

Chapter 7

Pragmatism and Philosophy: Enriching Students' Lives through a Critical Investigation of Spatial Literacy in Shared Spaces

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how a secondary boys' College has sought to create a cultural alliance between a spatial literacy which expresses an officially sanctioned version of the past and a contemporary curriculum that embraces a far broader understanding of this concept. This investigation of spatial literacy was contextualised through the curriculum plan of the College which seeks to educate students through a student-centred curriculum that aims to develop critically aware and culturally sensitive world citizens. The perceptions of key teachers were also examined which revealed their increasing use of school spaces to address political, philosophical and environmental issues in their pedagogical approach.

INTRODUCTION

Within the education sector it is recognised that students need to be aware of and learn a range of skills in order to critically evaluate the multifarious ways they receive and view information (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Davis, 2008; Kalantzis, Cope & Fehring 2002; Unsworth, 2001). As Davis (2008, p. 10)

notes, current evidence suggests that “the curriculum stalwarts of literacy and numeracy are no longer sufficient to equip students with the basics they need to operate in the innovation oriented, digitally wired twenty first century”. The importance of educating for multiple ways of understanding and relaying information, also known as ‘multiliteracies’, was formalised by the New London Group¹ The members of this group proposed that an educationally func-

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tional grammar for the future would include “the textual and the visual, as well as the multi-modal relations between the different meaning-making processes that are now so critical in media texts and texts of electronic multimedia” (New London Group, 1996, p. 77).

There is extensive literature regarding the value of the multiliteracies approach (Anstey & Bull, 2004; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis, 2001; Kress, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997; New London Group, 1996; Unsworth, 2002) and how its effective use in the education sector can enable teachers to “equip their students with the knowledge, skills, strategies and attitudes that will enable them to meet new situations and cope with them” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 18). In response to rapid changes in technology and society on a local and global scale, literacy knowledge, skills and processes have also changed. There has been an increased emphasis on placing the student at the centre of learning resulting in greater emphasis on the learner for accepting responsibility for their learning (Betts, 1992; Marsh, 2008; McComb, 1997; Weimer, 2002). A clear link has also been drawn to how developing a range of literacies is particularly important for students from diverse backgrounds in order for them to be able to more effectively negotiate learning in school curriculum areas (Unsworth, 2001). As Anstey and Bull (2006) note in order to be multiliterate a person should be able to “interpret, use and produce a range of electronic, live and paper texts that employ linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial semiotic systems for social, cultural, political, civic and economic purposes in socially and cultural diverse contexts” (p. 41).

This chapter will examine the Curriculum Plan of St Joseph’s Nudgee College which emphasises the autonomy of the learner through an inclusive educational philosophy utilising a range of literacies. Spatial literacy will be a specific focus of this chapter as the College campus and its history is an intrinsic part of the students’ daily lives and, for many, their motivation to attend this particular

college. The perceptions of key teachers will be utilised in addition to relevant curriculum documents to gauge the effectiveness of the multiliteracies approach in preparing students to become critically aware and sensitive world citizens.

BACKGROUND

St Joseph’s Nudgee College² situated in the north of Brisbane in the state of Queensland is an Australian Catholic school for boys whose philosophy is based on the Edmund Rice tradition³. The college’s current enrolment stands at 1350 boys in Years 5 –12, including 300 boarders. The demographic breakdown of the student cohort is 1205 Australian, 74 international (majority from Asia), 38 Papua New Guinea and 33 Indigenous students. When the college was established in 1891 it had a distinct Irish identity and catered mostly for ‘boys from the bush’ with the majority of these leaving home to board at Nudgee.

The campus covering 137 hectares is one of the largest in the state. The architecture of the college is diverse, reflecting a range of buildings and styles which are testament to the pressures—both past and current—to cater for population growth and a major demographic shift in the socio-economic status of the student clientele. Nudgee possesses open, well maintained grounds and renowned sporting facilities, including a golf course, Olympic sized pool and a national standard athletics track. The campus offers a physical reminder of the changing nature of the school; from its traditional past firmly rooted in the Irish/Australian experience and a modern search for identity in a new millennium. In 2008, another chapter of Nudgee commenced with the introduction of three primary year levels 5 to 7 (10 – 12 years of age) in addition to the traditional five secondary year levels of 8 – 12 (13 – 17 years of age).

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