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**LOOKING AGAIN:  
A CRITICAL REAPPRAISAL OF VISUAL  
LITERACY  
IN THE CURRICULUM**

A Minor Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Philosophy,  
University of Cape Town

By

Heather Moore

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## ABSTRACT

In this study I examine the concept of *visual literacy* and the way it is incorporated into, and interpreted by Curriculum 2005, from the perspective of the educational illustrator. In order to come to a better understanding of the notion of visual literacy, I explore the extensive body of literature on this topic, from which it is evident that there is little consensus regarding an academic understanding of visual literacy. An analysis of the way the notion of visual literacy is interpreted and implemented by Curriculum 2005 reveals a considerable lack of clarity on the part of curriculum designers. One of the main reasons for this is the problematic use of a "literacy" analogy in their engagement with the visual mode. Subsequently I embark upon a field study in order to gain an understanding of how professionals in the field of education, interpret and work with the notion of visual literacy. Responses reflect the confusion caused by the vague and ambiguous treatment of visual literacy by curriculum planners. Building on these insights I proceed to focus on the use and understanding of the visual mode in educational publishing. The procedures and relationships that conventionally determine the making of textbooks are compared with an alternative model that requires a fresh approach to the way production teams think about the visual mode. The potential influence of visually progressive textbooks on the future refinement of the curriculum, is assessed. Finally, some recommendations are made for further research in the area of visual literacy education.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the research done for this dissertation is entirely mine and that no material has been incorporated without due recognition of the source

Signed Signature removed Date 28-02-2001

University of Cape Town

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## INTRODUCTION

I embarked on this study in the hope that I would discover some things about visual literacy that would transform my work as an illustrator of educational materials. I wanted to discover how South African children, in all their cultural and economic diversity, received, enjoyed and made sense of the illustrations in their school textbooks. I hoped to be able to share my findings with educational publishers and that this knowledge that I had gained would enable us to make informed choices about how textbooks are illustrated. My intentions for this study soon found themselves floundering in the shallows, however. It did not take long to discover that my area of study did not provide a firm platform upon which to build a research methodology. "Visual literacy" is lacking in both conceptual solidity and in appropriate terminology. What has come out of my study has, nonetheless, transformed my work as an illustrator. This transformation is not, as I had hoped, one that helps me to understand the audience of my illustrations better, enabling me to develop style and content that suits their needs. It is rather a transformation in terms of the way that I see educational illustration and how I envisage this aspect of educational publishing developing and changing. Even though my findings do challenge current organizational structures and procedures in educational publishing, I do think that these findings could benefit that industry greatly. Perhaps my findings could encourage changes in educational publishing which could then provide a basis for research into the kind of knowledge that I wanted in the first place

### **i. My experience**

"Visual literacy" is a relatively recently coined term that has been devised and used in response to a world that seems to be increasingly filled with images. The profusion of images and visual forms of communication seems to have resulted in a feeling that we need to learn how to make sense of images, and visuals of all kinds, so that we can be at home in, and awake to, the visual culture in which we live. My own awareness of the issue of visual literacy stems from the five years I've been working as a freelance illustrator, mostly of educational material. In that time I have become increasingly aware

of the fact that not everyone perceives things in the same way. I have had responses to my drawings that have surprised me and alerted me to the fact that an understanding of a picture can be a very subjective thing, often influenced by factors such as cultural expectations, the amount of previous experience with pictures, and, personal taste. I became alarmed that I was given the responsibility of illustrating books that would be looked at by a wide range of people, with a broad diversity of backgrounds, and that I had no idea whether they would understand what I intended to communicate. I was being asked to illustrate scenarios in environments that I had never experienced and could at best only draw on hotch-potch gleanings of surface detail from other pictorial sources, if I could find them, to make a stab at authenticity. I was aware that I could be drawing things that might never authentically happen, or things that could be culturally problematic. With the kind of diversity of cultures and landscapes that we have in South Africa, I felt that the work I was doing was a potential minefield. I knew too, that although some of the learners had been looking at story-book pictures ever since babyhood, others might be looking closely at drawn illustrations and photographs for the first time. I wasn't clear about the difference this should make to my drawings, or about which kind of visual conventions would be understood by the learners, or which kind of representational style they would find most appealing. I was also aware that some of the other educational illustration that I came across seemed to show even less understanding of or care about these kinds of visual issues than I felt I did. I became interested in finding out more about how learners understood pictures, and what this would mean for my work, but when I asked the publishing firms who were commissioning these illustrations, they seemed to be as much in the dark as I was. It appeared that the only way to find out more about what I did for a living was to do some research into the matter.

## **ii. Chapter summaries**

A brief summary of each chapter of this dissertation follows:

## *Chapter 1*

### *The concept of Visual literacy*

The concept of visual literacy seemed to me a good place to start my research - a concept that I could use as my theoretical framework. However, when I started trying to find out more about visual literacy, I found that the rest of my questions did not seem to have a starting point any more. The review of the literature that I found on and around the nature and content of visual literacy will show that it is a really difficult concept to pin down. There are many different ways of understanding the concept and I think that even after all the reading I've done, I would still find it difficult to define concisely. I have attempted to show in the first chapter the range of approaches to the subject, as well as the way that visual culture and the concept of the visual mode appear to be causing shifts in long-held cultural patterns.

## *Chapter 2*

### *Visual literacy and Curriculum 2005*

The apparent shift, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from a word-dominated to an image-dominated worldview is having profound changes in many realms, one of which, to a small degree at this stage, is Education. It is probably the awareness of this shift that has resulted in the concept of visual literacy to be included in Curriculum 2005. Because most of my illustration work is in the educational field, I was interested to see how the curriculum understood the concept of visual literacy. In my second chapter I look at the definitions and the manner in which visual literacy appears in Curriculum 2005, comparing it with what I identify as a relatively mainstream understanding of the concept. My investigations seem to show that the curriculum's understanding reflects the lack of consensus on the definition of visual literacy revealed in my literature review. So although visual literacy is written into the curriculum, the way in which it is included does not render it particularly useful or useable except, perhaps, in terms of teaching map-, sign- and graph-reading skills.

### *Chapter 3*

#### *Field Study*

In order to find out to what extent Curriculum 2005's understanding of visual literacy affected the understanding of educators who make use of the curriculum, I sent out a four-question questionnaire to a selected sample of educators. This chapter will analyze the responses to my questions about what "visual literacy" and "visual text" mean to them, and how they make use of these concepts in their work. Of particular interest to me are the responses from people involved in educational publishing, including some other illustrators. This chapter suggests that there is more awareness of visual literacy issues amongst educators than I initially expected to see, although the responses of my sample do reflect a very broad range of understanding and approach.

### *Chapter 4*

#### *Suggestions for change*

Although researching visual literacy, my critique of Curriculum 2005 and the field study I conducted have all proven very interesting and stimulating, my investigations have not answered the questions that gave rise to my interest in this area of study. In fact, at the end of my final chapter, I make the recommendation that research is needed into exactly the kinds of issues that initially provoked my interest. The reason that I have not done this research myself is that the bewildering variety of opinion as to the nature and application of visual literacy seen in the literature review, did not lead me to think that there was a firm theoretical platform upon which to build research. However I have, I believe, identified the reason that so little research of this nature has been done. This chapter looks in part at my experience of educational publishing, questioning why the industry appears to pay so little attention to the visual aspects of textbooks. Although the lack of a theoretical platform is certainly one reason, I suggest another is that educational publishing and the curriculum are locked into a logocentric view of literacy. Both of these spheres need to acknowledge that making meaning from a written text does not just involve understanding the words written down. The font in which the words are written, the colour, texture and smell of paper on which they are printed and the way the words are arranged on the page all contribute to the meaning of the text. This way of

understanding literacy is described by Gunther Kress (1997) as a *multimodal* approach, and my dissertation is particularly concerned with the *visual mode*. I suggest in both my second and fourth chapters that educational publishing and the curriculum need to make a paradigm shift towards a multimodal approach. If they were to make this shift, the visual mode would be considered an integral part of the way we make meaning, not only of written texts, but of every type of engagement with the world in which seeing plays a part. The visual mode would be considered a valuable means of communication, and attention would be paid to the kinds of questions to which I would still like to know the answers.

### iii. **Beyond visual literacy**

Although I do identify reasons for and propose solutions to the visual mode's poor status, both in the curriculum and in educational publishing, perhaps the real value of this dissertation is simply that it asks more questions. After investigating the shabby state of visual literacy in the curriculum and a similarly uninformed attitude in educational publishing, the question arises whether their policies on the visual mode really are adequate to the visually saturated world in which learners live, outside of school hours. I attempt to provide some possible answers and solutions, drawing on Kress' ideas about new ways of conceiving of literacy in the curriculum, but I believe that this question can really only be answered with another question: How do we teach learners to, as Victor Papanek puts it, 'come to their senses' (Papanek 1985: 104) so that they are capable of making informed, insightful meaning from everything with which they engage? This question, applied to both the development of a curriculum as well as to the educational publishing industry, could powerfully alter the way education is conceived of today.

## Chapter 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Visual literacy: a problem of definition

When I first started looking for readings on visual literacy, my library and internet searches yielded little, the keywords "visual literacy" not proving very fruitful. However, The International Visual Literacy Association's (IVLA) website included Moriarty and Kenney's (1998) work-in-progress taxonomy and bibliography of writings on visual literacy and visual communication, providing a multi-directional signpost from which I could continue my search. Some of the disciplines pointed to by this bibliographical signpost included areas of 'mass communication (including photography, advertising, and news editorial areas), film and cinema studies, education, art and aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, architecture and even archaeology' (Moriarty & Kenney 1998: 1). Researchers in all of these disciplines appear to be using some element or aspect of the visual mode to make sense of the world within the context of that discipline. This signpost was important because it made me begin to understand that visual literacy is not a discrete field of study; rather, it is a notion or concept that has been given a title. The concept draws on a wide range of disciplines in the process of having its parameters, definitions and applications hammered out, and this makes its definitions and boundaries quite hard to pin down.<sup>1</sup> In her chapter entitled

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<sup>1</sup> Very late in my writing of this dissertation a package of journals and other papers arrived from the IVLA. Although I have attempted to include some of what I gained from the few articles I managed to read, I was not able to make extensive use of this resource. Nevertheless, a selection of some of the titles of the articles in these journals may give an idea of the most current research in the area of visual literacy:

Journal of visual literacy Spring 1999:

- *Digitization and Deconstruction... What role Aesthetics?*
- *The Visual World of Young Learners: Case Studies*

Journal of Visual Literacy Autumn 1999:

- *The Role of Abstraction in Scientific Illustration : Implications for Pedagogy.*
- *"Is That the Mona Lisa?" Art in Advertising and its Effect on Viewer Perceptions.*

Journal of Visual Literacy Spring 2000:

- *The Effect of Culture on the Efficacy of Pictures in Developing Communities: A Review of Certain Research and Some Guiding Principles.*
- *The Cyber-Goddess: Women and Technology*

Natural Vistas: Visual Literacy and the World Around Us (Selected Readings)

*Visual literacy: the definition problem* Barbara Seels (1994) questions whether there is even such a thing as a visual literacy field, profession or discipline. She decides that it cannot be characterized as a discipline or profession, because 'a discipline adds to its own knowledge[, and a] profession has a knowledge base and is characterized by the services it renders', and it is not a field because 'the area of visual literacy does not at present comfortably encompass both theory and practice'. She concludes that visual literacy can therefore only really be characterized as 'an area of study' and might be 'a theoretical construct rather than a construct with operational specificity' (Seels 1994: 102). This lack of clear-cut borders and definitions means that terms and methodology to do with visual literacy are still not generally agreed upon, making it difficult to formulate research problems. Nevertheless, many researchers refer to visual literacy as if it is a complete construct, perhaps unaware that they are working within their own idiosyncratic, synthesized definition of visual literacy. The lack of crisp borders means, Seels says, that most research has been limited to the evaluation of programmes and that 'In order for research and synthesis to occur, visual literacy, the theoretical construct, will have to be related to more operational constructs' (Seels 1994: 103).

Of course, the lack of a consensus definition of this 'area of study' is liberating in terms of my own study as I am able to subjectively formulate visual literacy in terms of my own mode of engagement with the subject, which is my experience as an illustrator of educational texts. This dissertation, therefore, will not attempt to clarify the borders and definitions of visual literacy. Instead, it will examine it in terms of my own area of application, describing the messy and disordered understanding of visual literacy in that area of application, thereby possibly contributing in a small way to greater clarity in that area. I will be looking at visual literacy from the viewpoint of the discipline of Education, which, although only one of the contributing disciplines in Moriarty and

- 
- *Evaluating Visuals for Instruction*
  - *A Visual History of American Education Through Editorial Cartoons.*
  - *Highlight Color Influences On Immediate Recall and Field Dependency.*

Connecting With the Community: Exploring Resources for Visual Learning

- *Seeing Tomorrow's Schools: Visualizing for Educational Change.*
  - *Nightline's Same-day Coverage of the Challenger Disaster: News as Myth*
- Leading Young Learners To The Visual World: Case Studies.*

Kenney's list, is one discipline that is able to straddle and incorporate aspects of all of the contributing disciplines.

### *1.1.1 A mainstream definition*

Although Branch, Kim and Brill state that 'there is currently no consensus definition of visual literacy among the IVLA community' (2000: 72), the IVLA's website answers the question *What is visual literacy?* with a quote from Fransecky and Debes (1972) who define visual literacy as:

a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visual actions, objects, and/or symbols, natural or man-made, that are [encountered] in [the] environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, [we are] able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, [we are] able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communications' ([www.ivla.org](http://www.ivla.org) 2000)

The IVLA definition suggests that becoming visually literate is both an inevitable development for all sighted people, as well as something that can be extended and enhanced through conscious learning. It suggests that the development of these 'vision competencies' results in a heightened understanding of one's environment and that this is essential for learning to take place. In other words, although a person might physically be able to see, their visual illiteracy does not allow them to fully engage with what they see. Such a definition implies that visual literacy is important for all engagement with visual material and that one can learn to "read" with greater or lesser expertise and understanding a face, a building or a sunset as well as a painting or photograph of a face, a building or sunset. An interesting feature of this definition is the insistence on the subject's active engagement with these competencies in terms of using them creatively to communicate. In other words, visual literacy is not just the development of subjective analytical skills, it necessarily has a synthetic, productive aspect. Other definitions of visual literacy are quoted by Seels (1994: 103-104): Curtiss' (1987) definition seems to elaborate on the content of the 'vision competencies' of Fransecky and Debes with lists of specific skills that these might require:

Visual literacy is the ability to understand the communication of a visual statement in any medium and the ability to express oneself with at least one visual discipline. It entails the ability to: understand the subject matter and meaning within the context of the culture that produced the work, analyze the syntax - compositional and stylistic principles of the work, evaluate the disciplinary and aesthetic merits of the work, and grasp intuitively the Gestalt, the interactive and synergistic quality of the work (in Seels 1994:104).

Curtiss expands on the communicative aspect of visual literacy by specifying the need to be proficient in a 'visual discipline'. It could be interesting to speculate which of the range of visual disciplines are appropriate to be developed in the educational context. I would suggest that access to as many means of visual expression and communication as possible is necessary.

The IVLA journal draws on research from a broad range of disciplines, and it is probably safe to say that the IVLA represents a mainstream understanding of visual literacy<sup>2</sup>. This understanding, seen in the definitions above, as well as in the Moriarty and Kenney bibliography, can be summed up in the following way:

- A broad range of disciplines makes use of and needs to use visual literacy for its particular purpose of "reading" visuals
- One needs to be visually literate in order to make sense, to greater or lesser degrees, of visuals, which include natural phenomena as well as symbolic meaning and human-made artifacts and which are heavily context- and culture-dependent

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<sup>2</sup> At this point it may be relevant to add some comment on the IVLA. All of the definitions quoted to this point come from sources directly or obliquely associated with this organisation. Seel's chapter appears in a book published by a firm closely associated with the IVLA and certainly, that book draws heavily on research done for the IVLA journal. Although the journal has been published since 1970 and 20 conferences have been held since 1969, I find it interesting that in the rest of my reading I have not come across any mention of this organization. In reading the journals that I could get hold of, I noticed that the names of the same researchers came up regularly, suggesting to me that the organization may be somewhat self-reflexive in its research. Also, from a purely subjective point of view, I find it astounding that a journal devoted to visual issues does not apply its understanding of these issues to the journal itself. Throughout, font sizes change, images are usually of very poor quality and are often placed without consideration of their relation to the written text, and captions to illustrations seem to be poorly conceptualized. Although this may not necessarily reflect the value of the written content of the journal, the content of the "visual text", of which the editors should be aware, speaks volumes.

- Visual literacy can be learned. It is a developmental process, moving from visual illiteracy to visual literacy and although it is a natural development up to a point, it can be augmented through training in visual literacy skills
- A vocabulary conventionally used to speak about language and literacy is useful also to speak about visual literacy

### 1.1.2 A developmental view

The definition of visual literacy used by the IVLA suggests that visual literacy is something that every sighted person acquires, to varying degrees, through their visual interaction with the world. In his chapter entitled *Theoretical foundations of visual learning*, John A. Hortin (1994) looks at how Piaget's developmental stages seem to suggest that visual literacy becomes important as a child develops towards and in the Concrete Operational stage of development<sup>3</sup>, where representational thinking develops. 'It is only as the child becomes capable of mental imagery that the level of thinking moves beyond sensorimotor actions toward logical thinking. It is mental imagery which leads to memory and reflective thought' (Brainard in Hortin 1994:12). Claire Golomb (1974) cautions, however, against the assumption that children's drawings reflect their level of understanding of the objects that they draw. She argues that the drawings of a child are as much about play and exploration of the possibilities of the medium and the visual mode of communication as an attempt to represent a specific object. 'The extensive narratives accompanying the drawing reveal that the child is not interested in a complete depiction of what he knows about a man. Much is left out because it is difficult to represent, superfluous to the basic structure of the human, and can be accomplished by verbal description.' (Golomb 1974: 60). Gunther Kress (1996) suggests that the signs that a child produces are motivated by the particular purpose that the child has in mind, rather than by the intention to accurately represent the world around him. Kress says that '[t]his

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<sup>3</sup> There are four periods of cognitive development in Piaget's theory. These are the Sensorimotor, from birth to 2 years, the Preoperational, from 2 - 6 years, the Concrete Operational, from 6-12 years, and the Formal Operational, from 12 years through adulthood. The Concrete Operational stage sees a child developing the ability to create representations of their world. 'For Piaget "concrete operations" are dominated by "figurative cognition," that is, mental imagery' (LaSpina 1998:190). Children engage in "active looking", which requires visual and spatial thinking. LaSpina quotes West (1991) who describes visual thinking as 'that form of thought in which images are generated or recalled in the mind and

process rests on the *interest* of sign-makers, which leads them to select particular features of the object to be represented as criterial, at that moment, and in that context (Kress 1996: 11). To draw the conclusion, therefore, that a child's graphic representation inevitably reflects his level of cognitive understanding is mistaken and is probably indicative more of his level of fine motor skills than anything else.

### ***1.1.2.1 Left brain, right brain***

The idea that there is a *visual mode* in which one understands and knows things in ways that are different from the way one knows or understands in the verbal mode is examined in Betty Edwards's book *Drawing on the right side of the brain* (1993). Here, Edwards explains that the left and right hemispheres of the brain allow us to have two different ways of knowing and of processing information. Our left brain 'analyzes, abstracts, counts, marks time, plans step-by-step procedures, verbalizes, makes rational statements based on logic ... the left-hemisphere mode [is the] analytic, verbal... sequential, symbolic, linear, objective mode' (Edwards 1993: 35). The right hemisphere operates in a different mode, dealing with 'the intuitive, subjective, relational, holistic' (*ibid*: 36) aspects of our understanding, and it is in this hemisphere that we operate in the visual mode. Much of Western culture emphasizes left-hemisphere modes of thinking and understanding. Certainly, school curricula tend to favour the operations of the left hemisphere, concentrating on verbal and numerical subjects and modes of study, and structuring the timetable, classroom rows and mark system in the linear, rational left-hemisphere style. The importance of this to visual literacy education is that Edwards suggests that the right-hemisphere mode - the visual mode - can be encouraged, and a shift from the left to the right hemisphere can be learned. Her book provides a sequence of perceptual exercises, most of which require drawing activity, that teach one how to draw upon the right hemisphere ways of understanding and knowing.

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manipulated' (LaSpina 1998: 190). Mental imagery and cognition therefore become closely associated. another

### *1.1.2.2 Developing perceptual skills*

The possibility that the individual's ability to interpret and reflect upon her perceptions can be actively developed, has led to the notion that visual literacy skills can be learned. The degree to which one is able to interpret, reflect on and manipulate what one perceives depends on the extent to which one is exposed to visual stimuli (and, importantly, these are often very culture- and context-specific). For instance, the ability to "read" another person's body language is something that human beings learn to do from birth, through their daily interactions with other people. Also, through experience, a person who regularly interacts with film, television or comic books is soon able to understand the visual devices used in these media to indicate things like the passing of time or a change in location. Some researchers have been interested in whether or not people unaccustomed to representational images would have a natural visual literacy in this medium. Paul Messaris (1994) reviews some formal and informal accounts in this area, finding that most inexperienced viewers have little difficulty in recognizing single objects in line drawings, although studies have suggested that there may be some difficulty in recognizing conventional indications of depth. However, these studies have found that just a little instruction would allow most naïve viewers to make sense of a representational image. Messaris argues that all viewers innately possess the information-processing skills necessary for the understanding of visuals, learned through their daily experience, and therefore he believes that there is not much point in teaching visual literacy skills. His view is that the most valuable contribution visual literacy education can make is to develop 'a systematic account of techniques of visual manipulation and to explore audiences' reactions to and awareness of these techniques' (Messaris 1994: 32). As I will show in the chapter that follows, much of the drive for the inclusion of visual literacy in the school curriculum appears to come from the sense that learners need to learn how to make sense of the visual media such as advertising, television news, cinema, magazines etc. Concerns about the influence of visual mass media are highlighted when one considers the use to which new research into human visual perceptual qualities will be put. Articles in *Readings in information visualization: using vision to think* (Card, Mackinlay, Schneiderman (Eds) 1999) consider the "information overload" and explore the potential of 'designing visualizations with human

strengths and weaknesses in mind, [so as to] exploit people's natural ability to recognize structure and patterns, and circumvent human limitations in memory and attention' (Wright 1999: 85). In terms of the need for visual literacy education in the face of all the visual media currently on offer, Feldman (1976) writes:

What really matters is whether the perception of visual images can be regarded as *critical understanding* rather than *programmed response*... At present, most persons... are visually literate in the sense that they are capable of receiving and acting on the signals sent out to them by electronic and printed pictures. They are not visually literate if by literacy we mean the ability to understand the rhetoric, the persuasive devices, employed in visual communication (in Hortin 1994: 25).

This type of call for visual literacy education seems to be based mostly on the fear of power of images, and of the threat that the culture of images currently appears to pose to an apparently eroding word-based culture. It is also an extremely narrow understanding of visual literacy, apparently concentrating on nothing but the use of visuals by the mass media for manipulative purposes.

## 1.2 Literacy

In recent literacy theory, the term "literacy" has been expanded to encompass forms of communication apart from simply the verbal. 'Instead of studying the separate skills which underlie reading and writing, it involves a shift to studying *literacy*, a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies. To be literate is to be active; it is to be confident within these practices' (Barton 1994: 32). In this view it is argued that the term "literacy" can refer to any form of communication that needs a form of language code. This requires a semiotic understanding, where "language" is also expanded to include all the meaning-making systems that we draw upon when we communicate. So things like, for instance, clothing, music, images are seen as 'signifying practices' which are used in socially structured ways, and are therefore language-like (Archer 1997). Using this semiotic understanding of literacy and language, some advocates of visual literacy training, like Dondis (1973) for example, see visual literacy as involving the acquisition of a group of skills that enable an individual to

identify, interpret and use the structural characteristics of visual material. This view assumes that there is a form or structure to visuals that can be learned, both through experience and through active learning, in much the same way as language is learned and acquired. Some visual literacy researchers use the language analogy quite literally, trying to parallel linguistic rules with visual language, looking at visual elements such as colour, syntax, composition and form, looking for universal visual elements in much the same way as Chomsky's (1968) idea of the a universal, innate grammar.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on these ideas, some visual literacy researchers inferred that these innate linguistic concepts could be extended in other fields like, for instance, cinema studies, where researchers looked for grammatical constructs in visual sequences. Barley (1971) wrote that

Students' visual literacy experiences will encourage them to identify parallelisms between verbal and visual syntax and will give them tools for creating visual/verbal utterances. When students set out to make photographs, slide sequences, one-reel, single concept films and other, longer motion pictures, they will demonstrate practical and theoretical knowledge of verbal and visual syntax (In Hortin 1994: 8).

In the IVLA journal (Autumn 1999), Rust reviews Horn's book, *Visual Language* (no reference provided in the journal), which explains 'the standard linguistic tools of morphology, syntax analysis and semantic analysis' (IVLA 1999: 224). Although Dondis (1973) feels that there is visual syntax and that a structural description is needed so that visual communication can become teachable, she says that 'languages are made-up systems constructed by man to encode, store, and decode information. Therefore, their structure has a logic that visual literacy is unable to parallel (Dondis 1973: 12). She nevertheless makes use of the language metaphor in her discussion of visual literacy, talking about 'the syntactical guidelines for visual literacy' (*ibid*: 20).

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<sup>4</sup> Chomsky (1968) wrote:

The principles that determine the form of grammar and that select a grammar of the appropriate form on the basis of certain data constitute a subject that might, following a traditional usage, be termed 'universal grammar.' (In Hortin 1994: 7)

### 1.2.1 A semiotic approach

Kress and Van Leeuwen's *Reading images: the grammar of visual design* (1996) sets out to 'provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of visual semiotics, and to analyze how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 1). Although the title of their book might suggest that their approach is linguistic, this is not the case. They make it clear that the visual and the verbal are not simply translations of one another, but that their co-existence in a culture means that we tend to apply similar understandings to each. Their semiotic analysis of the system of visual communication is intended to contribute to a broadened critical discourse analysis, including a variety of modes of communication, as well as to the vocabulary of the discourse of visual communication. Certainly, reading their book was (literally, I suppose) an eye-opener for me. I work professionally in the area of visual communication, but reading an analysis of visual communication techniques/ "vocabulary" made me conscious of things I had previously grasped only intuitively. Kress and van Leeuwen put forward the argument that

in a literate culture the visual means of communication are rational expressions of cultural meanings, amenable to rational accounts and analysis. [However,] literate cultures have systematically suppressed means of analysis of the visual forms of representation, so that there is not, at the moment, an established theoretical framework within which visual forms of representation can be discussed (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 20-21).

Kress and van Leeuwen say that because 'the move towards a new literacy, based on images and visual design, can come to be seen as a threat, a sign of the decline of culture' (*ibid.*: 15), mainstream culture is resistant to taking images seriously, except in terms of their threat to a culture based on verbal literacy. I would suggest that a cultural tendency to marginalize the arts, regarding them as inessential to the serious business of life, adds to this resistance. This has resulted in an enormously image-rich and increasingly image-dependent culture that has no common means of talking about and understanding this aspect of the culture. The development of a vocabulary with which to look at and with

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which to create a unified discourse is therefore essential to the field of visual literacy. The value of this vocabulary, however, must be that it works in tandem with an acquired understanding of visual communication; in other words, an understanding that is gained in meaningful, applied, productive situations. If one uses the analogy of language learning, a classroom-learned grammar divorced from real language interactions usually results in a rather sterile and often unusable understanding of the language. The development of this kind of vocabulary, in tandem with hands-on discovery and synthesis is the direction in which visual literacy needs to grow.

Rick Williams (2000) is sceptical, however, that the current ideologies informing educational practice are capable of including such content. Williams criticizes academics who, in the attempt to establish visual literacy as a legitimate part of academic discourse, have followed models that are rational and linear in their base when the process they are defining is largely intuitive. He draws on ideas of left and right-hemisphere theory (Edwards 1993) and Howard Gardner's (1983) ideas on multiple intelligences<sup>5</sup> to suggest that not enough regard is given to intuitive processes; visual perception being one of these processes. Although the need for a vocabulary is extremely important to the field, Williams asserts that we 'need to look beyond traditional, linear interpretations of metaphors toward an integrated view of the whole' (Williams 2000: 112).

### **1.3. Another approach to the visual mode**

The literature that I have reviewed up to this point has largely been supportive of the concept of visual literacy as defined on the IVLA website, and works to add to the understanding of that concept. The literature has an educational focus and is about learning and teaching coping skills to deal with the enormous amount of visual

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<sup>5</sup> Gardner's (1985) theory of multiple intelligences is a reaction to the reality that linguistic and logical systems of representation and expression have priority over other communicative systems. He suggests that there is a multitude of "intelligences" and that the linguistic and the mathematical are just two of these, presently unfairly privileged over the others, which include, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, personal etc. intelligences. There are criticisms of his theory, Robert Sternberg (1990) saying that it "overinclusive and too vague", but also that it "represent[s] a new contribution in terms of synthesizing metaphors for understanding the mind" (LaSpina 1998: 129).

stimulation that is almost unavoidable in most societies. Some of what I read, however, is more critical of the concept framed in this way, and the educational focus is consequently shifted. This literature is largely interested in the nature of the issues around the visual - interested in the visual culture in which we live.

### *1.3.1 Visual culture*

'Visual culture', described by Nicholas Mirzoeff in *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999), 'does not depend on pictures themselves but the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence' (Mirzoeff 1999: 5). Visual culture is interested in the nature of the cultural situation which appears to have shifted its focus from the verbal to the visual.

Western culture has consistently privileged the spoken word as the highest form of intellectual practice and seen visual representations as second-rate illustrations of ideas. The emergence of visual culture develops ... the sense that some aspects of Western philosophy and science have come to adopt a pictorial, rather than textual, view of the world. If this is so, it marks a significant challenge to the notion of the world as a written text that dominated so much intellectual discussion in the wake of linguistics-based movements such as structuralism and poststructuralism (Mirzoeff 1999: 6).

Visual culture is not limited to the areas such as the arts, and its related disciplines. Scientific and technological disciplines, where the value of visual mode has never been given much attention, are now beginning to draw attention to the value of this mode. The modern information-based economy of the developed world seems to have been discovering that visuals can provide an effective way of dealing with the "information overload". Although it is relatively commonplace to hear calls for more attention to be paid to the importance of arts education, DeFanti, Brown and McCormick (1999) make similar pleas from the disciplines of computational science and engineering. They feel that this discipline is hindered in its growth because there are not enough industrial researchers who know how to think visually. They complain that 'scientists, while educated to read and write, are not taught to produce or communicate with visuals' (DeFanti, Brown & McCormick 1999: 51). They also point out that

Contemporary scientific communications media are predominantly language-oriented. Printed media are coupled weakly, if at all, to the visual world of space-time. By contrast, half the human neocortex is devoted to processing visual information. In other words, current scientific communication leaves out half - the right half - of the brain. An integral part of our visualization task is to facilitate visual communication from scientist to scientist, engineer to engineer, through visualization-compatible media. Publication and grants, and therefore tenure, rarely come to researchers whose productivity depends on or produces visualization results. Superiors evaluate scholarly work by counting the number of journal articles published; publications are text, and visual media do not count. Funding itself is based on the careful preparation and evaluation of proposals, which are documents full of words and numbers (*ibid*: 51).

It seems that whether in arts or in science, the nature of the relationship between the visual and verbal is an important feature of visual culture, and some of the literature on the subject will be examined here. The visual-verbal relationship is also important in education, and particularly in educational publishing, as a subsequent chapter will examine.

### 1.3.2 *Gendered discourse*

#### 1.3.2.1 *The bisexuality of bitextuality*

Looking at the relationship between the verbal and the visual in illustrated books, Lorraine Kooistra (1995) coins the term "bitextuality", which refers to the way in which an illustrated text contains two interlinked texts - the verbal and the visual. Kooistra notes that most analyses of these texts separate the two, looking at them as if they are complete within themselves. She is interested in the "bitextual" book, playing on aural and semantic similarities with the word "bisexual". She shows how illustration and verbal text are generally given feminine and masculine characteristics respectively and points out the marriage relationship that these texts have when they appear together: the verbal text is regarded as the more important and powerful, capable of standing alone, and the visual text is seen as supportive, dependant, decorative. She speaks of how a reader is influenced by both texts in his approach to either one: the visual text affects how he reads the verbal, and vice versa. Kooistra holds that, on first reading, the visual text 'mediates between the reader and the text. That is, the text is initially read *through the*

*image'* (Kooistra 1995: 13) and that once the verbal text has been read the reader will view the image from the standpoint of textual knowledge.

The dialogic interactions of image and text suggest that the word cannot retain its place as privileged and authorizing ground in illustrated books. The word is not impermeable but porous; its interaction with the image reveals the degree to which it is saturated with, and shot through by, the alien desires and expressions of another medium, as well as by the cultural discourses out of which the book is produced (*ibid*: 249).

Kooistra talks about the role of the illustrator as that of critic - framing, selecting, omitting, interpreting and commenting on the verbal text, while also inventing the textual subject according to her artistic point of view. Kooistra concludes that the 'artist as critic's relationship to the written word offers a paradigmatic model for the reader/interpreter's relation to the text' (*ibid*: 250).

Kooistra's insights provide an empowering analysis of the role and power of illustration particularly because my own experience as an educational illustrator has been largely disempowering. When texts are regarded as bitextual and images are considered as having an equal, and even a critical, voice, the role of the illustrator is altered radically. This view of texts as mutually energizing casts the illustrator in an authorial role, to work alongside the writer of the written text in order to make a whole text. For this to happen in the educational texts that I illustrate, however, a massive shift of understanding would need to happen. Publishers would, for the first time, need to recognise the visual component as *content*, and therefore give it as much status and consideration as the written component. These ideas will be examined in more detail in my fourth chapter

#### 1.3.2.2 *Masculine/feminine: Mind/body*

In his article *The curse of literacy* (1998) Leonard Shlain, a vascular surgeon, says: 'I cannot prove that I am right, but I think a discernible pattern shows the shaping influence on culture of writing and particularly the alphabet. The rise and fall of images, women's rights and the sacred feminine have been closely tied to the rise and fall of alphabet literacy' (Shlain 1998: 75). He traces a link between the rise of certain masculine

characteristics that begin to characterize a society once a critical mass has become alphabetically literate, suggesting that alphabet literacy reinforces certain neuronal pathways of the brain, linked to the "masculine" left hemisphere of the brain. He is of the opinion that the 'rise of new visual technologies has been accompanied by a resurgence of feminine values, holistic thinking and respect for nature... [because of] the way they actually reprogram our brains' (Shlain 1998: 72). It may be just a hunch, but Shlain's idea holds the possibility that "visual" and "literacy" are two enormously different concepts, so much so that they each have the power to radically alter cultures through the way of thinking that their form encourages, described here by Barbara Maria Stafford:

Forcing human cognition to become synonymous both with computational codes or abstruse texts and with the ability to decipher them resulted in downgrading sensory awareness to superficial stimuli and false perceptions. Most damagingly, [the mind is emptied] of its body, obliterating the interdependence of physiological functions and thinking (Stafford 1996: 5).

Perhaps a visual culture could provide the opportunity to bridge the mind-body split as we become aware that our bodily experience is essential to our every thought, understanding and opinion.

### ***1.3.3 Bodily knowing - cognition before language***

In Marjorie O'Loughlin's article entitled *Corporeal subjectivities: Merleau-Ponty, education and the 'postmodern' subject* (1997), Merleau-Ponty is quoted as saying that somatic experience is not just the "handmaiden of consciousness", existing to provide the mind with things to think about, but that the "intelligent body's" experience of the world *is* the complete experience. O'Loughlin points back to the whole body as the necessary site of further exploration of the possibility of visual, as well as other sensory, ways of knowing:

In a postmodern view, discourses are the focus of concern; but bodies are the very foundation of discourses as well as their product. The discourses identified by postmodern writers exist and are reproduced only through bodies and their activities. Experiential exploration is first and foremost bodily exploration, and knowing is above all bodily knowing (O'Loughlin 1997: 30).

This phenomenological approach takes the position that one's somatic experience is what informs the meaning one makes from any situation, and that one's perceptions are therefore an essential part of one's cognitive activity. Maxine Greene puts it simply: 'By attending, listening, gazing, a perceiver structures what presents itself' (Greene 1995: 26). Rudolph Arnheim argues in *Visual Thinking* (1977) for the mending of the split between perception and cognition through the realization that all thought is inseparable from the act of perception. In fact, he argues that the functions performed by sensory perception *are* the functions of cognition. He shows how language depends on perception for its very substance, with almost every word one can think of having a perceptual base:

The universal verbal habit reflects, of course, the psychological process by which the concepts describing "nonperceptual" facts derive from perceptual ones. The notion of the depth of thought is derived from physical depth; what is more, depth is not merely a convenient metaphor to describe the mental phenomenon but the only possible way of even conceiving of that notion. Mental depth is not thinkable without an awareness of physical depth (Arnheim 1977: 232).

He argues against the tendency to think of perception as concrete and thought as abstract, showing how the act of perception itself is a process of abstraction - of isolating the salient points in the vastly rich sensory field that constantly surrounds us. Merleau-Ponty said that "perception is a nascent *logos*" (in Greene 1995: 53). By using words to create meaning and identity, the split between world and subject is made because by naming, you separate. By reading you are separating yourself from the text, whereas when you are "body-subject" - present to your bodily experience - your culture, gender, race etc. are essentially included in your view. A pre-rational, pre-verbal perception of the world includes the perceiver in the world, making him or her therefore responsible for the world (Greene 1995), making this way of thinking profoundly holistic. It requires, however, a radical shift from the common understanding that thought and language are inseparable. The idea of training learners in visual (and other sensory) perceptiveness is dealt with later in this chapter.

### 1.3.4 Visual "literacy"

The awareness of the cultural dominance of the verbal mode has made for some uneasiness with the use of the word "literacy" in tandem with "visual". In *Before Writing: rethinking the paths to literacy* (1997), Gunther Kress writes about the overuse of the literacy analogy, saying that

the problem stems from a fundamental unwillingness or inability on the part of those who develop these metaphoric extensions of the term as serious concepts, rather than as quick, rhetorically effective uses (or as glib or lazy as with 'emotional literacy' and its cousins) to see language as just one of many modes of communication. Because it is seen as *the only real mode*, as the most highly developed, the one that sustains thought and rationality, all other modes of communication, or for that matter, all cultural *systems*, have to be described as being a literacy. This devalues the term, so that it comes to mean nothing much more than 'skill' (as in keyboard skills) or competence. It also prevents the possibility of examining the actual function of other systems, as systems in their own right.... literacy is a name for a complex of quite disparate phenomena - print, text as block, letters, text as genre, letters as sound, directionality and spatial dispositions, media, layout. It is in fact no more than a theoretical and ideological convenience to lump all these together as *literacy* (Kress 1997: 115).

"Literacy" is, of course, an enticingly useful analogy. The associated term "vocabulary" seems like a particularly useful way of thinking about ways of talking about the visual aspects of specific disciplines. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:15-16) point out that reading written language is indeed a visual activity, which is perhaps why this analogy seems so appropriate. Nevertheless, although one feels quite comfortable talking about "reading" a building design or a painting, other literacy-specific vocabulary like "writing" is almost never used in terms of image production.

Stafford's (1996) objections go beyond just quibbling over the literal meaning of the coupled words "visual" and "literacy". The term "visual literacy" seems useful, because we are able to comprehend how understanding verbal codes allows us to uncover meaning, and that there seems to be a familiar feeling of deciphering of codes when looking for the meaning of, say, a dance or a painting. Sol Worth says that

pictures operate both within the framework of language knowledge *within us*, and outside the framework of language *in itself*. That is, the pictorial mode (from drawing to motion pictures) does not have a rigorous set of rules employing a lexicon, a grammar, an ability to construct paraphrases, or an ability to produce translations within its own formal devices. But we, the viewers, do have a *faculté de langage* in general, about all symbolic materials, so that in motion pictures, for example, where sequence and time become parameters to be manipulated we can instantly bring to bear linguistic rules for implication and inference (Worth 1996: 182-183).

However, Stafford feels that the "familiar feeling" that our *faculté de langage* gives us is the very reason that the use of the term "literacy" should be questioned. She argues in *Good looking: essays on the virtue of images* (1996) that Western modes of thought are typified as linear and rational and that the discourse of linguistics underpins and is underpinned by this mode of thinking. In other words, it makes sense to us to apply linguistic notions of literacy to an encounter with visuals because our entire way of thinking is based on these premises. Stafford deplores 'the one-sided estimation of language that has installed it as the paradigm for depth, seriousness, thought, even our very identity' (Stafford 1996: 8). She does not wish to replace language with visuals; she wishes to see images freed of their associations with shallow beguilement and spectacle, and instead to find their value and worth. She argues that the academy is defensively fearful of the apparent "visual turn" because it seems to threaten verbal culture, a point to which Kress (1996, 1997) alludes also, and that the academy needs, instead, to adapt. If reflective thought and communication continues to be found only in linguistic models of intelligence, Stafford feels that the current "instructional landscape" runs the risk of becoming irrelevant as the visual mode displaces the verbal mode from its dominant position in almost every other area of discourse.

#### **1.3.4.1 Mistrust of images**

Stafford traces the prevailing linguistic discourse back to Ferdinand de Saussure's binary oppositions of signifier/signified which strengthened 'the biblical coupling of meaning with naming [and] turned noumenal and phenomenal experience into the product of language. Not only temporal but spatial effects supposedly obeyed an invisible system, the controlling structure of an inborn ruling *écriture*' (Stafford 1996: 5). She argues that

the result of this 'controlling structure' is that verbal ways of knowing have become prized over other ways of knowing, to the point where these others are regarded with mistrust. Wolfgang Iser (1978), writing about aesthetic response, talks about how the meaning of literary works is somehow suspended between the actual text and the reader's response to the text. Unlike the assumption that is drawn from Saussure's schema of signified/signifier, which is that the meaning of the signified lies in and is inextricable from the signifier, Iser points out that 'there is no common code' as 'the reader "receives" [the message] by composing it' (Iser 1978: 21). The aesthetic nature of meaning is impossible to fully express through words because in doing so, it 'extends its meaningfulness by relating to something outside itself' (Iser 1978: 23) by becoming a verbalised text. Stafford criticises Saussure's schema from a stance similar to Iser's, pointing to the gap between an aesthetic response and a verbalisation of that response, which shows that the verbalising model is not sufficient to express all meaning.

Much of the perceived need for visual literacy training has come from a sense that images are beginning to overwhelm the word and the world and that critical tools are needed to be able to cut through their glossy, misleading surface to probe their real motives. Stafford takes note of this vast mistrust of images, particularly caused by the extensive use thereof for venal purposes like advertising and politics. Martin Jay (in Melville & Readings 1995: 355) points out how French postmodern thinkers have added to the mythology of the meretricious, slippery image, as well as having used the language of the detached technological surveillance equipment - "the gaze", "spectatorship" - for the act of perception. Derived from observational apparatus, these static concepts ignore the variability of optical sensations in different times, places, and individual beholders' (Stafford 1996: 6).

#### **1.4 Education beyond the "literacy" analogy**

When the reliance on the "literacy" analogy is dispensed with, insights from other areas of discourse can come into play in the search for ways to teach learners to engage with visual culture. Stafford asks the question:

What sorts of practical skills should every citizen possess to ethically and intelligently use, analyze, and disseminate digital apparitions? In the transdisciplinary epoch, what committee or program will assume the obligation to the public good to teach the different ways a wide range of visual materials are produced so that consumers can discern their reliability (Stafford 1996: 72).

Art educators talk about the need for art students to acquire a vocabulary which enables them to "read" and evaluate images critically (Taylor 1992). Visual literacy, for learners studying Art, involves training in 'the precise and vivid use of language, with each of the four areas [Content, Form, Process, Mood] likely to stimulate use of distinct types of vocabulary' (Taylor 1992: 70). This vocabulary is, when applied in isolation, relatively specific to the discourse of Fine Art, serving to focus a learner's attention on aesthetic considerations. However, limiting perceptual education to the realm of Fine Art is short-sighted, as Wolff points out:

The first and most obstructive block to visual learning is the ingrained assumption that only certain things are worth looking at and that the purpose of visual education is to indicate what these things are - in short to provide a ready-made realm of aesthetic certitude. The very presence of this hopeful belief in a special, visual world composed of elite aspects, as contrasted to the facets of routine daily seeing, defensively rationalizes a permissive adequacy for the lazy eye (Wolff 1965: 225-226).

#### *1.4.1 Teaching visual perceptiveness*

Although most people are physically able to see, their circumstances do not necessarily enable them to acquire the ability to see skillfully, something Messaris (1994) does not seem to take fully into account. In his writing on literacy, James Gee (1991) makes the distinction between "acquisition" and "learning", which I think can be applied to the issue of visual literacy. Gee points out that skills acquired through experience in meaningful, functional settings are better mastered than skills which are learned by conscious, analytic means. The skills that are *learned*, however, provide a person with the means to better understand, talk about and criticize his acquired skill. He points out that children from non-mainstream (non-middle class) backgrounds who lack the home environment that encourages the acquisition of literacy skills, probably due to lack of access to these resources, learning literacy skills at school will provide them with metacognitive skills

for critiquing something that they have not had the opportunity to acquire yet, rendering those skills almost pointless. Certainly, it would seem that children who have had a great deal of experience with the conventions of visual representation would have a greater ease with them than those who have not. In my illustration work I am aware that my drawings will be seen by an audience that ranges from the highly visually stimulated urban middle class child to the rural child who has little exposure to printed or screened visual material. I am sure that I make assumptions about ways of representing things that have the potential to be indecipherable to a viewer with little experience of pictures. Although Gee is writing about the oral and verbal modes, I would like to suggest that what he says is true for the visual mode too. Gee suggests that 'settings which focus on acquisition, not learning, should be stressed if the goal is to help non-mainstream children attain mastery [of visual literacy skills] (Gee 1991: 9). It is only once a skill has been acquired that one can learn to talk about it. Wolff asks:

How can the student's mind and sensibilities be propelled through experience that will reveal and structure the many facets of his daily visual life and finally bring him the pleasures and satisfactions of independent aesthetic perception? ... Aesthetic elements both in daily life and in art are not self-evident but require an intense and complex visual exertion that cannot be turned on at selected moments... but must be the normal function of a perpetually inquisitive and perceptive eye (Wolff 1965: 225-226).

This suggests that what is needed is a training in visual perceptiveness that makes us generally sensitive to how meaning is made. In my research I came across an approach to training general visual perceptiveness that comes from a Fine Art basis. The Imbali Visual Literacy Project in Johannesburg trains teachers to teach Art at schools, emphasizing the need for general perceptiveness training. The project posits that 'very often we "look" but do not "see". It is easy to gloss over details and take some aspects of what we see for granted. Part of becoming visually literate involves sensitizing our eyes and thinking carefully about what we are looking at' (Imbali Materials 2000). The skills and vocabulary of Fine Art are used to talk about all kinds of visual perceptiveness. McLuhan, Hutchon and McLuhan's *The world as your classroom* (1980) introduce the idea of using the Fine Art concept of figure/ground as a means of training critical

perception. In this method, applicable to all modes of engagement, not just the subject, but the context of what is being perceived is shown to be important to the meaning. "Figure" and "ground" are not intended as categories, but as 'tools that will help... to discover the structure and properties of situations' (McLuhan 1980: 31). The value of this approach is that room is made for cultural differences in visual representation, for subjective experience, and also that it does not limit the kinds of subjects to which skills in all kinds of perceptual modes can be applied.

#### *1.4.2 Whereto from here?*

The visual "literacy" debate seems to bring an unpleasant sense of disruption to a field that is in need, as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) say, of a unifying discourse. The point made by these dissenting voices is that we currently engage with the world, both natural and human-made, in an unbalanced way, drawing excessively on verbal ways of knowing and dismissing perceptual ways of knowing. Engaging the possibility that there are other ways of knowing points to a potentially more holistic educational approach, where the whole body, not just the left brain, is seen as integral to the process. Bringing in the whole body, however, requires a massive paradigm shift. This shift from the verbal to the visual, however, appears to be happening in spheres other than the academic and the educational, and these may find they have no choice but to make the shift, or risk becoming irrelevant. Victor Papanek tells us that 'we need to come to our senses again' (Papanek 1995: 104) in order to have a complete understanding of our world, whatever the context. Without being guided in learning to "come to our senses", the visual turn of Western culture may simply become overwhelming. Williams (2000) suggests that the current focus of the education system on the rational, left-brained mind has left the intuitive mind vulnerable to exploitation.

The media... exploit our *visual illiteracy* and our need for intuitive experience. As substitute educators, media exploit the power of our need for intuitive/visual experience to tap directly into our *intuitive void* and our preconscious memories (Williams 2000: 121).

It seems that a common way of speaking about all of this - a vocabulary that leaves room for cultural difference and which does not trap us in ways of thinking that belong to other modes - is an urgent necessity for progress to be made in the thinking around the visual mode. As Stafford puts it, 'The newfound power and ubiquity of images calls for innovations in teaching and for altering venerable but unexamined epistemological models and textual metaphors ("codes," "alphabets," "letters," "spelling," "grammar")' (Stafford 1996: 22). Added to this, the idea of being empowered, not just to analyze and understand images, but to synthesize and to have access to the means of productive synthesis, is one that continues to arise in writing around visual literacy and the visual mode. Any moves towards the creation of a common means with which to talk about visuals needs to include a "vocabulary" of productive visual communication skills.

#### ***1.4.3 Multimodal meaning-making***

Earlier in this chapter the idea of a whole-body engagement with the world and the necessity to engage our somatic experience was discussed. For this to happen, Gunther Kress says that it is necessary to 'insist on uncoupling the link, in existing common sense, of cognition and language, in which the former is thought to depend on the latter, and not be fully possible without it.' (Kress 1997: 43) His position is that

all modes enable cognition, or, cognition is possible, takes place in all modes - but differently so. That is the central point: written language enables one form of cognition; drawing another; colour as a medium another; the production of physical objects and their interactive use yet others (Kress 1997: 43).

For Kress the increasing dominance of the visual in the realm of public communication means that linguistics is no longer adequate for its analysis or description and that semiotics must now be the means for understanding the essentially multimodal forms that make up the "new social landscape of communication" (Kress 1997). In illustrating the centrality of multimodality, he makes the point that purely linguistic tools are not even adequate for a full understanding of written language:

Writing demands a range of skills to do with display, spatial design, spatial orientation, and so on, nearly all of which go unrecognized in discussions of the learning of writing. The significance of the page as a (visual) unit in written texts as much as in overtly visual texts is hardly discussed, but it is of fundamental importance for full control of writing. Consequently, the knowledge gained in the making of images of this kind cannot be overestimated. ... As texts draw more and more overtly on visual means of communication, the skills and knowledges of visual design and display will need to be fostered as a central part of any literacy curriculum (Kress 1997: 57-58).

Breaking the inevitable connection between cognition and language seems to leave space for the development of ways of thinking that could be most liberating and productive. In *Before writing: rethinking the paths to literacy* (1997) Kress observes the evidence of his own preschool, pre-literate children's "bodily knowing", demonstrated in the meaning-making activities which constitute their play. He documents the ways in which these children make their own meanings with "what is to hand" - with whatever mode or form they find to be convenient for the meaning they intend. He is concerned that, although during their play children develop a multiplicity of meaning-making skills before they begin school, these abilities systematically dwindle as alphabet literacy is learned. This loss seems absurd when one recognizes that the "communicational landscape" of today demands much more than basic alphabet literacy, and, indeed, alphabet literacy is in need itself of ability in other modes.

Multimodality is an absolute fact of children's semiotic practices. It is what they do; it is how they understand meaning-making; and the complexities of that mode of production are not a problem for them. The problem lies in our current firmly established common sense about literacy and what it is. Only we can fix *that* problem (Kress 1997: 137-138).

Kress does not want to do away with alphabet literacy. On the contrary, he recognizes that as visuals continue to become dominant, writing is likely to become the medium of the power élite and therefore it is essential that learners become highly competent in this medium. With this in mind, he outlines a new literacy curriculum, based on a social semiotic theory of meaning-making that assumes the centrality of multimodality to literacy. This curriculum requires an approach to literacy that can answer the following question:

What are the needs and demands which are likely to be made of language or literacy in the coming decades, and how can we make sure that these young people have the necessary resources to participate fully and productively in the making of their meanings - and in their remaking of their literacy resources? (Kress 1997: 151).

A literacy curriculum like this requires students who are able, not just to learn certain critical and performance skills in order to be literate, but who are 'creative, innovative, productive, acting out of their perceived needs' (*ibid.*: 151). Considering visual literacy in the light of this question would require a broad application of the concept, involving all kinds of experience. The visual mode would be an incredibly rich means with which to approach every aspect of engagement with the world. Not only printed or moving images would be relevant to the visual mode, but, for instance, the experience of walking into a sun-dappled forest, the uneasy feeling a low-ceilinged office gives, the layout of a supermarket, the position of the principal's office, the cut of his suit and the quality of his swagger, would all be possible points of insight.

### ***1.5 Chapter Summary***

This chapter's intention is to show the vast and sprawling discourse around visual literacy, as well as to try to identify some of the key issues governing that discourse.

From the literature, the following salient points emerged:

- The concept of visual literacy is a contentious one and there remains a lack of broad consensus as to its nature and purpose;
- There is consensus, however, that there has been an explosion of visual information and that ways of talking about, understanding, analyzing, harnessing, using and producing it need to be found;
- Education is an appropriate field of study from which to approach visual literacy as it is able to span all the multitude of disciplines that have vested interests in the subject;
- In order to engage with the full potential of the visual mode, a shift from a verbal paradigm to one that acknowledges the multimodal nature of all communication will need to be made.

Drawing on the insights gained from this literature review, the chapters that follow will critically appraise the way that Curriculum 2005 has approached visual literacy, attempting to show that this curriculum does not lay a solid groundwork for educators concerned with issues of visual literacy. Although I will give a general impression of how a sample of educators understand visual literacy issues, I have chosen to specifically examine the approach that the educational publishing industry takes to the visual mode. Part of this examination will include my own experience as an illustrator of educational texts. To highlight and contrast aspects of the current approach in educational publishing, I will look at an American text which documents the process of creating a series of school textbooks whose publishers foregrounded the importance of the visual mode. I will supplement this with my personal experience of working on textbooks when the visual aspect was given serious consideration. From this I will suggest ways in which educational publishing could possibly lead the way in visual literacy education.

## Chapter 2 VISUAL LITERACY AND CURRICULUM

Although most people don't think about it that way, the school curriculum is fundamentally a mind-altering device. It's a device for changing minds, changing the way people think. Moreover, schools are not just for changing the way people think, but for improving the way people think (Eisner 1990: 41-42).

Curriculum 2005 (hereafter C2005) is informed by 66 Specific Outcomes, which can be seen as a kind of "wish list" for the children of South Africa. These Outcomes (there are about 8 for each Learning Area) reflect the kinds of skills that the curriculum planners and developers felt would be desirable in South African learners. Certain terms and phrases, such as "apply", "show critical understanding", "demonstrate an understanding" and "evaluate", appear frequently amongst these Outcomes. These reflect the ethos of critical and applied engagement that the curriculum appears to wish to engender. If we think of C2005 in terms of Eisner's definition of curriculum, we get an impression that the curriculum intends to improve the way people think by providing them with the skills that enable them to engage critically with whatever they encounter. The Outcomes do not specify content that needs to be learned in each Learning Area, instead they all work together to outline the kind of disposition towards the world and its inhabitants that a learner coming under the influence of this curriculum should develop. Patrick Slatterly quotes Smith (1988) who says that 'education must not simply tell us what we are, but most significantly, what we hope to become' (Slatterly 1995: 73). There is an emphasis in C2005 on the porousness of the boundaries between the Learning Areas, so that the idea of the interconnectedness of knowledge and skills is part of the disposition to be developed. In this chapter I will show that the underdeveloped and confused understanding of visual literacy displayed in C2005 has resulted in the loss of the cross-curricular learning, thinking and meaning-making abilities that the visual mode has to offer. By isolating different aspects of the visual mode in separate Learning Areas, and by not fully acknowledging the fact that one can learn through aesthetic experience, C2005 neglects the development of an important, and possibly crucial, facet of a learner's disposition.

## 2.1 C2005 and visual literacy

C2005 has explicitly included the notion of visual literacy in its policy documents, specifically in the Literacy, Language and Communication Learning Area (hereafter LLC) and the Arts and Culture Learning Area (hereafter A&C). I would argue, however, that the way that it has been included does not appear to be consistent, and that the curriculum's description of visual literacy is frustratingly vague and nondescript. Also, the concept is explicitly available only in two Learning Areas and the possibility of its cross-curricular use is not investigated. The almost casual manner in which visual literacy has been included in the curriculum leaves teachers and materials planners with a vague sense that visual literacy should be made use of, but with no real understanding of how to implement this kind of competence. In my field study and in a subsequent chapter I will illustrate how the lack of a clear and unambiguous understanding of the visual mode in C2005 has impacted on educational publishing as well as on other areas of education.

In some Learning Areas it is clear where the curriculum sees the use of the visual mode as appropriate, namely in LLC and A&C, but this mode's potential to be integrated across the curriculum is far from realized. Even when the visual mode is clearly essential to what is being learned, the curriculum does not acknowledge that visual literacy could be extended to include such a use. For example, in the Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences Learning Area (hereafter MLMMS), pattern recognition is dealt with extensively, but this is not described as a visual literacy skill. Even in LLC and A&C where visual literacy is overtly included, the way in which it is discussed demonstrates the narrowness of C2005's understanding of the concept. In summary then, the definitions and applications of visual literacy in these Learning Areas are narrow and poorly integrated, and instances when the visual mode could be used in other Learning Areas have been ignored. This should make it clear that C2005 has an inadequate understanding of visual literacy. Nevertheless, reading closely, one can see that there are already existing frameworks within the curriculum that could provide for a broader, more exciting and relevant application of the visual mode across the curriculum. What is

necessary for this to work, however, is a much better understanding of the concept of visual literacy, in all the rich diversity of opinion on the matter.

### *2.1.1 Definition of visual literacy*

As I have attempted to show in my literature review, visual literacy is not a unified field of study with a core theory and a body of literature upon which to draw. C2005 is therefore entitled, if it wishes, to develop its own understanding of visual literacy, based on its own particular needs and purposes. Because no categorical definition of visual literacy exists, it might seem unfair to hold C2005's version of visual literacy up to critical scrutiny and comparison with other definitions and ideas. However, the curriculum's evident lack of a well-formulated position on the subject leads one to conclude that C2005 was not intending to position itself as a pioneer in visual literacy education. One can therefore assume that its understanding of visual literacy draws, at least to some extent, on other opinions in this area of study. In this critique I will assume that C2005 intended to use a fairly mainstream understanding of visual literacy, and I will therefore draw from a definition that I have identified as such.

In the literature review I identified a mainstream understanding of visual literacy as the IVLA website's use of Fransecky and Debes's answer to the question "what is visual literacy?". This understanding is summed up by Schamber (1991), who draws on Fransecky and Debes, identifying three abilities necessary for visual literacy:

- Reading and interpreting visual symbols and syntax
- Writing or composing visual messages, and
- Evaluating the impact of visual communication (in Abraham 2000: 12).

Judging from the vocabulary used in this summary, this understanding assumes that the visual mode has certain language-like properties and that visual literacy, like language, has a system of communication and analysis that can be learned. It also assumes that there is a particular vocabulary, drawing on the discourse of language, with which to understand visual material.

### 2.1.2 Basic Definitions in C2005

Visual literacy is included in C2005 on the basis of its being part of the expanded definition of literacy, described in all phases of the policy documents as follows:

Initially "literacy" was seen as a cognitive process that enables reading, writing and numeracy. In this document the use of the term "literacy" has expanded to include several kinds of literacies across all Learning Areas. "Literacies" stress the issue of access to the world and knowledge through development of multiple capacities within all of us to make sense of our worlds through whatever means we have, not only texts and books (WCED all phases 1997).

This definition takes an approach to literacy that is broadly inclusive of all modes of learning and understanding, and seems to draw to some extent on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1985) and the "new literacy". The list that follows expands on the kinds of literacies that are part of this broad approach:

Examples of kinds of literacies:

- Language literacy: The Interim Policy document for ECD affirms that the overarching goal of language development is affective [sic] communication. The focus will be on the improvement of learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.
- Cultural literacy: Cultural, social and ideological values that shape our reading of texts.
- Critical literacy: The ability to respond critically to the intentions, content and possible effects of messages and texts on the reader.
- **Visual literacy: The interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal (body) language, etc. [my emphasis]**
- Media literacy: The reading of e.g. TV and film as cultural messages.
- Numerical literacy: The ability to use and interpret numbers.
- Computer literacy: The ability to use and access information from computers. (WCED Foundation Phase 1997: 17-18).

Three things interest me about the definition of visual literacy in this list: firstly, it is interesting that only body language is described as being "non-verbal". This suggests that the idea of images being language-like has been extended to thinking of images as *part* of language. This kind of thinking can result in a very literal interpretation of the visual "literacy" analogy. Here, linguistic tools like syntax and semantics are applied to the visual media in order to have a means of talking about them, in much the way that Horn

(see literature review) seems to propose. The second interesting point is that visual literacy is only described as the ability to interpret visuals, and nothing is added about the ability to create communication in the visual mode. Lastly, it is also interesting that no comment is added about the connections between the literacies. The relevance of visual literacy skills to media literacy, or of critical or cultural literacy to any of these is not made explicit. The way these literacies are listed suggests that each one is a discrete category with its own set of skills to be acquired. A closer reading of the curriculum will reveal a more developed application of visual literacy. Nonetheless, the discrepancy between the overt statements on visual literacy on the one hand, and the way the visual mode is included in some of the Specific Outcomes, on the other, points to the fact that visual literacy has been poorly integrated in the curriculum. All of these points lie, I believe, at the heart of the lack of a clear approach to visual literacy in C2005. I will begin to examine this approach by using Schamber's summary, quoted above, of a mainstream understanding of visual literacy.

## **2.2 Schamber's summary**

### ***2.2.1 Language and the visual mode***

Schamber's first summary point is that 'reading and interpreting visual symbols and syntax' is necessary in order to be visually literate. This point draws on vocabulary associated with language literacy to talk about visual literacy. An understanding of visual communication as language-like is quite standard, and it is not at all surprising to find this in C2005. I would like, however, to look at some of the consequences of this understanding and how it can impact on Schamber's second point, which is that 'writing or composing visual messages' is part of being visually literate. It is interesting to note that visual literacy has only been explicitly included in two of the Learning Areas, namely LLC and in A&C. It would seem, however, from the overt statements on visual literacy in each Learning Area, that they both take different approaches to visual literacy. All phases of LLC describe visual literacy as

The interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal (body) language, etc. [*The term "text" is similarly expanded and "visual texts" are described as including*] posters, cartoons, advertisements, environmental print (e.g. road signs, signs on electronic equipment, icons), maps, diagrams, and charts etc. (WCED, all phases 1997).

The focus in LLC appears to be on learning the visual skills that enable one to make sense of certain visual texts. Some of these skills are to do with learning visual conventions, like those seen on electronic equipment, cartoons, maps, etc. and, although this only emerges in the Specific Outcomes, other visual skills are critical in nature. On the other hand, A&C (all phases) reads as follows in respect of visual literacy:

The Arts and Culture are at all times concerned with expression and communication. *Communication* can take place in many forms. Multiple forms of communication, including the mass-media, have been noted. In this document, communication is also referred to as literacies e.g.

- Visual literacy
- Spatial literacy
- Kinaesthetic/movement literacy
- Aural literacy
- Oral literacy

For this purpose the study of *Literature* as a form of art and cultural expression is included. Literature is integral to the study of certain arts such as drama. The "reading" of various texts such as film or visual art works forms part of this Learning Area (WCED, all phases 1997).

From this rather awkwardly-written statement, I gather that A&C has its focus on the expressive and communicative aspect of visual literacy, with a secondary interest in the interpretive or "reading" aspect. There seems to be a developmental scale, on which the Foundation Phase is concerned mostly with expressive aspects of communication in the Arts, while the Intermediate and Senior Phases are increasingly concerned with learning and applying critical and analytical skills.

### **2.2.2 *Communication and productiveness***

In LLC, a learner's experience of communication with visuals appears to be conceived of as a more-or-less one-way process, where the learner is to see and interpret a visual message, with little room for a learner's visual productiveness. The approach taken in

A&C, on the other hand, includes an "expressive" aspect of visual literacy. I would like to suggest that this splitting of the elements of interpretation and communication into separate Learning Areas is one of the problems of a linguistic understanding of visual literacy. In LLC, the visual mode is treated like a tool of textual analysis to be applied to certain kinds of "texts". While LLC is comfortable with the analogy of "reading" a diagram, a map, a movie or a cartoon, the visual mode has a productive component that does not fit as easily into the analogy of "writing". To deal with this, the productive component is labelled "expressive" and shifted to its traditional place in A&C. Kress writes that the visual texts produced by learners 'tend to be treated, with entirely good intentions, as *expression* of the children's feelings, desires, emotions, rather than as forms of *communication*' (Kress 1997: 9). When serving an expressive function, the curriculum documents appear to legitimize a learner's production of visual communication, but only in the realm of "the arts", because visual productiveness does not easily fit into a language Learning Area. And although A&C says that 'communication is also referred to as literacies', it seems that LLC considers "language literacy" the only means for full communication.

This illustrates Stafford's (1996) objection to the use of the literacy and language analogy when talking about the visual mode. The use of terminology from the linguistic paradigm tends to cause one to fall into assumptions and habits, such being unable to think that perception and cognition could be possible without the intermediary of language. Stafford does not argue that there is no place for language. Indeed, it is essential for much articulation of what is perceived. But if language is assumed to be necessary in order to perceive, it is possible that the potentials unique to other modes will be lost because they become invisible when looked at through a language lens. Later in this chapter I will draw attention to places in the curriculum where the visual mode is put to valuable use, but because a language lens has been used, these instances are overlooked, and the concept of visual literacy is therefore impoverished.

### 2.2.3 *Productiveness and visual literacy*

Schamber's second summary point of what is required for visual literacy is to do with 'writing or composing visual messages'. Unsurprisingly, the Foundation Phase includes a lot of productive work in the visual mode. Nevertheless, even in this phase it appears that, particularly in the LLC, this is a problematic aspect of visual literacy. Apart from its overt omission from the description of visual literacy, the problems begin to emerge when assessment of visual literacy is considered. Kress (1997) points out that the production of visual communication systematically declines throughout the years of schooling, and that even when learners are most visually productive, their work is not given as serious attention as written work is. He notes that

the generally held view - a least as it appears in the evidence of practices in schools - is that images are decoration, expression of feelings, emotions; pretty or not so pretty; but *not* explicit communication. That appears clearly in the comments of teachers on the early writing of children, which nearly always have images with the verbal text... By contrast, teacher's comments on the images are never 'corrections'... If the visual was seen as communication, then in my opinion, teachers would be 'correcting' (Kress 1997: 135).

The confusing messages about visual literacy and the lack of a program to provide teachers and learners with the vocabulary and rationale for the use of the visual mode leaves teachers with no sense of how to evaluate visual work. Even when children are encouraged to be visually productive, as they are in the Foundation Phase, their products are not considered evaluation material. It is interesting to compare this attitude to visual productiveness with that of, for instance, the Montessorian method (Standing 1971). Here, active and productive sensory engagement is considered essential to learning and also to the development of abstract thinking skills. Visual productiveness, therefore, is not treated as a decoration of a written text, nor an indication of a child's fine-motor development, but as an important and valuable place of learning.

The progressive decline of the use of the visual in C2005 can be illustrated by comparing one of the Critical Outcomes across the Foundation, Intermediate, and Senior Phases. The Critical Outcomes for each of the three phases are intended to frame the broad

content of each of the Learning Areas within that phase. Critical Outcome 5 of the Foundation Phase explicitly includes the visual mode as a communication tool:

Learners will... communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills **in various modes** [my emphasis]. (WCED Foundation Phase:10).

The Intermediate and Senior Phase Critical Outcome 5 reads:

Learners will... communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills **in the modes of oral and/or written presentation** [my emphasis]. (WCED: p13&15 respectively).

In the Foundation Phase this Critical Outcome appears to be concerned with the ability to communicate by any means, including the visual. By the Intermediate and Senior Phases, although visual skills are to be used to 'communicate effectively', the modes suitable for communication have been narrowed down to only 'oral and/or written presentation'.

I must conclude that Schamber's second requirement for visual literacy does not appear to be dealt with effectively in C2005. It would seem that "reading" visuals gets assigned to LLC and "writing" visuals is considered A&C territory, resulting in a fragmented approach to visual literacy. The curriculum seems to assume that teachers and learners have the necessary knowledge and vocabulary with which to "read" and "write" visuals, but no programme has been made available to give learners and teachers a theoretical understanding of visual literacy concepts. Schamber's third summary point - that a visually literate person should be skilled in 'evaluating the impact of visual communication' - is therefore also neglected by C2005. There is no fund of knowledge provided for teachers in order to evaluate learners' visual communication, or to be able to teach learners to make evaluations.

### **2.3 Discrepancies**

C2005's overtly-stated definitions of visual literacy have been shown to be deficient in terms of a mainstream understanding of the subject. A closer look at the LLC and A&C documents, however, will reveal some Specific Outcomes and Performance Indicators

that fit quite well into the mainstream understanding. This breakdown between the stated understanding of visual literacy and the operational understanding indicates, I suggest, a lack of clarity on the purpose and need for visual literacy in the curriculum.

For instance, space has been made in LLC for 'written **or alternative** [my emphasis] responses', and there are certain Specific Outcomes that call for a certain amount of visual productiveness in that area. In LLC (Senior Phase), for example, Assessment Criterion 6 of Specific Outcome 2 ('Learners show critical awareness of language use') deals with the identification and analysis of 'visual and other non-verbal/non-manual features of texts'. For this Assessment Criterion, activities are suggested where learners draw posters, analyzing them for their design features, 'pop videos/advertisements/news broadcasts/films and videos' are analyzed, symbolic implications of colours are examined, 'photographs/models/sculptures' are analyzed for their 'mood, tone and intent' and the effect of changing elements within these is considered. Also, texts are compared and 'the effectiveness of the visual and non-verbal features' are analyzed, and finally, the question 'how do they manipulate the learner?' is asked. This deals with all the aspects of Schamber's summary, and with some issues of multimodality too. Possibly it is because this aspect of visual literacy seems to be considered the most urgent for learners that this particular Specific Outcome covers all the visual literacy aspects so completely. But here the discrepancies and the lack of theoretical support become glaringly obvious, and the usefulness of the Specific Outcome is therefore questionable. Elsewhere in the curriculum "visual literacy" and "media literacy" are described as different competencies, but here they are melded into one. No explanation about the appropriate application of terms is given and, with no prior induction, the mastery of a critical metalanguage is simply assumed in this Specific Outcome. Teachers and learners seem to be expected to intuitively know enough about 'design features' and the elements of 'mood, tone and intent' to have a fruitful discussion.

Another discrepancy is found in the Foundation Phase, Specific Outcome 4. The Specific Outcome seems to assume a broad understanding of how meaning is made and that information can be multimodal in nature. Assessment Criterion 4 explains the

importance of understanding how the quality of paper, illustrations, binding, as well as the visual logic of the story and illustrations, all add to the meaning of the book. Assessment Criterion 3 in the same Specific Outcome, however, says that learners need to 'understand that illustrations **supplement the text** [my emphasis]' - directly contradicting the inclusive definition of "text" earlier in the document. And even though the Foundation Phase is liberal with its description of modes in which effective communication might happen, in LLC of that phase, item 3.6 reads: 'The seven outcomes [for LLC] are achieved through the integrated use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills' (LLC Foundation Phase: 31). Visual skills are not included in this list at all, in spite of having been included in one of the Critical Outcomes for the Foundation Phase. Despite some indications that the Foundation Phase of LLC might take more of a multimodal approach than the later phases, there is still a sense that the visual mode is regarded as a conduit for the verbal mode. Pictures are interpreted and understood in terms of the way they add to the verbal text, and visual productiveness is seen as a precursor to the development of verbal skills such as character and plot analysis.

#### **2.4. The Visual Mode beyond C2005**

Clearly, C2005's understanding and integration of the concept of visual literacy is confused and fragmented. There are places in the curriculum where the visual mode could be used to great effect, but within the general lack of clarity of intent, these possibilities are hard to distinguish. Teachers and other educators therefore tend to use their common-sense understanding of visual literacy, assuming that it is about learning critical coping skills for viewing the media and reading graphs, road signs and maps. Even amongst some of the highly qualified educators who feature in my field study, many of whom state that visual literacy is something they find relevant to their work, this kind of understanding was quite common. There is nothing in the curriculum that points to visual meaning being held in, for instance, the texture of the paper and the kind of font with which you choose to print your CV, or the feeling you get when you see a soaring arch, or the meaning inherent in the way the school library is set out, or what meaning can be seen in the materials chosen to build the housing development across the road.

The visual mode is reduced to map reading skills, reading graphs and critical analysis of the popular media. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine this more closely, I would like to suggest that, not only would a different approach to the concept of visual literacy allow the concept to be applied across the curriculum, but that in C2005 as it stands, there already lie the seeds for this different approach. Kress's ideas about multimodality and his curriculum of representation and communication (1997) present an exciting counterpoint to the narrow, skills-based, language-based understanding of visual literacy currently in C2005.

#### *2.4.1 The visual mode across the curriculum*

As the visual challenges the verbal mode's dominance of the media and of information presentation in general, people are increasingly required to think and communicate in modes apart from the verbal, particularly the visual. Kress (1997) makes the point that the multimodal qualities of language and language skills are increasingly pertinent to literacy. He says that

Writing demands a range of skills to do with display, spatial design, spatial orientation, and so on, nearly all of which go unrecognized in discussions of the learning of writing. The significance of the page as a (visual) unit in written texts as much as in overtly visual texts is hardly discussed, but it is of fundamental importance for full control of writing. Consequently, the knowledge gained in the making of images of this kind cannot be overestimated. ... As texts draw more and more overtly on visual means of communication, the skills and knowledges of visual design and display will need to be fostered as a central part of any literacy curriculum (Kress 1997: 57-58).

C2005 appears to have made steps in the direction of acknowledging that today's communicational landscape requires a new understanding of literacy by listing a selection of literacies. However, as I have suggested, these sub-literacies tend to be dominated by the language-based assumptions implicit in the "literacy" analogy. A multimodal approach to literacy no longer assumes that language is the true and universal mode of communication, but that a mode of communication must be chosen because it is the mode that best serves the purpose. People who are literate in terms of this multimodal understanding, then, have at their command a variety of meaning-making skills, as well

as the understanding of how to use them to best express their intended meaning. Kress points out that these kinds of abilities are not foreign to us; in fact, they are our earliest experience of making meaning. We spend much of our childhood engaged in play activity in which we use whatever we have around us to mean whatever we need it to mean in our game, exploring the ways in which we are able to physically and imaginatively relate to these things. This ability to make meaning in many modes begins to be stunted, however, when school begins, where progressively fewer things are made available with which to make meaning, apart from the verbal and the numerical. Wolff says the following in this regard:

The child soon learns that the total visual absorption and wonder with which, for example, he confronts a water buffalo for the first time is a private and non-scholastic matter, and that the main issue is to give the beast a name and a habitat, and to spell it all correctly. ... The pedagogical anxiety to induce quick mastery of the signs and symbols of communicable knowledge at this early stage, introduces the imbalance between sensory and verbal-cerebral factors that anticipates the almost total emphasis placed on conceptual learning in the high school and college (Wolff 1965: 223).

Kress points out the absurdity of a world which increasingly demands people who can think and express themselves in a variety of modes, but where schooling seems oblivious to, even suppressing other modes. Kress's curriculum of representation and communication is based on 'a theory of meaning-making in which individuals are the maker and not merely the users of systems of communication' (Kress 1997: 163). Core assumptions in his curriculum are that all texts are multimodal and that individuals will be able to make informed decisions about the resources of their systems of communication, both in understanding and production. A point to note is that the emphasis goes beyond analysis, towards an understanding of design: 'In the new communicational landscape of texts made out of a multiplicity of modes, forms, and materials, the emphasis will be on *design* rather than on reproductive competence (or even critique).' (*ibid*: 162-163). Papanek (1985) describes what design can mean:

All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity. The planning and patterning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process. Any attempt to separate design, to make it a thing-by-itself, works counter to the fact that design is the primary underlying matrix of life. Design is composing an epic poem, executing a mural, painting a masterpiece, writing a concerto. But design is also cleaning and reorganizing a desk drawer, pulling an impacted tooth, baking an apple pie, choosing sides for a backlot baseball game, and educating a child. (Papanek 1985: 3)

Kress' curriculum is not about learning the skills that make one "visually literate", although there are skills that can be learned, but it is about gaining access to all kinds of meaning-making resources, applicable in every sphere.

#### **2.4.2 Art education and visual literacy across the curriculum**

Because of the problems that seem to come from identifying too closely with the literacy analogy, perhaps it is necessary to turn away from the language paradigm for access to these meaning-making resources and skills. Perhaps it is more appropriate to approach visual literacy, or design education, through the vocabulary and understanding of art education. Stafford (1996) argues that those who practice or critically engage with art are those who are most equipped to make sense of our increasingly visually rich environment. She says that it is the responsibility of 'imagists ... to codify principles and practices that would reintroduce an awareness of craft, tangibility, and physicality into a society growing accustomed to seamless spectacle' (Stafford 1996: 72) so that visuals become accessible and meaningful. Art education is traditionally marginalized in education curricula, but perhaps the concept of *design*, as described by Kress, with its implications of economic usefulness, could effectively smuggle the rich insights of art education into the whole curriculum. Maxine Greene (1978) writes that art educators' concerns should be: 'to enhance qualitative awareness, to release imagination, and to free people to see, shape, and transform. [She hopes for] the kinds of curricula that permit an easy and articulated transaction between making and attending' (in Slattery 1995: 221).

In the course of my research I came across a visual literacy project that seemed to do just what Greene hopes for. The Imbali Visual Literacy Project, headed by Ruth Sack, trains

teachers, none of whom have taught art before, to teach art in schools, with the following approach to visual literacy:

Visual literacy is the basis of one of the critical forms of thinking and knowing. It is important to develop the learners' ability to see with understanding - to look at objects and images in the world around them and be able to make informed judgements, to understand visual modes of communication. It is important to expose them to, and to *talk about*, all kinds of visual material (Imbali Project materials, April 2000).

Because of the fact that one of the primary means of engaging with almost every facet of the world is our ability to see, it makes sense that this should be the ability that should be primarily valued and nurtured. Here, the Imbali Project places value on 'looking, perceiving, on conscious visual exploration of the world around the learner - as much as, and in part of, the process of making art'. Although their main focus is art education, the project acknowledges that the development of perceptual skills is vital to all critical engagement. By looking not only at art or craft works, but at things like the spaces in our environment, 'walls, fences and boundaries' (Imbali materials 2000), landscapes, clothing, patterns of life, culture and architecture, critical reasoning tools are learned that can be applied in other areas. In Kress's terms, this is an understanding of *design*. In Greene's terms, perhaps what is being learned is "wide-awakeness" (1995) - an alertness to what meaning we make through our active, whole-body engagement with the world.

#### ***2.4.2.1 A Phenomenological approach to curriculum***

The kind of approach to making meaning promoted by C2005, and by most education systems, seems to rely on the learning and application of prescribed systems and knowledge. In contrast to this, Slattery says that 'Knowledge is not logically ordered and waiting to be discovered, rather it is constructed in experiences of the whole body and being' (Slattery 1995: 214). This is the approach to meaning-making that both the Imbali project and Kress seem to take, and I would suggest that this approach is a phenomenological one. Phenomenology, Slattery writes, 'is based on the assumption that we cannot speculate about what beings are in themselves' (1995: 218) because they are only brought into the fullness of their being when they are perceived, and perception is



subjective in nature. Kress says that making meaning is an 'active, transformative practice', where a child learns to apply 'materials which are already culturally formed' thereby becoming 'agents of their own cultural and social making'. The child's active engagement with what he chooses to make meaning with, whether culturally formed or not, results in 'a transformation of the sign-maker's identity, their subjectivity' (Kress 1997: 13). In other words, nothing has an intrinsic meaning. It is only through our active engagement with it that meaning is made - it is brought into being. Merleau-Ponty (in Slattery 1995) speaks of the embodied consciousness, where the 'consciousness of rationality' can be recovered by paying attention to our active and sensory engagement with the world. In order for this to happen, however, we must lose the idea that language is the only medium in which cognition can happen, and 'we need to acknowledge ... that perceptual and pictorial shapes are not only translations of thought products but the very flesh and blood of thinking itself' (Arnheim 1977: 134). It is therefore vital that a curriculum should enable learners to become more sensitive to their perceptions. Greene says

What seems crucial is the noticing, the active insertion of one's perception into the lived world... To ponder this is to become convinced that much of education as we know it is an education in forgetfulness. Distracting the young from their own perceived landscapes and shapes, we teachers insist on the givenness of predetermined explanatory frames. We loosen the connections between the young and the objects, images, articulations, and other people with which they have been enmeshed, that is, "the true conditions of objectivity itself." (Greene 1995: 74).

Kress argues that if other modes of knowing, apart from the verbal, are to be acknowledged, our synaesthetic abilities need to be encouraged by the curriculum. Synaesthesia is the ability to experience with one or more of our senses what we might consciously consider to belong to another sensory faculty. For instance, one might find oneself associating colours with certain smells, or attributing textures to certain tastes or sounds. The communications environment has become filled with communications that intentionally appeal to these different modes of understanding - for instance, some shops use smells to encourage shoppers to linger, or they play music which encourages them to move about faster, and advertisers use colour to skillfully bring associations to mind. 'School by contrast encourages the use of language, written language, and more and more

so as children get older. But even where a particular medium is favoured, there is constant transition, translation, transduction between different modes - in the brain, even if not necessarily visibly on paper or with other media or modes' (Kress 1997: 39). This understanding of how the mind can work is not to be found in C2005. In A&C, different ways of communication and experiencing things are broken up into discrete categories, namely:

- Visual literacy
- Spatial literacy
- Kinaesthetic/movement literacy
- Aural literacy
- Oral literacy

This is quite contrary to Kress' ideas, implying that a level of optimal proficiency can be attained in each "literacy", separate from the others. In contrast to this kind of list of proficiencies that the curriculum deems necessary to A&C, Greene writes the following: 'To conceive the arts in relation to curriculum is to think of a deepening and expanding mode of tuning-in' (Greene 1995: 103). 'Tuning in' certainly can happen in each of these "literacies", but not in isolation from each other or in isolation from the body-subject. This is not to say that there should be no disciplines or structures of knowledge, but only that 'at the same time, there have to be the kinds of grounded interpretations possible only to those willing to abandon already constituted reason, willing to feel and to imagine, to open the windows and go in search' (Greene 1995: 104).

### **2.5 Kress's curriculum and C2005**

If C2005 were to be looked at through the lens of Kress' curriculum of representation and communication, much could be found that would be congruous with its aims. There are tantalizing instances, in all Learning Areas, of real possibility for an exciting use of the visual mode. An in-depth piecing-together of such a curriculum from what already exists is far beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a few instances can be pointed out:

In MMLMS (all phases), for instance, there are the seeds of a curriculum which teaches the learner how to look, to see with intelligence and insight. The emphasis is on

recognizing mathematical sense in patterns, shapes, space, location etc., so this Learning Area is effectively teaching learners how to look with insight and intelligence. Specific Outcome 2 of the Foundation Phase, the Range Statement 1.3 says 'Identify, repeat and continue patterns of sounds, body movements, body positions, art, music and stories' (MMLMS: 121). A concept of pattern is approached through multiple modes, making it a whole body understanding, something Kress identifies as essential:

... we need to rediscover and reinstate the different possibilities of engagement with the world which are open to us as bodily humans, for all of them offer different, essential modes of being in the world - emotionally, affectively, cognitively (Kress 1997: 163).

Learning these skills is perhaps the most powerful form of visual literacy because it empowers and opens up the world, it develops bodily engagement which includes every aspect of the learner as well as making the learner responsible for the world because he is part of it (Greene 1995).

The Technology Learning Area (Tech) is also filled with possibility, much of which fits in with Kress' concept of design, which 'is oriented towards competence in innovative production in a full awareness of the complex conditions of a particular environment' (Kress 1997: 163). The rationale of Tech (Senior Phase) includes the following:

- ... the ability to evaluate technological products, processes and systems from functional, economic, ethical, social and aesthetic points of view;
- the designing and development of appropriate products, processes or systems to functional, aesthetic and other specifications set either by the learner or by others (WCED Tech: 2).

Again, these outcomes require and nurture multimodal skills that should be applied across the curriculum. The learner writing a project should be making skilled functional, ethical, social and aesthetic choices about her choice of paper, font, layout etc, understanding how these add to the meaning of the language she chooses to use and the subject matter about which she is writing about.

Another example is the rationale of the Foundation Phase of A&C, which includes list of abilities for a learner to develop, and which could read as outcomes in Kress' curriculum:

- The ability to make, recreate and invent meaning;
- The specific use of innovation, creativity and resourcefulness;
- Effective expression, communication and interaction between individuals and groups;
- A healthy sense of self, exploring individual and collective identities;
- A deepened understanding of our social and physical environment, and our place within that environment... (WCED LLC foundation phase: 191).

There is something frustrating about seeing these kinds of possibilities in C2005, because it seems that all that is needed to release them is a well-conceived definition of visual literacy. However, what is really needed is a paradigm shift so that modes of communication other than the verbal and numerical are seen to add significantly to the meaning of all contexts and situations. As my field study will indicate, a number of respondents gave heartening indications that some educators are conceiving of visual literacy issues in the kinds of terms Kress uses.

## 2.6 Summary

In this chapter I showed that C2005 provides the basis for neither a theoretical nor an operational understanding of visual literacy. Even where it has been explicitly defined, users of the curriculum are not given a clear understanding of what it is, how it is to be used, and why it is there. An inconsistent approach and a preoccupation with the language-like aspects of visual literacy have resulted in an incoherent approach to the subject. Not only is the curriculum incoherent on the subject, there is also no theoretical and practical programme for teachers and learners to become familiar with visual literacy terms and practices. I argued that some of the assumptions underlying the inclusion of visual literacy in the curriculum are the source of the incoherence - namely the idea of the visual being a "kind of literacy". A paradigm shift in the understanding of literacy is necessary, and I suggest that Kress' multimodal approach is most appropriate, demonstrating that the curriculum already contains seeds of this type of approach. I

suggest that a shift from the "visual literacy" analogy requires a different use of vocabulary, and I suggest that vocabulary from the field of image-making and art might be more appropriate.

This critique points out how in C2005, a rich source of understanding and expression is passed by, an important mode of thinking and communicating is not taught and an opportunity to break with long-maintained paradigms is not taken. Outcomes Based Education and much of C2005 is filled with the potential and, I think, the will, to embrace a broader understanding of visual literacy and the possibilities inherent in the visual mode. The way it is currently included hampers this potential. The lack of curricular focus has an impact on other educational fields too; in educational publishing, for instance, where the visual is clearly important, there is a lack of commitment to research and to the creation of policy around visual issues. The relationship between C2005's position on visual literacy and the situation in educational publishing will be examined in a subsequent chapter.

## Chapter 3 FIELD STUDY

### 3.1 Rationale and methodology

I embarked upon my field study intending to get an indication of the general understanding of the concepts "visual literacy" and "visual text", and also wanting to establish to what extent the respondents work with these concepts. These terms are used in C2005 and I was interested to find out what impact this document's tenuous grasp of the concepts has on people involved in education. I was particularly interested to get responses from people involved in publishing, as that is my area of interest and the area on which I wished to concentrate. In my questionnaire I asked whether and how the concepts "visual literacy" and "visual text" impacted on the respondent's work. I asked this question because I was interested to find out, firstly, if the respondents felt any responsibility towards visual literacy education, and secondly, to find out how people are putting these concepts into practice. My expectation was that I would find that most educators have a very simplistic concept of visual literacy and that their concern would be mostly with the manipulative visual aspects of the mass media. The questionnaire was emailed or faxed in the following form:

#### **VISUAL LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: .....

Job description: .....

1. How would you define the concept of "visual literacy"?
2. What is a "visual text"?
3. Do you feel that the above concepts are relevant to your work? If so, in what ways?
4. Other comments.

### *3.1.1 Sample selection*

I sent this questionnaire off to as broad a sample as I could find of educators who fitted my requirements. I was reasonably sure that if I canvassed the opinion of all the teachers in a few schools I would get a response which indicated an extremely low level of engagement, or even a lack of familiarity with visual literacy terms and issues. A result like this, I felt, would tell me no more than what I already suspected was true. I therefore decided to approach a wider range of people in education and for this purpose I used the delegates list from the Western Cape Education Department Literacy Indaba of July 2000. I had attended this conference and remembered that there had been a visual literacy discussion group at this conference. I knew, therefore, that there was some level of interest in the subject amongst the delegates. I sent the questionnaire to almost every delegate who had an email address, as well as to every teacher, illustrator, designer, editor, writer and publisher that I could think of. I hoped that in approaching people who would choose to attend a three-day literacy conference, I would have access to a sample of educators who make a habit of engaging with current education issues. I also hoped that I would access those educators who represent a core of influence and of expertise and that their opinion would indicate to what extent visual literacy issues are on the education agenda. Because of my professional interest, I made a particular effort to canvass the opinion of many illustrators, and made sure that the educational publishing industry was well-represented in my sample. I sent out 63 questionnaires and received 25 responses, which meant that I had a 39.7% response rate. When one considers that my respondents had a choice of whether or not to respond to my email/fax, this response rate was not poor at all.

I had some difficulty in categorizing the job descriptions of my sample, because there were a number of respondents who were approached in one capacity, but who had multiple job descriptions. Therefore, of the 20 teachers, editors, authors, illustrators and designers who responded to my questionnaire, 3 had overlapping jobs, described as: teacher/author, author/editor and author/editor/illustrator/designer. In my summary of respondents I included the first as a teacher, the second as an editor, and the third as an author, based on what their response seemed to indicate was their primary occupation.

Profession	Sent	Response
- Teachers	8	5
- Librarians	4	1
- Curriculum planners & Subject Advisors	11	1
- Teacher trainers	4	1
- Educational NGO workers	2	1
- Education academics	3	0
- Publishers	6	2
- Editors	6	3
- Authors	4	2
- Designers	5	4
- Illustrators	10	5

Most respondents were very supportive of my interest in visual literacy and wished me luck with my studies. Many thanked me for the opportunity to give some thought to these concepts and issues, and quite a few responded in great length, clearly very energized by issues around the visual, some expressing a great passion for the visual arts. Judging by the speed with which many of the responses were returned to me, a number of the respondents are clearly enthusiastic about the subject. When the responses were coming in it was a very exciting time for me, because my job is largely isolated and I seldom get the opportunity to chat with colleagues about work-related issues. Now I have engaged in further correspondence with a number of the respondents, passed articles of interest around, and plan to meet some of the interested illustrators at a later stage. My field study has therefore been fruitful in many ways, and it appears that the opportunity to express themselves around these issues made the experience enjoyable and productive for some of the respondents.

Out of respect for the good impression my respondents might like to make, I have taken the liberty of correcting some spelling and syntax errors in some of their written responses.

### 3.2 Response to question 1:

How would you define the concept of "visual literacy"?

#### 3.2.1 "Reading" pictures

Many respondents found it useful to use terms like "read", "translate" and "interpret" in their description of the concept of visual literacy. The word "analyze" was also used frequently, as was the word "decode". These respondents seemed to find the language/linguistic analogy implied by the use of the word "literacy" to be a useful one, providing them with a vocabulary with which to talk about what they do when they take note of visual information. One respondent, an editor, pointed out the similarities between reading words and "reading" images. Both have certain technicalities that need to be mastered, respectively,

spelling, grammar, symbolism, imagery, etc....[and] perspective, 3-D, depth, technique, etc.' - and in "reading", one brings certain subjectivities - taste, cultural background etc. - which influence one's experience of the meaning of what one has "read".

Only one of the respondents, a teacher, took the literacy analogy quite literally, making clear parallels between reading words and "reading" images:

As with literacy, where a code takes on a sound, visual literacy looks at the codes used in pictures and tries to understand which codes are clear and which codes are confusing to viewers.

Only 8 of the 25 respondents actually used the word "read" when talking about visual literacy. Most of those who did - 5 of the 8 - enclosed it in inverted commas when referring to "reading" images or visual media. This suggests a certain distancing from the analogy, an acknowledgement that different kinds of engagements are required for the understanding of verbal text and of images. Far more common were other words like 'understand', 'appreciate', 'comprehend', 'decipher', 'decode', 'make/construct meaning', but none of these were put in inverted commas by the respondents. I would suggest that this indicates a certain amount of discomfort with the use of the literacy analogy, despite its convenience. Perhaps these respondents would be happy to substitute the word "read" with the word "interpret". "Interpret" also comes from a language paradigm, alluding to

some kind of translation, but it seems to suggest a different kind of action from "reading". Instead of applying a set of decoding skills to a text, as one does (at a basic level of reading alphabetic signs) when reading, "interpreting" seems to be more about a general "making sense of". "Interpret" is applicable to a number of modes of perceiving, modes that one does not commonly think of as encoded; one can interpret sounds, colour choice, body language, choice of clothing etc., and these interpretations can be quite subjective, dependant on culture, education etc.

### *3.2.2 Different levels of visual literacy*

One of the authors made a distinction between a basic kind of visual literacy, which involved the ability to

interpret two-dimensional visual images as representative of three-dimensional objects [and a less basic] familiarity with Western symbol usage; eg comic shorthand such as the "swagbag" for the burglar etc.

Another author made a similar distinction, which suggested that he believes that there are levels of visual literacy, starting with the two mentioned above and becoming increasingly complex. Interestingly, both of these respondents used the words "visual shorthand" to describe what is understood on the second level of visual literacy. I would like to suggest that this second level - the interpretation of symbols and "visual shorthand" - is more-or-less what C2005 describes as "visual literacy" in its overt definitions of the concept in LLC:

The interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal (body) language, etc. [The term "text" is similarly expanded and "visual texts" are described as including] posters, cartoons, advertisements, environmental print (e.g. road signs, signs on electronic equipment, icons), maps, diagrams, and charts etc. (LLC all phases).

Admittedly, and I have shown this in the previous chapter, C2005 does expand in the Specific Outcomes and elsewhere upon this limited definition, and so perhaps it is not too surprising that so few of my respondents limited their definition of the concept so narrowly.

### 3.2.3 *Visual literacy and Media literacy*

From my analysis of C2005 I got the impression that, aside from the impoverished overt definition of visual literacy, the curriculum had a concern with the manipulative visual aspects of the mass media. This seemed to result in the slipping away of the distinction between visual literacy and media literacy in places like Specific Outcome 2, Assessment Criteria 6 (LLC Senior Phase)<sup>6</sup>. I was very surprised, then, that more respondents did not concentrate their attention on this aspect of visual literacy. Most respondents felt that skills were needed for some form of visual analysis, but this was not expressed as a need to learn coping skills for the onslaught of visual media. In fact, only one respondent commented that internet and TV culture made visual literacy more important, as 'modern society requires sophistication and shrewdness', but this was a final thought, written under the heading "Other comments". A designer talked about a visually literate person having critical skills which would enable him to 'see bias and manipulation... in visual messages'. Apart from these two comments, none of the respondents seemed to show the fearfulness of images that I expected to find, although there was a concern for learning critical and analytical skills. A teacher at a private girls' school talked about visual literacy only in terms of the textual analysis that her school uses to look at movies and videos. She talks about 'teaching children to "deconstruct" TV advertising' as well as print advertising. However, her definition of visual literacy is, interestingly enough, more dependent on *literary* than literacy skills, and seems to amount mostly to an academic exercise:

... it is a process of decoding various visual signs and symbols which represent a narrative, which itself represents a particular cultural context.

A Grade 7 teacher/author acknowledges the proliferation of visual media in her learners' lives, but motivates for visual literacy education in the following terms:

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<sup>6</sup> Criterion 6 of Specific Outcome 2 ('Learners show critical awareness of language use') deals with the identification and analysis of 'visual and other non-verbal/non-manual features of texts'. For this Assessment Criterion, activities are suggested where learners draw posters, analyzing them for their design features, 'pop videos/advertisements/news broadcasts/films and videos/ are analyzed, symbolic implications of colours are examined, 'photographs/models/sculptures' are analyzed for their 'mood, tone and intent' and the effect of changing elements within these is considered. Also texts are compared and 'the effectiveness of the visual and non-verbal features' are analyzed, and finally, the question 'how do they manipulate the learner?' is asked.

In teaching [the children] to be a part of the world, they have to be consciously taught to examine and analyze the texts around them. [These texts include]... posters, print, graffiti, symbols, signs, photos and paintings, people's facial expressions and body language, adverts, video, television, film,

She emphasizes too that her students need to be given the visual analytical skills to make sense of these texts.

### ***3.2.4 Multimodal understanding: a more holistic view***

The Grade 7 teacher mentioned above takes her understanding of visual literacy much further than any of the definitions given in C2005:

It also involves teaching children how to analyze the way a page is laid out in a book or newspaper - where the important information is placed, how pictures are cropped, how text can be spaced and then allowing them to use this knowledge in their own writing and work.

The author/editor/illustrator/designer adds to this

... being able to read a page in a book or a newspaper - columns, top to bottom, left to right, to link elements like pictures and text together according to unseen grids, colour clues etc. To understand the import of colours to engage with what the creator of a visual text had in mind in the use of particular materials, forms, techniques...

These two respondents seem to see visual literacy in terms of the multimodal understanding of literacy that Kress (1997) advocates. They understand that the visual mode is not only relevant to images, symbols and electronic media, it also has an impact on the meaning of the written text. They also seem to acknowledge that design is an important component of how meaning is made. The first of these respondents adds the element of a learner's own productiveness to her description of visual literacy. In her description of how the concepts of visual literacy and visual text are relevant to her work, she describes the synthetic and productive work of her learners as a major part of their visual literacy education. Apart from this respondent, only one other respondent, someone who trains teacher-librarians, talked about the productive aspect of visual literacy; an aspect that Kress (1997) considers vital to a curriculum of meaning-making.

### 3.3 Responses to the question:

#### What is visual text?

Many of the responses to this question were quite vague and very brief. It seemed that the respondents felt that there was not much more to say about visual text after having written about visual literacy. One peculiarity in the responses was limited to the illustrators. Of five illustrators, three at first said that they were unfamiliar with the term "visual text", before attempting to explain its meaning. One of these went on to talk about cultural contexts, another thought that it was a verbal description which resulted in 'vivid mental images', and the third thought that it was an oxymoronic term, or that it referred to a direct visual translation of verbal text. This lack of awareness was rather surprising. Perhaps it indicates a disengagement with or ignorance of the theoretical aspect of their work. Certainly it would indicate that they are unaware of visual literacy in C2005, as this term is specifically referred to in that document.

Six of the other respondents named 'pictures, icons, symbols, photographs, drawings' as visual texts - their distinguishing feature being that they have no verbal components - they are 'images which convey meaning'. Four other respondents modified this strict definition slightly, saying that the message needed to be carried primarily in the visuals, although some secondary verbal components could be part of the text, like cartoons, for instance. Another three respondents felt that a visual text was a successful combination of visuals and written text, where a visual component adds to the meaning of a verbal text, or plays a supportive role of the same. A librarian and an illustrator both suggested that the mental imaginings that result from reading a written text might be called a visual text. The writer/editor/illustrator/designer took a multimodal approach, saying that

anything that can be seen that isn't primarily about reading might be a definition (grafitti, maps, photographs, drawings, carvings, the appearance of a room or the world around us).

This broad understanding of *everything as text* was echoed by the curriculum planner and by a Grade 5 teacher.

### 3.3.1 *Visual literacy across the curriculum*

Although her description of visual text was similar to those who had quite a basic understanding, one editor extended her definition of visual literacy beyond the interpretation of representational texts. To her, visual literacy describes an ability to derive meaning from all kinds of visual perceptions, not just diagrams, photographs, illustrations, movies etc. She explained visual literacy in the following way:

Being able to construct meaning from what is seen (whether it be a street situation or a book illustration). Also being able to appreciate harmony and construct it in the built/living environment... This implies recognizing implicit rules, eg. my 12-year-old daughter's recognition that hippy-ish clothes don't go with slick street fashions and feminine classics don't go with surfer shorts. ... We should all be trained at school to recognize patterns in traffic, in house building, in home decoration, in our clothing, in the natural environment, even in body language.

This definition is wonderfully broad and resonates with the ideas in Kress' curriculum of representation and communication outlined in the previous chapter. There is a sense, implied in this editor's definition, of visual literacy being a sensitivity to patterns and to the meaning they hold; in other words, a sense of *design*.

### 3.3.2 *Cultural and contextual issues*

One of the illustrators also drew on the understanding, suggested above, that *everything is text*. Her definition of visual literacy talked about someone being visually literate (in a particular context) if they could "read" material 'in the way that the originator intended'. She followed this with an unusual definition of visual text, in which she wrote that the visual text

Comprises every nuance and reference to the culture that the originator inhabits and can therefore call upon to make the meaning of the work clear.

From this I surmise that she sees the visual text as the "visual context", from which both the artist or the viewer draws his/her frame of reference. Although a person could look at an illustration (or a play, or a festival) and understand the basic action, without having access to the "visual (con)text" the person cannot understand all the meaning of what he sees. Everything that one sees, then, has a "visual (con)text", and this is mostly cultural, although it can relate to your gender, race, economic class etc. I would suggest that this

illustrator means that an engagement with whatever you see is far more than just applying skills of analysis, it has to do with personal, bodily experience. To this extent, her ideas fit in with what I have identified as a phenomenological approach. In the rest of her lengthy response to the questionnaire, it was clear that she was concerned with the idea that an illustrator might create visuals in a different cultural "language", or using a different "visual (con)text" from that of her viewers, thereby alienating the viewers from the purpose of the image. Again, the lines C2005 draws between the "literacies" - here "visual literacy" and "cultural literacy" - are seen to be artificial. One needs cultural literacy in order to fully comprehend any kind of text, visual or verbal. The author/editor/illustrator/designer felt that he could deal with a broad range of visual and cultural literacies by trying to

make things clear, to presuppose as little as possible, to keep page layout simple and to make illustrations bold and simple, rather than impressionistic and abstracted.

Another illustrator felt that

The dominance of Western culture in our educational system means that Western conventions and meanings dominate, and the assumptions which arise out of this are problematic in a country where the majority do not have life-long familiarity with Western conventions and meaning.

What the author/editor/illustrator/designer might consider simple, therefore, might be interpreted differently by the viewer who is drawing on a different "visual (con)text". Western conventions are, however, dominant in all kinds of meaning-making and to try to include every possible cultural convention in a visual text would be impossible.

### **3.4 Answers to question:**

**Do you feel that the above concepts are relevant to your work?**

I was not surprised when I came across the idea that images, as a kind of "universal language", can bridge gaps in our multi-lingual society. Two illustrators, a teacher and one publisher suggested this as a possibility for the visual mode. Although there might be truth in this, a great number of respondents were very aware of the problematic nature

of the subjective and cultural aspects of interpreting visuals. One of the concerns was with the fact, as with written texts, that it appears sensitivity to the visual mode is dependent on prior exposure to a wide variety of visual material. A curriculum planner talked about the importance of how the development of visual literacy can add to

the incremental acquisition of a personal "knowledge bank" feeding an internal construct of one's world.

A children's librarian made the distinction between just "reading" visuals and deriving meaning from them. She says that in order to derive meaning,

the reader must also interact with what he sees... [assessing] meaning from his own life's experiences, his culture and his knowledge.

Blaming an impoverished schooling system where children are not sufficiently exposed to visuals, a trainer of teacher-librarians despairs about the apparent lack of visual sensitivity of her (adult) students:

they can't read between the lines, get the jokes, see what's hidden in the picture, interpret body language, use the picture to interpret the accompanying text, predict what's coming next, see the detail, get the point, see the choices that the artist, camera producer has made and why.

A comment was made by the author/editor/illustrator/designer, a similar one coming from an illustrator, to the effect that research was needed in this area:

A far greater understanding of how people, and South Africans particularly, interpret visual texts would be tremendously useful; and an understanding of the extent to which people are visually literate.

A publisher acknowledged this need too, saying that

more attention needs to be given in our textbooks to the interplay between artwork and text... I think we (publishers/editors/etc.) need to increase *our* understanding of this interplay first.

### **3.4.1 Teaching visual literacy skills**

A number of respondents talked about their efforts to improve visual literacy skills. The teacher/author, although she does not elaborate on how she deals with visual literacy in

her work as an author, does give it a lot of attention in her classroom. She encourages her learners to use a variety of materials and modes when writing notes and doing assignments, and they spend time discussing

placement and emphasis in [their] own work. [She also spends] a lot of time talking about where things look "right" [in the classroom], why they are in that position etc.

Time is also spent talking about the movies, videos and plays that she takes her class to, talking about effects they saw being created there. An illustrator felt that she could try to alter cultural aspects of visual literacy by communicating certain ideas about, for instance, gender roles, by subverting the norm, thereby causing a clash between the viewers' culture and what they saw. Hopefully, she felt, this would cause the viewers to modify their understanding to some extent

#### **3.4.2 Responses from educational publishing**

Many of the responses from people involved in educational publishing (many freelancers) indicated that there was more of a concern with promoting the visual aspect of the educational text than I had expected to find. One publisher was unusual in that she included in her definition of visual literacy the visual features of a written text, demonstrating an awareness of the multimodal aspects of written text. She felt that

the way the material is presented needs to be understood by learners with a range of visual literacy ability, and it also needs to extend the learners' visual literacy.

I say that this is unusual, because my experience of the publishing industry, which I will expand upon in the chapter that follows, is that those in publishing have a very narrow understanding of the visual mode. The conventional approach that publishing takes in terms of the relationship between visual and written texts was expressed by a designer who talked about promoting visual literacy by

integrating more graphic elements to augment written text, in order to convey a difficult concept.

Another unusual approach came from an editor, who felt that a different way of developing educational texts could help to integrate the words and images better, encouraging the learner to make use of the visuals:

Verbal and visual text in educational material go hand in hand and ideally should be developed at the same time. In my experience, writing verbal text based on visual text has been a more effective way of developing material which would challenge learners' visual literacy, than the other way round.

In the next chapter I will expand further on how a development of the entire text along these lines can improve engagement with visuals and, possibly nurture visual literacy skills. A somewhat less radical approach to encouraging visual engagement came from another editor who tried to

use illustrations which entice the viewer to engage with the illustration for more than a moment, to explore its meaning and experience another reality.

Even though overall, the responses from publishers, editors, authors and designers indicate a reasonably high level of engagement with visual literacy, this is not backed up everywhere. One publisher, expressing some criticism about the level of knowledge about visual literacy amongst her fellow publishers and editors, said 'don't quote me here!' in reference to these remarks. A freelance designer was also unwilling to make his opinions on the subject known, declining to send me his response to my questionnaire, despite having drafted one, saying that he experienced a

conflict of interest between my professional involvement in the publishing process and the desire to answer honestly.

Perhaps their hesitation is indicative of the publishing industry's level of insecurity about this aspect of their knowledge and expertise. Another indication that my sample of respondents from publishing may be less than representative is found in the responses from illustrators. Almost all of the illustrators were clearly very frustrated with the current attitude towards their work and the visual aspect in general in educational publishing. Although one did not express this in her email, she did so in a subsequent telephone conversation. Another said that she had found that attitudes amongst publishers

were difficult to change and consequently had decided to do some writing herself, while still trying to bring as much as she could into her drawing that might engage the viewer. The chapter that follows will expand more on the illustrators' dissatisfaction with the status quo.

### 3.5 Summary

The range of responses to my questionnaire indicate that not all of the educators in my sample share an understanding of the concept. Some appear to have an extremely sophisticated understanding of what can be done in the visual mode, and others have a quite basic conceptual grasp of the issues. Overall, then, my sample reflects a lack of coherence on the nature and use of the visual mode, and I would conclude that this is because of a similar lack of coherence on the subject in C2005. That is not to say that the respondents' insights are individually incoherent, but that it is clear that all the respondents do not draw from a shared understanding. Their awareness of and engagement with visual literacy issues is not as a result of the subject being included in C2005, but because of their personal interest in current educational issues. If C2005 chooses to reformulate its approach to the visual mode, it could improve its own understanding of the concepts by taking note of the points raised in the responses to my questionnaire, summarized below:

**i.) There is some discomfort with the "literacy" analogy**

C2005 makes extensive use of the "literacy" analogy and, by limiting the understanding of the visual mode to its language-like properties, does not tap into the mode's potential to be used across the curriculum. The way the respondents seemed to prefer to use words like "interpret" indicated that they do not share the vocabulary C2005 uses to shape the understanding of visual literacy. This indicates that there might be room for a more multimodal approach, and certainly a few of these respondents already take this approach.

**ii.) Cultural literacy and visual literacy cannot be separated from one another**

The concern that a great many respondents had for the cultural accessibility of visual representation suggests that the boundaries drawn by C2005 between cultural literacy and visual literacy are artificial. A person's visual literacy is necessarily dependent on the context from which they see, and so this aspect of cultural literacy is vital to an understanding of visual literacy.

**iii.) Learning perceptual skills.**

Media and visual literacy often seem to be intertwined in C2005. My distinct impression of C2005's concern with visual literacy is that coping skills need to be taught to learners who find themselves in an image and media-saturated environment. Most of the responses I received did not reflect a similar sense of urgency for the acquisition of these skills. Instead, there seemed to be a more basic concern with learning skills that would enable learners to be generally more astute in their perceptual activity.

**iv.) The visual mode is relevant across the curriculum**

This point intersects with the previous one. Although not many respondents had this understanding, there was an encouragingly broad understanding of what the visual mode could do. The ability to look with insight and intelligence, with the ability to recognize pattern and issues of design, are skills that can be applied in any Learning Area and in any sphere of life. This is not acknowledged by C2005, where the relevance of the visual mode is limited to LLC and A&C.

**v.) There is a need for more research**

This was not a universal call from my respondents, but there was enough concern with issues of visuals, and especially of culture, to surmise that educators felt that they needed to know more. Clearly, they feel that C2005 does not provide them with what they need to deal with visual literacy issues.

As I was doing a final edit on this chapter, just before I handed in my dissertation, I received two more responses to my questionnaire; one from a librarian and another from

a curriculum planner. They apologized for their lateness but expressed their willingness to still participate if time allowed. I informed them that I no longer had time to consider their responses and both thanked me for giving them the opportunity to consider these issues. As I mentioned earlier, a number of respondents thanked me in this way, and I hope that it indicates a growing need amongst educators to understand and incorporate the visual mode in their work.

University of Cape Town

## **Chapter 4 EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING AND THE VISUAL MODE**

I have been progressively narrowing the focus of my interest in visual literacy throughout this dissertation, starting with an overview of the broad diversity of opinion on the subject. I then demonstrated how C2005, having no consensus understanding of visual literacy to draw from, therefore shows little more than a general awareness of the existence of the concept, providing little guidance on how to understand and use it. My field study went on to examine how this lack of clarity affects the way that educators understand and apply the concept. The field study demonstrated that although there was awareness of visual literacy, there was a great variety of approaches to and understanding of the concept. In this chapter, I wish to narrow my focus even further by looking specifically at educational publishing. Although this industry makes extensive use of visuals in the books it produces, it does not appear to have much understanding of how or even why visuals are used. My particular interest in the visual aspect of educational publishing arises from my work as an educational illustrator, and I find, along with some fellow illustrators, that certain aspects of this work are very frustrating. I hope that by drawing attention to these frustrations, and by suggesting alternative approaches, educational illustration could become a more satisfying and challenging career. As a consequence of these changes, textbooks could also undoubtedly improve in many ways.

### **4.1 Educational Publishing**

In an analysis of some American social studies textbooks (1988 in LaSpina 1998), a design firm surveying the books noted that all of them were particularly weak in their visual presentation, quality and content, as well as in the integration of visuals and text. They described the books as all having "low quality photographs and illustrations; hard-to-read and poorly rendered maps; a jarring mixture of sophisticated fine art and simplistic illustration; and a large percentage of nonfunctional, non-interactive, and merely illustrative art" (Laspina 1998: 11). Although this was written about American textbooks, I am sure that the same description could be written about most visuals in

textbooks produced in South Africa. Perhaps the South African publishing industry could hold C2005's tenuous grasp of the concept of visual literacy responsible for their own apparent lack of interest in the visual aspect of the textbooks they produce. (Although my fieldwork indicates a high level of interest amongst those working in educational publishing, both the conflicting evidence of the illustrators and a brief perusal of most publishers' products should indicate that this is not a true reflection of the industry).

Educational publishing and C2005 almost certainly share a similarly narrow understanding of literacy, tending to consider the verbal mode to be the most legitimate for the dissemination of knowledge. Certainly, the analysis of textbook visuals quoted above indicates that little thought goes into textbook visuals, showing the kind of value that publishers place on this aspect of textbook content. The curriculum does not appear to recognize visuals as educationally valuable, and so it is not surprising that publishers continue to neglect this aspect of their work. But even though C2005 may not provide a secure platform upon which educational publishers can build a policy on visual literacy, the mere fact that their products make extensive use of visuals should result in this being given more consideration.

I argued in my second chapter that if C2005 is to make the most of the possibilities of the visual mode, a paradigm shift towards a multimodal understanding of literacy is necessary. Educational publishing, I would suggest, need not wait for this kind of change in curriculum. Perhaps this industry can even help to work towards this curricular paradigm shift; educational textbooks could be the vanguard to visual literacy education. Of course, this will require some substantial shifts in educational publishing's attitude towards the visual mode, but perhaps the positive responses to my questionnaire from some people in publishing indicate that the industry is becoming ready to make these shifts. This chapter will describe the current style of textbook production, showing how the process sorely undervalues the visual aspect. This will be contrasted with positive examples from my own experience and from an American study. Together, these examples suggest how to change current styles of textbook production, and how this

could contribute substantially to a change in the current attitude towards the visual content of textbooks. For the basis of my critique of educational publishing's approach to the visual, I will draw on my own experience as well as that of other illustrators whose opinions I have canvassed. I will also look at some of the responses to my questionnaire from publishers, editors and designers.

#### ***4.1.1 The Development and Production of Educational Textbooks***

I have been working as a freelance illustrator in educational publishing since 1995. My first few years of work were very challenging, as I was teaching myself how to draw, and so each job was a learning experience. As the mechanics and subtleties of drawing have grown to be less of a challenge, however, I have come to realize that there are aspects of the job that are very frustrating. This feeling has been reinforced by the few lucky occasions when I have had the contrasting experience of finding this job challenging and stimulating, with the added pleasure of feeling that the work benefits others positively. As I will be arguing for a change in educational publishing's approach to the visual mode, and that this change will affect current production and development patterns, I will first describe the conventional production process of a school textbook:

##### ***4.1.1.1 Procedures and Roles***

Once the author has finished writing, the editor edits the manuscript, and then passes the written text to a designer. The designer comes up with an overall design concept and lays out the written text, leaving spaces for artwork. The allocation of these spaces is usually made according to an artwork brief that the author has written. In this brief, the author writes down what she feels would be appropriate content for an illustration in relation to a specific piece of written text. An illustrator whose style is deemed to be appropriate to the intended learner as well as to the content of the book, is selected by the editor. The editor and illustrator then usually read through the artwork brief together, the editor making sure that the illustrator understands the wishes of the author, and indicating the spaces into which the illustrations should fit. Once rough illustrations have been approved by the editor, publisher and sometimes by the author, the final illustrations are dropped into the artwork spaces by the designer and the book is ready to be printed.

The production of most school textbooks runs on the chain of action/command described above, and the editor acts as the kingpin in the process; liaising with the author, publisher, designer and illustrator who rarely meet or interact with one another. One of the reasons for the adherence to these roles and hierarchies is that the submission of textbooks to provincial authorities for approval places severe time constraints on the production of textbooks. Accordingly, it seems to be most efficient to divide the roles of author, editor, designer and illustrator so that everyone can work at their area of expertise efficiently, without time-consuming collaborative effort. My suspicion, however, is that this rigid adherence to the patterns, roles and hierarchies contributes much to the frustration that I experience with my work as an illustrator. In order to convey a sense of the nature of this frustration, I will describe my own experience, adding other illustrators' comments when appropriate.

#### *4.1.2 Illustrators' frustrations*

One of the illustrators who responded to my questionnaire summed up the prevailing attitude towards illustration:

I am beginning to conclude that local publishers waste *loads* of money on illustrations that they commission "as an afterthought", are executed in an incredible rush by illustrators that are underpaid and left in the dark, and ... not utilized to the extent that they feel they make a meaningful contribution.

Illustrators are often brought into the production process at the last minute so there is no time to do much more than fill the gaps in the text with the pictures requested. Deadlines are usually tight, leaving the illustrator sufficient time to put much thought or planning into the drawings. The most frustrating projects are those where all that is expected of me is that I perform like a technician whose job is to fill designated artwork spaces with something that matches the author's brief as closely as possible. In this kind of job I am not expected to engage with the text beyond ensuring that the content of my illustration correlates with the factual content of the written text. Sometimes artwork briefs can be arbitrarily prescriptive, specifying, for instance, the hairstyle and dress colour of the girl in the drawing even though these bear no relation to the purpose of the illustration. Often

the content of the brief is inappropriate to the space provided for artwork, or I feel that an illustration other than that specified by the author would be more appropriate. However, there is usually no relationship or communication between author and illustrator. In fact, in the first four years of working full-time as an illustrator, I only met one author for whom I had illustrated, and that was when I was illustrating the third book of a series that she had written. Because of this lack of communication, any suggestions from the illustrator for changes to an art brief mean a time-consuming process is entered into, the editor playing go-between for the illustrator and author, sometimes with the author remaining unwilling to negotiate.

The relationship between author and illustrator is a strange one, because although the author is often quite admiring of the illustrator's drawing ability, the author plays a superior role in that she not only prescribes the content of the drawings, but also has editorial control over them, criticizing their content, design, style etc. On the whole, authors seem to have very little conception of how best to use visual material. They seem to use it mostly just to lighten the look of the page, or to repeat what has been said in the verbal text. The kinds of critical relationships between the visual and the verbal texts that Kooistra (1995) talks about are seldom considered. She positions the artist as a critic, providing the viewpoint from which the reader initially regards the written text. This is clearly not the role that educational publishing sees its illustrators playing. For them, written text is primary and the visual is there in a subservient role. The possibility that visual material could be the primary text with which the learner engages is barely considered.

Although they both deal with the visual aspects of the textbook, the designer and the illustrator seldom meet, and it is rare that the illustrator has a say in the way her illustrations are incorporated in the book. I once received the printed copy of a book that I had worked on for four months, only to find that the designer had failed to trim the edges of my painted illustrations, leaving messy surrounds that I had never intended to be seen. I have also opened textbooks that I have not illustrated and found my illustrations traced or copied on the instruction, I imagine, of an editor. I have signed a contract

containing a clause in which the illustrator signs away her 'moral rights' to her illustrations, surrendering the right to object to 'distortions, mutilations and other modifications of the Work where such would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the [illustrator]' (Appendix A). Even in books where there is little written text and the book's content and sales depend largely on the illustrations, I find the authors' names are on the front covers and mine on the inside back page. Underscoring the sense that illustrators' work is undervalued is the feeling that the work is badly paid. I have not really found this to be the case, but perhaps this is because I draw quickly and can therefore carry a high workload. And, if racing through jobs is the only way an illustrator can make a good living, then this will inevitably impact on the quality of the illustration work. This may begin to read as a list of petty gripes, but when they are all taken into account, they indicate that illustration work is largely undervalued and the illustrator occupies a very lowly place in the power hierarchy of educational publishing.

#### ***4.1.3 Other visual aspects of textbooks***

It is not only the work of illustrators which is under-researched and undervalued. I would suggest that almost every aspect of visual communication in textbooks has not been given sufficient consideration and research beyond, perhaps, those directly to do with the marketing of the books. Some of the designers that I spoke to in my field study also expressed their frustration, one complaining that 'images are... chosen for communication value only and other factors [design, aesthetics, style, quality etc] are not considered'. She also spoke of a sense of disempowerment when design decisions and changes are made by publishers due to marketing considerations, often not in consultation with the designer. The response of the freelance designer, who 'felt a conflict of interest between [his] professional involvement... and the desire to answer [my questions] honestly', also suggested a feeling of disempowerment, certainly to the extent that he is unable to reconcile his personal opinions with what publishers expect from him.

##### ***4.1.3.1 Marketing considerations***

One area of the visual content to which publishers do seem to pay attention has mostly to do with the marketing of the books. Many of the provinces have stringent selection

criteria upon which they base their assessments of textbooks that are presented for their approval, and publishers have to be very sensitive to these. For this reason, publishers try to ensure that their illustrators pay attention to things like the inclusivity of racial groupings, cultures, genders and disabilities in their illustrations. As I suggested in the previous chapter, even in this regard there does not appear to be a well-researched, informed basis upon which these kinds of considerations are made. Beyond giving attention to these issues of inclusivity, which can be counted as not much more than window-dressing, publishers do not seem to know much about the visual abilities and preferences of their audience, nor about the cultural issues that should be taken into account. An illustrator that I interviewed agreed with this, saying that 'the problem is that [publishers] are for the most part... utterly uneducated about visual information'.

It is difficult to know what commitment publishers have to improving their knowledge in this area, although one of the publishers who responded to my questionnaire stated that 'I think we (publishers/editors/etc.) need to increase *our* understanding of [the interplay between text and artwork] first'. Some of the other respondents from publishing were similarly aware that their expertise was lacking in this area, mentioning that there should be more visual literacy education. Nevertheless, I am often acutely aware as I draw pictures of children in townships, for instance, that my experience of that environment is extremely limited, and that the author, editor and publisher who wrote and approved my brief are usually just as white, middle-class and ignorant as I am. The apparent lack of research into appropriate representations, styles and cultural issues can be paralyzing to artists and to publishers. This paralysis is sometimes relieved by avoiding racial and cultural issues altogether; illustrators are asked to be non-specific about the race, economic status and geography of the illustrations. One illustrator notes how an excessive political correctness can be another response, resulting in the kinds of situations where, she notes, 'the bad guy is almost always white... and even in some cases, being given Afrikaans names, and black people are always portrayed as positive or neutral figures'.

#### *4.1.3.2 The responsibility of illustrators*

Although this particular illustrator displayed an enviable knowledge of cultural sensibilities, she is probably an exception to the rule amongst illustrators, myself included. In fact, I believe that the limited job description that illustrators are given is not entirely undeserved. Many illustrators are fine art graduates who are doing the work to make money whilst en route to a "real" career, and are therefore not very committed to the work of educational materials development. Editors and designers complain that illustrators sometimes miss the boat completely - apparently not consulting the text at all when they do an illustration, and consequently producing an inappropriate drawing. I feel that illustrators are frequently only capable of playing the role of a technician. This role can occasionally be augmented by collaborations with editor and designer, but the expertise the illustrator brings is all-too-often no more than drawing skill. Possibly this is due to the nature of the job in the first place. Those illustrators who have insight, initiative, as well as drawing talent are likely to leave the business if they find it gives them no opportunity for meaningful, creative and professional input. And even if somebody does wish to be a professional educational illustrator, as far as I was able to ascertain, there is no course at any art school or technikon in South Africa that deals specifically with educational illustration.

#### *4.1.4 Power relationships*

But even if an illustrator has, as one of my respondents did, a wealth of experience and an enviable depth of knowledge about cultural preferences and sensitivities in illustration, the position she holds in the educational publishing hierarchy will stifle her contribution. This particular illustrator has, because she feels she can't change the system, 'decided to go into writing as well, because authors get more respect, more awards, societies, interest groups, exhibitions and royalties etc.'. Another illustrator complains about her 'frustration [at not being able to use] to full effect the tremendous amount of knowledge [she has] gained in this area by study, apprenticeship and experience [because of] having to interface constantly with much lower levels of knowledge within the publishing industry'. As the first illustrator points out, she finds herself illustrating according to briefs that she feels are wrongly written but, because of deadlines and the constraints

caused by the hierarchical relationship, she goes along with it. She adds that she occasionally 'makes up for [her] spinelessness' by inserting satirical details elsewhere, or simply by ensuring that her illustrations are as authentically South African as she can muster.

The illustrator's position at the end, both of the hierarchy and the production process (and perhaps the two are inseparable), means that her knowledge is not sufficiently valued, and she is given the least voice. The ability to produce the goods according to brief in record time is probably the most valuable skill an illustrator can have. If she shows initiative by interrogating the content of an artbrief, she is likely to cause an editor extra work, communicating the suggestions to the author, and then back again to the illustrator. Not only time, but money too, is a big consideration for publishers. Therefore, if an illustrator is regarded as someone who is bringing a great deal of expertise to the book, it might be necessary to have to pay her more - something publishers might be unwilling to risk.

#### **4.2 Positive examples**

In contrast to this dismal depiction of educational publishing's attitude towards the visual, I will describe a few of the publishing projects I have worked on that have been engaging and challenging. The main reason for these projects being so different from my usual work was largely, I think, due to a difference in attitude towards me as an illustrator. I was treated as an expert in my field. My opinions were given weight, my views were solicited, and I was treated with trustfulness. The source of this professional respect was a difference in the attitude of the publishers towards the visual and design aspects of the book. This experience of illustration work is far removed from the frustrating kind described above, which leads me to distinguish the two kinds of work from one another by giving each a different label. The type of work that I described in the first part of this chapter is simply "illustration", where written text is preeminent and images are included to demonstrate, support or clarify what the text has already said. I will describe the work that I am about to elaborate on as work of the "author of the visual text", where images

and words become interdependent and images are filled with content. Perhaps by drawing a distinction between the two types of work and by coining a new title for the illustrators' more challenging role, it will become difficult to conceive of the two as having much in common. By describing these projects, as well as one described by LaSpina (1998), I hope to show that a different approach to visuals could not only change educational publishing, but could also contribute substantially to visual literacy education. This different approach and style of working and creating texts also requires a new descriptive title; I will refer to it as an "integrated work mode".

#### ***4.2.1 On Our Own Two Feet***

Over the space of two years I worked on three projects managed by June Pym, then a publisher at Nasou-Via Africa. The books were all part of a Lifeskills series called *On Our Own Two Feet* (hereafter OOOTF). The other illustrator working on the series was Lizza Littlewort, who recommended that I be brought in on the project when she found that she did not have the time to do the series alone. Lizza, who had a key role in shifting the nature of the project, has been working as an illustrator for many years and has found herself growing increasingly disillusioned with the illustration work she usually does. While being briefed about the OOOTF project, Lizza expressed her frustration to June and persuaded her to break from the standard practice, and to hand the entire design and illustration side of the book over to her, along with the whole artwork budget. Lizza was then to be responsible for the design concept, the layout and the illustration of the whole book, and a designer would follow up her ideas and instructions on computer once the book was ready to be finalized in that form.

When I joined the project for the Grade 8 book, it was being run in the following way: The writer, Bridget Pitt, and I, looked closely at the basic text and art brief for her book, talking about the general design concept that this book would need. After this meeting, I formulated the design ideas more concretely, considering how certain stylistic features would help to hold the content together. Once this had been agreed upon, I set about making a rough, hand-drawn layout of the written text and the illustrations on A3 sheets of layout paper, using Bridget's text as a guide. I tried, with my layout, to keep a logical

flow of written text and illustration, attempting to create an overall visual and verbal coherence. I attempted not to split, for instance, a written text and its questions over a turning page, and I tried to give unit starters a recognizable layout, always on a right-hand page. I also made sure that when the written text referred to an image the two were clearly linked, mostly by their proximity. This involvement with the design of the written text allowed me to use the entire page space, allowing me to take more illustration space than I am usually given. Often I was able to use an illustration as the central focus for the written text. Once my layout and illustrations had been approved by Bridget, the final step in the process was to take my hand-drawn layout and final illustrations to an outside design company who then realized the complete product on computer. This was a consultative procedure where the designer, Mandy Darling, and I, made final design and layout decisions that were later approved by Bridget and June.

I have already mentioned some of the results of a departure from conventional publishing procedures, and many of these were immediately clear to me when I joined the project. The most important, I think, was that the publisher and the writer trusted me, my expertise, my initiative and my intelligence, and regarded me as an expert in my field. I was not being employed as an illustrator/technician; I was employed as a professional who could bring skill, insight and knowledge to the project. Possibly the procedure that the OOTF project followed sounds like not much more than Nasou-Via Afrika using the illustrator to fill in for their defunct design department, but perhaps this is the very reason that it was such an unusual work experience for all of us. Without a design department, there was room to change hierarchical relationships and job descriptions. Also, there was also no editor working on the project, which further altered the standard power relationships. A really radical departure from my usual experience was that, because I had the dual role of designer/illustrator, I needed to be given an editorial voice. Design, illustration and written text therefore all became intertwined and contingent on one another. Because I was doing the design and the layout of the book, I had to engage fully with the written text so that it would cohere in terms of how it was placed on the page and how it related to the illustrations. This meant quite a different relationship with the writer, and required us to work alongside each other, discussing how text and visuals

could be most effectively integrated. Because I was working with the visual aspects of the verbal text, Bridget was willing to take my suggestions about cutting or changing the written text. Also, since I was simultaneously working with creating a visual text, I could suggest alterations to some of the writing if I felt that the idea could be better communicated with images. I was helping to "write" the visual text of the book, integrating illustration with all the aspects of writing, editing and designing, creating an integrated text whose content was made up of verbal, as well as design and visual elements. This process was benefitted by the fact that Bridget had worked previously both as an illustrator and in desktop publishing, so had a good understanding of how visual and verbal texts can be created and integrated. Also, I have a Higher Diploma in Education and am generally quite well-informed on issues around education, which made me confident of making suggestions and decisions.

#### **4.2.2 *LaSpina and an integrated text***

After my own experience of a different approach to textbook-making, it was fascinating to read *The visual turn and the transformation of the textbook* by James Andrew LaSpina (1998). LaSpina examines the development and production of a series of American textbooks that were made with the consciousness that most of the books' users live and operate in a highly visually orientated world. LaSpina's interest in the textbooks came out of an interest in an 'informal curriculum in electronic visual literacy' (LaSpina 1998: xiv) that he suspected was being provided by video games and television. He wanted to know what textbooks for a generation that has grown up in a highly visual culture would look like. This is a relevant question, when one considers that 'the stable world of information constructed by the conventions of linear text is not the world we look upon today. The typical characteristic of information in today's communication landscape is its overwhelming quantity, multiplicity and multimodality' (*ibid*: 200). The term "information overload" was coined to describe this very situation. He found a series of books that he described as being 'designed for children who watch MTV and play video games' (*ibid*: xiv). These were a Social Studies textbooks series, produced by Houghton Mifflin Publishers, for learners from Kindergarten to Grade 8. The development and production process that LaSpina reviews is substantially different from the OOOTF

projects for a number of reasons, mostly to do with the amount of planning that went into our respective approaches. Nonetheless, the essence of the two examples is very similar and has at its heart a change in attitude towards the visual mode brought about largely through a change in production hierarchies.

#### *4.2.2.1 Ligature and SS21*

The series, Social Studies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (hereafter SS21), was produced in partnership with a design company called Ligature, who specialize in designing instructional materials. Ligature was set up by two men whose experience came from, on the one hand, editorial work, and on the other, art direction, both in educational publishing. They set up their company on the conviction that the prevailing model of text development in educational publishing needed to be challenged and turned around. They believe that the visual and verbal development of textbooks, instead of being separate processes, as the first part of this chapter indicated is conventionally the case, should instead be deeply integrated. Ligature's vision was to go beyond 'a discursive word-based delivery system' (LaSpina 1998: 28), conceiving instead of content as "visual/verbal". LaSpina points out that although the notion of visual/verbal content would hardly seem like a radical idea to a graphic designer in advertising, in the word-based world of education and educational publishing, it is quite extraordinary. He suggests, echoing Stafford's ideas, that the reason this kind of idea is so radical in educational settings is that '[there is] a widespread cultural assumption... that is: Visual information is inherently vacuous and deceptive, and images are without content' (*ibid*: 3). He adds that 'the future of the textbook is strangely connected to this fear of images. Rather than joining this chorus of dread, which senses the imminent "destruction" of the printed book, it might be more fruitful to view this alleged vacuousness as a space filled with creative possibility. For the cultural and pedagogical conditions that pit picture against text are no doubt radically changing' (*ibid*: 4). LaSpina makes it clear that textbook publishing needs to evolve or die, and that the way to move forward is not to deplore the encroaching visual culture, viewing education as the last bastion of written culture, but instead to integrate the visual and the written. In this way, I would add, the nature of

visuals can be talked about and their power to attract attention can be harnessed for the good of the learner.

Convinced of the positive educational possibilities of visuals, Ligature aimed at a production process that would integrate the visual and the verbal throughout the writing and design, holding as a maxim the idea that *everything is content*. In other words, written content is not, as is almost invariably the case, to be privileged over visual content. This process would understand words and images as equally legitimate, and that each had different ways of representing information, therefore the mode most appropriate would be chosen according to the type of information. The team was very careful not to make it sound as if verbal content was to be replaced by visual content and so they stressed that 'the visual was to be looked upon as "a colleague or partner... working with the words to create a text." (*ibid*: 31). To this end, choices were made that would provide learners with visuals that linked deeply and intrinsically with the written text, and all pictures were accompanied by captions and teacher instructions on how to approach this visual in a valuable, insightful way. Before lessons and chapters were even planned, a text/image ratio was worked out, so that both writers and designers each had content space that had to be used. Again, this was to ensure the breaking with old habits and assumptions about what can constitute *content*. In order to ensure the equal status of words and visuals and to avoid lapsing into the habit of considering content to mean verbal content, writers and designers in the Ligature team worked together from conception to production. There was no hierarchical relationship between them, with the head editor and head designer having equal voice in all decision-making. LaSpina points out that in the current educational publishing hierarchy, the editor plays the central role, consulting with writer, designer and illustrator. If one is assuming, as most publishers tend to, that linear, word-based ways are the best for conveying information, this approach makes sense. In the SS21 series, however, 'editor and designer become a team [and] the parallel structuration of visual with text drives development. With Ligature words and images become the "stuff" that books are made of; visual and verbal "sentences"' (*ibid*: 29). Both visual and verbal elements were understood to be interdependent, requiring the reader to interact with both. The main idea was that visuals

can serve to "shape and act as a "cognitive structure" which might enhance reader retention ... [with] visuals... so "compelling" that they would engage the reader and hold their attention, acting as a visual "step" into the text" (*ibid*:124).

Along with the maxim that *everything is content* went the call for "no gratuitous images!" Images were interrogated for their contribution to the information that was being put across and sometimes, because images were the best mode for conveying the information, visuals would predominate, moving towards a 60/40 art to text ratio. Sometimes they would choose to cover an entire double spread with an image, inviting the learner to "step into" the picture, and using it as a primary text, from which thought, questions, discussion, or responses in other modes can flow. Nevertheless, most of the time neither the visual nor the verbal mode is capable of carrying all the meaning alone, and the other needs to be brought in to help complete the meaning. Because of the tendency to view words as content, the team regarded captions as essential to the practical implementation of the concept of the visual/verbal text. The purpose of written captions is to point back into the image, not just to describe it, but to direct the view of the learner, to draw their attention to the content of the image, simultaneously teaching them how to look with insight at images. 'Captions provide the verbal frame which sets the proper boundaries of the visual frame; a conceptual template through which the teacher can assist the student to understand what is seen' (*ibid*: 42). Some of the activities in the series drew specific attention to captions so that learners would think about visual/verbal interaction. The understanding of this relationship would be demonstrated and emphasized when learners have to write captions for their own drawings.

#### 4.2.3 Key Concepts

There is so much more to describe about Ligature's production and development process, as well as the rationale and planning behind their work, but that is beyond the intention of this chapter. Instead, a few of the key concepts will be examined in the light of a possible paradigm shift in educational publishing. I will also compare the process of making the SS21 series with my experience of the OOTF project.

i.) **Writer and designer equality**

Bridget, the writer that I worked with, told me that one teacher's response to the OOOTF books was that her learners spent too much time looking at the pictures and not enough on learning. There seems to be a strong common-sense opinion that the more visuals there are in a textbook, the less content there is. LaSpina quotes Woodward, who writes about instructional illustration:

Unfortunately, there is no necessary connection between bountiful and attractive illustrations and learning. Rather, studies have suggested that many illustrations fail to enhance learning and in fact, may consume a large portion of limited space that could better be devoted to content (LaSpina 1998: 62).

Publishers seem to find a strange tension between the marketing advantage that an attractive, visually rich book can give, and this sense that good visual design means a compromise on the quality and quantity of instruction. The Ligature team, however, did not find a contradiction between a beautiful book and an instructionally sound book. Their view was that aesthetics was another way to "envision information" and that learners were being given a platform to build up an image of the world in which they live. In *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (1983), Tufte writes the following:

Words and pictures are sometimes jurisdictional enemies, as artists feud with writers for scarce space. An unfortunate legacy of these craft-union differences is the artificial separation of words and pictures... What has gone wrong is that the techniques of production instead of the information conveyed have been given precedence. *Words and pictures belong together.* Viewers need the help that words can provide (Tufte 1983:180).

Although Tufte describes it as a "feud for scarce space", the reality of the power relationships in educational publishing means that the battle has been won by the writers before it has even begun. Illustrators and designers are given the "content" - the written text - around which the visual elements must be arranged. As I have shown earlier, illustrators are expected to work as technicians, drawing what they are told to in the allocated spaces. Any dialogue or relationship between the words and the images that results is usually a fortunate result of an illustrator taking some initiative, but it certainly

is not part of what is expected from her. Although the OOOTF and SS21 projects had different points of departure, they are similar in that standard 'techniques of production' have not been given precedence, and that this has benefitted the content of the books. *Everything is content* was not the axiom adopted by the OOOTF team, but the change in the hierarchy, where the illustrator was a designer as well as having an editorial voice, precipitated an inevitable alteration in the attitude to the visual. Bridget has worked as an illustrator and designer before and therefore tended to write with issues of design in mind. Because the visual aspect was not, as is usually the case, a last-minute consideration, and was instead being developed in relation to the written and design content, it was given more attention and respect than it usually is. I have to conclude therefore, that the current hierarchies in educational publishing are a major cause of the neglect of the visual aspect of textbooks.

The two processes that I have described show that even if barriers between the writing, editing, design and illustrating are not collapsed to the extent of the SS21 project, their broaching makes an important difference. The extensive use of computers in educational publishing should assist greatly with increasing the permeability of job descriptions. LaSpina quotes Keith Smith (1992) who says that 'The computer allows the writer, for the first time, to simultaneously compose the page as well as the text... It gives the writer total control over the plasticity of the page, precisely as it will appear when it is published' (LaSpina 1998: 24).

## ii.) **Everything is content**

The crucial issue, whether visual information, that is, page layout, typography, and illustrations "facilitate comprehension and stimulate effective learning" is often correctly posed, but it largely stalls at the critical level noted before: aesthetic quality viewed as packaging, a selling device for market-driven publishers to obtain "customer acceptance" (LaSpina 1998: 58).

The approach to textbook development that sees that *everything is content* goes beyond issues of "packaging", drawing on notions similar to Kress' (1997) ideas about multimodality. When this view is taken, the cover, the choice of colours, the texture of the paper, the font, the quality of illustration, as well as the written text, all add to the

meaning of the book as a whole. And, as Kress points out, this way of making meaning is not foreign to a child. In fact, his earliest experiences of reading teach him to gain meaning from the visuals as well as the written text of a book. LaSpina quotes Mulcahy and Samuels (1987) who observe that 'the child [learns] that reading is a process in which the reader constructs meaning from information contained on a page, regardless of whether the information is in the form of a picture or a printed word' (LaSpina 1998: 63). Applying this to textbook production, however, means a massive change in the way the text is made. If everything is considered to be content, then every aspect of the whole text, including the visual, will need to be integrated, researched and given attention. Coherence becomes an important element of the book, which means that both visual and verbal texts have to make sense together. Clearly, if this is to happen, the writers of both the visual and the verbal text need to work together.

In terms of the relationship between the visual and verbal content, SS21 went much further than we did on the OOOTF project. Whereas the SS21 writer and designer worked together from initial conceptualizing stages, our designer/illustrator only came in once the written text was very nearly complete. The OOOTF team was, in contrast to the meticulously planned SS21 project, making up the rules as we went along; trying to fit a maverick approach onto an existing system. We were attempting to use a relatively new way of working together while still operating under the deadlines of the submission system. This meant that I was given a 180-page Grade 8 book to design, lay out and illustrate in a mere six weeks. Despite the newness of the system and the severe time constraints however, the book was completed on time and the publisher declared that it was a project that had given her far fewer problems than is normally the case!

The OOOTF project illustrates that, even though it was not our intention to regard everything as content, changing the conventional power relationships and hierarchies caused a shift in this direction. By breaking the boundaries between the currently isolated job descriptions it became clear to us that the visual aspect could both influence and contribute to the whole text. Perhaps if publishers begin to remove the hierarchies and power relationships they will begin move towards a new respect for the multimodal

content of their books. As an author begins to understand that the way her writing appears on a page can change the way in which it is read, she will begin to value, and perhaps wish to contribute to, the way it is designed. When she realizes that writing alongside a visual text writer allows ideas to take on a whole new dimension, opening her work out in ways she has not dreamed of, she will wonder why she never worked this way before.

### iii.) Visual learning

The Ligature team created a list of the attributes they wanted their SS21 books to display. One of these read: 'Skills for visual learning are taught throughout the program and prepare students for a world in which visual technologies have increasing power' (LaSpina 1998: 12), suggesting that textbooks can play an important role in visual literacy education. In my second chapter I suggest that C2005 probably included the notion of visual literacy because of the general feeling that learners need to learn to look with intelligence and insight. In spite of its good intentions, I go on to show that the curriculum does not provide the means, methods or place for teaching visual literacy much beyond the skills of map and graph-reading. I argued that this is partly because the curriculum could not loosen itself from the narrow possibilities that the "literacy" analogy tends to offer. By recognizing the multimodal nature of literacy, I suggested, the visual mode would be seen to offer possibilities beyond learning skills to cope with the mass media and textbook diagrams. What is suggested by the item quoted above from Ligature's list of aims is that, by paying attention to visual content and by drawing attention to the same, perhaps educational publishing could take up visual literacy education where C2005 didn't ever get started. I would like to suggest that textbooks could be invaluable tutors, both to learners and teachers themselves, teaching them how to look with insight and sensitivity.

The Ligature team felt that by including a visual learning strand in their series, learners who have a visual learning style as opposed to the more generally privileged verbal learning style, would benefit. This idea of different learning styles was drawn from Gardner's (1985) theory of multiple intelligences, where he speaks about children with a

strong visual/spatial intelligence who flounder when confronted with the linearity of the verbal mode. Ligature also made the assumption that learners with less English proficiency could make use of visuals to help them grasp concepts, approaching them through the "back door" of the visuals. The team took an overtly multimodal approach to literacy, saying that "Our premise was that students can and do read visuals, and that literacy is tied to both presentational and discursive processing of information" (LaSpina 1998: 128). The visual learning skills that were identified were the following:

- Develop careful and directed observation of images, objects, and the environment
- Understand, use, and create graphic information (timelines, charts, tables, other graphic organizers, graphs, diagrams)
- Interpret and respond to photographs, paintings, cartoons, and other illustrative materials
- Understand and use symbols
- Express meaning through sensory forms of representation (*ibid*: 132).

In the second chapter I extrapolated the bare bones of a cross-curricular approach to visual literacy already existing in C2005. The five visual learning skills listed above could provide an invaluable model upon which to build this curriculum. If our textbook industry could incorporate these into the design and content of textbooks perhaps the existing curricular bare bones could be fleshed out by means of textbook content.

Much teaching of visual learning skills could be done at the level of an informal curriculum of visual meaning making, where learners pick up a visual sensibility through their exposure to visual/verbal texts. This informal curriculum could be effected through the use of written text to direct the learner's attention to the image, ensuring that what is seen in the image is not just a repetition of the text. This should build up the understanding that images have content and are not just decoration. Well-formulated captions and excellently conceptualized and executed visuals could teach learners and teachers to look for content in visuals. Integrated written and visual text will induct learners into the implicit understanding that page layout and design is filled with meaning. This kind of understanding can be put into practice if learners are encouraged to, for example, write captions of a similar nature when they produce visual texts of their

own. Captions can also draw attention to formal visual literacy skills, such as sensitivity to the historical situatedness of images, and the use of colour and composition. In so doing, a vocabulary with which to talk about images and visuals can be built up through use. Textbooks that are created with a strong aesthetic sense, with carefully chosen design can possibly induct learners into aesthetic sensibilities and an awareness of how design affects meaning. This informal curriculum could also promote and emphasize the multimodal nature of communication. An example of this is the "exploded knight" (LaSpina 1998:47) where captions inform one not only about what one sees in the illustration of a knight, but what one cannot see. The written captions tell learners about the texture of the knight's tunic and that it is seldom washed, evoking a sense of how the knight might smell and feel. Learners are told about what is in the little bag at his waist and what this means for his future actions. So, the visual/verbal text evokes the senses of sight, touch and smell as well as the past and future actions of this illustrated character. Ligature called this strategy "say what you cannot see" and designed it to call on all the senses by telling in captions more about what was in the image, 'layering... doubled images, mental over visual [and] words and pictures [to] form recursive relationships' (LaSpina 1998:50). This strategy brings to mind Kress's (1997) idea about how synaesthesia needs to be encouraged in schools. Another powerful possibility is that textbooks make use of images as a primary text, from which learners extract meaning. This kind of activity would, I imagine, require visual "reading" skills, to greater or lesser degrees, but perhaps learners could uncover these skills by using carefully constructed questions about the image as a guide.

#### *4.2.4 Problems and criticisms*

I sent Bridget and June a number of questions about the OOOTF project that they discussed together, after which they communicated their responses to me over the telephone. One of these questions was about obstacles that they saw to the broader implementation of the style of working that we had used on this project. They responded that they believe that most illustrators are not capable of the kind of initiative that Lizza and I took. They felt that the ability to "get under the skin" and engage deeply with the written manuscript is not something that illustrators are generally capable of, as most do

not want to take risks or extend themselves. This failure on the part of illustrators was, they felt, partly because publishers have not provided a working situation that has encouraged the development of these abilities. I would suggest that most illustrators with initiative soon leave the business because they are given no room to extend themselves. Illustrators need to be trained to become authors of the visual text, but currently there is no university or technikon course that can provide them with the necessary knowledge. Bridget and June also felt that this style of working required an unusual level of trust and respect, where critique from all sides could be given and taken. Our project worked well because the individuals involved were willing to change our relationships and procedures and to work outside of, and in spite of, the current paradigm. Bridget and June felt that the current hierarchy and power relationships in publishing meant that most individuals would not be happy to have their area encroached upon by people with different views and abilities.

Overall, then, they felt that the process was more satisfying, less stressful and problematic, more cost-effective and time-effective and that the final product was more coherent than other books they had worked on. Nonetheless, without the right people, it would be difficult to implement this kind of working relationship across the board without a radical paradigm shift. Again, I would like to suggest, prompted by LaSpina, that the framework for this shift is already in place in the form of computers, where working relationships have room for flexibility and areas of expertise can have their boundaries blurred by the accessibility of computer software. This should not by any means be understood as suggesting that computer-generated illustrations are the answer; only that DTP software gives all roleplayers access to abilities that allow them to encroach on, and add to, other areas of expertise.

#### ***4.2.4.1 Despite the misgivings...***

Subsequent to the OOTF project I have become increasingly bold about recommending to writers and editors that my role becomes more integrated with theirs, and I have found a surprising willingness amongst them. I was approached to illustrate a series of eighteen Xhosa Grade 1 readers and I made it clear that I needed to be part of the writing and

conceptualizing process of these. The value of this was made clear to the authors after I sketched out one of the stories they had already written, and the visuals and written text were found to obscure one another. The authors subsequently agreed that I should be a co-writer, looking at the series as a whole with them, through the eyes of a designer/illustrator. On another project with a Non Governmental Organization, I have asked the writer to show me her initial concepts and then we have together formulated a design idea that not only communicates the information well, but also helps the writer to formulate her ideas more completely. Admittedly, these instances have been outside of large publishing organizations, which means that obstacles like pressures of multiple projects and existing hierarchical structures do not feature to the same extent. Nevertheless, perhaps these few incidents, coupled with the positive responses from publishing people in my field study can temper June and Bridget's feeling that few individuals would be willing to relinquish their isolated, expert roles.

#### **4.2.5 *LaSpina's criticisms of SS21***

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to go deeply into LaSpina's criticisms of the SS21 project. Much of his focus is on how the presentation of information on the World-Wide Web has affected other information delivery vehicles, and how this is impacting on textbooks' traditionally linear, textual mode. He points out that there is not enough research into visual/verbal "architecture" - into what makes a visual/verbal text. LaSpina criticizes Ligature for assuming that learners have picked up in their daily lives the "cinematic scanning" skills and the ability to identify visual markers that help to cohere the text, both of which are necessary for the optimal use of the series. The ability to grasp the Gestalt, to make meaning from the association of images and written text, is one that is difficult to teach and to evaluate, and is full of cultural and economic variations. It is interesting that LaSpina makes this criticism even in a media-saturated country like the United States where one might assume that learners have a great implicit understanding of visual form. In South Africa, where there are widely differing levels of exposure to visual media, illustrations, photographs, magazines, any assumptions in terms of design styles and even illustration style are difficult to make. This is no reason, however, to stick to unchallenging, dull design. What is needed, and LaSpina calls for

the same in his context, is more research into appropriate means of representation and design for the South African learner.

Other criticisms by LaSpina that are relevant to our situation have to do with how the textbook is used in the classroom. I mentioned earlier that a teacher had felt that the OOOTF series had too many distracting pictures. LaSpina quotes an expert on instructional design, Karen Wixon, who says that

Teachers are not quite sure how to deal with the visual aspect of the text in the first place. I know from experience that some of them do not ever look at it. Others think the material is not relevant [because] they are not going to test on it, so they can just treat it casually. And others recognize that there is new information in this material (LaSpina 1998: 151).

If teachers are not trained to deal with visual content and the curriculum does not back up the importance of the visual mode, the effort and research that has gone into a textbook can be wasted. My experience of working on the OOOTF team and on projects subsequent to this, however, makes me think that even if this is the case, and even if a hidden curriculum of visual literacy written into the books is never accessed, changing current modes of development and production can only improve textbook content. A textbook that coheres in all its aspects, and writers, illustrators and designers who find their work challenged and enriched by cross-pollination between modes of thinking, can only be beneficial to the final product. In the time that I have been working as an illustrator, I have seen a great number of editors and designers leaving educational publishing for more exciting, less rigid work in magazine or web-based writing and design jobs. Perhaps if educational publishing becomes more challenging and interesting work, then people who are creative, flexible and full of initiative will be attracted to the work.

### **4.3 Summary**

The main points that were made in this chapter were the following:

- Judging from appearances, the visual aspect of school textbooks appears to suffer from much neglect;
- There is a hierarchy of roles and of power in educational publishing; roles are allocated according to areas of expertise and maintained for the purposes of efficiency;
- The educational illustrator is at the bottom of this hierarchy both in terms of power relationships and in terms of the point at which she enters the process of making the textbook;
- The reason for this is that the verbal content of the book is considered of primary importance and the illustrations and other visual elements of design are given consideration mostly in terms of their marketing importance;
- The visual aspect of textbooks can, however, be an important site of learning, and of training in perceptual sensitivity. Visuals in textbooks should, along with the written text, be considered as "content". Educational publishers make extensive use of visuals in their books and should therefore, understand and use the visual mode to best effect, even if this is not required of them by the curriculum;
- In order for the visual mode to be better used, there must be a change in current hierarchies; the role of the illustrator needs to become equal to that of the author. Whatever the content of the book, it should be communicated through the mode that is most suitable to that content. If optimal use of both modes is to be made, then the content of the book, both visual and verbal, needs to be made concurrently;
- For this way of creating visual/verbal texts to work, individuals who are able to conceptualize across different modes are needed;
- There is a need for research into appropriate visual styles and forms that will best carry content to South African learners and visual/verbal text writers need to become skilled in the use of these;

Ideally, a curricular change would force the alteration of the publishers' attitude toward the visual. It would also provide for the proper assessment, for instance, of learners' visual productiveness, and would emphasize to teachers the importance of perceptual alertness across the curriculum. However, the textbook industry should not feel that they

must wait for these changes before they make changes of their own. They are in the business of instructional design and so this aspect of their work should not have to be driven by curricular decree, but simply by the quest for excellence. Judging by the way textbooks look and by the dissatisfaction expressed by illustrators, the visual aspect of textbooks is far from excellent. Whatever their opinion on the need for the inclusion of visual learning/visual literacy education in their books, visuals are a crucial aspect of publishers' work and they ought therefore to inform themselves about this. Research into appropriate forms of design and representation needs to be done, and the possibility that a resolutely verbal text-based delivery mode disadvantages certain students, as Gardner (1985) suggests, needs to be examined. Writers, editors and publishers need to become informed about the nature and the possibilities of the visual text and what they can bring to it in collaboration with the visual text writers. Finally, illustrators and designers need to become more expert in their fields so that they can bring a great deal of initiative and informed opinion to their role as writers of visual text, once the publishing hierarchies are done away with. Once this happens, and once-isolated roleplayers experience how input from another area of expertise affects their own area, I believe that an improvement is inevitable.

However, apart from an unwillingness to relinquish control of expertise, other obstacles to this kind of change may be economic. If the illustrator is regarded as an author of the visual text, will she then be paid what an author is paid? If designers are no longer simply DTP operators but are now doing the kind of work of an artistic director, do they need salaries that reflect this? And what is to happen with the position of the editor if the writer, illustrator and designer are to work so closely. Will her role become redundant? These are the kinds of issues and problems that will, if changes are to happen, have to be weighed up against the benefits that changes will bring both to the product and to the learner.

## Chapter 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 A critical overview

I first embarked on this study with the intention of finding out more about certain aspects of educational illustration, such as the level of perceptual sophistication and the kind of visual preferences that South African learners have. Having come to the end of this dissertation, however, it is clear that I did not even begin to research these questions. This is because, before I could start investigating levels of visual literacy, I had to find out exactly what was meant by "visual literacy", and this proved to be worthy of a study all of its own. Despite the fact that I still have unanswered questions, I believe that choosing to explore this issue has benefitted my illustration work more than the answers to my original questions would have. Even if I had researched these, and become very knowledgeable about learners' visual preferences and comprehension, I suspect that it would not have substantially changed my illustration work. Unless the visual mode is perceived, by the curriculum and by publishers, as being essential to the *content* of the book, an illustrator cannot make a significant difference to the reception of her work, however well-informed her depictions are. Her knowledge might result in a learner no longer being alienated by what he sees, but if the illustration is nothing but an afterthought, and the textbook and the teacher do not encourage the learner to engage seriously with the visuals anyway, the illustrator's knowledge seems to have little point. Therefore, diverting my attention to the issue of the lack of attention paid to the visual mode, as well as to some possible solutions to this problem, has, I believe, been far more valuable and potentially far-reaching than any answers to my initial questions could have been.

#### 5.1.1 Summary

The comments quoted below were made by Rob Wittig, one of the team coordinators on the SS21 project, in an interview with LaSpina. Wittig's comments encapsulate much of what has been covered in this dissertation.

"[Because] the culture of visual study in the education world [is] tiny [compared to reading], a lot of writing and criticism needs to be done. People have to invent some terms. What we found when we were studying visual literacy for our [series], is that you have to look for fragments of those studies in different realms,... in education, art history. But the tough thing is you can't just apply the study of reading to this. It's a different study altogether" (LaSpina 1998: 130).

In my literature review I outlined the wide range of literature that exists on the concept and in the area of the visual mode. When considering the bewildering diversity of literature in the Moriarty and Kenney (1998) bibliography, for instance, an appropriate response is, as Wittig says, to 'look for fragments... in different realms' in order to come up with an operative definition of visual literacy. The Ligature team working on the SS21 project managed to do this reasonably well, coming up with a very well-formulated operative construct that framed their approach to the development of the series. In contrast, my critique of C2005 concludes that, instead of synthesizing and shaping the concept from appropriate fragments, the curriculum has simply reflected the fragmented state of the concept, thereby rendering it clumsy and largely unusable. I showed how assumptions implied in the use of the "literacy" analogy are partly to blame for C2005's understanding of visual literacy; an overemphasis on the language-like aspects masking the unique qualities of the visual mode. As Wittig points out, visual literacy is 'a different study altogether', and should be approached on its own terms. Whatever these terms might be, however, they are unlikely to be acknowledged as valuable while the curriculum continues to consider visual material less important than verbal.

Educational publishing's relationship with the visual seems to have a similar root to that of C2005, also tending to privilege verbal material over visual. Although the industry is deeply dependent on visuals for the sale and reception of its textbooks, my experience is that it pays very little respect to this aspect of its business, rendering its visual experts virtually powerless in the publishing hierarchy. Because there is so little 'writing and criticism' on the subject of the visual mode in education, and because it has not been clearly emphasized in the curriculum, publishers do not seem to feel the need to make changes in their approach to this subject. And, once again, if the visual is conceived of in terms of being "a kind of literacy", publishers are likely to remain unaware that in the

learners' engagement with textbooks, *all* the content of the book contributes to the meaning they make from it. Using Kress' (1997) ideas on multimodality and curriculum as a model, I suggested that this type of approach to literacy is needed, so that proper attention will be paid to modes of thinking and understanding apart from the verbal and numerical. In opening up to this kind of approach, and drawing on concepts like design and on art education, a means of talking about the visual outside of the "literacy" analogy and language paradigm could develop. Wittig says 'people have to invent some terms'; the development of a vocabulary that allows the visual mode to be approached independent of the "literacy" analogy will, I believe, go a long way towards changing perceptions of that mode.

As the visual mode increasingly seems to be the answer to the "information overload" and has become an important mode of communication, Wittig's "terms" seem more and more necessary. The prevalence of the visual mode in daily life, Kress suggests, requires an education curriculum that looks at literacy as multimodal, acknowledging the fact that the verbal mode is no longer enough to make sense of the world. Educational publishing need not, however, wait for this kind of curriculum change. This industry is already deeply dependent on visuals, and it should therefore tap into the educational and experiential power that visuals can have in their textbooks. This would require a change in development and production hierarchies, as well as a great deal more professionalism from the "authors of the visual text". My field study was encouraging in this respect, as it indicated to me that educators, including publishers, are engaging with visual literacy issues, and that many are concerned that there should be more thought and research given to these issues.

Arising from the issues that I have looked at in this dissertation, I have a number of recommendations to make in terms of directions that further research and development of the visual mode in the curriculum and educational publishing could take:

## 5.2 Recommendations

### *5.2.1 Teachers need to be taught about visual literacy*

Not only has visual literacy been poorly incorporated into C2005, the visual literacy that has been included has not been backed up with supportive materials, nor with guidelines to assist teachers with incorporating visual literacy skills into their lessons. In some of the Specific Outcomes there are indications that teachers ought to discuss an image, or the manipulative techniques of images, but the curriculum seems to assume that the kind of critical metalanguage necessary for this somehow pre-exists in teachers and learners. My fourth chapter has suggested that educational publishers fill this gap in the curriculum, providing visual literacy education through textbooks. Well-formulated written text and captions that point towards the visual, encouraging engagement and providing vocabulary could possibly initiate both teachers and learners into some of the visual communication conventions. However, these would need to be integral to the whole text, so that teachers and learners do not gloss over them as irrelevant detail. As Bridget Pitt reported to me about the OOOTF series, many teachers feel that pictures are a distracting waste of time, devoid of content, and learners are not, on the whole, encouraged to engage with them in a meaningful or productive way. In my field study, the trainer of teacher-librarians reported a discouragingly low ability to make sense of images amongst her trainee teachers, and sees this as a symptom of their own poor schooling. Teachers therefore need to be taught about the value of textbook visual content, not only in terms of illustration, but also in terms of all kinds of visual presentation, including the visual textual features such as paper quality, layout style, choice of font etc. This should also extend to understanding the value of learners' synthetic visual productiveness. The breadth of application of the visual mode should also be emphasized, so that maths, science, art and language teachers all become alert to the way this mode can be applied in their discipline, and how it can make cross-curricular links.

### ***5.2.2 Further research into visual literacy issues***

The questions that brought me to look at visual literacy and educational illustration in the first place are still, I believe, very relevant, and educational publishing ought to be spending more time researching these kinds of questions. Their books' sales and authenticity depend to a great deal on the illustrations and so they ought to be far more knowledgeable about the extent to which South African children are capable of engaging meaningfully with textbook illustrations and other visual material. Research into the levels of understanding of visual conventions such as cropped images, cartoon panel type narratives, use of speech bubbles, abstraction of images, as well as cinematic and video visual and narrative conventions etc. would help with knowing what visual content can or cannot be assumed. Cultural representational taboos should be well known, as should the fact that certain cultural/language/age groups might prefer certain representational styles. Other sensitivities like acceptable levels of realism in depictions of, for instance, township life, should be researched. There needs to be some kind of measure of authenticity of textbook depictions, especially when cultures, landscapes, environments and situations are depicted that are out of the life-experience of the publishers.

Apart from this kind of context-based research, there needs to be further research into the usefulness of visuals in instructional materials as well as into means of assessing learners' visual productiveness. If a multimodal approach is to be made operational, these kinds of issues need to be understood. Although these have not been paid particular attention in this study, serious consideration should be given to Gardner's (1985) ideas about multiple intelligences. The possibility that learners with verbal and numerical ability seem to be given a substantial advantage over learners with other kinds of intelligences should be considered.

### ***5.2.3 Training of illustrators/visual text authors***

The research that I have recommended thus far concerns knowledge that publishers require in order to provide authentic, meaningful, accessible visuals for learners. It should also be an area of expertise for the educational illustrator. One of the illustrators who responded to my questionnaire shared with me some of the knowledge that she has

picked up through years of illustrating experience, but it is generally very difficult to access this kind of information. Educational illustrators should not be employed just because they can draw, as often seems to be the case. They should be employed as professionals with specialist visual education knowledge. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there is currently no course in South Africa that teaches educational illustration, and no way of learning what one needs to know except, possibly, through experience. Fine Art and Graphic Design departments at universities and technikons should be providing their students with skills that make them employable and educational illustration should be something that is taught and researched in these institutions. If, as I have recommended in my fourth chapter, illustrators are to transform their job description from "illustrator of educational text" to "author of visual text" they will need to bring a lot more expertise and professionalism to their work. This should include an understanding of visual features of written text, relationships between written and visual text, an ability to engage critically with written text, as well as a firm grasp of educational issues and agendas.

#### ***5.2.4 Building terminology for the visual mode***

As Wittig suggested above, 'people have to invent some terms' if thinking around the visual mode is to be changed. I would suggest that two of these terms could be "visual thinking" and "visual learning". As has been emphasized in this dissertation, cognition must not be thought possible only through language. David Perkins (1994) expands on the processes that make up visual thinking and learning: 'Although we tend to think of art as primarily a visual phenomenon, looking at art thoughtfully recruits many kinds and styles of cognition - visual processing, analytical thinking, posing questions, testing hypotheses, verbal reasoning and more' (LaSpina 1998: 94). Even if art can encourage these forms of thinking, the traditional marginalization of the arts is so entrenched in education that it seems almost futile to recommend that vocabulary and terms of reference should come from that discipline. Greene says that in schools, 'the dominant voices are still those of the officials who assume the objective worth of certain kinds of knowledge, who take for granted that the schools' main mission is to meet national economic and technical needs' (Greene 1995: 9). In response to this, however, Kress

(1997) points out that in fact, economic and technical needs have come to be very much entwined with visual culture. He adds to this that "Information-overload" may be an effect produced by the continued reliance on verbal representation, on writing, as the central means of communication. It may very well be that the solution to information-overload is not to produce less information, but to handle it visually' (Kress 1997: 99). Kress therefore asks what kind of disposition the curriculum intends to foster in the learners that it influences. He identifies the disposition he would consider the most valuable for a technologically sophisticated society, where change is constant, information overload is a problem and job expectations do not remain stable. He says that

the valued and necessary disposition will be one in which individuals have the knowledge, the skill, the ability, the willingness as a matter of course to produce the representations which fulfil their needs and demands in the contexts in which they are made. *Design* is oriented towards competence in innovative production in a full awareness of the complex conditions of a particular environment (Kress 1997: 163).

Perhaps, then, design can be the source of the terms that 'people have to invent' in order to talk about the visual, specifically, and about multimodality in general. Important to the notion of design is the mindfulness of the 'complex conditions of a particular environment'. Learners need to become aware of the meanings that reside in a context, many of which are accessible through visual perception. Here the vocabulary of fine art can come into play. Patterns and shapes, forms and textures, colours, materials, rhythm, focus, etc. can hold the keys to many layers of historical, social, economic, cultural meanings. One needs, however, the perceptual sensitivity to be able to access this meaning and one needs the means of expressing it too. Here is where the vocabulary and terms of reference of art and aesthetic education can enter the vocabulary of design and can feed into talking about and understanding terms like "visual thinking", "visual learning" and other terminology that will help to shape the visual mode.

### **5.2.5 Curricular change**

If the curriculum wishes to change its approach to literacy and consequently, to the visual mode, Kress' (1997) curriculum of representation and communication is the direction in

which that paradigm shift should be made. Understanding literacy as essentially multimodal is at the heart of Kress' curriculum and this understanding would transform C2005. In order for learners to know that meaning is not only found in verbal information, the curriculum will need to encourage learners to pay attention to other modes of perceiving. Learners will need to become awakened to their bodily engagement with the world. O'Loughlin writes:

'Encounter' is the notion we need to recover in order to do justice to our fundamental relationship with the world. This entails a multi-faceted ebb and flow of attention and involves all shades of obliviousness, attending to, taking notice of, and intensified contact. Education needs to be seen as education in environmental encounter, which is education concerned with those modes of awareness that develop and enhance an individual's understanding of the world around her or him. Emphasis is on watching in new ways, noticing, opening oneself to and attempting to see the world as it is in its own fashion so that person and world ultimately emerge (O'Loughlin 1997: 29).

South Africa does not have the kind of widespread technological advancement that inspires Kress' description of the kind of disposition such a society might require. However, our recently-won human rights culture should mean that learners are given the opportunity to uncover their ability to make well-informed choices. This can only be done if the learner is awake to possibility and awake to his sense of agency in this possibility. I have quoted Papanek as saying that every decision or plan is an act of design, and all learners should have the ability to carry out their design behaviour with skill and insight. Greene says that

When we see more and hear more, it is not only that we lurch, if only for a moment, out of the familiar and the taken-for-granted but that new avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience; we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is, we make [sic] take an initiative in the light of possibility. (Greene 1995: 123).

This kind of understanding of education is about enabling learners to develop their ability to operate with imagination and initiative, rather than about learning reproductive, or even critical competencies (Kress 1997).

### 5.3 Concluding remarks

Calls for curriculum writers to become more aware of the wonderful educational possibilities that the arts have to offer seem to be, more often than not, turned down in favour of the apparently more instrumental concern with serving the technological and industrial needs of the economy. In the case of the visual mode, however, because of the way that the Westernized world has become so image-saturated and increasingly image-dependent, this aspect of the arts can prove economically valuable. In my literature review I quoted computer engineers bemoaning the lack of visual sensitivity amongst their colleagues and research departments. As Kress points out, the skills that go along with arts education - the ability to think laterally, identify patterns, use imagination, flexibility of approach - are skills that are increasingly demanded in the workplace. He says that 'it may very well be that the technologies of communication just as much as the information-based economies of the day after tomorrow will actually need, demand, visual modes of representation and communication' (Kress 1997: 99). Curriculum writers will need to become more alert to the fact that the requirements for being considered literate have changed and that learners require more than what is currently being offered as literacy. Educational publishers too, will need to come to terms with the fact that some of its audience is extremely adept at understanding visual communication and that other learners need help to become more adept. Most importantly, however, there is the potential to open the eyes of learners, both to the incredibly rich world of meaning that is inherent in everything that they see, as well as to the sense that they are capable of making this meaning themselves.

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MML appoints the Freelancer, who accepts such appointment, to provide the Services specified in the attached Schedule subject to the terms and conditions contained herein.
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The Freelancer waives in favour of MML all his/her Moral Rights to the Work (i.e. the right to claim authorship and the right to object to distortions, mutilations and other modifications of the Work where such would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the Freelancer).
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The Deadlines set by MML in the Schedule are of the essence. MML, through the person designated for the purpose on the Schedule, may in its entire discretion grant written extensions of any Deadline.
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In the event of the Freelancer not meeting any Deadline MML shall be entitled to deduct from the Fee a sum calculated according to the Penalty Rate set out in the Schedule.
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This Agreement shall be conditional upon MML approving a sample of the artwork on or before the date stipulated for such approval in the Schedule.
7. **STANDARD OF WORK**  
The Work shall be of the same standard and quality as approved by MML in terms of 6 above or, if not subject to such preliminary approval, of the highest standard and quality. In the event of the Work not meeting such standard (the determination of which shall be in the entire discretion of MML) the Freelancer shall do whatever may be necessary to bring the Work to such standard at his/her own cost. Notwithstanding the provisions of clause 4 above, the Freelancer shall not, unless otherwise provided herein, be entitled to any Deadline extension for such corrective Work. In the event of the Work not being capable of being brought up to such standard, in the opinion of MML, MML may terminate this Agreement and the Freelancer shall not be entitled to any consideration for any Work done.
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The Fee stipulated in the Schedule shall be the sole consideration payable to the Freelancer, and the Freelancer shall have no entitlement to any royalties on the sale of any publication/s in which the Work is incorporated.
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Signature

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Date.....5/2/01.....

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Date...5/2/01.....

The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, has always thought it important that the ceremony of marriage should take the same simple quiet form as the regular Quaker meeting for worship. Every Quaker meeting is held on the basis of silent communion of spirit, in which there is opportunity to speak about what arises in your heart. Nobody officiates over the meeting, or over the marriage ceremony, and the meeting begins once the first person has been seated

The bride and bridegroom, in the presence both of local Friends and of those specially invited to the wedding, take one another as partners in a life-long commitment of faithfulness and love. Both partners make the same promise, and all present are asked to help by prayer and support, whether silent or spoken. Early in the course of the silent meeting, the bride and groom stand and make their marriage vows. After this, the meeting continues as it began with a period of silence, in which anyone present may speak. This can be a time when the couple gain inspiration and help which continues to be a source of strength to them during their married life. It is also an opportunity for those who attend the meeting to ask for a blessing on the marriage and to commit themselves to supporting the couple in whatever way they can.

The meeting closes after everyone has shaken hands. As soon as the meeting has ended, everyone who has been present at the marriage is invited to sign the Quaker marriage certificate.