

INTRODUCTION

Our students' identities are being forged and formed in a digitised and visually dominated world. How they produce, disseminate, receive, and consume images about themselves and others will be a significant means of negotiating their emerging identities in the years to come. As I have observed they are currently ill-equipped to deal with much of the visual information they are seeing, this project sought to develop students' agency as critical consumers of images, and as producers of visual texts which reflect a growing understanding of themselves.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can engaging with visual storytelling help Year 5 boys develop their understanding of the self?

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The King's School is Australia's oldest independent school. Located in the geographic heart of Sydney, the School sits on 300 acres and has approximately 1800 students enrolled from Pre-K – 12. The research took place in a Year 5 classroom at the end of 2018 and included 24 boys.

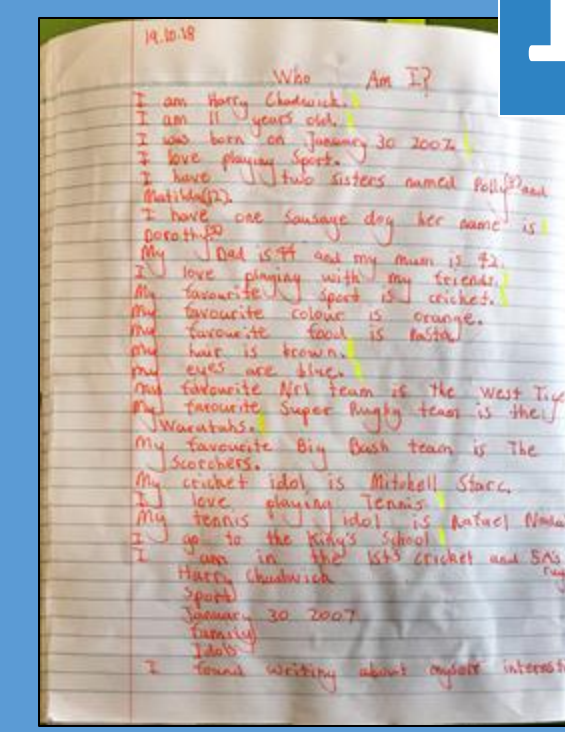


DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

- Data were gathered using the following methods:
 - Pre and post action surveys
 - Exit slips at the end of key lesson sequences
 - Teacher field notes and observations
 - Video recordings during lessons and mini-focus groups
 - Student work
- A thematic analysis model was used to find common themes and patterns, as well as to identify outliers. This method provided an opportunity to drill down into the individual experiences of the boys, allowing for differentiation and improvements to the action. Student work was also analysed to measure the quality and increasing complexity of reflection and communication of self.

THE ACTION

1

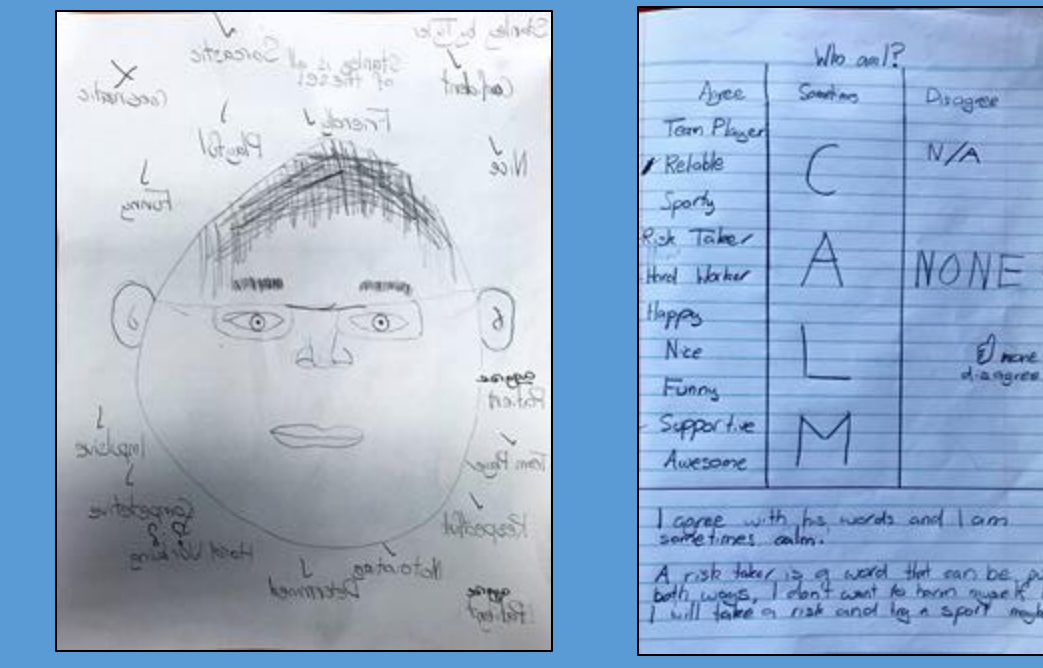


Students began by responding in writing to the question: "Who am I?"

"I loved this lesson! No one has ever really asked me that question before."

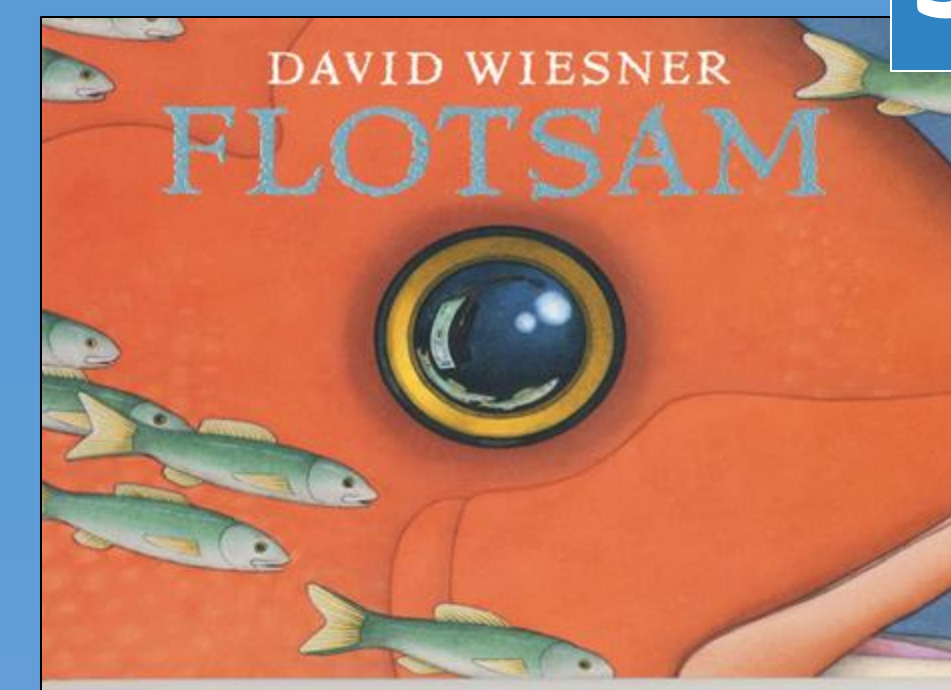
"I found writing about myself fun, interesting and weird."

2



To help develop a sense of self, they drew portraits of each other and labelled these with character traits.

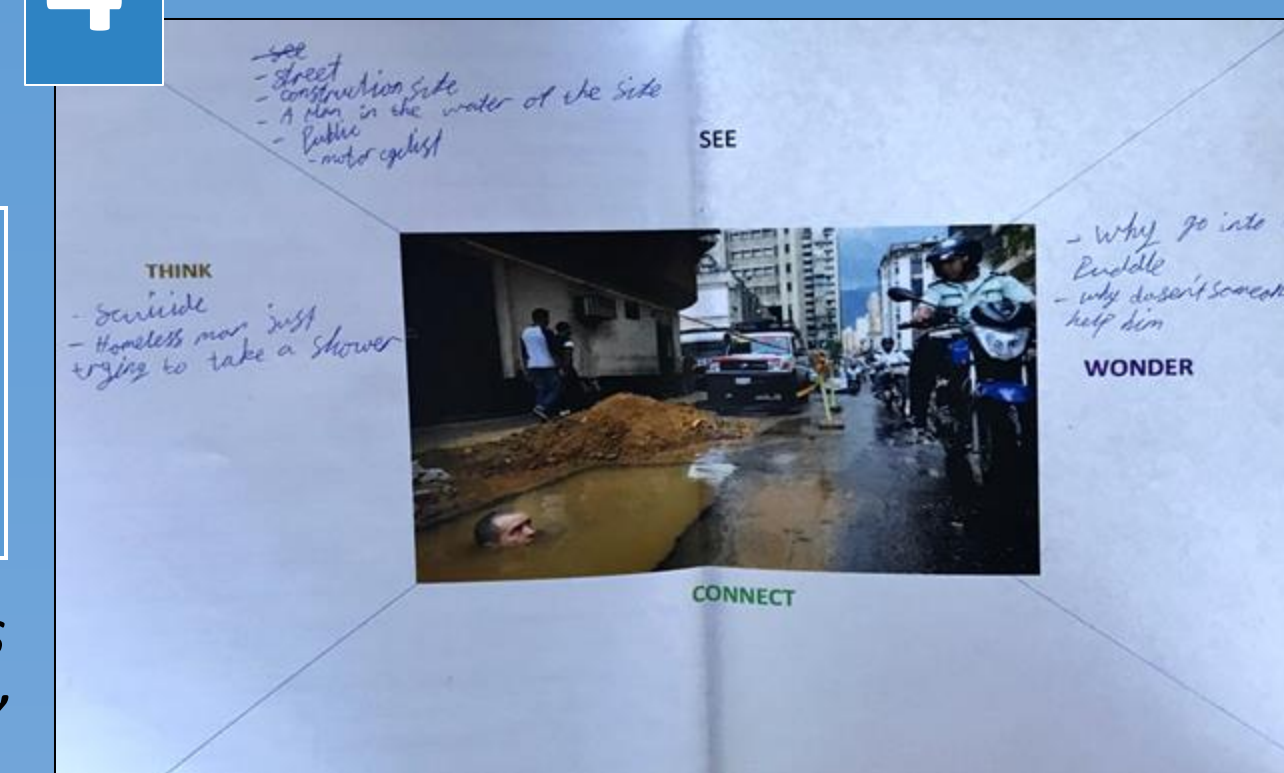
3



We discussed the wordless picture book *Flotsam* (Weisner, 2006) to show how stories can be constructed without words.

"[I learnt] how only pictures with no words can tell a big story."

4



Using the 'See, Think, Wonder, Connect' thinking routine, students practised being critical consumers of images

"[I learnt] about the deeper meanings of photos rather than just what's in the picture."

5

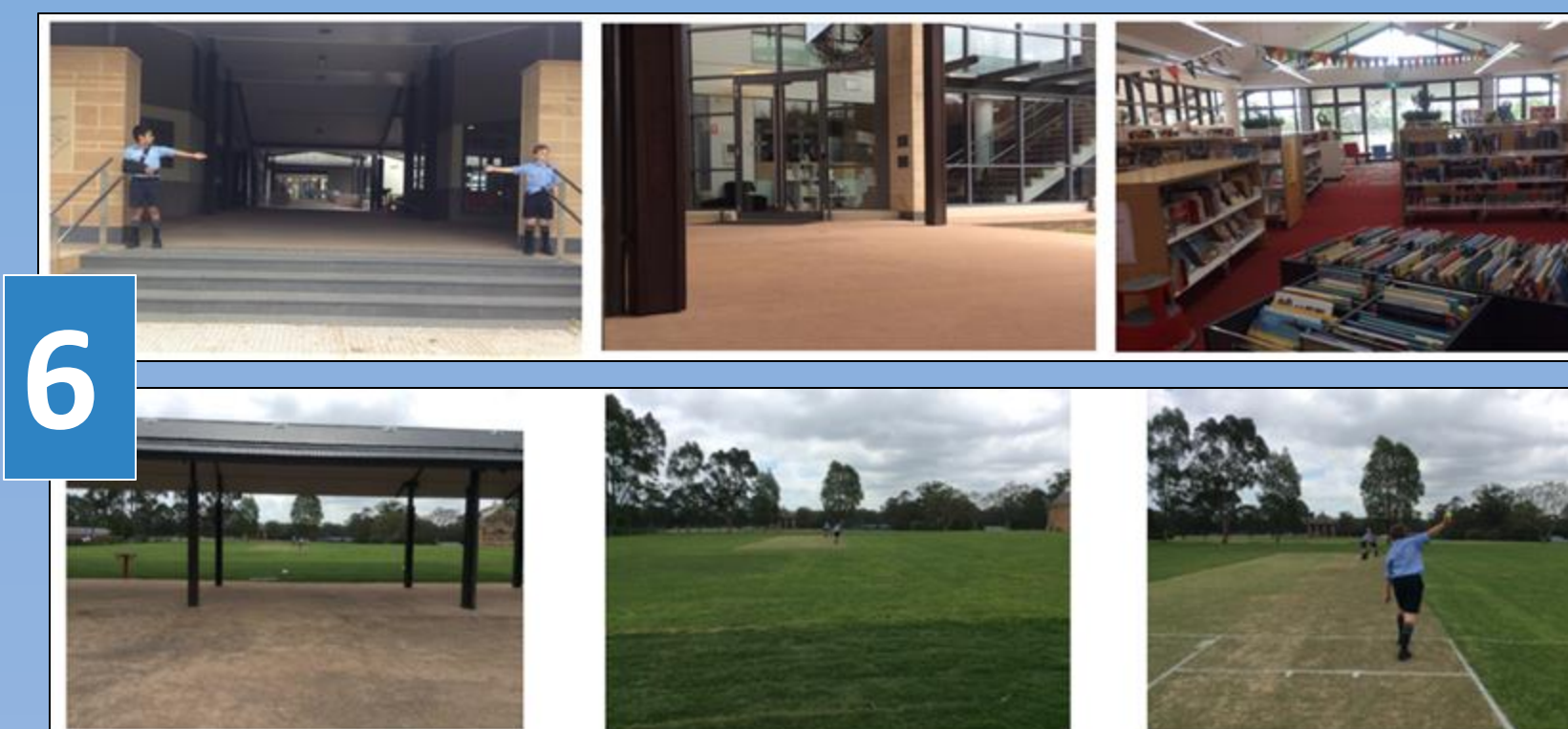


Wordless picture books *Re-Zoom* (Banyai, 1998) and *3"* (Mathieu, 2001) provided examples of a specific visual story-telling technique.

Students practised telling a story of their own using these techniques

"I learnt how to use images to tell a story."

6



Students practised interpreting and using symbols in images to create complex narratives.

7



8

Students revisited the question, "Who am I?" by authoring an autobiographical image.

"I learnt to express more about who I am."



I chose to wear a dirt bike helmet because it doesn't just represent me but it represents who I am in being a huge thrill seeker and I can't go one second without any thrill and a model dirt bike to give a little more representation to the image. I put on a rugby boot not represent my passion for rugby but for commitment in the sport and showing that I never give up and when it gets tough that's a sign to push harder and commit in whatever it might be that you're doing. I put on my foot a basketball shoe to represent not only like and enjoyment for the sport but enthusiasm in knowing that not only it is fun but also putting myself out there in learning a new sport. I used the vacuum cleaner on the text book to show that I want to suck up knowledge. I put famous places around my head of places I have been or that I want to go and to represent my love of travel."

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- Student engagement throughout the project was high.
- Students moved toward Gordimer's (2007) definition of being literate in that they were enabled "to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate purposefully" (p. 29).
- The data indicate that the action worked positively in aiding students to understand "why image matters, that we are able to critique and question visual texts as well as enjoy and learn from them" (Callow, 1999, p. 3).
- Students' ability to reflect on themselves and who they are became more sophisticated.
- Students developed an increasing sense of agency by being able to critically consume the visual world around them. This led to an engaged group who were keen to become authors and construct an image themselves. Their understanding of symbolic meaning enabled them to provide complex responses to the question, "Who am I?"

CONCLUSIONS

The data indicate the project resulted in overall positive results related to:

- Engaging boys in a reflexive process and arming them with tools to generate, evaluate, and hypothesise their sense of self
- Enabling boys' visual literacy skills in the context of the significantly changed and visually dominated social environment they are soon to inhabit by helping them become more critical consumers and producers of images
- Encouraging boys to reflect upon and express their own story by constructing images as a means of storytelling.

KEY READINGS

- Grushka, K. (2011). The "other" literacy narrative: The body and role of image production. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(3), pp. 113-128.
- Manichander, T. (2016). *Advanced educational psychology*. Lulu.com
- Pantaleo, S. (2009). The influence of postmodern picturebooks on three boy's narrative competence. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 32 (3), 191-21.
- For a full set of references for the project please visit: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J7xuQ-9Yw4bTkz1GjwH_x44nO1JIB8n/view?usp=sharing

