2.15 The use of visual media

Boys work well when given opportunities to use the language found in **cartoons, television, video and computer games, and the methods used by visual media to convey action are transferred effectively by boys into their own writing** (Millard, 1997, 2001). This dramatic dimension to their writing is accompanied by a more effective use of language, in the use of a range of adjectives, adverbs and complex sentences, in comparison with girls.

Many boys respond to **strong visual images** and it has been suggested that such images 'accelerate' boys' learning because they are more **oriented towards visual and spatial learning styles** (Smith, 1996). This has been substantiated by a recent growing body of research into the **impact of visual learning on writing development**. **Opportunities for pupils to present work in charts and flow diagrams, using overhead projectors and interactive whiteboards**, have met with enthusiasm from boys (Higgins, 2002).

Research by the **British Film Institute** explores the links between **moving image media and print literacy**. A pilot project, **Story Shorts**, has aimed at using short films within the context of the NLS at Key Stage 2 (Parker, 2002), and is based on emergent interest in how moving image media 'may have an important role to play in enhancing existing literacy teaching programmes' (Parker, 1999; Oldham, 1999; Burn and Parker, 2001). **There may be significant scope for teachers to use film to support the development of writing skills in weaker pupils, with particular benefits for boys**, and to extend this to Key Stage 3. In effect, **'cineliteracy' is being examined as a scaffolding tool, and goes beyond the ubiquitous storyboarding and media script-writing of the secondary school curriculum**. In one pilot school, the literacy hour was used flexibly to teach the project to Year 6. The aims included **exploring reluctant writers' responses to film text and the possible impact on their own narrative writing**. **The lessons 'were designed to explore how the director's use of movement, music and colour through the camera lens could be used by a writer to create similar effects with a pen' (Higgins, 2002: 29). The results were a significant improvement in motivation in the target group of reluctant boy writers,** and a marked improvement in the ability to **organise narrative material**, use **paragraphing and figurative or descriptive language**. In particular, boys were able to make progress in the sentence level objectives, producing effective use of subordination and the use of the passive to create atmosphere and setting, informed by their learning about visual organisation

of film texts: 'the project incorporated the construction of sentence in different ways to support inference and imagery' (2002:36). Descriptive language is not perceived as 'feminised' in this context. This is consistent with Canadian research (McClay, 2002), suggesting that **'cineliteracy' has a motivational impact across the ability range.**

The growth of such perspectives on literacy development demands flexibility from the writing teacher, whose own knowledge of these genres may need to be developed.

2.16 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The motivating effect on boys of ICT is well established, and there is a growing literature on the power of ICT to improve pupils' engagement with a wide range of literacy activities. **Tweddle (1997) explored the capacity of ICT to support the strategies already outlined as promoting boys' writing – the oral work which takes place in front of the screen during paired drafting, the focus on independent learning and providing real purposes for writing. It is an energising tool for talking about the details of linguistic and organisational features of texts.**

A full and helpful summary of recent literature on ICT in English is given by **Andrews (2001)**, who cites work which points the way for future use of ICT in literacy teaching, including the potential of **multimedia authoring and speech-to-text facilities**. The research of Moseley and Higgins (1999) is cited as focusing on 'supporting writing; improving reading and spelling with speech feedback; developing story-writing skills; teaching the correct use of omission apostrophes'. Andrews highlights a critical finding to be 'the speech to text facility…with children of all abilities…especially for reinforcing connections between letters and sounds' (2001: 129). He observes that **technology is about pupils being 'producers' as well as 'users' of texts**: 'handling the form, as well as the information that it gives us access to, is a critical leap for students and teachers'. Within the wider agenda for raising boys' achievement, **ICT is seen to have a special appeal in English, because the interaction with text allows boys to 'transform… be social… be engaged' (Noble and Bradford, 2000)**. The **benefits of ICT for boys'** (and girls') writing are summarised by Myhill as part of her response to the TAP Project (2001). Classroom strategies using ICT involve:

offering differentiated support on an individual basis

supporting both writing composition and transcription
whole-class direct teaching on an aspect of literacy.

Boys see ICT as a means of improving the presentation of their work, **increasing self-confidence and overcoming teacher disapproval of untidy handwriting (Bleach, 1998)**. The use of **spell-checkers has been welcomed because boys like instant feedback**. It is however, **in the 'alterability' of text on screen that ICT offers the most impact on the linguistic choices pupils make by supporting the teaching of composition features, for example using the highlight and font facilities to focus on topic sentences, cohesion, vocabulary chains and excessive co-ordination (Myhill, 2001)**. This is reliant upon teachers' own knowledge and motivation, and how they resist being hampered by a lack of sophisticated technology – it is rather about how to use what is available. At the other extreme, work on multimedia authoring offers exciting opportunities for teachers to push further the expectations of what pupils can do with language when the technology becomes available, as has been shown by work in London primary schools (Lachs, 2000).