Prue Greene, Senior Curriculum Support Officer English, K-12 introduces the new English textual concepts [intranet only] resource for teaching English. The resource reorganises English K–10 syllabus content through textual concepts and processes to help teachers design learning for high intellectual quality and foster deep understanding of the conceptual basis of the subject.

Finding the heart of English

What is English?
It has always been difficult for teachers and students to explain what the study of English is. The scope of English, the kinds of texts that students respond to and compose and the place of literacy in the subject makes a definition difficult to pin down. The syllabus states that:

- knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes acquired in English are central to the learning and development of students in NSW (BOSTES, 2013).

The knowledge (key concepts) that this statement refers to in the syllabus aims, outcomes and content points is difficult to readily identify because it is often implied rather than stated and threaded throughout every outcome. Therefore, teachers of English K–10 must know and remember their syllabus in its entirety. In order to teach effectively, they should also have an excellent knowledge of the Stage 6 syllabus; its treatment of concepts, and how to program for these so that younger students become familiar with the big ideas in the subject from the earliest years. It is quite a task. It is also quite a task for these understandings to be common to all teachers and faculties in both primary and secondary contexts.
English textual concepts
In a joint project with the English Teachers Association NSW, the English textual concepts resource for the teaching of English has been developed by the NSW Department of Education (NSW DoE). This ground breaking work, which has taken two years to complete, gives teachers of subject English a different approach to implementing the NSW syllabus for the Australian curriculum: English K-10. The resource reorganises syllabus content through textual concepts and processes to help teachers design learning for high intellectual quality and to foster deep understanding of the conceptual basis of the subject.

Continuum of learning
The transition points between Stages 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 often highlight the different ways the English syllabus is interpreted and implemented because students’ facility with the textual concepts of the subject differ widely, even though the syllabus outcomes provide a continuum of learning across stages. This continuum of learning is a welcome addition to the syllabus, but the content points that support the acquisition of the learning outcomes are not so elegantly arranged. For instance, the literary device, Point of view, is referred to or implied in 20 content points in Stages 4 and 5 and 78 times in Stages ES1, across a range of outcomes. Clearly, understanding and being able to use Point of view is an important part of subject English and this new resource identifies Point of view content, defines what the term means and clearly states why it is important to teach, based on a rigorous analysis of the syllabus.

Unpacking a concept: Point of view
What is Point of view?
Point of view in a text is the position from which the subject matter of a text is designed to be perceived. In defining a Point of view the writer, speaker or director of the text controls what we see and how we relate to the situation, characters or ideas in the text. Point of view may be expressed through a narrator or through a character (focaliser in a novel, persona in a poem) and because we are invited to adopt this Point of view we often align ourselves with the character or narrator. The Point of view constructed in a text cannot be assumed to be that of the composer.

Composers can privilege certain points of view by choosing a particular narrative stance including omniscient, limited, 1st, 2nd or 3rd person narrator. In visual, film and digital texts, Point of view is indicated through such devices as foregrounding in visual images, types of camera shots or guiding a pathway of navigation through a web site. In spoken and audio texts the tone and accompanying sounds convey a Point of view. Point of view therefore constructs an attitude towards the subject matter in a text which the reader, listener or viewer is invited to adopt (NSW DoE, 2015).

Why is it important?
Understanding Point of view is a critical reading practice because Point of view is often inferred rather than explicitly expressed and its exploration leads to an appreciation of the constructed nature of the text. It is a device which allows subject matter to be foregrounded or distanced and therefore it invites certain attitudes and feelings in response to the text. Experimenting with Point of view allows students to explore other ways of seeing the text (NSW DoE, 2015).

This definition has been made quite precise and constrained to avoid the confusion that arises with its colloquial use that makes it interchangeable with opinion i.e. to have a Point of view on a particular issue is normal usage in conversation but what is expressed is actually an opinion. In subject English Point of view is a language device and may be used to express an opinion or view of the world by characters created by the author for instance. This confusion is exacerbated
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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Progression of conceptual understanding - <em>Point of View</em></th>
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| Stage 5 | Students understand that *Point of view* is the position from which the subject matter of a text is designed to be perceived. Students learn that  
• narrators may be omniscient, limited, deceptive, masking the ideology of the text  
• there may be multiple narrators offering different points of view  
• *Point of view* may be through a focaliser  
• a narrator may adopt a satirical tone  
• the *Point of view* can create an emotional response  
• *Point of view* controls the meaning of a text and may be resisted. |
| Stage 4 | Students understand that choice of *Point of view* shapes the meanings, the values and the effect of the text. Students learn that  
• a narrator can tell a story, comment on a story or break out from the story to address the responder directly  
• *Point of view* is a device for persuading  
• *Point of view* directs the responder to the values in the text. |
| Stage 3 | Students understand that the narrator is different from the author and that *Point of view* positions the reader to respond in a particular way. Students learn that  
• a narrator may be inside or outside the story, in fiction and non-fiction texts  
• *Point of view* can create a more personal or distant relationship with the responder, evoking degrees of empathy or indifference  
• the author chooses the way a story is told and chooses language appropriate to that purpose in the different modes and media. |
| Stage 2 | Students learn that *Point of view* influences interpretation of texts. Students understand that  
• different points of view affect a story  
• different modes and media convey *Point of view* in different ways  
• meanings of stories may change when viewed through the eyes of different characters in the story or different responders to the story |
| Stage 1 | Students know that stories may be narrated through a character’s *Point of view*. |
| ES1     | Students recognise that different voices are represented in texts. |

Table 1 textual concept progressions - *Point of view*
by the Australian Curriculum content, which is included in the NSW English syllabus. For example, in Stage 3 (ACELT1609) present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage, and reflecting on the viewpoints of others. Clearly, this point of view is actually opinion. The revised definition in the textual concepts resource clears up this confusion in syllabus content and provides a good rationale for explicitly teaching this important device.

Naturally, this definition is not designed for students but the development of this knowledge about Point of view has been charted through the stages as well as what students should know about it and learn to do in their own composing (see Table 1). The content points and outcomes that have produced these progressions are also available in the resource.

Programming and conversations about texts
The progressions provide and stipulate a very detailed and deep experience of these textual concepts that build in sophistication and logic from ES1 to Stage 5 and beyond. Syllabus content has been carefully analysed to arrive at these progressions, which are a very good basis for programming and the selection of texts. English learning and teaching programs need these progressions to focus the learning on the transferrable understandings of the subject which help students move from one unit of learning to another. After all, not only is Point of view a device used in fiction but its potential to persuade is put to good effect in a range of nonfiction texts such as advertisements and documentaries. Likewise character and narrative conceptual knowledge travels very well through units of learning that use novels, films, fiction and nonfiction, cultural heritage and issue based units of learning.

Adapting existing units of learning
The English textual concepts resource is also a very useful tool to examine and adapt existing units of learning. Units can be transformed easily by changing the focus to ensure that textual concepts are being explicitly taught through the full range of processes. A check of the textual concepts being programmed over a stage will also ensure that the depth and breadth of the syllabus is being addressed.

Conversations about texts can be deepened and enriched by drawing questions about the text from the concept progression for a students’ Stage. It is important that students experience a broad range of texts in different modes and media to encourage them to apply their knowledge of the concept to its different manifestations. Students will make these connections if they experience a steady flow of quality texts and learn to look at them through a conceptual lens.

Choosing texts for study
This change of focus for the design of learning and teaching has implications for the way in which texts are chosen for study. Texts must work to teach the textual concepts if students are to deeply understand, use and transfer conceptual knowledge. They cannot be chosen simply because their content aligns to a topic, theme or text type that a unit of learning may be chosen around. Certainly, an idea or theme may frame a unit of learning but that idea or theme is not the transferrable enduring understanding students need to retain for later application to a range of texts. Texts are the vehicles through which the essential, transferrable learning of the subject is taught and must be chosen because they are good examples of the concept in use or illustrate the concept in a variety of modes. These selection criteria remain valid for all pedagogical approaches, including project-based learning where English outcomes are addressed, because understanding textual concepts is central to English outcomes.

Choosing texts is never easy but using a conceptual lens to choose texts has the power to invigorate the use of the old standbys and gives real purpose to the search for engaging texts for the classroom. The conceptual lens approach craves quality literature because it needs texts that are well crafted, artistic, multi-layered and diverse to achieve the depth of learning that students deserve and are capable of. Thin texts with shallow characterisation and simple language may serve other purposes but offer little to the conceptual approach. Students need rich texts that challenge and broaden their thinking even in the very early years. They need to discover the ways texts are created so that they can experiment with the textual concepts in their own composing.

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What makes texts distinctive and valued over time can be revealed through a conceptual lens. A Shakespearean play or poem can be viewed through the lens of Literary value, Code and convention,
Unpacking a learning process: **Experimenting**

**What is Experimenting?**

Experimenting is the process of applying knowledge and skills creatively and critically in order to develop deep understanding. Students manipulate language, form, mode and medium to express ideas, values and opinions in innovative and meaningful ways.

Students need to experiment imaginatively with language in playful ways. Through the exploration of language and ideas they develop an appreciation for aesthetic qualities of texts and understand the power of language to transform and re-interpret experiences. Experimenting enables students to stimulate and express their imagination and natural curiosity to make connections in their world (NSW DoE, 2015).
The original aim of this project was to increase teacher’s professional knowledge of subject English by providing a guide to textual concepts embedded in the outcomes and content of the NSW English syllabus for the Australian Curriculum K–10. The end product presents an alternate view of the syllabus and is, in one teacher’s opinion, one of the more useful documents I’ve come across in my career thus far...

The English textual concepts (intranet) document is currently available free for all teachers in NSW government schools and members of the English Teachers’ Association of NSW as a PDF download. In 2016, teachers’ experiences with using English textual concepts is being observed and recorded and professional learning events and online learning will be available to support its use.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Progression of learning process—Experimenting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Students compose critical and imaginative responses to texts. They adopt, combine and adapt conventions of genre and style to experiment with ideas and come to deeper understandings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Students use, adapt or subvert particular textual conventions across modes and media to experiment with a range of meanings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Students experiment with text structures and language features to adapt texts and ideas for different purposes and in a range of modes and media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Students identify aspects of texts that engage an audience and use them to experiment with their own compositions using a range of devices in different modes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Students create and recreate texts imaginatively in a range of modes and media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ES1</td>
<td>Students use their imagination to represent aspects of their experience, experimenting with different modes and media.</td>
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Table 2 English learning processes Stage progressions: Experimenting

References and further reading


NSW Department of Education 2015, *English textual concepts* [intranet only], accessed 2 February 2016.