Editorial

In 2016 the Australian Child Wellbeing Project released their final report which investigated the wellbeing of young people in their middle years. The findings of the research suggested four key messages. Firstly, that the middle years are important and, to this end, policy needs to consider more than just the academic achievement of young people. Secondly, low wellbeing is a concomitant aspect of marginalization. Young people who are marginalized have reduced engagement with school. Thirdly, policies affecting young people should be informed by the voices of young people as they are the experts in their lives. Finally, any policies purporting to improve young people’s wellbeing should be accompanied by rigorous evaluation, not only in terms of academic outcomes but also in terms of other forms of achievement. I would recommend the full report (http://australianchildwellbeing.com.au/sites/default/files/uploads/ACWP_Final_Report_2016_Full.pdf) to anyone who has an interest in the middle years. For those working in the education sector, I am sure that the messages from the report concur with your own views. The diversity of issues that surround working with students in the middle years is captured by the range of articles presented in this final edition. The two refereed articles cover areas ranging from a writing project aiming to develop a more inclusive approach for EALD students and improving the literacy outcomes of all students to the influences on middle years students in terms of their subject decision-making. Similarly the articles in the non-refereed section consider third culture kids i.e. students who are attend an international school, and a project aimed at developing the research skills of students. These articles typify the breadth of considerations that confront school personnel and policy makers. Finally, the article by Andrew Lines is very compelling reading for anyone associated with students in the middle years. Andrew shares a personal account of the transition of his own son to adulthood and, in so doing, asks some very salutary questions about how society in general prepares young people for this transition.

Adolescent Success plays a significant role as an advocate for students in the middle years by providing a means of sharing research, practice and stories from those who work in this space. The range of presentations at the recent conference in Singapore (APCAS) is testament to the breadth of work that is being undertaken both at a tertiary level and in schools. Next year’s conference, Discover, Design, Drive, in Brisbane (24-26 August) promises to be the biggest yet, and I would encourage you to consider submitting an abstract to present at the conference. For those who love social media, the regular Thursday evening Twitter Chats (#MyEdOz) each Thursday evening have seen middle years educators from around the world come together to discuss a range of different topics. Discussions have broached issues such as student leadership, reporting, assessment practices and transition. The passion of the participants is noteworthy and participation, from my perspective, has provided wonderful professional development. A further new initiative this year has been the development of podcasts which enable you to hear from renowned educators discussing a different issues. The Presidents Report will provide more detail about the many initiatives that Adolescent Success has undertaken in order to be an important conduit of information about the middle years. In short, there are many ways that members can engage with Adolescent Success.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling in 2016. The journal could not continue without your support and I look forward to working with you again in 2017. Please accept my sincere best wishes for a safe and relaxing holiday break and all the best for the festive season.

Dr Anne Coffey
Journal Editor
Adolescent Success

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24-26 August 2017, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

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SOUNDCLOUD

HINT
It is with pleasure and gratitude that I reflect upon this first 12 months as President of Adolescent Success. I thank our past president Graeme Evans for his leadership and guidance, providing a platform for us to move our association forward. With the dedicated and tireless work of this committee, we have seen a great deal of growth and development of the association and been able to consolidate our membership, being able to support them with some high quality professional learning and opportunities for members to be involved in activities that lead to strengthening the learning and wellbeing of our middle years students.

Our Gold Coast International Conference – in August 2015 proved successful, with delegates being able to take away some innovative thinking and to build new networking connections. Our executive officer, with the committee’s contribution to the conference success is invaluable.

Since August 2015, a strong focus for Adolescent Success has been to consolidate our financial position, to ensure we are able to provide our members the best services we can and to ensure that we are able to maintain our Executive Officer. Angela has worked tirelessly to maintain the relationship we have with our existing sponsors and to build upon our sponsorship base. As such, we are excited to be partnering with Furnware, Latitude Travel Group, Edvanton and Circil. Additionally, we have a unique partnership with Resilient Youth Australia who work with schools and organisations who foster positive wellbeing in our young adolescents. We thank all of these groups for their ongoing support of our association and look forward to continuing our relationship with them in the coming years.

Our focus on growing our membership continues to shape up to be one of our most powerful professional opportunities. In April this year, in support of our NZ partners and with a focus on learning environments, Angela organised an Adelaide tour. This was invaluable to this group of Principals and assisted in strengthening our partnership with NZAIMS and NZ.

This week, our Leadership Study tour in Brisbane has supported members from around Australia, with principals, deputies, APs, middle leaders from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Singapore visiting five of our member schools. We thank all of these schools and colleges for their support of our Adolescent Success.

We have hosted a number of other professional learning activities throughout this year; in May an event at Griffith University was well attended and our Brisbane based, Breakfast Teach Meets have kicked off this term; the first being organised by our vice president, Mart Atkinson, held in early October and the next occurring mid November at Mount Alvernia College. We will continue these into 2017 with the hope of growing this model as a more personalised opportunity for our members to engage in pertinent educational topics and to grow networks.

Our weekly Twitter chats have been highly successful in connecting middle years educators in Australia and abroad. Many thank our Community connections committee member Adam Sones for his enthusiasm and efforts in maintaining these Thursday night gatherings. We have over 1500 followers and each week, pertinent topics are discussed, drawing people from around the world and assisting us to spread our message and connect with a wider audience.

Again, this year, we hosted our Singapore Conference – APCAS. Whist numbers were a little lower than 2014, almost 100 delegates meant that this again was an extremely successful conference. Our keynote speakers were of high quality and the delegates who presented of exceptional worth. We are grateful that our affiliation with AMLE continues, and value the contributions that their Director of Middle Level Services, Dr Dru Tomlin, has made to attend this conference. Our Executive Officer coordinated this conference and with the assistance of some of our Management Committee, was able to ensure that all aspects were brilliantly managed for a successful event.

It is important to Adolescent Success to strengthen our connections globally, and as we move forward, consideration around possible venues for future international conferences will be a focus for us.

We continue our partnership with NZIAM, which began personally for President Graeme Evans for his enthusiasm and efforts in maintaining these Thursday night gatherings. We have over 1500 followers and each week, pertinent topics are discussed, drawing people from around the world and assisting us to spread our message and connect with a wider audience.

Anne Coffey has joined the committee as Journal Editor. This journal continues to draw from a wide base of our membership, in particular our universities. This is a respected publication and one that is valued by all concerned with young adolescents.

Having redeveloped our strategic plan for the next three years, we have identified some key priorities. This will be forwarded to our membership once signed off.

Our 2017 conference, which is our major event, moves from the Gold Coast to Brisbane next year and is shaping up to be one of our most innovative and engaging international conferences. We have secured our keynotes, from overseas, nationally and locally, and are looking forward to involving students as part of this event and a call for abstracts will go out to members in the near future.

Our continued focus on consolidation of our financial position has meant that our Executive Officer will be coordinising this conference; this will mean a substantial saving for us without the need to employ an event management company.

The website redevelopment will be a priority in the coming months. As it is our first point of call, it is our intent to redesign this space to ensure those who visit are able to access the information they need, with ease. We have discussed a number of approaches to this redevelopment and are obtaining quotes for its redesign during the last part of 2016.

Our focus on growing our membership and strengthening our financial position will continue as we move into 2017. A clear budget has enabled us to manage our programs and processes during the past year and our position continues to strengthen.

I look forward to working with this vibrant committee into 2017 to continue to provide for our members quality professional learning, strong networks and valuable resources.

Debra Evans
President
Adolescent Success
October 2016
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Supporting EAL/D students through The Writing Project

Nina Maadad
Beverly White

Abstract

A Catholic College in South Australia undertook a writing project to develop a more inclusive approach for (EALD) students and improve the literacy capability of all students. The Writing Project was designed upon the request of the School Principal, with the aim to build the capacity of the teaching staff so they could meet the needs of the rapidly changing student demographic including an increase in EAL/D enrolments. Over the period of three years, the school staff engaged in a range of professional learning opportunities, which were delivered by the visiting EAL/D Consultant and the Director of Student Learning. The data collected confirmed that the majority of staff experienced the value of the project and the range of professional learning opportunities led to sustainable transformations in teaching practices. The data collected from a sample of EAL/D students confirmed that The Writing Project has had a positive outcome on the EAL/D students’ language proficiency as they engage with subjects across the curriculum. The Writing Project at the Catholic College can be used as model of best practice in capacity building for other school sites aiming to develop sustainable improvements in language and literacy education for all.

Keywords: EAL/D students, writing, middle school, teacher professional development
Introduction

English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) in the Australian curriculum has been developed for migrant and refugee students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSIE) students who speak languages and dialects other than English. The EAL/D program aims to provide additional support to students who require assistance in developing proficiency in Standard Australian English or SAE (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority or ACARA, 2014). EAL/D students may come from diverse educational backgrounds and circumstances. ACARA (2014, p. 7) has identified some students who may have ‘schooling equivalent to their same-age peers in Australia’. It may be that students have ‘limited or no previous education. Likewise, some students may have little or no literacy experience in their first language (or in any language), or they may have excellent literacy skills in their first language (or another language).’ It could also be that students had ‘learnt English as a foreign language and had some exposure to written English but need to develop oral English’. In addition, students who already ‘learnt one or more languages or dialects in their home land and students with good academic language skills but struggle with the social registers of English may also be classified as EAL/D students’. There are also instances when EAL/D students ‘may live in remote, rural or metropolitan Australia, may live in advantaged or disadvantaged socioeconomic situations, or may have experienced severe emotional or physical trauma that will affect their learning’.

The teacher resource prepared by ACARA (2014, p. 7) stated:

EAL/D students are generally placed in Australian schools at the year level appropriate for their age. Their cognitive development and life experiences may not correlate with their English language proficiency. As part of the process to personalise learning for EAL/D students the student and parent must be consulted.

The EAL/D program has been developed for teachers who are not EAL/D specialists. Moreover, the program designed a learning progression that describes and measures the English language learning of EAL/D students (ACARA, 2011). The learning progression (ACARA, 2011, p. 8) allows the teacher:

- to understand the broad phases of English language learning that EAL/D students are likely to experience; to identify where their EAL/D students are located on the progression and the nature of their speaking, listening, reading/viewing and writing skills; and monitor the linguistic progression of their EAL/D students.

EAL/D learning progression

There are four language learning phases that broadly describe the English language learning of students. The students’ English language learning pathway may be described for each of the three stages of schooling (Foundation to Year 2, Years 3 to 6 and Years 7 to 10) according to the learning progression given below and the language modes of listening, speaking, reading/viewing and writing (ACARA 2011, p. 8-9):

Beginning English — students with some print literacy in their first language. A subcategory, Limited Literacy Background, is included to describe the reading/viewing and writing behaviours typical of students with little or no experience of literacy in any language

Emerging English — students who have a growing degree of print literacy and oral language competency with English

Developing English — students who are further developing their knowledge of print literacy and oral language competency with English

Consolidating English — students who have a sound knowledge of spoken and written English, including a growing competency with academic language

Most of these EAL/D children have experienced disrupted or severely interrupted schooling that contributed to their low literacy levels even in their own mother tongues. In addition, there are a total of more than 200,000 Indigenous students in Australia and many of whom speak English as an additional dialect, creole, and Aboriginal English (ABS, 2016; Dobinson & Buchori, 2016; SNOFF, 2013). Given the large population of EAL/D students to date, teachers are faced with challenges to meet the specific literacy needs of English language learners, particularly in writing.

Research in middle school EAL/D students included the following:

- focus of investigation: the need for scaffolded learning to develop writing skills through explicit focus on writing needs of students across the curriculum
- to improve SACE results for all senior students
- to support the language and literacy development for the increasing number of EAL/D students, enabling equitable access to the curriculum
- to build teacher capacity and expertise

Project Design

The duration of The Writing Project was three years of Professional Learning in order to build staff knowledge and capacity that would sustain pedagogical changes. The task for the staff to do was to develop one unit of work requiring an extended written assessment task for every subject in each semester. These units included an annotated model text, scaffolded language activities and an assessment rubric, making clear the performance criteria for each standard. The units of work were to be curriculum for all students across the curriculum.
Table 1 Staff involvement in The Writing Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Personnel Involved</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Whole staff</td>
<td>End of year, full day of professional learning: Introduction of the project, including Green Theory, outline of Teaching and Learning Cycle and genre mapping what already exists in Years 7, 8, and 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4 sessions of 1.5-hour workshops addressing Social purpose &amp; schematic structure of texts, Topic specific language, Interpersonal language and Conclusion of written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers and leaders</td>
<td>35 staff attended 10 sessions of 3-hour modules on How language works: Success in literacy and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5 Coaches</td>
<td>5 staff assigned to coaching roles attend 2 full day workshops on the Principles of explicit coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>With coaches’ support, teachers began to develop written assessment tasks and trial new learning in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole staff</td>
<td>End of year, full day review of project and genre map plus sharing of work thus far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4 sessions for 1.5-hour after-school pedagogy workshops addressing Teaching factual explanation, Teaching argument, Teaching interpretive response, Designing an assessment rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>New Teachers</td>
<td>Full-day induction to The Writing Project at Nazareth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LACs</td>
<td>1/2 day workshop, The Role of LACs in The Writing Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LACs</td>
<td>Scheduled meetings include mapping genres backwards from Year 12 to inform teaching and learning in the middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole staff</td>
<td>Full-day workshop on the Assessment of written work using the ESL scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaches, LACs and Teachers</td>
<td>Ongoing release time for collaboration between coaches and LACs, and LACs and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>New Teachers</td>
<td>Full-day induction to The Writing Project at Nazareth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESL/Literacy teachers</td>
<td>Assessing student writing using the Language and literacy levels of EAL/D students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaches, LACs and Teachers</td>
<td>Ongoing release time for collaboration between coaches and LACs, and LACs and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Teachers</td>
<td>Full-day induction to The Writing Project at Nazareth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the strength of the learning design was the spread of responsibility across the LACs and the Director of Student Learning, with the EAL/D Consultant in a supporting role. Combined with the range of support modes, from workshops to individual coaching support, the project design enabled significant new learning for teachers.

Discussion

Data was collected at different points during the implementation of The Writing Project, both formally and informally. A key aspect of The Writing Project was the flexibility, which enabled leaders to respond to teacher feedback regarding the direction and nature of the professional learning.

The first formal data was collected at the end of 2011 to ascertain the effectiveness of the professional learning delivered by the EAL/D Consultant. At the end of year staff day, teachers were asked to evaluate The Writing Project against the intended long term outcomes and also to respond to the support processes put in place for them. While over 30 teachers completed the surveys, a number have left out some responses.

It is clear in Figure 2 that majority of teachers found the process of producing a unit of work with a model text and explicit language teaching, as challenging to some degree. Reasons for this ranged from logistical issues such as lack of time, to deeper concerns such as lack of confidence in literacy and language based activities and a conceptually different approach to teaching and learning. Teachers expressed a lack of knowledge, skills and experience in teaching students how to write.

Figure 1 shows 97% broad agreement among the teacher-participants about The Writing Project being worthwhile, with about half of the teachers strongly agreeing. The teacher comments demonstrated a clear understanding of the long term impact on student achievement in the Senior Secondary, and general progressive improvement in written tasks overall. One teacher commented that students’ writing samples before and after the project showed a shift in quality and found this to be incredible. Some teachers also made a link to an improvement in assessment practices.

Interpretation of Figure 3 provides insight into the range of learning needs amongst the staff. While the majority agreed that workshops and resources were helpful, there was clearly some ambivalence in relation to this statement. There was a much broader range of comments, from some feeling the workshops helped incredibly, to a few commenting that the workshops were dry and uninspiring. More generally, participants felt that workshops provided a good start but realise that they will need further professional learning around this area.

Discussion

Teachers felt that their confidence and willingness to ‘have a go’ improved with somebody knowledgeable to guide the process. Again, time was an issue; as such, more time and smaller goals were mentioned as an improvement.

The shorter term outcomes of The Writing Project can be examined in light of the teacher feedback. The intended outcome of 2010/2011 Professional Learning included:

1. Teachers will learn how to explicitly teach the genres of their learning areas.
2. Teachers will design a teaching sequence and a booklet for other teachers in their learning area for one genre (or more).
3. Teachers will work in pairs, with a coach, to design learning and create booklets. Their work will involve collaborative planning, team teaching and mentoring.
4. Teachers will share their booklets with other staff at the end of phase 1.

It became clear that the process of learning how to teach the genres of their learning areas would be ongoing. As teachers expressed in their feedback, many did not...
have the confidence, skills and knowledge at that stage and would require ongoing learning and support. While some teachers completed their units of work to a very high standard, others needed to continue working on developing units during the following year.

It also became apparent that the selection and pairing of teachers by Learning Area Coordinators (LACs) clearly needed much more thought as new teachers who had not been involved in any professional learning workshops were expected to produce the units of work. It is clear from the challenge that even experienced teachers faced, that this was an unreasonable and unrealistic expectation.

Some of the genre booklets were shared at the end of 2011 with two teachers speaking to the whole staff of their learning journey. This was very positive as the teachers were appreciated by their peers and the booklets provided clear evidence of the new learning being applied to subjects which would not include an explicit approach to the language and literacy development of students.

**Implications in 2012**

Evidence from the teacher feedback provided direction for the manner in which the EAL/D Writing Project was implemented in 2012. The Catholic College staff members were continuing to fine-tune the genre mapping, working backwards from the genres used to express learning in the SACE curriculum. The LACs led this work and were expected to play a larger role in supporting their teachers to develop the genre units, to be delivered each semester in each learning area. The coaching process was appreciated but again, needed to be fine-tuned.

It required more regular meetings for the coaching team to discuss their modes of communication and debrief from teacher meetings. In 2012, coaches would be working with Learning Area Coordinators who in turn would support their teachers. Consideration was given to the matching of coaches and LACs to ensure positive working relationships. Coaches were also prepared to catch up with trainees informally, outside of the allotted relief times. It became clear from teacher feedback that the workshops for 2012 needed to be more specifically targeted to assist teachers in developing their units of work. While the language workshops provided a solid general base, the work was now directed at specific teacher needs so the information provided enabled teachers to develop their model texts, assessment criteria and lesson plans.

Generally speaking, the response of teachers to the work on developing writing was overwhelmingly positive. This seemed at odds with some of the more anecdotal evidence observed through interactions with staff members over the course of the year. It was clear from this data that the work required from teachers placed them well out of their comfort zone, which may have produced some avoidance behaviours as well as some verbal resistance. Nonetheless, teachers engaged and were willing to continue the work. Fine-tuning the process in light of this data led to easier progress for the teachers involved.

**2012 outcome**

The purpose of the data collection at the end of 2012 was to gauge the teachers’ perceptions of their growth and what aspects of the learning program best supported their development. In order to distil the teachers’ key messages about growth and sustainable practices, a mixed method approach was used to gather data. Teachers were invited to participate in an online survey with several question types. Some questions gathered information about the participants and their work in order to ascertain the breadth of impact of *The Writing Project*. Rank-order questions were also included, where participants either agreed or disagreed to a statement. These were followed by the open-ended question: *Why do you think so?* This allowed teachers to express their beliefs about the statement in more detail. Thus, the data is both quantitative and qualitative. The data was analysed and the open-ended responses coded and clustered into similar response sets.

The results were organised into five areas. The first set of questions intended to establish the characteristics of the participants in terms of the roles and the learning areas in which the participants worked. The second group of questions explored the engagement in professional learning opportunities during the first two years of *The Writing Project*. The third set of questions explored the impact of *The Writing Project* on teacher practice. The fourth and fifth sets of survey questions explored the value of *The Writing Project* to teachers and aspects of the project that had been most supportive of teacher learning. A total of 33 teachers out of 73 staff members participated in the survey. All teachers answered all of the survey questions.

**The participants**

Seven (21%) of the 33 teachers who completed the survey were LACs. The other 26 participants (79%) were teachers from various learning areas. Almost half of the teachers (45.5%) have been teaching for over 15 years while a third of them (30.3%) have been teaching five years or less. Fifteen percent have been teaching for 6-10 years, while 9% have 11-15 years of experience.

The teachers also represented a broad range of academic subjects, collectively teaching 24 subjects in the past year. With this span of teaching experience, the common elements within this group are their shared beliefs and the desire for positive outcomes.

Thirty percent of teachers taught Mathematics, Science, and English. Around 20% taught Languages and Physical Education, while nearly 10% taught Religion, Literacy, History, Research Project, Food and Technology, and Personal Learning Plan. Only 3% of participants had no teaching duties in 2012. This data, as shown in Figure 5, demonstrates the potential for *The Writing Project* to cover a broad range of discourses.
Change in teacher practice

Figure 8 shows that writing genres have been explicitly taught in 17 subjects out of the 24 subjects represented in the survey. Twenty-four percent of the genre writing has been taught in English, Mathematics, and Science. Around 20% has been taught in Physical Education and 15% in Languages.

In 2012, in which subjects have you taught genre?

There are also other subjects in which genre was taught as shown on Figure 8. Once again, this demonstrates the breadth of The Writing Project and the exposure students had in regard to explicit teaching of writing in 2012.

Considering the types of writing genre, persuasive writing through arguments was taught most often (42.4%) across the learning areas. This was followed by information report, practical report, investigation, explanation, and interpretive response (27.3%). Around 20% of teachers taught personal response, discussion, and procedural writing. Other genres have also been taught as shown in Figure 9. This demonstrates the broad range of purposes for writing, and again, the level of exposure students had of explicit teaching of writing.

Which genres have you taught in these subjects?

Professional Learning

The following graphs represent participation in 2011 and 2012 workshops.

2011 Language Workshops

Figure 6 shows the attendance rate of the surveyed participants at the 2011 workshops. Considering over 40% of participants attended How Language Works, and the remainder attended the mini courses, the overall rate of attendance for professional learning was very high. Feedback collected from the workshops revealed that all of the teachers felt their knowledge about language had increased. However, the majority indicated that they were not confident enough to change the way they were teaching in the classroom.

In 2012, the focus was to support teachers to use their knowledge of language. Three of the workshops were modelling the pedagogies used within a teaching and learning cycle to scaffold text production within a specific context. One workshop focused on literacy rubrics to encourage a consistent approach to assessing writing while another full day session for the whole school had participants placing student written work on a continuum of language development and considering teaching points that would assist students to progress.

2012 Pedagogy Workshops

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Professional Learning

The following graphs represent participation in 2011 and 2012 workshops.
Language features in Figure 10, also shown previously in Figure 6, formed part of the teaching of writing genres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language features</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive language</td>
<td>56.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person perspective</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interjections</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative language</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal to external</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>37.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun groups</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clauses</td>
<td>20.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs topics</td>
<td>48.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional complements</td>
<td>54.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun modifiers</td>
<td>18.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence connectors</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text connectors</td>
<td>58.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic sentences</td>
<td>88.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perception of the value and impact of The Writing Project**

The value and impact of *The Writing Project* was measured through the broad agreement of participants in regard to statements pertaining to the importance of writing, the usefulness of *The Writing Project* to attain long-term outcomes, and improvement of student writing.

Figures 11–16 present the results for the perceived value and impact of *The Writing Project*. There was unanimous positive agreement among the participants, who strongly agreed (80%) and agreed (20%), to its importance. Moreover, teachers’ beliefs about writing were an essential factor in engaging them in a long-term project requiring considerable time and commitment and in some cases a sharp learning curve.

**Why do you think so?**

There was a strong positive response to the ability of *The Writing Project* to address long-term outcomes with 97% of the teachers agreeing that *The Writing Project* has been worthwhile. Only one participant (3%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

**The Writing Project has been worthwhile in working towards the long-term outcomes**

This positive response to *The Writing Project* demonstrates that teachers could share the vision of an inclusive pedagogy and improved literacy standards for all students. Participants gave various reasons regarding the impact on long-term outcomes. Teachers (50%) referred to the improvement in their ability to teach writing. The noticeable improvement in students’ writing was also found to be significant by participants (24%), as well as the longer term learning outcomes for students (24%).

**Writing is important**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.20%</td>
<td>78.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of teachers valued writing because it is a necessity for life beyond school. For them, writing is expressed through communication (50%) and is a lifelong skill (24%). Regarding success at school, nearly 10% of teachers saw writing as a mode for demonstrating evidence of learning while another 6% emphasised writing as a school requirement. These responses show that the teachers’ beliefs about the importance of writing were underpinned by their views that writing was a valued skill in much broader contexts than school.
Combined, these responses that linked learning outcomes with the improvement in student writing revealed that more than half of the teachers saw the benefit of The Writing Project, finding the added workload and high expectations worthwhile.

When asked specifically if teachers have observed an improvement in student writing from the past year, an overwhelming majority of teachers either agreed (64%) or strongly agreed (21%). From the teachers’ perspective, The Writing Project was successful since it delivered positive change in student writing.

**Teacher perceptions on aspects of The Writing Project which most supported their learning**

Responses to the question on teachers’ perceptions of the usefulness of aspects of The Writing Project demonstrate that all professional learning opportunities were valued to some extent by teachers. However, opportunities to collaborate with and between LACs, teachers (33.3%), and coaches (36.4%) were found most useful (see Figure 16). Some comments from participants include:

- Working with others provides the most amounts of help due to the collaboration process and being able to ‘bounce off’ one another (Teacher 1).
- Collaborating with teachers and coaches about how to teach the learning and teaching (Teacher 2).
- It [collaborating with a coach] was more one on one and you were given resources. Sometimes in the big groups you get lost and it can be confusing (Teacher 3).

However, it was the combination of workshops aimed to develop teacher knowledge and then, the follow up and support which had the most impact. The teachers illustrate this:

- I have been able to learn particular linguistics that I have not known before. Working alongside someone to develop tasks and activities has been very useful (Teacher 4).
- Much of the subject matter has been so foreign to me; it is really like learning a new subject but with some background knowledge. Working with [coaches] this year has not been intimidating, as I really have felt a bit out of my depth with the skills and terminology, but they have allowed me to work at a reasonable pace to nut things out (Teacher 5).

Teachers believed that The Writing Project should continue by sustaining and developing units of work (30%) as shown in Figure 17. Many teachers felt, however, that more time needs to be given to collaborative planning and creation of new units of work (27%). Some teachers felt that the mapping of genres needs to be fine-tuned to avoid repetition and to ensure appropriate preparation for the SACE (15%). Other teachers felt the need for ongoing professional learning targeted to specific learning areas and genres (12%). Some believed that more work should be done in primary schools to prepare students for the literacy demands of secondary school (6%), while others felt that The Writing Project should be reviewed regularly (6%).
**How can the work of the Writing Project be sustained into the future?**

- Constant review: 6.10%
- Start in Primary school: 6.10%
- Workshops for learning areas: 12.36%
- Fine-tune mapping towards SACE: 15.20%
- Involve new teachers: 3%
- Sustain and build on units of work: 30.40%
- More time to plan, collaborate and create resources: 27.20%
- Unsure: 6.10%

*Fig 17 How to sustain the work of The Writing Project into the future*

**Student outcomes**

A sample of student data was analysed in June of 2014 to gain some insight into the impact of The Writing Project on student ability to write for their learning areas. The sample comprised 26 Year 10 EAL/D students who enrolled into Year 8 in 2012. The language levels were attained through the analysis two work samples from English and Science and compared to the language level from the students in Term 1 of 2012, which also were assessed using two learning area texts.

*The Language and Literacy Levels EAL/D Students was the tool used to measure student progress. This tool is scaled from Level 1 which is minimal English language to Level 14 which equates to the academic standard of written English that is required of students at the end of Year 10 to successfully complete the SACE at a high standard. On average, the EAL/D students achieved 1 scale per year level.*

The Catholic Education South Australia English as an additional language (CESA EAL) Program organises students into three broad support categories to assist with allocations of support. The pink category represents students (n=8; Year 8) with very high needs and often complex backgrounds. The green category represents students (n=16; Year 8) who require explicit English language teaching in mainstream classrooms. The blue category represents students (n=2; Year 8) who can generally participate well in mainstream classrooms when their teachers are aware of possible language and/or cultural needs and make adjustments when necessary.

Table 2 shows the progression of Students a – z across from Year 8 to 10. Student k is the only remaining student with very high needs. This student began Year 8 at Level 4, which is the expected level of language development of a child by the end of Reception.

Figure 18 graphically shows that student progress far exceeded the average over this period with improvement ranging between 2 and 6 levels. Three students have reached the standard of writing required by the end of Year 10 (Level 14) to fully engage with the curriculum. Fourteen out of the 26 students are at Level 10 or above indicating that they no longer require specialist EAL/D support.

*Fig 18 Students language development over 2 years*

**Table 2 Student progression across language levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Year 8 Language Level</th>
<th>Year 10 Language Level</th>
<th>Gain score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparison between Year 8 and Year 10**

*Fig 18 Extent of improvement in language levels*
Conclusion
The Writing Project at the Catholic College in South Australia can now be called a Writing Program. The key outcomes for this project have been a gradual cultural shift in the approach taken to literacy in the mainstream as teachers have become empowered to be more explicit about the literacy demands of each learning area. As teachers, through the leadership of their coordinators, have identified the specific language features that comprise the discourses of each subject, they have been able to make these demands more explicit to their students, particularly EAL/D students. By supporting students to become more formal and academic in their writing, teachers have enabled responsiveness to feedback regarding the direction and pace of the work.

Opportunities for collaboration on multiple levels, honouring the belief that learning is social

The Writing Project at the Catholic College can be used as model of capacity building for other sites who wish to develop sustainable improvement in language and literacy education for all.

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Making subject choices: Influences on adolescents’ decision making

Abstract

Middle Years students are required to make critical educational decisions with respect to subject choices. These decisions occur in adolescence – a period of intense identity formation, strong emotions, living in the moment and peer affiliation - characteristics which may affect decision making. Subject choices either broaden or narrow future pathways, so what influences adolescent student decision-making? A case study research investigation at one middle school involved teachers, students and their parents/caregivers through the use of questionnaires, interviews and document analysis to reveal various influences. Significant others (family, friends, older students and subject teachers), website sources and course information booklets were among the most frequently cited influences, although there were gender, ethnic and year-level variations. Structural issues related to school resourcing and timetabling affected some students’ choices. Of concern was inadequate awareness of: subject structure and function during adolescence (Steinberg, 2010). The focus is primarily on future learning and employment pathways. (Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade & Morris, 2006; Jensen, Madjar & McKinley, 2010). Little is known about the experiences and views of New Zealand adolescents in making subject choices. What factors directly or indirectly influence their choices? What information do they access? To whom do they turn for advice or guidance? How do they make decisions? This paper addresses these questions, based on a case study research design in a New Zealand middle school.

Overview of international literature

Adolescent brain changes

Medical research has revealed significant brain changes in structure and function during adolescence (Steinberg, 2013). The brain is essentially restructured and re-wired. Particular sections of the brain develop at different rates such as the limbic region, the centre for emotions, which develops first and the impulse control/judgment section (prefrontal lobe) which develops last. Considerable pruning of lesser used neuron pathways takes place along with myelination. Building of inter-regional connectivity across different sections of the brain occurs throughout adolescence, with the most important connections to the prefrontal lobe (the headquarters for executive function – judgment formation), occurring last (Steinberg, 2010). Awareness of brain development has implications for educators with respect to reasonable expectations for adolescent learning, behaviour and decision making.

As a consequence of brain development, adolescents experience major improvements in basic cognitive abilities (information processing) and logical reasoning. Indeed Steinberg (2013, p. 256) maintains “adolescents aged 15 and older are just as mature as adults when emotional arousal is minimized and when they are not under the influence of peers.” Learning programmes need to appropriately challenge students to enhance these cognitive capacities. Kwak, Payne, Cohen and Huettel (2015), suggest, depending on the characteristics of a problem, adolescents can be even more rational than adults. However Kwak et al., (2015), like Steinberg (2013), concede that in pressured situations of time urgency, emotional arousal, presence of peers and perceptions of potential pleasure or reward, adolescents are more likely to take greater risks and make ‘less rational/sensible’ choices. Students who are 14 years or younger are less likely to be competent in making decisions that require consideration of potential short and long-term consequences, because their brains are still maturing in relation to self-regulation (Steinberg, 2013). So what might be the implications for adolescent educational decision-making?

Decision making

Making decisions is a complex process. Competent decision making is primarily about how the decisions are made, not the implications of those decisions (Halpern-Felsher, 2009). The focus is primarily on the information processing and cognitive dimensions. Normative models of decision making entail five processes: identifying possible decision options; possible consequences of each option, including risks and benefits; evaluating the desirability of each consequence; assessing the likelihood of the occurrence of particular consequences; and synthesising the information to decide on a best option (Halpern-Felsher, 2009). Inherent in effective decision making is access to appropriate and accurate information – more likely from active seeking, rather than passive receiving of information. But active seeking requires necessary skills to know where and how to locate information, confidence to ask thoughtful questions and to think critically or laterally. Furthermore, generating possible risks and benefits implies some life experience in the matter, imagination or consideration of the experiences of others. Adolescents’ propensity for invulnerability to harm means risk evaluation is a challenging component of rational decision making (Steinberg, 2013). Although normative models are useful for rational and deliberate decisions, they simplify the reality of contextual, social and emotional circumstances in which most adolescents make decisions (Halpern-Felsher, 2009).

Dual-process models take into account real-life situations, such as the tendency for adolescents to make decisions based on heuristics and biases rather than on a systematic evaluation of options.
to make impulsive rather than planned decisions. Adolescents tend to down-play risks because they believe they are less likely to experience harm compared with others. Moreover in the presence of peers, adolescents have heightened sensitivity to perceived potential benefits (Halpern-Felsher, 2009) and social enhancement by engaging in particular actions. This phenomenon is highest in mid-adolescence when benefits of risk-taking are perceived to outweigh costs (Steinberg, 2010). Taking account of cognitive, psychosocial and experiential factors in the process and the implications of decision making is important in real life. Responsible decision-making includes generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed alternatives to problems as well as ‘assuming responsibility for personal decisions and taking action’ (Aasland & McDermott, Carvalho, Joseph & Jones, 2016, p. 34). The latter is not a consistent characteristic of adolescents.

Facts influencing an adolescent’s decision-making processes

Vakkal and Wibklad (2009, p. 326) maintain that: “...teenagers deserve respect for their immature decision making competence. To compensate for their deficiencies they also deserve constructive support from their social network.”

Key support people are deemed to be their parents or caregivers; irrationally, at a developmental period when adolescents are seemingly more influenced by the views of their peers than parents. However, even when parents are not directly involved in adolescent decision-making, they are present in adolescents’ world-views, thought processes, imagined and actual dialogue about the decision (Bell, Baron, Corn, Kostina-Ritchie & Frederick, 2014). Adolescents have internal messages and values they have absorbed from their childhood, which influence their decision making processes. Their views are mediated by influences from peers, other adults, societal messages and media (Bell et al., 2014). Nevertheless, support from family is important because adolescents lack experience that adults have in considering consequences of decisions.

The right balance of parental involvement is somewhat complex and varies according to adolescent personality, drive, and parenting style. Sowet and Metz (2014) found parenting styles affect the level of difficulty and satisfaction adolescents experience in making subject and career choices. Authoritative parenting is generally the more effective approach, with parents listening and responding to the adolescent, offering suggestions and guidelines, but supporting the adolescent to make their own decision. However, cultural mores and beliefs mean families with a collective cultural orientation are more likely to have greater input into the decision. In collective cultures consideration is also given to the impact of the decision on potential outcomes for family members, rather than just the individual adolescent (Halpern-Felsher, 2009).

Gender and age differences also influence adolescent decisions. While the process of making decisions is similar for males and females, male adolescents tend to perceive more positive outcomes while females tend to be more risk-averse (Halpern-Felsher, 2009). Adolescent decision making is impaired by the presence of peers, their beliefs that peers are engaging in particular behaviours or decisions, perceived or real pressure from others, the desire to be accepted and feel a sense of affiliation or belonging with peers, as well as inexperience in anticipating effects of decisions (Halpern-Felsher, 2009; Kwak et al., 2013; Steinberg, 2013; Zaff et al., 2016).

Adolescents benefit from support and guidance in the decision making process. Kwak et al., (2013) advocate appealing to adolescents’ rationality by helping them generate the gamut of positive and negative outcomes in real-life, complex decisions. Optimising opportunities for positive engagement (e.g. taking part in decision making such as helping adolescents to resolve barriers, minimise emotionally charged situations, relaxed timeframes and with support from their wider social network, including families and, when appropriate, educators or other pertinent professionals (Steinberg, 2013; Vakkal & Wibklad, 2009; Zaff et al., 2016).

Curriculum/subjects/secondary school/ pathways

Information about curriculum possibilities is integral to making effective subject choices. New Zealand’s national curriculum, the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) has a vision of “young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.7). The process of learning is as important as the content (learning areas). While the learning areas are presented as distinct, this should not limit the ways in which schools structure the learning experiences offered to students (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 16). Schools therefore have choices about whether to offer integrated or discrete subjects, in response to their community needs. Some proponents argue the value of integrated and rich task curricula for Middle Years students (e.g., Beane, 1995). Yet, resourcing and organisational systems restrict how subject choices are provided (Alloway, Dalley, Patteson, Walker & Lenoy, 2004; Harris & Haydn, 2012; McClone, Norris & Walker, 2005).

Subjects offered, their combination and timing are at the discretion of each school in the self-governing model of New Zealand schools. Larger schools tend to have more subjects on offer, although that may be restricted by greater organisational demands. Availability of qualified staff is another factor that varies across schools. Although the NZC is broad, its operationarisation at school level may have implications for individual student choices; an aspect explored in this research study.

In summary, multiple factors appear to influence decision-making by adolescents: cognitive maturity, gender, emotional levels, perceived and actual peer influence, parent involvement, supportive social networks and the school’s information and structural environment. However, we do not know how students perceive or experience the interplay amongst these multiple factors to navigate the subject decision making process.

Research design

A case study design was chosen because it allowed for in-depth analysis of behaviours in their natural setting and selection of methods that suited the complex environment of a middle school for adolescents. The study was bounded by time (data collected in one school term, just prior to subject selection time), location (one middle school in New Zealand), personnel (students, parents/caregivers and teachers) and topic (subject choice decisions).

Two phases were used, a quantitative survey phase followed by a more in-depth qualitative phase of focus group interviews and document analysis. In the first phase all students and teachers were invited (via the website administrator) to respond to an anonymous, on-line survey exploring their perceptions and experiences of making subject choices. In the second phase 50 students were interviewed, 10 per year (yr) group (10 x Yr 8, 10 x Yr 9, 10 xYr 10 + 30 students). Parents/caregivers of the focus group interviewees were invited to complete a questionnaire, yielding a 70% (≈ 21/30) response rate. Higher percentages of parents of girls (61%) and Year 10 students (44%) responded. In relation to staff, 60% responded, representing all levels of staffing. In the student questionnaire the response rate was 47% but it was representative of all year groups, gender (slight female bias at 50%) and ethnicity. The middle school had a roll of 700 students in Years 8-10 (comprising ages 12-14), situated within a higher socio-economic area of a large city with several choices of senior secondary schools.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS computer software to determine relationships between variables. Comparisons were made across groups using variance and correlation tests. Accepted levels of significance were (p <0.5), informed by widely accepted levels in educational research (Punch, 2009). Chi-square tests were used to show probability of a correlation e.g. attitude to subject and perceived level of ability. Analysis of the student questionnaire data informed the focus group interview questions and the questionnaire to parents. Results across the three data sources were combined and compared for recurrent themes (e.g. across year levels and gender).

Findings

Content analysis revealed several themes associated with student subject decision making: knowledge, perceptions, personal influences, information sources, school structural elements and student decision making processes. These themes form the core narrative of the findings section. As the prime focus of the study was student perceptions, their views take priority in each section of this article.

Knowledge (of interests and ability in a subject)

Student respondents indicated key influences on subject selection were knowledge of: their interests, the need to keep options open and perceived ability in a subject (refer to Table 1). The percentages refer to the proportion of students who selected each factor.
These trends may reinforce the notion of adolescents ‘living in the present’ with a focus on current workload/learning environment and less attention to the future (in contrast to parents who focused on future career pathways as most important in subject selection). Alternatively, it may suggest adolescents are mindful of the importance of teacher and student relationships for effective learning and achievement.

Information sources

Students reported most information they used coming from people (especially subject teachers); secondly course information booklets; thirdly websites, followed by careers teachers and events such as information evenings and Career Expos. However there were some interesting ethnic differences (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Ethnic variation in information sources accorded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Career teachers</th>
<th>Course information booklets</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Careers expo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NZ Europeans</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicities other than Asian students mostly information from subject teachers (albeit small percentages). The results cautiously suggest (from only one school) that information might be targeted slightly differently according to student nationalities. For instance, in this school Asian students tended to rely more heavily on factual information from course information booklets and websites, whereas the other nationalities turned first to people sources. Nevertheless, investment in course information booklets is worthwhile, given the 71% reported use across the three ethnic groupings.

Using information is one thing, but feeling sufficiently informed to make subject decisions is another. Only 30% of student respondents felt they had sufficient information to make choices, and of greater concern, 26% of students reported they had little or no information. Students in higher year groups felt less informed than students in younger year groups. Male students reported higher levels of information (50%) than female students (31%). Female students were accordingly less confident to make decisions and were less likely than their male counterparts to know where to source information.

School structural elements

School structural matters affected student choices. School resourcing meant subjects were allocated in certain subject lines (limiting the number of subjects selected in particular subject lines, or preventing the selection of subjects that clashed in the timetabled), and offerings varied according to staffing availability and student numbers. Where too few students opted for a subject it was deemed uneconomic for the school to offer it, or of too many students opted for a subject some students were denied access to the subject because the classes were full. These situations were exacerbated for transient students who arrived after subject selections were made and could only be slotted into classes with sufficient capacity, rather than the programme that best met their individual needs.

Decision making processes

Students reported using a variety of processes to make subject decisions. Some students were methodical whilst other students’ processes appeared somewhat haphazard, drawing on limited information, passively dependent on information given to them rather than actively seeking relevant information. Some students tried to choose a range of subjects to keep options open for the future, and this trend increased with student year level (refer to Table 2). Younger students had no experience in making subject choices; some were excited by the prospect of making choices, others were overwhelmed and had little idea on what basis to make decisions.

“When with the pressure from their parents, with them wanting them to do one thing and their friends wanting them to do another, and they want to be with their friends but they know they should obey their parents. They don't really know what to do, what to choose.” (Yr9, male student)

Students varied in the degree to which they sought advice from significant others, and whether or not they sought our information beyond the subject choice booklet supplied by the school. Table 4
Students grappled with interpersonal influences. When they were asked who they would go to for advice, parents were rated of most importance (72%), family next (48%), followed by friends (40%) and subject teachers (36%). It seems that people with whom students had some relationship were sought first. The careers’ teacher was little known or accessed – which may have implications for the participating school and other schools. Several researchers advocated the critical role of support and guidance from students’ social network, especially the influence of parents (Halpern-Felsher, 2009; Kvak et al., 2015; Vikland & Wbildahl, 2009). Other researchers felt the wider network needed to be involved including peers, other adults and media (Bell et al., 2014; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). Indeed Madjar et al., (2006, p. 6) warns students who do not have access to “informed adult support, and are allowed to make non-strategic choices early in their school career, are at particular risk of failing to achieve their academic potential, or of failing to gain entry to those qualifications that lead to their preferred careers.” An issue seemed to arise in this research study about sourcing informed people and pertinent information.

The third layer of complexity in student subject decision making was informational and structural. The majority of students felt they had insufficient information on which to make subject choices; exasperated by parents and staff who also felt ill-informed. Furthermore, school resourcing and timetabling issues sometimes detrimentally impacted on subject choices; consistent with other studies (e.g. Alloway et al., 2004; Harris & Haydn, 2012; Marion Smith, Golden & McCrone, 2009, McCrone et al., 2005). Indeed, poor subject choices has a negative impact on students from both ends of the achievement scale (Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Wylie et al., 2008), but these effects tend only to be realized in hindsight.

The fourth layer of complexity concerned decision making processes. Students who felt they had reasonable levels of ability in subjects and had sufficient information were more confident in selecting subjects for the following year. Other students passively waited for information to come to them (especially Year 10 girls), had little idea of where to go for more information, held minimal understanding of the requirements of NCEA, and gave low importance to future planning. They did not realize the need to consider information beyond their immediate world of liking subjects, selecting those in which they felt they had some interest and ability, suitability of the teacher and presence of friends in those classes.

To consider other information and to work through a systematic decision making process was either beyond student experience or too complex for them. None of the students, parents or teachers mentioned any guiding framework or system of coaching students in the subject making process; despite Steinberg (2013) arguing students under 15 years of age need support, especially with short and long term consequences of decision making.

**Conclusion and implications**

Effective subject decisions require consideration of all layers: intrapersonal, interpersonal, informational, and procedural; along with support from significant others. Young people possess abilities to succeed if they are provided with opportunities and support to engage positively (Halpern-Felsher, 2009; Hipkins, 2015; Madjar et al., 2007; Pendergast & Bahr, 2009). Systematic coaching comprising explicit discussions with students (and perhaps their parents) about their current performances, desired future selves and range of current options is sorely needed. Relationship with the student is essential, as are staff with expertise and knowledge in subject options and community representatives with career pathways. Not only could responsive coaching sessions potentially better inform students (and their parents) about subject options, qualification prerequisites and potential career pathways, the experience could model for students more effective decision making processes and successful pathways.

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**Table 5:** Comparison of information use, level of confidence and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male students</th>
<th>Female students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very high levels of information used</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of confidence about subject choices</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know where to go for information</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6:** Year level perceptions of sufficient information to make subject decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Have enough information to make subject choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yr 8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 9</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 10</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1:** Layers of complexity in adolescent decision making

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**Figure 1:** Layers of complexity in adolescent decision making
References


Releasing adolescents into adulthood

Andrew Lines

As a middle years teacher for over 20 years I have become fascinated by how we, as a culture, create respectful, responsible and independent adults. Through my observations of both schooling and parenting over the last two decades I have become aware that we have tended to protect our children and students from struggle and failure whilst also stifling their growth by doing too much for them. Without fear, failure, experience and expectation life-changing lessons go unlearned.

Ten years ago I created The Rite Journey to fill a void I saw in our culture and current educational model, the fact that we did not usher children across the threshold of adolescence by exploring what it is to be a responsible and independent adult whilst honouring that transition from child to adult. I wanted schools and parents to join together in this task of creating a process of education and ceremony which might develop a culture of responsibility and independence within our society.

Having worked with young people, teachers and parents through The Rite Journey over a decade I realised that there was another life moment for our adolescents which deserved a deeper acknowledgement… the age at which they are afforded all legal responsibilities of an adult. The day they turn 18.

Last month was my son’s 18th birthday.

A significant event here in Australia as it heralds the transition, legally, into the adult world.

Once 18, he is afforded every legal entitlement available in our country.

He can legally drink, vote, marry and change his name without my permission.

He can legally get a tattoo, a credit card and a passport without my consent.

He can sign any contract he wants and he will legally be bound by it.

Our law says he is an adult and he no longer needs my permission to do anything.

He is now in control of his life.

But is he?

Legally, yes.

But practically, for most 18 year olds, it is often a very different story.

Many of them are not independent at all.

They have not been raised to be that way.

The Advent of Adolescence

In days gone by, 18 year olds had usually left home, were working full time and contemplating marriage and parenthood. Today, young adults are mostly living at home, financially dependent and relying on parents to provide.

However, it hasn’t always been that way. Traditionally, for thousands of years of human existence, there have been 5 stages of human life: childhood, adulthood and
elderhood.

I frequently notice that in parents’ endeavours to help their children be ‘happy’, ‘successful’ and have a head start in life they often step in and prevent their child from truly being encouraged to be responsible. This can take many forms, with one example being parents not having expectations around their 18 year old being responsible for or contributing to: household expenses; mobile phone costs; the maintenance and running of their car; household chores, etc.

Anything we do for a teenager that they can do for themselves is robbing them of the opportunity of growing up. However, the more invasive way I witness parents stifling their child’s transition into adulthood is by choosing to be overly involved in decision-making and forcing advice on their child.

At some stage it is essential that we enable our children by allowing them the responsibility of making decisions around relationships, vocation, lifestyle, etc. rather than disabling them by not giving them the experience of weighing up choices and learning from them, be the outcome successful or not.

Why shield an adolescent from failure when we know it is a much better teacher than success?

In my workshops with parents of young children I explore how we can graduate responsibility over the course of their childhood so that by the time they reach 18 they are capable, responsible, respected and resilient young adults. However, this can only be achieved with intention and forethought. It requires the planning of numerous moments during a child’s life when they cross a threshold into a new phase of independence.

I had spent some time considering the token I would give him to acknowledge this moment of transition into the freedom and responsibility of adulthood and decided upon two gifts.

A Parent’s Gift - The Release

I call this process ‘the release’ and it is a gesture that acknowledges a young person’s step into independent adulthood and our ‘step back’, as parents.

It is an intentional moment in which we acknowledge to our 18 year old that we won’t choose to force our opinions or thoughts onto them any longer but that we will be here for them if they would like to seek advice.

It is an empowering gesture that provides them with space to grow rather than restricting them or causing them to be overly worried about pleasing parents.

It is a choice to own ‘our stuff’ as parents and not to burden our adult children with it.

There are a number of ways that such a moment might look but two important elements of the process are some form of public declaration of our intention and a token of the moment.

Last week, as Malachi turned 18, it was time to offer him this process.

You can read more about that in my ‘Graduating Responsibility’ article.
To symbolise this I am giving you a wristband. The braided leather symbolises both the interwoven nature of life and the strength that comes through relationship with others. The black of the leather contrasts with the gleam of the silver symbolising the importance of both the dark moments in life, which are important and formative, and the bright moments in life, which are also important and formative. And as the inscription says...Go Well.

The first was something he could wear that would be a symbolic reminder of this moment and my commitment. I decided upon a leather and silver wristband.

The second was a keepsake that reflected the combination of freedom and responsibility that comes with adulthood. For this I chose a hip flask.

As we gathered together for a family celebration dinner, Malachi was surrounded by his siblings, grandparents, auntie, uncle and cousins. And as the sun began to set over the vines on our property, I spoke.

"Malachi, as the sun sets on your birthday, we take a moment to reflect on the years of your childhood that have brought you to this point and we acknowledge the completion of this stage of your life. As with all endings there comes a new beginning. A welcome.

We want to take this moment to welcome you into adulthood. We all join together this evening to celebrate your life, the beauty and wonder of who you are and how you be.

We acknowledge that with legal adulthood comes a whole host of freedoms but that these come with reciprocal responsibilities.

To symbolise this, we have a gift which reflects the freedom you now have to legally drink alcohol. But in giving you this we acknowledge that, as with many adult liberties, it comes with a responsibility to do so with thoughtfulness and care to yourself and others.

As your dad, I also want to acknowledge that as you turn 18, you legally are now a fully fledged adult. You have every legal entitlement that I have. And again, with this responsibility it is time for you to step fully into adulthood. Throughout your childhood I have endeavoured to teach you right from wrong, to surround you with adults who love and respect you, to graduate you into responsibility and to model, as best I can, what a good man looks like.

Now it is over to you. Whilst you are still living at home and there will continue to be expectations that you contribute as a member of this household and family, I am no longer going to force my opinion on you. I am no longer going to tell you what I think you should do. Of course I will always be here for you, to help you when you ask and to support you when you seek it. But I choose now to release you from my expectations. I choose now to release you into your independent adulthood.

Malachi, we love you dearly and join together as a family to celebrate with you, and release you into this wonderful world of adulthood."

And in that moment, with a tear in my eye and a deep sense of pride, I put my arms around my son, with whom I was well pleased.

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The Dilemma of Students with Special Needs

Calli Kennedy

With over 25 years teaching experience, both in New Zealand and overseas. I am currently in my tenth year working at Kaitao Middle School, a decile 2 school in Western Heights, Rotorua. Seven of those have been spent leading the Adventure academy. The Adventure academy has a kaupapa (principle or policy) of supporting and accelerating the learning of those year 7 and 8 students who could be considered to have been ‘let down’ by the system through their primary school years. These children that are deemed to be “working well below” within the present system.

This year we have twenty five middle years students with a variety of different needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder, strong dyslexic tendencies, diagnosed auditory processing problems and students whose learning needs stem from ADD and dyspraxia to slow processing. We have a motley crew, indeed, however every student brings a special something to the table and we work on recognising their strengths and developing a program that encourages them while supporting their “needs”. These students might be considered to be round pegs who have been jammed into a square hole for six years at primary school. We have two years to help students to recognise their worth and abilities, which increases their mana and sense of self in order to build resilience and success in life. It saddens me that the definition of success is so narrow in the current system and the true successes of these students are not recognised. These students have incredible potential with gifts in creative thinking, hands-on, practical problem solving, interpersonal skills and unabashed curiosity that has, before now, been discouraged and sometimes suppressed. The truth is that the academy could, if all eligible students could be accepted, be filled many times over. However, numbers are limited in order to keep adult to student ratios up.

The academy staffing presently consists of two full-time teacher aides, two part-time teacher aides and myself. One of the full-time teacher aides and the two part-timers are “attached” to the funded, high needs children, while the other teacher aide is funded by the Ngati Whakaue Education Endowment Trust and work as a classroom teacher aide. The success the academy experiences is largely down to the low student to adult ratios as well as a small group, rotational program that maximises adult/student contact running alongside a rigorous EOTC program planned to bring classroom learning alive as well as challenging students, to build self-esteem and resilience.

The program is integrated to a large extent, although there are defined numeracy and literacy “blocks” of learning everyday. These blocks are structured to include a small group (no more than six) teaching session, an independent learning component and a digital component for every child. I am convinced that the accelerated progress of these students is predominantly due to the face to face, needs based, small group sessions with an adult. Many of these students have several “years” to catch up on, in order to have any chance of accessing the curriculum at high school, therefore, much of the teaching is based on “gap filling” and providing skills that have previously not been taught specifically to these students. Emphasis is made on progress and achievement is defined relative to their effort.
This year we have been working with Wingspan, ‘The New Zealand Birds of Prey Trust, running a program linked to a worldwide initiative bringing students around the world together based on the study and conservation of falcons. We have been linked with a Mongolian classroom and the students have had an invaluable opportunity to experience a completely different culture and way of life. We are the pilot class in New Zealand and have enjoyed this association which has brought with it some great learning experiences as well as some challenges.

This is the only program such as this in Rotorua, set up specifically to support these students at this stage of their education. It is an indictment that this academy could be filled several times over by the number of students who have ‘fallen through the cracks’ at primary. We are the last bastion before the onslaught of high school and impending disaster for many of these disenfranchised children.

Having painted a picture of my professional background I would like to reflect on the current New Zealand model of education, particularly related to students with the type of needs seen in the Learning academy. In the process I will conclude with some ideas that could be useful in mitigating some of the pitfalls that seem to confront the present system. The early identification of specific needs is the key to early intervention and the mitigation of magnified problems in later life. It is concerning that the majority of the students who are recommended to Adventure Academy have seemingly had little support throughout primary school. For example, one of the students has ASD, combined with physical and developmental issues. This student came to the Academy with five weeks of teacher aide time for transitioning at the beginning of the year. It took considerable effort to increase the level of support received by this student and to apply for further support. Whilst his previous teacher had “coped” the student’s needs were not completely met. It appeared that he had been marginalised and obviously pacified with “assistive technology”, for much of his primary schooling.

Teachers cannot be blamed entirely for the lack of identification and support given to these students. The recent emphasis on data, national standards and accountability (as opposed to responsibility) has put the average classroom teacher between a rock and a hard place when it comes to students with a different way of accessing learning. How does a teacher with 25 students, little or no support and increasing levels of paperwork try to interpret and navigate through a system that has very unclear support pathways for these children? Indeed many teachers appear to be ill-equipped to identify and find ways to solve problems for these particular children because of a lack of training. This seems to be occurring at a time when the number of students who are identified as being on the Autism spectrum or who are dyslexic or who have dyspraxia is rising. This emphasizes the need to teach in a way that caters to these children’s needs. There is a need for a system that better supports these children. As expressed earlier, the present approach appears to have an inadequate system or clearly defined pathway for the identification of relevant programs to support the needs of some students. Many students have processing problems and other specific learning anomalies from kindergarten but are only getting identified at year 2 and above – if at all. It appears that there is no clear pathway to access support in the identification of, or teaching, these children. More often than not it would seem that they are put in the “too hard basket” and simply kept busy. Obtaining a SPED (Solutions for People Experiencing Learning Difficulties) assessment is a costly enterprise so is restrictive for many parents. The same can be said for children who sit on the Autistic Spectrum. Application for funding for students with particularly high needs is an onerous process and results can be variable. The criteria could be considered inflexible, but open to interpretation, such that one is never sure if enough or too much information has been provided. Support, if granted, is not entirely useful in the form of teacher aide support without the necessary specific specialist input such as psychologists, occupational therapists and so on. In my experience adult to student ratios impact significantly on the learning and well-being of all students.

So where to from here. Perhaps the Finnish approach to education, which has a focus on equity, could provide an insight. In the Finnish system there is an emphasis on responsibility, well-being, innovation and divergent thinking. Within this model the special needs of the dyslexic, dyspraxic or ASD are catered for in an integrated manner. Teachers are well-educated and success is largely defined by existent factors such as well-being, life-skills and thinking rather than data and standards.

Considering the above I offer some ideas about the way forward. First and foremost, the current model of education needs to be challenged and reviewed. It could be considered inequitable and unsustainable. Could there be merit in looking to other educational models that are proving to be successful in developing a populace who are largely content, productive and creative? Secondly there is a need to develop a robust and equitable system of identification and pathways to access support for children with particularly problematic needs. The system should provide easy access to specialists that will support the particular needs of these individuals. Thirdly, teachers need better training to identify and work with the increasing number of children who are entering the system with special needs. Finally, there needs to be an increase in the adult to student ratios in all classrooms with trained teacher aids, in order to better cater to the many children with specific learning needs.

Without change many students with special needs will continue to ‘fall through the cracks’ and inhibit the building of social capital and the creation of a productive, innovative and sustainable society. I would like to believe that this is an opportune moment to question and to reflect on the current system with the view to eventual change for greater equity, sustainability and contentment.

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Third Culture Kids: What are Their Social Emotional Needs?

Stephen Toole

“Losing the presence of important people, like your best friends, has a large impact on you. The only thing you can do to make it easier is to accept it. I learned that many times.”

Grade 7 student.

Imagine an environment where children are constantly concerned about leaving or their best friend leaving - this is the life of a child who is educated in an international setting.

Introduction

I have recently graduated with a Master of Education from Flinders University, Adelaide and the topic of thesis was third culture kids (TCK) and the effects of mobility on their social and emotional health. The term TCK was first used in the early 1980’s by David Pollock who described children who have spent a significant amount of their developmental years living, and being educated, outside of their passport country. These children have difficulty defining ‘home’ as they neither fully belong to the country where they reside and they may not have an affinity with where their ‘home’ is due to the absence of living there. Children who grow up in these settings come from the four corners of the globe, yet they all have a common understanding of living overseas and so a culture is created, one that only they truly understand.

My story

I was raised in rural NSW and attended university at Charles Sturt University – Riverina, graduating in 1995 and beginning work in a small central school in north-western NSW in 1996. In June 2001, I accepted a grade six Social Studies/Language Arts position in the United States (US) at a public middle school in the northern suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia.

After leaving the US, I began work in my first international school in China and have since worked in Germany and now India. The issues relating to mobility and TCKs is one of great importance to me both personally and professionally. Both of my children were born in Germany, and although they hold an Australian passport, they may never truly know Australia, if my wife and I continue to work internationally.

Context

The study was conducted in an American international school in India, which has a student population of approximately 750 students. The school is accredited to deliver the International Baccalaureate in both the Primary Years Programme and the Diploma Programme and the middle school is accredited by the Middle States Association from the US and uses a standards-based US curriculum. The diverse population is made up of 50 different nationalities and the population of the middle school is 145 students. From this, 10 female students chose to participate in the study that was conducted, after writing a memoir about a transitional experience that had a profound impact on their lives.

The participants

The participants were enrolled in the middle school (grades six to eight) and comprised of:

• One grade six student from France
• There were seven students from grade seven. Five were from the US, one had dual US and Australian citizenship, and the other was from Korea
• Two eighth grade students were from Hong Kong and Argentina

Of these 10 students, seven of the girls were enrolled in an after-school Writer’s Club that gave them the opportunity to develop their writing skills and have their story published in a book the school produced entitled Memories from the Road. This book included memoirs, short stories, poetry and photographs from the entire school community (students, parents and faculty) and was a celebration of the unique view of the world that exists when you live and work overseas.

The other three students wrote their memoir in their English/Language Arts class during a unit that focused on memoir writing. What is so important is that the students were given the choice to write and they chose to write about the impact of transition.

Some issues

The chronic nature of transition in the lives of international school students is an issue that needs to be addressed if their social and emotional needs are to be met so their level of educational achievement can be maintained throughout their schooling. Transition is a defined as “discontinuity in a person’s life space” (Hopson and Adams, 1976: 5) and can occur in a number of different ways throughout life, one of these is geographical change. Fail (1996) reported that, on average, an international student will move 4.3 times by the age of 18. This statistic only focuses on the moves that each child may make, not the number of times a friend will leave and they are the ones that are left behind.

So what are the issues associated with chronic transition?

Culture shock is one of the main concerns that faced the children, particularly their move to India, which can be ‘confronting’ even for a seasoned traveller like myself.
Culture shock is defined in its simplest form as the "inability to understand and adapt to working in a foreign environment" (Hubbard, 1986: 62).

It is imperative that we understand culture shock as it can have a profound influence on the identity of a TCK. The feelings of loss, helplessness, anxiety and anger are all feelings that we, as educators, need to be cognisant of in order to ensure that we provide transitional programmes and support networks that help students understand the feelings they may encounter with each move, providing validation that other people have had similar concerns as well.

One aspect of culture shock that the children need to learn is the culture of the school, which can be vastly different from where they came, even from one international school to the next. I can say with confidence, from my experience, that international school students approach their education in a very different manner than their peers who live in their passport country.

By this, I mean that these students have a much broader world view due to their deep understanding and tolerance of diversity and cultural acceptance, are mature beyond their years, are linguistically fluent in numerous languages and have an amazing ability to adjust to change.

Even though these young adolescents are 'mature beyond their years', they still have worries. Two of these worries are: the loss of friends and the control over their own lives. We must ensure that school-based programmes are created that allow students to express the feelings they have, and understand these emotions, so as to give them the opportunity to express, and hopefully, resolve the grief they may be feeling.

For example, the responsibility that a school should have is to help the new arrivals understand the host's culture and the culture of the school as 'the way things are done' can be vastly different from the previous location.

Their words

The theme of transition and its impact was one that the students wrote about in their memoir and this invaluable exercise allowed the students to share their experiences and the impact that their mobile life was having on them. In relation to culture shock, the girls mentioned different experiences and even though they said they have conducted research before they arrived, the actual experience of living in India was different than expected. For example, one of the students said:

"I remember I refused to walk outside whenever there were festivals. I had nightmares that Indian gods were attacking me. So that entire year [first year when she was eight years old], I couldn't get past the fact that it was just culture shock."

One of the students who arrived when she was in Grade 6 said:

"...when I was looking [researching] in India, I didn't realise that there were slums and people living on the road. I thought everyone had a house or an apartment, everybody had the things that they needed..."

One of the issues that girls, in particular, deal with is being stared at, and one of the younger students said:

"When they stare it feels like they are looking at you because you are so different. It feels like they really don't want you here".

These quotes emphasise the importance of knowing and understanding the thoughts of the students so they can be addressed within various programmes that are implemented within the school.

In relation to being scared by the Indian gods, the students are given the opportunity at various grade levels to learn about the religion and culture of India and are taken on field trips to various religious sites and temples located within the city in which they reside.

Our extensive Community, Responsibility and Service (CSR) programme gives students, from all grade levels, the chance to engage with our local community, and as the students get older, they conduct their work in the slums of the city to help other children. This allows for a breakdown of the barriers that may exist and allows the children to become more informed of the issues the people of India face.

In terms of grief and loss there were many concerns that the students spoke about. One of the most significant, that was troubling for me as an educator, was the attitude that they had towards making friends.

"I have kind of accepted the fact that I'm an international student and that I have to go around and I have to leave all my friends. So even now in [school name] the group of friends that I have we always know that we're going to leave everyone pretty soon and we don't try to be...best friends forever...we would always say that the phrase is wrong and we know that we won't be friends forever and we just accept that's the way it is."

The quote below, written by a student whose best friend moved on to another international school in Europe, was very heart wrenching to read, as you can really get a sense of her loss and the impact that this had on her.

"Sometimes I wish I had never met him, so that I did not have to go through the process of living without him. Sometimes I wished he had never replied to my texts in the first place, so that our friendship never started. Sometimes I wished he was like the rest of people in my life, people who don't really have an influence on me."

Issues like these are important for us to understand and we need to make sure that the social and emotional education that we provide for the students, through classroom activities and an advisory/homeroom curriculum, helps them acknowledge the transient nature of their lives and the positive and negative impact that this can have on them. Students need to be given time to process their feelings; they spoke of the importance of being able to
write their memoir as it allowed them the opportunity to articulate their thoughts on their mobile lives and to connect with other students who had similar experiences. Being able to share their story with a wider, authentic audience was important to them and some of the thoughts they shared with me highlight how this process helped them to resolve some of the grievances that they may have had:

“I like writing in general… I read it and it’s like looking at your life in a movie because you see it as it is… It’s also a part of closure and accepting what’s happening.”

“I think it actually helped a lot… which was something that really hit me sort of and it kind of brought me through what I was going through because I would re-read this over and over again and I would just sit there and think how it has helped me get through.”

“I think it has made me feel honest, as I was writing it at the same time as the other kids in Writer’s Club. It felt good. It might have been awkward if I was the only one doing it (writing about being a TCK), but since it was like the other kids were doing it, it felt cool – kind of bonding. We all understood what we were feeling and I think it was cool to see that other kids were feeling the same as I was.”

These quotes truly show the importance of writing, and giving this opportunity to the students is one that they will cherish. To see their words in print, makes it even more special to them.

Conclusion

One of the greatest challenges for an international school (or any school) is to “support and encourage young people in the search for their identity, their own self-knowledge and, ultimately, their own fulfilment.” (Walker, 1998, p. 25). This is poignant in an international school setting as many students have difficulty understanding the notion of ‘home’ and clearly identify with people who have had similar lived experiences, regardless of nationality, as they are the only people who can fully understand and appreciate the grief and loss associated with the number of moves they have endured as they navigate through their developmental years.

The role the school plays is vital to the success of these mobile students and the need to develop a comprehensive programme to assist with transition should be treated as ‘priority number one’ and must involve all stakeholders within the community. Ensuring that a supportive environment is created to help all adjusting families cope with the new cultural surroundings when they arrive means that students will feel a sense of belonging from the beginning and integrate into their new environment in a positive manner.

One important feature of any transition programme implemented within a school are transitional activities that facilitate both the arrival and departure of students and help to establish and integrate intercultural skill building, whilst at the same time allowing students to explore their cultural identity (Pollock & van Reken, 1999).

To help students adapt to their new environment, it is imperative that school administrators hire globally minded educators who consider different perspectives, are open-minded, anticipate and understand the complex nature of collaborating with many nationalities and resist the temptation to stereotype various members of the community (Zilber, 2009).

Staff who are internationally-minded can identify and empathise with parents and their children who are experiencing culture shock when they first come to a school. Additionally, we must also remember to monitor the progress and process of the student adjustment ensuring that there is an individualised approach to help each student with their transition into a new cultural environment.

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References

Scotch College is a boys’ college in Western Australia. The college, first established in 1897, currently has over 1000 students from Pre-primary to Year 12 and teaches the International Baccalaureate program (IB). The Year 7 students are the sophomore year of the Middle School at Scotch College. Half of the 200 Year 7 students are in their first year at the College and so they have not necessarily had the inquiry-based framework that is pivotal in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP) of the International Baccalaureate. Milan’s comment was one of many that surprised us after completing the Going Live Project in Term 1, 2016. We realised that we had extended the boys’ capabilities further than we had planned for or could have ever imagined.

What was the Going Live Project?
Mathilda Joubert, a consultant on youth research, who works for Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA) in Western Australia, initiated the Going Live Project. She was commissioned by the Ear Science Institute of Australia (ESIA) to collect data from young West Australians on what the general public knows about preventing Noise Induced Hearing Loss. Mathilda approached Scotch College with the proposal of incorporating all of our Year 7 students, across 8 classes, into the Youth Research Project. Over the course of one term Mathilda spent five days working with our 200 Year 7 students to teach them how to conduct a research project. The boys were taught the skills needed to collect, analyse and interpret data for an external organisation. Each of the 8 classes took on a different project with one of the classes focusing on collection of data for the Ear Science Institute of Australia.

The primary goal of the Going Live – Action Research Project was to give young people a voice about issues that impact and affect them. The Former WA Commissioner for Children and Young People, Michelle Scott, said, “We need to listen genuinely to children and young people, give careful consideration to their views and use their insights to inform our work in meaningful and respectful ways”. We had seen this project run in a different format at our sister school, Presbyterian Ladies College, and were so impressed with what we saw that we jumped at the opportunity to be a part of this when Mathilda offered to involve our Scotch College students as youth researchers.

Why did we participate?
The project excited us as a Year 7 teaching group because of the potential of the project to introduce a range of soft skills to our students, some of which included time management, communication, problem solving and collaboration. Often these are incidental skills that students acquire over a period of time, but the benefit of the Going Live Project was that these skills would be explicitly taught and fostered over the course of the project.

The authentic nature and real-life experience that the project offered was of major appeal to the staff, in particular our Head of Middle School who is passionate about boys’ education. Going Live offered a number of kinaesthetic learning experiences as part of the programme as well as visual-spatial elements, which are well-documented to be fundamental to boys’ learning.

Another benefit for us as a Year 7 team was the professional development that we would acquire under the direction of Mathilda. The Year 7 staff were excited to take on these youth research projects yet felt out of their comfort zones when faced with facilitating lessons outside of their regular core curriculum classes. Taking on the project meant the teachers would be learning new skills and strategies, and most of the staff had their reservations about being able to facilitate the program that involved delivering a worthwhile presentation to the commissioning bodies.

The project was organised into five full days spanning across Term 1, 2016. Each day with Mathilda required the regular timetable to collapse which was done in consultation with the Year 7 Leadership team. During the full day sessions Mathilda delivered the technical research skills (which are outlined in more detail below) and Homeroom teachers assisted, supported and taught alongside Mathilda. The five days were arranged into the following structure –

Day 1 – Teamwork and the ten steps to research
Day 2 – The techniques of data gathering
Day 3 – Data analysis
Day 4 – Interpretation of Data
Day 5 – Presentation of findings

Research Topic | Commissioning Body
--- | ---
How to reduce the impact of Noise-induced Hearing Loss | Ear Science Institute of Australia
The Culture of Distraction and it’s impact on student learning | Dean of Teaching and Learning, Scotch College
Ways to develop the play space at our new Middle School Building | Head of Middle School, Scotch College
Consumption habits around public transport, recycling, water and electricity | Coast Nutrition
Reasons families choose to send their children to boarding school | Head of Residential Life, Scotch College
How can WASO engage the interest of younger people more effectively | West Australia Symphony Orchestra
How to raise awareness about the Old Scotch Collegians association | President of Old Scotch Collegians
What relationship exists between academic achievement and participation in co-curricular activities? | Dean of Teaching and Learning, Scotch College

Table 1. The Eight Research Topics

Preparation before the project commenced
Whilst the Ear Science Institute of Australia was the catalyst for the project, we wanted to have enough projects for all of our Year 7 students to be involved in Going Live. Interest from the Scotch community and beyond was ascertained to see what businesses or organisations were keen to use our boys as data collectors. We used our network of Old Scotch Collegians and were overwhelmed with the response and the number of projects from which to choose. Some of the organisations that commissioned data research projects included the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO), Scotch College Executive and Coast Nutrition (NSW).

Classroom teachers were given the choice on which commissioning body they would volunteer their students to collect research for.

Karen Woods
Year 7 Middle School Student
Scotch College, Western Australia

Deborah Mullin
President of Old Scotch Collegians
Scotch College, Western Australia

“I didn’t realise I was a people person until I did this project”
Milan
Year 7 Middle School Student
Scotch College, Western Australia
Each of the eight Year 7 classes had a different project to work on. The key idea promoted by these projects was that they were real projects and that the commissioners of the project would actually use the data collected in their organization. This gave the project authenticity, which was a motivating force for the students. This was highlighted when the commissioners came to speak to the boys who quickly realised that the work they were doing was for a real purpose.

Day 1 - Teamwork and the Ten Steps to Research

The first day of the project began as all immersion phases do – with lots of engagement through the use of hands-on activities. The students took part in a number of competitive team challenges over the course of the day, such as building bridges with straws, making towers out of raw spaghetti and marshmallows and a treasure hunt. The purpose of these activities was to demonstrate skills required when working collaboratively towards a common goal.

A key component of each activity was reflection. The students reflected on what helped them to work successfully as a team during each of the three activities. The boys discussed these ideas as a whole group and then recorded their thoughts on a poster that remained displayed in the classrooms for the remainder of the project (see image). This helped to illustrate the key idea expressed by Mathilda that collaboration skills were going to be a major pillar of the research project.

One of the other pillars of the project that Mathilda drew attention to was the ‘Steps to Research’. The Treasure Hunt was a fun way of introducing the ten major steps to conducting and reporting on research. After running around the campus hurriedly looking for answers to the clues, the students noticed that the clues had the following excerpts in common:

1. Ask questions
2. Find answers
3. Challenge everything
4. Carefully and accurately
5. Show concern for others
6. Gather evidence
7. Explore different views
8. Search for knowledge and truth
9. Identify what does it mean
10. Present all you found

It was explained to the students that these were the ten steps to research and that each of them is fundamental to the process of data collection.

Day 2 - The techniques of data gathering

This day was all about teaching the skills of data collection. The following is a sample of what the students covered:

- **Questioning Skills** – with a focus on writing questions that were important to the data collection process. Open and closed questions were introduced.
- **Observation skills** – with a focus on conducting an observation and noting the factual information that is observed. The boys observed Pre-Primary children at play and looked at what, when, why, how - when conducting their observations.
- **Questionnaire design** – with a focus on designing a questionnaire and writing ‘rating scale’ questions.
- **Interview skills** - with a focus on how to conduct an interview and writing appropriate types of questions for an interview. An activity that demonstrated how to use Excel to convert data to graph form was the Diamond Sort activity. The boys did this in groups and were able to use the data from this as an example when learning to use Excel to make graphs.

The Golden Rules were also introduced on this day and were an important part of the project. They are principles that can be transferred through all learning areas. Attached to the Golden Rules poster that outlines these important areas and include being systematic, sceptical and ethical when collecting data. We have since seen these principles applied by students when developing action plans for Humanities assignments, working on problem-solving in Mathematics and writing persuasive essays in English, and we anticipate these skills will continue to be utilised as students head in to Year 8 next year.

Day 2 – Meet, plan and collect

The first two ‘training’ days of the project happened within one week of each other. The third ‘training’ day, which centred on Data Analysis, was deliberately scheduled to happen a few weeks after the students had been up skilled on data collection techniques. This reason for this was to give the students time to meet with the commissioners of the eight projects, to plan the data collection methods and to collect sufficient quantitative and qualitative data. After meeting with the commissioners and spending time understanding the research topic and the relevance to the commissioning bodies, the students developed action plans on what data they would collect, how they would collect it and who they would collect it from. The conversations had by the students whilst developing these action plans were lengthy and multi-faceted as there were many aspects of data collection to be considered (see Golden Rules).

Because each class had a genuine audience who was invested in the data, the students took the process quite seriously by raising their own expectations of themselves.

Day 3 – Data analysis

Day 3 covered the skills required when analysing quantitative and qualitative data. An overview of the fundamental skills taught is outlined below.

**Quantitative Data**

This day was about ‘crunching the numbers’, tallying yes/no responses and calculating data. Some classes used Survey Monkey but only for the surveys or questionnaires.

Teachers printed the responses for boys to calculate and tally these onto excel spreadsheets. This allowed the manual sorting of the data, rather than Survey Monkey doing the data analysis for them. With the quantitative data the boys were able to apply filters to the data they collected based on the demographics. Applying filters (such as age, gender etc.) gave the boys a lens through which they could look at the data in different ways. The demographics were important when collecting responses as the students probably realized too late that it would have been good to add in more demographic questions such as ‘what suburb do you live in?’ ‘Do you speak another language at home?’ Information such as this could have been used to help filter the data. For example, in the project the Culture of Distraction, the boys could have filtered further if they had asked the survey participants, ‘Do you speak another language at home?’ This might have given them information about whether or not laptop use at home, after school or over the weekend, was less or more likely in a second language speaking household. Therefore the more demographic information the more filters that can be applied to the data.

**Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data is a difficult concept and the general feeling amongst participating staff was that our students would have trouble grasping this concept. Our concerns were not realized but rather the boys understood the information quite well, again proving that raising the bar often allows students to achieve well beyond expectations.

Interpretation of the qualitative data collected was about looking for common themes. Often the themes would be organised in a table format. An example of this

---

**What do people like about the Christmas Pageant?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family &amp; Friends</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>‘You get to see family and friends’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>‘Everything’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>‘You get to see Santa’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>‘The food.’ ‘food’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing &amp; Singing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>‘I like the dancing’, ‘the singing and dancing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>‘It’s fun’, ‘it’s fun’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The atmosphere</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>‘Lots of fun and lights that really light up the city’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floats</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>‘I like watching the floats go past’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>‘The fun atmosphere’, ‘it’s fun’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>‘I like the people dancing’, ‘The people’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>‘I like watching the floats go past’, ‘I’m cool to say people talent’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>‘You get to see family and friends’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey participants</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>‘Do you speak another language at home’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Example of Qualitative Data
is shown in the table below, where a local school collected research data on the Annual Channel 7 Perth Christmas Pageant. The boys were shown this example to help demonstrate how they would organise the qualitative data from their projects. The common responses were counted and changed into a percentage and a direct quote added to illustrate the themes. These were then ordered from strongest to weakest and importantly only counted if it had been mentioned more than once by the respondents.

**Day 4 – Interpretation of Data**

Once the students had tallied the results, crunched the numbers, drawn the graphs and pulled out the common themes, Mathilda taught them the skills required to interpret the data. The first step to interpreting data was to look for peaks, troughs, recurring patterns and differences. Sometimes these peaks and troughs stood out and were easy to find. Sometimes they were not so obvious which required that the students filter the data and interpret their world around them. All along the teachers had been facilitators of the research projects and, as such, viewed the data through their own ‘adult’ lens. By handing the responsibility of the research over to the students, it allowed them to present the data and its implications through their eyes and the relevance of the results to their world.

**Day 5 - Presentation of findings**

The final day with Mathilda was about putting the presentations together. The students used a common structure - a beginning, middle and end. It was important for students to understand that the commissioners wanted to see a summary of the research process and the data collected. They had to be selective about what went into the presentation. They were taught about adding in titles, writing an introduction, and the placement of photos. The summary of results and the recommendations were the most important part of the presentation and students were asked to explain, on their slides, what the data showed and their opinion as to why the data showed this.

**Summary**

The boys thoroughly enjoyed presenting to bona fide audiences – they really valued the authenticity of what they had done. The positive feedback from the boys, staff and commissioners affirmed that Going Live had been a worthwhile venture for the Middle School. All of the commissioners commented that the research carried out by the boys exceeded their expectations and was going to be of benefit to their organisations.

In regards to the professional development of the Year 7 staff, it was well worth the investment of a term and will certainly be a feature of the 2017 Year 7 curriculum. The attraction of continuing this project in the Middle School is that it fosters collaboration, critical thinking, data-gathering skills and analysis, time management and presentation. All of these skills are transferable and long-term and play an integral part in the future development of the millennial student.

The materials used in this project and mentioned in this article are the property of Mathilda Joubert, Education Consultant (SCEA).

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Information for Contributors

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- academic and research papers that make an original contribution of an empirical or theoretical nature
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- All references should be placed at the end of text using APA (6th edition). For example:

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  **Book**

  **Chapter in edited book**
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