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Tony Fetherston
Edith Cowan University

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Abstract: The visual aspect of classroom culture is becoming more important because students now have much greater access to the means of producing, viewing and manipulating images. Using a framework adapted from Foucault and taking a myth-making position, this paper puts forward six propositions as means of explaining how images in the classroom might be read. Theory relating to this emerging literacy is further explained through reference to three dominant classroom narratives. It is argued that the interesting elements of an image are often those that link the classroom metanarratives to wider, hegemonic concerns. Interesting research directions are proposed throughout the paper.

The visual has risen steadily in importance in our culture. The presence of visual images has progressed from the high art of the painting through various media such as still photographs, broadcast free and pay television, VHS video, video games, digital versatile disc (DVD) and Blue Ray® until it is now a commonplace attribute of popular culture. This progression has been inexorable. The increasing availability of various technologies has led to a similar increased presence of the visual in schools. These technologies give teachers and students easy access to the means of production and manipulation of images in their classroom.

We are all aware of Generation Y and its reputation for proficient use of technology. It is not surprising that this generation expects technology to be part of its learning. This generation is now in the last stages of its schooling and the members of the generation following are often referred to as 'digital natives'. The term is being applied to individuals who have grown up immersed in technology. Prensky (2005) claims to have coined the term. He states:

> *Our students ... are so different from us that we can no longer use either our 20th century knowledge or our training as a guide to what is best for them educationally. They are native speakers of technology, fluent in the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet.* (p2)

The digital native's easy use of new technologies, all of which are capable of handling digital images, makes it imperative for educationists to start to deal with the issue of how to teach students to 'see' these images, how to 'look' at them and how to 'read' them. While these issues are not necessarily new, and are often part of courses dealing with visual literacy, they are becoming increasingly relevant to the current generation in schools.

This paper is an attempt to conceptualise part of an emerging literacy that is about dealing with images, combinations of images and words and combinations of words, images and sound. The paper seeks to develop an understanding of images in the classroom culture and how they can inform the making of meaning. This is an important topic as this emerging literacy is part of a changing visual classroom culture.

Culture and classrooms

Before conceptualising the use of images in the classroom and its effect on classroom culture, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "classroom culture".

Culture is a term that is often used vaguely and generally and when applied to the classroom it does not offer any great increase in clarity. Gibbs (1994) provides an interesting definition: she describes the culture, or the climate, of the classroom as an atmosphere or feeling and as an energy that is related to a child's opportunity to learn and social development. Other definitions centre on ideas such as mutual respect, a sense of belonging and an atmosphere of trust. Many definitions revolve around behaviour management and aspects such as shared control and the setting of expectations. Viewed this way, the term can have an element of normativity 'such that it appears to account for human practices but…is used to control and prescribe these practices' (McHoul, 1993, 47). Prescription, in terms of what is taught and when, is part of the essence of a student's classroom life and is a dominant element of classroom culture. So whatever arises from this attempt to conceptualise visual culture in classrooms needs to embed prescription and control as an integral part.

For the purposes of this paper, the classroom culture is regarded as encompassing the broad range of activities occurring within the classroom. So, following Sturken and Cartwright (2001, 3), it is defined as: *the shared practices of the classroom through which meaning is made from the visual, aural and textual world of representations accessed in that classroom.*

Developing the discourse

How can this visual classroom best be theorised? There are probably many different ways of going about this and many different lenses through which the field could be viewed. At first pass it may be tempting to draw upon pre existing theories from other fields and this may ultimately be useful, but before this can occur the topic has to actually become the subject of discourse.

In tracing the development of another field, psychopathology, Foucault discussed the 'rules of formation' by which objects became the elements, or foci, of discourse. He proposed that, firstly, the 'surface of emergence' of the object must be mapped*: "show where these individual differences, which, according to the degrees of rationalisation, conceptual codes, and types of theory, will …be designated and analysed.* (1972, 42). By identifying the theories and concepts, the discontinuities in theory and the limits of concepts, the domain can be limited and defined, assisting its emergence as an object of discourse. This useful first step is where possible relevant theories can be identified.

Secondly, Foucault suggested that we must also describe the authorities of delimitation: we need to know who or what organisation of grouping is to be the major authority in society that will delimit, designate, name and establish the object. Part of this process will involve the emergence of the rules under which the individuals and body of knowledge will operate.

Lastly, he said, we must analyse the grids of specification: *"these are the systems according to which the different kinds of …are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified and derived from one another as objects of discourse".*

Utilising these three steps is only one way in which to proceed but is attractive as it locates the role of pre-existing theory. The approach may also have disadvantages. Interestingly Foucault (1972) himself recognised the limits of his three-step approach:

> *Such a description is still in itself inadequate. And for two reasons. These planes of emergence, authorities of delimitation, or forms of specification do not provide objects, fully formed and armed, that the discourse of (psychopathology) has then merely to list, classify, name, select, and cover with a network of words and sentences.* (p4)

So it seems that even after this process, there will still be considerable work to be done in order for any ideas to become useful in working with the visual culture in classrooms. This work would almost certainly involve empirical validation of any proposed ideas. However, this three-stage approach seems at least tentatively workable.

Surface of emergence

When we use words to represent our world, we use the rules and conventions that govern the production and reading of them. In the classroom, teachers and students understand generally the rules that operate when they use the written or spoken word (at least to a basic level) and these rules are taught implicitly and explicitly in schools. By using our experience with words and applying similar reasoning to the visual, we can ask what are the corresponding rules for the production and reading of images.

Some possible rules are now suggested in the form of tentative propositions. These are not detailed, universal rules or laws, capable of predicting the response of an individual student when he or she reads or produces an image, but general ideas or frameworks that may help us understand how individual responses may operate.

These propositions represent a starting point for theorising about the visual in classrooms and constitute the 'surface of emergence'.

Reading an image
Proposition 1: reading an image is an inner, meaning-making experience.

This meaning-making experience is a natural response to perceiving physiological stimuli on a page. When we 'read' an image, our body responds to the patterns of light and shade, the colours and the arrangement of shapes. These elements produce the inner experience and cognitive processes occur in reaction to the perceived stimuli. The experience produced by the reading of a image might not necessarily be unique, but could also be produced through some other means.

We can consider an image to be an assemblage of characteristics (a Wittgenstein idea) produced as we perceive the arrangement of the malleable elements in the image.

Each student reading an image would construct and combine these characteristics, sometimes in new and unique ways, so that in a classroom we could never pre-specify exactly the meanings generated by an image for an individual student.

Reading an image is about interrogating and playing with the separate elements that compose it (but also with the image as a whole) to produce some private meaning. This private meaning might then be capable of being communicated to another and it would then be the subject of social construction or reconstruction in a classroom.

Proposition 2: reading an image is a myth-making exercise.

Both Barthes and Saussure have proposed on many occasions that the photographic form produces mythical discourse and drawing on their ideas can help us to understand how images can create myths. Barthes used myth to refer to the values and beliefs evoked by the connotative aspect of images. He calls this evoked myth as the 'hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings…are made to seem universal' (Struken & Cartwright, 2001, 19).

Barthes seems to have based his ideas of signifier, signified and sign combining to construct myth on Saussure's work. The signifier in this context (the visual classroom) is the image; the signified is the concept that is constructed by the student with the assistance of existing memories; and image and constructed meaning together constitute the sign.

Figure 1: image of the Tour de France (downloaded 26 November 2007 from prblog.typepad.com/strategic_public_relation/2006/07/four_links_0710.html).

In Figure 1, the signifier is the photograph and its constituent elements; the signified (to my mind) is the Tour de France and together the photograph and the concept of the Tour de France make a sign. Of course, the Tour de France is but one signified and many others can come to mind easily: speed, effort, narrow streets, competition and marketing to name a few. Images acting as signifiers can evoke many different meanings in a particular student and different meanings in different students.

The signs produced are dependent upon the elements present in the signifier and their arrangement and these elements are in turn are mediated by the cultural context of their production. For example, the ready availability of digital cameras in classrooms either by themselves or embedded in devices such as mobile phones means that students have easy access to the means of producing signifiers. This access mediates what elements can be included in their images.

The sign is constructed at the time of reading and this construction occurs in and is influenced by a particular set of social and historical factors operating in the cultural context of the classroom.

Examination of a signifier introduces the discourse. This examination means that the image is dragged from a silent visual space into the noisy discourse world and this is where we can make links with the linguistic elements, with the words. This process binds the sign and image together in a joint frame where both linguistic and visual rules operate.

McHoul had another approach to signifier and signified. Instead of asking or investigating the relationship between signifier and signified, he suggested we ask 'what is the relation between an expression and its effect?' (1996, xvii). He is suggesting that we might interrogate an image as to its effect on those who read it. He used the term semiosis to mean 'something effective' and this term can be applied to any image that produces some meaningful effect on the reader.

Meaning in this context is largely a matter of how signs are made (from one occasion to another). He takes the position that 'for any community, the means of producing a semiosic object are identical with the means of recognising it' (1996, xxi).

This is taken to mean that producing an image involves seeing the scene first through a viewfinder before pushing a button and taking the photograph. This seeing of the scene is identical to the process involved when we view the resultant image.

This appears to be a position worth pursuing with regard to images in the classroom. It may be possible to teach students to look for the meaning of an image in its initial production, and this

could be a useful line of inquiry given the widespread availability of digital cameras and image manipulation software in schools.

Proposition 3: private meanings can become universal, natural or literal meanings.

Private meanings generated in a classroom through the reading of an image are more useful (in the learning sense) if they can become communicable, public meanings and part of that classroom's culture. Classroom culture is not an exclusive, privately-constructed phenomenon and the communication of ideas to others is a powerful scaffolding device.

Many privately-generated meanings or emotions could well be common to other students, especially if they have similar backgrounds and social settings. If made public, private meanings can become universal connotatives and, as proposed next, the act of turning private meanings into universals is a myth-making exercise. "Connotative" is used in the usual sense of the image suggesting something more than just the explicit, that which is denoted.

For example, in Figure 1 the image connotes attributes such as effort and competition. It also denotes individual objects, such as bicycles, clothing and male competitors. Sometimes the terms *intension* and *extension* are used for connotation and denotation respectively.

In Barthe's view, the construction of myths from images is a two-stage process and it is through these two stages that meanings can become literal, natural or universal. The first stage involves reading the image in terms of its practical purpose and its symbolic status: this is its message. We often look at the elements that comprise the image and then link the signifier with the signified (generating the signs) in what to us seems to be a natural way. By sharing these seemingly-natural ways with others in a classroom, these meanings can become more universal.

A deeper reading would seek to abstract the signifiers from the particular context portrayed in the image in order to understand their symbolic status.

The second stage seems to be about revealing the socioeconomic structures that are related to the production of the image. As Moriarty explains in the context of a photograph of the Tour de France: 'to drink wine and take an interest in the Tour de France seems simply part of being French, but the forms in which both of these things are presented in daily life reflect the structures of capitalist production" (1993, 21).

A photograph of the Tour (the object) might display dozens of men wearing bright clothing riding bicycles through French countryside. Its utilitarian purpose might be to convey how many riders were involved in the race. Its symbolic status might relate to epic feats of endurance (although more recently the myth might relate to the use of drugs in sport). A second-tage reading would look at how the photograph was taken, who was allowed to take the photograph, how it was distributed, who had rights to the image and why this particular image was selected (related, perhaps, to the sponsors' displays on the clothing).

This second stage reading can help us understand how the meanings generated in a first stage reading can become accepted by us as natural.

Proposition 4: images are inherently subjective.

Most images produced and accessed by students in the classroom often seem to give merely an objective representation of the students' world (its practical, utilitarian purpose).

However whatever is portrayed evokes in the reader reactions and meanings that may well be idiosyncratic. The mechanism by which meanings from images are generated and the way in which subjectivity arises can be explained in part by adopting the semiologist's idea of the signifier being an empty vessel. In this conceptualisation, the image itself does not contain concepts but is a vessel that will accept the reader's concepts.

This 'myth producer' position is one in which the reader of the image is the creator of the myth by bringing pre existing thoughts, beliefs and ideas to bear upon the image.

Using a computer, manipulation can occur after the first digital image is produced, further weakening any direct correspondence between the image and a stable, objective reality. Once we recognise that an image can evoke different reactions in different viewers, we can appreciate the subjectivity inherent in a seemingly-objective image such as a photograph. Students reading images need to be aware of this and be able to read and respond to this subjectivity.

Proposition 5: images are capable of persuasion

Reading of images in classrooms may reveal signifiers that conform to a particular worldview. Persuasion depends on helping the reader establish a connection between the signified and the signifier, a connection that, if we want to persuade the reader to a particular view, should appear as natural. If the image is a photograph, the photographer's skill and technique can assist the reader in forming this natural connection.

Students create their own images the classroom from film or digital cameras, mobile phones and computers. They download images from the Internet. They are able to manipulate both their own and others' images. The ready availability of images and the ability to modify them easily gives students the ability to create their own illusions and to make seemingly-natural connections in their images. They have the basic resources needed to create persuasive images.

If a student reads an image and perceives signifiers that he or she regards as natural, then, according to Barthes, the student is conforming to a particular worldview. In this way the image is serving particular social interests and becomes capable of achieving persuasion. This persuasion occurs by students constructing signs (myths) using signifiers in the images and their own signifieds. These constructed signs connect with or provoke certain habits of student though that appears natural in the classroom culture. If a myth connects with common classroom metanarratives (see below) that are also accepted as being natural, it can be especially persuasive.

Proposition 6: some images in a classroom can be regarded as valuable.

Images can become valuable in a classroom if they:
· generate powerful connotative meanings;
· are moved or manipulated easily; or
· capture key learning moments/concepts in the students' classroom life.

Teachers and students might base the perceived value of an image used in their classroom on what they believe to be its value in the larger societal cultural context. However, traditional constructs operating in this larger context, such as uniqueness, authenticity and market value, are unlikely to be linked to value (particularly learning value), in the classroom context.

One way an image may become valuable is through its ability to show or demonstrate objects or concepts to students (the *connotative* aspect). Some teachers will regard an image as valuable if it stimulates discussion, controversy or a chain of reasoning. This value would be related strongly to its myth-making ability.

Given that digital cameras are becoming increasingly common in classrooms, images may gain value because of the ease in which they can be transferred to a computer or by the extent or ease by which they can be manipulated by editing software. For example, an image that requires little manipulation and is moved easily by phone or e-mail to peers or teachers may be perceived as being quite valuable. Similarly, images that are produced for assessment, are transferred easily and require little manipulation, may also be regarded as being highly valuable by students!

The rhetorical figures of myth

All of the above six propositions are grounded in or related to the position that reading an image is a myth-making exercise. We now need to understand more about how this exercise takes place. We know when it occurs: when the image is read. When students perceive the signifiers, apply their own concepts to the image, see connections, generate meanings and employ the image in some form of discourse, they construct myths. This making of a myth from an image is related closely to the actual form of the image, so in order to understand more about how myth is created, we need to know how this form produces the discourse. Moriarty (1993, p6) describes interesting rules for the production of discourse and in the following section these rules are applied in a practical way to the use of computers in teaching and learning.

Tautology – a thing is defined by itself

Images of computers in classrooms often show them in conjunction with other familiar technologies such as books, pens and coloured pencils. By equating the computer in the classroom with familiar learning objects, we lead the reader to construct the myth that computers are the same as other forms of learning technology. By accepting this seemingly natural connection, the debate is restricted to appearances and excludes the possibility that the use of computers in classrooms is complex or debatable. It is also interesting that the use of an acronym can serve the same implicit tautological function: computers are 'ICT' (Information and Communications Technology). The use of the acronym can serve to further stifle debate because if one does not know what the acronym stands for (literally, what it signifies) then this discourages one from entering any debate around the issue.

Identification

Identification is about reducing the differences between elements in an image to a single fundamental and familiar identity. It is about making all the signifiers very much alike. In this way, any one element of the image becomes the same as any other. A photograph could show a computer next to an uncompleted student worksheet, making the seemingly natural connection between these elements and suggesting that computers are in reality just the same as worksheets.

Using the same rule–or perhaps the inverse of it–one would make the photographed object exotic or alien. One's attention would be aroused and one would have permission to stare: in doing so, one would be under no obligation to assimilate or accommodate the object.

Neither identifying nor making alien causes one to make any attempt to try to understand the elements to assimilate or accommodate them. This saves intellectual effort and leaves one at ease with the objects and the natural connections between them.

In photographs of computers in classrooms, we see both 'identifying' and 'making alien' used. It is interesting to note that with the increasing popularity of notebook computers (the name itself reinforces the 'learning' myth) in classrooms that these are often conveyed to classrooms in trolleys. Trolleys are also used in libraries to move books: so if both appear in images, we can create the seemingly-natural myth that 'the computer is a book is a workbook'.

Figure 2: Library trolley (left) and laptop trolley. Downloaded 26 November 2007 from http://cdfurniture.com.au/Office%20Furniture/Other%20Furniture/trolleys.htm.

Neither-norism

"Conflicts and oppositions can always be sublimated by weighing up the rival forces and rejecting both in the name of some higher value, which there is no particular need to specify, and which does not commit us to anything" (Moriarty, 1993, 27).

Imagine a photograph that contained an image of a young child working at a computer, looking out a window at some other children playing soccer. The rival forces might be intellectual exercise (or entertainment?) and physical exercise. In the Mark Parisi cartoon below, the rival forces might be similar but could also be reality versus virtual reality. Note the books behind the computer.

Figure 3: Virtual reality soccer. Downloaded 5 June 2006 from www.offthemarkcartoons.com.

A teacher to whom I showed this cartoon said:
"Kids who use computers get fat because they sit in front of a computer rather than running around doing the real thing. But sport isn't everything. It's relationships that are important at school, collegiality and supporting the learning community".

If we accept this particular 'neither-norism', we dodge the issues associated with implementing computer use in schools and their possible effects on physical health, the competing elements in the above cartoon. Use of the neither-norism turns attention from these elements to the 'real' issues of learning communities.

The term 'learning communities' is a cliché and I suspect that we often invoke it (a high-level idea that lacks detail and gives us no real sense of what schools or learning looks like), whenever we want to skirt around the real day-to-day issues of teaching and learning. Neither-norism is one way that teachers can maintain the status quo and resist change.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations place in the human body a small dose of a disease so that the body is provoked into providing a defence to the disease. Then, if the disease enters the body at some later date, the body can respond more swiftly and with greater effectiveness as it recognises the disease.

In social systems the process works in a similar way. When the object, institution or product is attacked (vaccinated), this alerts it to the invaders and the attack is denounced quickly–the immunological response. If the initial attack is small in magnitude and not lethal, the attack is handled relatively easily. The attack is repelled and looks superficial or illusory. The object is sensitised to similar denunciations and is better able to resist if similar attacks occur.

In the cartoon above (Figure 3), readers such as teachers are alerted to the possibility of undesirable material being made available through computer games. This is an attack on their values and ways of working in the classroom. The teachers remember this and when students ask to play a game, teachers say no, because there may be undesirable material in the game. The attack ("can we play a game?") is countered easily. In a similar way, teachers can resist the introduction of computer in schools: there is potential for harm.

It is a tactic also played out in political advertising: In June 2006, the then Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, announced that the Australian government would create a National Filter Scheme to provide every Australian family with a free Internet filter as part of a $116.6m comprehensive package of measures to crack down on Internet pornography. Teachers perceive attacks when myths are constructed by students from images that run counter to the dominant classroom hegemony.

Transformation of quality into quantity

Constructing a myth is essentially an individual process that occurs without immediate reference to an outside reality – it is anti-dialectical. One way in which the reader can create myths in reading an image is by transforming perceived quality into quantity. If a reader wishes to accept that an image is only about objective reality, then he or she is more likely to transform quality into quantity, reducing the subjective quality of the image into an objective quantity.

Moriarty (1993, 27) uses the example of the theatre audience to explain: the members of the audience judge whether they have had their money's worth in relation to their perception of the actors' exertions. This view of theatre reduces the whole political and social reality of that art to a simple exchange and a simple judgement. In a similar way, we would ask how many computers there are in a school and whether we get our money's worth in terms of learning.

These questions obscure the real issues around the social and political use of computers in the culture of the classroom. We see this myth making in progress when we are presented with images of labs containing twenty or thirty computers. This allows us to construct the myth that it is the number of computers that is important.

Transforming quality into quantity gives a pseudo-certainty to our interpretation of an image. Any suggestion that things are more complex and connected than the simple result obtained by transforming quality into quantity can then be dismissed easily.

As a final example, we see this myth making in the establishment of national benchmarks for literacy through systematic testing. This process reduces the complexity of learning in this area to answering whether x numbers of students have achieved certain quantitative measures in relation to the money spent – has the state got its money's worth?

Surface of emergence – other considerations

Hegemony in a classroom is a state of culture that has been arrived at through negotiation or struggle over meanings, laws and social relationships within it. All teachers would recognise at least some aspects of that struggle: they are often included under the umbrella of 'behaviour management'. Classroom hegemony is often in a state of flux, which results in the dominant hegemony needing to constantly reaffirm itself.

One source of evidence for constant reaffirmation could be in the images students produce and in the text they write to accompany the images. If we ask students to present images of aspects of their classroom lives, we might expect a high degree of agreement between the images and the dominant hegemony. We could ask the question of the image, 'does it affirm the dominant hegemony?' In answering the question, we would interrogate the image for evidence of ways in which myths constructed from the image affirmed the dominant hegemony.

However, the social existence of many students can work against the dominant hegemony, so we could also examine images selected and used by students for counter-hegemonic signs. Where the image is neither resembling nor affirming the dominant hegemony, we are being asked to look at it in a new way. If we do this, we may be exposed to counter-hegemonic forces or construct myths that cause us to examine the classroom culture's status quo.

Teachers need to be mindful of the dominant ideology and its influence on students' ways of reading and producing images. Students can read images in a variety of ways, not necessarily those of the dominant ideology.

Hall (1993) suggests that students can take at least three positions when reading a photograph:

· a dominant-hegemonic reading, where they identify with the dominant message of the image and are relatively unquestioning of it;
· a negotiated reading, where they wrestle with this dominant meaning and negotiate some position that is influenced by their own contexts; or
· an oppositional reading, where the dominant position is rejected or disagreed with.

The 'wrestling' approach is probably the most common and aligns closely with the idea of constructing meaning or myth from an image.

These three positions accord with Piagetian learning theory: if students identify and are unquestioning in their reading of an image, they are assimilating the image. If they wrestle in their reading, they are accommodating the image. The images that students can accommodate and assimilate are, according to Piaget, related developmentally. This suggests that if were to ask students to read images, those with simple, concrete elements would suit younger children and those with more abstract elements would be suitable for older students.

Of interest is the oppositional reading. Firstly, how likely is it that students will produce a reading or an image that is oppositional and that, subtly or not, challenges the dominant classroom hegemony?

Secondly, how likely are we as readers engaged in educational activity, steeped in this dominant ideology and employed in the business of propagating it, to be able to read in oppositional ways? We could argue that we are more likely to be able to identify the dominant hegemony and the elements that do not accord with it. But we have to be aware that often we only see what we believe. The act of creating images and then manipulating them using software involves some negotiation with the dominant ideology. This occurs in the selection of the elements to include in the image and can be conscious or unconscious. As software allows students to crop images, recolour, retouch, reconfigure and enhance, they have further opportunities to interpret, reject or reconfigure the elements and to choose what to include or exclude. At this stage of production, considerable negotiation can take place.

The more stages that are encountered by students as they produce their images the more likely they are to portray the dominant culture. This is because each stage is a chance to encounter what De Certeau (1998) describes as the strategies and ways in which institutions exercise their power.

Do images pass on 'knowledges'? For this to occur, certain images would be validated, presumably most commonly by teachers. The images that were not validated could be deemed less valuable or, if produced for assessment by students, given less marks. In this way the teacher, who is seen as having more expertise, can give credence to certain kinds of images and not to others, so only certain kinds of knowledges can be produced and reproduced.

Authorities of delimitation

The second stage in this essentially Foucaultian conceptualisation of images in classrooms is to specify the 'authorities of delimitation': "We need to know who or what organization of grouping is to be the major authority in society that will delimit, designate, name, and establish the object" (Foucault, 1972). In terms of visual culture, the major society that performs these functions is located in the classroom and is a sub-set of the wider society in which the classroom is located.

What is the major authority in the classroom society that is likely to delimit, designate, name and establish the object (images)? To answer this question, some of the metanarratives that are in action in this setting need to be described. They provide the framework that helps to explain the classroom and what is occurring in it to outsiders. As the old (Zebrahead) song suggests, this is the question to ask:

What's going on?
What's going on?
Ready or not - NOT
The world moves on and on and on
Yo, what's going on?

Source: www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/zebrahead/whatsgoingon.html

In the wider community, the metanarratives circulating might be based on religion, science or new-age philosophies. One of the characteristics of a metanarrative is that it carries a sense of progression and this leads to the identification of the first metanarrative operating in classrooms: learning as a progression or progress toward a goal or an outcome.

A second metanarrative comes easily to mind: control/behaviour management (the technology of control), with its cousins, punctuality and neatness. Students cannot arrive late for lessons and, particularly in primary schools (especially in writing lessons!) the idea of neatness prevails. This second metanarrative is linked strongly to the 'gaze'. The teacher's gaze is often described in the 'how to teach' books commonly prescribed in undergraduate teaching courses and behaviour management texts. For example, Barry & King (1992) state, under the heading, 'Scanning the Class':

> Keep an eye on the whole class. Regularly scan the class for signs of
> inattention and make sure that you can always see all the pupils. If you are
> working with a single pupil or a small group, keep your eye on the rest of the
> class. Make a comment or move over to any pupil who is off task. This lets
> the pupil and the class know that you are aware of what is happening and
> that they should adjust their behaviour accordingly (p14*8).*

It is interesting to note the reference to making sure that students understand that the teacher 'knows what's going on' and how this is related to students adjusting their behaviour.

The *panopticon*, a type of prison building designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century, was intended to allow prisoners to be watched without knowing they were under surveillance. Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor for modern 'disciplinary' societies and their pervasive inclination to observe and normalise. He argues that, through history, all hierarchical structures, including the school, have evolved to resemble the panopticon (Wikipedia, 2007).

Following Foucault, beginning teachers are advised in the above passage to develop their surveillance skills. The outcome is that students assume that they are constantly under observation. The teacher's gaze ensures compliance and control. The gaze reinforces the metanarratives of progress (students who are not on task are noticed), control ('they should adjust their behaviour accordingly') and a third metanarrative, synchronicity (see below).

The gaze develops and reinforces the existing hegemony through the agency of these metanarratives primarily because we afford power to the person doing the looking. Rarely do we see students 'looking' at the teacher unless directed to do so as part of an expository sequence. In this case the teacher is still in control, even though the students are doing the looking. Perhaps part of a teacher's development is to get used to being looked at by students and accept the relationships associated with their gaze.

With new technologies, students now have new and different ways by which to 'gaze' at their teachers or classrooms. What happens if we give a student a digital camera? The student is now capable of 'looking' in the classroom and of reversing the gaze. How will the student portray the teacher? His or her fellow students? How do the images establish difference? What codes (especially those of race, class and gender) are portrayed? How do the images relate to the metanarratives described above? Are there new narratives displayed? Are their differences in the gazes of girls and boys? These are just some of the questions that arise and are worthy of further study.

Gaze also reinforces dominance, subjugation, difference and otherness. The teacher looks, the student complies. If students are looked at, they are noticed, so this means they are different from other students, at least momentarily. If they are looked at enough, they may become the 'other' kind of students–those that present classroom management problems. One end result of the skilful use of gaze by teachers might be what Foucault would term 'docile bodies and minds'.

Postmodernists would seek to identify or reveal the values underlying the systems of thought in the classroom and to question the mechanisms and ideologies that make them seem natural. This view aligns well with the myth-making position adopted and discussed above. We could examine the images produced by students for ways in which power is expressed within and through them and for evidence of the operation of the metanarratives described. We might ask why does it seem natural that teachers have to demonstrate that every child has learnt? Why does it seem natural that students have to demonstrate that they have achieved? Why is it not enough for each child to just be?

Ideas of pluralism, multiplicity and difference would seem to run counter to a third metanarrative of synchronicity (the coincidence of events that seem related but are not obviously caused one by the other). This metanarrative is about how students in most classrooms seem to do much the same kind of learning activity at the same time. Their learning approaches seem related but the way in which each child approaches the task and the ideas he or she brings to bear are not caused or brought about by other students. This metanarrative relates to 'doing together' and this is adopted as 'natural' in most classrooms.

Group work is but one manifestation of this metanarrative. Time is the essence of this metanarrative but is also a fundamental construct underpinning the previous two metanarratives. Teachers in this outcomes- and standards-based world have to demonstrate the learning that has occurred in a certain time frame. Students' behaviour must be controlled or 'managed' or it wastes learning time.

Learning time is allocated or rationed among learning areas in most schools. Reading, play and so on are nominated and allocated amounts of time. This relationship of metanarratives to time represents a strong normative and controlling influence in classrooms. These metanarratives should not necessarily be judged in a pejorative sense, as they are linked strongly to learning and perhaps are part of the operation of pastoral power. The key question is, why these metanarratives? Would other, less-dominant narratives lead to as much learning?

When teachers or students read images produced by students in classrooms, they need to examine them in light of these metanarratives, see to what extent they bring these narratives into

play (the extent to which images are dragged from a silent visual space into the noisy discourse world mediated by the metanarrative) and determine whether the images support the metanarratives or not.

Participants in the classroom culture could examine the images for evidence of questioning of the metanarratives, of the values that underpin the metanarratives and of other, less-dominant metanarratives.

In such an examination, it would be tempting to regress toward an objective, realism approach that might be grounded in the idea of presence. We should reject the temptation to look in images to find evidence of immediate experience of the captured sense impressions. We need to be mindful that these sense impressions which, at first pass, may seem to be an objective capture of a 'real' setting are mediated by students' language and the social forces acting upon them (the metanarratives), dictating their choice of elements in the image.

The interesting elements in a student photograph are those that link the classroom metanarratives to wider concerns–to what extent do the photographs produced speak of race, class, gender or age? Examining images in this way may result in many different readings. Due to the operation of the classroom metanarratives described above, in a classroom everything will lead eventually to the generation of a preferred reading. However, students can be taught to look for elements such as parody or reflexivity: do the images comment on themselves and their production?

Grids of specification

The last step in this consideration of the use of images in classrooms is that of describing the grids of specification. Foucault's concept of grids is about describing the emerging object of discourse (the use of images in a visual classroom culture) in relation to how it is structured and differentiated from other (classroom) objects.

It is essential to specify how the different kinds of images produced in classrooms can be divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified and derived from one another as objects of discourse. But this will have to wait until we have a sufficient number of student-produced images upon which to draw. Or will it?

There are many image databases such as Google and Getty, as well as those that are part of media organisations. One fruitful research direction that could be used to validate the above idea involves having students interact with these databases. Instead of producing images, they would have to select images that could then be modified, using software. In this way it mighr be possible to build a body of student images quite quickly that could then be used to develop grids of specification.

A logical first step in such a research program might be to ask students to produce pictures of aspects of their classroom lives as part of normal classroom activity. A next step might be to ask them to take pictures using digital cameras and manipulate the images, rather than drawing diagrams.

Conclusion

When teachers or students use images in teaching and learning, two main processes occur: the images are brought into the world of discourse and meanings are constructed from and through the them.

In the visual classroom culture, participants are often engaged in searching for the meaning (and, eventually, the learning) that is produced from the shared practices of producing and reading images. The images used in classrooms may be inherently valuable but they cannot rely solely upon their uniqueness for their value: it also depends upon how they are read.

The act of reading an image produces myths. It assembles in our mind various characteristics of the image, some of which may change on subsequent readings and some of which may be undesirable. In a classroom, the reading of images is a shared practice but private meanings are a necessary first step. In reading, we are looking for how the objects that are portrayed may masquerade as natural objects through the myths they produce.

At a first-level reading, we might examine the relationship between the sign, signifiers and signified and the plastic elements of the image. How closely do they resemble each other; to what extent is each affirmed by the other? (We can contemplate the similarities and differences between signs made from one occasion to another because we recognise that meaning in an image may lie in the act of its production – the 'photoshop' effect). At this first stage, we look at how each image is made, used, circulated, read and consumed.

At a second-level reading, we might identify the social structures underpinning and related to the reading and production of the image. This more overtly political reading would attempt to identify the myths that connect the signifier and the signified: those myths that attempt to make objects appear natural. We are aware the seemingly natural serves particular interests, so we should identify these interests. We can examine the images for ways in which myths are constructed by tautologies, by identification, neither-norism, vaccinations or quality into quantity.

At this stage, we look for evidence that the dominant hegemony is reaffirming itself through the creation of myths. Is there evidence of any oppositional reading? Does the image show evidence of having wrestled with the dominant hegemony? Such wrestling will be evident in strategies and tactics and these might well be identified in the production stage of the image. Are their particular knowledges being validated?

Three metanarratives are probably strongly related to, and perhaps underpin or maintain, the dominant hegemony in classrooms. Those identified were: moving on; technology of control; and synchronicity. When reading images, we should ask about the extent to which these metanarratives are bought into the world of discourse through the image. To what extent are they present, supported, reaffirmed or subverted?

Time and gaze are supporters of these metanarratives, so we should search for how this support is realised in the images that are produced. An important question is 'to what extent does giving a student the means of production of images subvert the teacher's gaze'? In looking at an image in terms of metanarratives, the intention is to understand how the metanarratives are employed in order to make elements appear natural and the extent to which they are realised in the myths constructed from the image.

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