

Australian Journal of Middle Schooling



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Editorial

It is incredible to believe that this year is almost over. For those of us who live in Queensland and for some educators in Western Australia, 2015 saw the introduction of Year 7 into secondary. I trust that it went as smoothly as it did in my college, where through the incorporation of many middle years philosophies and strategies, we were able to welcome, work with and see success for our young adolescent learners and their teachers alike. I know I look back on the year and reflect upon the processes and structures we put into place, the curriculum we developed, the systems we implemented and can envisage how we will build upon what we have begun for the coming years. Bringing Year 7 into our College most certainly reinvigorated all of our middle years' practices. The refereed article by Pendergast et al most certainly highlights many of our findings and I am sure will resonate with our entire readership whether or not you have been involved in this change during 2015.

This final edition presents some very relevant articles that will provide food for thought and practical ideas that can be undertaken in any middle school classroom or setting at this time in education. I encourage you

to share these with your teachers now and then to utilise them in professional learning circles, staff meetings and other forums during 2016. The research presented through all of the refereed articles is pertinent. The three articles that appear in the non-refereed section of this edition; "The maker movement", "Student-led conferences" and "Building teacher capacity through action research" pose very concrete ideas for embedding innovative and engaging strategies and practices within your school settings.

It is interesting to note that I wrote the last editorial with the view that that was my last; however, situations occur, and now, as the President of Adolescent Success, I am introducing this journal, our final for 2015. This provides me the opportunity to recap some of the highlights for Adolescent Success over the past year. For those of you who were able to attend our International Conference in August of this year, we thank you for your attendance and trust that you gained a great deal from the event. The feedback was extremely positive and we now move towards our second conference in Singapore (APCAS) in September of 2016.

This year also saw the introduction of

our Adolescent Success Awards and we congratulated a number of schools and colleges for their dedication to working with and for young adolescents.

We hosted our very first Twitter Chat with #satchatoc in October. This proved to be an extremely successful forum for deep discussion and I urge you to keep a look out for our Adolescent Success Twitter Chats in 2016. Our website hosts a number of forums, so please ensure that you as our valued members engage with these and connect with those like-minded educators, nationally and internationally. There are so many more events and activities in the pipeline and as such, I look forward to collaborating with you in 2016 and beyond.

To all who have contributed to this very comprehensive edition of the Australian Journal of Middle Years of Schooling, I thank you and look forward to working with you again into the future. Have a relaxing and well-earned break and very safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Debra Evans
Journal Editor (for the last time)
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The education change model as a vehicle for reform: Shifting year 7 and implementing junior secondary in Queensland

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Abstract

Queensland schools are engaged in change as they shift Year 7 from primary to high school settings from the start of 2015 and implement junior secondary in all public schools in Years 7, 8, and 9. This agenda signals one of the most significant reforms undertaken in Queensland education. It is accompanied by a systemic policy commitment, including resource allocation, to ensure it is supported at the individual school level and in the wider schooling system. In this paper, we outline the Leading Change Development Program undertaken in 2014, which was designed to enable school leaders to facilitate these reforms in their unique school contexts. The program—conceptualised around the Education Change Model—is outlined and data are presented that indicate school leaders' assessment of the stage of reform their school was located at, according to the reform model.

Keywords: educational change, middle years, junior secondary, reform

The context

In Queensland, where this project is based, a progressive approach has been taken to reforming the middle years with the shift from 2015 of Year 7 from primary to secondary setting across all sectors. Prior to this, Year 7 was typically located in primary schools. This shift occurred, in part, because of the introduction of a voluntary Preparatory year in 2007 followed by a lift in the entry age of schooling in 2008. Year 1 entry age was raised by six months. The cut-off moved from the end of the calendar year to the middle of the year. This aligned Queensland with other states across Australia. The overall effect of lifting the school commencing age is that students, on average, are six months older in each year level. The first cohort who experienced this change is undertaking Year 7 in 2015; hence the timing of the shift to secondary school.

The implications of this major change in school education are significant. Most students will complete seven years in primary and six years in secondary school settings, adding a net extra year of schooling.

Students will be six months older when they complete each year level from 2015 and half will turn 18 during their final year of school. In government schools, many have

experienced the shift to a junior secondary model for Years 7–9, which demands a more defined approach to teaching and learning for young people.

For the first time from 2015 onwards, national analyses that compare year level data will be of students at the same age as well as year level across the nation. In the past, this has not been the case for Queensland students in high stakes data analyses of student performance, such as the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN is comprised of tests in the four domains of reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), and numeracy (ACARA, 2013). Until 2015, students in Queensland compared to other jurisdictions in Australia were approximately six months younger; an explanation confirmed by researchers to be an influence on student scores (Daraganova, Edwards, & Siphthorp, 2013).

An early indicator of the possible benefits of the major reforms is the 2015 NAPLAN results for Queensland. In a press release announcing the state as the most improved nationally with leaps in Years 3, 5 and 7 scores, the Minister for Education credited the introduction of the Preparatory year; older school starting age; and

the shift of Year 7 to secondary for the best ever results in reading, spelling and numeracy—all experienced by these year levels for the first time with Year 7s at the vanguard (Wordsworth, 2015). In addition, Year 5 students were reported as third in the nation in reading and numeracy and Year 3 third for grammar, punctuation and numeracy. This is a dramatic shift from the usual tail end placing of Queensland in many of these domains.

Junior Secondary

Concomitant with the shift of Year 7, from 2015 Queensland public schools must ensure alignment to new guidelines for the delivery of Years 7, 8 and 9; the approach being known as junior secondary (ACER, 2012). This approach is based on much of the middle years literature over recent decades. It involves intentional structural arrangements and a philosophical commitment that aim to provide optimal learning opportunities for young adolescents. The focus on young adolescent experiences of schooling and the role teachers play is critical, because it locates educational policy and practice in ways that move beyond taken-for-granted notions of adolescents and adolescence (Vagle, 2012).

The introduction of the new junior secondary phase of education in Queensland is based on the six ‘Guiding Principles’ developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2012) as described in Table 1. These principles provide challenging educational offerings that engage young adolescents, while giving them a sense of belonging and support during the changes they face.

Table 1: Junior Secondary

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle	Explanation
Distinct identity	Junior secondary students will be encouraged and supported to develop their own group identity within the wider high school. This can involve dedicated school areas and events.
Quality teaching	Teachers working with students in the junior secondary years will be given the skills they need through additional professional development, so they can support young teens through these crucial early high school years.
Student wellbeing	We will meet the social and emotional needs of junior secondary students with a strong focus on pastoral care. For example, schools could provide a home room to support students as they adjust to new routines and greater academic demands.
Parent and community involvement	We want parents to stay connected with their students’ learning when they enter high school. Parent involvement in assemblies, special events, award ceremonies and leadership presentations will be welcomed.
Leadership	Schools will be encouraged to create leadership roles for students in Years 7, 8 and 9. Dedicated teachers experienced with teaching young adolescents will lead junior secondary supported by the principal and administration team.
Local decision-making	The needs of each school community will influence how junior secondary is implemented in each school.

(ACER, 2012)

There is some contestation of the appropriateness of these Guiding Principles and a challenge that there is a negligible evidence base of the effectiveness of specific approaches to teaching and learning for young adolescents (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). The purpose of this paper; however, is not to explore this consideration, but to focus on the implementation of the Leading Change Development Program (the Program) (Pendergast et al., 2014) underpinned by the Education Change Model (ECM). The reform was supported by a systemic policy commitment, including resource allocation. This ensures it is supported both at the individual school level and in the wider schooling system, and provides optimal conditions for effective reform.

When taken together, shifting Year 7 to secondary and implementing the Guiding Principles represent one of the most significant reforms undertaken in Queensland education. In fact, all 259 unique public schools with Year 7 in 2015 have been engaged in reforming their middle years. These schools have been familiarised with the Guiding Principles



since their release in 2012. For 20 pilot schools, Year 7 moved to the secondary setting in 2013. Importantly, some schools are configured as P-10 or P-12, and hence Year 7 has always been co-located. For the vast majority of schools, Year 7 students shifted to secondary school settings from the beginning of the 2015 school year. For the first time, the junior secondary model became fully operational. The question then is, how do schools implement such a reform, remain mindful of their unique contexts, and ensure consistency and alignment to the core expectations of the Guiding Principles?

In 2014, all 259 public high school leadership teams, represented by three people from each school

including the principal, participated in the Program. This Program aimed to build school leadership capacity to direct effective change processes in schools, specifically for transitioning Year 7 and consolidating the intentional approach to teaching Years 7-9 through the full implementation of the junior secondary model. The role of leadership teams in guiding school communities through this reform required a planned and deliberate approach to enabling change that reflected the needs of each school context. There was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The Program was developed by a team of academics from Griffith University, along with several external partners, and consulted various officers of the state education authority. It was

conceptually built around a distinct model, the ECM, which is detailed later in this paper. Importantly, it was informed by the education reform literature, to which this paper now turns.

Reforming schools and school systems

There is a growing field of knowledge about the effectiveness of change processes, especially in reforming education systems, which have at their core the imperative to improve student learning outcomes (OECD, 2015). The complexity of educational change is exacerbated by a range of national, state, and local reform agendas. Schools often attempt to implement several reforms simultaneously and from different starting points.

Leaders face multiple choices and combinations of decisions along the reform path (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). This was the case in this reform moment.

In Australia, education systems are undergoing rapid change in education policy and practice. For many Australian schools, the overarching framework guiding this change is The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008). The declaration is connected to this project as it identifies enhancing middle years teaching and learning practices as a priority.

The need for attention to a middle years' policy recognises that early adolescence and the

transition to high school is 'a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning.'

Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical, and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 10). In line with this focus on teacher practice for young adolescents, the recently released Action now: Classroom ready teachers (TEMAG, 2014) sets out 39 recommendations that seek to improve teacher readiness for classroom work. The current focus on teacher effectiveness is also affirmed by Dinham and Rowe (2007) and Hattie (2003), who argued that this is one of the most important factors influencing

student learning outcomes, particularly in the middle years.

In their analysis of twenty education systems around the world, Mourshed et al. (2010) revealed there are eight predictable elements that contribute to reform improvements. These range from understanding where the system is in regard to a range of features, to specific leadership, classroom, and structural factors. Importantly, they note that a 'spark' is often required to trigger major change and that a 'system can make significant gains from wherever it starts and a timeline of six years or less is achievable' (p. 14). This spark can result from a crisis or a major reform initiative. They also note that for reform to be sustained over the long term, improvements must



be integrated into the 'very fabric of the system pedagogy' (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 71).

The initial 'spark' for the reform in Queensland was clear evidence of relatively mediocre teaching quality (Goos et al., 2008; Luke et al., 2003; Masters, 2009) over several years, along with growing evidence that certain pedagogical approaches appeared to be more suited to young adolescent learners (MYSA, 2008; Pendergast et al., 2005). Concerns had also been raised around Queensland students' literacy and numeracy scores against national and international benchmarks (Luke et al., 2003; Masters, 2009). This spark eventually led to developing the ACER theoretical framework underpinning the reform entitled Junior secondary – Theory and practice (ACER, 2012). This framework specifies both a structural arrangement to incorporate the final year of primary school into the lower years of secondary school, and a philosophical approach involving the use of age-appropriate pedagogies and approaches in response to the identified needs of early adolescence.

In relation to the Queensland reform, three key features to success should be considered: 1) the teacher as an active agent; 2) an intermediary between the school and the system; and 3) strong leadership (Mourshed et al., 2010).

The concept of a teacher as an active agent of school reform and development is central to educational practices and policies. Teachers must be active and effective agents of the intended change. In fact, teachers then act as both the subjects, who need

to change individual practices, and agents, who implement reform, of this change (Main, 2013). Providing opportunities for individuals to work together and have collective responsibility to improve practice is a positive. On the other hand, lack of agency has been recognised as a problem in school development. The importance of enabling collaborative practices to properly develop and become established is highlighted by Hattie (2003) in his synthesis of over 50,000 studies and 800 meta-analyses of student achievement.

He drew the major conclusion that 'the remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching' (Hattie, 2003, p. 86). To achieve collaborative practices, teachers need time to reach a common understanding and establish a shared commitment.

This sets up the conditions for embedding a shift in the fabric of the teaching and learning in a school or system (Fullan, 2001). In junior secondary reform in Queensland, a focus to move from the student to the teacher as the subject and agent of implementing the reform is necessary (ACER, 2012).

Developing a middle layer between the school and the system is also critical for effective reform. The form that this middle layer takes can vary and depends on the context and type of reform being implemented. For example, in Mourshed et al.'s (2010) work, this mediating layer typically performed three tasks: 1) providing targeted support to schools, 2) interpreting and communicating

the improvement objectives, and 3) facilitating and encouraging the collaboration between schools. Including a research team to drive the Program in this scenario served as a middle layer, mediating between the schools and the systems in which they operate.

In order for reform to be sustained in the longer term, the shaping of leadership is the third imperative (Mourshed et al., 2010). For junior secondary reform in Queensland, the leaders and teachers were identified as both the subjects and agents of change (ACER, 2012). In order for this change to be sustainable the leaders needed to be provided with opportunities for professional learning and to enable others to take risks. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) argued that leaders must be 'committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, education research and best practice' and be 'courageous and collaborative' (2001, p. 28).

Being courageous as a leader embarking on a junior secondary reform means being willing to break down strongly held historical traditions pertaining to education for adolescents. Sustaining such reforms requires leaders who support teachers within their school by providing explicit training in the pedagogies associated with the reform and ensuring that continuity for those practices is then implicit within the school context.

Within these various layers of education reform, the need to identify a model that would be useful for this Program was crucial. This paper now describes the model selected.

The Education Change Model

At the core of the Program is the ECM, which was developed originally for reform processes in Australian middle schooling (Pendergast et al., 2005; Pendergast, 2006) and later used to facilitate state-wide reform of the early childhood sector in Victoria (Garvis et al., 2013). The model has been derived from an educational scenario; however, the principles underpinning the reform model are equally applicable to business, industry and community reform settings. The ECM has value for an individual, a site or setting, and the systemic level. At the individual level it can be used to assist people to determine the stage of reform they are operating at by reflecting on their own understandings and practices. Similarly, in a specific site, the phase of reform can be determined by auditing the evidence presented across the site. At the systemic level, the components of the phases outlined in the ECM support further progress in implementation. Hence, adopting the ECM is applicable to the innovative change in school reform in this project.

Typically, the ECM proposes that programs of reform are established in three phases, gradually introducing particular core component changes, and spanning seven years, depending upon circumstances.

These phases are the Initiation phase, the Development phase and the Consolidation phase. Both the ECM and the relevant literature recognise that educational reform often takes longer than expected or typically allowed for in schedules. The three broad phases can be

mapped onto any major reform initiative, and feature indications of time taken to achieve each phase. The Initiation phase occupies the first year or two, the Development phase consumes the next two to five years, and the Consolidation phase can last over a further five to ten years. The time periods associated with each of the three phases are indicative only and can be accelerated through the alignment of enablers. Similarly, inhibitors can lead to dips in the progress of the reform program, adding extra time to the overall reform process. It is important to note the duration of the reform journey is consistent with the six year duration that Mourshed et al. (2010) indicated. The core components for each phase are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Core components of Education Change Model for junior secondary

Initiation Phase 1–2 years	Development Phase 2–5 years	Consolidation Phase 5–10 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing new language and philosophy Focus on transition Establish quality teaching model – structures, protocols & practices Establish leadership model Plan and establish evidence principles Develop knowledge base around junior secondary learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and refine junior secondary Quality Teaching model Encourage emerging leadership Plan and implement, revise and renew Facilitate learning communities for teachers Use and extend evidence sources Develop support structures to enable sustainability of reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine quality teaching practice Lead and support others Build capacity, ownership and sustainable practices

Where these core components are not satisfactorily achieved within a particular phase, there may be a dip in the pace and rate of progress being made. Enablers to reform include: clarity of vision and philosophy; existence of a risk taking culture; leadership at systemic, school and teacher levels of operation; encouraging a collaborative culture with an emphasis on teachers as members of a learning community; provision of support for teacher professional development; and resource commitment, including time and finances. Inhibitors to reform leading to downward dips in progress include: lack of leadership, lack of funding, lack of vision and philosophy, poor evidence base, and lack of commitment (Pendergast, 2006).

There are three key features necessary for reform: establishing collaborative practices, developing a mediating layer between the schools and the centre, and architecting tomorrow's leadership (Mourshed et al., 2010). The ECM was used as the overarching framework to ensure these elements were achieved. The changes associated with implementing junior secondary, through relocating Year 7 into secondary schools and

establishing junior secondary, are profound and will significantly change the schooling of young adolescents in Queensland. The change will take several years to be normalised within the system. By using the ECM, it is apparent that sustaining change will be achieved only in the final phase of reform, that is, the Consolidation phase. Hence, the core components within the Initiation and Development phases of reform should be

successfully achieved before a strong focus on building capacity, ownership and sustainable practices is embedded into the system and genuine consolidation can be achieved. Table 3 provides a mapping tool of the six Guiding Principles within the context of the three phases of the ECM, closely linking the two for the purposes of reflecting on each phase of junior secondary reform.

Table 3: Tool for mapping Education Change Model phases and the Guiding Principles

Education Change Model phases and core components	Guiding Principles					
	Distinct identity	Quality teaching	Student wellbeing	Parent and community involvement	Leadership	Local decision-making
Initiation						
Introducing new language, philosophy	■	■				
Focus on transition	■	■	■			
Establish leadership model					■	
Develop knowledge base around junior secondary learners		■		■		
Establish quality teaching model: structures, protocols and practices		■				
Plan and establish evidence principles					■	
Development						
Implement and refine junior secondary quality teaching model	■	■	■	■	■	■
Encourage emerging leadership	■	■	■		■	
Facilitate learning communities for teachers		■				
Use and extend evidence sources						■
Develop support structures to enable sustainability of reform						■
Plan and implement, revise and renew	■	■	■	■	■	■
Consolidation						
Refine quality teaching practice	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lead and support others	■	■	■	■	■	■
Build capacity, ownership and sustainable practices	■	■	■	■	■	■

KEY: ■ Commencing ■ Working towards increased complexity ■ Achieved at complex level

The ECM was applied in a context where the junior secondary framework had first been introduced in 2012, with variable uptake by 2014, when the Program was underway. It was expected that the 259 schools would be at varied stages within the ECM. The tool became useful to identify which of the core components had been addressed and which required more attention to ensure a smooth transition to the next stage. Initially, this information was relevant at a school level, then for the regions, and finally more widely at the system level to determine the overall progress of the reform and to predict and plan what was needed to achieve sustainable reform.

The Leading Change Development Program

The Program was designed for schools just commencing this journey, as well as for other purpose-designed schools, including those that had been pilot schools. The Program aimed to work with all schools to further

develop their junior secondary program. The ECM, as outlined earlier, was used as the underpinning framework. The Program involved three stages, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Leading Change Development Program project stage

Stage	Activity	Timeline (2014)
1	Two-day professional learning conference for school leaders	April–June
2	Implementation with coaching support, including development and/or further refinement of action plan	May–September
3	One-day workshop for school leaders	September–October

Stage 1

In Stage 1, school leaders engaged in intensive professional learning where they were asked to determine their school's current phase of reform. Integral to this process was engaging with the resources to assist them to move forward through the change process. Central to this stage was the ECM (Pendergast et al., 2005), used in conjunction with John Kotter's (1996) Eight step Leading Change Model and strongly guided by the principles garnered from the report, How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better (Mourshed et al., 2010). Two hundred and fifty-nine (259) schools were involved in the two-day conferences held in the seven regions around the state.

For the two-day conferences, the delivery team developed a comprehensive suite of resources. These were made available to all schools via a USB device for each school and access to a purpose-built interactive website. Resources provided theoretical information and evidence-based research



related to adolescent learners, the six Guiding Principles, the ECM and quality teaching strategies. Information, PowerPoint presentations, and activities were developed for twenty-eight topics ranging from effective practices for adolescent learners to building teams within schools. Leadership teams were informed that they could use or adapt these resources to best suit their contexts. During the two-day conference, evaluation tools were administered to gather evidence regarding: each leadership team's perceptions of (a) the efficacy of their teachers to teach in junior secondary, (b) their school's stage of reform based on the ECM, and (c) the effectiveness of the conference program as professional learning.

Stage 2

Stage 2 involved a coaching program individualised around clusters of schools to provide ongoing support over a period of months for each school leadership team. Each school had the opportunity to participate in a coaching process, although the original design was mandatory participation. All 259 schools were placed in 22 clusters that were negotiated with regional representatives.

Each cluster included approximately ten schools and was allocated two professional coaches. For three to four months the coaches were available for direct support to assist schools with their junior secondary 'Action Plans' and to provide feedback and advice on three structured milestones.

These documents were designed around an action learning model

focused on a reflection tool for schools to consider progress to date, revisit goals and responsibilities, and seek feedback. The ECM data collected in Stage 1 enabled school Action Plans to be developed. These plans were aimed to target areas that had the potential to inhibit reform.

Once schools uploaded their documents to the Leading Change website, coaches evaluated the documents and provided written feedback. This included comments, recommendations for future direction, or additional resources.

Of the 259 schools, 114 (44%) engaged in Milestone 1 (developing an Action Plan); 71 (25%) in Milestone 2 (refining the Action Plan); and 60 (23%) in Milestone 3 (reflecting on the outcomes). Regional engagement ranged widely, from 71% to 10% for various milestones.

In addition to the coaching process, four webinars were presented on topics that were most frequently requested by school leaders during the two-day conferences. The overall satisfaction with the coaching, from participants who completed the survey administered at the one-day workshops (88 responses), was an overall mean of 7.2 out of 10 and mode of 8 out of 10. This indicates that the most common response for overall satisfaction was 8 out of 10, indicating that most participants were very satisfied with the coaching program (Pendergast et al., 2014).

Stage 3

Stage 3 provided an opportunity for the school leadership teams to reflect on and share their Action Plan achievements and their

readiness for the change in 2015. The one-day workshop delivered in seven regions constituted the final phase of the Program. The one-day workshops were structured around the concept of best practice, with a focus on three key themes: Transition, Quality Teaching, and Evidence-based Practice. Sessions throughout the day were structured around best practice for the themes, followed by presentations from selected schools in each region to share effective practice on the themes. Following school presentations, school leadership teams engaged in activities that provided them with the structure and tools to reflect on different aspects of their school's progress in each area and to consider other strategies that could further support or enhance their junior secondary program. Schools were given opportunities to network and to share their successes in their program implementation efforts.

During the one-day workshops, evaluation tools used in the two-day conferences were used again to develop longitudinal understandings of: (a) each leadership team's perceptions of the efficacy of their teachers to teach in junior secondary; (b) their stage of reform based on the ECM; and (c) the effectiveness of the conference program as professional learning.

Underpinning the Program design was clear evidence that 'purposeful professional learning for teachers and school leaders is one of the most effective strategies for improving student outcomes in our schools' (AITSL, 2012, p. 6).

With this Project, continuing and targeted professional development was at the core of the strategy. This

approach had a clear focus on the school leaders. The objective was to enable them to ensure that all high schools were ready to accept Year 7 students into their junior secondary structure. It also aimed to enhance and improve pre-existing junior secondary models with sound philosophical and educational practices in place. This readiness was to be inclusive of preparing teachers for this significant shift, enabling them to be self-efficacious and thereby better positioned to improve student learning in general.

Using the Education Change Model as an evaluation tool

During the Program, evaluation tools were used to gather evidence from school leaders about: (a) the efficacy of their teachers to teach in junior secondary, (b) their school's stage of reform based on the ECM, and (c) the effectiveness of the conference program as professional learning. This paper now discusses how the ECM was employed at the end of the three stages of the Program as a reflection tool for school leaders.

The participants

Each school had up to three school leaders present. Two-hundred and forty-seven of the 259 school teams from seven regions across the state completed a survey that asked schools to consider the ECM core elements and hence map their stage of reform.

The survey instrument

The survey instrument was an electronic or paper-based list of the 15 core components for each stage of the ECM. Respondents were invited to indicate the degree to which the component was in place.

They worked through a discussion process to reach agreement on each item to determine their response on a one to five point Likert scale for each of the 15 core components in each of the three stages of the ECM. Participants were also asked to indicate their assessment of where they believed their school was located according to the stages of the ECM.

Findings

Table 5 shows the number of respondents' assessment of their school's stage overall, combined for all regions. While the ECM has three defined phases, respondents indicated on a Likert scale and hence many indicated being part way between stages, as indicated by the numbers in the second and fourth columns (titled Cusp) of the ECM stage portion.

Table 5: Perceived Education Change Model phase for school population

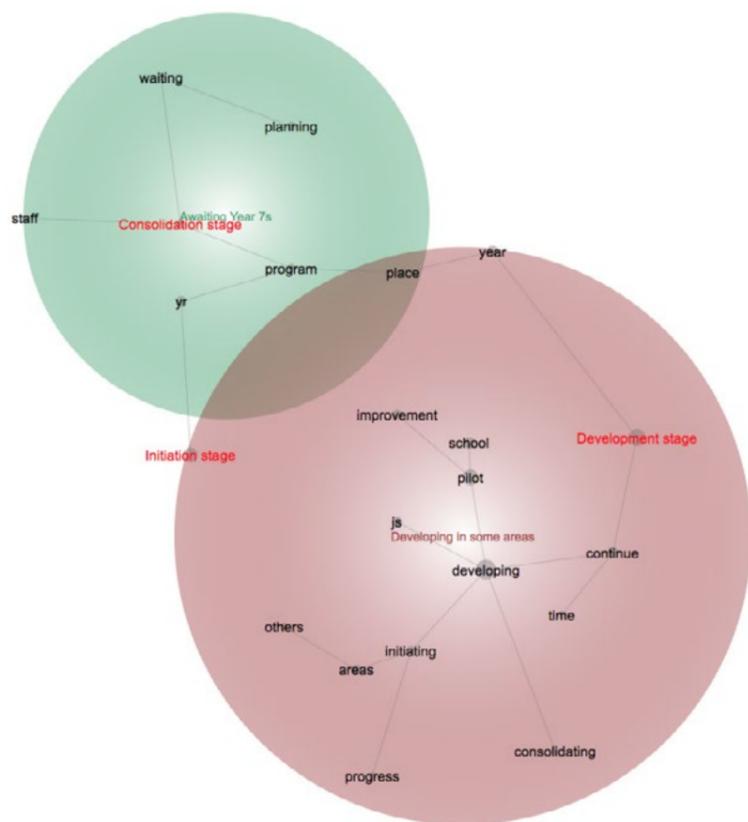
Education Change Model phase					TOTAL
Initiation		Development		Consolidation	
Mid	Cusp	Mid	Cusp		
39	15	115	37	41	247

As can be seen in Table 5, 54 schools indicated they were in the Initiation phase, 152 in the Development phase, and 41 in the Consolidation phase at the time the survey was administered. For each school, the process provided the opportunity to identify areas of strength and weakness for each of the 15 core components, thereby enabling a focus on these components at the appropriate stage of reform. In this way, plans to address possible inhibitors and dips in the reform process could be initiated by the leadership team.

The respondents were also asked why they chose the phase as indicated. Figure 1 presents a concept map (generated through the use of Leximancer (Smith, 2006)) of a content analysis of the responses explaining how they determined their school's ECM phase. There are two main themes, each represented by a circle, with the size of the circle indicating the number of comments related to the theme.

The comments have been analysed according to the associated phase: Initiation, Development or Consolidation (shown in red). Two themes emerged from the data: 'developing in some areas' (100% connectivity) being common of the comments from respondents identifying being in the Initiation and Development phases. The theme of 'awaiting Year 7s' was common to respondents identifying being in the Initiation and Consolidation stages. In other words, the respondents indicated they are in this phase because Year 7s had not yet joined the school.

Figure 1: Thematic analysis of responses explaining stage of the Education Change Model



With respect to the larger node ‘developing in some areas’, respondents indicated that they had achieved some of the core components but on balance, were in the second stage of the ECM, that is, some components were still developing. Also in this node were respondents who assessed themselves to be in the Initiation phase. Comments typically related to being ‘involved in the pilot’, which applied to 20 of the schools, ‘the nature of the school’, along with ‘improvement’, ‘continue’, ‘developing’, ‘time’ and ‘progress’; all themes that captured the notion of continuing on the journey of reform.

For the second node ‘awaiting Year 7s’, there was a strong connection with leadership teams who assessed

their school as being in the final Consolidation phase of reform. Terms such as ‘waiting’ and ‘planning’ were typically used by respondents. While this group was smaller (41 of 247 schools), it was noteworthy that these respondents generally considered their school to be at Consolidation, hence focusing on sustaining the reforms. This is somewhat ironic as, in general, these schools were absent of Year 7 students, so their reforms were more likely to be around Year 8 and Year 9 changes of practice.

Final thoughts

The Program played an important role in this major reform agenda in Queensland schools. It was informed by the international

school reform literature and a broadening understanding around adolescent development and state and national education agendas focused on young adolescents.

Mourshed et al. (2010) observed that major improvements in education systems often have their impetus grounded in a spark, typically being either a crisis or a major reform agenda, as in this case.

Concerns had been raised around Queensland students’ literacy and numeracy scores against national and international benchmarks for more than a decade. There was also a national focus on the middle years of learning and state reform centred on creating junior secondary in Queensland government high schools. Notable about this project is the resource investment to ensure congruence between implementing the reform and the willingness of leadership teams to drive it in a sustainable and consistent way across the state. Using the ECM as the underpinning platform of the Program provided a framework that had emerged out of an evidence-based project (Pendergast et al, 2005) and informed by the literature in the field.

Looking ahead to the future, it is pertinent to consider the insights from a recent report presented by the OECD (2015) entitled *Education policy outlook 2015: Making reforms happen*. The authors reveal the scale and scope of education reforms being undertaken in the 34 OECD member countries and detail more than 450 separate initiatives in the past seven years. One of the most important observations of this collection is:

[O]nce new policies are adopted, there is little follow-up. Only 10% of the policies considered in this dataset have been evaluated for their impact. Measuring policy impact more rigorously and consistently will not only be cost effective in the long run, it is also essential for developing the most useful, practicable and successful education policy options (OECD 2015, p. 20).

A key recommendation following this major change in Queensland state education is the need for an appropriate evaluation of the reform. The timing of this should be informed by the ECM, which indicates a suitable timeline for evaluation is after most schools have located themselves in the Consolidation phase, that is, three to five years after the major reform, in 2018–2020.

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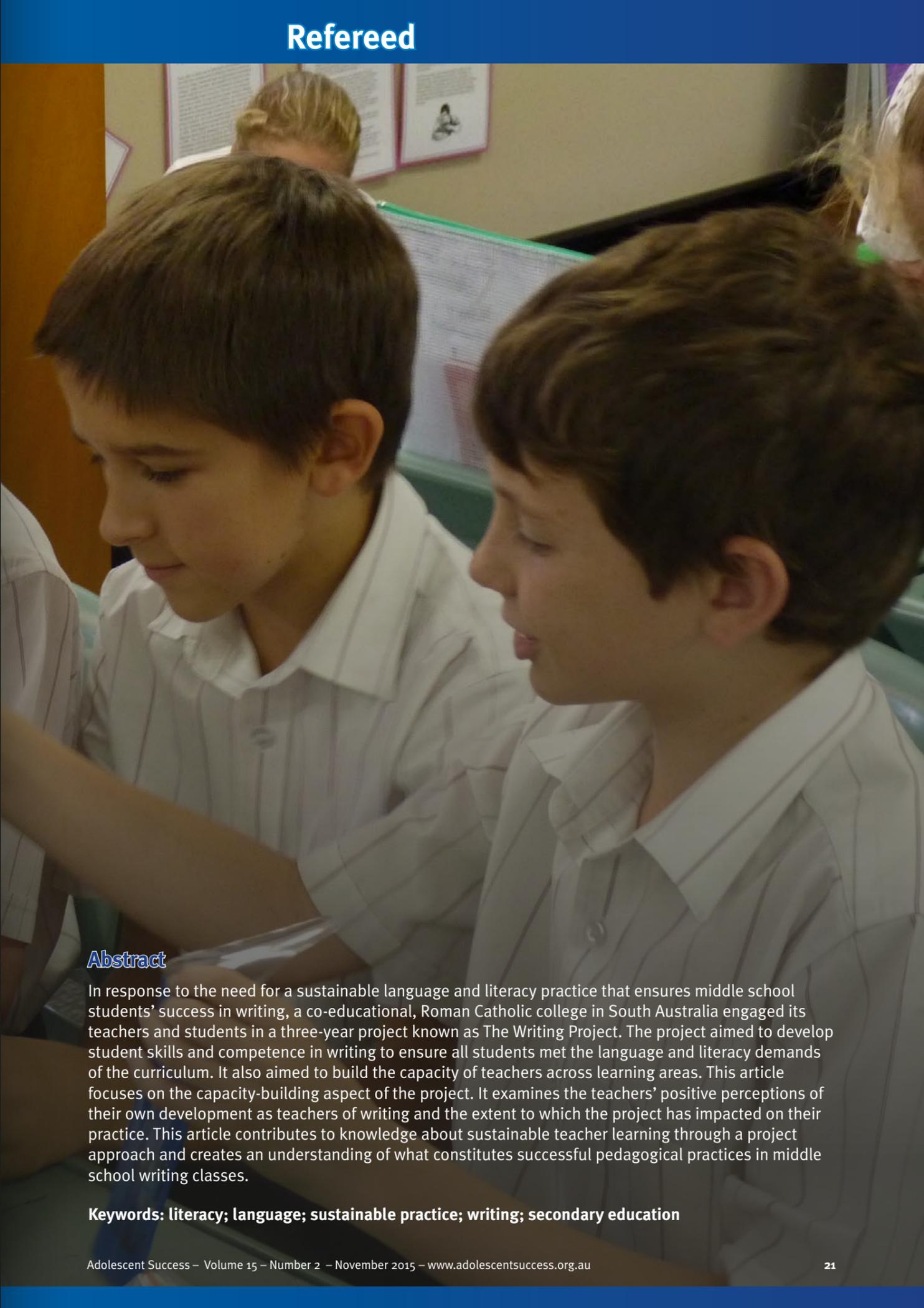
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Towards sustainable language and literacy practices for teacher learning in a secondary context: A focus on writing.

Dr Nina Maadad and Ms Beverley White



Abstract

In response to the need for a sustainable language and literacy practice that ensures middle school students' success in writing, a co-educational, Roman Catholic college in South Australia engaged its teachers and students in a three-year project known as The Writing Project. The project aimed to develop student skills and competence in writing to ensure all students met the language and literacy demands of the curriculum. It also aimed to build the capacity of teachers across learning areas. This article focuses on the capacity-building aspect of the project. It examines the teachers' positive perceptions of their own development as teachers of writing and the extent to which the project has impacted on their practice. This article contributes to knowledge about sustainable teacher learning through a project approach and creates an understanding of what constitutes successful pedagogical practices in middle school writing classes.

Keywords: literacy; language; sustainable practice; writing; secondary education

Introduction

Developing sustainable language and literacy practices is essential to enable equitable access to the curriculum and successful senior schooling years for all students. Concerning both policy-makers and educators, the complex task of improving literacy is one aim of national initiatives around the globe. For example,

- the National Literacy Strategy in the United Kingdom (Literacy Taskforce, 2013; Stannard & Huxford, 2007)
- the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States of America (Federal Education Budget Project, 2013)
- The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians of the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs, or MCEETYA (2008).

Literacy currently includes how learning is used beyond the classroom in diverse social and cultural situations. Current definitions of literacy encompass everything that students need to access the school curriculum and enjoy fully participating in life beyond school. The Australian Curriculum Literacy Capability prepared by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority or ACARA (2013b, p.1) states that:

Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school.

The Australian Curriculum defines students' production of texts as 'composing texts' (ACARA, 2013b). This capability is based on a social model of language, requiring students to write for a range of purposes and contexts.

In middle schooling, this requires students' master various discourses across a breadth of studies over several years. The texts, whether web-based or text-based, become increasingly complex and multimodal. Within this learning environment, there remains considerable need for students to master written language skills to demonstrate evidence of learning. Middle schooling demands written language as a mode of assessment as well as a mode of learning. Students unable to meet this specific literacy demand are disadvantaged and their progress through schooling may be hindered. Hence, this study focuses on developing teacher capacity to explicitly teach the written genres of their learning areas, focusing on the grammar of written language. Continued research in this area is essential as many students in Australia are not achieving the expected national literacy rate. Concerns about this cohort, commonly referred to as the literacy tail, were reported to the Council of Australian Governments (Love, 2010) and taken up in The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5):

... by comparison with the world's highest performing school systems, Australian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are under-represented among high achievers and overrepresented among low achievers... there is room for

improvement in Australia's rate of Year 12 completion or equivalent.

Consequently in 2008, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This assessment program includes students' ability to compose written texts. These tests provide data to 'inform the development of strategies to improve literacy and numeracy skills of students in all schools across Australia' (ACARA, 2013b, p. 4).

Data from the 2012 NAPLAN persuasive writing task for Year 9 students (ACARA, 2012, p. 255) reported that:

In Persuasive Writing, the percentage of students across Australia who achieved at or above the national minimum standard is low relative to the other domains and other year levels (81.7%).

While this result has been consistent with the latest figures on the persuasive writing component of the NAPLAN (ACARA 2014; 2013c) for the years 2013 (82.6%) and 2014 (81.8%), this does not provide a complete picture of students' writing ability. NAPLAN is mainly assessed on the technical side of writing and not on voice or style. The test is on-demand and artificial, where some topics for writing are often not age-appropriate and confusing (Cox, 2014). However, this outcome suggests that work needs to be done for secondary schools to devise strategies aimed at improving student writing or student attitudes towards writing. An ideal situation would be to develop

students' writing skills, whether narrative or argument, relative to the demands of their year level; explicitly teaching the increasing complexity as students move to higher levels. It has to be stressed that developed writing skills would be beneficial for students preparing for subsequent years as they work towards achieving their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), and further learning in either vocational or university studies.

Since teaching students how to write can be considered a specialist skill, many teachers, across all curricular areas, require substantial professional education. Hence, the relevance of The Writing Project presented in this report.

Aim of this article

This article discusses part of the results of implementing an intensive school-wide professional development program called The Writing Project. This article reports on a particular segment of the program that focuses on teacher learning. It aims to describe, first, the teachers' perceptions of their own development as teachers of writing in their respective learning areas, and second, the extent to which professional learning has impacted on their practice. This article will contribute knowledge about sustainable teacher learning and build an understanding of what constitutes successful pedagogical practices for lifelong learning, focusing on writing in middle school. Research adding to the collective knowledge of how teachers can improve students' literacy is important at both the national and international levels.

Context of study

The context of this study is a metropolitan, co-educational, pre-school to Year 12, Roman Catholic college in South Australia. The school has experienced rapidly changing demographics in recent years. It has changed from single sex to co-educational, and the proportion of English as Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students increased to 18% in 2012. School surveys show that approximately 30% of parents did not complete Year 12 and a further 10% did not complete Year 10. To ensure all students have access to the curriculum, the secondary campus of the college embarked on a three-year project to incorporate the explicit teaching of writing in every subject from Year 8 to Year 10. This endeavour was called The Writing Project. The principal of the college expressed concern that some students studying for their SACE could not compose written assessment tasks without support. The SACE represents choices for students, be it academic study, a vocational pathway or meaningful employment, hence the principal's moral imperative that every student achieved the SACE. In light of this, the aims for The Writing Project were:

1. develop skills and competence in written language for all students across the curriculum
2. improve SACE results for all senior students
3. support the language and literacy development for the increasing number of EALD students, enabling equitable access to the curriculum
4. build teacher capacity and expertise.

The last aim, building teacher capacity, is directed at supporting teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the discourse of their own subject areas with scaffolding as a key pedagogical approach. This will enable students to engage cognitively, affectively, and skilfully with the required language demands.

Writing and the teaching of writing

Society expects that through schooling, all children will learn to write. However, the challenges for children are many as they learn the skills necessary for success with writing. Likewise, 'the challenges for teachers are equally daunting as they grapple with trying to meet the diverse needs of students, curriculum requirements and the expectations of employers and the community' (Mackenzie, 2009, p.60). Writing has been defined as a means of expressing or communicating in print (Mackenzie, Scull, & Munsie, 2013). It is a complex cognitive, linguistic, and communicative process that can be developed and nurtured (Whiteman, 2013). This requires both educators and students to understand the influence of the social context on language choices for writing. Students can then make informed choices about the degree of technicality and the level of formality required for a topic, which is influenced by the roles and relationships between authors and readers (Halliday, 1994). This knowledge not only equips students in the middle school to make appropriate and powerful language choices, it also develops their abilities to become effective communicators as members of the community in a range of social contexts.

This social view of language provides insights into the way language develops across the years of schooling as it moves from ‘spoken-like to ‘written-like’; therefore, increasing in complexity. Young children begin school with the capacity to communicate using spoken language that reflects the face-to-face interactions they are accustomed to in the home and community. Over time they are exposed to more complex written texts and by the time they reach the middle and later school years, they are expected to understand and produce texts with ‘increasingly formal and academic features using technical, abstract and specialised ‘written-like’ language forms, to communicate complexities of meaning’ (Education Services Australia, 2013, n.p.).

An understanding of the social view of language has informed the teaching of writing via a genre-based pedagogy (Callaghan and Rothery, 1988). For many years schools have taught genres for a wide range of purposes across many subjects (Christie and Derewianka, 2008). Genre is defined as:

... any staged, purposeful social activity which is accomplished through language. Genres may also be referred to as text

types. Genres are used for specific purposes with each genre having specific language features and schematic structure (Department for Education and Child Development, 2012, p.1).

Teachers are expected to systematically and explicitly scaffold the process of writing across genres. This task is not only expected of English teachers but also teachers of other subject areas across the curriculum. Given this, the nature of staff development and required resources is critical. In the case for literacy pedagogy being introduced to pre-service secondary teaching courses, Love (2010, p. 339) asserts that ‘the capacity of high school teachers to plan specialised content area learning in tandem with an informed consciousness of the role of language and literacy is crucial’. Developing specific literacies is a complex task, especially for the language required in Science and History texts (Unsworth, 2005) and for other subject areas. While teachers may have specialised knowledge of the subject content, this knowledge can be difficult to unpack using the discourses that express it, and then make these language patterns visible for students, who often rely on their

teachers to make the discourse of their learning areas accessible.

While teachers developed knowledge of language, and understanding of its critical importance in enabling access to the curriculum, they also required time and support to implement changes. In a study of a secondary school literacy initiative in New Zealand, May (2007) argued that a minimum realistic time frame to develop sustainable literacy practices is three to five years. This time frame enables teachers to adapt and share their work, gauging the impact it has on student improvement. Formal and informal discussions around the efficacy of approaches need to occur both within and across learning areas. Therefore, the teachers’ learning also included collaborating with others to produce artefacts to be used in the classroom and shared with their colleagues.

The Writing Project followed the social model of language for teaching writing and revealed that the aforementioned processes can provide significant change in teaching student writing. This project provides a relevant and significant example of how effective language and literacy practices can be sustained in a middle schooling.



Method

Mastering the complex language patterns of learning areas requires time and effort from middle school teachers. In The Writing Project, the time frame for establishing change in practice was three years. An outline of the key processes and professional learning timeline is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Key processes and professional learning timeline

Year	Process	Participants
2010	End of year, full day professional learning: Introduction to The Writing Project, including Genre Theory and mapping genres currently taught in Years 7–10	All staff
2011	4 x 1.5 hour language workshops addressing Social purpose & schematic structure of texts, Topic specific language, Interpersonal language and Conventions of written language	Teachers
	10 x 3 hour modules How Language Works: Success in Literacy and Learning	15 teachers and leaders
	2 x full day workshops on the Principles of Cognitive Coaching	5 leaders assigned to coaching roles
	With coaches’ support, teachers begin to develop written assessment tasks and trial new learning in the classroom	Coaches and teachers
	End of year, full day review of project and genre map, plus teachers sharing units of work and reflections thus far	All staff
2012	4 x 1.5 hour after-school pedagogy workshops addressing Teaching Factorial Explanation, Teaching Argument, Teaching Interpretive Response, Designing an Assessment Rubric	Teachers
	Full day induction to The Writing Project	New teachers
	1/2 day workshop, The Role of LACs in The Writing Project	LACs
	Scheduled meetings include mapping genres backwards from Year 12 to inform teaching and learning in the middle school	LACs
	Full day workshop, Assessment of Written Work using the English as a Second Language Scope and Scales	All staff
	Ongoing release time for collaboration between coaches and LACs, and LACs and teachers	Coaches, LACs and teachers
2013	Full day induction to The Writing Project	New teachers
	Assessing student writing using the Language and Literacy Levels EALD Students	EAL/Literacy teachers
	Ongoing release time for collaboration between coaches and LACs, and LACs and teachers	Coaches, LACs and teachers

The evidence of teacher development was collected at the end of the second year and used to inform the direction of the project in its final year. In the first year teachers attended language workshops, considering the systems of language described in the Australian Curriculum, i.e. the language for representing ideas, the language for interacting, and the language for creating cohesive texts. They considered the nature of written language in contrast to spoken discourse, and how they could reveal these differences to students. The second year focused more on the pedagogical knowledge required to engage students both collaboratively and cognitively in the learning. Teachers took on student roles and experienced the scaffolding approach to teaching and learning. These workshops were genre-specific so teachers became more aware of how cultural, social and situational context informs and shapes the text production.

When the data was being collected, the college’s secondary campus had 970 enrolments and 73 teachers. Most teachers participated in The Writing Project to some extent as all teachers take middle school classes (Years 8 and 9), which were the focus of the project. To distil the teachers’ key messages about growth and sustainable practices, a predominantly quantitative approach was used. At the end of the second year, teachers were invited to participate in an online survey with several question types. The data included both closed and open-ended responses. Some questions gathered information about the participants and their work to ascertain the breadth of impact of The Writing Project. Rank order questions were also included, where participants either agreed or disagreed with 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 and these were analysed quantitatively by clustering similar response sets.

One of the researchers delivered the professional learning workshops and coached Learning Area Coordinators (LACs) and teachers (Table 1), providing significant insight into the context and enabling clear interpretation of responses.

Results

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

The Participants

Table 2 shows that seven (21%) of the 33 teachers who completed the survey were LACs. The other 26 participants (79%) were teachers from various learning areas. LACs planned backwards from Year 12 to decide which genres should be included in Years 8, 9, and 10 to prepare students

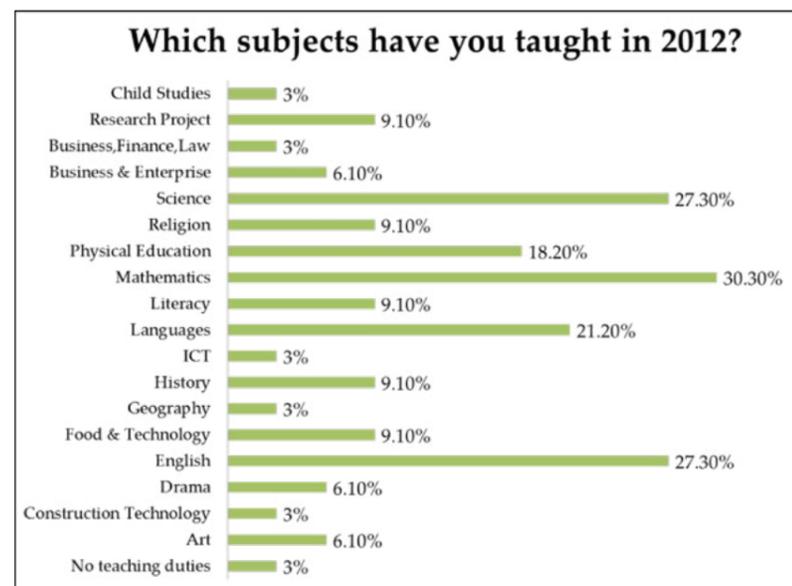
for senior secondary. LACs also supported teachers to develop units of work to ensure each learning area met the required number of assessment tasks using extended writing. Hence, LACs provided useful insights into implementing the project.

Table 2: Participant characteristics

Demographics	Frequency (n=33)	Percentage (%)
Learning Area Coordinator		
Yes	7	21.0
No	26	79.0
Length of teaching experience		
1–5 years	10	30.3
6–10 years	5	15.2
11–15 years	3	9.1
More than 15 years	15	45.5

Table 2 also shows that half the teachers (45.5%) had been teaching for over 15 years, while a third of them (30.3%) had been teaching from one to five years. 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 were their shared beliefs and the desire for positive outcomes.

Figure 1: Subjects taught by the participants

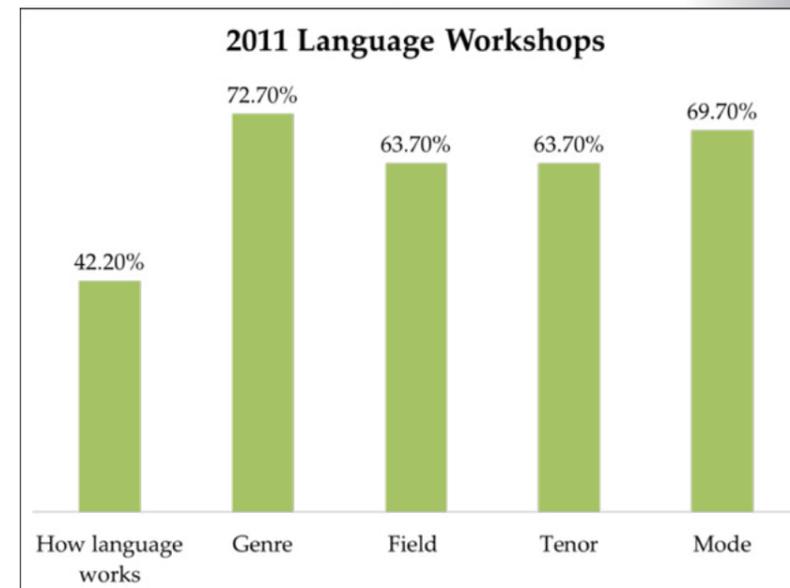


Thirty percent of teachers taught Mathematics, Science, and English. Around 20% taught Languages and Physical Education, while nearly 10% taught Religion, Literacy, History, the Research Project, Food and Technology, and Personal Learning Plan. Only 3% of participants had no teaching duties in 2013. This data shows the potential for The Writing Project to cover a broad range of discourses, thus offering writing opportunities to students in a wide range of learning areas.

Professional learning

The following graphs represent the teacher participation in the 2011 and 2012 workshops.

Figure 2: Participation in the 2011 language workshops



In 2011, the focus was to build teacher knowledge about language. The English as Additional Language Consultant (EALC) from Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) delivered a 30-hour course to ten interested staff members. The course, titled How Language Works, was developed by the Department of Education and Children's Services (2011), now called Department for Education and Child Development. The consultant also offered four after-school workshops on the applications of the functional model of language in middle school contexts. Figure 2 shows the attendance rate of the surveyed participants.

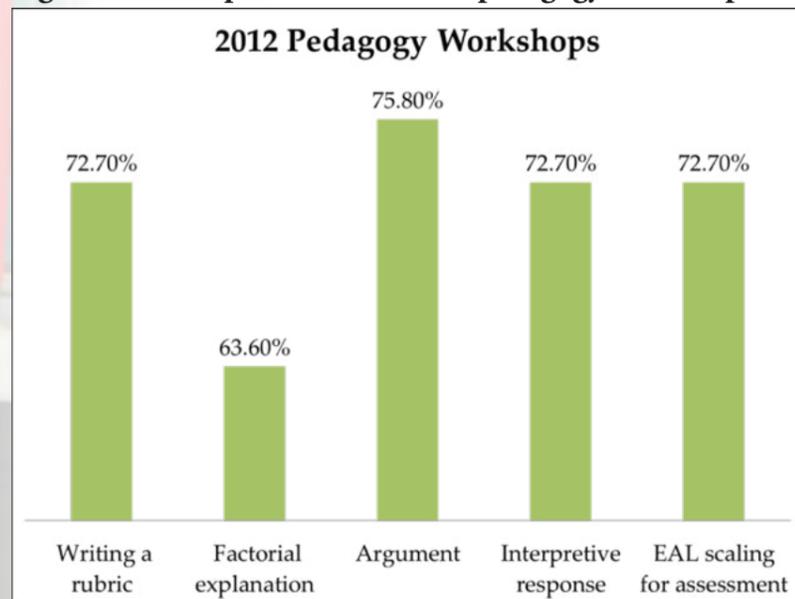
Considering over 40% of participants attended How Language Works, and the remainder attended the mini course, the overall rate of attendance for professional learning was very high. Feedback collected from the workshops revealed that all of the teachers felt that their knowledge about language had increased.

However, the majority indicated that they were not confident enough to change the way they were teaching in the classroom and adjust to the recommendations of the program.

In 2012 the focus was to support teachers to use their knowledge of language. Three of the workshops modelled the pedagogies used within a teaching and learning cycle to scaffold text production within a specific context.



Figure 3: Participation in the 2012 pedagogy workshops

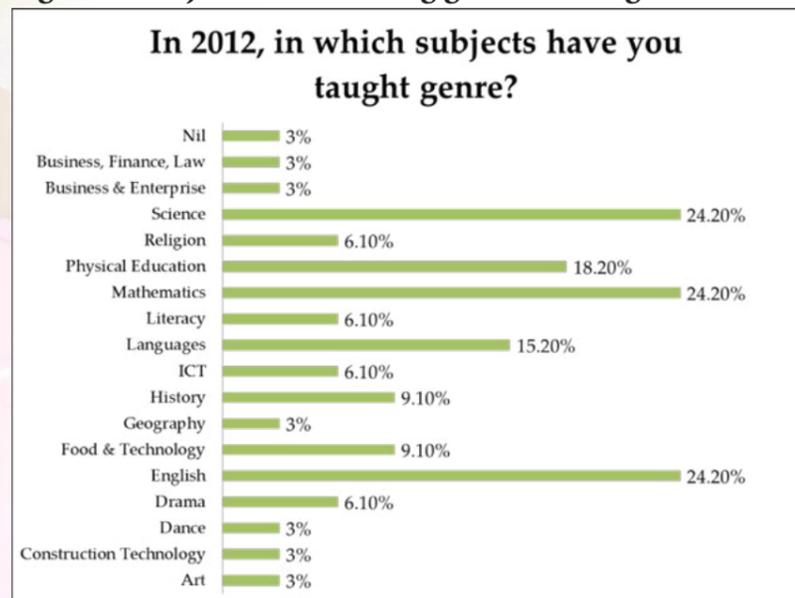


One workshop focused on literacy rubrics to encourage a consistent approach to assessing writing. Another full day session for the whole school had participants placing student-written work on a continuum of language development and considering teaching points that would assist students to progress.

Change in teacher practice

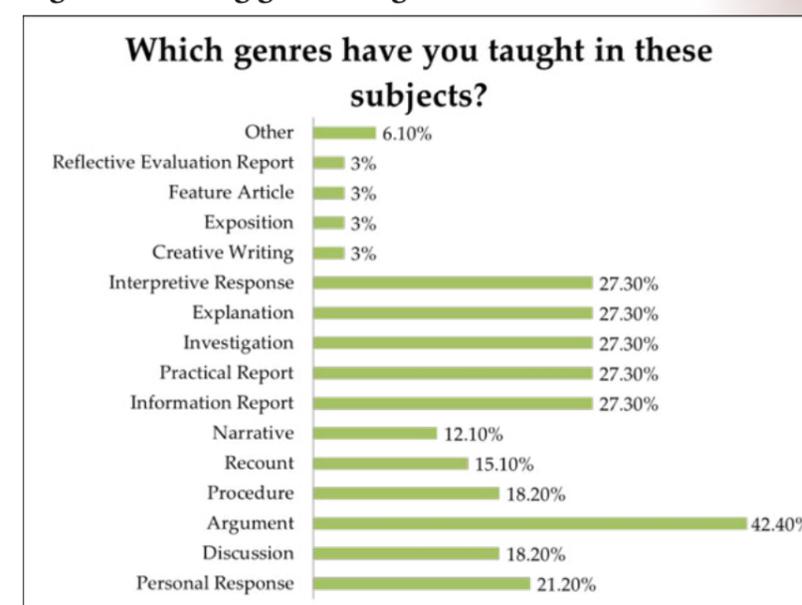
Figure 4 shows that writing genres were explicitly taught in 17 of the 24 subjects represented in the survey. Twenty-four percent of the genre writing was taught in English, Mathematics, and Science. Around 20% was taught in Physical Education and 15% in Languages.

Figure 4: Subjects where writing genres are taught



There are also other subjects in which genre was taught as shown in Figure 4. Once again, this demonstrates the breadth of the project and students' exposure to the explicit teaching of writing in 2012.

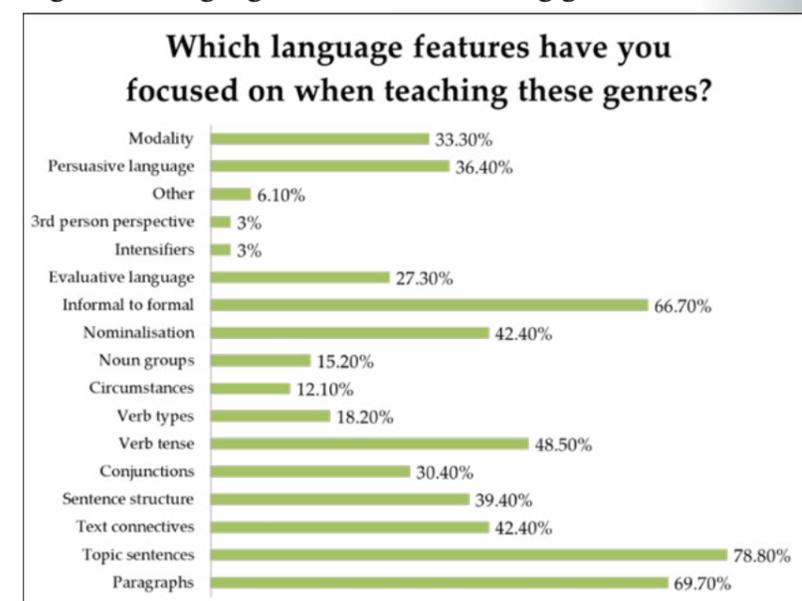
Figure 5: Writing genres taught



This was followed by information reports, practical reports, investigations, explanations, and interpretive responses (27.3%). Around 20% of teachers taught personal response, discussion, and procedural writing. Other genres were also taught as shown in Figure 5. This demonstrates the broad range of purposes for writing, and again, the level of exposure students had to the explicit teaching of writing.

Language features, as shown in Figure 6, formed part of the teaching of writing genres. Most of these language features were taught by the participants but some of these features were taught more often than the others. This could also indicate the current needs of the students.

Figure 6: Language features for teaching genres



Results show that a majority of teachers supported students to develop cohesion in their texts by explicitly teaching how to use topic sentences, construct paragraphs and effectively use text connectives.

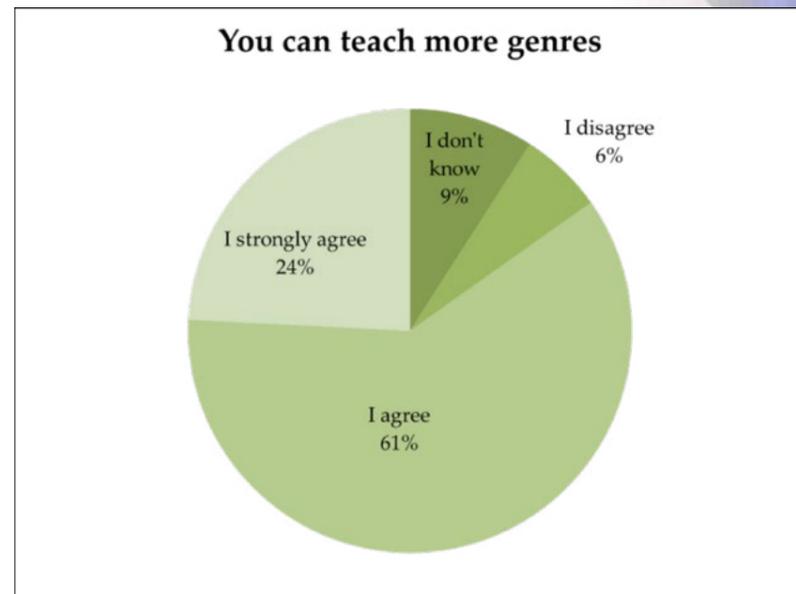
Nearly 80% of teachers focused on topic sentences, nearly 70% of the teachers taught paragraph writing and around 40% focused on text connectives.

Moving students along the register continuum to produce more formal writing was also a focus, with 66.7 % of teachers teaching the difference between informal and formal language choices and 42.4% of teachers teaching nominalisation.

Presenting a range of viewpoints and strengthening arguments was taught by about one third of teachers, for example, persuasive language (36.4%), modality (33.3%), evaluative language (27.3%), and third person perspective (3%). Teachers also supported students to improve their writing at the sentence level by teaching verb tense (48.5%), sentence structure (39.4%), conjunctions (30.4%), verb types (18.2%), noun groups (15.2%), circumstances (12.1%), and intensifiers (3%). Other grammatical features of texts that are not listed were also taught (6%). This demonstrates the depth of involvement of teacher-participants in scaffolding student writing, in which most of them focused on strategies that led to more elaborate sentence construction.

As a result of The Writing Project, 85% of teachers surveyed believe they can teach more genres in their respective learning areas.

Figure 7: Broad agreement to having confidence in teaching more genres



Through The Writing Project, 82% of teachers revealed that they were encouraged to teach language in context more explicitly.

Figure 8: Broad agreement to teaching language in context



More than 80% of the participants believe they are more confident in teaching writing because of The Writing Project.

Figure 9: Broad agreement to teaching writing with more confidence



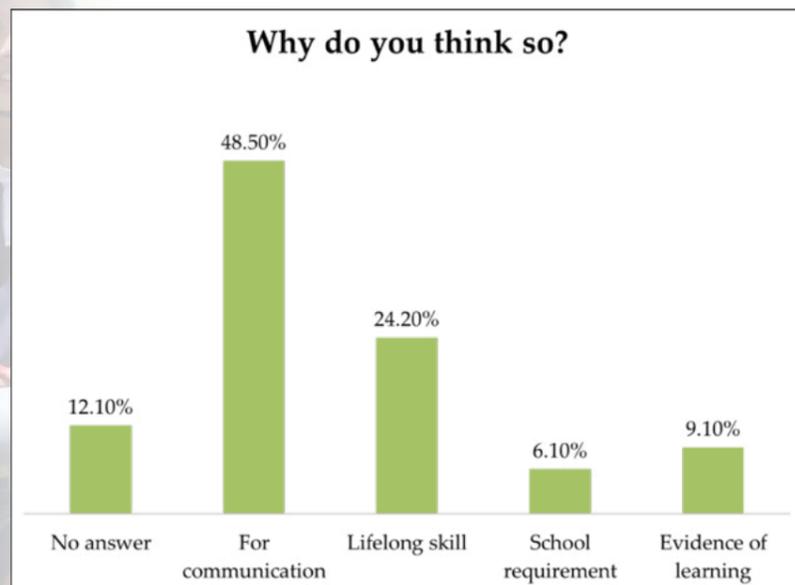
The results indicate that the majority of teachers have increased their ability to teach a wider range of genres (85%), an increased range of language features in context (82%) and are also more confident in their teaching of writing (82%). These results indicate a positive change in teacher practice, resulting in more subject-specialist teachers gaining confidence in teaching the written discourse of their learning areas.

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 to statements pertaining to the importance of writing, the usefulness of The Writing Project to attain long-term outcomes, and the improvement of student writing.

There was unanimous positive agreement among the participants about the importance of The Writing Project. 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 steep learning curve. Figures 10–13 present the results for the perceived value and impact of The Writing Project.

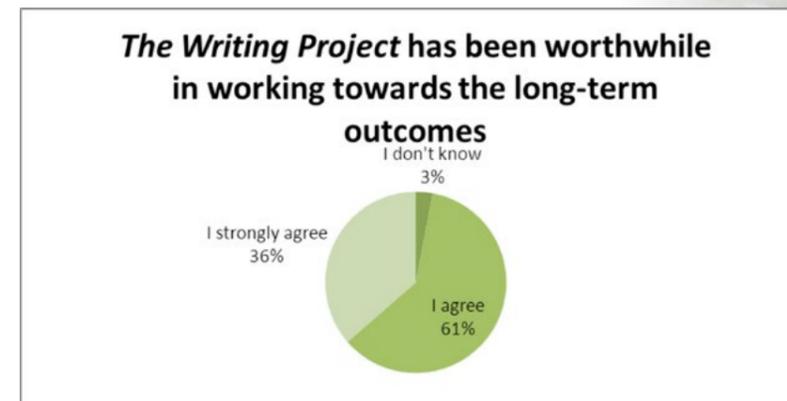
Figure 10: Top reasons for the importance of writing



The majority of teachers valued writing because it is a necessity for life beyond school. For them, communication is expressed through writing (50%) and is a lifelong skill (24%). Regarding success at school, nearly 10% of the 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.

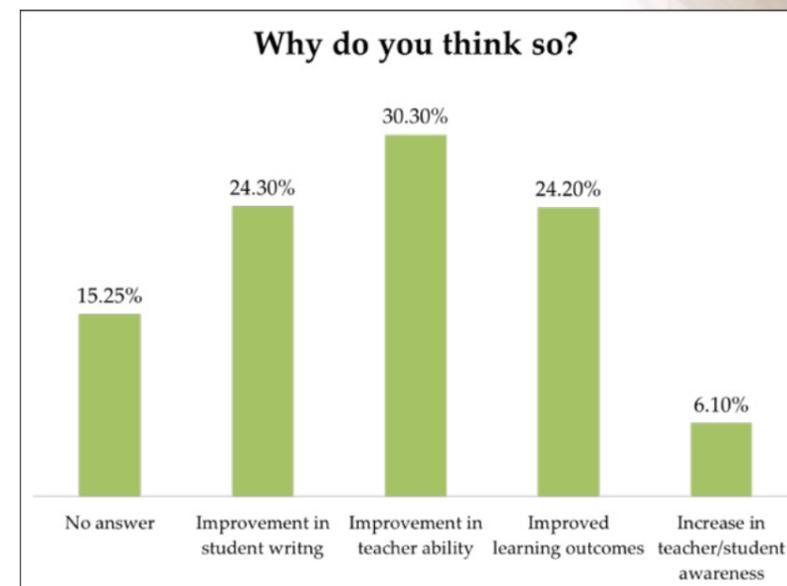
There was a strong positive response to the ability of The Writing Project to address long-term outcomes with 97% of the teachers agreeing that the project has been worthwhile. Only one participant (3%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 11: Importance of The Writing Project on long-term outcomes



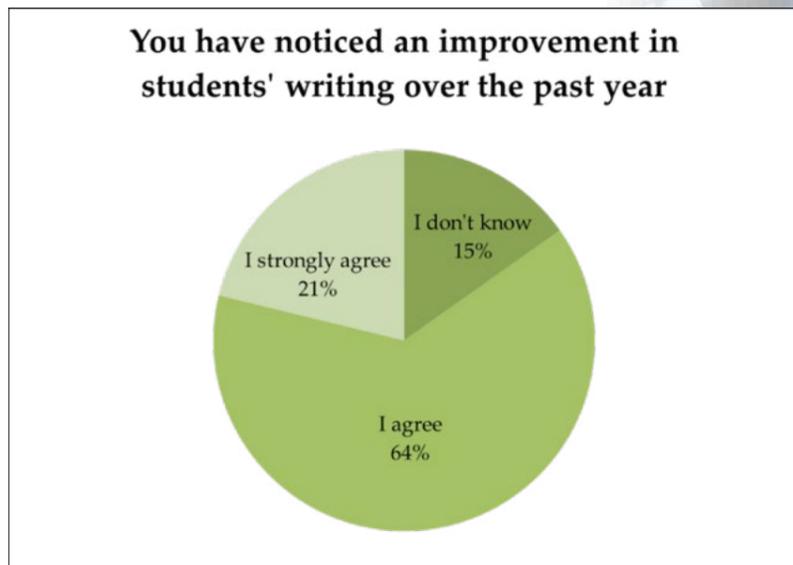
This positive response to The Writing Project demonstrates that teachers could share the vision of an inclusive pedagogy and improved literacy standards for all students. Participants gave various reasons regarding the impact on long-term outcomes. Thirty percent referred to the improvement in their 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%).

Figure 12: Reason for the importance of The Writing Project on long-term outcomes



Combined, the responses that linked learning outcomes with the improvement in student writing revealed that more than half of the teachers saw the benefit of the project, finding the added workload and high expectations worthwhile. When asked specifically if teachers had 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.

Figure 13: Broad agreement on improvement in students' writing



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

Responses to the question on teachers' perceptions on 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 LACs (12.1%), teachers (33.3%), and coaches (36.4%) were found to be the most useful. Some comments from participants include:

Working with others provides the most amount [sic] of help due to the collaboration process and being able to 'bounce off' one another. (Participant 1)

Collaborating with teachers and coaches about how to teach the teaching and learning cycle and how to assess appropriately has provided clarification about how to make information about genre accessible to students. (Participant 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. (Participant 3)

Figure 14: Most helpful learning opportunities

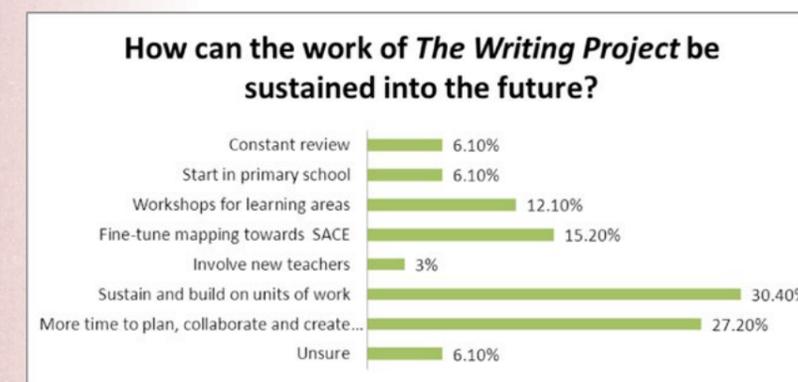


With the social view of teaching writing, collaboration provided learners and teachers opportunities for feedback that were useful for creating a deeper understanding of the writing process and the expectations derived from writing tasks. However, it was the combination of workshops aimed to develop teacher knowledge and, the follow up and support that 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. (Participant 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. (Participant 5)

Figure 15: How to sustain the work of The Writing Project into the future



This result supports the earlier claim that the collaborative approach supports teacher professional learning. Teachers believed that The Writing Project should continue by sustaining and developing units of work (30%). Many teachers felt, however, that more time needs to be given to collaborative planning and creating new units of work (27%). Some teachers felt that the mapping of genres needed 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 middle school (6%), while others felt that the project should be reviewed regularly (6%).

Clearly, to sustain the work of this project, it should become a Writing Program, which would require ongoing planning at the whole-school level to ensure it is maintained. All of the suggestions require careful planning and ongoing professional learning support at the faculty level.

Conclusion

The responses in this survey provided very useful information to whole-school approaches to literacy improvement. In this paper's introduction it was established that a literacy policy alone is unlikely to change what happens in the middle school classroom. This is often due to middle school teachers, who are specialists in their learning areas, not having the specialised knowledge to unpack the language of their subjects. Staff development is critical to any successful literacy program. This

must be implemented with clear goals, support from leadership, and a realistic time frame.

An overwhelming majority of teachers from this school shared the belief that writing is important for students to be successful both in school and in life itself. A number of students reaching Year 12 without gaining these writing skills was strong motivation to change the school's approach to teaching writing.

The Writing Project was perceived as worthwhile by a large majority of those surveyed. They saw an improvement in teachers' knowledge and ability to teach writing, as well as an observed improvement in students' writing. Participants attributed this to the

knowledge and skills they have acquired through professional learning workshops focusing on language, pedagogy and assessment, and the opportunity to collaborate with others to apply the learning. Formal professional learning in workshops and presentations is critical to build knowledge, but not always enough to make a difference to classroom work. Coaching support from experts in the field, along with opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in an ongoing program is what makes a difference.

Finally, given that The Writing Project has concluded its third year, data will be collected to ascertain the difference the project has made to students' ability to write. The results to be available in mid-2015.

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RIOT radio: Showcasing multiliteracies in a Reggio-inspired middle school

Dr Sandra Hesterman

Abstract

This research paper examines how middle school students can initiate their own designs of meaning to facilitate multiliteracies experiences. The RIOT (random, intelligent and optimistic teenagers) Radio project was documented over a one-year period in a small Western Australian independent community school inspired by the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy. A class of fourteen young adolescents unanimously agreed that constructing a middle school radio studio and creating a variety of radio shows had been a project 'filled with excitement, hard work and loads of fun'. Their teachers recognised the radio project as a way of integrating technology, media and popular culture to scaffold learning in authentic ways. This case study, using ethnographic inquiry methodology, provides insight to how a student-initiated project supported the development of General Capabilities as specified in the Australian Curriculum.

Keywords: multiliteracies, authentic learning, middle school, Reggio Emilia, Australian Curriculum General Capabilities

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have enabled new ways of creating and communicating meaning; broadening our understanding of what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century. The Australian Curriculum, a national curriculum for schools in all states and territories of Australia, identifies students' use of ICT as an essential general capability they will integrate across the curriculum and in their lives outside school (ACARA, 2013). Relevant to this paper, key documents such as the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the *National Report on Schooling in Australia* (ACARA, 2009) recognise 'the middle years as an important period of learning – [one] in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines is developed' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 12). It is envisaged that teachers will prepare varied and engaging teaching and learning approaches responsive to the needs and characteristics of middle school (middle school) students. These approaches include the use of ICT.

While there is an expectation that students will acquire ICT capability as they learn to use ICT, the success of developing ICT capacity lies in teachers' ability to demonstrate 'ICT as fun, creative and engaging' (Australian Computer Society, 2013, p. 2). To accommodate the multiplicity of visual, aural, gestural, spatial, linguistic and interacting multimodal designs of meanings (Callow, 2013; Kress, 2010; Luke, 2013) reflective of contemporary media and popular culture communications, a shift is required from traditional constructions of literacy to include a plurality of literacies—multiliteracies.

To achieve this, it is advocated that a pedagogy of multiliteracies—a pedagogy that embraces the notion that there are multiple modes of representation that communicate meaning broader than print mode—be adopted beyond Standardised Australian English print mode.

Other modes of meaning relevant to twenty-first century communications include:

- Visual mode (still and moving images, including view and perspective)
- Auditory mode (sound, including music, noise, hearing and listening)
- Gestural mode (expressive and kinesthetic movement, including eye movements, demeanors of the body, gait, dance, ritual and ceremony)
- Spatial mode (proximity, spacing, layout, communication in time and space, interpersonal distance)
- Oral linguistic mode (includes live and recorded speech) (adapted from Cope & Kalantzis, 2013).

While shifts to a pedagogy of multiliteracies remain limited in Western Australian schools (Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin & Hesterman, 2013), there are a few case studies that document how teachers have embedded a pedagogy of multiliteracies in the curriculum to make meaningful connections with students' lived experiences (Sandretto & Tilson, 2013; Willis, 2009). For instance, the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, which intuitively embeds a

pedagogy of multiliteracies, can facilitate these connections (Hesterman, 2013) to provide a curriculum that 'inspires and challenges all learners, and prepares them for the future' as advocated by ACARA (2010b, p. 1).

Literature review

The single case study of RIOT Radio (referred to RR or the radio project) provides insight to how young adolescents' interest in media and popular culture can be harnessed to facilitate middle school multiliteracies experiences and inadvertently support their development of a wide range of general capabilities, including ICT. Before proceeding to the RR project itself, it is important that the reader is familiar with the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, a pedagogy of multiliteracies, and qualities of an authentic learning environment. Following the literature review discussion, the RR project is examined to show how the integral relationship between these theoretical constructs as enacted in a middle school context.

The Reggio Emilia Educational Philosophy

The *Reggio Emilia* educational philosophy, shaped by the writings of Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner and Malaguzzi, promotes social constructivist learning principles, including that 'knowledge is socially constructed in a cultural setting' (L.T. Hill, Stremmel & Fu, 2005, p. 7); and that 'there is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners' (Hein, 1991, p. 1). These principles are exemplified in the design and

enactment of the curriculum. It is not pre-planned by the teacher, but negotiated through emergent processes within the context of a community of learners.

While the *Reggio Emilia* philosophy has its genesis in early childhood education, it is relevant to the wider education spectrum. It is recognised that students of all ages communicate meaning in many ways. These communications include *The hundred languages of children*, a metaphor for thinking about the many avenues that students can use to communicate knowledge.

Students are encouraged by their teachers to express meaning using a wide repertoire of mediums, including 'words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, or music, to name a few' (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p. 7).

Student learning is made visible through documentation—a narrative form—used to recall, reflect, share and inform choices for designing learning environments. Assessment of learning is viewed as a personal perspective that gives value. It is 'not aimed at giving the event objectivity but at expressing the meaning-making effort' and invites a 'path of research' (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 87).

Components essential to the full expression of *The hundred languages of children* include daily class meetings where adults respond to students' ideas, interests and group work; documentation that reflects critically on students' experiences and expressions; and provide a learning environment that is richly and carefully

resourced to stimulate meaning-making processes. Students are encouraged to take leadership in their educational pursuits and adopt a multi-symbolic approach by accessing a wide range of media and popular cultural artefacts to design meaning. Because language and knowledge constructs are subject to individual interpretation, *The hundred languages of children* (multiple modes of meaning that include ICT) are varied according to a student's design purpose.

In this research study, teachers implemented a Reggio-inspired approach and intuitively adopted a pedagogy of multiliteracies. They recognised varied modes of meaning—*The hundred languages of children*—as dynamic representational resources that can support students' learning across the curriculum.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies

If students are to be equipped with the skills necessary to meet the challenging and diverse demands of different forms of communication brought about by new technologies then a broader definition of literacy is required; one that views language as 'revisionary, creative, personal and pluralistic in nature' (Loveless, DeVogd & Bohlin, 2001, p. 74) and embraces the cultural and linguistic diversity characteristic of Australian society (MCEETYA, 2008). To achieve this end, a pedagogy of multiliteracies is advocated (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). Familiarity with multiliteracies metalanguage is useful when discussing students' use of various resources and modes of meaning, and to develop deep understanding of concepts such as multimodality (Bearne, 2009; Kress, 2010).

Multiliteracies metalanguage has been described as a 'tool kit', whereby its contents are acquired, supplemented and adapted to support students' learning of multiliteracies and serve their communication purpose (Unsworth, 2001). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) propose a metalanguage based on the concept of 'design'. Design is defined as 'an active and dynamic process' ... where 'the individual and the individual's culture are inseparable' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 20 and 23). Importantly, a multiliteracies metalanguage 'tool kit' extends discourse on literacy pedagogy, reinforces the epistemology inherent in the multimodal theory (Kress, 2010), and grounds its theoretical perspective to teaching practice:

Teachers and learners should be able to pick and choose the tools offered. They should also feel free to fashion their own tools. Flexibility is critical because the relationship between descriptive and analytical categories and actual events is, by its nature, shifting, provisional, unsure and relative to the contexts and purposes of analysis (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 24).

It is incumbent on teachers to reflect critically on how they invite student participation in multiliteracies discourse. For instance, students need time to talk about the *available designs* for language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions in contemporary society. They require flexibility to fashion available designs to demonstrate their ideas and knowledge through open-ended *designing* activities with access to different 'tools'. Then,

during the process of *designing*, the creation of a new meaning-making resource that expresses cultural and linguistic individuality will emerge. This *redesigned* resource is one that has personal significance for the student designer and has the potential to be a new *available design* for interested others. As illustrated in RR, providing an authentic learning environment to support multiliteracies experiences (and *The hundred languages of children*) cannot be understated.

An authentic learning environment

How do teachers provide a learning environment that can facilitate multiliteracies experiences that include ICT in ways that students deem authentic real-life, purposeful engagements? Research shows that an authentic learning environment will provide:

- 1. An authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge will be used in real life.** It will provide the purpose and motivation for learning, and a sustained and complex learning environment that can be explored at length.
- 2. Authentic activities.** Ideally such tasks should comprise of ill-defined activities that have real-world relevance, and that present complex tasks to be completed over a sustained period, rather than a series of shorter disconnected examples.
- 3. Access to expert performances and the modelling of processes.** It will expose students to expert performance, giving them a model of how a real practitioner behaves in a real situation.

- 4. Multiple roles and perspectives.** In an authentic learning environment, it is important to enable and encourage students to explore different perspectives.
- 5. Collaborative construction of knowledge.** The opportunity for students to collaborate is an important design element. True collaboration is not simply working together, but also 'solving a problem or creating a product which could not have been completed independently' (Forman & Cazden, 1985, p. 329).
- 6. Reflection.** Collaborative groupings enable students to reflect socially and to engage in meaningful discussions on issues presented.
- 7. Articulation.** The environment will incorporate inherent opportunities to articulate.
- 8. Coaching and scaffolding.** An authentic learning environment needs to provide collaborative learning, where more able partners can assist with scaffolding and coaching.
- 9. Authentic assessment.** The assessment must be seamlessly integrated with the activity and provide the opportunity for students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge, and to craft products or performances in collaboration with others (adapted from Herrington & Herrington, 2008, pp. 70-73).

Integrating ICT in middle school to promote multiliteracies requires a particular pedagogical mindset receptive to social constructivist learning principles and providing an authentic learning environment characterised

by the features described above. The following account of RR illustrates the provision of such an environment and demonstrates how multiliteracies experiences and the development of students' general capabilities were supported in authentic ways.

Research background

This case study was conducted in a Western Australian independent community school inspired by the *Reggio Emilia* educational philosophy. It catered for children aged three to seventeen years. The school's *Parents' Advisory Council* asked me, in my role as an education consultant, to conduct research on the efficacy of the *Reggio*-inspired approach in the middle school. An ethnographic inquiry methodology to develop a single case study well-matched the task of capturing thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences in the middle school (Patton, 2002). Ethnography can be adapted for its own purposes and its method of preference is participant observation (Crotty, 1998).

Fieldwork in the middle school occurred on a weekly basis over a year. Each visit was three hours in duration. During fieldwork, I observed and conversed with students about their involvement in a radio project and identified many opportunities for them to develop understandings about multimodality.

Three experienced secondary teachers were responsible for the middle school programme and facilitating the radio project. While the teachers and students were unfamiliar with the term 'multiliteracies', they understood the theoretical construct of *The*

hundred languages of children— that there are many different ways to learn, know and communicate. The broad research question that guided my investigation of RR was 'How can a student-sustained project support multiliteracies experiences in authentic ways?'

Teacher and student participation was voluntary, with students also requiring parent permission. Fourteen students (pseudonyms provided) also participated in the end-of-year semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded; seven males (aged 14–15 years) and seven females (aged 12–15 years). Student interviews, averaging one hour, were presented as informal group discussions (on teacher recommendation there were three to four students in each group). Each participant was asked to describe their participation in the radio project. Interviews were conducted with the middle school teachers on their perceptions of RR as a project-based learning approach.

My relationship with the middle school during RR activities was one of a non-judgemental adult interested to learn about the project. A process of triangulation (cross-referencing different sources of data, including document analysis of fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, radio programme content, students' daily journal reflections and photographs) helped confirm the validity of my interpretation of recorded events and the construction of a single case study. Case study research presents in different forms, employs a variety of strategies and is subject to a range of definitions with reference to what constitutes 'a case'. In this research I employed Yin's (1989) case study definition:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 23).

During data analysis, I adopted a social constructivist theoretical framework (Vygotsky 1980). I emphasised the importance of the school culture (*Reggio*-inspired) and the middle school context in understanding both the experiences and expressions of the teachers and students. In addition, I based data analysis on constructions embedded in my own socio-cultural frameworks. Rogoff (1990) refers to these as lenses, through which events are interpreted and understood. During fieldwork, I embedded myself in the social context of the middle school while discussing perspectives about RR in the data collection phase of the research. Themes that emerged related to constructing the internal design of the studio, designing the radio shows, and middle school interactions with the school community. These themes are embedded in the following case study account, which presents excerpts of participants' told story of the radio project shaped through my lens of a multiliteracies perspective.

RIOT Radio case study

The middle school students created the acronym RIOT early in the school year to describe themselves. The students proscriptively designed the radio project to accommodate their learning interests. Due to the length of the project and the spontaneous and diverse nature in which it evolved,

I have elected to present case data in four school term accounts. The project was one of many I observed while conducting research on the efficacy of the *Reggio*-inspired approach in the middle school. My interest in the radio project was to learn how it could support multiliteracies experiences in authentic ways. Italics are used in the following writing to emphasise multiliteracies metalanguage as it relates to the concept of design; that is, evidence of *available designs*, *active designing*, and *redesigned* resources during RR.

RIOT Radio project: Available designs in term 1

RR commenced at the beginning of the school year shortly after Simon (a student aged 15 years) undertook a week of work experience at an inner city radio company. Simon said the experience provided him with a 'great overview' of how a radio station functioned; this prompted a desire among his class peers to *design* a radio studio at school. The middle school teachers' response was to arrange three excursions for students to observe real radio stations 'in action' and have some of their questions answered by radio station staff. One teacher described one *available design* for delivering a radio service:

The purpose of our visits [excursions] was to identify elements of their operation that we can use or adapt for our radio station ... Significantly, they use CD and record players to play music, while promotions, themes and other elements were sequenced through a computer ... FM310 [pseudonym], for instance, is a community radio station,

and, as such, has a local focus, giving voice to under-represented groups (Jane).

Teachers informed me that during the excursions the students made notes of the equipment used, procedures followed, and information given by ‘expert’ performers. As students observed expert, real-work practices and listened to expert comment, they came to appreciate the complexity of ‘how a real practitioner behaves in a real situation’ (Herrington & Herrington, 2008, p. 71).

To design an authentic radio studio environment, students required time, space and resources. During the succeeding weeks, time was provided for students to explore ideas, consider design elements, and visit a recycling centre to gather resources.

These included egg cartons, lengths of foam and carpet squares used for soundproofing the studio. A small annex to the school’s drama and music room provided space for daily RR *designing* activities.

The *designing* of RR (studio and shows) reflected the collaborative way that knowledge is used in real life; an authentic context that provided students with purpose and motivation for learning and which presented them with complex and diverse tasks completed over a sustained period. As these tasks could not be completed by one individual, the class developed and employed a ‘radio job list’. One student recorded in his daily journal, ‘The students negotiated who would adopt roles, including managers [schedule/record keeping, alternating play/podcasts], technicians [oversee recording and testing volumes], programmers, researchers, presenters and music coordinators [arranging music selection]’. Negotiations occurred over a series of class meetings (averaging 45 minutes in duration) and ensured that students assumed leadership and mentoring responsibilities during RR activities. Students also discussed the *available designs* observed during the excursions to the radio stations and reflected on their lived experiences of broadcasted radio shows.

RIOT Radio project: Designing in terms 2 and 3

During Term 2, students continued to share an interest in actively *designing* RR with different combinations of students—depending on their interest—working on particular radio shows. The students believed they had sufficiently researched (including through internet use) broadcasting knowledge to begin *designing* radio shows. They were eager to set procedures to ensure that RR established itself as a relevant and interactive part of the school. Progress during Term 2 was slowed by delays in school ICT purchases and technical difficulties. In the interim, students’ *designing* activities were directed towards refining their aims for RR and discussing its perceived benefits to the school community during class meetings.

Students’ RR aims incorporated a wide range of General Capabilities as specified in the Australian Curriculum (and as I have mapped on Table 1 for this research project): literacy, numeracy, creative and critical thinking, personal and social capability, ethical and intercultural understandings, and ICT capability.



Table 1: Student aims and perceived benefits of RIOT Radio

RR Aims	RR Perceived Benefits
The first thing we need to do is to fix the dodgy sound proofing so that the recordings don’t sound bad [literacy and numeracy applications when designing the studio, critical and creative thinking, ICT capability].	<p>For Us [middle schoolers]: We get radio experience and get to learn how to use some of the new technology. We get to be creative and talk about the stuff we’re interested in. We get to interact with the other classes and have fun working with our friends.</p> <p>For the school community: They get to listen to music at lunchtime and learn interesting things from our variety of shows. They will get to interact with us and get involved in some of our shows, which will get them excited when they hear themselves, or they answer a question on air. We also bring them news about the school and tell them if anything new or exciting is happening.</p>
Encourage our audience to share their thoughts on the radio [literacy, personal and social capabilities, ethical understanding].	
Enhance public speaking skills in the community [literacy, personal and social capabilities].	
Share news with and from other classes [literacy, intercultural understanding].	
Broadcast good music and interesting shows [ICT capability, critical and creative thinking].	
Create a learning experience for older students in media studies [ICT capability].	
Give us an idea and opportunities to see what kind of jobs there are in radio [personal and social capabilities].	

Towards the end of Term 2, new ICT equipment arrived. There was renewed activity as students produced and tested their radio show material, while also practising their skills for broadcasting. Mastering the mixing desk and setting up playlists necessitated literacy and numeracy applications. There was also a keen sense of purpose and motivation as students shared their expertise with others and designed shows that integrated their media and popular culture interests:

Sean [student] has been working tirelessly to master our new mixing desk, and Josie [student] wasted no time in putting her new experiences at the RSPCA [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] animal rescue shelter to good use, putting together a wonderful podcast on animal care: the first in a series [of shows]. Now that we can record and test our shows and trial our play lists, I expect that we can begin regular test broadcasts by next week (teacher documentation on middle school blog).

Students hoped to broadcast a one-hour programme, once a week during lunchtime, and to allow the school community to participate with interviews, jokes, announcements and also in designing shows.

These shows facilitated students’ intercultural understandings—their appreciation of their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. One student commented on the challenge of accommodating this diversity:

The amount of work of that has gone into our podcasts is phenomenal ... how do you cater for such a diverse range of ages and target a wide range of responses on many wonderful experiences that make up our school? (Sarah, aged 15 years)

To respond to this challenge, the students conducted a ‘radio station survey’ to gather information about show content preferences of the school community. This documentation was used to assess perspectives of interested others. In *designing* and rehearsing shows, students extended one another’s knowledge on topical issues that included the use of technology. Teacher-facilitated class meetings enabled every person’s voice to be heard and their cultural and linguistic interests to be communicated.

Early in Term 3 the students hosted the grand opening of RR, their first real-life broadcast over the school public announcement (PA) system. During a lunchtime period, fifty school community members (including parents) gathered to listen to the show. During this time middle school students circulated among attendees and requested feedback about the quality of the show performances using a middle school designed survey instrument. The grand opening included, ‘live music, podcasts, a variety of songs, live announcements, a raffle, tours of the recording studio and lots of yummy food’ (Tess, aged 12 years).

After the inaugural event, students gathered together for a class meeting to assess the first broadcast, share their personal perspectives and discuss their survey data. This assessment (recorded below by two students in their daily journals) was seamlessly integrated with student-specified RR aims and student motivation to polish future radio performances.

Inside the studio

We got a lot of responses saying that our speaking over the radio needs to be louder and clearer. People should always remember when speaking into the microphone to speak directly into the microphone, and to speak slowly. It would also be useful to have three microphones for shows that consist of more than one or two people. These ideas will all assist with the sound level for the audience and make our voices easier to understand. Another suggestion from the sound controller was to give him time to test the levels of volume coming out of the speaker for each individual announcement. We received many positive reactions and with only a few changes we will be back, ready for more (Becky, aged 14 years).

Within the audience

Our response to the responses of the RR opening party was that if they [the audience] would like to hear the broadcast clearly they should stop talking and listen. The people who were listening, however, seemed to enjoy the music and everything. I didn't expect

so many people to come as we are a small class and I always get the feeling that we 'rioters' keep to ourselves within the school area for some random reason (Max, aged 14 years).

By the end of Term 3, RR evolved into a multi-disciplinary integrated project. It was 'integrated' not only across many curricula learning areas but also to facilitate the students' perceptions of the middle school entity as being an integral component of the school community. This reinforced their sense of connection with the rest of the school. The learning and assessment processes of RR did not involve competitive relationships or oversimplification of learning tasks, but rather focused on the skills, strategies and links that students required to improve their collective meaning-making effort. Self and group assessment gave added value to the radio project and invited a path of research to acquire more knowledge.

RIOT Radio project: The redesigned resource in term 4

RR continued to open endless opportunities for varied and engaging teaching and learning approaches. Eliza (teacher) observed that:

By necessity, the shows are now more spontaneous, containing much more live content, but also much more energy and a palpable sense of excited tension in the students. We are just starting to find the balance between scripting, pre-recording and improvisation, which gives live radio its edge.

After each broadcast, class meetings continued to focus

on modifications for the next performance. Assessment comments included performers needing to listen to the show in progress so they knew what was going on, avoiding squeaky chairs and touching the microphones, having background music playing, and taking care not to have extremes in volume. Other RR improvements encompassed designing formatting schedules to guide activities such as the music play-list procedure, conducting a survey of IT systems, and creating programme running timesheets. As the middle schoolers refined their broadcasting expertise and the variety of shows covered more sophisticated content they also reaffirmed their middle school identity as random, intelligent and optimistic teenagers. One student reflected:

How can it be that such a relatively 'old fashioned' medium [radio/PA system] holds such vitality, energy and relevance for today's young people? RR is real and immediate, challenging, and a little bit dangerous. From the ground up, RR is an extension and expression of who we are (Paige, aged 14 years).

The variety of radio shows captivated the interests of the middle school students and the school community. By the end of the school year, the show performances included culturally and linguistically diverse content across a range of learning areas:

- A health podcast promoting physical health and 'being happy' (Technologies, Health and Physical Education)

- DJ introductions, witty talk-back; book reviews, interviewing guest speakers; presenting alternative scripts (in costume) for the play *Commedia dell'Arte*, an Italian comedy (English and the Arts)
- School news and community updates (English, Humanities and Social Science)
- Music compositions and 'jamming', improvising music without extensive preparation or predefined arrangements (the Arts)
- Descriptions of popular culture ICT games and innovative media advertisements (English and Technologies)
- Quizzes on general knowledge (Science and History).

A station blog also served as an authentic platform to connect the middle school with the community to exchange ideas and gain feedback (Mathematics applications and Technologies).

Figure 1: Middle school student-designed RR logo



The redesigned RR integrated visual (Figure 1), aural, gestural, spatial, linguistic and interacting multimodal meanings to showcase students' multiliteracies expression. Students and teachers fashioned a multiliteracies metalanguage tool kit relevant to the radio context and purpose of performance analysis. RR also served as a new available design; an alternative meaning-making resource for other students and classes in the school to consider.

Project postscript

At the close of the school year, Alan (teacher) documented the following reflection on the RR learning journey:

RIOT Radio was an idea born right at the beginning of the year and, from my perspective, has achieved—and, in many case surpassed—any expectations I had. For me, RIOT Radio's greatest success is measured in the independence and ownership demonstrated by the students. The radio operates almost entirely without staff support, with several [student] leaders and many willing participants in different areas [of interest] driving the broadcasts. The [school] community has embraced it, and I think it has had a huge positive impact on how the middle school is perceived.

The school's Reggio-inspired philosophy enabled the middle school to be flexible with many aspects of teaching (time, space and resources) and accommodated a student-initiated and sustained project developed in a learning environment deemed authentic.

Assessment of the project was neither prescribed nor a predefined procedure, but rather it emerged from the process of developing the project itself.

Discussion

The Australian governments are committed to working with all school sectors to ensure that schools provide programmes that are responsive to students' developmental and learning needs in the middle years, and which are challenging, engaging and rewarding (ACARA, 2010a, citing the Melbourne Declaration).

The Australian Curriculum outlines what learning areas young Australians should cover as they progress through schooling. How students learn—the pedagogy that guides their learning on a day-to-day basis—remains a matter of teacher preference. A key dimension of the Australian Curriculum is also supporting students' development of the seven General Capabilities while attending school. The reality is that there are multiple and diverse capabilities that Australian students have developed through lived experiences and will continue to develop over the course of their lives. A capability, the power to do something, has an aspect of freedom and at times a sense of obligation to employ (Sen, 2009). The assessment of capability can be problematic and its demonstration is ultimately dependent on an individual's aspiration and motivation at a given point in time.

Authentic learning, which necessitates teachers' provision of an authentic learning environment, resonates deeply with young adolescents' perceptions of what is meaningful and adds value to

their lived experiences. For instance, students see their use of ICT outside school as ‘authentic real life, purposeful engagements’ (S. Hill, 2005, p. 2). The challenge for middle school teachers is to support ICT integration inside of school in ways that students perceive as fun, creative and engaging and that builds their general capabilities. With RR, the middle school teachers harnessed students’ out-of-school interests as stimuli for a range of school multiliteracies experiences, which were evident while students constructed the internal design of the radio studio, designed the radio shows and interacted with the school community (Table 2). Their interest in technology, media and popular culture sustained a radio project that supported multiliteracies experiences in authentic ways.

Table 2: Examples of Multiliteracies Integrated in the RIOT Radio Project

Multiliteracies (modes of meaning)					
Visual	Aural	Gestural	Spatial	Linguistic	Multimodal
Pictorial draft designs of the radio studio on the classroom whiteboard to promote discussion and ideas	Considerations related to song, interviews, music and podcast requests	Experimenting with play scripts	Discussion on the physical design of the radio studio and the layout of ICT equipment	Speaking and listening while sharing ideas about RR studio design and show content	RR performances
Designing radio programme sheets	Designing radio sweepers (voice, sound effects) as segues between radio songs	Role-playing radio drama, interview and announcement techniques	Soundproofing the studio with egg cartons and foam (resulting in mathematics calculations related to area, volume and surface area)	Critical analysis of community survey feedback sheets	Trialling ICT equipment needed for studio
Designing invitations to RR Opening Day	Designing podcasts	Understanding the importance of posture when speaking into the microphone		Discussion on modifications for new performances	Sharing ICT research findings (involving internet use) to acquire and extend radio broadcasting knowledge and skills and expertise
Designing survey sheets for community feedback on RR’s first broadcast	Understanding sound operations of the PA system	Role-playing diverse roles during different show performances		Recounting observations of professional DJs’ performances	Use of ICT during RR shows (CD, computer, record players, PA system)
				Writing in daily journals and class blogs for parents	

Evidenced in RR were features consistent with those identified by Herrington and Herrington (2008) as constituting an ‘authentic’ learning environment. The project provided a sustained and complex learning environment (radio studio) that was explored at length; over the course of a school year. RR activities had real-world relevance and supported the development of students’ general capabilities and learning across the curricula. Students had access to expert performances giving them a model of how real practitioners (radio broadcasters and technicians) behave in a real situation. There were varied opportunities for students to explore different perspectives in and out of school and participate in the collaborative construction of knowledge with interested others. Assessment processes (an intricate part of RR documentation) were seamlessly integrated with project activity and involved student reflection and articulation. Meaningful discussions on project issues occurred spontaneously ‘on-the-spot’ in the studio and also in the classroom. The radio project provided a context for collaborative learning where more able partners (teachers and middle school peers) could assist with scaffolding and coaching, particularly while rehearsing performances. Also, in alignment with *Reggio* social constructivist learning principles, middle schoolers invited constructive feedback from the school community to realise RR aims and reap its perceived benefits.

In 2014, an independent review of ACARA’s Australian Curriculum reported that the curriculum should encourage more diversity and allow schools flexibility over how the curriculum is taught.

There is concern over the existing ‘command and control’ model of education. Recommendations state there should be more ‘independence, flexibility and choice’ to implement the curriculum according to students’ needs and characteristics; to be more inclusive (Donnelly & Wiltshire, citing Caldwell, 2014, p. 10). Regarding the seven General Capabilities, it was recognised that these ‘only come alive’ when students are fully engaged in the learning process, not when ‘artificially linked to the curriculum’ (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 29).

Significantly, middle schoolers were fully engaged in the learning process and their development of general capabilities was authentically linked to the curriculum.

Accommodating their interest in technology, media and popular culture in the middle school programme initiated a wide range of multiliteracies experiences based on the concept of design.

Students sought to create a *redesigned resource* (a school-community radio station with a local focus) based on their observation of *available designs* of three radio stations in the Western Australian community. Their project design focused on the pragmatics of engaging in and delivering authentic experiences for themselves and for their school

community audience. Students were intrinsically motivated to ‘fix the dodgy soundproofing’ in the studio, to enhance [their] public speaking skills, ‘to broadcast good music and interesting shows’, ‘to share news with and from other classes’ and, importantly, ask for audience feedback as a tool to assess their RR design. The communicative potential of ICT was capitalised on during the radio project. Through a process of trial and error middle schoolers’ self-management, creativity and teamwork were developed; their general capabilities ‘came alive’ and were cultivated while fully engaged in this authentic learning environment.

Conclusion

If the education community accepts in principle that a pedagogy of multiliteracies is relevant to the students’ twenty-first century lives and recognises that ICT have become tightly woven into the fabric of Australian middle schoolers’ lives, then it is incumbent on teachers to provide time, space and resources for long-term projects initiated and sustained by students’ out-of-school interests in technology, media and popular culture. The RR case study has introduced the reader to the realities observed, the conversations heard and the knowledge gained during such a project. While there is a range of teaching approaches deemed responsive to the complex ecology of twenty-first century adolescent lives, it is this author’s contention that the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy and its alignment with the theoretical construct The hundred languages of children well supports a pedagogy of multiliteracies and the development of middle school students’ general capabilities in authentic ways.



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The maker movement – A learning revolution capturing the hearts and minds of middle years

Jill Margerison and Andrew Stark

Abstract

Making things and learning-by-doing in the world of education is not a new phenomenon. Decades ago, developmental educationalist Jean Piaget (1973) heralded the importance of hands-on opportunities and making for real student growth. Yet with the empowering rise of digital interactive technologies, the insurgence of a modern-day Maker Movement has reminded educationalists of the value in

sharing, exploring, tinkering and risk-taking through the process of doing.

In 2014, the International Boys School Coalition (IBSC) tasked a group of teachers, working in a variety of boys' schools around the globe, with implementing Maker Culture Action Research projects in their respective school environments. The Southport School embraced the underpinning theories of Piaget's protégé, constructivist educationalist and

mathematician, Seymour Papert (1980). They explored how to re-design a silent-reading library lesson in English around the principles of Maker Culture to develop critical thinking and facilitate creativity in a class of middle years students. Observations of this approach led to the analysis of two main components. First, what effect making can have on deeper learning, and second, what role might making play in the ongoing development of intrinsic drive for middle years students.

Introduction

Making is a way of viewing the world through problem solving lenses. It is a mindset that sees an opportunity to connect educational objectives with authentic learning experiences. It is also a pedagogical approach that generates collaboration between students and between students and teachers.

Encouraging social partnership for middle years students is critical because it enables ideas to be shared, interpretations, and co-construction of knowledge. It also results in reciprocal teaching.

Collaboration in the middle years takes many different forms. For those involved in delivering learning via a Maker Space, one of the intrinsic motivations for engagement is developing a 'community' of people working together to innovate, explain and create. It is an approach that has even been heralded by President Obama, who asserted that we are changing the world 'not by buying stuff, but by building stuff ... by making ... tinkering ... inventing and building' (whitehouse.org, 2014)

For teachers at The Southport School, the premise of embarking upon the IBSC Maker Culture Action Research journey was to gauge the viability of connecting the excitement of making to adolescent boys' engagement with learning in the English classroom. We wanted to offer an authentic learning experience, and to encourage students to invent something based on their interpretation of a text to assess how important a collaborative, kinaesthetic activity was for engagement with literacy.

We re-assigned the once-a-week silent-reading lesson in English to incorporate 'making' in response to a class of Year 8 boys' interpretation of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Ethical clearance was obtained from students and parents. The boys were asked to reach certain chapter targets before each lesson to be able to involve themselves in the making and building activities facilitated by the teachers.

This 'flipped learning' approach to the text generated much interest not only within the students and parents, but also among the school's teachers and Executive staff.

Facilitating kinaesthetic learning practices and allowing students to construct knowledge through interaction with their world are strategies that work well in developing boys' engagement with learning. After all, knowledge is not merely a commodity to be transmitted, encoded, retained, and re-applied, but a personal experience to be constructed. (Ackermann, 2004:16).

Facilitating creativity with our middle years

There was no summative grade assigned to this project and from the outset, participants realised this objective. The emphasis was on making something in response to a text-based interpretation. This was a significant departure from the normal 'rules of engagement' with learning for our students, who typically, have looked for a grade or a mark for diligence to provide inspiration to engage with their learning. In this project we wanted to see whether hands-on interaction with making materials prompted

greater critical engagement with the text. We hypothesised that through facilitating a learning space in which students shared materials for construction, there would be interaction, dialogue, and opportunity to 'take risks' with their understanding of the plot and key themes.

It can be argued that this constructivist approach to produce something creative is one that stands in the face of publicity, pressure and increased focus in recent years on accountability through standardised testing for measuring student progress. Standardised testing continues to prompt much debate in education regarding what constitutes real, deep or sustained learning. Although 'our society is locked into a testing arms race' (Kamenetz, 2015:19) we are also constantly bombarded with information that the future for our students lies in how they exhibit and develop their individual talents and creative ideas, through collaboration and innovation (Robinson, 2014).

Data that being creative leads to greater emotional happiness and a growth mindset also sends mixed-messages to educators who are passionate and committed to delivering personalised learning to motivate students to achieve their goals.

This project was not designed to cover material to be tested, nor was it targeting a specific set of sub-skills that needed measurement. It was aimed at developing conversations, engagement and a creative mindset in middle years learners.



The action research Maker Culture process

It was expected that the boys would read the novel *Lord of the Flies* outside class time. This way they could make the most of the informal learning Maker Spaces during the weekly library contact time. The boys were eager to play with a range of different materials. They quickly realised the need to keep up their reading to participate effectively.

As part of the prior and ongoing background knowledge for this task, boys were required to keep online diaries via the electronic portfolio system. They were asked to comment on their reading of the book, add paragraphs about plot, characters and setting. They also engaged in discussion forums via this system to 'chat' with their friends about the text. This electronic portfolio diary provided a creative and collaborative tool for the boys to demonstrate their understanding of the novel. It was also a valuable platform for the teachers to monitor the independent progress of the students in their reading and critical analysis of the text.

Using this electronic evidence of prior knowledge and engagement, we concurrently implemented a range of hands-on activities in the library lesson. These activities included construction of a *Lord of the Flies* island setting with play-doh and a plot re-enactment with Build to Express Lego. This enabled models to be constructed and a Claymation movie to be made.

The Maker Culture influence also involved students using paper and coloured pens, Minecraft and video software to interpret the text artistically.

We capitalised on the opportunity to connect making with role-play, further supporting and encouraging the students' imagination and innovative mindset. The library space was re-designed to simulate a 'press club' scenario with boys acting as journalists and interviewing a teacher who role-played the author. The outcome of this flexibility was the recording and editing of video material to evaluate the text from an 'author-centred' perspective.

The question

The research question focused on asking whether 'the affinity spaces of Maker Culture enhanced creativity in middle years boys'. We specifically formulated the question in this way to consider how kinaesthetic and relational activities contributed to intrinsic motivation to engage and create. The theories of James Paul Gee (2004) suggest 'affinity spaces' are places where people can interact and collaborate with one another, a space where informal learning takes place.

Findings and implications for middle years pedagogy

Our findings indicated not only were the boys receptive to Maker Spaces, but the pedagogical approach of making had positive implications on their relational learning and motivation for productivity. On one occasion a Year 12 boy (unrelated to the project) stopped and asked, 'Could we perhaps build Macbeth out of Lego, too? It would really help with understanding some of the themes and twists in personality.' On another occasion a colleague who passed by explained he was so impressed by the situated and relational learning he had decided to buy a set of Lego for the Year 7s

to make models of Martin Luther King's iconic speech 'I Have a Dream'. Similarly, a member of the Design and Technology faculty posted 'Maker Space' posters outside his own classroom and shared his materials with us in the library to support cross-pollination of pedagogical ideas.

Another important element of this project was the decision to facilitate the space through team-teaching. This environment modelled collaborative work structures, open and spontaneous discussion and reinforced the value of positive, critical work relationships. The lack of formal assessment for this project not only reduced the level of pressure placed upon us (and the boys) but also allowed for greater flexibility.

As the students immersed themselves in the actions associated with making, creating and responding, they slowly realised that the making was more important than the marking.

This project gave students the opportunity to connect with two adults and their peers. As teachers, we let the students take ownership of their making, letting them explain to us how they would engineer their creations. Students discussed the stranded island themes through a Minecraft perspective, a Claymation dimension, the creative re-design of Monopoly, model making, graphic novel design and music and sound synthesising.

Feedback from students

As responses to the task were replicated in various group exercises, boys conversed about the process of making with boys they rarely talk to. What

we observed was a space rich in learning from a holistic perspective; we had a dynamic, participatory culture at work. So engaged was this community in building artefacts (particularly the Lego interpretations of *Lord of the Flies*) that we had many positive interactions and comments from passers-by. In fact, we discovered we were not only creating a Maker Space, but encouraging communities of practice; communities that offer the opportunity to share practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002).

Prior to the start of the project, students were surveyed to discover their understanding and personal connection to the concept of 'creativity'.

According to the responses generated, many boys felt they benefitted from having access to a variety of spaces and places to feel creative. In many instances, they enjoyed working collaboratively and regarded creativity as being essential for their future work.

It is also interesting to note that the project began with over half of the students feeling they were not particularly creative.

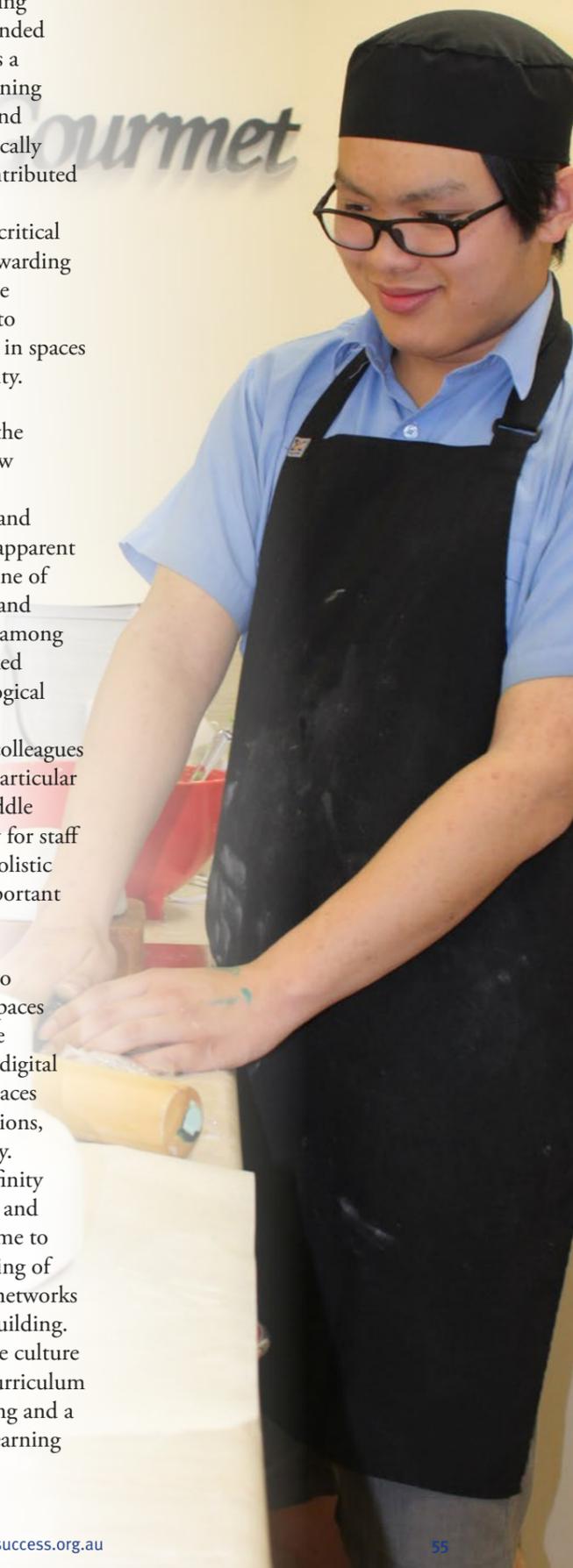
At the conclusion of the project, the boys were re-surveyed to gauge whether there had been a reappraisal of their understanding of creativity, collaborative learning and Maker Spaces. The results indicated the boys' understanding and appreciation of self-conceptualised creativity had changed quite dramatically as a result of having had the opportunity to access a Maker Space for this type of literary study.

Conclusion

Making is about encouraging micro-networks of like-minded people to come together as a community and enjoy learning from the process, people and product. Our study specifically looked at how making contributed to positive relationships, influencing creativity and critical thought. This was most rewarding to us and demonstrated the intrinsic desire for people to connect to and participate in spaces where they feel some affinity.

While the main focus for the project was to consider how making in different spaces encourages boys' learning and creativity, it soon became apparent that this project was also one of nurturing team dynamics and professional collaboration among staff. In particular, it sparked cross-departmental pedagogical discussions. This type of communication between colleagues in schools is essential. In particular when dealing with the middle years, it offers opportunity for staff to be connected with an holistic education, which is so important for adolescents.

Finally, we were also able to examine the community spaces which we work within. We discovered that a blend of digital and traditional learning spaces created dynamic conversations, collaboration and creativity. Similarly, these positive affinity spaces generated creativity and risk-taking. Being given time to make encouraged the sharing of ideas. Establishing micro-networks resulted in healthy team building. Establishing a Maker Space culture within our middle years curriculum has proven highly rewarding and a valuable contribution to learning and teaching.



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Building teacher capacity through action research

David Ralph & Louise Swanson

Impetus for the projects

The 'Building teacher capacity through action research projects' model grew out of the need to implement several strategies to target student learning and engagement. These were identified by research, high stakes tests and school-based evidence. It was understood that more strategies equate to less time on each project, which reduces the likelihood of embedding them in whole school practice.

After investigating current research on leadership and spending a year using the traditional hierarchical approach for driving change in the school, the Middle School Team (MST) realised using the vertical leadership structure had limited impact and resulted in limited change of teaching practice.

Through ongoing reflection and reference to research the MST identified several factors likely to be inhibiting implementation. Although one year is insufficient time to embed a strategy across a

school, other factors were retarding implementation. When a team develops a strategy in isolation to the implementing group, the group has little ownership of the strategy. If a change is mandated using the hierarchical leadership structure, the implementation may meet resistance and not be consistently implemented across all faculties.

If the Faculty Head Teacher does not support the strategy or uses their positional power to drive the strategy into their faculty without building commitment or trust, there will likely be resistance.

Teachers may see the strategy as something extra to their role and comply in a superficial manner enough to satisfy the leader's base level expectation. This approach undermines the professionalism of the teacher. It fails to respect the teacher's professional knowledge, which de-incentivises them. Dinham (2015) in a presentation to educational leaders in Sydney stated it is better to have volunteers than conscripts. Mandating change and driving it through the hierarchical

leadership structure fails to bring people along with the change. The MST identified the need to find a professional learning model to engage teachers in the collaborative development of projects based around a problem of practice. Harris (2005) highlighted the importance of capacity building to generate and sustain school improvement.

With the roll out of the NSW Department of Education's Performance and Development Framework and the implementation of the accreditation process for all teachers, the team identified a need to find a scalable model to meet the professional learning needs of the whole school.

The MST led the project. The MST comprises a Deputy Principal responsible for Middle School, a Head Teacher Teaching and Learning and Middle School (Head Teacher), and a teacher working in the role of Middle School Coordinator. At the time of writing, the model and associated projects were still being implemented.

The team and structure of the projects

The MST identified three key projects to be implemented during 2015:

1. Bring your own device (BYOD)
2. Literacy
3. Resilience

Figure 1: Projects

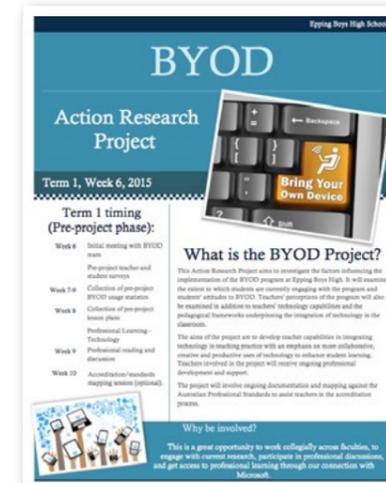


The Middle School Team managed three action research projects: BYOD, Resilience and Literacy.

Overview of the projects

Bring your own device

Figure 2: BYOD

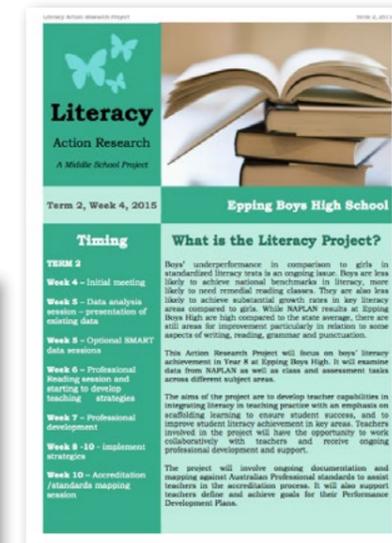


The BYOD Project staff newsletter

Like many schools, the school, has moved to a BYOD model for delivering and using technology. There was clear evidence showing technology use in the classroom was inconsistent across the school. Teachers claimed students did not bring their devices, so they could not plan for use. Students claimed few teachers used the devices in the classroom, so they felt it was a waste of time bringing the device to school. In a survey teachers were asked to list the three most significant issues in the school. Inappropriate use of technology was number one. Further, there was significant variance between teachers' level of knowledge in how to use technology effectively to engage students in learning. The BYOD project explored several pedagogical models for implementing technology.

Literacy

Figure 3: Literacy



The Literacy Project staff newsletter

The Literacy project targeted teachers of Year 8 classes. It involved an analysis of NAPLAN results from the previous year to identify and address areas requiring attention within the whole year

group. Year 8 teachers created classes in the School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART), and looked at the Item Analysis tool to find areas where the class struggled most. Teachers examined relevant teaching strategies to address these weaknesses. Teams developed lessons to incorporate these strategies. The project targeted one strategy over a few weeks across all classes. The team came together to evaluate and plan at the end of each cycle.

Resilience

Figure 4: Resilience



The Resilience Project staff newsletter

After looking at current research, it was identified that the boys in Years 5 to 9 were showing decreased levels of resilience and academic self-concept (Martin, 2006) and increased levels of anxiety, avoidance of failure behaviour and self-sabotage. High levels of self-efficacy are linked to strong senses of enablement, resilience and self-power. These are very important to adolescents in managing the major biological, social and emotional changes taking place. During transition from primary to secondary school, adolescents

often experience a loss of self-efficacy. Epping Boys High School participated in the Tell Them From Me survey over three years.

The survey identified, 'Only about 40% of NSW students felt confident in their skills and challenged in their classes. Research conducted in Canada found that students who lack confidence in their skills are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to suffer anxiety problems during middle and secondary school.'

While students at Epping Boys High School scored in the high positive range on most measures of the survey, there was still a need to improve student engagement in learning. The team spent a significant amount of time understanding the factors contributing to self-efficacy and resilience, explored approaches such as growth mindset, and collaborated with teachers to develop strategies to explicitly teach students how to learn more effectively.

Distributed instructional team leadership

Teacher incentives:

- To desire to work as an equal part of a team: a learning community
- The need to engage in professional dialogue with colleagues that is evidence based and data driven, and targeted on practice and improving student learning and engagement.

The key benefit of the model is it uses the knowledge of many teachers to solve a learning problem.

Figure 5: Literacy points

- Boys' underperformance in comparison to girls in standardised literacy tests is an ongoing issue.
- Boys are less likely to achieve national benchmarks in literacy, more likely to need remedial reading classes.
- Boys are also less likely to achieve substantial growth rates in key literacy areas compared to girls.

The Literacy Project had key student indicators as project aims.

Hattie highlights the importance of making student learning visible to teachers by ensuring 'clear identification of the attributes that make a visible difference to student learning' (p. 1 Hattie, 2012). Teachers should know their impact and the act of teaching should be visible to students. To do this, teachers need to become evaluators of their own effect (p. 15 Hattie, 2012). The teacher is the greatest source of variance in the school system. This variance occurs both between teachers and within the same teacher. In the high school context, many teachers teach the one student across a range of subjects. Each teacher's influence forms only a part of the total influence. We need to make the influence more focused and consistent to maximise impact. By implementing a team-based approach to learning—where groups of teachers who teach the same students work together, using an evidence-based approach, to develop and implement agreed upon strategies with the same students across a range of subjects—we achieve two things: reduced variance and increased impact.

Hattie highlights the best professional learning teachers can engage in involves teachers planning together, evaluating together and critiquing each other (p. 39 Hattie, 2012). This further supports teachers working in a collaborative learning community.

Developing the professional learning community

Teachers need to, 'talk with each other about the impact of their teaching, based on evidence of student progress, and about how to maximise their impact with all students' (p. 67, Hattie, 2012). Hattie suggests several structures that can bring teachers together to focus on student learning: instructional data teams, instructional rounds and professional learning communities. All these structures reflect on evidence of student learning and the impact teachers have, when they work together to establish group teaching goals and critique one another's teaching.

Developing several team structures to facilitate professional learning was influenced by Dinham's (2007) alternative approaches to teacher learning. The project teams became small-scale learning communities. These communities focused on problems and solutions, explored pedagogical models and theories, encouraged experimentation and risk-taking, set expectations for the whole group, had high expectations for improvement, enabled opportunities for leadership within the group, used expertise existing within the group, and drew on external expertise.

As the projects developed, collaboration occurred across the project teams.

The learning communities amalgamated to incorporate the MST in conjunction with all the project teams. This was evident in project meetings.

Frequently, discussions occurred in one team about theories, events or issues in another team. The learning community was replicated online. A middle school projects Edmodo group began with three small groups set up within it, one for each of the projects. The group was used to share project data, links to resources and project newsletters. Project leaders provided information about meetings and events, teachers posted resources, and teachers unable to attend meetings or unlikely to participate in person took part in online discussions.

Problem and solution focused

As discussed, a reflection on existing programs and initiatives in the school led to identifying

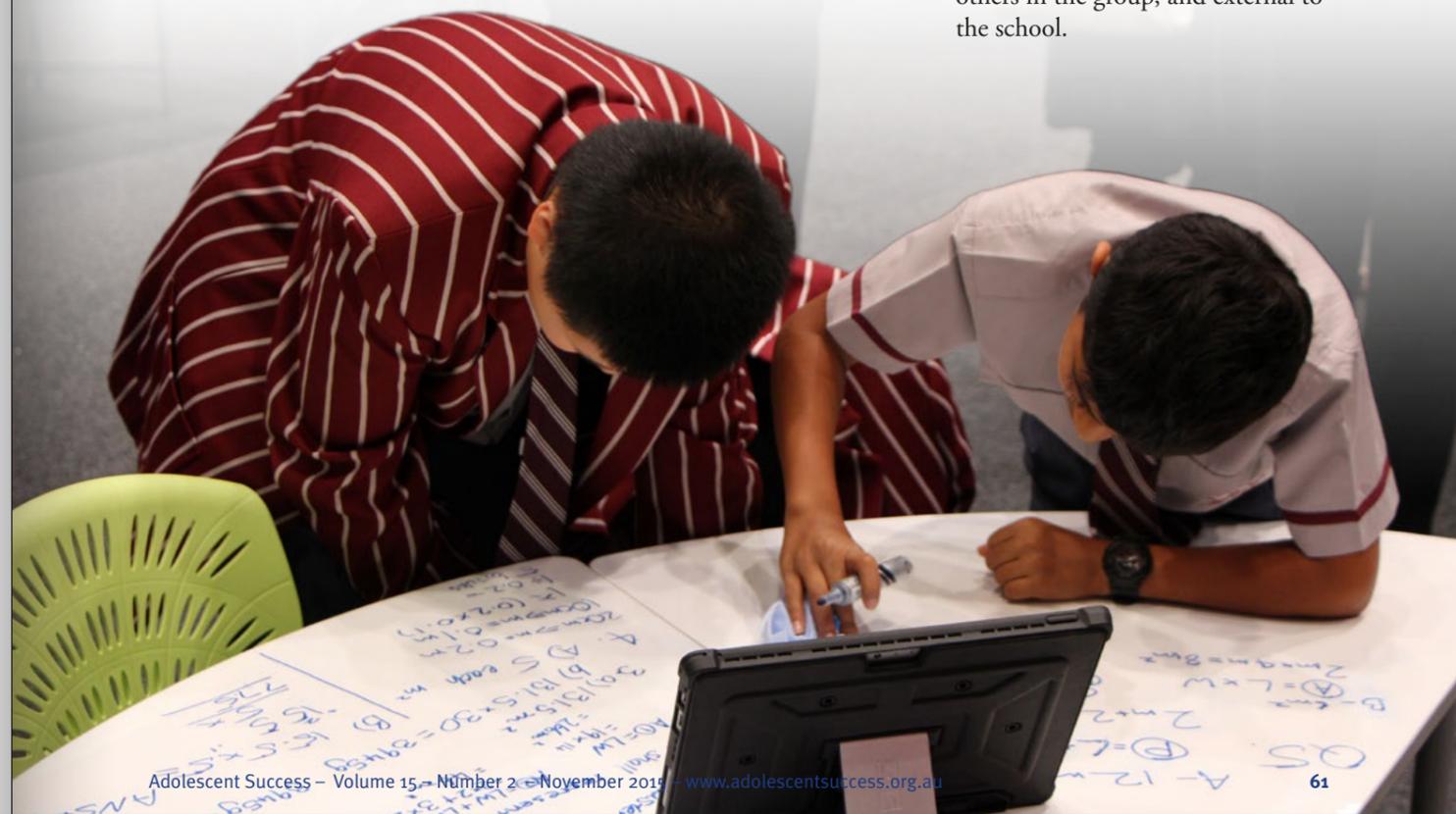
three areas of need. The context-specific nature of the issues enabled us to engage teachers, as they were experiencing the problems in their classrooms. This provided motivation for involvement. Dinham's (2007) model of alternative teacher learning emphasises the importance of problem- or issue-based learning and the need for it to be context specific. The project themes were identified from an evidence base comprising data collected through student assessment, parent and student surveys, and parent and teacher feedback and observations. Current research informed an understanding of the general nature of the identified issues, but the focus was on the specific nature of the problems as they presented at this school. To explore the nature of the problems, additional pre-project data collection was undertaken to inform decision-making. In the initial stages, the MST explored the problems, while focusing on a more positive, solutions-based approach with the project teams.

Internal and external expertise

Dinham (2007) discusses the significance of learning within a learning community being facilitated by expertise and resources both within the team and from outside it. Within the teams, the expertise of the project leaders facilitated the process of learning. Teachers brought their own skills and knowledge and engaged in professional reading to extend their knowledge. Members often became the experts. Often they guided the direction of the project, taught others new skills and developed implementation strategies.

Harris (2005) discussed the importance of leaders who are seen as a source of instructional advice, but Robinson (2007) emphasised the significance of a leader who also acts as a learner.

The project team leaders could participate in the learning process by drawing on the expertise of others in the group, and external to the school.



Central to providing professional learning for the project teams has been the incorporation of expertise external to the team and school. Members of the BYOD team attended several sessions at Microsoft Head Office. The Literacy team attended a range of sessions run by Regional Office. The Resilience team took advantage of online webinars. In addition, an academic, Dr Jane Hunter, from the University of Western Sydney, School of Education was employed to undertake student focus groups and compile the data to provide the direction for the BYOD project. Dr Hunter provided connections with other academics to discuss projects related to the Resilience project.

Exploring pedagogical models and theories

Central to Dinham's discussion of learning communities is that teachers should be regularly engaging in discussions of pedagogic models and theory and using appropriate pedagogic terminology (Dinham, 2007). Each project team was provided with a series of professional readings throughout the project. These were discussed with reference to relevant school data.

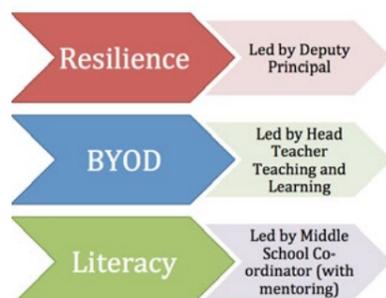
In the BYOD project, models for technology integration were examined and analysed. Discussions began by examining models familiar to teachers such as Bloom's digital taxonomy (Churches, 2001) and the substitution augmentation modification redefinition (SAMR) model (Puentedura, 2014), but moved towards models with a stronger basis in research, such as technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and the

high-possibilities classroom (Hunter, 2015).

The Resilience project examined models to improve self-efficacy and has been largely influenced by the growth mindset model (Dweck, 2006). In the initial stages, the learning analytics model on developing resilient agency (Crick, Huang, Shafi & Goldspink, 2015) was considered. This uses learning analytics to investigate personal skills and attributes that contribute to resilience. It is anticipated this may be a possible future pathway for the next iteration of the Resilience project.

Leadership model Distributed leadership

Figure 6: Project leadership



Each Middle School Team member led an action research project.

A challenge of running three action learning projects at once was the capacity to lead them effectively with limited time and a limited budget. Early in the project it was decided to disseminate leadership roles both within the MST and within the project teams. This would allow the issues identified to be addressed, but also allow latent leadership capacity in teachers to be harnessed. This leadership capacity building was seen as central to implementing change in the classroom. Harris (2014) states distributed leadership ‘...

equates with shared, collective and extended leadership practice that builds capacity for change and improvement’. Robinson (2011) describes five dimensions of leadership, emphasising it is not possible for a single leader to demonstrate all of these at the highest level. To go down this path is to be locked into notions of heroic leadership. Robinson states leadership is by its very nature distributed.

Within the MST, leadership was distributed to allow ownership of each project by an individual. This individual organised meetings, communicated with project team members, sourced relevant research and implemented strategies for data collection. The MST still collaborated on each project and contributed in a leadership capacity, but responsibility mostly fell to a particular individual. The Literacy project developed under a slightly different model, with the Middle School Coordinator being mentored through the action learning process as it progressed. This built capacity within the MST, both in terms of a junior staff member developing new skills in leading a project and team of teachers, and in more established staff developing skills in mentoring and coaching.

The project leaders were generally seen as a source of advice and information regarding the project topic. However, opportunities were created to empower project team members in decision-making processes and to allow them to demonstrate their expertise.

At times, this required those in formal leadership roles to relinquish control, and to allow the project team to determine the

direction and strategies of the project. If the direction of the project went down a different pathway to what was originally intended or anticipated, this could be challenging. However, it was supported on the proviso evidence and research were used in decision-making processes.

The role of the project leaders was to provide support and guidance. As the projects progressed, teachers not in formal leadership roles and more junior staff members began acting as mentors for others. Team members empowered each other, and the project leaders participated as learners, not just leaders. The interests and expertise of some of the team members ended up providing added motivation for their involvement in the project. These interests provided the impetus for the leadership roles within the group.

Authoritative leadership

Dinham and Scott's (2008) application of parenting and teaching styles theories on educational leadership identifies four styles of leadership based on the relationships between responsiveness and demandingness. The building teacher capacity model attempts to replicate the positive attributes identified in authoritative leaders. According to Dinham and Scott, authoritative leaders build strong relationships, work collaboratively and build effective networks. (This will be discussed further in the section on social maintenance.) They are demanding and have clear expectations; they are assertive but rule by moral authority. (This will be discussed further in the section on climate of high expectations.)

They have a vision for the future and encourage innovation. (This will be discussed in the section on experimentation and risk-taking.)

Authoritative leaders have a student-focus but emphasise the importance of professional learning. They are strategic in the way they instigate change and build in leadership sustainability.

Social maintenance

Dinham (2007) stressed the importance of social maintenance in fostering effective action learning by authoritative leaders. This is where ‘...members care for each other and their students as people and social and professional relationships are important to group performance’ (p. 37). Harris (2005) also emphasised the significance of social cohesion and trust, the development of collegiality and collaboration on classroom practices. To create and encourage these kinds of relationships, a lot of time and energy was invested into building strong, positive relationships with teachers. This was achieved by encouraging and supporting ideas presented to the project teams and to individual members of the MST, by encouraging social interaction during the project meetings, particularly if they were held after school, by being as inclusive as possible in scheduling meetings and events, and working through issues or problems team members had in implementing project strategies.

This helped to create high levels of trust, creating bonds and supports that made teachers feel comfortable in making mistakes and taking risks. These relationships also enabled the leaders to be seen as more accessible.

Increasingly, these relationships encouraged more informal conversations to occur outside of meeting times about the project readings, inspiration or ideas for implementation.

Climate of high expectations

Dinham (2007) emphasises the importance of creating a climate of high expectations in developing effective learning communities. These expectations come from within the group rather than being externally dictated.

Members of the learning community feel a sense of loyalty and obligation towards the whole group to meet those standards. He states, ‘The group creates a climate of high expectations and professionalism which members rise to, not wanting to let anyone down...’ (p. 37). This approach is backed by Robinson (2007).

Further, Dinham claims accountability measures should be set by the group rather than by an external entity. In the middle school action research projects, this was done by modelling professional behaviour; demonstrating qualities and behaviours that exemplified excellent team participation and leadership. Behaviours desirable in team members were modelled. This included undertaking extensive research, providing evidenced-based strategies for implementation, providing multiple models for progressing, setting and meeting deadlines, leading discussions but also allowing others the opportunity to lead. Many of the team members not only met expectations, but exceeded them and set new expectations for the whole team. These high expectations were integral to the

success of the projects and provided the impetus and motivation for continued participation. Demands were placed on teachers, but other school-wide demands were taken into consideration, to ensure goals were achievable. Accountability measures were generally set by the whole team, or at least guided by a few members of the team. There was no externally imposed accountability for the projects.

An important method for creating high expectations for teachers has been the use of the Australian Professional Standards to articulate the behaviour and activities within the project team. Although they are an externally dictated set of expectations, they have been an effective means of acknowledging the efforts of team members, at a time when the standards are just being introduced for many experienced teachers. This has encouraged teachers to undertake extra roles running groups, making decisions and leading others.

Experimentation and risk-taking

Dinham (2007) identifies the importance of encouraging experimentation, risk-taking and innovation in learning communities. This is reiterated in Dinham and Scott's (2008) discussion on authoritative leaders. In developing the middle school projects, risk-taking was encouraged by allowing teachers to try new things, discuss issues and brainstorm ways to overcome problems or failures. Innovation was encouraged through exploring research, then allowing teachers the freedom to try out their own ideas. The supportive nature of the teams allowed teachers to be honest about any failures and the team then tried to develop solutions.

Emphasis on professional learning

The importance of involving teachers in discussions of teaching is stressed by Robinson (2007). Dinham (2007) also emphasises the value of professional learning. Targeted professional learning was provided through the project team structures. Initially, this took the form of professional readings selected by the MST, and formal professional learning events such as webinars, visits to external companies and DEC regional office. Increasingly, project team members played an important part in determining the professional learning within the teams informally. One team member held a very successful discussion session based on several of the readings. Two practicum teachers in one team compiled resources and disseminated them to staff. Team members presented information about previous projects and initiatives they had been involved in. As teachers tried and implemented new strategies in their classes they would often come back to the team and showcase their ideas. All meetings and sessions were developed and evaluated according to the Australian Professional Standards.

Lessons learned

On reflection, three individual projects were challenging to sustain and put a significant extra workload on the MST. This limited what could be achieved due to time and budgetary constraints. Some projects took a while to get off the ground and find their direction. It might have been good to begin some of the projects earlier. The projects were run during lunchtimes, which required an extra commitment from teachers. This

put some teachers off and prevented teachers from attending all sessions due to other commitments.

Robinson (2011) highlights five key dimensions of leadership. She emphasises the leadership dimension with the biggest effect size is professional learning for teachers. If we want change to happen it is essential to prioritise it by allocating time for teachers to develop one another professionally and strategically link professional learning to things that will have a direct impact on the learning of students.

The Literacy and Resilience projects in their initial stages took time to articulate fully a clear direction. Teachers highlighted that at times they were not sure of the project's direction. There is a difficult balance between teacher ownership and a strategy moving in a single clear direction. Teachers need to see a result from their work more quickly. This requires finding and deciding on a focus and direction, setting actions to be taken by teachers, and determining what will be measured and when much earlier in the process. The Resilience project struggled to find a clear direction and went down a few different explorations before finding an approach teachers could implement.

Where to from here?

At the time of writing, the projects had been running for a little over two terms. The first cycle of the projects were concluding. As discussed previously, the MST was looking for a model that could be scalable to a whole school. We have established that teachers working in collaborative teams to decide

on strategies they will implement with students is the best way to embed changes to teaching practice across a school. Teachers have more ownership and control over implementing change. Teachers' professionalism is valued and used when they work collaboratively. Because of the project's success and support, the individual projects have been embedded into the school's strategic plan 2015–2017. The individual projects will provide a clear focus for strategic resourcing and professional learning. The way the teams worked will be a model to help the school implement the NSW Performance and Development Framework. Every time the team met, the meeting was written up in line with the Australian Professional Teaching Standard. Teachers found this to be an extremely valuable outcome. This was initially modelled by the MST and then taken up by various members of the teams. It was seen as a practical support for teachers and highly valued. It has consequently become something practiced across the school.

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Student-led conferences: Empowering students as active participants in the learning process

Robyn McCarthy

Introduction

The disengagement of early adolescents has been the focus of much research in middle years education and is a significant issue (Absolum, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009). Lack of student engagement in the learning process, and diminished responsibility for their academic progress, has been a particular issue in my school. It has been a common complaint among middle school staff that our students are generally apathetic about submitting assignments on time and lack concern regarding their grades. There was also a student mindset that their poor grades were the teachers' fault. There was a genuine need to turn that attitude around and encourage our middle school students to accept more responsibility for their learning, be more active in their learning, and be more accountable for achieving their individual learning outcomes.

My inquiry into the research on student-led conferences (SLC) revealed that this could be one way of setting students

up as active participants in the education process (Brooks, 2003), and prompted me to initiate introducing SLC into our middle school pedagogy. This paper is a reflection on the SLC process—the planning, implementation, feedback and reflection—as well as the implications SLC have for middle school teachers, schools and the students.

Literature review

In Australia, communicating student progress is traditionally employed through parent–teacher interviews and end-of-semester reports. Unfortunately, the majority of these processes are just that—between parent and teacher. They generally discourage or exclude students from being an active participant in this communication (Hackmann, Kenworthy & Nibbelink, 1998). Hackmann (1996) mentions the distrust experienced by many middle school students, who describe parent–teacher interviews as an opportunity to ‘talk behind their backs’ while they wait anxiously at home wondering what information

has been shared about them. This is a view shared by many of our interviewed middle school students, who indicated they were rarely informed of what was spoken about at their parent–teacher interviews, and were not even shown their report cards. Is it any wonder that these students feel left out of the educational loop, which in reality, they should have an intimate knowledge, understanding and control of?

What are student-led conferences?

SLC are a way of reporting to parents led by students. There are generally three parts involved in the SLC process: preparation, the conference (including goal setting), and evaluation (Taylor-Patel, 2011).

Why student-led conferences?

SLC have emerged as an effective alternative to parent–teacher interviews. They allow students to share what they have learned, show their portfolios and discuss

their academic progress with their parents (Dunne, 2001, as cited by Gay, 2011).

According to Hackmann (1996), the goal of SLC is ‘to encourage students to accept personal responsibility for reporting their academic progress to their parents’.

SLC address several of the middle schooling signifying pedagogical practices (Garrick & Keogh, 2010, p75), such as student choice, authentic and reflective assessment, and parental involvement. Alleman (2005) claims that SLC promote relevance, responsibility and effective communication—three essential elements for student performance. Add to that the elements of choice (as to what work samples are shared by the student) and a ‘real audience’ (parents) for evaluation, and these conferences have all the ingredients to become a powerful tool for developing intrinsic motivation.

SLC provide the opportunity for students to not only participate in, but also be responsible for the content and facilitation of the discussion (Hackmann, 1996). Brooks (2003) suggests students develop ownership of their learning through participation in discussion, choice, responsibility and decision-making. Borba & Olvera (2001) support the idea, positing that active participation in the evaluation and reflection of their classroom work improves student academic performance by motivating them to think about, and act on, ways to improve their learning. The preparation phase of SLC enables this to occur.

Perhaps the most important feature of SLC is suggested by Taylor-Patel (2011, p5), who articulates

that SLC create an opportunity for students ‘to engage with and understand all the information about their learning’, not just the tasks and results they are sharing.

Why NOT student-led conferences?

Research shows that SLC feedback from parents is generally positive (Absolum et al., 2009). However, there has been evidence in literature that suggests some parents felt unprepared. Other parents desired extra information from the teacher. Also, the SLC is an inappropriate place to discuss sensitive issues (Absolum et al., 2009). Negative feedback, from teachers involved in the process, revolved around the need to commit an enormous amount of time for intense preparation prior to the SLC (Alleman, 2005; Gay, 2011).

Initiative results

Implementing our first middle school SLC was not without concerns—predicted reluctance from some staff, lack of commitment or indifference from students, negative reactions and lack of support from parents, and little or no change in improving student ownership of their academic progress. However, by pre-empting these responses, we addressed most of them with the support of literature and positive colleagues.

The initial pitch to introduce SLC was to the school Executive—the Principal, Assistant Principal and Heads of College. They were already aware of the increasing level of student apathy in middle school and open to hearing about a more student-centred approach to reporting. I had previously shared my Meridan State College Signifying Pedagogies – Junior

Secondary conference experience (where I first saw SLC in action) with the Executive, and I revisited my understanding and observations of SLC. The Executive was supportive, and encouraged presenting the SLC initiative to the middle school staff.

Since the initial concerns about student disengagement and lack of academic ownership came from them, the middle school staff were open to discussing possible ways to involve their students more in the learning process. Many of them felt their students blamed them for the poor grades they received. The constant excuses for lack of effort, late submission of tasks, and disregard for feedback frustrated them. Two of the 11 middle school staff had been involved in SLC before. One had not had a positive experience and was very reluctant to pursue the idea. As SLC were a new concept to the majority of the middle school staff, the supporting literature needed to be shared and explained. A presentation of what had been witnessed at the Signifying Pedagogies conference, in the form of a mock SLC, and that school’s accompanying documentation (reflection, script and goal-setting paperwork) were shared with the staff.

After this, the reluctant staff member reflected on her ‘negative version’ of the SLC experience. She admitted that her old school had not ‘prepared’ the students as part of the SLC process. From this point, she was ‘willing to give it a go and see what happen[ed]’.

The staff’s preliminary SLC interviews with students, in the preparation phase, revealed a high number who had reportedly

never received feedback from their parents about past parent–teacher interviews. The majority of students interviewed had, surprisingly, also never been shown their report cards. This reflective SLC component, on past academic achievement, initiated many meaningful conversations between teachers and students as to what ‘Achievement’ and ‘Effort’ grades meant in relation to their learning outcomes.

For the first time, many of our middle school students saw the relationship between effort and achievement, and attempted to explain why they had achieved particular grades. They began to not

only take an interest in their results, but also take responsibility for what they had (or had not) achieved.

The search for, and selection of work samples for their portfolios proved to be a confronting task for many of the students. It was easier for them to choose a piece of work they were proud of than to select an example that demonstrated more work was needed. Several students had real difficulty admitting they had a weakness. Initially, they refused to choose poorer work samples. Through conferences with their teachers, these students began to acknowledge deficits in their attitude or understanding, and accepted greater ownership of these results.

For those students who struggled with school, many of whom had learning difficulties, this process was very challenging. There were many tears as they struggled to work out how they would explain their low grades to their parents. Again, through individual conferences and the positive relationships built with their homeroom teachers and Learning Support Assistants, they realised their parents were probably already aware they struggled at school. This was comforting for most. Through these conversations, they then became excited about being empowered to select and share something they were proud of, despite the low grade.

Initially, students were generally reluctant to be an active part of the



SLC. Until now, it had been their teachers’ responsibility to explain their academic progress to their parents. As one student responded, ‘hopefully, one or other of them would make excuses for him’. The SLC required students to take responsibility for and justify their results to their parents.

Goal setting was the most difficult aspect of the SLC. It was hard to maintain the balance between involving parents in collaborative decision-making with the student (when they are used to making all the educational decisions) and giving their adolescent a ‘voice’ and independence to contribute. The teachers vacillated between being facilitators and mediators. Despite this, the practices of parental involvement, negotiation and shared governance in student learning were generally maintained.

Discussion

The student-led conference experience

Having now gone through the process of promoting, preparing, conducting and reflecting upon our first middle school SLC, our experience was relatively successful.

Promotion of the concept of SLC with students and parents was very important. Parents needed to be informed of the change in process from the traditional parent–teacher interviews. Students needed to understand the central role they would now be expected to play in the conference. An explanatory parent letter, then school and class newsletters, and social media posts informed parents of the SLC in the weeks leading up to the conferences. Students were encouraged to communicate with their parents about the effort they were making preparing their

portfolios and scripts. As reflected in the research (Hackmann, 1996, and Little & Allan, 1989, as cited by Borba & Olvera, 2010; Bailey & Guskey, 2001, as cited by Gay, 2011; Hackman et al., 1998; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004), parent attendance at the SLC increased.

Another interesting observation was the increase in additional family members who attended the conferences – both parents (where normally only one might attend), siblings and even grandparents. This less formal forum, being led by the student, was perceived to be more relaxed and inviting.

Families enjoyed seeing and hearing about the academic success that students had to share; a view shared by Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael (2004, p. 77). One negative implication coming out of the preparation phase was the reluctance of Year 9 students, in particular, to tell their parents about the upcoming conferences. Alldred (2000, as cited by Taylor-Patel, 2011) found students could be ‘passive’ in involving parents. This was particularly the case with our older middle school students who would not pass newsletters or information on from the school.

As mentioned in the research (Alleman, 2005; Gay, 2011; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004), preparation for the conference was a lengthy process and the major complaint of the middle school staff. Preparation involved teachers having several individual conferences with each student, collection of work samples, completion of reflection paperwork and scripts. Some classes prepared digital resources to share, which

took time to create and organise. Multiple practises of students’ scripts were also necessary to prepare them fully for their conferences. Prior to introducing the SLC, some staff also visited other schools to see SLC in action. This had implications for teachers who needed to complete the preparation activities in their time-tabled lessons. Many of them incorporated the tasks into their literacy rotations and spent their Pastoral Care periods as a time for student conferencing.

The SLC was a fairly simple process to conduct. The library was chosen as a common and neutral space to hold all the middle school conferences in. Modular furniture (rather than desks and chairs) was used to create a more relaxed and comfortable environment. Students had the opportunity to organise their conference environment (Alleman, 2005) by creating displays, which reflected their classroom learning experiences. Our SLC ran over three afternoons, with every family who had made bookings keeping their appointments. Despite the simple process, there were several issues. Some families were unable to attend the SLC on any of the allocated afternoons. This meant that teachers needed to make alternative arrangements (and probably give up another afternoon of their time). Some students had parents who were too ill to attend their SLC. In these situations, teachers digitally recorded the SLC taking place. Another teacher (of the student’s choosing) ‘stood in’ as the parent, and the movie was sent home with the student to share with the parent. Some families did not make an appointment at all; however, this number was substantially less than in previous years. Teachers also

digitally recorded these students. Again, these extra SLC took time for the teachers to complete, and the entire process was completed within a four-week period. 'Being accommodating is the secret for success in achieving nearly 100% attendance' (Alleman, 2005, p60).

'As a teacher, the best thing for me was hearing from the students what they believed they should work on. It was confronting for many of them but they were made to take ownership of their own learning and I think this is extremely important. I am now a student-led conference convert.' – Initially reluctant middle school teacher

It has been very valuable to reflect on our first SLC experience. We received feedback and suggestions for ways to improve from staff, parents and students. Alleman (2005) suggests that each time SLC are held is an opportunity to improve upon the last one. Our feedback included some of the 'negatives' raised in the Absolum et al. (2009) research: parents unable to discuss sensitive issues in front of the student, parents still expecting and wanting 'parent-teacher only' time, and parents not understanding the process or purpose of the SLC. Implications for our middle school are to ensure that the format of the SLC is more clearly conveyed to parents, and to provide a five-minute opportunity at the end of an SLC for parents to be alone with the teacher, if required. As always, the opportunity to make another appointment to meet with the teacher would be offered to parents.

Conclusion

From as far back as 1897, Dewey (in My Pedagogic Creed, as cited by Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004) talks about the necessity of children taking responsibility for their education. Using SLC, to enable students to take greater charge of their learning, has many positive implications and reflects many of the elements of middle schooling. SLC provide the opportunity for middle school students to take the lead, 'own' their work and be a part of authentic, reflective assessment. They improve the quality of communication between home and school, and encourage parental involvement in student learning (Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004). They help to develop strong relationships between student and teacher, and encourage schools to work towards becoming learning communities where learning can be shared (Taylor-Patel, 2011). SLC empower students to be active participants in the learning process (Absolum et al., 2009, as cited by Taylor-Patel, 2011, p3).

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Growing good men: Positive psychology and service learning

James Nelson

Abstract

Young people need opportunities to create worthwhile contributions, need a real connection with others and need to know who they are. 'Growing Good Men' offers young men of St Andrews Lutheran College a chance to build a positive self-concept and skills to become more 'others centred'.

This project enables our young men to get their hands dirty on a real project, learn life skills, clarify their own values, and develop a stronger conviction and commitment to the kind of man they are becoming.

Through this program the students gain confidence, develop in their emotional intelligence, and practice teamwork and leadership skills. Quantitative data is gathered on student emotional intelligence to look for change over time. Qualitative data comes out of student identification and expression of values that motivate and clarify self-identity. Staff also conducted interviews as a follow-up to gauge and account for student learning, their commitment to the expressed values and changes to emotional intelligence.

'Growing Good Men' is a gender specific program for boys, drawing

upon a wide range of literature on Bringing up Boys (Dr James Dobson), Manhood (Steve Biddulph), Boys in Schools (Father Chris Riley; Celia Lashie; Rollo Browne & Richard Fletcher), Leadership (Kouzes & Posner), Rites of Passage (Richard Rohr) and Positive Psychology (Jeffrey Froh & Acacia Parks). The program is a deliberate attempt to give young men a clearer sense of their identity, their dignity, their values and their potential in leadership and service to their school and their community. Within the context of our college, it aides to create balance as there are programs for girls such as 'Girls with a Purpose', 'Not just Skin Deep' and 'Bronzed Aussies'. These approach Health & PE, mental health, wellbeing and emotional intelligence from different angles and offer young ladies opportunities to delve into these valuable learning areas. Beyond the college context, boys need healthy and engaging rites of passage; experiences that connect with positive, pro-social and virtuous versions of manhood. Our charter is to create pathways that account for the diversity of our young men; offering concrete teaching and learning experiences that all boys might find value in and build upon for their future.

For the past three years, the college has run the Growing Good Men

program and been intrigued by what it delivers. This program was designed as an opportunity for boys to experience and grow by being involved in a meaningful work project.

Each of the young men who contribute to the project speak of it as being a valuable time of maturing and confidence building. Several have since taken action towards leading and serving in their community.

The program is offered to middle school boys (predominantly Year 9). This is a time of transition and change in their lives and there is a need to honour their journey into manhood. The course is facilitated by senior teachers, our pastor and grounds staff. This allows the boys to experience teaching and humour as part of a meaningful project that will assist them in their development. It is interesting to watch the young men who have experienced the program, now playing significant roles in leadership, through particular positions of responsibility and as members of the community who understand more appropriately their role in society.

The project centres on a significant garden project. The young men experience a real sense of

accomplishment at the end of the hard work. Over four or five weeks the young men work once a week for an hour and a half after school. They are provided safety instructions and an overall picture. The boys are asked to separate roles and define objectives for each afternoon's work. They are also given scope to design what the garden will look like. A mix of boys with varying degrees of school engagement participate in the program. It is not simply a leadership development course for prospective leaders, nor is it a remedial course for those struggling to remain engaged. That the boys notice the varied grouping helps with the authenticity of the program and engagement of the students; the mix promoting the college ethos of 'Nurturing the Individual'. Teachers will nominate boys they think 'need' the experience and others are invited to create some balance in the student group. Each young man realises he is included because it is the right time for him to step up to responsibility for himself and others.

Memorable quotes emerge as some young men recall one year later in interviews:

'Dad left when I was 5, so this is the first time I've worked alongside men. What stands out is when our Principal was chatting to us as we dug the holes for the benches and commended me on my work.'

These recollections remind us of the importance of creating different opportunities and spaces, outside the classroom for student growth and development (Parker Palmer).

Gathering feedback from students and teachers during the project, and following up again a few months later, helps create a log of useful qualitative data for ongoing evaluation of the program. This, in conjunction with responses to interviews undertaken one month and one year after the project, prove useful. The interviews gauge each young man's learning and create opportunity for dialogue about the strengths and characteristics they valued in the program. To seize this opportunity for professional development and action research

the question is asked: 'In what ways can a brief program of team work and commitment to values improve a young man's emotional intelligence?' This has helped focus professional dialogue, readings and reflections on this program over the years. It will continue to maintain the focus on the data we gather on emotional intelligence, values and the literature and not simply our own particular cultural or personal biases. The data will continue to grow as 20–40 young men participate in the program each year revealing interesting patterns regarding student development. Continued reflection upon quantitative data will also help shape the way the program operates and develops into the future.

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Achieving intercultural understanding in schools

Rhiannen Gimpel

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John Paul College is a co-educational Early Learning to Year 12, independent, ecumenical school located in Daisy Hill, south of Brisbane. The school, which has around 2,200 students, has a significantly above-average ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage) value (ACARA, 2014). John Paul College has been taking part in Thailand BRIDGE since 2013 and has a partnership with Kantharalak Wittaya School in Sisaket, Thailand. In 2014, the college joined Korea BRIDGE, developing a partnership with Sunsim Middle School in South Korea.

Rhiannen's intercultural understanding definition

Intercultural understanding is an essential part of learning. By fostering intercultural understanding in the classroom, students are able to learn, and value, their own culture, language and beliefs, as well as others. At John Paul College students learn about, and engage with, diverse cultures in ways that recognise difference, creates connections and fosters mutual respect.

Intercultural understanding practice at the school

Rhiannen Gimpel is a Design Technologies teacher and vocational trainer and assessor at John Paul College. She has led the development of strong intercultural relationships between the college and Kantharalak Wittaya and Sunsim. These relationships involve students, staff and the broader school communities. A variety of information and communication technologies (ICT) are used regularly to connect partner school classrooms. For example, students create pages on a Wikispace to exchange cultural information.

Cooperative curriculum planning between the partner schools is a feature at the college. For example, in Year 7, the curriculum partnership focuses on Community Design and Design Technologies. John Paul students worked collaboratively and sustainably on projects to design and make products for students at Sunsim. These projects are intended for use as educational resources and as gifts for Sunsim students and staff. Year

7 students at Sunsim reciprocate by learning some English from their John Paul counterparts, with a focus on Art and Design to align with Community Design at the College. At Kantharalak Wittaya, the reciprocal focus is also on English and Design, but with an added component of Home Economics.

At John Paul, Community Design is a subject that allows students to use skills from all Design areas: Home Economics, Visual Art and Applied Design (Manual Arts). This allows students to be creative when designing their project. In 2014, there were four Year 7 Design classes at the college (Home Economics, Visual Art, Applied Design and Community Design). Classes rotated every term so all Year 7 students completed a project in Community Design. In 2015 Community Design is being run as a unit in the second semester, which will enable students to create a project using skills from Home Economics, Visual Art and Applied Design.

The Australian Curriculum view of intercultural understanding

underpins intercultural learning at John Paul. Rhiannen uses all organising elements and sub-elements of the general capability to plan for teaching and learning. She identifies content descriptions in the Australian Curriculum: Technologies that support intercultural learning. For example, in Year 7 Design and Technologies (Knowledge and Understanding), Rhiannen focuses on the following content descriptions:

- Investigate the ways in which products, services and environments evolve locally, regionally and globally and how competing factors including social, ethical and sustainability considerations are prioritised in the development of technologies and designed solutions for preferred futures (ACTDEK029).

- Investigate the ways in which products, services and environments evolve globally through the creativity, innovation and enterprise of individuals and groups (ACARA, 2015).

Rhiannen elaborates:

“In Design Technologies at John Paul College, students are working collaboratively and sustainably to solve problems, to design and make products for those in the local and global community. These projects are designed to cater for the specific needs of the community receiving the product. Students are constantly recognising different cultures and developing respect for

diversity. They interact and empathise with others along the way, reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking personal responsibility.”

Rhiannen describes how her intercultural experiences enable her to better understand and interact with her students to create a safe and supportive learning environment. She plans to continue to work with the BRIDGE partner schools with a focus on developing further activities and dialogue to promote a greater understanding of student diversity. Rhiannen hopes that this understanding will enable her school and the partner schools to review and improve on how they are responding to students' needs, particularly from a cultural perspective.



On a broader school level, Rhiannen describes her college as a learning environment in which all members have the opportunity to reach their potential of living a fulfilling life, and of 'getting involved.' It is a place that is built on mutual respect and hospitality that extends to people of all cultures and faiths. The college's commitment to BRIDGE is a prime example of its commitment to cross-cultural engagement and understanding.

The John Paul International College was opened in 1997 to prepare and support international students for their studies in Australia.

There is a strong focus on student welfare in addition to academic success. Its programmes are intended to develop students' learning as well as English language and intercultural skills to enable a smooth transition into education in Australia.

International students receive English language tuition, academic and vocational counselling, and assistance with homestay and private accommodation. Their presence at the college adds to the rich variety of intercultural experiences that all students can access.

John Paul also runs annual study abroad and student exchange trips to its partner schools. Prior to their trip, participating students are required to study the language, literature, history, geography and culture of the country they intend to visit. While in the country, they participate in collaborative activities with the local students and/or teachers. On their return, students are asked to reflect on their

experiences, in particular those that inhibited or supported the development of their intercultural understanding.

Rhiannen now hopes to set up a similar exchange program with Sunsim and Kantharalak Wittaya, so that her students are able to gain firsthand experience of what it may be like to live the life of their South Korean and Thai counterparts. She believes that by providing students with authentic intercultural experiences—face to face, or virtually in the classroom—they are able to develop an insight into the thoughts, feelings, motivations and behaviours of people from other cultures.

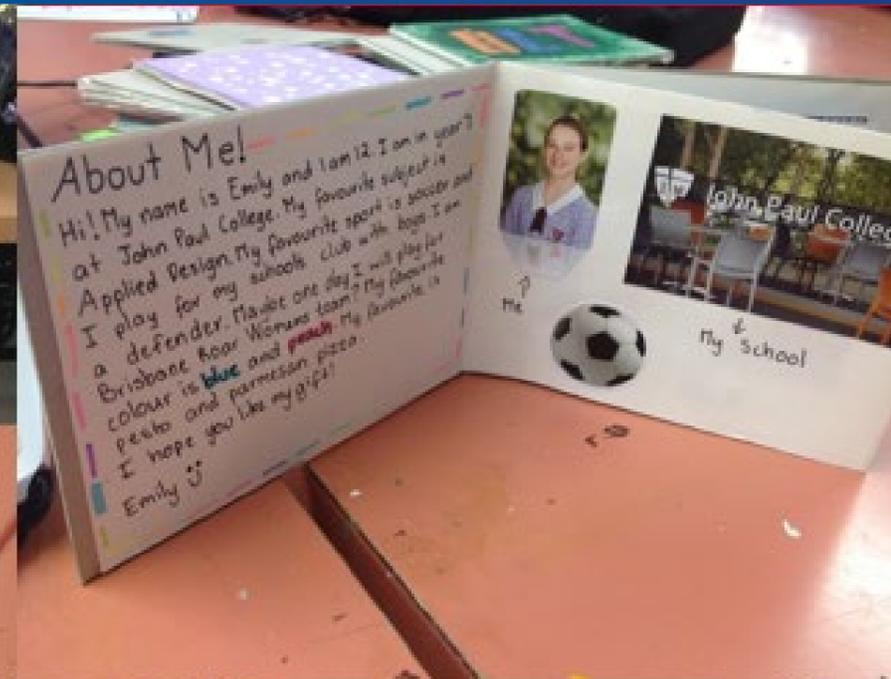
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ABOUT ME

Name: Ms Gimpel
My Favourite Colour: Blue
My favourite Food: Vietnamese Rice Paper Rolls
My favourite Movie: Shawshank Redemption
My favourite TV Show: Master Chef

My Hobbies: Playing Volleyball, Cooking!!

What I already know about Korea:
I know about the Korean Education System.

What I would like to know about Korea:
Korean History, Lifestyle and Traditions! I will get to learn more about this when I visit Sunsim Middle School in September!

Lets be Pen Pals! 😊

Information for Contributors

Adolescent Success welcomes submissions for journal inclusion that reflect the aims of the Association and address issues relevant to the middle years of schooling. Possible topics include: the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents; family and community partnerships; varied approaches to teaching and learning integrated curriculum; authentic assessment; school leadership and organisational structures in the middle years; information and communication technologies and resources in the middle years; research findings and future developments in the middle years.

Contributions may take the form of:

- academic and research papers that make an original contribution of an empirical or theoretical nature
- literature reviews
- papers of a practical or applied nature
- reports
- viewpoints
- book reviews

Contributions

- The journal has two levels of acceptance of papers for publication: refereed and non refereed. Refereed papers will have two referees selected from relevant fields of study by the editor. Papers must clearly indicate if they wish to be considered for refereed status. Refereed articles will be included in a specific section of the journal.
- Contributions shall be submitted electronically via email to the MYSA email address, or on CD, as a Microsoft Word document. Articles must be double-spaced, without the use of styles, 12 point font Times New Roman. The submitted article and CD become the property of MYSA.
- All contributors need to complete an Author's agreement form to be submitted with the article.
- Papers should be between 700 and 5000 words in length.
- Each article should have a

separate title page that contains the title, the names of all authors, their contact addresses, email addresses, and telephone and facsimile numbers. The names of the authors should not appear on the rest of the paper.

- An abstract of no more than 200 words must accompany each refereed article.
- All references should be placed at the end of text using APA (6th edition). For example:

Journal article

Rumble, P., & Aspland, T. (2010). The four tributes model of the middle school teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 10(1), 4–15.

Book

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Chapter in edited book

Ajsen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: a theory of planned behaviour. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckman (Eds), *Action control. From cognition to behaviour* (pp. 11–40). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

- Footnotes are not to be used.
- Figures and diagrams should be professionally prepared and submitted in a form suitable for reproduction, indicating preferred placement.
- Photographs should be submitted separately (not included within the text). All student photographs, art work,

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