LIFE THROUGH A LENS: EMPOWERING EMERGING IDENTITIES

THROUGH VISUAL LITERACY

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"The unexamined life is not worth living."

(Words attributed to Socrates by Plato in "Plato's Apology")

Abstract

During Term 4 of 2018, twenty-four boys in Year 5 participated in a program of action research that investigated the efficacy of using visual autobiographies to engender and empower their sense of self. At the start of the action, students were engaged in a program of teaching and learning to help them better understand images as constructs imbued with meaning. Subsequently, students explored how symbolic meaning and symbols communicate both concrete and abstract ideas. Finally, the students produced their own image that conveyed a personal narrative, which addressed the question: Who am I? The findings indicate the students were highly engaged and enabled as storytellers through their understanding and application of symbolic meaning. In a changed world where images are ubiquitous and identities are forged and formed digitally through the use of images, the project highlighted how boys can explore and empower their sense of self.

Introduction

As a historian, archaeologist, anthropologist, learner, and teacher, images and the power of visual narrative are central to how I engage with the world. I have always sought to "picture the past"; to try and grasp the truth of the present in my "mind's eye," and have been keenly aware that when we acknowledge understanding, we often say, "I see." Yet, an image without a viewer holds no sway in the world. Thoreau (1851) wrote, "The question is not what you look at, it's what you see."

Understanding the power of the image and becoming visually literate has relevance for today's students (Callow, 2005; Gordimer, 2007). Their world is increasingly visual, as exemplified by more than 10 billion Snapchat videos watched daily (Frier, 2016) and a

projection for video traffic to be 82% of all consumer and business internet traffic by 2022 (CISCO, 2019). The emerging identities of young people will be forged in a digitised and visually dominated world.

How students produce, disseminate, receive, and consume images will be a key influencer in the years to come. I have observed in my classroom, however, that they are ill-equipped to deal with much of the visual information they see. They are also often contributing images to their digital communities with little understanding of the potential short and long-term impact. They lack both the knowledge that images are produced with intent and for purpose and the skills to interpret them analytically. With this in mind, they are about to embark on the journey of self-discovery that adolescence brings, during which their sense of self will be developed, negotiated, bolstered, and rebuffed. Having a more concrete notion of their identity, however, might increase students' resilience during this turbulent time (Erikson, 1951; Manichander, 2016). To this end, the research question that drove my inquiry was: *How can engaging with visual storytelling help Year 5 boys develop their understanding of the self?*

I believed action research to be the most appropriate methodological framework to pursue my research question as it provided a means to "study a real school situation with a view to improve the quality of actions and results within it" (Schmuck, as cited in Mertler, 2017, p. 28). Stringer (2004) adds that it ensures the teacher "will be both subjectively involved and will interact with the research participants and the research environment" (p. 28) in order to "construct educational activities that are truly meaningful and worthwhile within their [students'] lives" (p. 25).

Literature Review

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) launched the United Nations Literacy Decade under the slogan *Literacy as Freedom*. In "The Global Literacy Challenge" mid-way review of the Literacy Decade, UNESCO states:

> Literacy has never been more necessary for development; it is key to communication and learning of all kinds and a fundamental condition of access to today's knowledge societies…Literacy leads to empowerment, and the right to education includes the right to literacy – an essential requirement for lifelong learning and a vital means of human development. (Richmond, Robinson & Sachs-Israel, 2008, pg. 9)

The New South Wales English curriculum echoes these values, stating that literacy and literature are "key elements in the development of each student's worldview" and that being literate "includes the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate purposefully" (Gordimer, 2007, p. 29). In brief, there can be little doubt of the importance for our students to become literate, especially when "literacy is the basis of all learning" (Gordimer, p. 29).

We live in a post-literate age where a more dynamic and contestable notion of literacy must broaden the definition of "texts" that can be "read" to include the visual (Callow, 2008; Grushka, 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Leu et al., 2004). With an estimated 1.2 trillion images taken in 2017 (Cakebread, 2017) compared with 0.35 trillion in 2010 (Heyman, 2015), the rise of visual texts as the primary mode of communication, increasingly shared through social media that embed these images in social contexts and the stories of users' lives, cannot be denied. Grushka (2011) discusses the role of images in "critically and performativity shaping subjectivity" (pg. 113). How we view, think of, and construct the world around us in combination with the ubiquity of image construction and dissemination as a means of social agency "reveals how the skill of visuality as literacy has entered the debate surrounding the image as a legitimate means of representation" (Grushka, 2011, p. 114).

In accordance with the ascendancy of the visual, our concept of literacy and of being literate must develop to include the ability of our students to critically engage with and produce visual texts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that "visual communication is coming to be … more and more crucial in the domains of public communication.…Not being 'visually literate' will begin to attract social sanctions.…Visual literacy will begin to be a matter of survival" (p. 3). There is little doubt, therefore, that "it is vital both for understanding our world and teaching students 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).

Pantaleo (2009) presents storytelling and narrative as "a way of making sense of human experience" (p. 191). She cites Genette's "systematic theory of narrative," which distinguishes within storytelling the narrative (the story itself) from narrating (the act of producing a narrative and the literary techniques involved). In combination with the broadening view of what it means to be literate, this notion precipitates a key question for this research: how might narrating stories through the visual enable students as storytellers?

Image-making, and thereby telling stories through the visual, is becoming increasingly central to the lives of young people. Callow (2008) writes that "students need to develop

new literacy skills … in order for them to negotiate the growing number of texts that populate their home and school lives" (p. 616). Similarly, Zyniger (2008) argues the importance of employing pedagogies which promote engagement and are relevant to the lives of students. Furthermore, Grushka (2011) poses that the production of images should be woven into pedagogy and that "learning can be located in the performative, self-authoring, embodied and material role of image construction" (p. 114). The visual texts that students produce, therefore, become artefacts "that can be examined to reveal [students'] understanding of and abilities to produce narratives" (Pantaleo, 2009, p. 203). Students need to be taught to both critically engage with images and to produce images for purpose and with intent. The hypothesis of this project was that, in accordance with constructivist theories of learning (Handelsman et al., 2004; Shunk, 2012), engaging with visual autobiographies would empower students to acquire and practice these skills in context.

A sense of self, or concept of one's identity leading to self-actualisation, is an important part of a student's development. Boys in Year 5, aged 10-11 years-old, are at a turning point in the development of their sense of self. Erikson's (1950) stages of psychological development describe students in this age group as wrestling with the notion of competence within a context of industry versus inferiority; meaning they are increasingly challenged to master new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure, or incompetence. In Erikson's model, these students are also moving toward a new phase labelled "role confusion vs. identity" (pg. 261). During this phase, adolescents are challenged to explore and cement their sense of self. Those who do so more readily "will emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Those who remain unsure of their beliefs and desires will feel insecure and confused about themselves and the future" (Manichander, 2016, p. 103). This notion underpinned the importance of engendering a strong sense of self within the students in my care.

The changed world in which today's students exist, in particular, a world changed by the ubiquity of "images, sounds, and spectacles [that] help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities" (Kellner, 1995, p. 1), complicates the landscape in which students' sense of self must emerge. It is necessary, therefore, that students be exposed to the means of production for constructing their sense of self, which today is arguably dominated by the visual.

Sarbin (1986) introduced the term narrative psychology to describe a field in psychology that seeks to explore and understand concepts of the self and identity and posits that the analysis of the stories we construct can help illuminate the "unity and coherence" (pg. 31) of the self. That is to say, how we tell our stories and what we choose to tell constructs our identities. Therefore, enabling pre-adolescent students to move from "placing emphasis on their physical characteristics and more on our thoughts, feelings and concepts of morality and judgement" (Crossley, 2000, p. 5) is an integral part of their development and construction of a sense of self. Hull, Kenney, Marple & Forsman-Schneider (2006) state that "having an identity as a boy doesn't, or shouldn't, exclude having an identity as a literate and powerful communicator" (p. 5). In fact, it seems that being a literate and powerful communicator may be the foundation of one's identity. Storytelling, therefore, truly is a pathway to constructing and learning about the self.

Research Context

The King's School, founded in 1831 by command of King William IV of England, is Australia's oldest independent school. With two of its three campuses, the Preparatory School (Pre-K to Year 6) and the Senior School (Years 7-12), located in the geographic heart of Greater Sydney, the school focuses on academic excellence and character development. The school's motto is to make "an outstanding impact for the good of society through its students, and by the quality of its teaching and leadership in education." The Preparatory School enrols approximately 425 boys and this research took place in one of the four Year 5 classrooms.

The 24 students involved were all members of the same class. Nine of the boys were new to the school in 2018 and eight were from a language background other than English. The participants and their parents or guardians all signed a consent letter that provided information about the action research project. This consent allowed for the collection of photographic, audio, and visual data. It also guaranteed the anonymity of the participants in reporting of the research. I conducted the research over eight weeks during normal classroom hours as part of a unit of inquiry entitled "How We Express Ourselves."

The Action

I designed lessons specifically for this project and sequenced activities so that each built upon the learning of the previous lesson. The action began with the boys responding in writing, unprompted and without scaffolding, to the question: Who am I? Their responses

provided the baseline data against which the effect of the action would be measured. At the conclusion of the action, the boys produced a visual narrative to answer the same question. Throughout the project, the boys were concurrently engaged in activities that taught them visual literacy skills as well as activities that asked them to reflect upon their personality and character. I sequenced these activities as follows:

- Drawing portraits of a partner and labelling these with adjectives and abstract nouns to describe that person. The subject then reflected on this description and responded with reasons in agreement or disagreement of the attributed characterisations;
- Examining the wordless picture book *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 2006) to discuss how narratives can be constructed visually without text;
- Using the "See, Think, Wonder, Connect" visible thinking routine to prompt consideration that images are produced with purpose;
- Borrowing techniques from the wordless picture books *Re-Zoom* (Banyai, 1998) and *3"* (Mathieu, 2011) to create their own visual narrative exploring an aspect of their life at school (see figure 1 below);
- Analysing logos in business and popular culture to explore concepts of symbolic meaning;
- Creating images imbued with symbolic meaning based around life at school;
- Creating rich narratives based on interpreting a set of given symbols; and
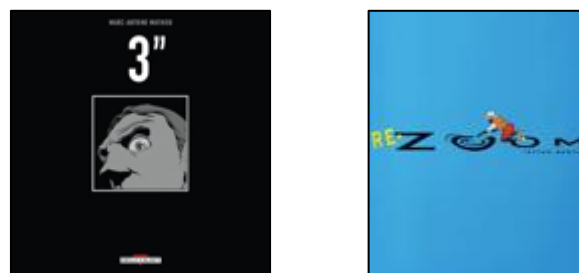- Creating a final visual autobiographical image imbued with symbolic meaning to revisit the question 'Who am I?'

Figure 1: Mentor texts 3" (Marc-Antoine Mathieu, 2011) and Re-Zoom (Istvan Banyai, 1998), used to show and analyse a visual story telling techniques.

Data Collection

Across the lifetime of the project, opportunities for formal and informal data collection frequently presented themselves. Regularly collected data provided a robust picture of the efficacy of the intervention rather than if data had just been collected at the start and end of the project. I collected and analysed data using both qualitative and quantitative methods to help ensure academic credibility. The project relied most heavily upon qualitative methods, however, which lent themselves more to the unquantifiable art of storytelling.

Formal data gathering opportunities included the use of a survey at the beginning and end of the project action, reflection (or exit) slips at the end of a number of lessons, and video recordings of mini-focus groups with students. The baseline survey measured students' attitude and perceived ability to tell a story through a traditional written narrative. At the end of the intervention, I asked the boys about their level of confidence when using images to tell a story, and to reflect on their preference for using images or words to tell stories. The reflection slips provided an opportunity to gather information from students as close to the point of intervention as possible. The boys also shared their level of engagement with the content and summarised what they had learnt. Recorded mini-focus groups allowed me to gather more in-depth responses from students and to probe their levels of understanding and learning. Throughout the project, I kept a journal of field notes and documented observations and students' direct quotes.

Data Analysis

I used a thematic analysis model to approach the generated data, reviewing the boys' views and opinions to find common themes and patterns, as well as to identify outliers. To determine common themes arising from the research and to provide structure for further detailed breakdown of individual learning, I referred to all field notes, survey data, exit slips, and transcripts from the mini-focus groups. This analysis model provided insight into the overarching success of the intervention. Using it helped to identify opportunities for its improvement and allowed me to drill down into the individual experiences of the boys.

Further to the thematic analysis model, I also examined student work through the lens of SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982). The taxonomy provided a means of assessing student learning outcomes in terms of quality and increasing complexity and provided an analysis of student growth and achievement in their reflection and communication of the self as revealed by the work they produced. As seen in the Figure 2, students acquire and

demonstrate increasing complexity in their levels of understanding. In this project, the taxonomy translated to adopting the grammar of visual literacy relating to symbolic meaning and using it in an integrated manner to communicate reflections on the self through images.
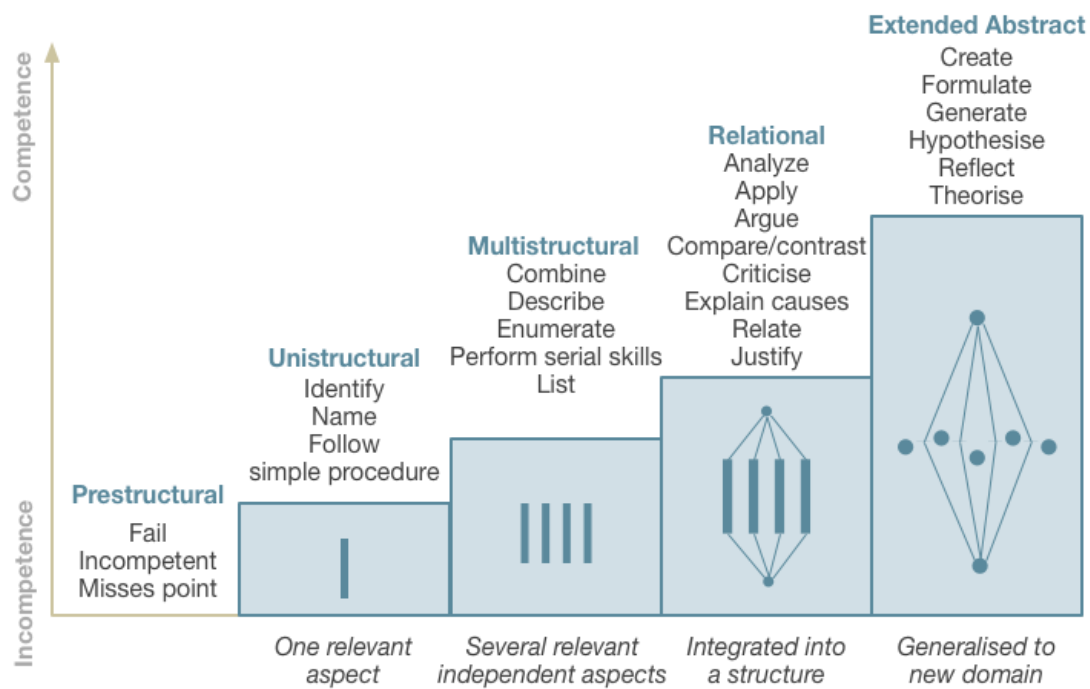

Figure 2: Hierarchy of the SOLO taxonomy (adapted from Biggs and Tang, 2011), taken from https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/learning-teaching-university/0/steps/26410

Discussion of Results

Across the lifetime of the project, I collected a range of data which, when subsequently coded for analysis, provided a robust picture of the efficacy of the project's action. Once analysed, the following themes emerged:

- The majority of boys felt strongly engaged with the process;
- Students felt empowered in their visual literacy skills, specifically in their understanding and use of images as constructs imbued with symbolic meaning in which the author and viewer both have agency in providing and interpreting meaning; and
- Students' ways of answering the question, "Who am I?" evolved from unistructural or multistructural to relational and extended abstract (Biggs & Collins, 1982).

Who am I? Then…and Now

It was clear from the outset that students had rarely, if ever, been asked the 'Who am I?' question. Boy T reflected, "It took me a while to remember who I am," and when answering the question, Boy G wrote, "I didn't know where to start." Initial responses focused on external identifiers (possession or hobbies). Table 1 indicates the range of response types at the start and end of the action. Examples of each type of response are provided in Appendix 7.

	Before the action	After the action
Category	Number of students (out of 24)	Number of students (out of 22*)
Solely 'What I have' (e.g. possessions, family members, pets)	0	0
Solely 'What I do' (hobbies and interests)	5	0
Solely 'Personal Qualities' (aspects of character, e.g. being kind, funny or sporty)	0	5
'What I have' and 'What I do'	13	0
'What I do' and 'Personal qualities'	0	15
Across all three categories	6	2

two students were away for the final task

Table 1: Response types to the question "Who am I?"

At the start of the action, few students were able to readily reflect upon aspects of their character or to do so in a sophisticated manner. The majority focused solely on external identifiers (possessions and hobbies). By the end of the action, this pattern was reversed and students largely responded with an emphasis on personal characteristics, thereby moving

from "placing emphasis on their physical characteristics and more on our thoughts, feelings and concepts of morality and judgement" (Crossley, 2000, p. 5).

Student Engagement

On four occasions, I asked the boys to report formally on their levels of engagement via an exit slip (Table 2). They rated their engagement on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not at all engaged and 10 being highly engaged.

Point of Data Collection	Average Student Score (1 being not at all engaged, 10 being highly engaged)
Start of the action: Initial responses to 'Who am I?'	9.2
Mid-Action: Becoming visually literate, critically consuming images	8.2
Mid-Action: Using images to tell stories (group work)	7.3
End of Action: The final task, representing the self through an image	8.4
Average engagement across the lifetime of the project:	8.3

Table 2: Student engagement reported via an exit slip

Student voice and my observations corroborated these data. Students found the topic itself highly engaging. Boy E wrote, "I loved this lesson! No one has ever really asked me that question before," and Boy B wrote, "I found writing about myself fun, interesting and weird." Boy K's comment shows how students were also engaged to think: "I found that this lesson made me think deeply about what I wanted to communicate with my picture." My observations supported these statements; the boys were on task throughout lessons, keen to share their work with the class, and repeatedly asked for more time on this project.

Knowledge and Skills: Critical Consumers and Powerful Producers

The action focused on enabling students' understanding of images as constructs imbued with meaning by their authors and enriched with meaning by the consumer. Analyses of teacher observations and students' written reflections on the lessons indicate the tasks successfully introduced many to the notion that images are constructs and convey meaning with purpose.

As they analysed and discussed images, the boys recorded reflections on a graphic organizer (Figure 3). Boy A wrote, "In this lesson I learnt in pictures you have to see, think and wonder more than just about the thing you see," Boy J wrote, "[I learnt] About the deeper meanings of photos rather than just what's in the picture," and Boy E wrote, "In this lesson I learnt about not just to look at the pic and just leave it, but now I study the photo more." Boy D summed up the learning intention when he wrote "[I learnt] How there is much 'behind' a picture if you think deeply about it."
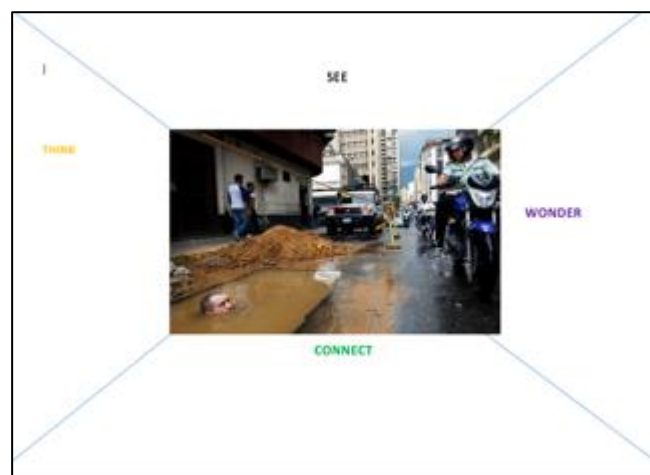

Figure 3: Students analysed this image of a live art installation designed to promote awareness and discussion of climate change using the 'See, Think, Wonder, Connect' thinking routine.

The data, therefore, 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).

Further lessons on symbols and semiotics required students to delve deeper into understanding how individual elements, or symbols, within an image can convey complex meaning. Students engaged with wordless picture books, observing how the stories were constructed using pictures and considering some specific techniques used by the authors.

Students replicated these techniques and used pictorial symbols to create their own stories (see Figures 4 and 5).
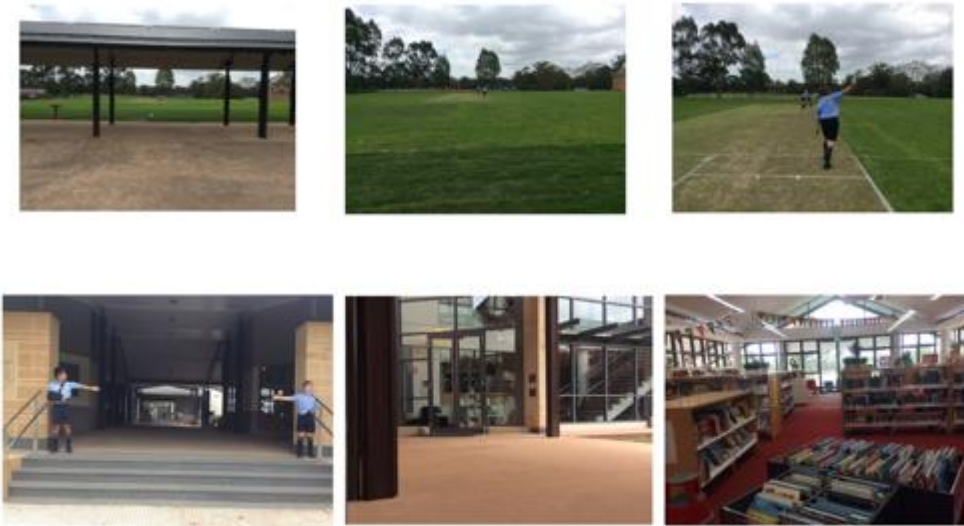

Figure 4: Using the techniques from Re-Zoom (Banyai, 1998) students created their own mini-stories focusing on as aspect of school life that they love (cricket and the library respectively).

Figure 5: Students practising interpreting and using symbols in images to create complex narratives. The boys sequenced images to create and communicate a narrative to the class. While many groups interpreted the symbols similarly, they sequenced them in many different ways, thereby creating a broad variety of stories.

Students' written reflections corroborated my observations that these lessons were engaging and successful. Boy I wrote, "I learnt how to use images to tell a story," and Boy H wrote that he learnt "How only pictures with no words can tell a big story." Boy E stated, "Pictures have big meaning, and the quote 'a picture means 1000 words' is a fact, not an opinion." I observed that the students had become empowered to become storytellers through their understanding and application of symbolic meaning. This part of the action enabled students to express themselves using images "through the choice between different compositional structures" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 2).

Sophistication and Complexity

I measured students' responses and growth using the SOLO taxonomy, which is a "means of classifying learning outcomes in terms of their complexity, enabling us to assess student work in terms of its quality" (Biggs, n.d., para. 1). The SOLO taxonomies are:

- Unistructural: defining oneself through only one aspect at a time (e.g. a list) with no relationship or connections made between identifiers;
- Multistructural: defining oneself through several independent aspects and making an effort to combine identifiers;
- Relational: defining oneself in a more integrated way by comparing and contrasting, justifying or interrelating certain aspects across What I have, What I Do, and Personal qualities; and
- Extended abstract: defining oneself through reflection and generating hypotheses about how and why one feels, thinks or behaves in certain ways.

Table 3 indicates growth when comparing student responses at the start and end of the action.

Category	Number of students (out of 24)	Number of students (out of 22*)
	Before the action	After the action
Unistructural	18	1
Multistructural	5	12
Relational	1	5
Extended abstract	0	4

Table 3: Comparing students' responses before and after the action using the SOLO taxonomy. * *Two students were away for the final task.*

Student voice corroborates these data. Boy B wrote, "I learnt that there are lots of different parts of my personality and I enjoy many different things," while Boy R wrote, "I learnt that when I put in more thinking time I made it easier for myself," and Boy K wrote, "I found that this lesson made me think deeply about what I wanted to communicate with my

picture." Boy C's summation echoes my observations and the final results of the majority of boys' attitude and work; he wrote, "I learnt to express more about who I am."

The data indicate that the action helped students move toward Gordimer's (2007) definition of being literate in that they were enabled "to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate purposefully" (p. 29). Figure 6 provides an example of the level of sophistication many students achieved. This student's initial work was unistructural; he defined himself solely by listing hobbies and activities he liked to undertake. His final piece shows the depth and sophistication of reflection achieved by using an image imbued with symbolic meaning to reflect upon and communicate. This final piece demonstrated his growth to an extended abstract response.
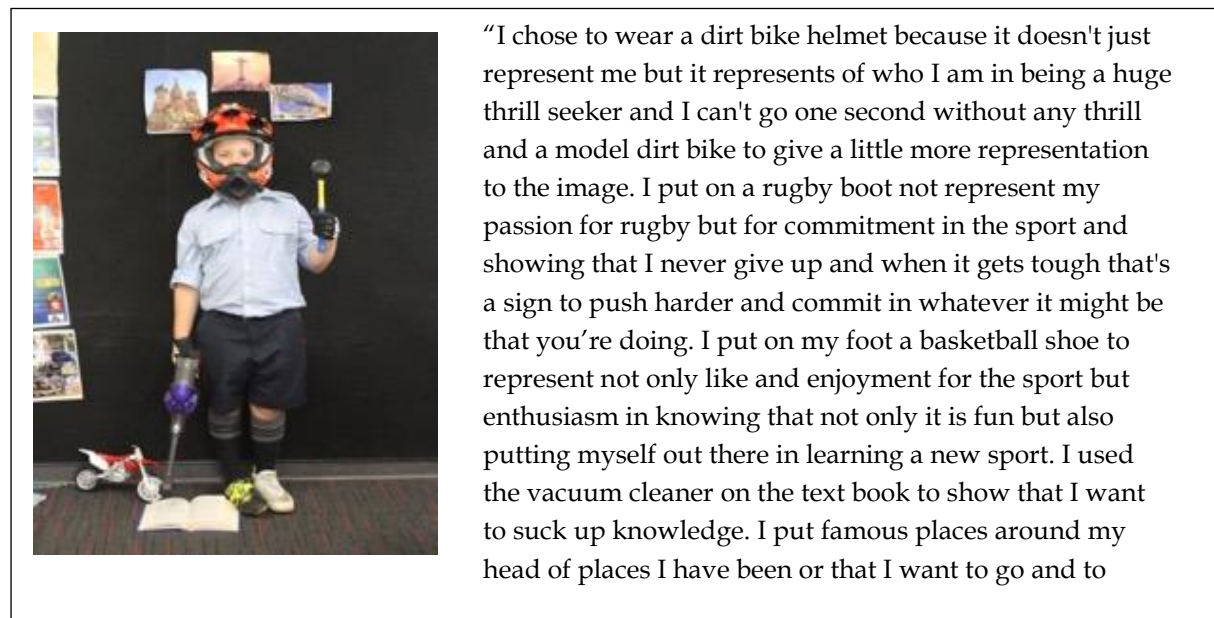
"I chose to wear a dirt bike helmet because it doesn't just represent me but it represents of who I am in being a huge thrill seeker and I can't go one second without any thrill and a model dirt bike to give a little more representation to the image. I put on a rugby boot not represent my passion for 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

Figure 6: Example of student work. Student T's initial work was unistructural and focused solely on 'What I do'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my analysis and interpretation of the research data indicated an overall positive result for the action in regard to:

1. Preparing foundations for the boys to move from a period of "Industry vs. Inferiority" to one of "Identity and Role Confusion" (Erikson, 1950) by engaging them in a reflexive process and arming them with tools to generate, evaluate, and hypothesise their sense of self;

2. Enabling boys' visual literacy skills in the context of the significantly changed and visually dominated social environment they inhabit by enabling them to become more critical consumers and producers of images (Callow, 2005; Grushka, 2011); and

3. Demonstrating how constructing images as a means of storytelling enabled boys to reflect upon and express their own story.

The action succeeded in providing the boys with a pathway to learning about themselves through storytelling. The richness of their reflections, their ideas about what they wanted to communicate about themselves, and their ability to use symbols to provide breadth and depth to their thinking demonstrated the growth of each student across the lifetime of the project. The boys were moved to become critical consumers of images through their understanding that those images were produced with intent. As a result, they felt empowered and developed agency in how they interacted with the world around them.

The project has implications for our school curriculum and pedagogy within it. Our school is increasing our focus on literacy in 2019 and visual literacy forms a key part of this approach. The findings of this research are being incorporated into a revised approach to our Unit of Inquiry entitled "How We Express Ourselves" and aspects of it will be used across all of Year 5 in 2019. I will be sharing my findings with my colleagues at the Preparatory School, as well as presenting my findings at the 2019 National Boys' Education Conference in Sydney.

While the action met with a positive result, there were a number of limitations on the research that must be acknowledged. A small number of participants and the qualitative nature of action research limits the generalisation of this project's findings. At this point in time, the efficacy of the project's specific teaching sequence cannot be compared to a different sequence or approach to achieve the same ends. However, there will be opportunities to refine and adjust the sequence in subsequent iterations of this project's implementation. In addition, there has been no opportunity to assess the long-term impact of the action on the students involved.

Reflection Statement

During the lifetime of this project, I embarked on two other great journeys. The first, and most significant, was experiencing the all-encompassing joy of becoming a father for the first time. The second was becoming one of the four Housemasters at the Preparatory School, which carried significant administrative responsibilities and direct pastoral care for nearly

While the project was challenging, it was also inspiring. I reconnected with my past, having completed a Master's degree in Visual Anthropology in my early twenties, which explored the power of images. I also connected my students with their futures, talking with them about the world they would inherit and the challenges and opportunities they would encounter. I felt supported and encouraged throughout and took great comfort and joy in hearing about the trials and successes of my team members from around the world. Most of all, I was encouraged by my students. They dove into the work asked of them and participated willingly and with gusto. They found interest in what I had devised for them and I felt their understanding of the world expand.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Letter

Research Topic:

Stories as a pathway to learning: enabling the expression of the self through visual story-telling

I, ... (Student) consent to my participation in the 2018-2019 IBSC action research project.

I, ...(Parent/Guardian) consent to my son's

participation in the 2018-2019 IBSC action research project.

I have read the information sheet provided and understand the purpose and nature of the research.

I give permission for any interview with my me/my son to be recorded to enable accurate analysis of the data. I also give permission for photographs/video to be taken and for these to be used in the presentation of the research findings for educational purposes.

I understand that any information or personal details gathered during this research are confidential and that my name/my son's name or any other identifying information will not be used or published in the presentation of the research findings.

I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I/my son can withdraw from the research at any time, knowing that there will be no penalty or discriminatory treatment for doing so.

Signed (Student) .... Date....................

Signed (Parent/ Guardian)................................... Date....................

Appendix 2: Parent Information Letter

Research Topic: Stories as a pathway to learning: enabling the expression of the self through visual story-telling

Dear Parent/Guardian and Student,

I have been selected to participate in the 2018/2019 International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) Action Research Program. The aim of this program is to encourage and support educators in boys' schools to research and reflect upon practices in their classrooms and schools, with the outcome of enhancing boys' learning through better teaching practices. This research has been approved by the Headmaster of the Preparatory School, Mr Peter Allison.

My research will focus on developing the boys' visual literacy skills. In particular the boys will explore the idea of images as 'texts' which can be read. The boys will learn that images can be constructed for purpose and can be deconstructed for meaning. The participants in my project will be the boys of 5E. In researching the impact of visual story-telling I will be engaging the boys in a program of teaching and learning that focuses on visual literacy skills and the construction of visual narratives as a way of developing their story-telling abilities. Data in the form of boys' comments, work samples, photos, filmed focus groups and anecdotal records will be collected across the program of research. While the majority of data will be collected during normal class time, some interviews may be conducted outside class at a time suitable to participants. It is anticipated that data collection will be undertaken during the end of Term 3 and throughout the first 6 weeks of Term 4.

All information collected in my research will be treated confidentially and no participants will be identified by name in any publication resulting from the research.

First and foremost, the results of my research will help inform program development here at The King's School Preparatory School. Beyond this, the results will be disseminated to the broader educational community. This will involve the presentation of my results at the IBSC's 24th Annual Conference in Montreal in June, 2019.

Student participation in this research project is voluntary and no student will be disadvantaged through non-participation. Participants may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Attached to this information sheet is a form seeking consent from both you and your son for him to participate in this research project. Upon signing, please have your son return the form to me.

Please do not hesitate to contact me by email pse@kings.edu.au or visit me in the classroom if you have any questions regarding this research. If you have any further concerns about the study you may also contact the Coordinator of the IBSC Action Research Program, Mrs Margot Long longma@stjohnscollege.co.za.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Ell

Appendix 3: Lesson Sequence

Who I am? & SOLO Hexagons	Students were asked to write uninterrupted and without frontloading on the topic of 'Who am I?'. Students were asked to reflect on this piece of work in regards to how they engaged with it.	This provided the baseline data for comparing how the action would affect students' understanding of themselves and ability to express it.
Portrait for a partner	Students were given 10minutes in pairs to draw a portrait of their partner. They were then asked to label their portrait with character and personality descriptors using language developed earlier in the year in another unit of work. Students were then given the portrait their partner had drawn of them, and were asked to write a response to the character and personality descriptors and whether they agreed or disagreed with them and why.	This activity was designed to begin developing students critical understanding of themselves. Working in pairs, and asking them to reflect on someone else's thinking about them worked well to help students reflect upon themselves.
See, Think, Wonder, Connect	Students were given an image with four quadrants around it labelled 'See', 'Think', 'Wonder' and 'Connect'. The image was deliberately obtuse and required	This guided activity was used to model for the students how images contain clues for the viewer to interpret and that there is purpose in the construction and dissemination of images.

	critical evaluation and interpretation.	This engaging activity worked well to help students understand that images convey meaning.
Flotsam by David Wiesner	Students read through the wordless picture book Flotsam. A guided discussion was held to interpret the meaning of the images.	This activity served to demonstrate how images can tell a story and helped to set up the final output which the students would create – a picture of themselves that might capture them in this moment in time.
Zoom by Istvan Banyani and 3" by Marc-Antoine Mathieu	Students read through these two wordless picture books with the purpose of examining how a specific technique had been used to convey the viewer through the story. Students then used this technique, taking 'Zoom' pictures of their own under the title of 'My Life at School'. Students had to demonstrate an important aspect of their school life through the use of three images.	This task worked well to introduce students to the notion of constructing an image for purpose. Through their first opportunity to be authors of images they engaged well with considering how to convey meaning.
Wordless stories	Students were given a series of images and asked in groups to create a story using them. They had to arrange the images in a sequence and then present their story to the class. Students did this activity twice. The first time the images were limited	This activity served to enable students to further their understanding of how images and the clues contained within them prompt meaning in the viewer. By having to interpret the images and ascribe meaning to them the activity allowed for a guided discussion on how we as the viewer use symbols in images to make meaning.

	in subject matter and more readily connected to each other. The second time the images were more abstract and less easily sequence, greater interpretation was required.	
Symbolism	In this guided activity students were shown a range of familiar images such as the Olympic rings and the Bluetooth symbol. The lesson focused on demonstrating how these images are symbolic and full of intended meaning.

Students then jointed deconstructed a series of images for meaning with the teacher.

Students then independently ascribed meaning to images by interpreting them symbols within them. | This activity enabled students to be more critical consumers of images by enabling them to focus on the details contained within them.

The activity also set up the students well for their final task of the action. |
| Telling the story of 'Who I Am' through an image | Students were asked to draft on paper, and then construct an image full of symbolic meaning which would help them communicate to the viewer their answer to the question 'Who am I?' | This highly engaging activity provided the students the opportunity to re-engage with the original question through a different medium having acquired new knowledge and skills. |
| Final reflection | Finally, students were asked to reflect on the process them had gone through. They were asked to provide an interpretation of their image and justify their selection of | This final reflection was a formal opportunity for student voice to be gathered in regards to the action. Students were enabled to provide feedback on the program and whether |

	various symbols which helped them communicate about who they are.	they felt it had enabled them in any way.
	Students were asked to compare how they felt constructing an image was to when they did their original piece of writing at the start of the action.	It also provided a further data point for the researcher to evaluate and analyse the development of their understanding and ability to reflect upon themselves as a result of the action.

Appendix 4: Data Collection – Exit Slip

In this lesson, I learnt…

_____

_____

How would you rate this lesson on a scale of 1-10 (1 = I was not engaged, 10 = I was highly engaged)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

What made you give it this rating?

_____

_____

Appendix 5: Data Collection – Final Survey

Name:

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Insert your picture here.

Click 'Insert' from the menu above, then 'Image', then 'upload from computer'

</div>

My Reflection:

There are many different symbols in my image. These symbols represent different parts of my personality and who I am. The symbols are listed below, as well as my interpretation of what they symbolise:

- E.g. the musical note symbolises my dedication to practice

-

-

-

-

Who Am I?

Describe who you are for the reader. *Think about what your picture and symbols inside it say about who you are. Think about the differences between* <u>what you do</u>, <u>what you have</u>, *and* <u>who you are</u>.

Go back to the start

Go back to your red book and find the page where we did our first piece of writing with the title 'Who am I?'. *Read your work back to yourself.*

Can you describe below how you feel it compares to what you have written above? Are they the same, similar, very different? Is one text richer, more descriptive, or captures your better? Use one of the sentence starters below to get you going.

When I compare the two pieces of writing I feel that…

My description of who I am above compare to that in my red book is / shows that / has changed…

When I think about who I am now, compared to when I wrote in my red book, I feel / think ...

A Quick Survey

How difficult was it to write about yourself at the start of our project. This was the writing you did called 'Who Am I?' in your red book. Put an 'X' in a box

Very easy	Straightforward	Tricky	Difficult	Very challenging

How much easier was it to write about yourself at the end of the project (the writing you did in this document above?)

How hard did you find it think about who you are?

Did you discover anything about yourself and your personality during this process?

Did you enjoy the project? Give it an overall score and let me know what you enjoyed

What did you find challenging about the project? What made you think?

Appendix 6: Student Response Development Measured Against SOLO Taxonomy

Student ID	BEFORE THE ACTION		AFTER THE ACTION		
	What I: Have; Do; and/or Personal Qualities	Unistructural Multistructural Relational Extended Abstract	What I Have/Do/Personal Qualities ~~Strikethrough~~ = no longer mentioned **Bold** = added **Italics** = elaborated	Unistructural Multistructural Relational Extended Abstract	Increase: Movement of student's response up the SOLO levels
A	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
B	Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Relational	+2
C	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Relational	+2
D	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
E	Have / Do	Unistructural	AWAY FOR FINAL TASK	AWAY FOR FINAL TASK	
F	Do	Unistructural	Do / **Personal**	Relational	+2
G	Personal	Relational	*Personal*	Relational	+0
H	Have / Do	Unistructural	Have / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
I	Have / Do	Unistructural	Have / Do / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
J	Have / Do / Personal	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / *Personal*	Multistructural	+1
K	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have / Do~~ / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
L	Have / Do / Personal	Multistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / *Personal*	Relational	+1

M	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
N	Have / Do	Multistructural	~~Have~~ / Do / **Personal**	Multistructural	+0
O	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
P	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
Q	Have / Do	Unistructural	AWAY FOR FINAL TASK	AWAY FOR FINAL TASK	
R	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / **Personal**	Extended Abstract	+3
S	Have / Do / Personal	Multistructural	~~Have~~ / *Do* / ***Personal***	Extended Abstract	+2
T	Do	Unistructural	~~Do~~ / **Personal**	Extended Abstract	+3
U	Do	Unistructural	~~Do~~ / **Personal**	Unistructural	0
V	Have / Do	Multistructural	~~Have / Do~~ / **Personal**	Extended abstract	+2
W	Do	Unistructural	Do / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
X	Have / Do	Unistructural	~~Have~~ / Do / **Personal**	Multistructural	+1
				Average affect =	+ 1.3

Appendix 7: Written response types at the start of the action. Responses to the questions 'Who am I?'

19.10.18

Who Am I?

I am Harry ███.
I am 11 years old.
I was born on ███.
I love playing sport.
I have two sisters named Polly(8) and Matilda(12).
I have one sausage dog her name is Dorothy(2).
My Dad is 44 and my mum is 42.
I love playing with my friends.
My favourite sport is cricket.
My favourite colour is orange.
My favourite food is Pasta.
My hair is brown.
My eyes are blue.
My favourite Nrl team is the West Tigers
My favourite Super Rugby team is the Waratahs.
My favourite Big Bash team is The Scorchers.
My cricket idol is Mitchell Starc.
I love playing Tennis.
My tennis idol is Rafael Nadal.
I go to the King's School
I am in the 1st's cricket and 5A's rugby.
Harry ███.
Sport
January 30 2007
Family
Idols
I found writing about myself interesting

Student response focusing on 'What I Have' and 'What I do'

Who am I?

I am Ryan ███ a human that is 11 years old and enjoys the technological wonder of 2018. I was born into an age of computers and tablets and other 21st century tech and have started taking these tools and the ability to use them for granted. I have alot of hobbies, most, if not all on computers or any other tech like gaming, programming, video editing and a new one 3D modeling. I dont spend time practising handwriting or woodwork etc as 2018 tools can replace that and although it is still useful to learn these skills, I concentrate on the electronic counter parts, continuing to rely on tech, but I still read books and all that on electronic devices such as e-books.

Student response focusing on ' What I do'

Who am I

I am a funny person with a funny personality I am a good rugby player and a good cricket player I am good at athletics and I also have a family of seven with 3 brothers and 1 sister. I also like to play games (fornite). I am also a good swimmer. My hobbys are Gole, going to the beach to surf. And I am 11 years ald

Student response focusing on 'What I have', 'What I do' and 'Personal qualities'.