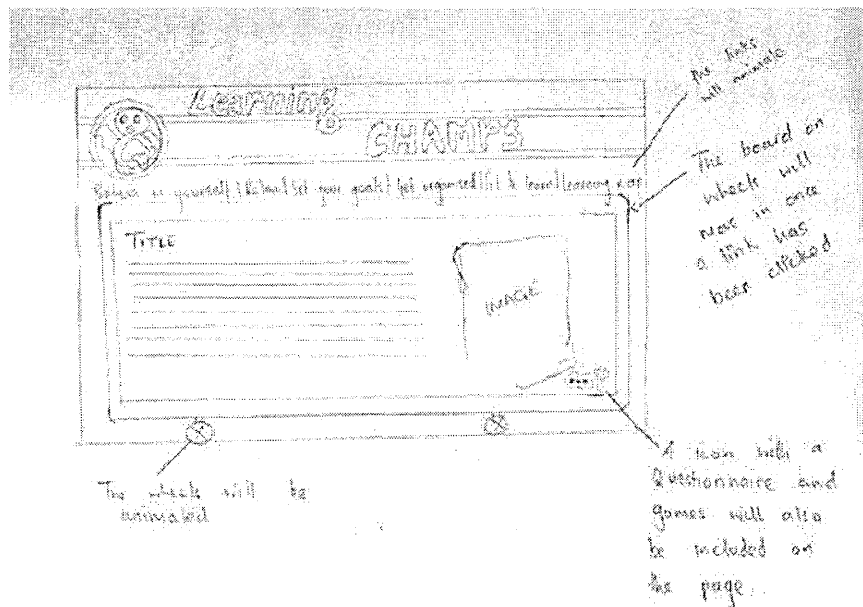


Image 1: Example of an interface storyboard with annotations

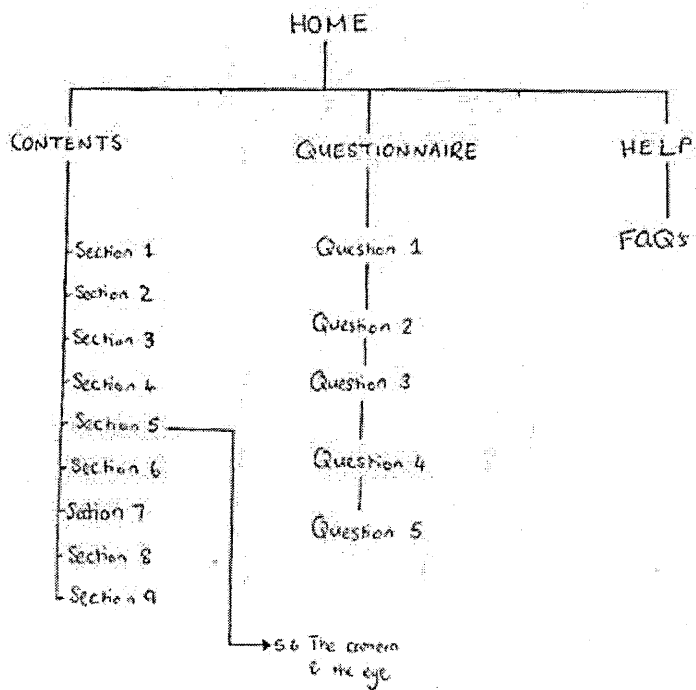


Image 2: Example of a site tree diagram