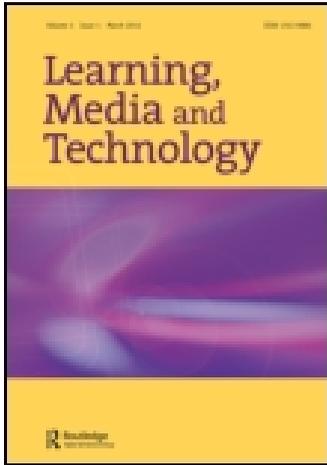


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Children's writing goes 3D: a case study of one primary school's journey into multimodal authoring

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Children's writing goes 3D: a case study of one primary school's journey into multimodal authoring

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This paper draws from research conducted as part of an Australian Research Council funded Linkage Project 'Teaching effective 3D authoring in the middle years: multimedia grammatical design and multimedia authoring pedagogy', which is a collaboration between the University of New England, the University of Tasmania and the Australian Children's Television Foundation. This project is being conducted in over 20 schools around Australia. The data presented in this paper focuses on one such school, located in Tasmania. It explores one school's endeavour in the teaching and learning of multimodal narrative. Data includes interviews from students and multimodal analysis of student narratives. The paper showcases the kinds of semiotic choices the children are making for their stories, and includes excerpts from the interviews to illustrate how they are able to articulate justifications for their choices. In particular, it focuses on how children are establishing literary concepts such as genre, characterisation and point of view using all semiotic resources. In doing so, it considers the pedagogy behind the creations to explore how effectively it works as children create new kinds of texts which are innovative, critical, creative and 'of quality'.

Keywords: multimodal authoring; multimodal analysis; literary technique; intermodal complementarity; narrative; *Kahootz*

Introduction

Primary schools in Australia have typically included the teaching of narrative in their curricula. Indeed, the practice of encouraging children to produce illustrated stories has been very commonplace. With the emergence of new media in an increasingly technological world, a revaluing of all modes of signification has impacted the ways in which teachers conceptualise literacy. There has been an increasing focus on visual texts, and texts of new media (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), leading into a conception of textuality as multimodal, and theories of multimodality (Unsworth 2001; Quinn 2004) moved teachers away

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from the privileging of linguistic modes to a view of semiotics which accounted for all modes. Theorists and practitioners experiencing this shift have begun to speak in terms of multiplicities: multiple forms can be texts, and texts can be multimodal – a concept the New London Group termed *Multiliteracies* (New London Group 1996; Cope and Kalantzis 2009a, 2009b). Drawing on the work of Halliday (1985), these multiliteracies theorists emphasised the further development of a metalanguage to talk about the ways words, images, sounds and all forms of multimedia texts were constructed, to make meaning within particular contexts, discourses and ideologies.

The key tenet of multiliteracies pedagogy, building from early work on critical pedagogy (cf. Freire 1972) and taking into account the advances of society over the past three decades, was that we need to prepare children for their social and economic futures through transformative pedagogies. And that transformative pedagogy is all about knowledge building, within communities of experts, allowing students to have power and leadership yet also providing explicit instruction in how multimodal texts work to achieve their purposes. This pedagogy is critical, it is participatory, it is dialogic and it is transformative.

A multimodal view of textuality brings with it new complexities at the classroom level. One complexity is the pedagogy teachers might use to best equip primary school students with the critical understandings required to interpret and produce stories in different combinations of modes and media. Embedded within this complexity is more specifically understanding to what degree literary concepts such as genre and characterisation can be explored across and through semiotic modes.

The multimodal authoring project

The aims of the Australian Research Council (ARC) project on multimodal authoring from which this paper draws are: to provide an account of children's innovative, transformative and critical multimodal stories and to develop a transformative pedagogy for multimodal authoring with the teaching of explicit multimodal metalanguage. At the heart of this project is the recognition that schools and teachers need to find optimum ways to work with multimodal, digital texts in their classrooms, and indeed to reconceptualise literacy in schools to account for multimodality.

This project incorporates schools from across Australia, in both city and rural areas. Using a 3D animation software program called *Kahootz* (The Australian Children's Television Foundation 2008–current), teachers are trained in visual literacy, film literacy and the technological requirements of *Kahootz* to create machinima (movies using gaming platforms) in 3D worlds (cf. Thomas 2008). Teachers then work with their various classes across a range of contexts with a semi-structured plan of work, allowing students' time to explore, collaborate and experiment with their own machinima. The pedagogy provides a range of open ended tasks that allow students to analyse and evaluate

ways to communicate multimodal meanings, and is structured to provide both meaningful contexts for play and explicit teaching of multimodal grammatical design.

The focus on grammatical design was to ensure students gained a critical media literacy (Kellner and Share 2007), through which they could create richly layered texts that deployed linguistic, visual, gestural and aural resources to make meanings. The explicit teaching of both a metalanguage of semiotics and of the ways a story can be told through the texturing of these semiotics facilitates students' strategic and aesthetic construction of multimedia texts. The need for explicit teaching of multimodal grammatical design has been emphasised in studies of middle school students' use of animation and digital video (Burn and Parker 2003; Burn and Leach 2004; Burn and Durran 2006). This work showed that when grammatical design was taught, students made very sophisticated commentaries on their reformulated movie texts (Burn and Durran 2006). The students' creative transformation of the uses of software facilitated their development of grammatical design knowledge in an enjoyable manner (Burn and Durran 2006).

Methodology

Data collected included samples of students' multimodal texts from across two classes of children, and interviews conducted with six focus children, who were identified by the teachers as rating highly on a survey of knowledge about digital multimodal authoring and narrative technique which had been developed by the research team. The text analysis drew on systemic functional grammatical descriptions of language (Halliday 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), and semiotic descriptions of the ways images and sounds construct meaning (Van Leeuwen 1999; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). It also utilises theorisations of the use of colour in images, drawing on the system of ambience developed by Painter (2008). Additionally, the text analysis used the notion of intermodal complementarity (Painter and Martin, forthcoming) to examine the ways in which children were able to create richly textured narratives in terms of the semiotic overlay of meanings included. Interview data were used to illuminate and elaborate upon the reasons why certain semiotic decisions and choices were made by the children whilst constructing their texts.

The multimodal texts created by children were instances of 3D animated movies, created with the software tool, *Kahootz*. As such, the text can be considered tri-modal, as they instantiate meanings from three meanings systems: verbiage, image and sound. To date, the work done by Painter and Martin (forthcoming) and other semiotics theorists (such as Unsworth and Cleirigh 2009) has concentrated on developing extensive systems which explore intermodal relationships of bimodal texts (verbiage and image). In particular,

Painter and Martin (forthcoming) discuss the concept of complementarity – the degree to which the metafunctions and the affordances of each modality either commit to creating the same meanings (convergence), or oppositional meanings (divergence). They describe complementarity as:

... the degree to which each [modality] commits meaning in a particular instance and the extent to which – for each metafunction – that commitment converges with or diverges from that of the other modality.

(Painter and Martin, forthcoming, n.p)

In this paper I take the concept of complementarity and extend it modestly to include the semiotic resource of sound, in an attempt to account for the kinds of choices made by children and reflected in their narrative movies.

As narrative was the genre of the children's movies, I especially wanted to examine how narrative and literary concepts such as genre, characterisation and point of view were realised semiotically and through intermodal complementarity in the children's multimodal texts. I also wanted to understand to what degree the children were able to articulate the constructedness of their texts, and whether they were able to draw upon a metalanguage to describe their choices. The completed analysis would then map back to the two central aims of the project – describing the multimodal texts children were able to create, and evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogy the research team had implemented with teachers in their classrooms.

Analysis

Our pedagogy was sequenced in several stages, over three units of work. The data presented here is primarily from unit one, which involved children recreating versions of the traditional rhyme, *Little Ms Muffet*. In this recreating, a majority of the children from both classes seemed to choose a horror genre for their retelling, although there were several who chose the romance genre, and several who chose a more faithful-to-the-original, present-day retelling of the rhyme.

I first examined the ways in which children were able to establish genre. I spoke with Nike¹ about his work.

Figure 1 shows *Little Ms Muffet* sitting in an empty space in the upstairs of a theatre, taking a break to eat her curds and whey. Here meanings which convey genre are committed entirely through the semiotic system of images, through ideational meanings of circumstantiation – the symbolic use of an old skeleton (symbolic attribute as it is traditionally associated with horror) at the back of the theatre, and the use of the fog (setting), and through interpersonal meanings of ambience – the way that a muted, cool, removed palette in the background is utilised to convey the mood of the horror genre.

I asked Nike to explain his choices for this shot, and his response was:



Figure 1. Screenshot from student Nike's Little Ms Muffet.

I swatched all of her clothes black and used blacks and grays and shadows and black fog effects because I wanted the audience to immediately know this was a horror genre

Nike clearly has a good sense of social purpose for his piece, however the fact that all meanings reside with the semiotic resource of the image means he could further develop the piece to mark the genre more strongly. In saying this, I do not mean to devalue a text which foregrounds one resource over others, as this can be an effective choice to make to serve a number of literary purposes. One might expect however that genre would lend itself well to being treated by a consideration of more than a single resource.

Somewhat more sophisticated is Isabella's text. Figure 2 shows the work of Isabella, who created a romantic retelling of Little Ms Muffet. What cannot be seen from the image is that the bird on the top left flies across the title, the camera zooms around to follow Ms Muffet, who sits on a park bench, and all



Figure 2. Isabella's retelling of Little Ms Muffet.

the while a gentle musical melody wafts through the animation. The images clearly mark the genre. Ideationally the circumstantiation includes the use of the colourful flowers and the slowly flying bird weaving across the shot, are all symbolic attributes of romance. Interpersonally, affect and ambience reflect romance – vibrant, fully saturated colours, warm pink and red hues. According to Painter (2008, 92) ambience can be described as *familiar* if the image is infused with colour of high differentiation, which in turn draws from Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) system of modality. Figure 2 reflects both a high degree of familiarity (Painter 2008) and a high level of modality for an animation coding orientation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). According to Painter (2008), this allows the viewer to feel more intimately connected (as opposed to distanced) from the image.

Affect and ambience are also reflected in the music, which has sound qualities that might be characterised as bright, soft and round, using harps, bells, violins and a major arpeggio. In assigning a semiotic description of the music, I adapt Van Leeuwen's (1999) theorisation of how music conveys emotion: through the use of melody configuration, dynamics and rhythm. Melodically, the music selected by Isabella is undulating within a narrow pitch range, medium tempo and soft. Using van Leeuwen's descriptions of melody types, this matches his description of *tenderness*, a perfect selection for a romantic genre.

Interpersonal meanings of romance are committed through the coupling of two resources – the images and the sounds. This intersemiotic resonance creates an amplification of meaning associated with romance, and Isabella has effectively constructed genre through modal convergence of the interpersonal. On asking Isabella about her choices, she had the following to say:

I sort of wanted it to be a happy little play and it just sounded nice to start with – whoever watches can get into it. I made all those flowers, yeah, I put all of them in. I like how you can accessorise the background and everything to suit the mood. It looked nice and happy. I dressed her in those clothes because it looked like a romance sort of thing . . .

Isabella's ability to convey genre is more sophisticated than Nike's, discussed above, her ability to articulate her choices is charming for an 11 year old, and her choices were clearly very deliberate to serve the social purpose of the text. However, it is notable that she does not actually draw upon any metalanguage, and this raises questions about how the semiotic grammar might have been represented within the pedagogy.

I next wanted to explore how characterisation was constructed multimodally. Typically, in written texts, characterisation might be realised through the description of a character, the actions of the character, revealing the inner thoughts of a character, and the interactions the character has with another character. Grammatically these might be realised through: the use of extended

nominal groups, where adjectives and adjectivals provide description, express roles and/or reveal the qualities of a character; the use of varying gradations of material processes (i.e., does the character walk, meander, stumble, or run); the use of internal monologue where sensory processes are revealed (i.e., mental processes of perception); the use of processes to indicate interaction (i.e., a use of behavioural processes to indicate interaction); or the use of circumstances of manner to indicate how the character behaves towards another (i.e., how did the baby cry – with a healthy gusto or with a scared whimper?). These are just a few examples but choices writers make about constructing written characterisations cross all three metafunctions.

In Figure 2 I have already discussed Isabella's choices to construct genre. In her comment, Isabella also mentioned her Ms Muffet character, and the fact that she selected red clothing to make her look like a romantic figure. Here she has utilised symbolic attribute of red to swatch Ms Muffet's clothes, not solely to convey genre, but to construct Ms Muffet's character as a romantic character, ready to fall in love.

In contrast, we can see in Figure 3, Mikey's choice of character did not use any symbolic attributes related to romance. This is in stark contrast to the red love heart images used to swatch just about every other object in the shot.

I asked Mikey about her swatching and why her Ms Muffet had on 'normal' clothes. Her response was:

That's because she's just normal, she's not exactly in love with the spider yet, or, she never is . . . if I swatched her, it would look like she wanted to be in love with somebody.

So here, ideational meanings associated with characterisation are reflected through the resource of images, specifically with the deliberate choice NOT to use symbolic attributes associated with the genre – Mikey constructs Ms Muffet to subvert the anticipated role of the female protagonist of romantic fiction by being dressed in her own unique way – blue shorts and a purple T-shirt. This is both a different kind of suggestive symbolism, and a foreshadowing that what is to come in this romantic genre might not

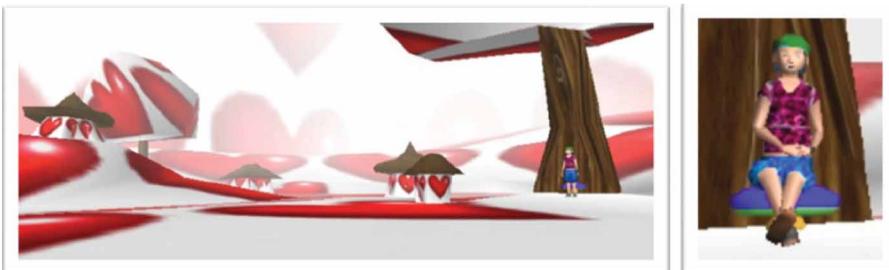


Figure 3. Mikey's retelling of Little Ms Muffet: characterisation.

actually end up happily every after. Semiotically, the meaning is constructed solely at this point within the image, however as the text unfolds, more is revealed.

The sequence of shots in Figure 4 shows Mikey's depiction of the spider, a hyperbolic characterisation of somebody in love. The sequence shows the spider with cartoonish love heart eyes, which balloon out of his head when he spots Ms Muffet and falls in love with her. Additionally, purple and red love hearts explode around him. We hear two kinds of sounds – first the spoken expression 'ooh la la' and then a musical line which is the same romantically themed line that Isabella used above (see discussion of Figure 2). So in this sequence, characterisation is realised through the interpersonal metafunction, specifically that of affect, across all three modes. Table 1 demonstrates this.

Here all three semiotic resources and the affordances of each (image, shot type, animation, words, spoken qualities of words, melody and sound qualities of melody) converge at the interpersonal metafunction for each resource to create maximum intersemiotic resonance. We are left in no doubt about the character of the spider.

In discussing her choices, Mikey stated:

[About the verbiage] Ooh la la is a common expression people use for love... well, if somebody wants to make fun of something... like if you want to make fun... say your sister is going and falling in love with somebody and you don't know them, you go ooh la la and kind of tease them like cheesy, or cheeky kind of...

[About the image] To make the audience involved... maybe the eyes with the spider, like to show them that he is definitely in love... I deliberately did that (front on view, eyes staring out)... yeah, I kind of learnt it from the unit and somewhere else, kind of a bit of both... I saw it in Doctor Who... with the werewolf... he has like black eyes, like he's a boy and he has completely black eyes and he's right on you and he makes your blood run cold and stuff... they do heaps of close ups with the eyes in Doctor Who, like red eyes... and so I used that here but with the romance to make the audience involved...

[About the music] Because it kind of sounded like romantic kind of, like he was in love, and he felt like he was a butterfly or something



Figure 4. Mikey's characterisation of the spider in her retelling of Little Ms Muffet.

Table 1. Analysis of Mikey's characterisation of the spider.

	Verbiage	Image	Sound
Ideational			
Interpersonal			
Affiliation		Gaze of character directed at reader/viewer	
Feeling (affect)	<i>ooh la la</i> , lexis expressed with emotion	Visual affect: love heart eyes invoking a <i>romantic</i> facial expression	<i>Tender</i> musical melody
Feeling (ambience/ tone)		Ambience vibrant and familiar	Verbiage expressed with an intimate, <i>romantic</i> tone
Textual			

These justifications for her choices across semiotic resources by Mikey reveal a strong sense of audience and an understanding of how to communicate meanings multimodally. It is interesting to note that later in my interview with Mikey, she stated:

I absolutely wanted to inform the audience that this was a romance and the spider was in love

Her use of the intensifier *absolutely* here reflects the extent to which she consciously and deliberately imbued meanings across all three modalities, and explains why all three modalities have a high degree of commitment and convergence to the attitudinal meanings of the text.

The level of detail in the articulation of choices by Mikey was not common among all children, but represents excellent understanding about the concepts taught within the pedagogical framework provided by the project team to the teachers. I was deeply impressed by Mikey, despite the lack of metalanguage. Interestingly, some of the children did use the metalanguage, but used it with the child-like misunderstanding one might expect. Figure 5, for example, reveals a shot of a character from two children's work in the second stage of the project (unit 2).

In a recent classroom visit to make observations of the children at work on their second unit, two students, Willow and Sophie, were excited to tell me about their story. I asked them why they were using an extreme close up in this shot that they were working on, and they replied:

We used an extreme close up here because we wanted to show how the villain was arrogant and hogging the camera, he is demanding, and how the other animals are talking behind his back

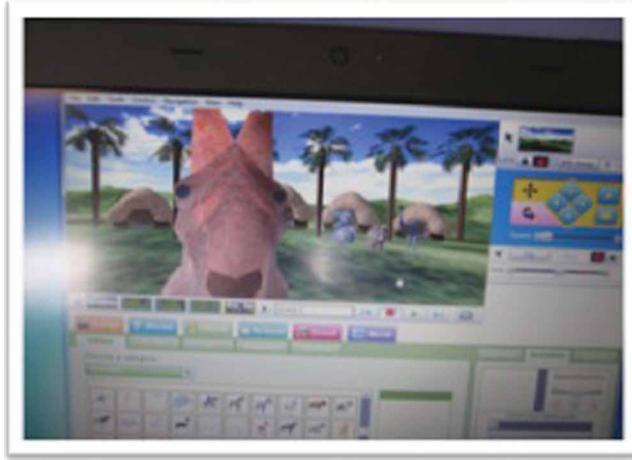


Figure 5. Screenshot from Willow and Sophie's original narrative.

It amused me because the concept of *demand* (realised by the character's gaze directed at the viewer) seemed to be mixed up with *intimate social distance* (realised by an extreme close up) and also the children seemed to think that a demand had to be used to show a demanding² character. It seemed to me that the concept of *demand* was not understood by these two children, or misconstrued in ways not intended. And even though Mikey did not actually use the term *demand* when discussing the spider's eyes in her piece (Figure 4), she clearly had a much better developed understanding of the concept and purpose for making those choices.

Returning to Mikey's story, the next scene (illustrated in part in Figure 6) reveals the spider crawling up onto Ms Muffet and giving her a long, loud kiss on the lips. Ms Muffet, horrified, jumps up and shoves the spider off her. The spider lurches backwards onto the ground, and Ms Muffet exclaims,

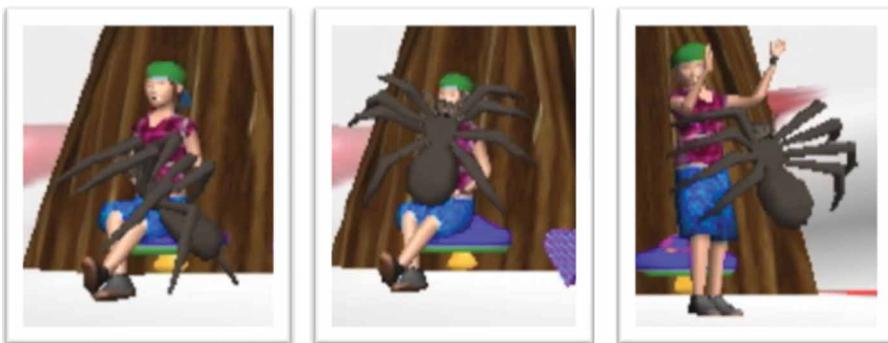


Figure 6. Mikey's retelling of Ms Muffet reveals more about Ms Muffet's character.

‘Gross!’ This has the effect of first creating a sense of horror or distaste in the viewer as the spider crawls all over Ms Muffet, but then comedic relief as she shoves the poor creature off her. All meanings in the previous shot demonstrated high commitment and modal convergence related to positive affect – romance and love. Here, the ambience remains the same, however Ms Muffet’s character and the attitudinal meanings represented in her characterisation at this point diverge from the positive, and into the extreme negative, both with the gestural attitude (the shove, head turned to one side as if in disgust) and the verbal attitude (the expression *gross*, a form of indirect negative social sanction expressed towards the spider and his unwanted attentions). Ms Muffet’s characterisation then reflects a strong convergence of two modes (animated gesture and verbal expression) set up against the still positive romantic ambience of the setting. This intersemiotic shift between convergent and divergent and the combination of both together in the one shot serve to create the humour in the text, and is summarised in Table 2.

Furthermore, when discussing her choices for making the spider crawl up onto Ms Muffet’s lap, and kiss her, Mikey commented:

Just because it was kind of funny and it would get the audience engaged... especially on this bit, because you can just feel the spider kind of creeping up on you and people just have shivers sometimes, yeah all of my friends have shivers ...

When discussing Mikey’s work with her teacher, she expressed astonishment at her ability to articulate such synthesised understandings about audience engagement with a text. It seemed that Mikey was able to demonstrate much deeper knowledge than the teacher thought she had taught the class, and her comment to me was ‘*it’s all so much more sophisticated than I ever imagined it could be*’.

Table 2. Analysis of Mikey’s characterisation of Ms Muffet following the spider’s kiss.

	Verbiage	Image	Sound
Ideational			
Interpersonal			
Feeling (judgement)	<i>Gross!</i> , lexis expressed with disgust	Depicted affect/action invokes judgement – shove and head turned to one side	
Feeling (ambience/ tone)		Ambience vibrant and familiar	Verbiage expressed with an intimate, <i>disgusted</i> tone
Textual			

An interesting note worth mentioning here is that the gesture Mikey used to create the expression of disgust and the shove of the spider was managed through an intriguing technical work-around. The female character selected to represent Little Ms Muffet only had a limited number of animations available to use. Mikey spent considerable time analysing each of the available animations, and eventually selected one called *dance*. If the dance animation is assigned to the female and then triggered, it activates a long dance sequence, with the girl waving her arms joyously around from side to side, head bobbing away and doing interesting dance steps. Mikey carefully selected a very tiny portion of the animation and then stopped it after a single movement of the body had elapsed, in order to capture what could be used as a shove and head turn that looked like disgust. She then worked carefully with the spider, and keypointed the spider movements in minute detail (over 15 keypoints) so that it seamlessly reflected the reaction of the shove by falling backwards in an arc off Ms Muffet's body and onto the ground. She notes:

I moved both the start and stop points of the dance so she would only go to the first position. She is dancing to music... I just keypointed it carefully so she quickly flicks up and moves her head once. It is dancing. The spider has no animation, I just keypointed him with lots of keypoints. The person I chose also, she doesn't run (i.e., have a run animation) so there (when she is running away) I chopped off her feet and just glided her along but you can't see her feet so it looks like she is running.

The attention to technical detail to achieve this interaction between the characters added significantly to the storytelling.

Finally, I wanted to explore how point of view was constructed multimodally. Abbot (2002) distinguishes point of view as different from focalisation,³ claiming that focalisation is the perspective we are given by the camera, what the eye might see, and as distinctly represented through 'our visual purchase on the narrative' (Abbot 2002, 195). In contrast, he argues that point of view is better served by considering the voice of a narrative, as it is 'achieved through the language we imagine ourselves hearing' (Abbot 2002, 195). With this in mind, I think it is useful to say that in my analysis, I initially analysed both focalisation and voice to determine a combined perceptual and conceptual point of view represented in the children's texts. This is because in our pedagogy the research team marked focalisation as a critical component of point of view for children to understand. In the early stages, we did not emphasise the concept of voice, however I wanted to include that in my analysis due to my observations of what children were doing with their narratives, which was beyond what we had intended.

The first example is one which actually did not work, serving as a strange kind of non-sequitur in the text. Leah, in establishing the genre before the rhyme begins, set up a shot at the bottom of some stairs that curved up a hill (Figure 7) and used the camera to take the viewer up the hill. Many of the

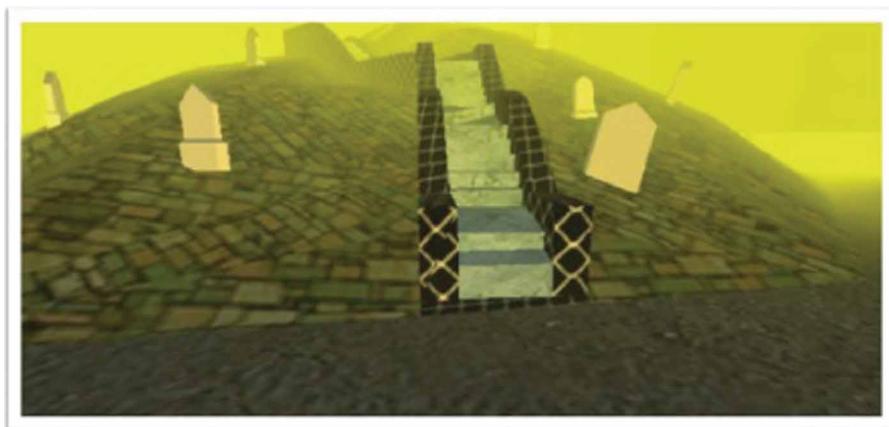


Figure 7. Leah's introduction to her retelling.

children were creating elaborate sweeping camera movements as their establishing shots for the work, and many included abstract sound effects to create the aural sensation of foreboding to situate the narrative in the horror genre. Leah decided to do something slightly different however, which was to add in a heavy, close, loud panting sound, which stayed with the camera all through the shot up the stairs. I probed Leah's understanding of this:

Leah: I had the camera coming up the stairs to show the 3D-ness of the world, but then to make it more effective I added the panting.

Interviewer: Who is doing the panting?

Leah: The camera

Normally in a sweeping shot such as this one, the point of view resides with the audience and the purpose is one of orientation. However the addition of panting and personification of the camera added in an invisible character taking us on a first person journey into the world. Clearly point of view of audience and point of view of character had been confused by Leah, and this reveals the level of complexity of such concepts when working with young children.

In contrast, Willow created a sequence in his work where the spider's point of view is clearly foregrounded. During the part of the rhyme *Along came a spider, and sat down beside her*, we see the camera attached to the spider's legs, and the view is at the ground level as the spider runs up to Ms Muffet. At the beginning of the shot, Ms Muffet is actually spotted from between the spider's legs. As the spider reaches Ms Muffet the camera angles to a low angle shot and we look up to see Ms Muffet way above us (Figure 8).

The use of the low angle is somewhat ironic, as it realises the attitudinal meaning of subordination of the spider to Ms Muffet. So in ordinary circumstances, Ms Muffet would be the character who has power in this instance. But it is the manner in which the voiceover is delivered that lets us in to the



Figure 8. Willow’s retelling of Ms Muffet, demonstrating the spider’s point of view.

humour. The words *Along came a spider, who sat down beside her* are whispered, a hushed conspiratorial voice is used, and it feels like we are part of a secret – the indirect meaning of the voice is, ‘shhh, we’re sneaking up on Ms Muffet ...’. The use of the whisper might be considered in a parallel way to Painter’s system of ambience for the visual meaning making resource. Ambience is about the *tone* of a piece, and a case could be made that a whisper could be assigned a tonal quality. The meanings associated with this tone are intimacy and familiarity. The audience feels intimately connected with the spider, even though the words themselves are from the third person distanced narrator. So it is not the verbiage that creates the point of the view, but the tone (Table 3).

Table 3. Analysis of Willow’s use of point of view.

	Verbiage	Image	Sound
Ideational <i>Action</i>	<i>Along came a spider who sat down beside her</i>	Spider scuttles down the aisle	
Interpersonal Affiliation (visual focalisation)		Reader’s gaze aligned with spider	
Power		Shifts from equal to a low angle by the end of the shot	Voiceover is delivered with quick whisper, like a conspiratorial knowing wink between the speaker and the audience (intimate and familiar)
Textual (<i>prominence</i>)		Spider’s legs frame the shot; spider is salient	

So at the beginning of the shot, and in its first few seconds, there is a distinct convergence of attitude between the focalisation and the intimate whispered voiceover. By the end of the shot, the low angle signifies a shift in power, but not a shift in point of view. The point of view remains with the spider because it is committed by both sound and image. The effect of the whisper adds an extra depth to the way the audience perceives the story – the degree of intimacy it creates ensures that the audience is aligned much more strongly with the spider than Ms Muffet. The shift in power that Willow constructed is significant because it is ironic given what happens next in the story. Willow commented:

I thought putting the camera on the spider's legs showed an interesting point of view, and I moved the camera up to show Ms Muffet because I thought it would be funny to show how big she is compared to the spider.

This thoughtful consideration to point of view, and the ability to play with attitudinal resources such as camera angles to create humour and irony in a text reveal just what young students can achieve.

Conclusions

This is just a small sampling of data, with a focus on the ways in which children are able to construct genre and characterisation in their multimodal narratives, and how well they deploy the affordances of the 3D multimodal authoring tool *Kahootz* to do so. In reflecting on children's abilities, this paper has demonstrated that some children are well on the way to exhibiting deep understandings about how to effectively create narratives employing three meaning making resources: image, verbiage and sound. Although unit one focused on a simple and existing narrative, a retelling of Little Ms Muffet, students were able to create interesting narratives using convergence of modes, and they were able to play with modal divergence to create unexpected twists and humour in their narratives. In general, children exhibited varying degrees of sophistication with their multimodal storytelling techniques, ranging from those like Nike who relied heavily on the image meaning making resource to communicate most of the meaning, to Mikey, who deployed all three meaning making resources to create a richly textured, more sophisticated text. As far as demonstrating an understanding of the metalanguage is concerned, many children were able to articulate excellent justifications for their choices in the text construction, though few used explicit metalanguage. One exception to this revealed a somewhat confused interpretation of what the metalanguage actually meant (refer to discussion of Figure 5).

In terms of the project aims: (a) the data in this paper reflect some quite sophisticated texts are being created by students, even in unit 1 of the project pedagogy, and (b) the pedagogy appears to be effective in creating understandings,

though more attention might need to be applied to the explicit teaching of the metalanguage, so that children are able to better articulate about their work. This has significant implications for how the pedagogy might better be adapted for other teachers joining the project in future.

Overall, the project is set within a multiliteracies philosophy, that aims to provide students with transformative pedagogies which are meaningful to children beyond schooling, and into the future. To this end, a quote from Nike reveals the extent to which we have been successful to date:

I've always been interested in making movies. I'm in a group of people named Foulmen Productions. They make movies. I've been part of the filming to make sure everything's gone right. Geoff, my uncle, has been teaching me. We've put a couple of our ads on youtube. They're really funny. They don't animate but if they could I could help them do that. I learnt about framing shots in this unit and that has helped me.

A further comment from Jimmy is also significant. He stated:

You actually get to play around, its not boring, you always have something to do ... some school work is boring, but *Kahootz* is never boring. People laughed at my movie, they got it, that was the best bit.

If all children could engage in the kinds of literacy practices which they see as exciting and meaningful, such as the work within this ARC project, we can only imagine the transformative potential for this kind of work.

Notes

1. All children's names used in this paper are pseudonyms.
2. In more recent work, Painter and colleagues have altered the Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) terms 'offer/demand' to 'observe/contact' due to the confusion the original terms caused, as clearly evident in this case (Painter 2006).
3. Please note: the use of the term focalisation here is from a literary theory perspective, where it simply means 'what the viewer sees' through either the verbal description or the realised image from the use of camera angles. In semiotics, the term focalisation is used to signify two things: whether the character gazes out at the reader or not, and whether the viewer's gaze is aligned or not with the characters. As Painter and Martin (forthcoming) explain, focalisation is about the sourcing of perception and/or attitude, internal or external to story.

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