Scan

The journal for educators

NSW GOVERNMENT

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Aboriginal Education Focus Day 2023

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Published by the NSW Department of Education, *Scan* is an open access online journal, delivered quarterly. *Scan* is a leading educational resource that brings innovative change to the lives and learning of 21st century educators and students. *Scan* informs teachers' practice by encouraging engagement with a wide range of articles, including peer reviewed research, to enhance school and student outcomes across NSW, Australia and beyond. The journal aims to leave teachers inspired, equipped and empowered, and students prepared to maximise their individual talents and capabilities.

Uncle Pat Connolly, Wiradyuri Elder, leads the staff of Temora High School in a smoking ceremony as part of the school's Aboriginal education professional learning. (Image: © Lisa Muller, 2023. Reproduced with permission.)

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Action research for reflection, improvement and innovation

June Wall

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June Wall provides an overview of an online micro-course developed to assist teachers in systematic inquiry through action research to achieve individual and school-wide improvement of practice.

Action research

Teachers are continually exploring new ways of doing and teaching. We are a profession that puts improvement at the forefront of everything we do. In the Learning Environments team, we support schools and staff through professional learning (PL), specifically in the areas of:

- new learning spaces and how to use space as a learning and teaching resource,
- change management in an educational context, and
- innovative pedagogies.

Throughout 2023, the professional learning team has developed a range of MicroPL – professional learning that is modularised so that teachers may access PL in relatively small periods of time. Our aim

has been to keep each module at no more than 30 minutes. Teachers can select the module they need for their context and revisit it as required.

One area that the Learning Environments PL suite (staff only) focuses on through its course in action research, is innovative pedagogies that have an evidence base. As Kervin et al. (2016) note, effective educators are those who reflect on their practice and use these reflections to shape their future practice.

The action research course was developed as teacher-identified hours to meet the following teaching standards:

Know students and how they learn
- 1.2.2 Structure teaching programs using research and collegial advice about how students learn.
- 1.2.3 Expand understanding of how students learn using research and workplace knowledge.

Engage in professional learning
- 6.3.3 Initiate and engage in professional discussions with colleagues in a range of forums to evaluate practice directed at improving professional knowledge and practice, and the educational outcomes of students.

Why action research?

Teachers make educational decisions and reflect on their practices every day. If a lesson doesn't go well, they try to identify the problem and think of another strategy to try. This is a research process – although at a personal level. It is rarely documented, and while they may ask a colleague for their ideas or opinions, it is informal. But what if this process was formalised?

Action research is a systematic inquiry and reflective process that empowers educators to examine their own teaching practices and address specific challenges or areas for development that they have identified. Teachers are active participants in engaging with research, rather than being given research to use. Action research can be completed independently or collaboratively and supports a mindset of continuous improvement.

Characteristics of action research

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Action research is:

- **Inquiry based** – action research emphasises the active involvement of teachers as researchers in their own classrooms or educational settings. The process starts with a question and is designed to generate knowledge and insights that can lead to positive changes in the classroom or school.

- **Contextual** – action research is based within the participant's classroom or school. It aims to address specific challenges or offer opportunities for innovation in teaching and learning practices for the individuals or teams in that unique setting.

- **Practical** – action research allows teachers to identify and investigate concerns or interests that are relevant to them. It enables them to develop knowledge and strategies to address these needs and reflect on the outcomes to improve their own practice.

- **Systematic** – action research is planned and intentional. It follows a structured process that ensures the use of a strong research question, organisation, and reliability of results or findings.

- **Cyclic** – action research follows a continuous and cyclical process of inquiry and action. It involves cycles of identifying a focus area, implementing interventions, collecting and analysing data, reflecting on the outcomes, and making adjustments for further improvement.

The action research cycle

While it is called a cycle, the action research process is often fluid and spiral-like, providing opportunities for the original plan to be revised or for other areas of interest to be investigated.
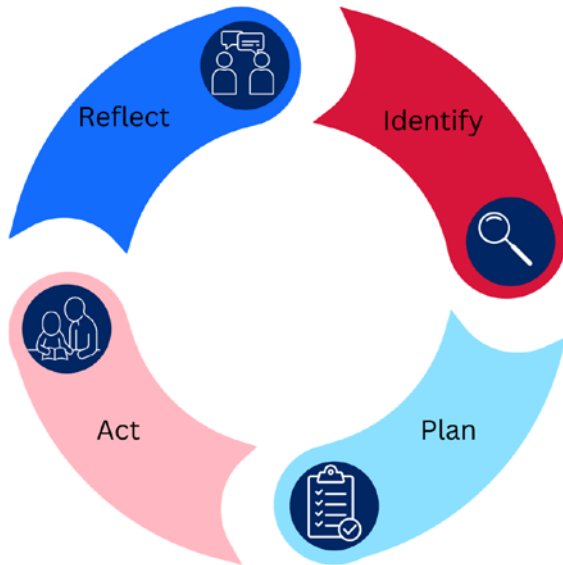
Figure 1: The action research cycle (adapted from Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014)

The four main phases of the action research cycle are:

- **Identify** – a research question and find quality research to guide you
- **Plan** – what data will you need for evidence of impact? Who do you need to work with? What other resources will be needed?
- **Act** – How will you approach this?
- **Reflect** – Analyse the data collected and share your findings to then determine next steps

So what?

Action research is a methodology that can be used for intensive teacher professional learning or as a learning process in the classroom for students. As teacher professional learning, it is closely aligned with Spirals of Inquiry (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], 2023). The research tells us that positive school culture, leadership support, and high motivation are core to success if the implementation of action research is school-wide. Action research can be initiated in the classroom as an individual teacher activity and under this guise can lead to data-informed research and analysis which in turn should lead to improved learning for all.

The action research micro-course

The MicroPL action research course (staff only) offers teachers and leaders an opportunity to develop an understanding of what action research is and how it can be used to drive teacher professional learning. It examines the different elements needed to complete action research and provides scaffolds that can be used to develop action research practices in the user's educational setting.

The course consists of articles to read, videos to watch, reflections and tasks to complete. The video Action Research – Identify (2:58 minutes) is one example from the course.

Figure 2: Action research – Identify (2:58 minutes), YouTube

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Engaging well with parents and carers – why it matters

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Dr Jodie Goldney provides a synthesis of a wide range of research that points to the benefits of schools engaging with parents and carers to facilitate improved academic outcomes for students.

This paper explores the possible impact of schools engaging well with parents and carers, and why it matters for NSW education. Research shows that when schools engage well with parents and carers, students may do better academically (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2022; Sheridan, et al., 2013; Smith, et al., 2020; Winthrop, 2023), experience improved reading success, have increased social-emotional competencies (Hill and Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2012; Sheridan, et al., 2013; Smith, et al., 2020), and have more positive long-term outcomes such as decreased use of drugs and alcohol, lower rates of suspension, and reduced risk of dropout (Dearing, et al., 2006; Esler, et al., 2002; Fan, and Chen, 2001; Hill and Craft, 2003; O'Donnald, et al., 2002) relative to other students. Parents who are involved in their child's schooling can have increased confidence in

their abilities to parent, help their children learn at home, and engage in communication with teachers (Epstein, et al., 2002; Gardner, et al., 2020; Jackson, and Davis, 2000), which in turn may serve to improve student outcomes and the teacher experience of working in the classroom (Hoque, et al., 2023). In addition, improved teacher satisfaction helps teachers maintain a high level of passion and enthusiasm for their work, and consistently deliver quality teaching (see Figure 1) (Hoque, et al., 2023; Zong, 2016).

Engaging well with parents and carers – what does that even mean?

The focus of engagement is to build positive working relationships between families and educators to promote children's social, emotional, behavioural, and academic development (Sheridan, et al., 2021). Engagement refers to the active connection and collaboration between parents and educators, and reflects the influence both parties have on student outcomes. Engagement is different to 'involvement.' According to Ferlazzo (2011), 'A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth – identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute' (para. 5). In contrast, 'a school striving for parent engagement leads with its ears – listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners' (Ferlazzo, 2011, p 12, as cited in Winthrop et al., 2021, p 8).

The importance of engaging well with parents and carers

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In this paper, we look at the evidence on why engaging well with parents and carers matters and raise some important questions. These questions range from 'How can parent and carer engagement help improve student outcomes?' to broader questions of 'What does good engagement look like within the school context?' Given the evidence, finding answers to these questions is crucial if we are to collaboratively lift the systemic performance of NSW public education and achieve improved student learning and wellbeing outcomes for all.
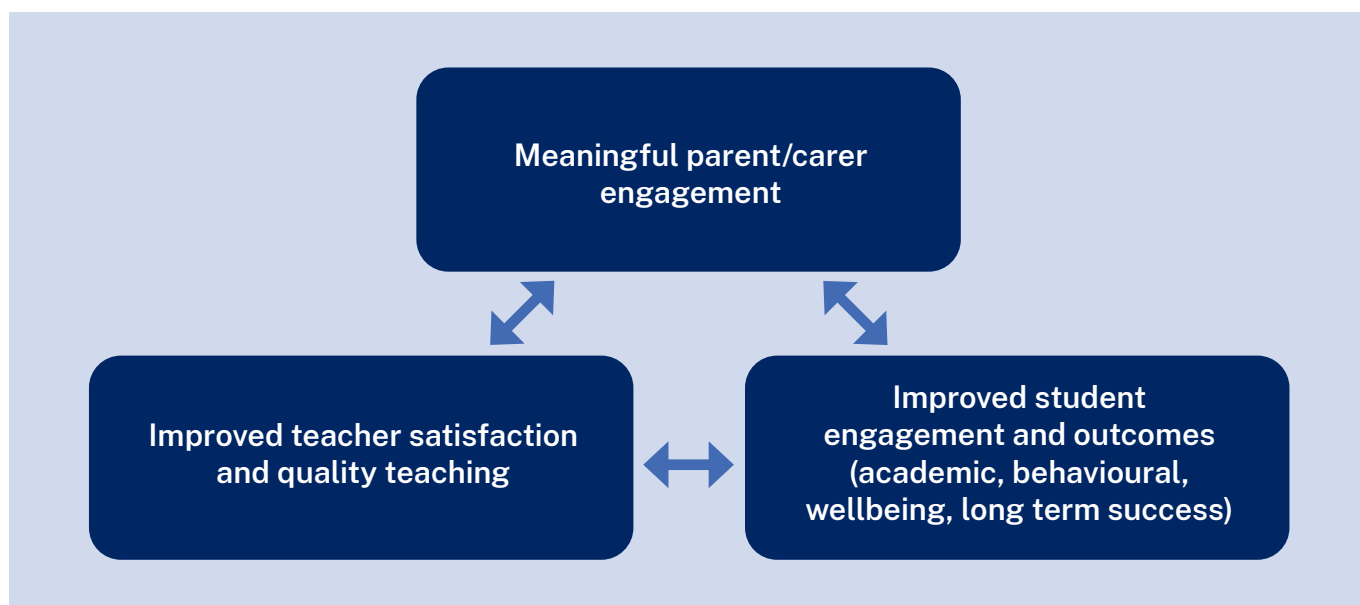
Figure 1: The inter-relationship between parent/carer engagement, student outcomes and improved teacher satisfaction and quality teaching

What educational outcomes does effective parent and carer engagement influence?

Research shows that schools that effectively engage with parents and carers can have a corresponding, and significant positive impact on student learning and wellbeing outcomes.

For example, longitudinal analysis of hundreds of schools in Chicago showed that when schools and systems invested in improving family and community relationships; alongside the quality of school leadership, the capacity of educational staff (including teachers), the school learning climate, and instructional guidance; students' learning outcomes were substantially improved. The researchers found that if even one of these ingredients was missing, little overall improvement in student outcomes occurred (Bryk, 2010).

Similarly, a meta-analysis of 52 studies found that engaging parents in their children's schooling leads to improved grades for students both in their classes and on standardised tests. The positive impact of this engagement was found to be irrespective of children's cultural backgrounds (Jeynes, 2007).

Another study which combined data from two large randomised controlled trials evaluating the impact of teacher training in universal classroom management practices, found that regardless of developmental context, family school engagement predicted increases in youth prosocial skills and decreases in youth concentration problems, disruptive behaviours, and emotion dysregulation at the end of the year (Smith, et al., 2019).

> ... collaborative engagement with parents/carers may be especially beneficial for children with a lived experience of disability ... or from economically disadvantaged or culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly when school personnel make efforts to reach out and establish partnerships that respect the parent's perspective.

Additional positive impacts of parent/carer engagement can include immediate reduction in a child's disruptive behaviour and improvement in adaptive and social skills (Sheridan, et al., 2019). These outcomes can be more pronounced in non-urban and rural schools and irrespective of the cultural background of the child/family, or the child's age (Smith, et al., 2022). In addition, collaborative engagement with parents/carers may be especially beneficial for children with a lived experience of disability (AERO, 2023; Reiman, et al., 2010; Rispoli, et al. 2019), or from economically disadvantaged or culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly when school personnel make efforts to reach out and establish partnerships that respect the parent's perspective (Clark, et al., 2017; Raffaele, et al., 1999).

What is the cumulative impact of parent and carer engagement on student outcomes?

Early school years

Effective parent/carer engagement has been shown to provide a long-lasting positive impact on student outcomes across the school lifespan. For example, longitudinal studies document improved learning outcomes for children when parents increase their support for learning at home as children transition into and through kindergarten (Powell. et al., 2012). Parent engagement is also an important predictor of early reading success, school readiness, social-emotional adjustment, and ease of movement from kindergarten into higher grades of school (Aikens and Barbarin, 2008; Dearing, et al., 2006; Mantzicopoulos, 2003) and even into long-term education and employment (Ryan, et al., 2006).

> Children also show higher levels of social competence and fewer behavioural problems at school when their parents maintain high levels of engagement as children enter and continue through their schooling (El Nokali et al., 2010).

Later school years

In the later years of school, parental engagement is associated with positive teacher/student relationships. In one study, this was found to be the case six months after initiation. The positive teacher/student relationship was in turn, associated with

> **Parental participation in the later years of school has also been found to lead to increased academic achievement and performance, improved study habits, greater propensity to complete secondary school, better homework habits and work orientation, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher educational aspirations …**

students' improved school performance, attendance, valuing of school, and perceptions of competence, creating an interconnected relational loop of improvement over time (Cheuang, 2019). Conversely, an Australian study using two longitudinal cohorts (N = 14,082; 51% boys) found that low school belonging at age 15 is a consistent and practically significant predictor of not in education, employment, or training (NEET) status at ages 16 to 20. Given that NEET is an indicator of inequity, educational policy makers and practitioners need to consider how parent/carer engagement can be used as one catalyst for ensuring students feel welcomed and valued, and remain in schools (Parker, et al., 2022). Parental participation in the later years of school has also been found to lead to increased academic achievement and performance, improved study habits, greater propensity to complete secondary school, better homework habits and work orientation, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher educational aspirations relative to students whose parents/carers are not engaged (Fan and Chen, 2001; Masten and Coatsworth, 1998; Sheridan, et al., 2016; Trusty, 1999).

Beyond school

Parent/carer engagement by schools, increases the likelihood of student-school engagement. Student school-engagement in adolescence has been found to be a predictor of positive outcomes far beyond the years at school. One longitudinal study using data spanning 40-years, from the 1970 British Cohort Study, used school engagement at age 16 to predict highest education level and socio-economic

status at age 34. The study controlled for childhood socio-economic status, cognitive ability, gender, and ethnic minority status, and found that adolescent school engagement has a persistent, positive impact on adult educational and employment outcomes even after individual differences are controlled for (Symonds, et al., 2023). This finding is particularly significant, as it highlights a relatively low-cost area for educational policy makers to explore as they seek to improve equity outcomes for all students in NSW. A global study comparing evaluations of different types of educational interventions (such as teacher training, materials provision, and scholarships) across 46 low-and middle-income countries found sharing information about education with all parties involved, particularly parents/carers to be at the top of the list in terms of cost effectiveness (Angrist, et al., 2020).

Finally, family-school engagement is associated with effective school-level reform (Bryk, 2010). Research suggests that outcomes are particularly pronounced if parents are supported by schools to reinforce pedagogy and practice, including modelling vocabulary in the home environment (Fantuzzo, et al., 2004). Indeed, when this is not done, parents' resistance to any desired change, such as syllabus role out, may occur, with a 'knock-on effect, rooted in vocal parent dissatisfaction to which educators cannot help but respond' and can result in the Reform being side-lined (*Implementing education reform*, 2021, p 15 [PDF 803 KB]).

> **Programs which result in improved outcomes for teachers, students, and parents … and strengthen the inter-relationship identified in Figure 1, tend to be co-designed with the family, part of a program of events, more-sustained, directly linked to student's learning or shared goal setting, timely and two-way, help parents to reinforce pedagogy and practice at home, and integrate families' unique knowledge into teaching at school …**

Behaviours that work: ingredients for success

So, what does effective parent/carer engagement look like at the school level? Research identifies three types of parent/carer engagement: school-based engagement, home-based engagement, and parent-teacher communications (Fantuzzo, et al., 2000). However, not all approaches are equally helpful in improving children's learning, behavioural and wellbeing outcomes (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

Family-school engagement activities that are intermittent, ad hoc, and not closely tied to children's school learning, such as attending isolated school events, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering at school, are not as impactful as other approaches as they have little influence on a child's adjustment or attainment (Christenson, 1995; Christenson, 2023; Miller and Kraft, 2014; Sheridan, et al., 2019; Smith, et al., 2019). In addition, these activities may be most likely to be accessible to and attract some demographics and not others (Abrams and Gibbs, 2002; Turney and Kao, 2009; Weiss, et al., 2011).

Instead, programs which result in improved outcomes for teachers, students, and parents, irrespective of cultural and economic background, and strengthen the inter-relationship identified in Figure 1, tend to be co-designed with the family, part of a program of events, more-sustained, directly linked to student's learning or shared goal setting, timely and two-way, help parents to reinforce pedagogy and practice at home, and integrate families' unique knowledge into teaching at school (Dowd, et al. 2017; NAEYC, n.d.; Sheridan, et al., 2019).

Engagement strategies need to be nuanced to address the different needs/demographics of families. The NSW Department of Education is already doing substantive work in this space to improve equity and educational outcomes for all students.

Links to relevant information include:
- Strong strides together, 2022 (PDF 8.7 MB)
- English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) effective school practices
- Remote learning: an evidence-based explainer, 2020 (PDF 1.16 MB)
- Disability strategy

What are some implications for us to consider?

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When schools engage well with parents and carers, students do better. They do better academically, behaviourally and in terms of wellbeing. Teachers also seem to do better, as engaged students are rewarding to teach, and parents/carers are better equipped to support the work of teachers at home. In addition, teachers' pedagogy and practice are better able to be culturally sensitive when it is informed by parent/family/student cultural/linguistic background. Finally, it seems the system too does better, as parent/carer engagement interventions are often cost-effective, and benefits can be long-lasting and cumulative across the age span and even beyond the student's time at school.

The evidence about parent/carer engagement points to the need for the education sector to continue to consider how schools and policy makers can effectively engage with parents/carers to support improved outcomes for students.

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Staff at Temora High School gather at the school's yarning circle to hear Uncle Pat Connolly's knowledge of language, culture and healing. (Image: © Lisa Muller, 2023. Reproduced with permission.)

School development day – Aboriginal education focus

Colleen Mitchell

Leader Aboriginal Education Strategy, Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships

Colleen Mitchell outlines the significance and intrinsic value of the Aboriginal Education Focus Day 2023 as a School Development Day across all NSW Department of Education schools.

Every teacher inspired, equipped, empowered

That was the goal of the School Development Day – Aboriginal Education Focus Day 2023 – to inspire, equip and empower 90,000 school staff to better understand the needs of our 74,000 Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander student learners across NSW public schools.

Every student supported to maximise their individual talents and capabilities – this is what we constantly strive for

Much has been made about the focus on increasing the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students attaining their Higher School Certificate while maintaining their cultural identity.

But why not simply completion of Year 12?

We know the value universities place on the HSC, but other institutions and organisations may recognise the significance of completing Year 12 without the attainment of the Higher School Certificate. They may also appreciate the effort it takes to complete a School Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship.

Why only a focus on Year 12 students, and not ALL Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students?

Whilst the NSW Department of Education did not set the priority, it was tasked with achieving it. A targeted approach was designed and implemented to support all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the specific cohort to reach the goal.

Why for only three years?

The department is acutely aware of the need to support ALL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across ALL facets of their educational journey.

When _The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education_ (PDF 1.14 MB) was released in 2004, it contained 72 recommendations for improving the quality of Aboriginal education across NSW. Eighteen years on, we finally saw the monumental realisation of one of these recommendations – a feat which seemed to kickstart significant momentum for Aboriginal education.

The launch of the first-ever mandatory professional learning course, Aboriginal Cultural Education – Let's take the first step together, sparked an overwhelming desire to learn more and do better. What followed was another first of its kind – a state-wide targeted approach through the establishment of a School Development Day with an Aboriginal Education Focus.

There is good reason to support the state's 2,200 public schools with their understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, and cultures. They are the nurseries for our future leaders and decision-makers. They are the cultivators of the minds that will design and create what we cannot yet imagine, but what we hope to one day see.

Impacts on teaching

By supporting our school staff to understand the significance of not only Aboriginal Australia, but the area where their school is located and its peoples, histories and cultures, we aimed to develop empathy and connection with students, families and community members. We wanted to equip staff with the knowledge and strategies to engage with our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and families – to build authentic relationships with long-lasting positive impacts. Teachers will be more confident to 'have-a-go' at embedding Aboriginal cultural perspectives into their daily teaching and learning experiences enabling our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to truly see themselves in the curriculum. Our non-Aboriginal students will learn about the history of Australia prior to colonisation – as nations of proud, resourceful, environmentally sound inventors and linguists who successfully travelled, communicated, traded and, most importantly, survived for tens of thousands of years.

Explicit cultural teaching in a culturally safe and responsive environment supports the academic and social wellbeing of our students. Educators can learn how to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Figure 1: Blackett Public School Staff, Mel Smith and Stacey Dunne, at the Aboriginal Education Focus Day 2023. (Image: © Joan Palenzuela, 2023. Reproduced with permission.)

Islander perspectives, histories and knowledge systems into their teaching practices. This approach enriches the educational experiences for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and promotes a more diverse and comprehensive curriculum for all students. Learning about Aboriginal education can expose educators to effective teaching methods and strategies that align with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, including storytelling and community involvement to create engaging and relevant learning experiences. Exploring cultural processes to enhance learning experiences invites our students to engage more deeply with their learning and embrace the opportunity to be the knowledge holders and the teachers of their own culture.

You can't be what you can't see

Utilising cultural content enables our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to see themselves in the curriculum. The opportunity to see people like themselves in story books, to read the traditional language of various nations and to learn about cultural protocols such as smoking ceremonies, are all good examples of this. Cultural ways of counting and measuring, exploring sustainable fishing methods using the world-renowned Brewarrina fish traps, or interrogating the science of extending the length of a lever and using a woomera to achieve greater velocity with spears are further examples of how cultural content can be incorporated into everyday teaching and learning.

Continuous professional development is essential for educators to stay informed about best practices in teaching and learning. A dedicated day focused on Aboriginal education allowed educators to enhance their skillsets, broaden perspectives and improve overall effectiveness in the classroom. This approach reflects a commitment to addressing historical injustices, promoting cultural understanding and reconciliation, and improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

Dedicating a day to professional learning served several important purposes and reflects the department's commitment to Aboriginal education. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students often face unique challenges and disparities in education,

including lower graduation rates and limited access to culturally relevant curriculum. A dedicated day of professional learning supported educators to better understand these challenges and learn strategies to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. A day focused on Aboriginal education provided opportunities for educators to connect with local communities and knowledge holders to foster meaningful relationships benefiting both students and educators, leading to collaborative and culturally appropriate educational practices.

Incorporating Aboriginal education into professional development equipped teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment that benefits all students and supports the success and wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. It is a meaningful way to promote cultural understanding, equity and inclusivity in education and contributes to a more informed and culturally educated system.

The process

The announcement in late 2022 of the pending School Development Day – Aboriginal Education Focus – created a flurry of excitement. It also created a wave of panic – how could we plan and execute a full day of professional learning for every school in the state for day 1 of Term 2, 2023?

We were creating the framework for the first state-wide focussed School Development Day. Where should we begin? Collaborators? Content? Presenters?
- What do teachers think they know?
- What do teachers need to know?
- How can we deliver this while ensuring we did not apply a cookie-cutter approach forcing schools to engage with professional learning they did not need?

Embedding engaging learning experiences with opportunities for collegial discussion and deep reflection were paramount to the success of the day. Also, key was the understanding that schools know what they need and must be able to drive their individual agenda, including the need to step away from the school site and onto Country to connect with land and local Aboriginal people.

A project plan enabled backward mapping to ensure these outcomes could be achieved: content writing, resource creation, module filming and editing, and accreditation of the professional learning to ensure every teacher gained six valuable hours of learning in the priority area of Aboriginal education.

Focus areas were quickly identified, and subject matter experts engaged. Scripts, facilitator guides and participant booklets were all designed for each professional learning module offered to the 90,000 school staff across the state.

Stage and screen

With Christmas looming, Gravity Media had a very tight timeframe to film and edit each of the modules. Presenters put on their Sunday best, headed to North Sydney, and enjoyed their time in the makeup chair, ready to wow the camera. Butterflies may have been stirring the stomachs, but it was not evident when our stars stepped on stage to film their modules.

Tools

As with any production, there was a great deal happening behind the scenes. A principals' toolkit was designed to support schools in preparation for the day. This included templates, overviews, information for parents and carers, videos, and surveys for schools to learn what was on offer and determine their school-specific agenda.

The result

The result is meaningful, locally contextualised professional learning that supports the establishment or continuation of authentic relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families, and communities.

On-Country learning experiences facilitated by Traditional Custodians, local community members and/or the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (NSW AECG, 2023), provided deep learning and reflection, and the opportunity to ask the 'silly questions' they may have been previously too uncertain to ask.

Utilisation of the quality modules created by the department to explore topics such as the effective teaching of Aboriginal EAL/D students, Personalised Learning Pathways, or Strong Strides Together, enabled improvement of approaches to Aboriginal education within the specific school context.

The School Development Day - Aboriginal Education Focus was embraced across the state, with comments such as, 'About time' and 'When is the next one?'. There is a deep hunger to ensure our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students achieve at the same rate as their peers, as well as improve the teaching of Australia's entire history.

The bravery to initiate the School Development Day - Aboriginal Education Focus has been a significant step towards feeding this hunger and ultimately achieving this goal.

The Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnership Directorate have really created a 'one-stop shop' to make it as streamlined as possible for schools across the state. I think that after participants engage with this learning, they will be left wanting more!
Cynthia Villar – Canley Vale Public School

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From phase to sequence to quality teaching activity – programming for deep learning (Part 2)

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In the second article in a two-part series about programming in English, Tom Gyenes and Jacquie McWilliam build on their introduction to programming with the Phases in Stage 6 – see _Scan 42(3)_. Here, they explore how conceptual programming frames the sequencing of learning in Stages 4, 5 and 6. This process promotes deep learning from the program all the way to the individual classroom activity.

Since the publication of our first article on the Phases approach to programming, NSW has seen the arrival of the new English K-10 syllabus (NESA,

2023). As we write, English faculties are preparing scope and sequences, assessment schedules and teaching and learning programs for the first year of implementation, 2024. In the staggered approach recommended as part of the department's Models of curriculum implementation (NSW Department of Education, 2023), the English curriculum team is developing content aligned to Secondary setting A. The resources developed support the teaching of Years 7 and 9 in 2024 and the teaching of Years 8 and 10 in 2025. NESA will consult on the Stage 6 English syllabuses in 2023 and 2024 will see syllabuses released. This means the time is ripe for a refining of our work on the Phases approach, which will help ensure teachers and faculties are supported to program conceptually to reach the goals identified in the NSW Curriculum Reform.

From article 1 to article 2 – the Phases, Stage 6 and conceptual programming

As we outlined in our first article, the Phases approach is a research-based initiative designed to support the sequencing of learning through a 10-week program based on sound pedagogical principles. These principles involve a focus on:

- learning intentions – what are students expected to be able to do by the end of the sequence?
- learning processes – which activity verbs allow the teacher to align teaching and learning activities to the learning intentions and outcome content?
- learning interactions – what are the relationships between teacher and students, and between students and students, that the teacher is facilitating to achieve the desired outcomes?

The phases are ... best thought of as a planning, reflection and focusing tool. ... They assist planning as they help break down the onerous task of sequencing learning across a program into manageable sections.

The phases indicate the essential and overarching direction for each section of the program.

The term 'phase' helps to focus planning by identifying the specific purpose of each section within a teaching program. The phases are closely aligned to the learning processes as outlined within the 'English textual concepts and learning processes' resource: understanding, engaging personally, connecting, engaging critically, experimenting, and reflecting. As such, each phase focuses teacher attention on why this learning matters and what students will achieve. The phases indicate the essential and overarching direction for each section of the program. They deepen reflection and focus on teaching practice by encouraging the faculty and teacher to consider the aims of each of those sections. Whether a phase is a single lesson or two weeks long, the consistent focus on narrow and deep learning ensures that strategies, texts and assessments are meeting those aims.

The phases are, therefore, best thought of as a planning, reflection and focusing tool. They are not a scaffold, template, or rigid model that a program should be squeezed into. They assist planning as they help break down the onerous task of sequencing learning across a program into manageable sections.

As outlined in our first article, we initially organised model units for Stage 6 into 8 phases (see Figure 1). Examples of the learning materials developed for Stage 6 utilising this approach are available on the Planning, programming and assessing English 11-12 section of the department's English curriculum web pages. The phases are grouped into a structure broadly analogous to Aristotle's 3-act structure for a narrative: the beginning, the middle and the end (with thanks to Dr Duncan Driver at the University of Canberra for this connection). As such, they ensure that the focus of programming remains on a coherent learner journey through the texts and resources, concepts and tasks.

Understanding the 8 phases of teaching and learning

The 'engage and orient' group
- Engaging with module ideas and concepts (Engaging personally)
- Unpacking the module requirements (Understanding and Connecting)
- Discovering the prescribed text/s (Engaging personally)

The 'concept development' group
- Engaging analytically and critically with texts (Engaging critically)
- Connecting critically and conceptually between ideas and/or texts (Connecting)
- Deepening text and module understanding (Understanding and Engaging critically)

The 'apply, experiment and evaluate' group
- Writing creatively in response to the module and text/s (Experimenting and Reflecting)
- Preparing the assessment (Engaging critically, Experimenting and Reflecting)

Figure 1: The 8 phases of the English curriculum team's Phases Project (organised by learning groupings and aligned to the 'learning processes' (shown in brackets) from the English Textual Concepts resource).

As may be evident from the discussion here, our approach has already been refined due to feedback, our ongoing research and now, the programming work we have undertaken for the Stage 4 and 5 components of the English K-10 Syllabus (NESA, 2023).

Principally, the approach has been aligned to our ongoing work on conceptual programming. This approach underpins our team's design of sample programs that provide wraparound support for the Stage 4 and 5 outcomes within the English K-10 Syllabus (NESA 2023). The structure of the samples ensures that:

- conceptual understanding is fundamental to teaching and learning
- conceptual understanding is effectively and accurately structured into scope and sequences and programs
- sample content aligns with NESA and department requirements and priorities
- class work and assessment opportunities are focused on supporting students to express their deep understanding of knowledge and skills.

The structure and terminology of the samples reflect research fields and frameworks. The Learning by Design (CAST, 2018) research field and Understanding by design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005), have influenced the emphasis on the inclusion of ideas and knowledge about skills transfer. Content knowledge development rests on the foundation of deep knowledge, deep understanding and problematic knowledge drawn from the Intellectual Quality dimension of the Quality Teaching Model (NSW Department of Education, 2023). We also draw on the work of Stern et al. (2017) to bring attention to the mechanics of conceptual understanding and the vital interplay of key concepts. Finally, we have built on the work of colleagues who designed the English Textual Concepts resource (English Teachers Association and NSW Department of Education, 2016; Gold and Greene, 2016) and have researched its impact on teaching and learning for conceptual understanding and knowledge transfer (Macken-Horarik et al., 2019). The latter work highlights the importance for English to focus on an 'understanding of the nature of textuality rather than seeing English as a study of a collection of individual texts' (Gold and Greene, 2016, p 1).

We are heartened that the curriculum reform process embeds 'deep learning' as the objective and the English K-10 rationale (NESA, 2023) continues to invite students to learn about 'the power, purpose, value and art of English' (para. 4). Through this concept, we have a foundation for a subject-English problem: exploring the struggle, power and beauty in the contested relationships between composers and responders.

(Department staff are able to access a more in-depth exploration of the English curriculum 7-12 team's approach to conceptual programming and assessment in practice through the English statewide staffroom presentations.)

Moving from the macro to micro in Stage 6

At the conclusion of our first article, we made the distinction between what the Phases approach might offer across a term (macro level) and the relevance to individual lessons (micro level). The distinction between macro and micro allows us to think about the progression of teaching and learning more flexibly. The principles we have established apply to planning across the term and within the planning a teacher will do for individual lessons and series of connected lessons. We have named these connected lessons 'sequences' in our published materials.

We can begin by considering 'macro' and 'micro' as different axes (see, for example, Table 1). The layout highlights that the 'macro' level guides the progression of teaching and learning across the entire teaching and learning program. This is demonstrated through the first 4 phases listed horizontally across the top row of the table. Then on a 'micro' level – vertically listed within one of the 8 Stage 6 phases – you can see how the choice of activity verbs guides the planning. The clear hierarchy, as symbolised by the font size, is linked to the overall purpose of that phase.

On the macro level, the title verb is an overall guide to the purpose of that phase. The types of activities chosen to help students to 'discover' the prescribed text will differ to those that will guide students to 'engage critically'. The key is to be mindful of the verb so that strategies and resources are well-suited to the learning intentions for that stage of the program. 'Discovering the prescribed text', for example, will depend on a range of engaging critical and creative thinking strategies as well as building on the preceding work completed by the class. An initial 'engagement' with the module would move into understanding the requirements. This learning becomes a foundation for the initial encounter with the text.

Phase (macro) →	Engaging with module ideas and concepts (2-3 lessons)	Unpacking the module requirements	Discovering the prescribed text/s	Engaging analytically and critically with texts
Progression within the phase (micro level)	Engage ↓ Explore ↓ Establish conceptual focus ↓ Evaluate (collaboratively) ↓ Apply and Experiment			

Table 1: Macro and micro teaching and learning development

To illustrate this point, we have included the phase statements for 'Engaging with module ideas and concepts' and 'Engaging analytically and critically with texts':

The 'engaging with module ideas and concepts' phase is a brief and stimulating sequence of learning that introduces and orients students to the broad conceptual scope of the module. It is usually part of the opening few lessons of the unit and later phases refer to the ideas and dispositions sparked by these initial activities. In particular, all phases continue to elaborate and refine the conceptual focus of the module which is established during this phase. To encourage a meaningful connection, activities in this phase focus on the learning process of engaging personally. This helps students make personal connections, activate prior learning, make predictions and spark wonder and curiosity regarding the core ideas of the texts and module. The engagement phase is intended to build the field for students new to the module and/or the prescribed text. It is a 'warm-up' phase that is crucial to the attitude with which students approach the learning activities, concepts and texts that make up the course.

The 'engaging analytically and critically with texts' phase is focused on establishing students' analytical response to the prescribed text, then deepening and extending it towards a critical appreciation. A critical study is facilitated through a personal engagement with the text, an understanding of the text's distinctive characteristics and an examination of the text through a critical lens. Such critical engagement is crucial if students are to develop an informed personal interpretation and perspective. Moreover, critical engagement of this kind is the foundation from which students can demonstrate the synthesised response to the text that is required at this level.

Phase (macro) →	Engaging with module ideas and concepts	Unpacking the module requirements	Discovering the prescribed text/s	Engaging analytically and critically with texts
Progression within the phase (micro level)	Engage ↓ Explore ↓ Establish conceptual focus ↓ Evaluate (collaboratively) ↓ Apply and Experiment	Engage ↓ Explain ↓ Analyse	Engage ↓ Explore and build knowledge of the field ↓ Supported reading ↓ Analyse	Engage personally ↓ Engage critically ↓ Engaging with research texts – exploring context and perspective …

Table 2: Macro and micro planning across a Stage 6 module

The 'engaging analytically and critically with texts' phase is framed by the learning process of engaging critically. Students are supported to investigate the text closely through research into the form and composer, companion texts, and through close analysis of language and textual features. Critical engagement, which is defined against cultural and literary values to construct an informed personal understanding, must be adapted to the needs of each Stage 6 English course. At the micro level, the relative size of the process verbs reflects the goals of the phase. To engage students initially in the module, you would be looking primarily to engage personally and establish the conceptual focus of the entire program. There may well be a segment of the lesson that is focused on exploring a stimulating short text. Higher level cognitive engagement is possible, but this is not the central focus. Across the first four phases this strategic emphasising of the process verbs might look something like Table 2.

In the first article, we demonstrated these ideas through a case study of English Standard's Module B: Close Study of Literature and here, would like to dig a little deeper into the macro/micro balance. Tables 3 and 4 show teaching and learning sequences (one row of the table) from a Module B unit. The phase is 'Engaging analytically and critically with texts' and the content is divided according to the pedagogical principles we have set out. Note that to guide the discussion which follows we have:

- included annotations in the outcome content column
- colour-coded these annotations on the left with the teaching and learning activities on the right
- removed the 'evidence of learning' and 'differentiation/evaluation' columns for clarity of view.

The sequence in Table 3 (Part 1) is then followed by the learning sequence in Table 4.

Annotations and outcome content	Teaching and learning
• S6S12-O1DA02 explain how and why **texts influence and position readers** • S6S12-O8RC1 analyse how language and **argument can create or reflect bias** that may **shape cultural perspectives** **Whole class** – build interest and engagement **Teacher-directed** – new knowledge and checking knowledge **Collaborative** – pair or group deeper exploration **Reflection** – individual student work	Learning intention: students **develop deeper textual understandings** by engaging with the perspectives of others **Part 1** - Students explore the foreword (Clark in Oodgeroo, 1988) to Oodgeroo Noonuccal's collection (Oodgeroo, 1988). Engaging personally – What is a 'public intellectual'? Do we have them in Australia? Show clips – quick debate. Give **context** to Manning Clark. Who are our current public intellectuals and what is their purpose/goal/**perspective**? **Define** – the purpose of a foreword as type of text (teacher directed), the term 'public intellectual' and other relevant vocabulary Comprehend and discuss – comprehension and inference questions (Think, pair, share) **Review and reflect** – Clark (in Oodgeroo, 1988) remarks, '[w]e were like human beings who had fallen in love at first sight' (p. 2) to describe Oodgeroo's excitement. What connections do you see between Clark's observation and Noonuccal's poetry? (discussion and independent writing) Then independent reflection on activity: 'I used to think … Now I think'.

Table 3 (Part 1) - Module B: Close study of literature – Engaging analytically and critically with texts

Annotations and outcome content	Teaching and learning
S6S12-O8RC1 analyse how language and **argument can create or reflect bias** that may **shape cultural perspectives**	Learning intention: students develop their understanding of the **personal essay, its codes and conventions**, and the ways the personal essay is used by writers to **explore their personal feelings and experiences** **Part 2** - Students explore and reflect upon perspectives
Whole class – establish conceptual focus	**Engage** and **define** – driving question: 'Can an essay actually be interesting?' followed by concise overview of this type of text on **The MasterClass website – how to write a personal essay**
Teacher-directed – new knowledge, knowledge check and guided instruction	**Elaborate** – introduction to Ellen van Neerven. Focus on students understanding the significance of poets like Oodgeroo Noonuccal on the writing and lives of younger generation of poets – define and discuss unfamiliar terminology
Collaborative – develop and solidify concepts	**Comprehend** and **discuss** – examine van Neerven's (2013) personal essay on Noonuccal – model note-making and collaborative discussion of analysis questions – students write individual responses (collaborative and independent)
Reflection – self evaluation	**Review and reflect** – what connections do you see between van Neerven's confessions and observations about life, Clark's foreword and Noonuccal's poetry? (independent) 'I used to think … Now I think': reflection on activity.

Table 4 (Part 2) Module B: Close study of literature – Engaging analytically and critically with texts

Based on the two case study sequences, we make the following points:

1. In tune with the first of our 3 principles, learning intentions are central. You can see here the explicit connections between the focus of the lesson and the outcome content – deepening textual understanding and enjoyment will come from exploring how and why the poet and her poetry has influenced the experiences and perspectives of two well respected Australians. We have chosen the public intellectual, Manning Clark, who wrote the foreword to the anthology, and a personal essay written by Aboriginal author Ellen van Neerven. These individuals were purposefully selected for the diverse perspectives (based on differing contexts) they present about the poems.

2. Part 1 of this sequence begins with whole class discussion and engagement to build interest, activate prior knowledge and highlight the significance of exploring the perspectives of others. Students discuss what they think the term 'public intellectual' means, whether we have these in Australia and, if we do, who they are. The macro phase is focused on engaging critically, but some initial personal engagement is important. Students should understand some of the contextual details surrounding Clark and the value in exploring the thoughts and ideas of others (a supported introduction to researching the work of others to inform one's own perspective). Students could make connections to current public debates and whether there are people like Clark in the media spotlight sharing opinions to sway public thinking – who are they and what are their goals?

3. Students move to collaboratively exploring the foreword, continuing to refine their understanding of new terminology. They complete comprehension and inference questions to identify how this text adds authority to the anthology and positions us to respond in particular ways. Notice the developing interactions – towards collaboration – and the importance of the verbs chosen: comprehend and discuss.

4. This sequence culminates in a personal reflection task where students are reviewing their thinking and identifying their new understandings before moving on and exploring the perspective of a very different thinker. They make connections between Clark's remark that, 'we were like human beings who had fallen in love at first sight' (1988, p. 2), and Noonuccal's poetry, and then evaluate how their thinking has expanded and deepened through this learning.

5. As we move on to Part 2 (a new row and sequence guided by new outcome content and learning intentions), we follow a similar process frontloading key terminology and personally engaging with a thought-provoking driving question. 'Can an essay actually be interesting?' Many students may not have examined a personal essay like van Neerven's before and it will expand their thinking about this form. Students are supported to understand the codes and conventions of this type of text before going on to the 'elaborate' activity.

6. Then we move to collaborative and individual comprehension and discussion – once again new terminology is defined and discussed. A timeline of the authors and their work is provided. Students will see van Neerven is part of a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers who have been influenced by one another. As we examine van Neerven's personal essay on Noonuccal, we model note-making with students and collaboratively discuss the analysis questions before students write individual responses.

7. We finish this segment with a review and reflect task coming back to Clark's remarks. This time with a focus on what connections students see between van Neerven's confessions and observations about life and Noonuccal's poetry.

From this overview, it is clear that it is the learning intentions – what students are expected to be able to do – that is driving the sequencing of learning. The learning processes and activity verbs are directed by the syllabus (key words and phrases are bolded) and allow the teacher to align the teaching and learning activities to the learning intentions. Finally, the learning interactions, the relationships between teacher and students and between students and students, are being facilitated in such a way that the teacher is monitoring the achievement of the desired outcomes. For more information about the specific focuses of each of the Stage 6 phases please see Planning, programming and assessing English 11-12.

Phases, sequences and learning activities in the Stage 4 and 5 space

Since the release of the English K-10 syllabus (NESA, 2023), the English 7-12 curriculum team have been designing scope and sequences, as well as sample program materials to support the implementation of the syllabus beginning in 2024. In preparation for our programming work, we reconceived the Phases project into the Stage 4 and 5 space and reduced the number of phases to 6 to meet the needs of students at that stage of learning. These changes are outlined in Table 5.

Group	Stage 4 and 5 phases
Engage and orient	• Engaging with the unit and the learning community • Unpacking and engaging with the key concept
Concept development	• Discovering and engaging analytically with a core text • Deepening connections between texts and concepts
Apply, experiment and evaluate	• Engaging critically and creatively with model texts • Preparing the assessment task

Table 5: Stage 4 and 5 phases

All sample programs are structured into these 6 phases, with slight naming variations reflecting the forms and conceptual focus of individual programs. Each phase begins with a 'phase statement' or overview that outlines the key teaching and learning focus for that part of the program. This moves into an outline of the conceptual programming questions that a teacher will use to guide the choice of specific activities and strategies. To explore this in practice, the Program 2 for Year 7, 'Seeing through a text' is used as a case study (see Figure 2).

The phase statement for Phase 1 – engaging with the unit and the learning community – makes clear that the focus is on personal response, engagement and connection to the student's existing knowledge. There is once again, alignment with the hierarchy of activity.

The conceptual programming questions pinpoint the uniquely English nature of the learning; the focus is on the 'textuality' of visual texts and the choice of activity in the learning sequences must support personal engagement with the unit's focus:

- Where do we encounter visual texts?
- What sort of emotional responses can visual texts evoke?
- How are visual texts different from written texts?
- Why do responders to the same text have different interpretations?

Later, in Phase 3 – discovering and engaging analytically with a core text – the focus is on students reading, responding personally to, and critically examining a core text. In this necessarily longer phase, students are guided through multi-stage activities. These refine their understanding by strengthening comprehension skills and prepare them to write both creatively and in an extended response. After analysing features of a poem, students explore a visual adaptation of the poem in the form of a music video. The

> **... it is the learning intentions – what students are expected to be able to do – that is driving the sequencing of learning.**

The focus of this phase is for students to engage personally with a range of model visual texts to create interest and enthusiasm for the program. Students engage with visual texts to consider how they convey stories, explore ideas, and evoke emotional responses. They consider multiple ways of 'reading' a visual text and how and why varied interpretations of the same text can arise. Students begin to explore how visual texts can be constructed to position the responder. They develop an awareness of and appreciation for the ways in which visual language is used across contexts. Students are introduced to the codes and conventions of visual texts. They begin building knowledge of the metalanguage essential for discussing the texts they are exploring. Literacy activities are embedded throughout the phase to support students to develop and refine their informative writing skills.

The teacher draws upon students' prior experiences with visual texts in their everyday lives such as film, video games and social media to begin building an understanding of the significance of visual texts and popular culture.

Figure 2: Sample 1, Year 7, program 2 –Seeing through a text – phase 1: Engaging with the unit and the learning community

conceptual programming questions, therefore, focus on intertextuality, with a strong emphasis on the intentions of composers and experiences of responders:

- How do composers draw on elements of other texts to create new meanings and texts?
- How do we respond to adaptations, and how can we experiment with them in our own work?
- How do visual features interact with the written text to create new, complex or layered meanings?

Within each phase, every row of the teaching and learning table has been conceived as an integrated progression from activity to activity, guided by learning intentions and connected to outcome content points. This sequence is then the next level of organisation within the program. Here, we return to the micro level planning and reflection characterised by the Oodgeroo sequence discussed earlier. In the following example (see Table 6), again adapted and abbreviated from the 'Seeing through a text' sample Year 7 program, we see how the phase statement and conceptual programming questions above guide the organisation of teaching and learning. Note again, that all elements have been substantially abridged to

Outcome and content point	Teaching and learning sequence
EN4-RVL-01 Reading, viewing and listening for meaning Engage with the ways texts contain layers of meaning, or multiple meanings	**Understanding and responding to a core text** **Learning intentions** By the end of this learning sequence, students will: • understand how figurative language and devices are used to represent ideas in a poem **Building the field – class discussion** • Teacher reads fable to introduce the idea that animals are often used in texts in a symbolic way. • Class discussion unpacking why the particular animal was chosen to build their field of knowledge. Students extend to advertising and reflect on why a brand would choose a specific animal in their advertising • Students research and choose an image of an animal then compose a 2-sentence description, including at least one key physical feature and one movement or activity that is characteristic of the animal. **Experimenting and expressing** • Students rewrite descriptions into a poem by adding specific language features **Reading the core text** • Students prepare to read the poem by predicting the animal in the text based on key challenging vocabulary • Students read the poem (Adamson, 2009); teacher reads aloud several times. Students are shown a photograph of animal and compare. Students complete 'sketch to stretch' activity as they read and respond to the poem. • Think Pair Share as students think about and discuss their personal response to the core text, share their own poems with pairs and feed ideas back to class. • Teacher explicit instruction about Imagist poetry and the allusion to Eurydice and Orpheus; followed by class discussion of impact of this new knowledge on their personal response
EN4-URA-01 Connotation, imagery and symbol Analyse how figurative language and devices can represent ideas, thoughts and feelings to communicate meaning	**Learning intentions** By the end of this learning sequence, students will: • be able to recognise and experiment with the codes and conventions of poetry to deepen their personal response **Post-reading and language work** • Students explore the conventions around enjambment by experimenting with the placement of line breaks in their own and Adamson's poem • Students revise the terminology of parts of speech by identifying examples in the core text. Then experiment with parts of speech to extend understanding and analysis: replace and exchange preposition + noun pairings to change the tone • Students analyse the literal and implied meanings through a provocative or challenging question such as 'Is this a love poem?' They discuss the symbolism of the owl and the figurative 'flying' at the end of the poem. Students consider the different interpretations of the poem depending on the literal or figurative meanings. They are guided to use evidence from the text to support analytical sentences. • Teacher introduces the metalanguage of 'dynamic associations' from the outcome content point under Connotation, imagery and symbol. Students compose a short analytical response using evidence from the poem to express what they now think the poem is about **Writing and reflecting** • Students compose independently to conclude this sequence of learning: they may re-write their own initial poem, write a personal response about the figurative meanings of the text, or write a reflection about how the reading activities supported their understanding and/or enjoyment of the poem.

Table 6: Sample Year 7 program – Phase 3: Discovering and engaging analytically with a core text

work as a case study of the conceptual programming approach being demonstrated.

The movement in thinking suggested in Table 7, from whole-of-program to phases, then to sequences and activities is critical to our approach. At each level, represented in the programming diagram in Figure 3, the learning is steered towards its conceptual goals by the guiding questions (program level), conceptual programming questions (phases), then learning intentions (sequences). Activities are centred on student process verbs that are carefully aligned to the outcome content point chosen.

In the first sequence in Table 6, student engagement with the layers of meaning in the text is supported through discussion, student choice and experimentation. Reading is explicitly prepared for and supported by pre-reading prediction, personal response and teacher explicit instruction.

The second sequence extends this learning into post-reading work starting with the verbs 'explore', then 'revise' and 'experiment', before moving to 'analyse'. Note the movement through teacher-centred work, then to guided practice and finally independent application. All strategies are designed to support students to meet the intention of the outcome content point to analyse the way figurative language can be used to express ideas.
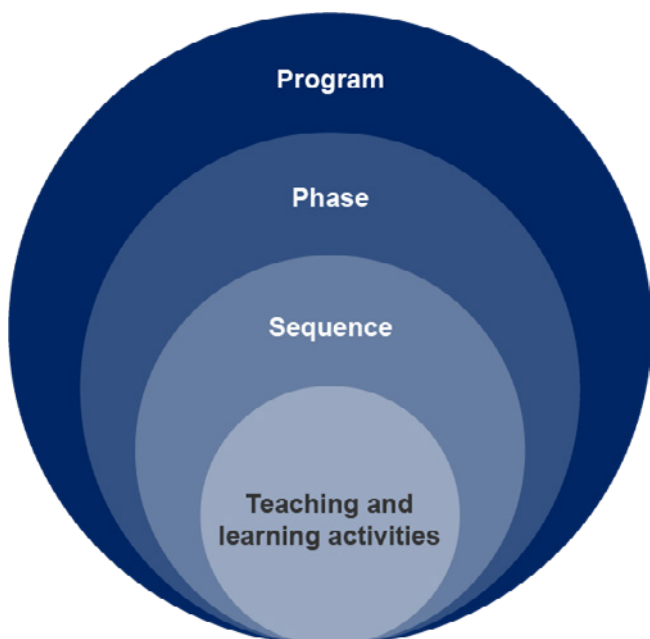

Figure 3: Programming layers diagram

It is important to consider how this structure allows for adaptation, both within the classroom setting, and for the purposes of faculty programming. Within the sequence there are several moments at which other strategies could be applied. There are instances in which the discussion or student work may lead the class learning organically in a different direction. The intention here is not to create a rigid predetermined template that teacher and student must maintain at all costs. The third phase encourages the teacher to design sequences where students encounter a text and engage with it, first personally then analytically to deepen their understanding of how meaning has been created. While there are a variety of activity types here, ranging from discussion, through explicit language work to independent composition, this objective of the phase guides the thinking, planning and evaluation of the teacher at all times.

Parting words

Our intervention in the teaching and learning program space is designed to represent some of the ways we can bring the opportunities inherent in the new syllabus to life and support deep and transferable learning. While the obvious key changes flagged by the syllabus include new text requirements and reorganised outcomes, the renewed focus on reading and literacy through a conceptual lens will be most effectively embedded if there is a coherent approach to programming that underpins them. The Phases are neither a definitive 'answer' to the problem of sequencing learning, nor a crutch that will support a mechanistic faculty process focused on compliance. The Phases are a professional learning device designed to encourage:

- conceptual understanding and deep learning within the frame of the syllabus
- faculty processes of adapting and adopting sample programs through design features that support collaborative planning and reflection.

Suggested strategies

The targeted choice of strategies to align learning with outcome content points so that core English knowledge – about textuality, grammar, reading and writing – is designed to effectively engage students in their learning. Where to next?

If you are new to the Phases approach, it is useful to approach the exploration of them in a collaborative and reflective way. They could be part of a faculty program evaluation that could incorporate the following strategies.

A 'turn and talk' routine is a collaborative routine that promotes the use of new content in conversation and is particularly useful for prompting discussion.

There are 3 basic steps in a turn and talk:

1. Examine the hexagonal radial diagram (see Figure 4). This diagram is used to show the relationship between central ideas. This is the prompt. In this figure, programming is at the centre.
2. With a partner, one person shares their ideas and thoughts while the other listens.
3. Swap and repeat the process.

Use a timer and indicate when partner 1 begins and should end, and complete the same for partner 2. Share observations within the group.

Pairs could be allocated a phase from a sample program and explore this in depth and complete a 'See, Think, Me, We' activity for the phase:

1. See – look closely at the sample program and the assessment – what do you notice? Make lots of observations.
2. Think – what thoughts do you have about the sample program and assessment?
3. Me – what connections can you make between you and the sample program and the sample assessment?
4. We – how might the approach, interpretation of the syllabus and structure be connected to bigger ideas, practices and evidence bases connected to programming and assessment? For example, this could branch off into other key learning areas.

Each pair reports back and shares their observations. This is a time efficient way of collaboratively exploring the samples while also reducing cognitive load.

Turn and Talk

What opportunities do the phases provide?

1. Individually, examine the diagram in Figure 4.
2. Form pairs, partner 1 shares ideas and thinking about the diagram in terms of what the diagram says about programming in English, Partner 2 listens.
3. Partner 2 shares ideas and thinking while Partner 1 listens.

Teachers can explore the sample scope and sequences programs, annotated assessments and resource documents on the Planning, programming and assessing English 7-10 page on the department's website. The English curriculum 7-12 team are always interested in hearing from teachers who are engaging with the materials. Feedback, questions and experiences can be shared via English.curriculum@det.nsw.edu.au

Figure 4: Hexagonal radial diagram of the Stage 4 and 5 Phases

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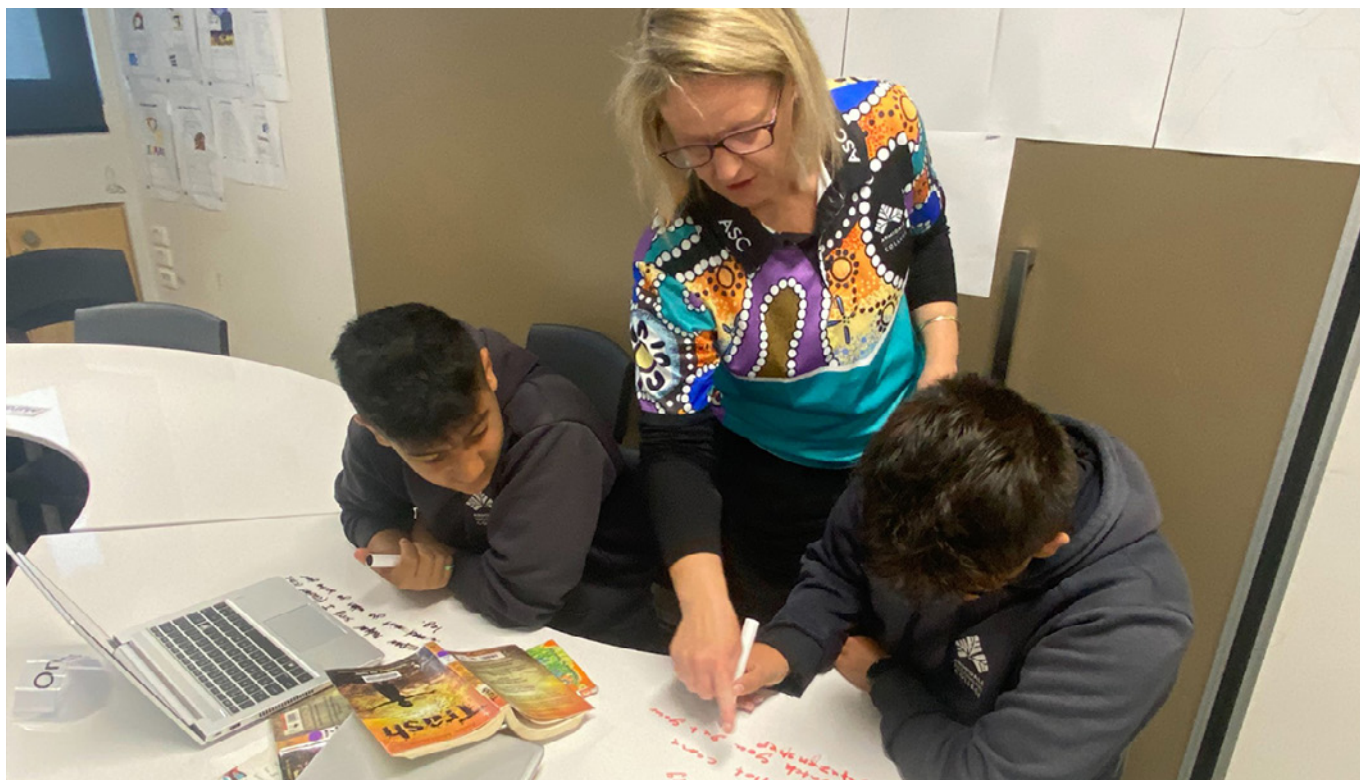
Improving English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) outcomes in a rural setting

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Carole McKinney and David Partridge outline the use of research-based intervention to accommodate and enhance learning opportunities for students from the Ezidi community who attend Armidale Secondary College.

Within its diverse population of approximately 24,000 people, Armidale has a tradition of welcoming international students to its local schools and university, the University of New England. The most recent and substantial change to the population of Armidale is the establishment of an Ezidi community.

Armidale Secondary College has been recognised as a lighthouse school for English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) education in rural NSW. Located halfway between Sydney and Brisbane and two and a half hours inland from Coffs Harbour, this school, in the New England region, has risen to the challenge of Armidale becoming a refugee settlement location in 2017 (Settlement Services International [SSI], 2021 [PDF 296 KB]).

The arrival of over 800 Ezidi refugees in Armidale since 2018 has changed the dynamic in many classrooms, creating opportunities as well as challenges for educators. To cater for this added diversity in the school profile, Armidale Secondary College pivoted to enact change. Over the past five years, the school has developed innovative and culturally responsive practices that have led to positive academic and wellbeing outcomes for this new student cohort.

In this article, we showcase a model of a parallel EAL/D class that has enhanced the outcomes of EAL/D learners, and present aspects of our approach to refugee education.

Armidale and the Ezidi

The Ezidi people comprise an ethno-religious group that lived in the areas of Syria, Turkey, Iran and northern Iraq (Kaplan, 2022). In August 2014, the Ezidi were the victims of a series of genocidal attacks by the Islamic State (Minwalla et al., 2022; SSI, 2019). August 3, 2014 marked the 74th genocidal attack on the Ezidi and is known as Roja Resh or 'Black Day' (Coe and Loehr, n.d.).

As a result of intergenerational persecution and segregation, the Ezidi are underrepresented in the Iraqi education system (Wendt et al., 2019). Due to the ongoing lack of access to education, the Ezidi language has developed primarily as an oral language with many students only being exposed to Western literacy practices when enrolling in the Australian education system.

This issue has been exacerbated by the limited educational opportunities available during their years of displacement and often protracted stays in refugee camps, in which it has been said that

individuals experience 'a gap in life' (Uptin, 2015, p 36). These experiences, compounded by trauma, have impacted not only levels of literacy in their first language but also educational concepts, behaviour, welfare and social skills.

These conditions created many challenges for our school and teachers as they responded to the high needs of this new student cohort. What we have learnt about supporting these students is that emotional, social and wellbeing needs must be met for our students to be able to access, engage and succeed within the Australian schooling system.

Empowerment

At Armidale Secondary College, we embrace the mantra of 'empower, don't save'. We are passionate about supporting students to develop the necessary skills needed to navigate and succeed in secondary education and bolster their post-school chances for success. Fundamental to this aim has been a range of wellbeing programs.

Armidale Secondary College and Armidale Intensive English Centre have forged strong links with NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). STARTTS is a non-profit organisation that specialises in providing professional, culturally relevant psychological services to refugees to help them heal the scars of torture and trauma (STARTTS).
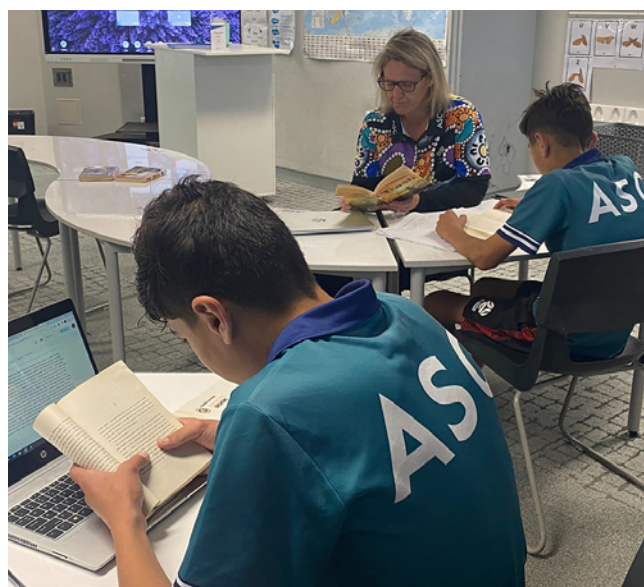

Figure 1: Teacher and students in an intensive language class

Working with STARTTS and other agencies within the community, we have developed robust programs and procedures that empower our students to feel an increased sense of safety and belonging at our school.

Prominent examples of our work in this area can be seen with our school offering the STARTTS program Settling in kit – a purchasable program for newly arrived refugee students that helps them to adjust to life in Australia (STARTTS, 2019). We have had seven staff members trained to be facilitators in this course and have conducted the program on numerous occasions. The *Settling In* program has empowered our students to better make sense of their resettlement process; articulate their thoughts and feelings and has provided students with strategies to aid this process. As a further benefit, facilitators have also deepened their knowledge and understanding of the journeys our students have undertaken, thus enriching other wellbeing programs that take place.

Establishing the Armidale Intensive English Centre

Armidale Intensive English Centre (IEC), hosted by Armidale Secondary College, was established in 2019 to provide support to the high numbers of secondary-aged newly arrived refugees. This is a significant accomplishment for rural and remote EAL/D education, as Armidale IEC was the first to be opened outside of a metropolitan area in over 40 years.

Upon arrival in Armidale, students aged from eleven years upwards are eligible to attend the IEC for up to five terms before transitioning into the mainstream school environment. Here, they are supported by a passionate team of EAL/D educators that includes bilingual School Learning Support Officers (SLSO).

All staff have received, and continue to receive, professional learning that is responsive to the learning and wellbeing needs of students. Outside agencies are encouraged to deliver professional learning using the IEC as a hub for other educators in the area. This holistic and inclusive approach involves orientating students and their families to our schooling system. It has been achieved through

community engagement events such as IEC Family Afternoons. The consistent use of QR codes on all communications' sent home, through which families can access video translations in Kurmanji and Arabic, assists with collaborative relationships between the IEC and families.

The carefully curated teaching and learning in the IEC ensures that students make impressive learning gains, preparing them for exiting the IEC into Armidale Secondary College. Working closely together, the IEC and EAL/D team have created a pathway of entry into mainstream schooling for IEC students, and for EAL/D students who have transitioned from feeder primary schools.

Bridging the curriculum gap

Our observations of these students in mainstream schooling were consistent with research (Alford and Jetnikoff, 2011; Ollerhead, 2009; Slaughter and Cross, 2021) reporting that many EAL/D learners struggle with the demands of secondary school. Our school's capability to cater for these learners was challenged by the speed and volume of new arrivals entering mainstream classes, heightening the need for astute pedagogical intervention.

For several years, Armidale Secondary College has delivered the Year 7 curriculum through a middle-school model, in which English and humanities are taught collaboratively as are STEM-based subjects. For the 2022 Year 7 cohort, we implemented an auxiliary arrangement by establishing a parallel EAL/D class within the humanities strand for EAL/D students in the lower phases of English proficiency. This class was strategically staffed by a primary-trained teacher with specialist EAL/D qualifications and a bilingual school learning support officer (SLSO).

This staffing combination allowed for intensive literacy and language teaching and for the students' first language (L1) to be meaningfully incorporated into teaching and learning. The bilingual SLSO was pivotal in providing scaffolding in L1 and was empowered to lead moments of micro-teaching. These conditions allowed students to purposefully 'mobilis[e] [their] linguistic repertoire through instruction' (Cenoz and Gorter, 2021, p 18)

where the teaching team meaningfully incorporated translanguaging practices that supported the needs of the students. In translanguaging, students 'draw on and mingle all elements of their linguistic repertoire ... to decode and produce language in all modes' (Feez and Harper, 2021, p 12). These inclusive teaching practices shifted our EAL/D learners from being 'academic outsiders to intellectually-capable insiders' (Feez and Harper, p 12).

As there were similarities between the mainstream EAL/D learners in this learning environment and the IEC student cohort, a successful IEC-developed phonics-based program was used for our teaching intervention.

In addition to data that measured an overall increase in confidence and engagement, of particular interest were the reading and reading comprehension data for the class:
- At the beginning of the teaching intervention, students' scaled score on average was 242.
- After two terms, students' scaled score increased on average to 350: an increase of 108.
- 50% of students achieved above the average increased score of 108, with 16% of students achieving an increased scaled score of 150 or higher.
- An average of 11 months reading age growth for students in a teaching period of two terms, with some students increasing their reading age by two years.

Figure 2: Student working one-on-one with a bilingual learning support officer

The positive impact of this pedagogical intervention on EAL/D student outcomes was recognised by the principal, who ensured that this model was sustained in Year 7 and extended into Year 8 in 2023. Owing to the efficacy of our intervention and the high-quality teaching and learning taking place, these classrooms have become instructional leadership spaces, modelling practice and pedagogy for other teachers at Armidale Secondary College and schools from the region.

Our pedagogical intervention demonstrates the power of using research to inform teaching practice as well as the potential of collaboration to improve student outcomes.

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Hear to learn – why acoustics matter in the classroom

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Dr Kiri Mealings considers the importance of classroom acoustics and provides guidance on the creation of optimal teaching and learning acoustic environments.

Introduction

Often when we think about classroom design, we think about the visual space. However, classroom listening and peer interactions mainly take place in the auditory domain, so optimal acoustic environments are vital to ensure learning can take place. This article delves into the significance of classroom acoustic parameters such as reverberation and noise, exploring how inadequate acoustic conditions can impact both children's and teachers' listening, learning and overall well-being. Additionally, it offers actionable recommendations to enhance the acoustic conditions in your classroom to foster an optimal learning environment that benefits all.

Reverberation explained

'Reverberation' refers to the prolongation of a sound in a room. Reverberation is measured by the

reverberation time of the room, which is the time it takes for a sound to decay by 60 dB (Schomer and Swenson, 2002). Longer reverberation times mean that the sound is more prolonged in the room. An example of a room with a long reverberation time is a large cathedral. The size and shape of the classroom as well as the absorptive characteristics of the materials all affect the reverberation time.

Noise explained

There are many different noises that can be heard in classrooms, including ambient noise, intrusive noise, and occupied noise. The presence of noise also gives rise to the Lombard effect and café effect.

Ambient noise

External environmental noise may be present, such as traffic, railway, and aircraft noise (Mealings, 2021; Shield and Dockrell, 2004). Internal ambient noise includes noise from inside the learning spaces, such as heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, and electronic equipment (Mealings, 2021).

Intrusive noise

This refers to noise that enters the learning space from other occupied spaces, including noise from children in adjacent classes, corridors, common learning areas, and the playground. Intrusive noise is especially present in open plan classrooms.

Occupied noise

Internal noises, such as talking and movement of the children are a major noise source in the classroom (Mealings, 2021; Shield and Dockrell, 2004).

Lombard effect and cafe effect

Modern teaching styles often involve dynamic collaborative learning activities where children work in groups. This can result in many people talking at the one time. This may give rise to the Lombard effect, which is the tendency for speakers to raise their voice in noisy conditions so they can hear themselves and so others can hear them (Lombard, 1911). The result is the café effect, which refers to the progressive increase in speech levels in a room (Whitlock and Dodd, 2008). This effect is also related to the reverberation time of the room, with rooms with longer reverberation times producing higher noise levels.

Effect of poor acoustics on speech perception

Children spend around 70–90% of classroom time engaged in direct instruction or group work (Imms et al., 2017; Mealings et al., 2015a). Both learning scenarios require children to be able to comprehend what their teacher and classmates are saying. Vital to understanding speech is consonant perception. This visual analogy shows what the phrase, 'consonant perception is vital', looks like (that is, would sound like) when only vowels are present: _o__o_a__ _e__e__io_ i_ _i_a_. This sentence is nearly impossible to understand due to the softer and shorter consonants (compared to louder and longer vowels) being lost as a result of reverberation, noise, or distance.

Reverberation

Reverberation affects speech perception by masking (that is, blurring) speech sounds. A visual analogy to demonstrate this effect is shown in Figure 1. The first phrase, 'short reverberation time', represents a short reverberation time so has the letters spaced out and is easy to read. The second phrase, 'long reverberation time', has all the letters overlapping and is difficult to read. Vowels typically mask consonants because they have more acoustic energy, so are shown in bold. Not all reverberation is bad, however. It is only the late reflections that interfere with speech perception. Early reflections with less than a 50 ms delay aid speech perception by enhancing the speech sounds (Bradley et al., 2003).

Short reverberation time

Longreverberationtime

Figure 1: Visual analogy showing the effect of different reverberation times on the phrases, 'short reverberation time' and 'long reverberation time'

Noise

Noise also masks speech, making it difficult to hear. The signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) is a useful measure of speech intelligibility as it compares the signal (for example, teacher's voice) to the background noise.

The SNR is calculated as follows:

$$\text{SNR} = \text{level of signal} - \text{level of noise}$$

Figure 2: Equation to calculate the signal-to-noise ratio

Positive SNRs indicate how much louder the signal is compared to the noise, whereas negative SNRs indicate how much softer the signal is compared to the noise. For example, if a teacher's voice is 65 dB and the noise is 50 dB, then the SNR is +15 dB. Another visual analogy can be used to explain the SNR. In Figure 3, the first phrase, 'good signal-to-noise ratio, represents a good SNR as it has black text (the signal) written on a light grey background (soft noise), so is easy to read. However, when the noise is increased (i.e., the background is a darker grey and granular) resulting in a poor SNR, the phrase, poor signal-to-noise ratio', is much more difficult to read.

Figure 3: Visual analogy showing how the signal-to-noise ratio can affect the ability to hear speech

However, the SNR does not take into effect reverberation. The speech transmission index (STI) is a guide to the quality of the speech that is transmitted in a room and takes into account the signal, the noise, and the reverberation of the space. The STI is represented on a scale from 0–1, where 0 indicates that no speech would be understood and 1 indicates that all speech would be understood. Using the same visual analogies as above, Figure 4 illustrates what understanding speech in a classroom with a poor STI would look like.

Figure 4: Visual analogy showing the effect of a poor STI on the ability to understand speech

Distance

In a free field (that is, where there are no objects that sounds can reflect off) a sound decays by 6 dB for every doubling in distance. So, while a teacher's voice may be 65 dB at 1 m, at 2 m it is 59 dB, at 4 m it is 53 dB, and at 8 m it is 47 dB. If the noise level is a constant 50 dB throughout the classroom, this gives respective SNRs of +15 dB. +9 dB. +3 dB, and -3 dB across the classroom, which is a big difference. This, however, assumes that there is no reverberation. The further the listener moves away from the speaker, the greater the amount of the reverberation the listener hears. A useful measure for understanding the impact of the reverberant sound is the critical distance. The critical distance in a classroom can be approximated as:

$$\text{critical distance} = \sqrt{\frac{QR}{16\pi}} \approx 0.057 \sqrt{\frac{QV}{T}}$$

Figure 5: Equation to calculate the critical distance in a classroom

where Q = directivity factor of the source (for example, 2.5 for the human voice), R = room constant, V = volume of the classroom in m^3, and T = reverberation time of the classroom. The critical distance is the point in a room where the direct sound and the reverberant sound are equal in energy. Beyond the critical distance, the reverberant sound is stronger than the direct sound. This is problematic because when a sound hits a surface, some of its frequencies are absorbed and some are reflected, so the reverberant sound that is reflected is different in its frequency, intensity, and temporal domains and affects its perception (Crandell and Smaldino, 2000).

Effect of poor acoustics on children

Poor classroom acoustic conditions not only negatively affect children's speech perception (Murgia et al., 2022) but also their listening comprehension (Mealings, 2022b; Schiller et al., 2022). In a series of comprehensive reviews, I have shown that poor classroom acoustics negatively impact literacy, such as reading, writing, and spelling (Mealings, 2022g), numeracy (Mealings, 2022b), cognition such as attention and memory (Mealings, 2022f), behaviour (Mealings, 2022e), physical

health (Mealings, 2022d), and mental wellbeing (Mealings, 2022c). Noise is problematic for all children, especially young children (Johnson, 2000), whose brains are still developing, and even more so for children with additional learning needs. For example, noise can increase repetitive behaviours in children on the autism spectrum (Kanakri et al., 2017). Children with ADHD are more affected by auditory distractions than children without ADHD (Adams et al., 2009). Children with hearing loss are also more adversely affected in terms of their ability to hear and engage in the classroom (Crandell and Smaldino, 2000; Todorov et al., 2021). Additionally, children with English as their second language are at a disadvantage compared to their peers when listening in noise and reverberation (Nelson et al., 2005).

Effect of poor acoustics on teachers

Teachers' health and wellbeing is also at risk, as noise can result in headaches and fatigue, and put them at risk of developing voice disorders (Kristiansen et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2020; Mealings et al., 2015b).

Acoustic recommendations and how they can be achieved

We've established that poor acoustic conditions can negatively affect children's and teachers' listening, learning, and wellbeing. So what are good acoustic conditions and how do we achieve them? Following are recommendations of what acoustic conditions are needed and how they can be achieved. A useful tool to measure the acoustic conditions and see how your classroom fares is the ListenApp for Schools.

Reverberation time

Aim for an unoccupied reverberation time of 0.4–0.6 s (Australia/New Zealand Standard, 2016; Crandell and Smaldino, 2000; Mealings, 2016). To achieve this, have carpet, soft furnishings, and acoustic treatment on the ceiling and walls as this can aid children's speech perception, attention, reading, and wellbeing (Mealings, 2023).

> **Noise is problematic for all children, especially young children … and even more so for children with additional learning needs.**

Ambient noise levels

Aim for an unoccupied ambient noise level of < 35 dBA (Australia/New Zealand Standard, 2016; Crandell and Smaldino, 2000; Mealings, 2016). To achieve this, ensure that low-noise-emitting heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, and other equipment are installed. Turn off equipment when not in use. Use building materials that provide good sound insulation and close doors and windows when possible. Locate special purpose rooms, such as music rooms and gymnasiums, away from classrooms.

Signal-to-noise ratio

During critical listening activities, aim for at least a +15 dB SNR throughout the classroom (with preferably a +20 dB SNR if there are children with additional learning needs) (Crandell and Smaldino, 2000; Mealings, 2016). Given that a teaching voice is usually 65 dBA at 1 m, the occupied noise level should be limited to 50 dBA during critical listening activities (Mealings, 2016). Ensure that the class is quiet before you instruct them. Remind children not to shout during group work. Monitor noise levels and reward children for keeping levels down. Consider installing a sound field amplification system (as long as the reverberation time of the classroom is reasonable) to improve speech intelligibility throughout the classroom (Mealings, 2022a) and save the teacher from needing to raise their voice and compromising their vocal health, which also affects speech intelligibility (Schiller et al., 2022). A wireless remote microphone should be used for any child who has hearing loss.

Speech transmission index

The STI throughout the classroom during critical listening activities should be > 0.75 (Greenland and Shield, 2011; Mealings, 2016). Controlling both the noise levels/SNR and reverberation time in the classroom as outlined above will help achieve this.

Distance

During critical listening activities, children should be seated as close to the teacher as possible. Effort should be made to keep the speaker-to-listener distance for communication within the critical distance of the space. In an average classroom, this is around 3-4 m (Crandell and Smaldino, 2000).

Conclusion

The classroom acoustic environment is vital for children's and teachers' listening, learning, and wellbeing. Following the advice outlined in this article will help ensure the acoustic environment is optimal so that children and teachers thrive in the classroom.

Acknowledgement

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SPaRK

Shared Practice and Research Kit

Bindi and beyond –
a cross-curriculum study

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In this Shared Practice and Resource Kit (SPaRK), Cleo Mihail uses Bindi as a focus text to create an inspiring cross-curriculum study for Stage 3 students.
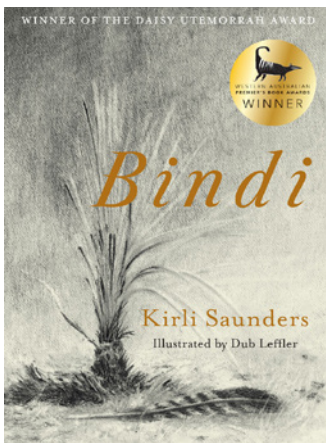

Figure 1: *Bindi* by Kirli Saunders (2020, Magabala Books)

Resource overview

Bindi by Kirli Saunders is a sensitively crafted verse novel. It relates the experiences of an eleven year old Aboriginal girl, Bindi, whose ordinary life is changed by the escalating danger of bushfires threatening her community and Gundungurra Country. Written for mid to upper primary students, this text presents a nuanced portrayal of coming-of-age themes relevant to Stage 3 students. Themes of self-discovery, healing and resilience are artfully explored through Bindi's roaming adventures with family and friends, her passion for art, horse-riding, hockey and importantly, her unwavering connection to her Aboriginal culture, language and land.

Through the combination of contemporary realism and autobiographical fiction genres, this story's rich use of themes, concrete poetic formatting and figurative devices, including vivid imagery, personification, simile and metaphor, provide opportunities for meaningful curriculum links and learning. Saunders orchestrates a deft juxtaposition between the buoyancy of childhood and the gravity of natural disasters, leaving readers weighing the delicacy of innocence, the seriousness of bushfires and their impact on both the natural environment and Indigenous cultural identity.

Saunders' verse novel is complemented by Dub Leffler's realistic greyscale illustrations. This harmonious blend of written prose and illustration invites the audience to develop their visual literacy skills and appreciate the narrative on both written and visual levels.

Educational significance

Saunders' *Bindi* displays a rich assemblage of language features, Tier 1 and Tier 2 vocabulary, characters, settings and text formats that can be used to explore the Stage 3 English curriculum and other key learning areas (KLAs).

Aboriginal identity and communal/familial bonds thematically underpin *Bindi*, influencing the significant implementation of Gundungurra language and culturally driven subtexts. The use of Gundungurra words 'I bawa yana' (p 92) and 'watching wirritjirribin' (p 31) enhance the authenticity and realism of the characters, especially to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers who have personally heard or spoken an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dialect (Mishan, 2005). The verse novel's inclusion of the Aboriginal perspective allows for genuine integration of intercultural education and supports the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. It also invites readers to examine how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander authors employ language to share cultural perspectives and build cultural contexts.

In lieu of a conventional prose structure, entries like 'Absence note' (p 55) and the bedroom wall murals (pp 22, 43, 63) reveal added meaning by taking the form of a typed letter and bedroom wall paintings. *Bindi* is purposefully structured into three parts with different themes foreshadowed by the subtitle: Seedlings (innocence and childhood youth); Cinders (fire and destruction) and Sprouts (rebirth, hope and new beginnings). Saunders' clever use of symbolism elicits creative thinking, assumption and predictive skills.

Through poetic language devices including similes like, 'we threw around hugs like confetti' (p 39), metaphors such as, 'Mum is warm butter sliding down toast' (p 9) and alliteration coupled with vivid sensory imagery including 'The day drips with the scent of camellias' (p 41), students are invited to examine the role linguistic devices have in shaping the depth, emotion and tone of a narrative.

Throughout *Bindi*, Saunders juxtaposes lighthearted thematic descriptions with solemn tones conveyed through language usage including metaphor and personification. The onset of bushfires is expressed

Syllabus links

Outcomes in the NSW syllabus learning areas for Stage 3 include:

English
- **EN3-CWT-01 plans, creates and revises written texts for multiple purposes and audiences through selection of text features, sentence-level grammar, punctuation and word-level language**
- **EN3-UARL-01 analyses representations of ideas in literature through narrative, character, imagery, symbol and connotation, and adapts these representations when creating texts**
- **EN3-UARL-02 analyses representations of ideas in literature through genre and theme that reflect perspective and context, argument and authority, and adapts these representations when creating texts**

PDHPE
- **PD3-2 investigates information, community resources and strategies to demonstrate resilience and seek help for themselves and others**

Science and technology
- **ST3-1WS-S plans and conducts scientific investigations to answer testable questions, and collects and summarises data to communicate conclusions**
- **ST3-2DP-T plans and uses materials, tools and equipment to develop solutions for a need or opportunity**

Creative arts
- **VAS3.4 Communicates about the ways in which subject matter is represented in artworks.**

as, 'the *canbe*...licked the back fence' (p 53). By recognising such devices, students can explain how mood and meaning are created and heightened through vivid imagery to deliver an emotive story telling experience. By observing Saunders' skilful application of characterisation and language features, students are provided with a model to improve their own creative writing. In addition, students can investigate the impact bushfires have on environments/communities and integrate the cross-curriculum priority of Sustainability and other KLAs such as HSIE and science and technology.

Suggestions for using *Bindi* as a focus text

Bindi offers many possible uses across the curriculum. In relation to English, contemporary issues, cultural perspectives and language devices evidenced in *Bindi* can be examined using different strategies. The incidence of bushfires in Australia can be explored in science and technology. Health, safety and wellbeing in times of natural disaster can be considered as an aspect of PDHPE, and the symbolism and cultural relevance of art making can be used as a focus for creative arts.

Teaching activities
English

Literature circles (Simpson, 2023) can be used to encourage students to assess *Bindi* from diverse perspectives, construct new understandings through meaningful discussion and debate, and jointly unravel the verse novel's layers.

For example, students in the role of Word Wizard within the literature circles could undertake activities like the following.

- Create English and Gundungurra vocabulary cards using the 'Gundungurra word list' on p 124.
- Using the cards, write short stories with Gundungurra vocabulary.
- Create a table of unfamiliar words found within *Bindi* and use context clues to determine their meaning(s).
- Investigate how Gundungurra and English words are used to allude to various meanings in *Bindi*. For example, 'karrat' and 'garrall' are used interchangeably to allude to 'rain'.
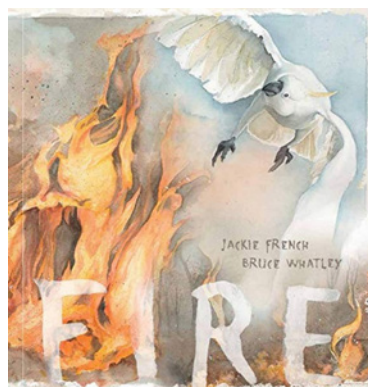

Figure 2: *Fire* by Jackie French (2015, Scholastic Australia)

Comparative studies allow students to engage in an analysis of *Bindi* in reference to other literary and digital works. Students can highlight commonalities and differences in themes, styles, and cultural elements.

For instance, *Fire*, a picture book by Jackie French, unveils a moving story of Australian bushfires through the eyes of a cockatoo. Questions can include:
- How do the authors use language devices and text structure to explore themes of devastation, regrowth and healing?
- How do the characters demonstrate the power of coming together during challenging times? How do these examples resonate with real-world situations?
- Examine how both authors use a cockatoo to symbolise hidden meanings and themes?
- Discuss the role of illustrations in *Bindi* and *Fire*. How do the illustrations contribute to readers' understanding of the written text?
- Both *Bindi* and *Fire* address themes of environmental impact. How do these perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of our relationship with the land and our role in its preservation?

Themes of self-discovery, healing and resilience are artfully explored through Bindi's roaming adventures with family and friends, her passion for art, horse-riding, hockey and importantly, her unwavering connection to her Aboriginal culture, language and land.

Figure 3: *Two Mates* by Melanie Prewett and Maggie Prewett (2012, Magabala Books)

Two Mates by Melanie Prewett and Maggie Prewett follows two close friends, Jack and Raf. Alongside colourful illustrations, this book shares mirroring themes of childhood innocence, Aboriginal culture and the natural beauty of the Australian bush and wildlife.

Questions can include:
- How do each book's main characters display qualities of curiosity, friendship and imagination?
- What are the key differences in Saunders and Prewett's approach to writing? Do their writing styles evoke different feelings or thoughts in you as a reader?
- Discuss the significance of embedding Aboriginal words in the text for readers who may not be familiar with them. How does this contribute to cultural awareness and understanding among a wider audience?
- What themes are central to both books? Why do you think themes of nature, community and Aboriginal culture overlap? How are these themes emphasised?
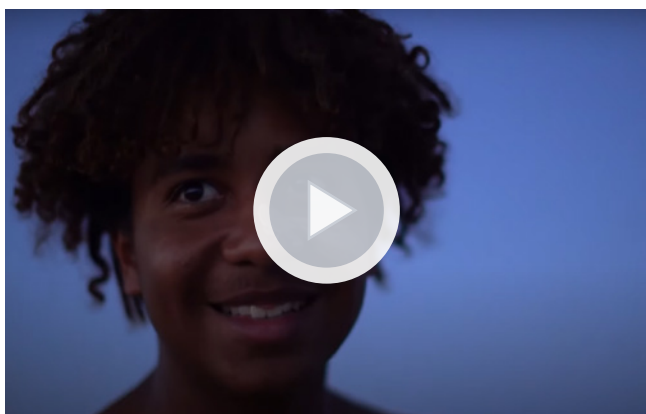

Figure 4: 'BAMA' (5:27 minutes) by Jahvis Loveday, YouTube

Additional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander works

BAMA (5:27 minutes) is an award-winning Indigenous Short Film by Jahvis Loveday.

Questions can include:
- How is childhood, friends and community depicted in these texts? How is it similar or different to Bindi's experience?
- What techniques do Loveday and Saunders use to express symbolism and foreshadowing?
- What role do culture, community and being Aboriginal play in shaping each character's life experiences and identity?

Figure 5: Growing up Aboriginal in Australia by Anita Heiss (2018, Black Inc.)

Compiled by Anita Heiss, *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia* is an anthology of fifty firsthand accounts from Aboriginal Australians. By juxtaposing the somewhat fictional narrative of *Bindi* with the real-life experiences shared in Heiss' collection, students are given an insight into more sensitive issues faced by many Aboriginal people as they grow up. Crucial aspects of history like the Stolen Generation, and contemporary challenges such as racism and prejudice can be explored and investigated.

Possible entries to begin with:
- 'Thanks for the childhood travels' by Karen Davis (p 74)
- 'I remember' by John Hartley (p 115)
- 'The streets of my youth' by Terri Janke (p 121)
- 'What it's like' by Keira Jenkins (p 125)

Writing activities

Bindi could be utilised in writing units focusing on poetic language, personal identity and environmental awareness. For example:

- Recount – My favourite childhood memory is.
- Diary entry – What parts of your life, interests and culture do you think shape your identity?
- Informative text – Investigate the effects bushfires have on human beings and the environment. Are these effects seen in *Bindi*? Support your writing with direct quotes and examples.
- Persuasive text – How do the language devices in *Bindi* provide you with a better understanding of the characters and events? Persuade your reader on the importance of using language devices when writing stories. Use examples from *Bindi* to back up your arguments.
- Imaginative text – Choose a chapter in *Bindi* that interests you. In verse format, rewrite this chapter from the perspective of a character other than Bindi. Examples:
  - '44 homes' – Omeo's perspective whilst leading the sibling bushwalk.
  - 'Hockey game'– Mum's perspective as the team's coach during the hockey final.
  - 'Friends' – Olive, Marco or Henry's perspective during their afternoon adventure in the *bawa* (bush).
  - 'Evacuation III' – The firefighter's perspective on the bushfires and evacuating nearby houses.
- Poetry – Imagine you are Bindi. How was your first night sleeping at the evacuation centre? Use verse format and language techniques. Students can describe:
  - What the evacuation centre looked, sounded, smelt, tasted and felt like?
  - Where did Bindi sleep?
  - Who was there?
  - What were her emotions, fears and hopes?

Contextual inquiry

Create personal connections to the text:

- Discuss how the Australian bushfires affected you or someone you know.
- Do you know any pre-existing books, movies or personal life experiences that are similar to *Bindi*?

Enhance understanding of the text's themes and context:

- Discuss the effects the 2019-2020 bushfires had on human beings. Create a class mind map on these impacts.
- The following videos may be used to prompt discussion:
  - Survivors of Australia's bushfires tell their stories (2:56 minutes), TRT World, YouTube.
  - Black Summer aftermath (3:14 minutes), Behind the News, YouTube.
- Watch the following videos. Write 3-6 similarities these children and Bindi share in relation to their bushfire experience.
  - Bushfire kids visit (4:46 minutes), Behind the News, YouTube.
  - Bushfire rookie reporters (5:58 minutes), Behind the News, YouTube.

Science and technology

Bindi's world is turned upside down by the bushfires. In Australia, the risk of bushfires is an inherent part of our country.

Students can plan, design, experiment and create a solution that both Bindi and Australian citizens could use to prevent or contain bushfires. In groups, students can investigate and identify primary problems that arise before, during and after bushfires, along with the issues faced by living things interacting with these fires. Where a need is found, students can plan and create a solution for the identified problem. For example, most firefighter deaths are caused by heart failure. A design solution could be creating fireproof goggles that display and monitor a firefighter's heart rate whilst they are on the fire ground.

Students can then test and evaluate materials, tools, methods and technology to determine the best options for their design idea. They could create prototypes and investigate how they can use coding, ICT and 3D printing programs like Tinkercad to strengthen their design.

PDHPE

Bindi connects to the PDHPE strand on health, wellbeing and relationships. Students can identify important strategies to protect

themselves and others in a variety of situations during a unit on promoting health, safety, and wellbeing. For example, they can create a list of emergency contacts including parents, neighbours and local fire departments, and discuss when to reach out to them during bushfire emergencies.

Students could also plan and discuss the steps to take during a fire evacuation at school or home. Together with the teacher, they can consider escape routes, designated meeting areas, and the role of community resources like fire services, help lines and evacuation centres in maintaining their own and others safety. After this activity, students can reflect on Bindi's school and home evacuation on pages 70-76 and draw links to their own evacuation plans.

Creative arts
As an artwork reflection, students discuss how the symbolism and meaning behind the painting 'Ashes to Ashes' by Ursula Theinert can be used to analyse the impact bushfires have on the natural landscape, human life and Aboriginal cultural identity.

Possible questions:
- What does this artwork tell us about Australian bushfires and its impact? Look for both obvious and symbolic connections.
- Why do you think these colours have been chosen?
- What could the burnt tree stumps represent?
- What may have been here before the fire?
- How does the picture make you feel?
- Why might destruction to the environment impact Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders on a personal and cultural level.
- Find quotes from Bindi that resonate with your thoughts on the artwork.

Art is a central part of Bindi's life and one of her main interests. Throughout the verse novel, Bindi paints murals on her bedroom wall. These murals have hidden meanings, symbolism and cultural relevance. Students can create their own 'bedroom murals' by picking a chapter of their choosing and painting a mural inspired by the events, themes and emotions within the chapter.

Experimenting
This section offers learning activities that extend upon the themes and events presented in Bindi. Activities can be done individually or in small groups.

- Script a dramatic scene with various individuals who would have been impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfires. For instance, a firefighter, farmer, news reporter or survivor/community member. How was their personal experience shaped when dealing with the fires? How were their lives affected?

- Create a Q&A interview between Bindi and a news reporter, where Bindi responds from her perspective to an interviewer's questions. This can be presented to the class as a live play or video.

- Research and create an information report on **one** of the following bushfires. In your report mention the maximum fire temperature reached, economic cost, number of properties lost, hectares burnt, human and animal fatalities, and event date.
  - Gippsland and Black Sunday 1926
  - Black Friday 1939
  - Black Tuesday, Tasmania 1967
  - Ash Wednesday 1983
  - Black Saturday 2009
  - Red October, NSW 2013
  - Black Summer 2019/2020

- Students create an information poster on how bushfires affect:
  - Individuals (residents, farmers, firefighters and so on)
  - Wildlife
  - Environment

- By using the website Ten impacts of the Australian bushfires, students can gather information for one of the following tasks.
  - Students conduct an investigation into sustainable and safe fire prevention methods like 'cool-burning' (an Aboriginal cultural burning method). Students write a persuasive speech on the benefits of cool-burning and why the Australian government should adopt the cool-burn method over the prescribed hazard burn.

• Simpson (2017) stresses that learning is most memorable when students are 'situated as participants in their own meaning-making' (p 118). Thus, immersing students in real-life contexts, such as embarking on an excursion to bushfire affected sites or bringing in local Aboriginal Elders or speakers will promote the integration of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

Islander perspectives through connecting with the '8 Ways' framework on Community links and Land links (8 Ways, 2023). This would also provide students with the opportunity to explore the type of settings described in *Bindi* and meet individuals with experiences that resonate with the novel's themes and characters.

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So, what is 'real' reading anyway? Exploring non-traditional types of reading

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John Gallimore explores the value and validity of non-traditional texts to engage children and young people in reading and foster their literacy.

In the 21st century, reading in its various forms is ubiquitous. From hard copy or digital news reports, through navigating day-to-day activities, to the final hours spent curled up with a book at night before bed (or a last-minute scroll through Instagram), reading is a constant in our daily lives. Teachers, teacher librarians and parents, therefore, are acutely aware of the need to keep young people engaged in reading widely and for pleasure. But what actually counts as 'reading' when it comes to education and promoting literacy to children and young adults?

Reading can be defined as comprising 'a number of interactive processes between the reader and the text during which the reader uses his or her know-

ledge to build, to create, and to construct meaning' (Day, 2020, p 2). There are several terms at play here, but the foremost feature is that reading requires interaction with the text and entails the construction and development of meaning through context. While the concept of reading is most often associated with reading fiction, and novels in particular, the aim of this article is to explore less traditional types of reading beyond the realms of the novel or prose fiction; for example, non-fiction, graphic novels, and video games can be considered texts worthy of 'reading'.

The new NSW English K-10 syllabus (to be implemented for Years 3-10 in 2024) promotes the reading of 'a wide range of texts of increasing complexity and varied topics' (NESA, 2023). The syllabus also explains that 'texts should be understood to mean any written, spoken/signed, nonverbal, visual, auditory or multimodal communication'. To this end, the suggestions that follow offer formats that, while differing from traditional reading options, provide 'varied genres and topics' (NESA, 2023) and are quality examples of different modes of reading.

Non-fiction

The value of non-fiction reading as wide reading or reading for pleasure has become somewhat contentious in the context of literacy research. A recent study by Jerrim and Moss (2019) found a strong correlation between reading fiction and academic achievement, while a similar correlation was not discovered in relation to the reading of non-fiction, nor the reading of 'non-traditional' texts. However, Wexler (2019) contests this argument and points out that the correlation in the study undertaken by Jerrim and Moss does not indicate causation and that there remain literacies and knowledge that children are unable to learn from fiction reading alone.

Alexander and Jarman's (2018) study demonstrates that reading non-fiction can be a source of pleasure for children. Some children may express a preference for non-fiction over fiction, and reading non-fiction enables them to engage in a wider variety of texts that interest them. When compared

> ... the reading of non-fiction cultivates specific skills, such as classifying information, connecting information read to prior knowledge, evaluating evidence, developing vocabulary, and critical thinking skills.

with fiction reading, note Job and Coleman (2016), the reading of non-fiction cultivates specific skills, such as classifying information, connecting information read to prior knowledge, evaluating evidence, developing vocabulary, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, Wexler (2019) describes how certain non-fiction texts can carry the same impact as fiction when they contain elements such as a coherent narrative, causality, conflict, and characters. One example illustrating this is David Grann's (2009), *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon* (Stages 5–6), where the historical biography of explorer Percy Fawcett is composed in a narrative structure and interwoven with the author's narrative description of his own research into Fawcett and his disappearance.

There is a range of recent non-fiction publications enticingly presented to appeal to children and young adults. For example, the *Aussie STEM Stars* series, published by Wild Dingo Press, features biographies of Australian STEM heroes, and is aimed at children aged 9-13 years-old. The series features a number of authors and contributors and focuses on a diverse array of people from a variety of STEM fields, such as marine biologist Emma Johnston and maths teacher Eddie Woo. Teacher notes, study questions, and activities are also available for each book, making this an attractive non-fiction series for both children and educators.

Another appealing non-fiction text is *Big Ideas for Curious Minds: An Introduction to Philosophy* (2018) by The School of Life. Suitable for Stage 3 and up, it presents basic philosophical questions, ideas, and concepts in a colourful and uncomplicated manner. It also brings together stories and narratives from historic philosophers and draws out the essence in their philosophies in simple to understand language.

Another style and genre of non-fiction can be seen in the recently published, *The World is a Cat Playing with Australia* (Stage 3) by Simon Kuestenmacher (2023). A fun and interesting introduction to geography, the book looks at forty maps and explores topics ranging from history and geology to mythology and anthropology. Since non-fiction texts can create their own captivating narratives, as well as provide a unique pleasure when reading, non-fiction reading should certainly be considered as reading. In addition, non-fiction elicits the development of a range of critical skills in children and young adults.

In the new K–10 English syllabus (NESA, 2023), works of nonfiction, such as those mentioned above, are supportive of the Reading comprehension focus area for Years 3-6 that include the following outcomes:
- EN2-RECOM-01 – reads and comprehends texts for wide purposes using knowledge of text structures and language, and by monitoring comprehension.
- EN3-RECOM-01 – fluently reads and comprehends texts for wide purposes, analysing text structures and language, and by monitoring comprehension.

Non fiction texts are also supportive of the Understanding and responding to texts focus area for Years 7-10, particularly the following outcomes:
- EN4-URA-01 – analyses how meaning is created through the use of and response to language forms, features and structures.
- EN5-URA-01 – analyses how meaning is created through the use and interpretation of increasingly complex language forms, features and structures.

Graphic novels

Graphic novels (which here includes formats such as comic books and manga) present a unique approach to reading. However, there are still those who hold the belief that graphic novels do not constitute 'real' reading (Moeller, 2016). Rather than a simple reading of words on a page, graphic novels offer multimodal forms of interaction with the reader. As noted previously, the essence of reading is engagement with a text to create meaning. In the context of graphic novels, this meaning is

created not only through words, but through visual representations, panel usage, carefully conceived shots and angles and colour choices, along with a host of other medium-specific techniques.

Graphic novels have the potential to be strong tools for creating and developing meaning for readers and can tell stories in creative and distinct ways compared to traditional texts. For instance, graphic novels provide an engaging avenue to confront and discuss issues relevant to social justice and diversity, such as climate change, discrimination, sexuality, and racism (Garrison and Gavigan, 2019). One prominent example, amongst the many examples, of graphic novels addressing social issues, are the graphic novels and comic books that surround the character of Miles Morales, the successor to Marvel's Spider-Man (debuting in *Ultimate Comics: Spider-Man no. 1*, 2011). Miles Morales is unique as the first African-American male and first mixed-race person to don the mantle of Spider-Man. As a result, many of Morales' plotlines across his media franchise involve issues of race and culture, with Morales' biracial identity paralleling his two identities as both Miles Morales and Spider-Man (Santos, 2021). Morales' plots also serve as a medium to discuss issues of racism and a way to change negative stereotypes around African-Americans and people of colour (Worlds and Miller, 2019). The graphic novels and comic books relating to this character can cater to Stages 2-4, depending on the text type and writers.

Graphic novels, including non-fiction texts, accommodate a wide range of genres, such as autobiography, biography, science, mathematics, and journalism. *Tetris: The Games People Play* (Stages 5-6) by Box Brown (2016), for example, blends some of these genres together in its tale of how the video game *Tetris* was created. Told through a minimalist graphic style, the text recounts in one space the biography of the game's creator, Russian Alexey Pajitnov, the technical information and computer programming which went into creating it, as well as the bidding war in the West over the rights to own and distribute the game to audiences. Similarly, at the intersection of STEM and graphic novels, look no further than *The Manga Guides* series by No Starch Press and, in particular, *The Manga Guide to*

the Universe by Kenji Ishikawa (2011). Told through a stylistic manga design, the text creates a fictional story of four Japanese school students and their attempts to learn more about the universe and its components, coupled with scientific learning and information. Despite the manga aesthetic, this and other works in the series become highly technical in their presentation of STEM knowledge and would be most suited to Stages 5-6.

Graphic novels may also open 'pathways to literacy skill building and engagement' (Garrison et al., 2021, p 51) and give students the skills needed to navigate their challenges. Graphic novels offer a powerful medium for reading and engagement with texts and their multimodal form serves as both 'real' reading and a way to promote multiple literacies. In this way, graphic novels can support outcomes of the primary English focus area of Understanding and responding to literature, such as:

- EN2-UARL-01 – identifies and describes how ideas are represented in literature and strategically uses similar representations when creating texts.
- EN3-UARL-01 – analyses representations of ideas in literature through narrative, character, imagery, symbol and connotation, and adapts these representations when creating texts.

In the secondary English focus area of Understanding and responding to texts, outcomes that can met using graphic novels as texts include:

- EN4-URA-01 – analyses how meaning is created through the use of and response to language forms, features and structures.
- EN5-URA-01 – analyses how meaning is created through the use and interpretation of increasingly complex language forms, features and structures.

> **While video games may be the least traditional format when it comes to what constitutes reading, their structure and interactivity allow for complex explorations of a variety of literacies.**

Video games

Finally, and perhaps most controversial, is the relationship between video games and reading. This is not to say that all video games count as reading; many have no words or narratives beyond the fundamental gameplay loop. However, video games, in essence, fit the definition of reading as interaction with a text to build and construct meaning. A video game, like a traditional book, requires interaction from the reader, or in this case, the player, for the game to function and make sense. Research indicates that video games are an exercise in literacy and require an understanding of multiple kinds of literacies (Abrams and Van Eck, 2021).

There are many examples of video games that have been critically acclaimed based on their narrative strength, well-developed gameplay, and thematic structure. An example worth considering is the commercial game *Papers, Please* by Lucas Pope (2013). In *Papers, Please*, the player is cast in the role of a border immigration officer for a fictional Eastern Bloc-style nation. The player is presented with a variety of information, such as the immigrant's passport, visa documents, height, appearance, gender, and country of origin and must either approve or deny the individual access to the country. This is generally achieved through searching for discrepancies in a person's documents, such as misspellings or locating evidence of a forged document. The game also presents a number of complex moral choices and failure to make the 'correct' judgement, according to the state, results in punishment for the player and their family. Here we see several literacies at play, including written, visual, comprehension, critical thinking skills, and, to a certain extent, cultural and ethical literacy. *Papers, Please* sits at a crossroads in video games; the simplistic style underlies a complex and introspective tale and raises questions about immigration and the nature of asylum seekers (Lohmeyer, 2017). Due to the game's themes, language, and presentation, it is most appropriate for Stage 6.

On the other side of the video game spectrum, sits *Lil Gator Game,* also a commercial product, published by Playtonic Games (2022). This low-stakes adventure is about the titular 'Lil Gator' and their crew of animal friends as they explore and adventure across their environment. Most

information is communicated to the player through text and speech bubbles, requiring basic reading skills. Along with exploring the bright and colourful cell-shaded environment, the game features elements such as making friends with the other characters and playing imagination-based games with them. The game is thus a kind of virtual playground where written and social literacies are intertwined. This game would be most suited for those in Stages 1 and 2, but it is a wholesome adventure enjoyable for children (and adults) of all ages. While video games may be the least traditional format when it comes to what constitutes reading, their structure and interactivity allow for complex explorations of a variety of literacies. Age-appropriate video games with a narrative structure could be considered 'texts of personal interest' (NESA, 2023, p 11).

Reading is ever-present, even when not consciously recognised. This brief exploration of the value of non-fiction texts, graphic novels, and video games may inspire teachers, teacher-librarians and parents to consider reading for children and young adults more broadly. The suggestions offered are not necessarily intended as a substitute for the traditional reading of novels. Rather, these non-traditional texts should serve as a supplement to existing reading and literacy activities, especially in time set aside for reading for pleasure. By combining both traditional and non-traditional formats, children and young adults can be given the autonomy to choose what and how they want to read, which thereby contributes towards keeping them engaged in reading as a life-long pursuit.

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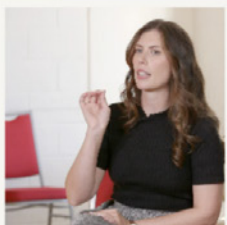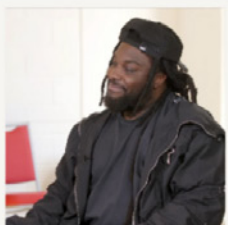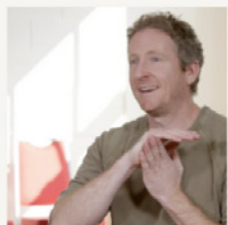
Writer biographies

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John Gallimore is a Library Assistant at Northern Beaches Library. He will soon complete his Master of Information Studies (Librarianship) from Charles Sturt University and is keen to transition into a librarian role. John is passionate about all-things-library, but especially children's literacy issues and collection development in public and school library contexts.

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