

Thinking About Learning the Curriculum in Different Ways

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The 'Literacies for Learning in Further Education' project funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) has been working on developing changes in practice for teaching and learning within curriculum areas based on our preliminary research into students' everyday literacy practices. The changes in practice are intended to draw on elements of literacy practices that are important to students in other domains of their lives and incorporate these into the literacy practices used for learning the curriculum.

The introduction of mind mapping as one of the innovations implemented by our childcare practitioner in Perth College came about in response to the emerging insights from the research that suggest that students enjoy learning using multimodal texts which incorporate colour, pictures and icons. These texts are often non-linear and interactive. We also found that students enjoy creating

and designing their own texts as a way of engaging with course materials. The use of mind maps and the discussions around designing the maps meant that the students started to think about how they learn and how best they can learn. This change in practice also took into account the demands of the new HNC framework in childcare.

The New HNC Framework

An HNC is considered to be the same level as first year of a degree within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) so students should be doing more independent investigation and self-directed study. However this is not traditionally how HNCs have been delivered as they have been deeply embedded in an FE context where students come from many different backgrounds and often have had poor school experiences or may not have studied for a number of years. The emphasis was on formative assessment and allowed the students to develop in a process-based way and delivery has traditionally been face to face with a lot of support.

The new HNC has more formal summative assessment instruments, which are graded. Therefore, in order to help students to become more independent learners and to give them the skills to successfully engage in this type of summative assessment a change of approach was needed from lecturers and learners.

Research Findings

The initial feedback from last year's childcare students involved in the LfIFE project indicated that the students learn more effectively if they make up their own notes and that they enjoy doing this. Also, students are using different types of technology in their literacy practices in their everyday life. For example, many of the younger students use MSN and texting for keeping in touch with friends; many students are adept at navigating and building websites or using art software to design posters and logos in order to keep up with their hobbies, interests and work activities. These literacy practices include manipulating colour, images and icons in creative design work and have specific purposes, which are valued and often involve relating to others particularly family, colleagues and their peers. Therefore, if the college can incorporate literacy practices which resonate with elements of these valued literacy practices then learning should be in principle more effective.

Mind Maps as MultiModal Tools

Mind mapping is one way that students can draw on the multimodal elements of their most valued literacy practices from other domains of their lives for a formal educational purpose. Students can use images and colour and design their own mind maps in a way they find relevant and useful. Mind maps are flexible tools which the students and lecturers can design drawing on various modes which incorporate the processes of transformation as students reorganise information onto their maps, and transduction as they incorporate semiotically meaningful images, icons and colours into their maps. The process of collaboratively producing the maps and discussing the process and their content with peers was an important aspect of the learning process. There has been a move away from considering competent performance as evidence of learning to considering design as the foundation of the learning process (Kress, 2003). This makes both learning and communicating/representing into dynamic active processes far removed from static notions of acquisition

Mind Maps as Flexible Tools

Mind mapping was originally introduced as a tool for taking notes that would allow students to take ownership of their notes and help the cognitive process of understanding the material and passing assessments. The design of mind maps allowed students to create multimodal texts according to their individual preferences that



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resonated with the kinds of texts they used out of college. As the students started working with mind maps it became evident that they were useful in a number of different ways in relation to studying their curriculum area but importantly they were also useful in the other domains of students' lives for work and leisure activities. There is resonance between the genre of mind mapping across the different domains of students' lives. Students reported using mind mapping for various purposes in different domains of their lives and that this increased as a result of the change in practice. Mind maps were used

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by students at home to organise and plan domestic activities and in the work placements to scaffold activities with children. The students interviewed about this intervention reported successfully using mind maps as intended for note taking and as an assessment tool, but they also discovered that they were useful for understanding how they learn. The group work that resulted from using mind maps as classroom texts promoted an informal peer learning which again resonated with the way students learn outside of the college domain. Lecturers have found that as a result of this innovation students have engaged in a more analytical process in relation to the curriculum.

Reference

Kress, G. (2003), *Literacy in the New Media Age*, London: Routledge.