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## Why I'm (really) not against 'Dual Coding'

*Clare Lawrence*

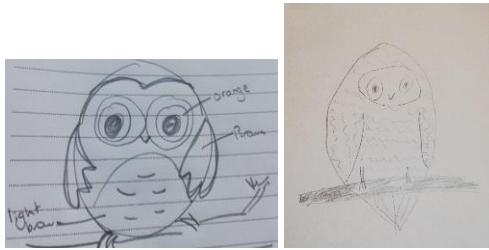
Like many teacher educators, I imagine, I have been perplexed in recent months about what we are understood to be doing in our role. The Core Content Framework for teacher education seems to be more about how teachers help pupils to memorise what they are told than it is about supporting them to explore, and I feel beset by demands to introduce alien-sounding terms to our student teachers that are apparently essential for their good teaching. One of these is 'Dual Coding'. This is not a new idea (it has been around as a named concept for about the same amount of time as I have been in teaching, being introduced by Allan Paivio in the mid 1980), with the term signifying the use of images to aid memory and to ease 'cognitive load', but is it relevant within subject English?

I believe that in English, thinking across words and pictures is something a little different. For us, it is less about an 'aide-mémoire' and more about visualisation of ideas presented in words as an active demand made by writers of the reader. It's called 'imagery'.

Not that the concept of imagery doesn't involve memory. In order for the pictures that writers paint with words to work, the reader must be able to recall that which is being described. If you cannot remember being outside in a blizzard, saying that the paper swirled in the air like snow is not going to have the same impact.

Perhaps we need to think a little more about this. There is a (relatively rare) condition – Aphantasia – where an individual cannot conjure a picture in their head. In a similar way, as pupils experience imagery in school I am not sure that they actually realise that this is what the writer is asking them to do. Do we as teachers remember to tell them that 'imagery' means that these words draw pictures, not just in some vague abstract sense but actually, in a concrete equivalence that can be 'seen'? There is also the danger that pupils' experiences will not enable them to access the ideas on which the imagery depends. When Ted Hughes describes an owl 'pale on the gatepost/like a clock on its tower' (*The Warm and the Cold* in *Season Songs*, Faber and Faber), we may not realise our pupils' misinterpretation of that

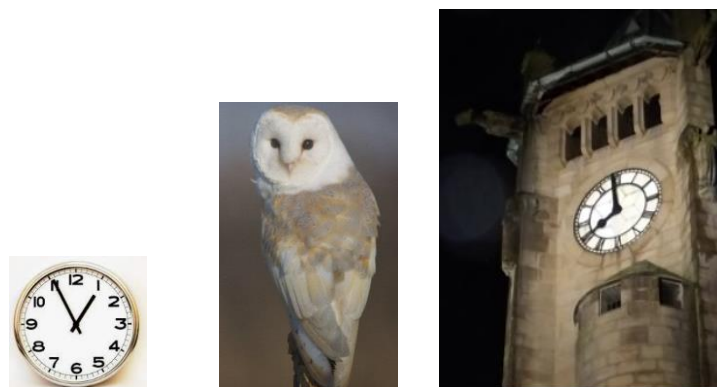
written image unless we translate it into the visual. If we ask them to draw the idea, we may be better able to understand their confusion. Why would these owls be like a clock?



And this owl may indeed be 'pale' and on a post, but it does nothing further to support Hughes' image:



Only when we consider Ted Hughes' own schema that he is drawing down from his childhood in the countryside of Yorkshire can we start to decipher what he means. A Barn Owl is, indeed, so very like a clock in its tower, especially the way the lines of its beak mimic the hands on the face pointing to five to one, and the way that its luminosity speaks of the glow in the dusk. *Now it makes sense...*



Confusingly for pupils, 'imagery' in literature can work across all the senses, not just the visual. Conjuring pictures in your head may mean 'feeling' textures, 'smelling' scent and

'hearing' sounds. Nor is imagery our only cross-pollination with other subjects. We also, for example, think across words and music in the creation of literature, in the rhythms and repetitions and alliterative, assonant and onomatopoeic sounds that writers utilise. Paivio did not seem as interested in the link between verbal and auditory pathway to memory as between verbal and visual, but they remain an important part of learning. Pupils are not going to 'get' Shakespeare unless they hear it spoken aloud, and choral recitation of poetry can have a huge impact I believe on pupils' understanding of the verse in a way that their own silent reading will never do. This may not, strictly speaking, be Dual Coding, but it is an important interplay across sensory pathways that is important to explore.

An example of a recent exploration of this undertaken with our PGCE student teachers is a session we held just before Christmas jointly with the Art teacher trainees. We looked at the potential of making visual responses to Roger McGough's poem '*Mouth*' (*Holiday on Death Row* anthology, 1979 – Jonathan Cape), a text chosen because of having to teach – and to support new teachers to learn to teach – people who have their mouths covered by masks. The opening stanza of the poem reads:

I went to the mirror  
But the mirror was bare,  
Looked for my mouth  
But my mouth wasn't there.  
Over the lips had grown  
A whiskered hymen of skin.

The trainees embraced the concept of working together to formulate an image response in mixed specialist groups, something that they have missed for much of this year as our full cohort all-subject sessions have been suspended due to pressures re social distancing. The Art trainees had no issues with the idea of using poetry, and the English teachers no issue with image, suggesting that the artificial barriers of discrete 'disciplines' may not be entirely helpful. Pupils, of course, work across different subjects during their timetabled week, but it might be that we as teachers would benefit from a more interdisciplinary outlook.

The trainees' confidence with the idea makes sense. The lineage between word and image can be traced back to hieroglyph and hanzi pictograms and later through illustration, especially in religious settings prior to wider spread literacy, and is familiar now to most of

us through children's picture books. The student teachers' responses were informed and sophisticated. Some chose to use collage, either working physically through cutting, pasting and superimposing image or choosing a digital approach, consciously echoing the work of artists such as Richard Hamilton and William Burroughs. Their appropriation of pop art and Dadaist methodologies gave expression to the surrealism of the poem, and the appropriation of advertising through layout and graphics echoed the accessibility of experience and 'real world' context of McGough as a Liverpool Poet. One group, feeling particularly adventurous, made their way to the art studio and persuaded the technician to let them loose with the clay.

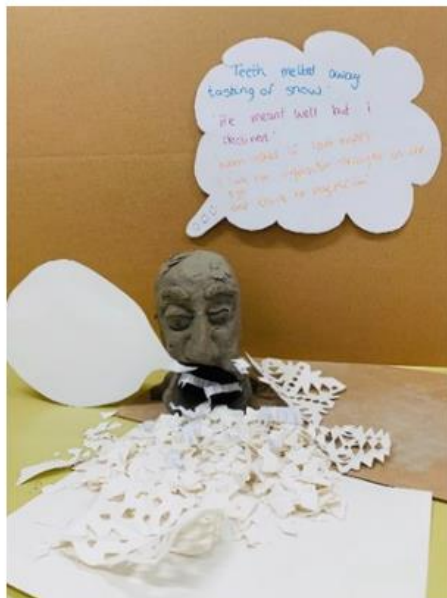
I share three examples of the responses under.

Perhaps most important about the session was that – despite their masks – the students talked. All were engaged, interested and inventive; there was no shortage of ideas exchanged and debated, suggestions made, discussion, explanation ... and plenty of laughter: those making the paper snowflakes seemed to be having a particularly raucous (and messy) time! Discussions focussed around concepts of thwarted and frustrated communication, but also around the mouth's importance both sexually and sensually. They pondered the phrase, 'I give no one directions and in turn am given none', linking it to arguments regarding their controls and freedoms as trainees. They picked up on loss of identity and of social belonging and brought these ideas back to their relevance in the classroom. Some had had experience teaching pupils who are selectively mute; others shared communication issues that they themselves had faced (and which had inspired them to want to become teachers). In their presentations to feed back to the group on their work they made text-to-text, image-to-image, text-to-image and image-to-text connections, as well as those that were image/text- to world and to-self, using the platform to discuss books, films, paintings, computer games ... and always their emerging experiences as teachers.

I cannot confirm whether what took place supported the students' understanding of the poem (nor, indeed, whether their 'recall' of it is any better because of the session), as I did not collect that data. What I can report is their enthusiasm for the task, the 'buzz' that

could be felt and the energy that was brought to the work. I can confirm their keenness to translate the session into their own practice (one student was overheard as she left planning to encourage her Year 9s to illustrate 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'). Importantly I believe, these beginning teachers, starting as they are in such challenging times, seem to have had a ball ... and if for nothing else, I believe that the session had value for that.

Perhaps next week I'll try 'interleaving'!



[With thanks to Dr John Rimmer for his expertise, and to the PGCE student teachers at Bishop Grosseteste University who have generously shared their work.]