

Re-animation: multimodal discourse around text

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Abstract

This article offers a multimodal analysis of spontaneous, improvisatory interactions between pre-service teachers as they engage with a range of material resources connected to, or generated by, a literary text (in this case, the Old English poem *Beowulf*). We draw on an understanding of role as a form of frame, offering students a particular perspective on the material that they engage with and a heightened awareness of the signs that they make, and we consider the function of role in supporting learning. Using video evidence collected across a 2-day workshop, we select two key episodes for close analysis to illustrate the complex ways in which learners' spoken words, gestures and bodies combine in the processes of shared meaning-making, aspects of learning that tend to be ignored in official accounts of classroom literacy. In particular, we identify fleeting yet generative moments of role play that learners adopt while engaged in collaborative activities around images and a touchscreen, a form of embodied response we term 're-animation'.

Key words: drama, frame, multimodality, re-animation, role

Introduction

In this article, we present a multimodal analysis of spontaneously occurring interactions between learners as they engage with various material resources connected to a literary text. The video data we draw on here were collected during a 2-day workshop conducted with pre-service (postgraduate student) secondary teachers who were primarily positioned as readers and learners, encouraged to enter into a dialogic relationship with a largely unfamiliar literary text. In this study, our interest lies in broad questions about literacy practices rather than in the specifics of teacher education. Like Burnett (2015, 2016), Burnett and Merchant (2016, 2018), Leander and Boldt (2012) and Taylor (2006, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2019), we draw attention to the kinds of ephemeral social interactions that tend to be written out of accounts of literacy-related activities. We explore the complex ways in which learners' spoken words, gestures and

bodies coalesce as part of collaborative meaning-making processes. In particular, we focus on fleeting moments of spontaneous role play adopted by individuals within small groups while engaged in reviewing, analysing and editing still and moving images. We suggest that this kind of embodied in-role response to visual stimuli has significant pedagogical implications for literacy classrooms, as an important semiotic resource that learners might draw on when making meaning around texts.

The workshop was conceived as a case study within a larger externally funded research project focusing on the processes involved in producing transmedia adaptations of a canonical literary text, the Old English poem *Beowulf*.¹ Underpinning all of our transmedia work around texts is Burn and Durran's (2007, p. 169) productive understanding that "the development of a critical grasp of the systems of meaning-making which operate in media texts is best achieved by making them." We take the view that the way learners move from one mode to another (from drama to creative writing, for example) lends a more critical emphasis to their work, requiring them to adapt their approaches according to the possibilities and limitations offered by the specific semiotic modes at their disposal (Mills, 2015). We have written elsewhere in more detail about working in this way with a literary text (see Coles et al., 2021; Coles and Bryer, 2018). Here, we turn our attention to the social spaces co-constructed by learners as they interact with material resources (Potter and McDougall, 2017).

Our analysis of learner interactions is informed by the associations between frame (Goffman, 1974) and role that were suggested by the drama-in-education practitioner Heathcote (2015/1980a). Heathcote's (2015/1980b, p. 89) attentiveness to the "syntax of signal and response" that inform the continual negotiation of the roles that people inhabit in social contexts enabled her to conceptualise a way of working in the classroom that involved a nuanced and flexible

¹For a fuller account of the research project as a whole, see <http://darecollaborative.net/2015/03/11/playing-beowulf-gaming-the-library/>.

understanding of different degrees of role-taking that were not necessarily dependent on a clear distinction between audience and performer. Explaining how Heathcote positioned children in role, Wagner (1976, p. 68) records how she encouraged “concentration on one thing – attitude” as it related to a particular dramatic context or event, as distinct from each child or actor being asked to assume an individual character. In the analysis that follows, we are alert to the ways in which learners’ relationships to the narrative or materials are shaped by their assumption of particular roles that relate to the dramatic action or that imply specific expertise (the role of editor, for example). We focus on how these roles are manifested in bodily signs: the repertoire of gestures, posture, bodily movement, use of space, gaze, intonation and language that students draw on to communicate and make meaning in relation to the creative work that they engage in.

Methods

We designed our case study to focus quite broadly on the affordances of role when reading and adapting a canonical text across different media. Our wider dataset includes field notes, video recordings, photos, the products of the students’ creative work and focus group interviews, which were transcribed with reference to a multimodal frame (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001), coded and analysed thematically (Miles et al., 2014). In reviewing our video evidence, our attention was caught by moments of embodied communication between students as they worked together in groups. In many ways, close reviewing of the video material has involved us, as co-researchers, in a dynamic process that mirrors the activity that the students themselves engaged in as they edited their short films. As Harris (2016, p. 5) notes, “Video editing is by its nature an analytical activity with a creative output, and data analysis always includes a kind of sense-making from fragments.”

For the purposes of this article, we focus on two brief episodes selected from video evidence recorded on the first day of the workshop. The first involves students’ collaborative analysis of still images (representations of the monster Grendel’s Mother taken from various publications); the second focuses on three students editing a short film that they have just shot on an iPad, re-imagining an episode from the poem (a fight between Beowulf and the monster). In each case, in subtly different ways, the students appear to slip into role in response to the image in front of them, or while watching themselves on-screen.

Capturing the details of bodily movement in written transcription is a complex and creative process. We have opted to include movement, gestures,

proxemics and gaze in brackets to distinguish these modes from speech and demonstrate their relationship to it. The brackets are not intended to imply that physical action is somehow less significant or has less ‘modal intensity’ (Norris, 2013, p. 90). The stills from our video evidence, which we reproduce here, help to address shortcomings of transcription and provide some indication of why we are drawn to these moments as a focus for analysis. They are intended to offer the reader a form of anchor, “a snapshot to show posture, expression and gaze as they were in that split second” (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 148).

Although we use culturally appropriate pseudonyms throughout this article, all 25 of the student teachers involved gave their written consent for us to publish photographs and video stills.

Episode 1: collaborative engagement and role play around still images

The first day of the workshop began with an introduction to *Beowulf*, followed by interactive story telling, drama and writing in role. Before the students started film-making, we asked them to consider the different ways in which Grendel’s Mother (the second of three monsters encountered by Beowulf) has been depicted, drawing on a variety of media, including illustrated literary adaptations for children (Crossley-Holland and Keeping, 1982; Morpurgo and Foreman, 2007), photos of 3D models, a graphic novel (Hinds, 2007) and film versions (Baker, 1999; Zemekis, 2007). Each group was given a different image mounted on a large sheet of paper, which students annotated with marker pens (see Figure 1).

We planned this activity to serve simply as a brief prelude to the film-making, but revisiting the dialogue it generated has prompted us to reassess the work that images do in classroom contexts, particularly in relation to the spontaneous assumption of roles. In the following analysis, we highlight the ways in which the visual signs that captured the students’ attention are briefly embodied by them and reflect on what this means.

We positioned a small video camera on the floor in front of one group (Sophie, Elsa and Geoff). We found the resultant tight focus on the combination of their arms and hands, the large piece of paper on which they scribed their ideas, their voices and those of the teacher leading the session at this point (Jane) very suggestive of the interplay between representation and affect: a feeling response that is predominantly evidenced in bodily or physical reactions (Hurley, 2010, p. xii) and that Burnett and Merchant (2018, p. 66) relate to “the feeling generated as things come into *relation or assemble*” (their italics).

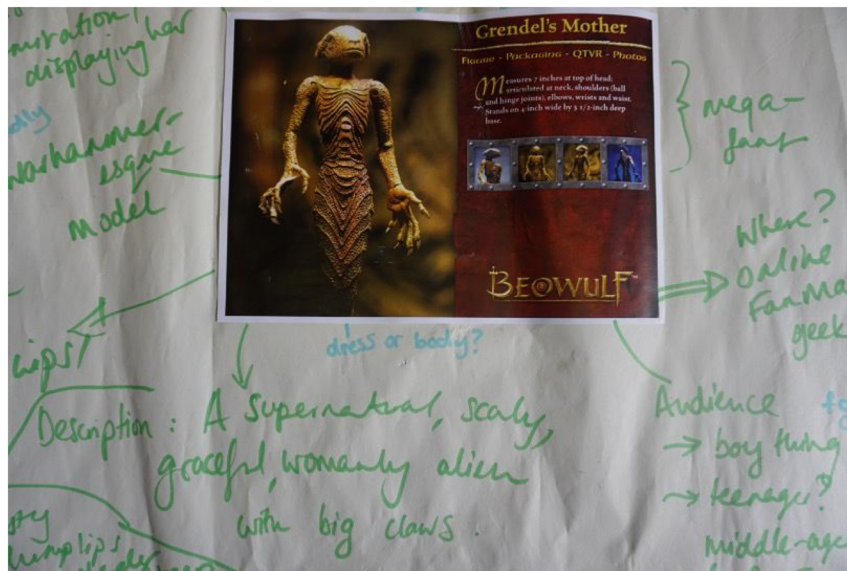


Fig 1: The annotated sheet [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

At first, the group is not clear whether their image of Grendel's Mother (an advertisement for a kind of action figure produced by McFarlane Toys, 2007) represents a toy or collector's item. As they work, there appears to be something that happens in the interface between their words, their hands and the image – a kind of interpretation of the picture transmuted into a gesture, supported by the words that they say and write. As instructed, they start by finding words to describe the image:

Sophie: Supernatural, scaleey, a kind of womanleey, [elongating the ees, to give Elsa time to write] alien.

Geoff: Graceful.

Sophie: Yeah, graceful, yeah, she is. [She points at the paper for Elsa to write.]

Jane: [in the background] Just one of you in the group, just write that sentence in, maybe at the top of the sheet of paper.

Sophie: Yeah, that's fine. [They had written it below.]

Sophie: [points to the page to encourage Elsa to write again.] With big kind of claw-like, [Sophie dictates slowly as Elsa writes on the paper, pausing to make a clawing gesture, briefly, with the pen sitting between her fingers, as Geoff throws his marker pen in the air and catches it.] Big claws.

Elsa: [scribes a full stop to gesture she has finished on the page – like a nod of agreement to the other two. She adds an A at the start of the sentence, so that it becomes a sentence rather than a list. She looks at the page.] Supernatural, scaly, a kind of graceful, womanly alien with big claws; alien.

Sophie and Elsa: [Laugh.]

Sophie: That's pretty accurate.

Geoff: I like it, I like it!

Though the model that they interrogate cannot necessarily be said to act in a way that constitutes gender

(Butler, 1988, p. 519), it has been positioned and photographed to suggest an awareness of the camera and an audience. Her gaze appears to demand a judgement and a response. Its criterial aspects (Kress, 2010, p. 70) are suggestive of femininity, albeit embedded in a flesh that is monstrous (scaly, for example), so that even before Jane points the students towards questions of gender, these attributes privilege the women's responses. There is a symbiosis in the way that Sophie speaks in time with Elsa's writing, and there is something in Geoff's interventions that suggests some kind of deferment to the two women (he flips his pen rather than writing). The first word that he offers, 'graceful', is generous in its appraisal of the figure. In response to Jane's next question to the class about features that are suggestive of gender, Elsa notes that the monster's 'shape' seems feminine and Geoff that she is 'skinny'. Sophie's response to his suggestion is to curl her fingers, in a claw-like way, an action that appears to prompt Geoff to suggest, 'she's feline'. They discuss the monster's lack of breasts but do not dwell on this. Elsa suggests that the claws are 'quite delicate' then flexes her long fingers before speaking and writing, "Also kind of slender fingers." Their words alone provide an adequate summation of the image – so we question why the women punctuate what they say with these gestures. It seems unlikely that they are performing for the tiny camera lens, positioned out of their eyeline. Yet these brief embodiments appear to move the group a little further in the ways that they interpret what they see, so the flat image almost begins to move in a 'feline' way. Maybe Elsa is trying out what it feels like to have claws, and her gesture is suggestive of a sympathetic or affective response, perhaps implying an affinity with one of the most monstrous

aspects of this female figure. She appears to be 'flickering' in and out of role, in the way that Fler (2014, pp. 126–128) describes young children role playing fairy tales, experiencing and anticipating the emotional dimensions of the stories through repeated retellings. Fler (2014) draws on Vygotsky's (1971) recognition of a doubleness of emotion in the shift between the real and imaginary in order to understand the ways that this response inflects and supports play.

That the most compelling aspects of the image happen to reside in its monstrous yet feminine nails or claws and our video camera is focused on hands may influence our reading of this moment. Kress (2010, p. 168) suggests that gestures act as a kind of dynamic subtext captured in hand movement, an "outlining of the 'shape' of what that thing not yet spoken might be or might look like." In this instance, we propose that the women's gestures add a further layer to their verbal interaction, serving to develop their understanding of the monstrous female and the ways she is represented. It may therefore be significant that Geoff does not perform them. The combination of two women interpreting the image alongside a man, with the significant invitation of the blank paper around it and marker pens in their hands, along with the guidance of their teacher's questions, appears to have a dynamic effect, so that the work that the image does is to provide a platform for thinking about gender, difference and power, partly through trying out how femaleness is instantiated in monstrous form. The physical enactments prompted by the visual image are an indication of the students' insights about how choices are made in the representation of a female figure. This is an example of the situated discourse around text that involves what Taylor (2012, p. 163) refers to as representing "images we have seen as postures or actions", one of the ways that she notices 9- to 10-year-olds making sense of classroom activities, drawing on their knowledge of popular culture and their physical capacities to communicate with their peers in playful ways.

In Leander and Boldt's (2012, p. 42) analysis of two boys' reading of manga comics, the authors are keen not to interpret the ways that the boys are prompted to leap about and play fight too instrumentally, calling their responses a 'production of sensation'. It is worth bearing this in mind in relation to the nuanced interactions that we go on to focus on here. We recognise that these interactions represent some form of seepage of the outside world and of identifications, enthusiasms and humour into the classroom space, as the students endeavour to situate the monstrous figure in a particular cultural realm.

A further significant aspect of the discussion is the way in which it stimulates those involved to move towards an active framing of the images, although, again, this is not articulated in precise ways. Sophie,

Elsa and Geoff are prompted to interpret the image from the perspective of film-makers by Jane's question about the mood of the image:

Elsa: What did we say, clinical as well

Sophie: But then also like, it's kind of serene there. [She puts her right palm, flat down on the bottom half of the image, so that only the top half of the monster's torso and face is visible and then, she moves her hand back over the top half of the monster's body, revealing its bottom half.] But then it's quite sinister – the claws isn't it, yeah? [She takes her hand off and circles them.]

Elsa: But I don't like the light on it. [Elsa hovers her hand over the image, holding her pen like a torch, which somehow gives it authority.]

Geoff: That's what the clinical thing is It's a display.

Sophie: You think it's clinical – what do you think? A golden light.

Elsa: Yeah, I dunno, I think it's quite warm light.

Sophie: Yeah.

Geoff: She's almost smiling.

Sophie: Yeah.

Elsa: Somehow, she's shining down like she's in a theatre or she's – she's kind of quite beautiful isn't she, if you think like the body

Sophie: Yeah, yeah – it's quite

Elsa: [puts her palm flat over the left side of the creature's body and then the other hand over the other side.] If you think like the body

Sophie: Yeah, yeah, it's quite beautiful.

The group relates the lighting effects to the ways that the monster is performed or presented so that is the body that appears to be the site of the drama. Whether or not the monster's apparently female attributes are an encouragement to segment her body in this way is unclear. This sophisticated analysis of the particular ways that lighting, colour and pose are integrated to address an audience is enhanced by the dissection of the body, enacted by hands that provide a frame by assuming the role of a camera, or camera person, moving into a close-up.

The class as a whole is introduced to other representations of Grendel's Mother including the graphic novel depiction (Hinds, 2007) of a screaming harpy-like, older woman alongside Angelina Jolie's gilded and air-brushed appearance (Zemeckis, 2007). Through their interrogation of these images, a range of intertextual insights are also brought into play – including mention of *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro, 2006), for example. These and other cultural references are shared through the students' verbal interactions but also, in more haphazard ways, as they appear to try on the role of the creature before them or assume the role of a camera. This form of enactment offers possibilities in terms of understanding that happens through the transduction from

2D image, to speech and then into an emphatic form of writing. In this analysis, it is clearly not just the words that the group share that work to open up the polysemy of the images (Barthes, 1992/1977, p. 39). A sensitivity to the signs that the students read into the representation of Grendel's Mother is apparent in their gestures, gestures that point towards the more overt assumption of roles to come but that are motivated and have their own effects too. A multimodal lens enables us to identify these brief interactions as forms of role play and to recognise the complex signing that constitutes forms of enactment, as learners make sense of and rearticulate texts.

Episode 2: collaboration and role play around video editing

We now focus on another small group of students (including Sophie) as they review and edit a short film they have just shot, an underwater fight sequence between Beowulf and Grendel's Mother based on that moment in the poem (see Heaney's, 2000, verse translation, lines 1,408–1,631). This moment comes from a key piece of video data involving the group of three editing for half an hour. Their absorption is notable, and again, the communication that informs their creative decision-making appears to be punctuated by distinctive moments of enactment.

Using cameras makes very particular demands on students to articulate the fight and its ensuing pain and suffering in ways that are appropriate to the medium. Introducing degrees of stylisation supports the contemplation of the effects of violence in ways that involve generating a felt reaction. Our analysis suggests that the roles that the students assume at different stages of the editing process, as well as the shoot, enable them to experiment with possibilities – and to do so in ways that are reflective and subversive. Their affinities with the representations of Grendel's Mother, expressed in bodily form, continue to be a significant aspect of these responses.

In considering how the students interpret the role of Grendel's Mother, we are prompted to return to the question that we asked – what aspects of her body suggest gender? Or, what aspects of her gendered body suggest monstrosity? The focus on dramatic action (the fight) shifts this locus of attention from her body to the ways that she engages in combat. We suggest that through the process of making these short films, there is some form of “contestation, a struggle for meaning and a struggle for control of the way that the body is placed into its context and the way that it is read” (Conroy, 2010, p. 73). In analysing what happens as the students knit their images together into a



Fig 2: *Beowulf vs. Grendela, Grendela attacks* (photograph) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

piece of defined dramatic action, we try to make sense of this contestation and how it is informed by the roles that the students assume through the process. We start with reference to the finished film and to aspects of the shoot that precedes the edit.

Sophie, Hope and Sumaya's powerful 34-second film is made up of six photographs and three short shots or moving images. In his interrogation of the language of the cinema, Metz (1974, p. 45) notes that:

The rule of the 'story' is so powerful that the image, which is said to be the major constituent of film, vanishes behind the plot it has woven – if we are to believe some analyses – so that the cinema is only in theory the art of images.

So, according to Metz's logic, working with still images in the form of photographs encourages students to focus on the constituent parts of the filmic sequence that might otherwise be overlooked.

The women decide to give the female monster a name in the film's playful title, *Beowulf vs. Grendela*.² Their inventive choice of a stairwell as a setting (see Figure 2) is suggestive of watery depths. Beowulf sports a wooden sword, and Grendel's Mother (or Grendela) is wrapped in red, gauzy cloth. In shooting the film, Sumaya operates the iPad camera to capture the action from a series of angles. She is constrained

²The text (from Heaney's, 2000, translation of Beowulf) that we give this group hints at an ambiguous outcome to the battle: Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight With Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder And laid about him in a battle frenzy: He pitched his killer opponent to the floor But she rose quickly and retaliated, Grappled him tightly in her grim embrace. (Heaney, 2000, lines 1,537–1,542)



Fig 3: *Beowulf vs. Grendela* (sequence of three photographs)
[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

by the narrowness of the stairwell, tending to position herself above or below the action.

The sequence of three photographs that succeeds this shows Beowulf being suffocated at the height of the battle (see Figure 3). Grendela's movement up the stairs emphasises her surge in strength, with outstretched arms and fingers (or claws), a determined stance and a physical suggestion of the 'grim embrace' (Heaney, 2000, line 1,542), accentuated by the blood red gauze that is eventually wrapped around both actors.³

³These photographs also appeared in Coles and Bryer (2018), with a different focus.

Sophie knows that stage combat relies on the responses of the actor under attack. Her acting, foregrounded through Sumaya's low-angle and high-angle shots that position her face at the centre of frame, means that the audience is privy to Beowulf's anguish, proof of the monster's capacity to inflict pain. Every gesture that the two characters make in this compact sequence is suggestive of extreme physical tension. Leander and Boldt (2012, p. 45) suggest that play fighting is about "the vividness of being and experiencing being." The women's film reminds us that there is also an intensity in more actorly *representations* of being. It is significant that although Sumaya does not appear on-screen, in the roles of director, camera operator and then editor, she is able to make decisions that represent the intense action in ways that appear to challenge convention.

The iPads that the students use to create the film support a reflective pause in the collaborative process, a point at which a small group can view a single photograph or shot, critique the embodiments of their roles and plan their next photograph or shot in response (see also Cannon et al., 2014). The technology opens up possibilities for criticality and review, enabling identifications with a variety of roles in ways that allowed for a significant degree of control and agency in relation to the dramatic action. Sumaya expressed her satisfaction with this way of working:

You were able to kind of look and go, oh that's really good, do that again or pose like that [gesturing with her arm in the air] and we'll take a picture. You know we had that control ... you have got to use your body to kind of create the story.

Although drama draws on the signs that we use to make meaning in our everyday interactions with other social actors, through gesture, words, movement and positioning (Franks, 2015; Heathcote, 2015/1980a), it does so in a way that is selective. These selections may be arrived at through processes that appear quite spontaneous, haphazard, even, but once fixed on a timeline, the nuanced and minute choices are made more visible – available for debate, further revisions and enhancements. Like violence itself, Sophie and Hope's attempts at stage fighting are messy until they are able to shape them more precisely in the edit. The graphic style that emerges from both the women's expressive movements and their editing choices is reminiscent of the bold, heightened physicality of some of the images that the students had interrogated earlier.

Initially, it seems there is little to be gleaned from the transcript of the verbal interactions of the editors of *Beowulf vs. Grendela*. Choices are made through a screen-based tap, scroll and pinch of fingers, placing, sequencing, cutting images and then watching, and

reaching agreements that are accompanied by the briefest 'yes', 'no', smile or shake of a head. Their gaze is on the screen in front of them. When they view themselves on the iPad screen, the actors recognise how successfully (or not) they have fulfilled their roles. There is clearly some sense of pride in their committed gestures and the ways that their bodies take up space in the stairwell and on-screen. They share their affinity with the work and their appreciation of each other's movements (on-screen), through word and gesture (off-screen), so that in considering how they make the most of their palette of options – their resources or raw materials – we note that they have recourse to the kinds of fleeting assumption of roles identified in the earlier image annotation activity. In Figure 4, Sophie demonstrates the power of Hope's claw gesture.

On several occasions, Sumaya, the director and camera person, spontaneously performs the action that they are viewing:

Sumaya: Oh, I love it! [She bangs the table.] I like the way the end

At this point (see Figure 5), she moves her hands in a circle and wraps them around herself, miming the movement of the red gauze that, on-screen, Hope (Grendel's Mother) wraps around Sophie (Beowulf). Sophie is prompted to mirror the action in response and Hope to cup her hand. All three smile with satisfaction. Hope's smile as she looks at herself on-screen seems to acknowledge her peers' enthusiastic responses.

In doing this, they appear momentarily to assume the roles of the characters, or to replay the action, as

if testing out the power of the gesture from the perspective of the audience or possibly to recall something of how it feels. Hurley (2010, p. 36) claims that, "the feeling body is theatre's focus, theatre requires a perceiving person in order to *be*" (her italics). In becoming such an animated audience to their own dramatic action, the women confirm its affective power. This is a slightly different emphasis from the 'postural intertextuality' (gestures and actions alluding to texts and ideas), that Taylor (2006, 2012, 2014) identifies as a significant aspect of students' interactions and learning. In this instance, the students appear to be quoting *themselves* in role, through a generative re-animation of their own actions.

Beowulf vs. Grendela is successful because of the way that the women embrace a heightened and expressive performance style. In Sumaya's case, the way that she relishes the action is startling. The locus of attention shifts to her as she does it, as if she were fuelled by her peers' expressive dramatic action or by their shared responsibility for realising a dramatic moment on the screen in front of them. As they determine which music to use to accentuate the action, Sumaya makes an enthusiastic sword gesture in response to a drum sound – appearing to test out how they complement each other (Figure 6). There is something in the way that she does this that suggests she is not only showing approval for Sophie's gesture and its accompanying music but also claiming a part of the exuberant on-screen action, that she appeared to have been distanced from behind the camera.

For Sumaya, wielding the camera and editing offer her roles that bring her closer to the expressive action,



Fig 4: Sophie mirrors Hope's claw action, as the *Beowulf vs. Grendela* film-makers edit (still) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Fig 5: *Cocooning as the Beowulf vs. Grendela film-makers' edit (still)* [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Fig 6: *Sumaya and the sword (still)* [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

so that she becomes a protagonist too. Sumaya expresses her roles in the creative process through motifs and signs (Heathcote, 2015/1980a) evolved over the course of the intense few hours that the students work together.

The role of the technology

In each of the stills from our video data reproduced here, it is clear that the iPad provides a central focus. Hands, fingers, gaze and torsos acknowledge this through the ways that they orientate towards and interact with the multimodal affordances of the camera and editing apps and the materiality of the tablet itself (Daniels, 2017). The haptic quality of editing on iPads supports the group in making sense of their task –

because of the symbiosis between working with the touchscreen or ‘finger-flowment’ as a student once described it (Potter and Bryer, 2016), and the gestures that are integral to the story telling. It seems as if re-animating their powerfully physicalised roles, as evidenced on screen, combined with the touchscreen technology, expands the resources available to the editors. Murch (2001, p. 44) recalls that analogue editing was a process that involved physical exertion and actual cutting. Now we rely on the scissor graphic to make sense of the processes involved in shortening a shot. But there is a degree of physicality in the ways that sensitive finger tips engage with the screen, and the actions for cutting and sequencing shots are more distinctive than the clicks of a mouse. The following transcript illustrates the ways that words, gestures, motivations and intentions flow between the creators

and the material resource of the iPad screen, as they work out the editing possibilities available to them.

Sumaya: We can make them shorter [she demos with her fingers – a squeezing motion.] Four seconds, shorten that – so it looks like a freeze frame

Sophie: Freeze frame, yeah.

Hope: [makes a chopping gesture, denoting editing.] We can have the video, then the images.

Kaudra: That's yeah, really good, [nodding] all come together. That's almost like telling the story [she points at the screen]

Sophie: [nods.]

The ways that the students edge into the role of editor are captured in Sumaya's squeezing and Faith's chopping gestures, as they recognise how they are able to shape the narrative through these processes.

We recognise that as an artefact, the iPad has particular cultural associations for the students working with it that inform their responses to it. We know that the ways that the students interact with the touch screen in other environments will guide their fingers and their aesthetic responses in the same ways that we anticipate they know how to act in front of a camera lens. In this context, the editing app and touchscreen support the adoption of roles, articulated through the students' creative interactions. The ways that the screen frames the drama have the effect of framing the women watching in a particularly dynamic relationship with the action, opening up possibilities through this collaborative way of working and offering all three roles that include a surprising degree of emotional engagement and embodiment.

Conclusion

As Burnett and Merchant (2016) point out, the kinds of multilayered, multimodal complexities we have described do not usually feature in official accounts of classroom literacies. Like Burnett and Merchant (2016, p. 276), we are interested in the 'intensities' manifested in the tension of the outstretched arm, the claw-like fingers and chopping gestures, the open mouth and the animated gaze – interpreting them as evidence of students responding to each other's bodily presences and assuming different roles as they work together. We want to put emphasis on the trajectory of the sign here and how it is sustained through the creative impetus of image analysis, filming and editing and through the frames or ways of seeing and understanding initiated at each stage of this narrative exploration. We have indicated how questioning the various representations of the female monster prompted physical responses, a form of thinking through the body,

associated with the particularities of a gendered role. The students' reflexive viewing of themselves in role seems key to their motivated responses to the signs made by the bodies on-screen and to the flexible way that they shift between enactment and editing. The touchscreen technology and the cultural associations associated with the multifunctionality of the iPad play their part in encouraging this degree of plasticity. In this project, the inventiveness offered by this surprising spectrum of role-taking acted as both catalyst and a safe space to experiment, to reflect, to feel and to communicate – and to contest. Key to the 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) of the processes the students engaged in was a foregrounding of particular signs, motifs and gestures that spoke back to them from the images on paper and screen and that they amplified in response. There is a lively affective dimension at play here that relates to the spontaneity of the students' interactions. The visual stimulus emerges as a particularly potent prompt to the imagination, a focal point for the students' emotional engagements, orientations and interests, expressed and refined through the animated responses that we observed. The significance of these bodily signs is often ignored, and they are rarely recognised as evidence of learning, despite Heathcote's (2015/1980a) insights. Here, we identify their generative and re-animating potential both on-screen and off-screen, as realised in the socially produced spaces formed by and around the learners.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was given for this case study and the wider research project that it was a part of.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the students, now teachers, who were involved in this research.

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