

**Paper 3: NIX01440 "Slow and steady - not enough pace!": the absence of the
visual in valued middle primary literate competencies**

Helen Nixon

Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures,

University of South Australia

Holbrooks Road

Underdale SA 50222

Helen.Nixon@unisa.edu.au

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acquisition of school literacies"

Barbara Comber, Jo-Anne Reid & Helen Nixon

Paper abstract:

This paper arises from a three-year longitudinal study of middle primary school literacies funded by an ARC SPIRT grant between 1998 and 2000. The project focused on the literate practices made available to, and taken up by, students in the years immediately after the early years. A major outcome of the study was the production of 18 case studies of children attending three South Australian schools serving communities living with high levels of poverty. This paper draws on one case study to discuss how different theoretical frames about literacy and literacy assessment make visible different kinds of literate practices and student achievements. In particular, I suggest that bringing aspects of a multiliteracies theoretical frame to data produced in the study constitutes the case study student as a differently literate subject and more successful student than he is constructed in his school report cards.

Introduction

The key questions we wanted to raise in this symposium are introduced in the first paper, written by Barbara Comber. These questions relate to theoretical, analytical, ethical, methodological and representational questions about longitudinal case study research in literacy acquisition. In the second paper, Joanne Reid illustrates how post structuralist understandings of situated, fragmented and incoherent subjectivities (McCarthy, 1996) contribute to our understandings of case study student Jake's behaviours and literate practices. In this third paper in the symposium I continue to consider how different theoretical approaches to ethnographic data about literacy practices constitute different 'subjects' in a study (Honan, Knobel, Baker & Davies, 1999).

The paper arises from a three-year longitudinal study of middle primary school literacies funded by an ARC SPIRT grant between 1998 and 2000. The project focused on the literate practices made available to, and taken up by, students in the years immediately after the early years (Comber et al., under review). A major outcome of the study was the production of 18 case studies of children attending three South Australian schools serving communities living with high levels of poverty. In this paper I draw on a case study of a boy known as Joseph to discuss how different theoretical frames about literacy and literacy assessment make visible different kinds of literate practices. In particular, I suggest that bringing aspects of a multiliteracies theoretical frame (Kress, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; New London Group, 1996) to data produced in the study constitutes Joseph as differently literate subject and more successful student than he is constructed in his school report cards.

Literate practices valued in student report cards

Part of our research project was focused on what 'counted' as literacy in the Year Three to Year Five classrooms we visited. As part of this study of valued school literacy practices, we analysed teachers' descriptions of student achievement on report cards. We found that students' literate practices were commented on by teachers from two different perspectives: as language practices, and as literate work practices. Teachers' comments on language practices constructed a student identity as a 'literate being', while their comments on work practices constructed a student identity as a 'literate worker' in the context of schooling. From reading the report cards it seems that students not only had to acquire language practices, but also to display appropriate values and attitudes about how they worked at literacy tasks and participated in literacy events.

Further analysis of teachers' comments suggested three different foci:

- General displays of behaviour and attitudes towards literacy
- Specific literate competencies
- Directions of growth, ie changes achieved or needed to be achieved in literacy.

In many of these comments there was a strong underlying theme about the importance of 'proper' work practices such as attention, practice and effort as a means of addressing perceived literacy difficulties.

The questions of interest to me in this paper are:

- What did these findings look like for case study student Joseph across three years of his middle primary schooling? How was he constructed within his school life as a literate being and a literate worker?
- Which of his behaviours and literate practices were foregrounded by his teachers, and which were made less visible?

- What alternative readings can be made of what Joseph produced during the study when different theoretical frames are applied? What are the implications of these alternative readings?

Joseph as a literate worker

What did teachers make of Joseph's general displays of behaviour and attitudes towards literacy? From the beginning of the study Joseph was seen to be in control of several aspects of 'doing school' and becoming a literate worker that posed far greater challenges to his peers. In particular, Joseph had several dispositions that augured well for the future. He was extremely well organised for a child of his age, and he had the will and the skills required to manage the range of resources needed to get school tasks done. As early as Year Three his class teacher wrote:

Joseph is well organised. He demonstrates this by planning and organising his belongings (pencils, reading book, etc) for the day; keeping his workbooks, folders and tray organised and readily accessible and making good use of his time and personal and class resources. Homework is completed successfully and presented on time. Joseph usually sets about tasks immediately which demonstrates his understanding of task priorities. (End of Year Report, 1997)

Joseph's highly organised approach to tasks and routines suggested that he was on the road to success as a productive literate worker.

Similar reports of Joseph's good organisational skills were made in subsequent years. In Year Four his teacher wrote that 'Joseph is an organised and resourceful student who has excellent work habits' (3-Way-Conference, 1998). And in Year Five his teacher was noted that: 'His organisation ... skills are good He is a self-motivated student who is able to work independently on a set task' (End of Year Report, 1999). Here was an independent, motivated and highly organised student whose work practices suggested he was likely to continue to achieve success in school.

However, despite this apparent head-start to success, Joseph's meticulous approach to his school materials and production of school work had its drawbacks. Moreover, these dispositions were implicated in the construction of Joseph as being 'at risk' of literacy failure. Teacher-produced assessments as well as self-assessments from Joseph throughout the study drew attention to his 'slow pace' of working. Lack of speed in work completion was a persistent theme in assessments of his performance. In Year Three Joseph wrote: 'My goals for next term are to do my work faster.' Closure and completion were valued behaviours, even in Year Three, and Joseph sometimes failed to measure up on this score within class time.

Joseph's Year Four teacher reported that 'his work standards are meticulous, though often completed at a slow pace'. His teacher cited 'the amount of written work completed' as a focus for development that year. Meanwhile, in the same report Joseph wrote that 'I need to write faster'. By the end of Year Four, his teacher noted that Joseph was 'making an effort to improve his cursive writing, edit his work and increase the amount of work he completes', and Joseph wrote that 'My school work has improved a lot and I am a bit quicker.' By the end of Year Five, Joseph was pleased to report that 'I am getting my work done faster than in previous terms'.

Thus in his middle years of primary schooling it was impressed on Joseph that certain levels of literate productivity were required. Moreover, these levels had to be attained within certain time and space parameters for them to be seen as legitimate. Writing in particular needed

produced with more speed and in greater volume. And this needed to be demonstrated within the time frame of a lesson. Even though Joseph appeared happy to complete unfinished work at home – in contrast to many of his peers - his teachers impressed on him the need to step up his pace in the classroom. As his Year Three teacher liked to point out to her students when she kept them in at the end of the week, 'it's all very well starting things but we really need to finish them'.

Joseph's literate competencies as assessed by teachers

Despite his positive attitude towards literacy and his good organisational skills, Joseph was from Year Three seen to be 'at risk' in relation to satisfactory literacy achievement. His oral work, and the pace and volume of his written work, were singled out by Joseph's teachers as areas of concern. This assessment was supported by the results of the Year Three Basic Skills Test (BST): Aspects of Literacy. The results concluded that Joseph 'required considerable assistance in literacy', and that he 'did better on questions about pictures, labels and headings than on questions from the main part of the text' in reading.

Although Joseph was rated poorly by his teachers in the literate competencies of speaking and writing, their suggestions about how he might 'develop' in these areas were not clearly related to the development of specific oral and written skills. Based on what teachers wrote in his reports, the changes that needed to be achieved in his oral work were learning to speak up in class and group work. The changes that needed to be achieved in his written work were improvement in spelling, and the production of more writing more quickly.

Oral literacy

Joseph was a quiet child who could often be seen sitting and working alone. However, when asked to work in pairs or a group, he would do so. The researchers noted throughout the study that even when he was sitting in a group Joseph rarely interacted with his peers. Teachers referred to Joseph's solitary tendencies and his limited peer interactions during class and at play in the yard. His Year Four teacher constructed Joseph as 'essentially' shy.

A person like Joseph, who is so shy, you would never be able to judge his oral language on what he voluntarily does because he doesn't do very much voluntarily. He's just too shy. So you have to deal with [him] one to one to get his confidence up. He will come up to me and talk to me or ask a question. He's not shy coming to me but in the whole class activity he does have to be pushed along a little bit or encouraged.

Later that year this teacher repeated and elaborated his concerns about Joseph's apparent shyness:

Teacher: He's shy to deal with in everything. Very reluctant to speak. When pushed he will impart. Doesn't offer in class small group discussions a lot. The first or second lesson when questioned he will give an opinion because he knows he has to, that's the way the system works. He is very aware of class rules, regulations, behaviour, and he can virtually sit there all day and you would never know that he was there. He's that innocuous, he just gets on with his work, but his only problem is he's the same with all the other children too. He seems

to have no friends, wanders around by himself, sits by himself, recess and lunchtimes.

Researcher: Do you think that's a physical problem [perhaps he couldn't run because of his weight or his asthma], more than a social problem?

Teacher: I think a physical problem might be causing the social problem, because he can't run. He has difficulty running and doing anything physical. He's got a coordination problem. I think, I would guess, that he knows it and doesn't like to display it, and part of the way of doing that, I think, is to withdraw into himself and doesn't mix very much with the other kids.

In the End of Year Report to parents this aspect of Joseph's behaviour was reported as: "His quiet disposition prevents him from readily interacting with the other children in group or class discussions". Thus Joseph's quiet disposition was seen to be not only of concern in relation to his social development, but also a hindrance to his oral literacy development.

Joseph's Year Five teacher had an alternative reading of Joseph's solitary behaviours. In her view, Joseph's limited interactions with others did not result from feelings of exclusion, but was rather an active choice on his part:

Joseph's quite happy not to, like he'll stand out in the yard and not want to play and I said to him the other day 'Joseph, don't you want to go and play?'. 'Oh no, they asked me but I didn't want to play soccer today'. He chooses to be by himself.

Here, as elsewhere, this teacher may have been more accurately alert than his Year Four teacher had been to the independent and humorous undercurrents in Joseph's behaviour. However, Joseph was also a concern for her because of her focus in the curriculum on oral language:

I feel if the children can get up and talk, they can think, they can express themselves and then they have the confidence to go from there.

In her classroom, speaking was encouraged in a variety of ways: through informal talks each day; puppet shows; weekly performances and plays; radio plays and interviews; and one minute spontaneous 'speeches' to encourage self expression, thinking skills and confidence. It is therefore not surprising that she saw Joseph's tendency to be quiet and to sit back in group activities as an issue that required attention. She reported to his parents that:

Joseph has settled into the class really well. He is a quiet, co-operative student who always completes tasks set. Great work Joseph, now all you need to do is be "boss" more in a group situation.

Thus Joseph's 'quiet' demeanour – sometimes constructed as personal attribute or inherent disposition - was also constructed during the middle primary years as a social and educational handicap. This is despite the fact that he was also considered a conscientious and hard working student. By Year Four teachers had begun to articulate that they placed an emphasis on 'oral performance' and that Joseph did not measure up to their expectations in

this regard. His Year Four teacher concluded that Joseph was excessively 'shy' in all aspects of his life, including class work. His Year Five teacher judged that he needed to be more assertive in his interpersonal relations and in classroom interactions in order for him to be considered a 'success' and to continue to make 'progress' in school.

Written work: volume and pace

As has been discussed, Joseph's slowness to complete and lack of volume in written work were matters for concern for his teachers from Year Three. However, it is not easy to tell how much of this slowness was due to problems with written literate competence *per se*. Indeed, there may have been physical explanations for Joseph's comparative slowness. As early as Year Three Joseph had been noted as 'lacking coordination' and was removed from classes to join The Rainbow Club, a co-ordination program for motor skill development activities offered to junior primary school students. Late that year he was also moving from print to cursive writing, and this would have required significant changes in hand-eye control, especially when combined with copying from the board. In addition, as Joseph often sat towards the back of the room, it was possible that he had some difficulty seeing the board clearly. His Year Four teacher also noted the physical demands that writing placed on Joseph:

his written work is sometimes slow, particularly if he has to copy off the board. And he struggles a bit with the actual writing. Control of his writing. He seems to be improving, developing, getting a handle on the cursive.

Speed writing

The emphasis in middle primary years report cards on the production of an increased *volume* of writing with increased *pace* was supported at Joseph's school by the inclusion of various forms of 'speed writing'. In Year Three Joseph's teacher saw what she called 'power writing' or 'timed writing' as an extremely effective method to gain writing output within a minimum time frame. In Year Four students regularly participated in what the teacher called 'speed writing'. These episodes usually went for periods of five minutes and followed the introduction by the teacher of 'story starters' such as: "Under the giant mushroom" and "There was a huge explosion and the...". In Year Five 'speed writing' took the form of what the teacher called 'the ten minute dash'. The name referred to the fact that students were often asked to write as many words as they could in a set period of ten minutes.

In each year level, the process of first counting then recording of the number of 'words produced' in the margin or below the text was a regular feature of what students were asked to do as part of speed writing. From student work samples it would appear that the number of words produced was the only criterion that teachers' used to 'assess' students' achievements. Joseph appeared engaged during speed writing but he worked more slowly than his peers. This meant that he was rated lower than they were. It is impossible to know the effects that the emphasis on speed and the production of particular 'volumes' of work had on the slow-working Joseph. However, it is clear that over time he took up the discourses of speed and pace in his self-assessments where he regularly reported that he needed to improve the volume and pace of his work.

Alternative readings of Joseph's speed writing

But what if criteria other than number of words were applied to speed writing output? It was true that Joseph's writing produced under pressure was shorter than that produced by many of his peers. However, a closer look at his writing samples shows that, even in Year Three,

Joseph did much more than 'get words down' on the page. His speed writing work samples show that he could develop a story line with a beginning, a conclusion and a title, and could self correct as he wrote. His Year Four writing shows that he could write with humour, and could maintain a good sense of narrative suspense under time pressure. He was also able to integrate reported speech into his stories, even though his use of punctuation mark conventions fell away towards the end of the time limit.

On some occasions Joseph's sense of humour and his predilection for gadgets and innovations came through in his stories. In one piece of speed writing Joseph wrote about being stranded with others in the middle of sea without even a fishing rod to catch some fish to eat:

Suddentlee someone came up with an idere. "Wy don't we just padlle" he said. Evryone thort that was a good idere. But ther were no padls. So we started thining ugen. So every one thort and thort. Then some one siad has anyone got a mobil phone (original spelling). (Work Sample, 21/9/98)

Another piece of speed writing ends with a girl attempting to make a 'time machine'. This is an example of Joseph's recurring interest evidenced in his writing and drawing in inventions, science fiction and astronomy; interests that seemed to be quite well-developed for a boy in Year Four:

"What's that behind you" I said. "Nothing" she replied. I went up to the thing that was covered in the whit shet and pulld the whit shet off the ting. I coudent belivie what I saw. It was all thiss peases of rubish allover Dads car. "What do you thik your doing" I shouted. "Making" she replied. "Make ing what" "um um um um a time-mashin". But its not posibal to mak a time mashin [ran out of time] (original spelling) (Work Sample, 30/10/98)

These skills evident in Joseph's writing were often not evident in his peers' speed writing, nor indeed were they always present in their polished writing. In short, although Joseph may not have completed some set class work as quickly as his peers, during speed writing he could work under pressure and, at the same, carry over into his speed writing the language and writing skills that the class had been working on in other lessons. This was more than many of his peers could do. However, as these achievements were not looked for by his teachers, they went unrecognised and are not listed on his report cards.

Assessing spelling competence

Spelling was an important part of the curriculum for each of Joseph's teachers. Moreover, Joseph showed that he knew that his teachers valued vocabulary development and correct spelling. However, in his report cards Joseph's spelling remained an area of concern and a site of potential improvement for his teachers.

In Years Four and Five Joseph's class was required to keep a memo book into which they copied their weekly spelling lists. Students were regularly tested on these words and they were sometimes required to write out corrected versions of their misspelled words several times. While Joseph made many mistakes with simple words in his spelling lists, he also demonstrated knowledge of how to spell some difficult words. These included 'limousine' and 'conveyor belt' in Year Four (Transcript, 25/5/98) and 'orbiting' in Year Five (Transcript, 25/8/99). On both occasions when I pointed this out, Joseph's teachers expressed mild surprise that Joseph knew these words. However, a close interrogation of Joseph's work samples shows that he had a well-developed interest in vehicles of all kinds, and in science fiction, invention and astronomy. These interests were reflected in his broad general

knowledge about these topics. This included a well-developed vocabulary, much of which he was able to spell correctly. In Year Four some correctly-spelled words that appeared in his writing included: pilot, computer chip, remote control car, cement-mixer, oil tanker, hovercraft, rescued, community and confiscated.

Unlike some of his peers, Joseph also had some word-attack skills to draw on when attempting to spell. In addition, he was not averse to asking for help with spelling. Our analysis of lesson transcripts shows that Joseph:

- showed initiative in attempting to get his spelling correct
- was able to translate correctly from an adult's sounding out of a word to its accurate spelling on paper
- was willing to ask for help from the teacher or another adult
- knew the value of a dictionary, and was able to use it with adult assistance.

These qualities and skills were likely to prove valuable for Joseph's long-term writing and other literacy achievements. However, these achievements went unrecognised when the classroom focus was primarily on the production and memorisation of word lists. Despite his obvious language strengths, Joseph continued to be constructed as 'at risk'.

The invisibility of the visual in assessments of Joseph's literate competencies

As I have pointed out earlier, according to the Year Three 'Basic Skills Test (BST): Aspects of Literacy', Joseph 'required considerable assistance in literacy' and he 'did better on questions about pictures, labels and headings than on questions from the main part of the text' in reading. These results suggest that Joseph may have had difficulties reading and comprehending print text. However, they also suggest that he had some strengths in the 'visual' dimensions of literacy in that he was well able to make meaning from pictures and labels. Joseph did not take the Year Five BST test. As constructed by teachers in his report cards from Year Three to Year Five, the literate being Joseph needed to develop and show 'improvement' in literacy. He either needed to improve, or was noted as having improved, in spelling and in the production and completion of work. His quietness was made much of, and his teachers noted that he needed to 'speak up' and to 'be boss' in group situations.

Although his teachers largely concentrated the need for Joseph to improve in these perceived areas of deficit literate competence, Joseph himself placed more emphasis on the visual aspects of literate practice. In Year Four he wrote that 'I am good at art and using documents on the computer, like Claris Works, Kid Pix and Art Work for kids. I know how to use the internet and CD ROMs' (End of Year Report, 1998). In Year Five he reported that he had enjoyed the work he had done including 'the excursions, the subjects, the videos and all the drawings we have done'. He added that he had learned 'more about Space, how to draw flowers and how to use HyperStudio and hot mail' (End of Year Report, 1999). These lists of things Joseph enjoyed doing and learning at school suggest the significance for him of both visual and verbal modes of communication (Kress, 1997). They also point to the facility he had developed for integrating visual elements into his work in pursuit of goals that remained firmly tied to achieving success at school. This is a typical response to school from Joseph: 'I always try hard to get on with my work. My behaviour is good. I am looking forward to the rest of the term' (3-Way-Conference, 1999).

Research with young children suggests that drawing is commonly used to inform the writing process (Millard & Marsh, 2001). However, as Millard and Marsh note:

The visual representations, which children produce as a matter of course in the early years of schooling, are not developed and built on as a means for future communication use. (Kress (1997) cited in Millard & Marsh, p. 54)

They argue that, on the contrary, there is a tendency for teachers to "largely regard the movement from pictures to words as one of intellectual progression", and to privilege "continuous, uninterrupted prose texts" (p. 55). Moreover, schools neglect the multi-modal possibilities of representation that are engaged in by children. However, this official absence does not stop children from continuing to use graphics to enhance their print texts. Children in and beyond the early years continue to produce texts that show a strong dialogic relationship between word and image. They continue to embed drawings and diagrams within their print texts even when this is not encouraged or valued in schools.

This was certainly the case for Joseph. According to our observations, Joseph took up many opportunities to demonstrate and develop his interest and skills in the visual mode of communication (Kress, 1997) even where this was not the explicit focus of the task. He showed a keen interest and competence in drawing, painting and model-building. He also demonstrated knowledge about film, television and advertising, as well as a facility with graphics-based computer programs such as Kid Pix.

I don't want to suggest that Joseph's teachers were unaware of these interests. On the contrary, by the end of Year Three teacher comments on his report were suggestive of Joseph's facility with 'the visual'. However, it was not seen as part of his valued literate repertoire. Rather it was either not highly valued or was considered to have value in relation to other things. For example, in relation to the report card category 'Information or resource based learning/ Problem solving skills', his teacher wrote that:

He can find information in junior reference books and non-fiction books, CD ROMs and from people. He can apply both critical and creative thinking in finding a solution. Joseph can present his researched findings in an interesting and well-constructed layout, either by hand or using the computer (End of Year report, 1997).

In relation to "Mathematical ideas and technology", his Year Three teacher wrote that Joseph 'is developing competency at using a number of computer programs for illustrating, labelling, mapping and word processing'.

Taken together, Joseph was constructed as being highly skilled in many aspects of finding information and processing and presenting his findings. Further, he appeared to have already developed some of the competencies likely to be valued in his post-school life, including critical and creative thinking and presenting findings using pertinent and attractive graphics produced by hand or on computer. These seem to be very sophisticated literacy skills indeed for a child diagnosed by a formal test as requiring 'considerable assistance in literacy'. However, this apparent incongruity went unremarked by his teachers. I suggest that this was in part due to the structural constraints of the report card design. However, it may also have been due to the constraints of the theoretical frames and discourses about literacy and literacy development in the middle primary years that his teachers had available to them. These frames and discourses foregrounded speaking and writing, and pace and volume. They did not include newer concepts from literacy studies such as visual and hybrid literacies, multiple literacies and multiple modes of meaning-making. Thus readings of Joseph's literate competencies according to these frames of reference that included the visual were not available to his teachers. Consequently they had no place in the grids of specification (Comber, 1996) constructed by the school report cards.

However, when we do bring to bear concepts about visual and hybrid literacies, multiple literacies and multiple modes of meaning-making on the analysis of Joseph's writing, it is possible to construct him as something other than a student at risk of low achievement in literacy. Such concepts enable us to 'see' and to represent a different Joseph. They make it possible to see Joseph as a literate being who could:

- read 'hybrid' visual-verbal texts quite fluently
- explain to his peers the intricacies of visual texts from popular culture: films, swap cards, television programs and print and electronic advertisements
- draw, paint and work with computers competently and with confidence
- produce sophisticated texts that combined visual and verbal elements.

Joseph's production of sophisticated hybrid visual and verbal texts can be seen in some of his work samples. His ability to playfully integrate these elements is shown in figure 3 taken from the case study (**on overhead**) where the letters of the word 'SEA' are suggestive of both sea creatures and periscopes, half submerged below the water. In this work both human and animal creatures are figured; fish are anthropomorphised; and a dolphin jumps over the letter 'A'.

Figures 4 and 5 show Joseph's use of the computer to record comprehension answers and research findings for a research contract on Oceans as well as his interest in integrating verbal and visual text. In figure 4 (**on overhead**) Joseph's word-processed letters, his decorative border and his fish illustration are all boldly executed. In figure 5 (**on overhead**) the visual is more than an illustration. The size of the drawing of the drift net serves to emphasise the written meaning of the text that "drift nets endanger fish." Joseph's drawing of the boat includes a typically whimsical feature: the steam from the funnel of the boat forms a large cloud that floats very close up to the word-processed letters of the word 'shouldnt' (sic). These examples show how some of Joseph's writing combines print text with visual images, and computing with drawing. They also illustrate how this mixed mode of writing allows visual expression of Joseph's sense of humour, a quality that was generally rendered invisible in the classroom by the dominant perception that he did not talk or 'speak up' in class.

The high value accorded by Joseph to art, drawing, video, and various aspects of computing suggest that his strengths and interests lie more in the visual or multimodal areas of literate competence than in oral and written areas. The observed curriculum in action at the school, however, did not make provision for the everyday integration of multimodal literacies into regular classroom practice. Nor did teachers have available to them theoretical tools, discourses and arguments that might allow them to 'see', or to consider the significance of, these hybrid and multimodal literacies. Theoretical concepts such as the blending of visual and verbal modes of communication, and changing technologies of meaning in today's learning environments (Zammit & Downes, in press), were not part of the teachers' discursive and pedagogical repertoires.

Even though teachers in our study valued the use of multimedia computers in the classroom, we have little evidence that they saw literate competencies and modes of meaning-making as changing, multiple and fluid. The argument made in the multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), that literacy practices are necessarily changing and multiple in the age of multimedia, may have been a helpful resource for them in this regard. This argument:

relates to the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on. This is particularly important in the mass media, multimedia, and in an electronic hypermedia. Meaning is made in

ways that are increasingly multimodal – in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. [...] When technologies of meaning are changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitutes the ends of literacy learning, however, taught. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 6).

Similarly, understandings about dispositions associated with successful computer use might have led to different interpretations of Joseph's lack of pace. In Year Three, his teacher had stated that 'Joseph's slowness holds him back'. However, even though his slow and methodical ways may have been a handicap in relation to working quickly and producing high volumes of written work, they appear to have been very effective for successful computer use. Even in Year Three, he always knew where he had been on the computer and what step needed to be taken next. He could remember the sequences he had taken, being able to recall such things as 'first we clicked on this icon, then we did this', and so on. From Year Three to Year Six he continued to demonstrate that he could work independently and use a range of computer-based resources for research, presentation and writing. Thus despite his slow pace, Joseph may have been much better prepared than many of peers for the kind of extended literacy tasks and independent learning likely to be required of him in the senior primary years and beyond.

Conclusion

Working against deficit views of the literacies practised by children living in poverty is a key impetus of our work. This is what I have attempted to do in this paper. Joseph practised different literacies from those valued in his teachers' assessment practices. This constituted him as a 'failure' because his assessed literate competencies did not match the normative literacies associated with the middle primary years. When he was expected to show signs of development in relation to speaking up, and writing with increasing volume and pace, there were no indications of these developments to be recorded. However, as I have shown, other theoretical frames that take into account the visual and multimodal of literate practice make possible other ways of constructing Joseph as a literate subject. At the same time, these frames work against the production of him as a deficit literate being.

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