We need to recognise that our students are multimodal in thought, word and action; adept at interpreting, thinking about and reading information. One only has to observe them watching a football match on television in which they are not only exposed to the actual game but simultaneously to a continuous barrage of items (scores, replays, analysis of play, injury reports, other events, etc) being flashed across, onto, below, above and around the game. Additionally, it is most likely that they are also engaged in other activities while they watch the game. They can also be working on the computer, as they listen to their iPod music and do their homework. They have become agents of simultaneous activity and therefore see this as the norm. Kress (2000) notes that literacy debates now include visual modes of communication as a result of the rapid movement from the printed medium to an age of visual images and greater access to technologies. Children from very young ages are computer literate and masters of multimodal multiliteracies, using a range of modes and mediums in their meaning making and in their documentation of that meaning.

In classrooms around the world, we are facing some students becoming disengaged and disenfranchised in ways that make it difficult for teachers and students alike to stimulate, motivate, engage and access teaching and learning. No longer is the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ appropriate nor relevant to the world of education nor to the lifeworlds of students. Gee (2003) notes the disparity between in class learning and the real world; and highlights the need for educators to utilize out of class learning strategies such as those in video games to enhance in class learning outcomes. In his analysis of computer games he recognises the qualities within the game structure that would be ideal if channelled into education as well, including scaffolded learning, progressive learning that continually has incentive to keep moving on; stimulating learning scapes, engaging multimodal scenarios that empower the user and provision of a sense of achievement at a range of levels. Allowing students the opportunity to visually tell their stories incorporates many of these successful practices.

As teachers we now recognise that there are a range of learning preferences and styles within our classes. Most teachers work hard to incorporate knowledge of this diversity to enable students to be engaged and successfully navigate their own unique learning journeys. Of concern however, is whether teachers are incorporating this understanding into their assessment tasks, their activities and ensuring that there is provision for multiliterate and multimodal means of documenting learning. In particular there is a need to incorporate opportunities for students to be taught and engaged in a range of ways; but for this to be effective it also means educators must allow students the opportunity to tell their stories in a range of ways. Providing these opportunities will enable more students to actively participate, actively engage and most importantly actively tell their stories in authentic and meaningful ways.

Each child is a dynamic being and sees the world differently from the way that he represents it and, as he grows, his expression changes (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1975).

Research into brain compatible learning clearly recognizes the need for both right and left brain activities. However schools have tended to focus on the logic side of learning and to a lesser extent on the creative side of learning. Such creativity would promote new ways of seeing and doing, thinking beyond the norm, creating and making unique contributions, and laterally thinking to combine and create newness (Schirrmacher, 1998). Creativity is a normal brain function that builds fluency of ideas and functions, flexibility, originality and problem solving. All of these attributes would help students to navigate and document meaningful learning journeys and stories. By not providing students with the means, the mediums and the modes of choice, in documenting their journeys we are doing them a disservice.

Open-ended tasks that promote students’ personal expression empowers learners to use process and
part of their literary work to tell a story and through this they are building a visual narration. This is not to say that educators cannot combine the multimodal opportunities of visual, aural, oral and gestural as another avenue to explore with the visual narrative. And in fact, visual narrative is frequently used in the form of video in which students eagerly create a visual medium as the framework and incorporate sound to further amplify meaning. In the past, text referred to the printed form, but today it can refer to film, arts and multiple formats. Following are some examples of the use of visual narrative, visual representations used by students to tell their stories. They by no means represent the multitude of ideas and activities that could occur in effective classrooms, however, they are provided as food for thought about the opportunities that visual narrative provides for students.

**Scenario One:**
**Visual narrative as a recording device**
All students given sufficient time and support can and do progress (no matter what their level or starting point). As educators we need to give all students a starting point and build upon their strengths. For many learners, visuals are an important hook for engagement, retention and access to learning. As a thinking curriculum facilitator, I believe that all classrooms (no matter what the age group or focus) need to acknowledge, recognize and use learning styles and preferences to the advantage of the learners in that class. One such tool is Mind Mapping (Buzan, 2001) which is a graphic organizer that supports note making, note taking, decision making, presentations, and so on. Its importance and value is that it aids retention, allows for organization of thoughts and graphically it clearly tells a story. I have taught and used this process with all age groups from preschool to tertiary, with principals and business. Within the context of this paper I do not intend to teach the process but rather to use it as another example of visual narrative. See the examples below. Figure 1 shows a young child’s product to represent meaning, and encourages developmental benefits which may not be accessed with traditional print form only. For example, student voice can be visually represented which will enhance creativity through the integration of many factors including the form, line, colour, use of space, composition, movement or motion and the use of a variety of media (Miller, 1996). Open-ended creative tasks ensure wide ranging developmental benefits that are interdisciplin ary and build life skills and gains. For example, sensory experience (emotional, physical, mental); exploration and experimentation across the disciplines, use of motor skills and co-ordination, planning, ordering and problem solving, spatial relations, sense of pride and accomplishment. The other important aspect of visual representations is the opportunity to emphasize process not product, ensuring the activities are openly available to all because there is no wrong way/no right way (Kohl, 1994). Everyone can take part. Since visual representations reflect the individual and what it is they wish to ‘say’ or wish to express; then the unique construct of such an event is entirely unique to the story that they tell. By the same token, viewer interpretation can also lead to further ‘voice’ and representation as each person uniquely responds to the visual narrative. In other words, the narrative continues and displays different stories to different people. This is the unique characteristic of visual stories – they are originally developed in the eye of the creator; and later evolved in the eye of the beholder and so the story is a never-ending evolving story.

Meaning making can be more accessible through the use of visual narrative opportunity. Increasingly, research is examining the verbal but also the visual in visual narrative inquiry. Since no two children are alike; each differs from his earlier self as he constantly grows, perceives, understands, and interprets his environment. Each child is a dynamic being and sees the world differently from the way that he represents it and, as he grows, his expression changes. Therefore, all children need to make their own mark, their own way and to tell their own stories.

**Visual story telling – the Creation of Meaningful stories**

‘Meaning making is not just about making texts, but is also about the making of our selves, in a process of becoming’ (Lillis, 2001: 48).

Story telling could be formed in a range of ways. And in fact, the literacy work may be a visual medium or a multimodal mixture of various text types. In visual narrative, the author/creator is presenting an account or story of events; using it as
through imagery. It is both revealing and generates self awareness, agency and empowerment.

What stories can you read from this visual narrative? What message do you think was being told?

Older students are given a task of taking a set of photos to help others understand how they learn. They each bring the photographs to the classroom and set them up in a sequence and allow their peers to wander around interpreting each others’ visual stories. After having time to re/f_l  ect the students come back together and suggest what they interpreted in the visual representation. The /f_i  nal speaker is the author of the visual narrative and they describe to others what it was they were depicting.

This activity is useful for building the visual narratives and allowing them to evolve into verbal narratives.

Scenario Three: 3D Visual narratives
Students are asked to create a visual representation of themselves. They are taken into a room with many materials available to them including a range of coloured papers of various shapes and sizes, pens, paint, glue, boxes, pipe cleaners, and so on. No further instruction is necessary. The students

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allow space for students to become self-aware; ‘Students use artistic practices as cultural and personal responses to experience including their search for identity’ (Freedman, 2003: 40). The visual narratives were once again varied and meaningful to the creators and the audience. Additionally, through the display of visual narrative, students have the opportunity to read and interpret the stories of others and in doing so they locate similarities, other views, and means of representation. In this part of the reflective process, they gain and evolve their own thoughts and interpretations; just as we do as teachers through every interaction with our students. We learn and grow through and with others.

Visual Narrative is intended to be offered within a suite of classroom activities that integrate a range of teaching and learning styles and preferences and ideally it is also offered in the range of opportunities to document information. As with other thinking tools, it is important to explicitly introduce such a tool so that all students are given the opportunity to explore, experiment and elicit what works for them. It is also important to note that within Visual Narrative there is no right way or wrong way; so this opens doors for many learners. It is constructed

freely wander from table to table and are completely engrossed in their task. Interestingly a wide range of visual representations evolve. They are all unique and each tells a specific and targeted story. Creators are obviously proud of their ‘work’ and confidently put their creation on display at the end of the session for others to view. What was significant about this activity was the wide range of styles and creations – flat collages, hanging mobiles, three-dimensional models, and some with a mixture of expressive elements such as cut and paste combined with sketches. In many ways, these 3D visual narratives evolved during the creative process because the creators began with an idea in mind, which modified as they were exposed to the qualities of the materials, intertwined with their thoughts about what they wanted to say and who they saw themselves as. As an observer, I saw students’ trial materials, construction ideas and then either discard or modify them. They were interested in the meaning they were depicting and also the aesthetic quality that they wished to produce.

Scenario Four: ‘My Journey’ Visual Narrative as Personal and Professional story telling
Tell me your story of learning. It is important to

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References


Coral Cara is a Lecturer at Victoria University. Coral has wide ranging experience as an educational consultant, educational leader and educator who has worked across all sectors and levels of education.