



Early childhood education ▼

Public schools ▼

Teaching and learning ▼

Student wellbeing ▼

Policy library

About us ▼



| Scan



◀ [Back](#)

Poets in the making: confirming identity in English

[Dr Janet Dutton and Dr Kathy Rushton](#) discuss the value of poetry in the classroom in the development of critical thinking and literacy.

Peer reviewed article.

For me the private act of writing poetry is song writing, confessional, diary-keeping, speculation, problem-solving, storytelling, therapy, anger management, craftsmanship, relaxation, concentration and spiritual adventure all in one inexpensive package.

(Stephen Fry, 2007 p.xii)

Like Fry we think that poetry can allow students to express many of their ideas and emotions while also helping them to engage with the ideas of others, but unlike him, many of us do not share his knowledge of or facility with language. For several years, we have been working on a project to support students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to develop both literacy and their understandings about English language and literature. We focussed on the reading and writing of poetry as one way to engage students and to confirm identity. We also sought to support their wellbeing by actively calling on their own experiences and linguistic resources. Our expertise and work as English teachers and teachers of pre-service English teachers has confirmed our belief that teaching poetry is one of the most effective ways to confirm identity and encourage students to engage with English language and literature.

To support teachers to do this, a series of workshops was held to outline some strategies that could be used. As the participating teachers were concerned to improve literacy and language, the professional learning workshops focused on drama based pedagogy and the development of oral language as strategies for achieving this. A conscious decision was also made to work 'shoulder-to-shoulder' with teachers at the programming and planning stage. In this way the teachers' existing units of work were used as the basis for developing written texts; and poems and poetry writing were included as part of the process. Our decisions were informed by our view that the classroom teacher knows the most about their own class (Timperley, 2011) and by working

this way teachers were in control of their own work and were making their own decisions about content and pedagogy. What we offered were some ideas about how students might be engaged in literature and literacy development through reading and writing poetry.

Why Poetry?

Poetry provides an opportunity to do all the things Fry suggests and who better to answer this question than poets themselves. The former British Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen, sees 'literature as being in effect, 3000 years of wisdom about human behaviour put in a form that we can understand and take pleasure in.' (Rosen, 2009). This is the goal many teachers pursue, to engage students in learning. Rosen argues that this is just what literature and poetry can do. However, he also notes that "for some incredible reason, we have created an environment in some schools, in some classrooms (not all, please note) where the writing of summarisers, extract-hacks and writer-substitutes has been promoted above the level of those who've spent their whole lives trying to perfect ways of encapsulating wisdom and feeling into literary form" (Rosen, 2009). This is a cry to pursue quality; rather than simplifying or dumbing down, to instead provide scaffolds for students.

Poetry provides that link between spoken and written language that move along the mode continuum (Hammond, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2008) which can support reflection about language. In the classroom this provides opportunities for discussions about all levels of language from structure to grammar and vocabulary. Even though, as Huisman (2016) notes the teaching of poetry in primary education often tends to focus on 'levels of expression and wording' whereas in secondary education the focus shifts to include 'semantics and context' (p.8); poetry affords the opportunities to teach all of these aspects of language. Indeed, she makes the important point that:

All written or heard language, not just poetry, requires this active construal by the reader/hearer to make sense. But the interpretation of poetry particularly requires a continued close attention to all levels of language.

(Huisman, 2016, p.8)

This is a great gift for teachers struggling to support students whose level of literacy is hampering their learning or for students who are not engaging with English literature and poetry. Poems may be long but many are also very short and this affords the teacher the time to explore and discuss a poem while giving students the time to reflect about both its meaning and its construction. For instance, these short excerpts from some poems by Australian poets provide a rich starting point for discussing important themes as well as how language is used to develop the subject matter and the tenor which engages the reader or listener with the poet's perspective.

Lionel Fogarty's poem (1990) 'Stories'

Cook didn't find us,

we found them first

They didn't see us in the bush

Near the tree

And over the sky.

or from Omar Musa's poem (2017) 'Danny said I couldn't tag along because I had a future'

If we were angry

They would hate us.

If we were polite-

Just the same.

So we did what we felt.

We lashed out.

Or from Ali Cobby Eckermann's (2015) 'Kaleidoscope'

A boy sits on the shore of languages, water babbles

There are no rocks, no constants, the tide laps gently

On the horizon sunset appears and colours stretch

Twilight will arrive like vowels that sustain the sky

Stars burst in a global dance, in the distance a didgeridoo blows

Comets script the language names, the boy recognises his own.

Whoever the poet is and from whatever time or place, there is meaning and music in the words and by careful selection students may find their own experiences reflected in some of the poets they read.

How reading and writing poetry can develop critical thinking and literacy

I think poetry, when handled well, offers autonomy. It does this, I would argue, through several channels: Suggestion; Reflection; Juxtaposition; Physicality of language; Mutability of language and interculturalism.

(Rosen,2009)

Unfortunately, it is not just the students who may find it difficult to appreciate or write poetry, often it is also the teachers. In Weaven & Clark's (2013) research they found that many of the teachers they interviewed found teaching poetry a challenge: 'It's just something that I'm not really comfortable writing, and so how do I get over that discomfort so that I can teach confidently in a classroom. Because we all know that we teach better when we're competent with the subject material' (Weaven & Clark, 2013 p. 209). These challenges are amplified when the students are already disengaged with literature and poetry and perhaps more so if they find it difficult to make a link from their own cultural heritage or personal experiences to the texts they are studying.

As Rosen also notes 'One of the important parts of being a child is hearing words, whether spoken directly to you, or spoken in the air, without knowing what they mean. Instead, all you hear is the word's physicality, its material existence, if you like – its sound, its tone, its pitch, its volume, its rhythm, its place in a cadence of words and the like.' (2009). This is how young children develop vocabulary as they master their mother tongue and it is a similar process for older students developing their first or an additional language. It is essential to both hear the language and then use it to interact orally or in writing. This process can be confronting or very comfortable depending on the support which students are given. For instance the language of Shakespeare may be challenging for many students to read, but when Baz Luhrmann presented his actors in a modern setting in 'Romeo and Juliet', any young student could view the film and understand all the nuances of Shakespeare's language as the viewer is able see the play unfold in a setting with which they are already familiar. Indeed, it is the writing of poetry which can provide one of the best scaffolds to support the understanding of poetry because the writer needs to solve the problems that the subject matter and the form present. For instance, the poet, Mark Strand, says that in writing poetry he has deepened his understanding of the poetry of others, 'If my readings have any acuity or sensitivity, it is probably because I have paid close attention to how my own poems worked, and to which ways and to what extent I might improve them' (Strand, 2000 p. xxiii).

Many decades ago the poet and academic, Kenneth Koch (1970) used a variety of strategies to support disadvantaged, bilingual students to write poetry. While many other poets may have worked in communities, Koch's account of the processes he employed are unusual because he has provided very accessible prompts for teachers to promote poetry writing. This is probably why his book has been re-printed several times and is still available today. We employed some of his ideas to promote poetry writing, and as Rosen has stated, it is hearing and reading poetry which is the starting point for writing so we shared some poems, such as those suggested above, which related to the topics teachers were addressing. Table 1 provides some suggestions and examples which we used to help students to start writing poetry. The suggested structures free students with low levels of literacy to experiment with themes and expression and provide opportunities to develop vocabulary in a meaningful way.

Examples

**"Wishes, Lies and
Dreams"**

**Kenneth
Koch, 1970,
Vintage, N.Y.**

“Wishes, Lies and Dreams”

Kenneth Koch, 1970, Vintage, N.Y.

Examples

1. Wishes p.138

I wish...Joint construction:-

I wish I was a green goanna with lots of money

I wish I was a blue bird that never did homework

I wish I was a pink parrot that ate lollies all day

I wish I was (describing adjective/ noun)

I wish I was a pink parrot (add **an adjectival phrase**) with lots of money
(add **an adjectival clause**)

that ate lollies all day

Ask information report questions like: Where does it live? What does it eat? What does it do? Develop complex sentences

(Begin with a jointly constructed text in Early Stage 1)

2. I used to be
(adjective)

I used to be little

But now I'm very big

But now
(adjective) p.156

3. I seem to be
(adjective) p.246

I seem to be happy

But really I am worried

But really I am
(adjective)

I seem to be smart

But really I am scared

4. Comparisons –
simile p.87

Use a colour/and a word from your language

Summer is like... orange fire

Spring is like...

Winter is like... grey ciel (sky)

Autumn is like

“Wishes, Lies and Dreams”

Examples

Kenneth Koch, 1970, Vintage, N.Y.

5. Metaphors p.143

Use “is” to compare two things

The snow is a snowflake

The blue sky is an ocean

The blackboard is a black notebook

An apple is a red rose

A bat is a big fat stick

Mrs Wiener is a lovely flower which shouts

Tomas Torres Y4 from “Wishes, Lies and Dreams”

6. Lies p.192

Each line must be a lie

The Dawn of me

I was born nowhere

And I live in a tree

I never leave my tree

It is very crowded

I am stacked up right against a bird

But I won't leave my tree

Everything is dark...

Jeff Morley Y5 from “Wishes, Lies and Dreams”

Table 1. Examples of poetry starters

How can poetry help to confirm identity?

It is also important not to underestimate what students know and understand about the world, even if they cannot always express their ideas clearly in English (Ewing, 2010). As Rosen states:

‘I’ve seen children looking at pictures of refugees escaping the bombing of Barcelona in 1936 and then writing poems based on the idea that right now, they’ve got to leave and take with them important things, important memories, important wishes and desires. And then I’ve seen these

children, some of them refugees themselves – from a wide range of faith and national backgrounds: Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Caribbean, eastern Europe and the UK – share these around in a circle, talking of such intimate details as a hug from a grandmother or a look in someone's eyes.' (2009)

For this reason, we made suggestions about the texts that were chosen for study. They didn't need to reflect each and every student's personal experiences or cultural heritage but they did need to indicate that these aspects of their students' lives were important to the teacher. Universal themes like love, hate, the love of nature or the nature of war resonate across time and space, but the language chosen to present these themes can invite or exclude the reader/listener depending on the support they have in understanding the message.

One of our suggestions was to invite students to respond to poetry by producing an Identity Text in the form of a poem. An identity text (Cummins, 1981; Cummins 1986; Cummins, 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011) is a multimodal, oral or written text that draws on an individual's experiences and linguistic resources. It is a text shaped from material and experiences from each student's own background and which includes the opportunity for first language use. We suggested the concept of identity texts (Cummins, 1981; Cummins 1986; Cummins, 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011) as a way of engaging students and supporting literacy development. Cummins, Markus & Montero (2015) draw attention to 'essential aspects of the link between identity affirmation, societal power relations, and literacy engagement' (p. 556) and suggest that inviting students to tell their own stories is one way to support the confirmation of identity.

Producing a text which is valued in an educational context provides students with an opportunity to represent their own identity and culture while maintaining the integrity of the NSW K-10 English Rationale that states:

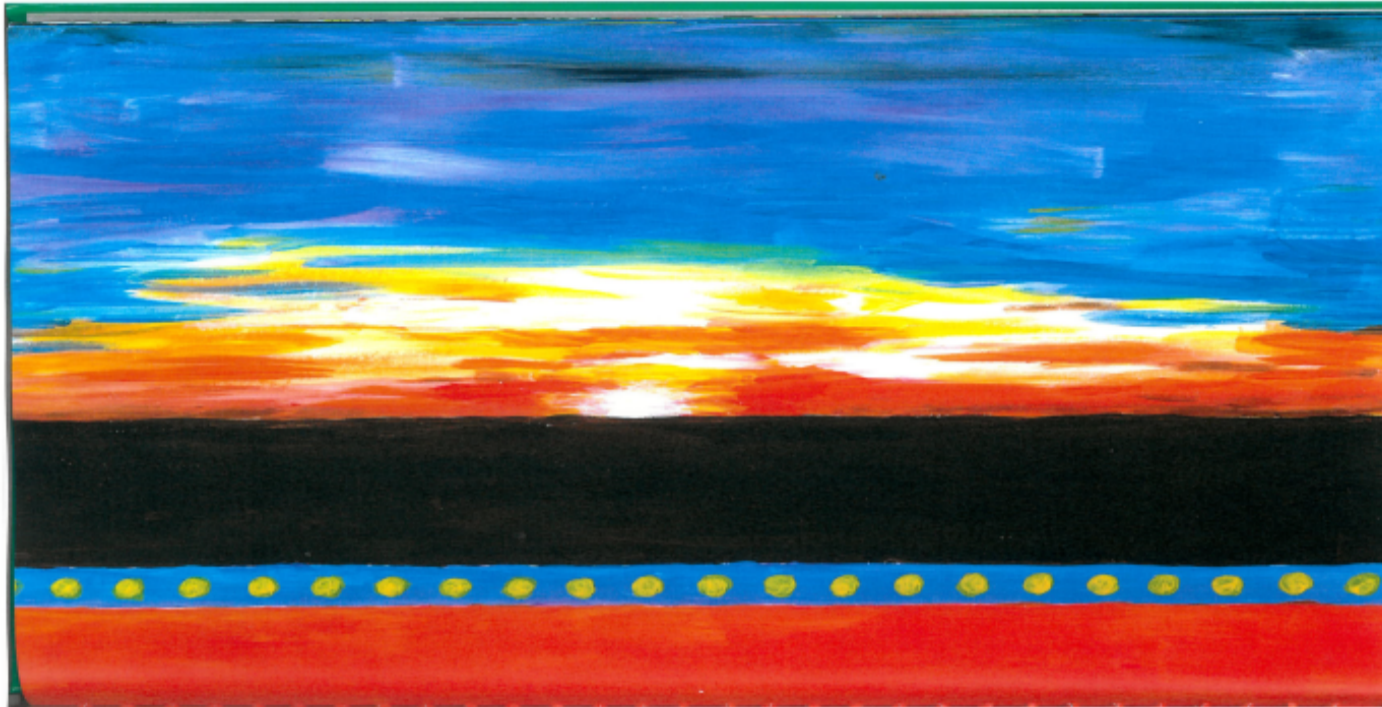
By composing and responding with imagination, feeling, logic and conviction, students develop understanding of themselves and of human experience and culture. They develop clear and precise skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing, and knowledge and understanding of language forms and features and structures of texts. (NESA, 2012, p. 10).

Being able to negotiate aspects of culture in this way (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert & Muspratt, 2002) is also a form of 'interim discourse' between students' 'primary discourses' and the 'secondary discourse' or more academic discourse which is the goal of schooling (Gee, 2000). Seen from another angle it supports the move from spoken to written language and provides students with a purposeful and creative activity in which to reflect on their language choices. The prompts offered by Koch (see Table 1) provided a structural starting point for writing poetry and they also afforded students the opportunity, which Koch exploited, of inviting students to use all of their linguistic resources including their first language or dialect to express themselves. Cummins, Hu, Markus & Montero (2015) similarly state that: '...teachers [could] expand the instructional space beyond simply an English-only zone to include students' and parents' multilingual and multimodal repertoires even when they themselves didn't speak the multiple languages represented in their classrooms.' Reading and writing poetry provide these opportunities.

Conclusion

One of the obvious benefits of teaching poetry is that it introduces students to the language of poets. Every reading allows opportunities to engage with and reflect on the poet's language choices and as Rosen (2009) suggests also to consider the juxtaposition, physicality and mutability of language. When the cultural perspective which a particular poet may offer is also considered, just a few lines such as those previously suggested can provoke a very rich discussion while also

demonstrating to students how such a poem may be constructed. For example, by using the picture book “Why I love Australia’ by Bronwyn Bancroft a young student, Lucy, was able to produce her own identity text entitled “Why I love the top end” based on her account of a trip to the Northern Territory. Using the example of the lyrical language in Bancroft’s text, she was able to paint and describe her own scenes.



Marvellous sun going down at dusk over ancient artwork

When meaning is the focus students can easily be supported with appropriate vocabulary development and the use of language features. One double page in Bancroft’s text describes a city at night “Modern city lights like a jewelled necklace adorning an ancient landscape.” The language in the text provided a template and in some cases the vocabulary for the student to use in her new identity text. In this case an adjective ‘marvellous’ and prepositional adverbial phrases of time ‘at dusk’ or place ‘over ancient artwork’. Support can be given to enable students to reflect on their own experiences and draw on these to write their own poems. This allows the focus to be on their own personal expression and developing their skills as language problem solvers in the service of making meaning.

Moffat (1981) suggests that the levels of abstraction that a writer has to master when writing for different audiences, changes according to the audience. Expressive writing or writing for the self or a known and trusted audience, as when writing in class with a focus on the process of writing rather than the product, is the most personal and the least difficult. Writing for a more remote audience is more challenging so the ability to explore ideas and problem solve the challenges of the form from the levels of text, including word choice and therefore vocabulary building, can be introduced to students through the study of a poem to which they can respond. In short, the development of expressive writing in any poetic form requires thought about all aspects of language (Ewing, 2010; Huissman, 2016; Moffat,1981; Rosen, 2009) and by using poetry and identity texts, teachers can help students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds develop their literacy, express their ideas and emotions and engage with English language and literature.

References

Alloway, N., Freebody, P., Gilbert, P., & Muspratt, S. 2002, *Boys, literacy and schooling: Expanding the repertoires of practice*. Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra, ACT.

Bancroft, B. 2010, *Why I love Australia*, Little Hare Books, Surry Hills

Cobby Eckermann, A. 2015, *Inside my mother*, Giramondo Publishing Company, Artarmon:

- Cummins, J. 1981, 'Four misconceptions about language proficiency in Bilingual Education', *NABE Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 31-45, doi.org/10.1080/08855072.1981.10668409
- Cummins, J. 1986, 'Empowering minority students: a framework for intervention', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 18-36.
- Cummins, J. 2000, *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon England
- Cummins J., & Early M. (Eds.) 2011, *Identity Texts: The Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools*, Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent
- Cummins, J., Hu, S., Markus, P. & Montero, M.K. 2015, Identity texts and academic achievement: Connecting the dots in multilingual school contexts. *TESOL Quarterly* 49,3, Sept 2015,555-581
- Ewing, R. 2010, *The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potentia*., ACER Press, Melbourne
- Fogarty, L, 1990, *Jagera*., Cheryl Buchanan, Coominya
- Fry, S. 2007, *The ode less travelled: Unlocking the poet within*, .Arrow Books, London
- Gee, J. 2000, 'Identity as an analytic lens for research in education'. *Review of Research in Education*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 99-125.
- Hammond, J. (Ed.), 2001, 'What is scaffolding?' *Scaffolding teaching and learning in language and literacy education* pp.1-14, PETAA, Newtown
- Huisman, Rosemary. 2016, Talking about poetry - using the model of language in Systemic Functional Linguistics to talk about poetic texts [online]. *English in Australia*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 7-19. Availability: <https://search.informit-com-au.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=433028696266165;res=IELHSS> ISSN: 0155-2147. [cited 20 Dec 17].
- Koch,K. 1970, *Wishes, lies and dreams: Teaching children to write poetry*, Vintage books, NewYork:
- Lester, A. 2008, *Isabella's bed*, Hachette Children's books Australia, Sydney:
- Martin, J. & Rose, D. 2008, *Genre Relations: Mapping Culture*, Equinox Publishing, London:
- Moffat, J. 1981, *Active Voice: A writing program across the curriculum*, Boynton/Cook, Portsmouth, NH:
- Musa, O. 2017, *Millefiori*, Penguin Random House, Australia:
- NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) [NSW English K-10 Syllabus](#) 
- Rosen, M. 2009, '[The Philippa Pearce Memorial Lecture, Homerton College, Cambridge](#) '. 'What's Children's Poetry for? Towards a new child-specific 'Apologie for Poetrie' (Philip Sidney 1579)
- Strand, M. & Boland, E. 2000, *The making of a poem*, W.W. Norton & Co. Ltd., London
- Timperley, H. 2011, *Realising the Power of Professional Learning*, Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, London
- Vygotsky,L. 1986, *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MIT Press, Massachusetts

Weaven, M. & Clark, T. 2013. 'I guess it scares us'-Teachers discuss the teaching of poetry in senior secondary English'. *English in Education* vol 47, no.3, pp. 197-212. doi:10.1111/eie.12016

How to cite this article – Dutton, J & Rushton, K. (2018). Poets in the making: Confirming identity in English. *Scan*, 37(3).

Last updated: 06-Feb-2020

Say hello



We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

Scan

[Latest issue](#) →

[Past issues](#) →

[Contact Scan](#) →

[Find out more](#) →

[Accessibility](#) →

[Information access](#) →

[Privacy](#) →

[Copyright](#) →

[Policy library](#) →

[Department contacts](#) →

[Our Ministers](#) →

[Social media](#) →

[About us](#) →

| NSW Department of Education

Bounce Back! A positive education approach

Enhancing wellbeing, resilience and social-emotional learning in the primary years

Professors Toni Noble and Helen McGrath explain the features and benefits of effective social and emotional learning programs, and outline the evidence underpinning **Bounce Back!**

The ultimate goal of educators is to enhance students' wellbeing and their capacity to succeed at school. At the heart of the NSW **Wellbeing Framework for Schools** are the goals of helping all students to **connect, succeed and thrive**. The Framework cites DEEWR's definition of student wellbeing which was developed by the authors of this article and the Bounce Back! program (ACU & Erebus, 2008).

Student wellbeing is a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience and satisfaction with self, relationships, and experiences at school. A focus on student wellbeing has led to an increased interest in positive education and social-emotional learning (SEL).

Positive education integrates the science of positive psychology with evidence-based educational practices to enable students to thrive and succeed academically, socially and emotionally (Noble & McGrath, 2015; McGrath & Noble, 2017).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the collective term for a range of core skills and behaviours that enable students to understand and manage their own emotions, develop and sustain positive relationships with their peers, display empathy, support and kindness towards others, and set and achieve their own positive goals (CASEL, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011).

Benefits of social and emotional learning: connect, succeed, thrive

Reviews of worldwide research consistently indicate that SEL programs have a wide range of positive effects on student behaviour and learning. One significant large scale meta-analysis conducted by CASEL (Durlak et al., 2011) assessed the combined outcomes from 213 different school-based SEL interventions. It identified significant increases in positive social behaviour, a reduction in behaviour problems, and an 11 percentile point gain in academic achievement. The pilot study of the Australian KidsMatter Project also identified significant academic benefits in schools which were assessed as effectively implementing their SEL programs. The average academic performance of students in these 'high implementing schools' was superior by up to 6 months on national literacy and numeracy assessments (Dix et al., 2012). Bounce Back! was by far the most popular whole school SEL program, being chosen by 64% of the 101 schools in the KidsMatter pilot program. Bounce Back! is endorsed by KidsMatter.

'Bounce Back! A positive education approach to wellbeing, resilience and social-emotional learning' (2018 edition)

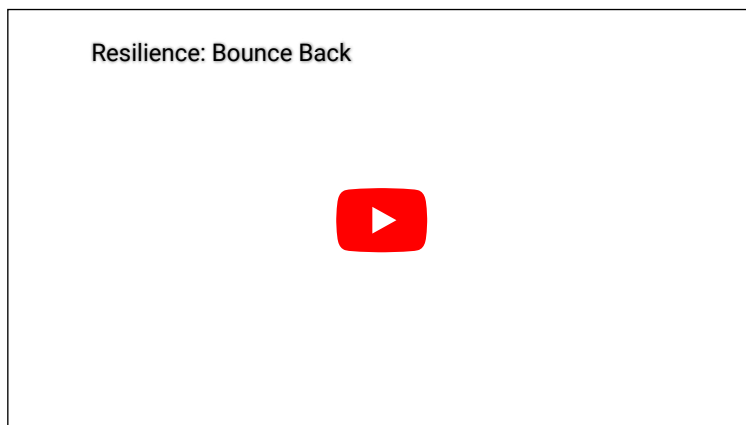
The multi-award winning Bounce Back! program was first published in 2003 to support schools and teachers in their efforts to teach skills for wellbeing and resilience, and to create safe and supportive school communities. It is a whole school social and emotional learning (SEL) program that teaches the core skills advocated by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning). Additionally, the program includes activities for teaching students evidence-informed coping skills which are based on cognitive behaviour therapy. It was the world's first positive education curriculum program when it was first published. It is now in its third edition (2018) as a hard-cover book that also provides access to an ebook with comprehensive online resources.

Bounce Back! is a whole school program that provides strategies and materials at three levels: K-Year 2, Years 3-4 and Years 5-6. Each level incorporates the same 10 curriculum units with age appropriate activities and is supported by curriculum correlation charts linked to the National, Victorian and NSW English and HPER curriculum.

Bounce Back! units	
Core values	Honesty, fairness, acceptance of differences and responsibility
Social values	Inclusion, kindness, cooperation, friendliness, being respectful to others and self-respect
People bouncing back	Skills and attitudes for coping and being resilient
Courage	Finding courage in both everyday life and difficult circumstances
Looking on the bright side	Optimistic thinking and positivity skills
Emotions	Amplifying positive emotions and managing uncomfortable emotions
Relationships	Social skills for making and keeping friends and managing conflict
Humour	Using humour to connect with others, to cope better and to understand differences between helpful and harmful humour

Bounce Back! units	
Being safe	Skills for understanding, countering and managing bullying situations; skills for supporting others who are being bullied
Success	Skills that lead to successful goal achievement (goal setting, growth mindset, overcoming obstacles); identifying your own positive character strengths and ability strengths

The video on [Resilience: Bounce Back](#) by Bounce Back! (2 min 37 secs) from [WhisperCreative](#) describes the core skills taught in the program:



Evidence-based teaching strategies for effectively teaching social and emotional skills

CASEL has used the acronym SAFE to identify the most effective features of a SEL program. These are: Sequenced, Active learning, Focused and Explicit (Durlak et al., 2011).

Explicit

The most effective SEL programs are those that explicitly teach specific SEL skills (Durlak et al., 2011). This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Hattie (2011) and Marzano (Marzano et al., 2001; Beasley & Apthorp, 2010) that the explicit (direct) instruction of skills and understandings (whether we are talking about literacy, numeracy or SEL skills) has the most significant impact on positive student learning outcomes. The Bounce Back! program guides teachers on how to explicitly teach SEL skills, and then provides strategies and activities that enable students to practise and transfer these skills in classroom and playground activities. Each unit also includes a variety of take home tasks that encourage students to practise the skills outside the school context.

Sequenced

A sequenced program is a critical feature in the effective teaching of SEL skills (Durlak et al., 2011). As a whole school program, Bounce Back! sequences the teaching of SEL skills in 10 curriculum units from Kindergarten to Year 6. Interviews with teachers at schools which had been implementing the program for up to 12 years found that this sequencing of skills was one of the most important factors that contributed to it being teacher friendly and sustainable over time (Noble & McGrath, 2017), as illustrated by the following comments from teachers in the research study:

The organisation of the units is really, really helpful, especially for teachers who have never really taught most of these skills before and its developmental sequence of units (across all 3 teacher resource books) is really helpful.

The best thing is the structure of the program and the lessons that develop competency and social and emotional skills across years.

Active forms of learning

Two recent research studies (Noble & McGrath, 2017; McGrath & Noble, 2011) found that the use of children's literature was a particular strength of Bounce Back!, helping educators to feel more confident about teaching the skills and understandings that contribute to the development of wellbeing and resilience. This is illustrated by the following comments from teachers:

- 'I do think it's easy to teach. I choose a really enjoyable, fabulous literature piece and I will teach ideas through that.'
- 'The children's picture books are the absolute stand out in the program for me. They are all so relevant and the kids can relate to them so well.'
- 'The use of high quality children's picture books and follow-up literature and language activities is great.'

The program's recommended books, films and videos enable teachers and students to discuss real life issues (for example, friendships, setbacks) in a safe and comfortable way. After the devastating Victorian bushfires in 2009, the Victorian Department of Education offered Bounce Back! training workshops to schools in the seven regions most affected by the fires. Research indicated that teachers' use of the program's recommended books supported their capacity to help students to cope more effectively with the aftermath of the bushfires and in general to behave more confidently, resiliently and pro-socially (McGrath & Noble, 2011).

Bounce Back! also makes the learning of SEL skills active by using graphic organisers as scaffolds for learning. These include the BOUNCE BACK acronym of 10 coping statements, 'dos and don'ts' charts for social skills, drama activities such as reader's theatre and role plays, and highly engaging educational games and quizzes for reinforcing what has been learned. The program also incorporates cooperative learning strategies such as 'team coaching' and 'cooperative heads together'. These offer robust ways to explicitly teach social skills and build positive peer relationships, and to achieve good academic outcomes. Marzano and colleagues reported a composite high effect size of 0.73 on student learning for cooperative learning (Beesley & Apthorp,

2010) and Hattie (Visible Learning Plus, 2017) reported an effect size of .59. Bounce Back! also includes a range of collaborative problem solving (thinking) tools such as the 'ten thinking tracks' and 'cooperative controversy' which encourage students to think and discuss curriculum issues critically, creatively, empathetically and ethically in small groups. These strategies and tools facilitate student voice and the development of problem solving skills and responsible decision making.

Focused

A focused approach requires a clear understanding by the teacher of the personal and social skills they are teaching through their chosen SEL program (Durlak et al., 2011). To assist teachers to clarify specific learning goals, the introduction to each Bounce Back! unit provides a concise list of the key skills and understandings that are encapsulated in the unit's lesson activities. A section on 'teacher reflections' in each unit encourages teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices, as well as the personal practices that contribute to their own wellbeing. For example in the 'success' unit, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their use of process praise to encourage a growth mindset in their students (Dweck, 2006) and to identify and engage their own strengths as teachers and in other aspects of their lives.

Conclusion

The Bounce Back! program has been highly effective over many years because it is based on a combination of sound educational and psychological theories and evidence-based teaching strategies. It provides a diverse range of practical strategies and resources for teaching primary school-aged students how to cope with the complexity of their everyday lives and to learn how to 'bounce back' when they experience sadness, difficulties, frustrations and challenging times. The use of high quality children's literature and videos, thinking tools and educational games, as well as relationship-building strategies of cooperative learning and circle time, ensure a highly engaging curriculum that promotes effective academic, social and emotional learning.

References and further reading

Australian Catholic University and Erebus International. (2008). *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review*. Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

Beesley, A. & Aphthorp, H. (Eds.). (2010). *Classroom instruction that works, second edition: Research report*. Denver, USA: McREL International.

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning). (2018).

Dix, K., Slee, P.T., Lawson, M.J. & Keeves, J.P. (2012). Implementation quality of whole-school mental health promotion and students' academic performance. *Child and Adolescence Mental Health*, 17(1): 45-51.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D. & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1):405-432.

Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset, the new psychology of success*. New York, USA: Random House.

Greenberg, M.T., Domitrovich, C.E., Weissberg, R.P. & Durlak, J.A. (2017). **Social and emotional learning as a public health approach to education**. *The Future of Children*, 37(1):13-32.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning. A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London, England: Routledge.

Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J. & Pollock, J.E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McGrath, H. & Noble, T. (2003). *Bounce back! A classroom resiliency program. Teacher's handbook*. Sydney: Pearson Education.

McGrath, H. & Noble, T. (2018). *Bounce back! A positive education approach to wellbeing, resilience and social-emotional learning. Lower Primary, F-Year 2; Middle Primary, Years 3-4; Upper Primary, Years 5-6* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Pearson Education.

McGrath, H. & Noble, T. (2011). *Report on the evaluation of the impact of training teachers in bushfire-affected schools to use the Bounce Back! program*. Victorian Department of Education and Early childhood.

Noble, T. & McGrath, H. (2015). The *PROSPER school pathways for student wellbeing: Policy and practices*. Netherlands: SpringerBriefs in Well-Being & Quality of Life Research.

Noble, T. & McGrath, H. (2017). Making it real and making it last! Sustainability of teacher implementation of a whole school resilience program. In Wosnitza, M., Peixoto, F., Beltman, S. & Mansfield, C.F. (Eds.), *Resilience in education: Concepts, contexts and connections*. New York, USA: Springer.

Noble, T. & McGrath, H. (2018). [Bounce Back!](#)

NSW Department of Education. (2015). [The Wellbeing Framework for Schools](#). Sydney: NSW Department of Education.

Pearson. (2018). Bounce Back!.

Visible Learning Plus. (2017). [205+ influences on student achievement](#).

How to cite this article – Noble, T. & McGrath, H. (2018). Bounce Back! A positive education approach to enhancing wellbeing, resilience and social-emotional learning in the primary years. *Scan*, 37(3).

Last updated: 28-Jun-2022



© State of New South Wales (Department of Education), 2022. For more information go to <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/copyright>.

⚠ Wash your hands, cover your cough and stay home if you're sick. [Get the latest COVID-19 advice.](#)

A NSW Government website - Education



Early childhood education ▾

Public schools ▾

Teaching and learning ▾

Student wellbeing ▾

Policy library

About us ▾



| Scan



◀ [Back](#)

SPaRK - The Curious Garden

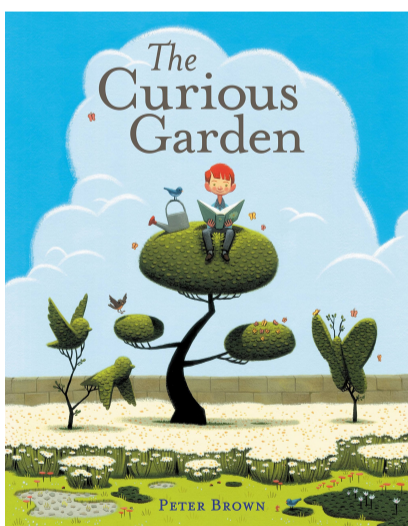
How can we care for and improve our spaces and places?

By [Gaye Braiding](#) - teacher at Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre, Epping North Public School, and NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education.

Resource overview

A Shared Practice and Resource Kit (SPaRK) for geography Stage 1 (Years 1-2), Stage 3 (Years 5-6) and Stage 4 (Years 7-8).

'The Curious Garden' by Peter Brown (2009), New York: Little Brown and Co.



Inspired by New York City's High Line, 'The Curious Garden' is a picture book that conveys the transformative power of sustainable actions by one small boy who cares for a place. The boy, Liam, loves to be outside exploring his city. During one of his explorations, his curiosity leads him up a dark stairwell and onto a disused railway track where he sees some struggling plants in desperate need of care and attention. Liam immediately takes action and waters, prunes and nurtures them. The plants thrive and, together with Liam, expand their explorations and spread across the city, transforming it into a natural urban oasis. As the landscape is greened, and biodiversity is increased, changes also occur in the community as more and more people come outside to garden, socialise and enjoy the surrounding plants and animals. When contemplating this book, author Peter Brown wondered, 'What would happen if an entire city decided to truly co-operate with nature?'

Educational significance

Reinforcing the geographical concepts of place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability and change, 'The Curious Garden' could be used as a visual representation in support of the Geography K-10 Syllabus focus areas: Features of places (Stage 1), Factors that shape places (Stage 3), and Place and liveability (Stage 4). It strongly supports the learning across the curriculum priority of sustainability.

At a Stage 1 level, double page spreads, detailed illustrations and a compelling narrative depict the diverse natural and human features of a city and reveal how people can understand their environment through immersion in it. The picture book illustrates how the environment can change when people care for their place.

For Stage 3 students investigating how people influence places, 'The Curious Garden' expresses the far-reaching impacts of sustainable actions by informed and responsible citizens. It shows the widespread effects of local sustainability initiatives in increasing biodiversity, improving amenity and connecting people.

The illustrations depicting the community working together, and spending their leisure time in their enhanced environment, provide stimulus for discussions and investigations by Stage 4 students into strategies that enhance liveability.

While the book provides a model of how a place can be transformed into a sustainable green space, the actions of the protagonist also model geographical inquiry skills. Liam actively inquires in his environment, and closely observes his surroundings and the responses of the plants. He undertakes secondary research during winter, and both takes individual action and leads collective action to improve his place.

Liam is a good role model of an informed, active and responsible citizen. He could be used to inspire students to take care of their place or to undertake a sustainability action project to restore or improve biodiversity within their school grounds.

Suggestions for using this text

Before a shared reading of the text, examine the cover and explore definitions of the word 'curious'. Discuss the definition suggested by the cover: does 'curious' mean 'strange' or 'inquiring'? Or both?

Share the book with the class. After reading, make connections to other texts about places or environments that have changed, to personal experiences, and to perceptions of gardens and green spaces at home, in the school grounds or in the local area. Consider connections to media articles about greening spaces, such as vertical gardens on city buildings.

Revisit some of the double page illustrations and ask students to identify the natural and human features of the place. Compare the first and last double page illustrations, inviting students to identify the changes that occurred to the cityscape. Also ask them to consider their perceptions of the place in these two illustrations. How does each place make them feel? What would it be like to live in or visit each place?

Through the lens of thinking and working like a geographer, examine the behaviours and actions of the main character, Liam. What dispositions does he demonstrate? How does he perceive his environment? What geographical skills does he use? What sustainable actions does he take?

Teaching activities

Stage 1 – what are the features of our school grounds and how can we care for them?

Take the students outside to explore and observe the natural and human features of the school grounds. Allow time for them to explore places independently or with a partner. This could be guided by a sensory scavenger hunt. For example, students could find a human made place in which an animal is living, a human made place that is cool, a natural place in which an animal might hide, a leaf that has been chewed by insects, or a leaf that has an aroma when it is scrunched.

Working with a partner, students take turns imagining one is a visitor or new student to the school. They take their partner on a tour of sections of the school grounds, describing the places and activities which are undertaken in each space. Students take photographs of each other using these spaces, which are subsequently compiled and annotated. Photo collages can be displayed on a large wall map of the school grounds.

As a springboard to discussing ways to care for the school grounds, students closely examine the first and last double page spreads in *'The Curious Garden'*. They identify the changes to the human cityscape depicted in the first illustration, specifically noting spaces and places in which natural features have been added, as shown in the last illustration. As a class, discuss the effects these environmental changes had on the people in the story. Also discuss other consequences of the changes, such as cleaner air, increased animal diversity, new friendships, increased fitness, and new places to relax.

Revisit the school grounds to identify evidence of people caring for, or not caring for, the grounds. As they explore, students describe and model ways they can personally care for the school, such as picking up litter as they walk, staying on pathways and respecting out-of-bounds areas.

Features of places

A student:

- describes features of places and the connections people have with places GE1-1
- identifies ways in which people interact with and care for places GE1-2
- communicates geographical information and uses geographical tools for inquiry GE1-3.

Content

Students investigate features of places and how they can be cared for, for example (ACHGK005):

- description of the natural and human features of places
- consideration of how a place can be cared for. For example, a park, farm, beach, bushland.

Stage 3 – how do people sustainably influence places?

Define the word 'sustainability' and draw on examples of sustainable actions that are familiar to students. Re-read *'The Curious Garden'* and ask students to create graffiti boards of the ways in which Liam and the community members influenced their place. On their boards, students highlight the actions that contributed to sustainability.

Using one or more of the sustainable actions identified on the graffiti boards, students generate a cause and effect table or flow chart to list the immediate and longer term effects of the sustainable actions illustrated in the book. Students use think-pair-share to generate a class list of the longer term effects on people and the environment of the community's sustainable actions in greening their city. For example, passive cooling of buildings, increased biodiversity, enhanced amenity and new leisure spaces.

Using an example in the local area, local government area, or city, students investigate a development or project that has 'greened' an area or has incorporated green spaces or gardens into the development. If possible, take students to visit the site. Alternatively, access photographs, satellite and Google Street View images, and video footage. Students survey key stakeholders and users of the site, or analyse peoples' reviews and comments, to determine motivations, intentions and impacts. Students summarise these as annotations on a satellite image, photograph or diagram of the development.

Factors that shape places

A student:

- explains interactions and connections between people, places and environments GE3-2
- compares and contrasts influences on the management of places and environments GE3-3
- acquires, processes and communicates geographical information using geographical tools for inquiry GE3-4.

Content

Humans shape places

Students investigate how people influence places, for example (ACHGK029):




- description of who organises and manages places eg local and state governments
- identification of ways people influence places and contribute to sustainability eg roads and services, building development applications, local sustainability initiatives
- examination of a local planning issue; the different views about it and a possible action in response to it.

Stage 4 – how can the liveability of places be enhanced?

Students closely examine the last four double page illustrations in 'The Curious Garden'. They identify and discuss how people are interacting with the place. Using sticky notes or annotation, students add speech and thought bubbles to one illustration to express the people's thoughts and conversations as they interact with the space. Ask students to 'step into' the illustration and role-play the thoughts and conversations of the residents. In role, students also express their views on the liveability of the place and the impact the environmental changes have had on their lives.

Students undertake research to locate survey data about what makes a city liveable. They analyse their research findings to identify commonalities and, as a class, generate a list of the top five criteria of liveability.

Using an urban growth project as a case study, students identify a range of strategies proposed to enhance liveability in that community. Students assess the proposed liveability of the place against the class criteria of liveability, and suggest strategies that would bring further

improvement. Urban growth projects can be found at [UrbanGrowth NSW Development Corporation](#) , [Landcom](#)  and [Revitalising Newcastle](#) .

Place and liveability

A student:

- explains how interactions and connections between people, places and environments result in change GE4-3
- examines perspectives of people and organisations on a range of geographical issues GE4-4
- acquires and processes geographical information by selecting and using geographical tools for inquiry GE4-7
- communicates geographical information using a variety of strategies GE4-8.

Content

Enhancing liveability

Students investigate strategies used to enhance the liveability of places using examples from different countries, for example (ACHGK047):

- identification of the characteristics of places considered highly liveable
- examination of a range of strategies used to enhance liveability
- assessment of the role of governments, non-government organisations, communities and individuals in enhancing liveability
- proposal of strategies to improve the liveability of a place in Australia.

Experimenting

Stage 1

Students identify an area of the school grounds in which they follow the sustainability action process to create a garden to green the space. This could be as small or as large as the grounds allow, for example, vertical gardens or garden beds created in old car tyres filled with soil and planted with vegetables or flowering plants.

Stage 3

Inspired by 'The Curious Garden' and informed by local case studies, students design and create a three-dimensional model of a building or development that incorporates green spaces that contribute to sustainability. Students describe the expected effects of their design on people and the environment.

Stage 4

As an opportunity to apply their learning, students follow the sustainability action process to undertake a project that enhances liveability within their school grounds. For example, greening a quadrangle by adding raised or vertical gardens, using planter boxes to create shaded outdoor spaces or planting shrubs to improve amenity and increase biodiversity.

References and further reading

Professional resources

[Educator's Guide: The Curious Garden](#) , Little Brown

[Friends of the High Line](#) , Flickr

[Geography K-10 Syllabus](#) , NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2015.

[Human Society and Its Environment: Guide to Using Picture Books in Geography K-10](#), NSW Department of Education, Learning and Teaching Directorate – Secondary Education

[Learning Across the Curriculum – Biodiversity](#), NSW Department of Education

[Sustainability Action Process – Biodiversity](#) , NSW Department of Education

Picture books

Belonging by Jeannie Baker

Last Tree in the City by Peter Carnavas

So Many Wonderfals by Tina Matthews

The Tin Forest by Helen Ward and Wayne Anderson

How to cite this article – Braiding, G. (2018). SPaRK – How can we care for and improve our spaces and places? The Curious Garden by Peter Brown. *Scan*, 37(3).

Last updated: 15-May-2020

Say hello



We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

Scan

Latest issue



Past issues



Contact Scan

