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English in Australia aims to publish a diverse range of opinions on issues of concern to English teachers and literacy educators.

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All contributions will be blind peer reviewed to determine their suitability for publication.



English in Australia

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Editorial

LARISSA MCLEAN DAVIES AND WAYNE SAWYER

This special edition of *English in Australia*, titled 'Assessing English', offers a scholarly contribution to debates about the ways in which English is assessed in contemporary Australian schooling. It also explores the ways English as a school subject is being 'assessed' by institutions, the media, and key governmental stakeholders. This edition acknowledges the importance of the English teaching profession contributing to, and taking the lead in, public and professional debate about assessment in subject English. Bethan Marshall (2011) observes that while debates about assessment in subject English are perennial they are often unresolved, and English teachers appear 'quarrelsome' when asked to engage with issues of assessment (p. 2). Indeed, the nexus between assessment and curriculum, and the balance between formative and summative assessment have long been sources of tension for English teachers (e.g. Johnston 1987; McGregor & Meiers, 1991; Stibbs, 1979, and *English in Australia*, 59, March 1982). Marshall attributes this contrary response to the fact that 'in some shape or form [English teachers] wish to see the subject assessed as an arts subject and that means concentrating more on the whole of what is written or said than its parts' (2011, pp. 1–2). Another reason may be the ways in which authority for the administration and design of assessment tasks often resides outside the influence of English teachers; it is something that happens to us, rather than something we can feed into and control. Yet, as a profession it is vital that we contribute expertise with regard to debates about assessment, and examine the models and modes of assessment that are being employed in, and alongside, secondary English. Further, it is important that we offer accounts of practice that provide examples of meaningful assessment for students. This special edition of *English in Australia* responds to these imperatives, and in doing so, expands the conversation about assessment and English nationally and internationally.

It is without doubt that debates about assessment have gained prominence in the context of an increase in international high-stakes literacy testing regimes. When this first edition of *English in Australia* for 2018 goes to press, Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 will have recently taken part in the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Australia's version of high-stakes literacy testing has arguably come to stand

as a proxy for a more comprehensive assessment of student achievement at school, in particular in English. Since its inception, whatever its conceptualisation as not 'belonging' to English, the literacy components of the NAPLAN suite of tests have impacted to varying degrees on the articulation of literacy in subject English, on the enactment of English curriculum, on the valuing of teacher professional judgement, on priorities for teacher professional learning, and ultimately, on student experience of secondary English. These issues are explored in this edition.

Research into the efficacy of NAPLAN on a national level offers a cautionary tale and a recent report, commissioned by the New South Wales Teachers' Federation into the writing component of NAPLAN (Perelman, 2018) argues for a review of assessment of this domain and emphasises the importance of connections between assessment and the forms of writing that are both valued by the curriculum and important outside of schooling, such as information texts. In this edition the importance of reclaiming and supporting student voices in English is emphasised in Janet Dutton and Kathy Rushton's article which reports on the 'Identity Project', a pedagogical initiative designed to use drama pedagogy to support literacy learning in English in a context in which the majority of students are from EALD backgrounds. The gains made by students (and staff) point towards the particular importance of pedagogical approaches which support both student voice and teacher agency.

The focus on writing and student voice in high stakes environments circulating through the articles in this edition is also taken up by Paul Gardner in this issue on the ways in which NAPLAN data has been erroneously interpreted with regard to writing attainment. Gardner argues that more comprehensive and longitudinal examination of NAPLAN writing data and approaches to literacy learning is required to address the 'decline' in student performance in this domain. Also taking a systems level view, Sam Simpson Reeves, Beryl Exley and Julie Dillon Wallace report on a study undertaken with Queensland teachers designed to better understand the influence of NAPLAN on subject English and teacher agency. Timothy Bibbens offers an account of the way in which one school set about to positively change assessment practices in subject English through the collaborative development of rubrics and attention to formative assessment.

Meaningful professional learning for teachers is

further explored in Helen Woodford and Jane Southcott's article which reports on a study of the transitional and transformative potential of personalised online learning. Read alongside Dutton and Rushton's and Woodford and Southcott's accounts of the value of teacher agency in designing and administering assessment and engaging in professional learning, Nathaneal Reinertsen's analysis of writing rejected by an Automated Assessment System (AES) highlights the importance and irreplaceable nature of teacher judgement. Reinertsen's article is a reminder of the global, holistic nature of much English assessment practice.

Of course, the reach of high stakes assessment in Australia is not confined to the compulsory years of schooling that are tested by NAPLAN. In Western Australia, Year 12 students will be preparing for final literacy (and numeracy tests) that must be passed before they can be awarded the Western Australian Certificate of Education. Final year students in New South Wales are scheduled to be doing the same by 2020, and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority is seeking feedback on the same intervention for students qualifying with the Victorian Certificate of Education. Out of such a context, Jennifer Dove explores the place of imaginative writing and the nature of feedback on writing within the high-stakes New South Wales Higher School Certificate, examining assessment reports to better understand the potential of this form of writing. Like Dove, Margaret Merga offers a timely reminder about the value of pedagogical approaches to English that stand to be silenced or passed over within a high-stakes testing environment. Merga's study shows the value of silent reading and student voice in research that seeks to understand generative pedagogical approaches in high-stakes contexts. These ideas resonate with Pauline Griffiths' article, which suggests that new pedagogical approaches to writing are needed in the current assessment climate. Griffiths argues that the 15th century practice of creating 'commonplace books,' which involved individuals recording and reflecting on their reading and selecting and weighing the importance of new knowledge, is relevant to contemporary classrooms in which students are supported to develop skills in reflecting on learning.

As a collection, the articles in this special edition offer engagement with existing testing regimes and high-stakes practices in Australia, and also explore useful approaches to assessment and professional learning in Australian schools. These interleaved perspectives draw, at times, on influential texts and innovative approaches to assessment from previous eras and different national contexts. In doing so, they remind us that disciplinary history has a valuable role to play in assisting us to understand the

challenges and demands of the contemporary moment. As Ian Reid reminds us:

It is vital for English teaching to put collective memory to work in two ways: to recall salient features of the historical development of our field of study, and to revive the memory of certain historical realities that contemporary culture prefers to repress. (2016, p. 98)

To this end, we are introducing into the journal a new section titled 'Perspectives from the Past'. In this section, we will reproduce, or publish for the first time, historical material that is significant to contemporary English teaching. The plan is to publish short extracts from this historical material with a short Introduction. In this edition, we have included extracts of texts by Graeme Withers and John Dixon and Leslie Stratta. Full texts of the material will be available on the AATE website under the title *AATE Archive*. This repository will be curated by AATE's new Research Officer, Philip Mead, and will further support English teachers, teacher educators and researchers to retrieve subject 'memory' for the purpose of engaging with contemporary issues.

This historical initiative begins, then, in the first edition of the new *English in Australia* Editorial Team. We would like to begin by thanking the previous Editor, Associate Professor Anita Jetnikoff, for her excellent stewardship of the journal for the past two years. For the next term, Larissa McLean Davies (Editor) will be working with a team of Associate Editors: Catherine Beavis, Lucy Buzacott, Brenton Doecke, Kelli McGraw, Philip Mead and Wayne Sawyer, to ensure *English in Australia* continues to deliver high quality debate and insight on key issues of English teaching for the English teaching community. This Editorial team will continue to be supported by an expert international Review Board.

We trust that this edition contributes to your thinking on the issue of assessment.

Larissa McLean Davies and Wayne Sawyer, Editors

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Confirming Identity Using Drama Pedagogy: English Teachers' Creative Response to High-Stakes Literacy Testing

Janet Dutton, Macquarie University and Kathy Rushton, University of Sydney

Abstract: English teachers often feel blamed for low results on high-stakes standardised literacy tests such as Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Faced with pressure for their students to produce high scores, teachers can react by making changes to both content and strategies which result in a narrowing of curriculum and teacher pedagogy. The 'Identity Texts Professional Learning Project' began when a group of Australian secondary English teachers sought to eschew this propensity to narrow curriculum and practice and instead developed a creative, syllabus aligned way through which to improve the literacy and engagement predominantly for students with Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) or for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). The resulting approach involved the use of drama-based pedagogy to craft *identity texts* (Cummins, 2000) that incorporated students' cultures and linguistic resources, including first languages. Teachers in this professional learning project have described gains in student literacy and engagement, and strengthened links with community. This article will report on the ways these teachers came to value the role of drama pedagogy to strengthen student literacy and respond to the demands made by testing regimes that are currently used to assess students and their teachers.

Introduction

The teaching profession in Australia in recent decades has been strongly impacted by a regime of high-stakes external testing, teacher quality initiatives, a national teacher accreditation framework and an Australian Curriculum (Fehring & Nyland, 2012; Gannon, 2012; O'Mara, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2016). Primary and secondary teachers increasingly find themselves teaching and assessing English on a metaphorical 'highwire' (Dutton, 2017) as they negotiate a political and educational environment fuelled by continued assertions of poor literacy standards (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011; Parr, Bulfin & Rutherford, 2013) and Australia's falling results on global measurements such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

English is the only mandatory subject taught in Australian schools from Foundation (5 years) to Year 12 (18 years) and is underpinned by a broad range of theoretical and pedagogical approaches. The *Australian Curriculum: English* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority ACARA, 2014), which informs the English syllabuses in all Australian jurisdictions, includes Literacy as one of the three strands integrated in the teaching of subject English, along with the strands of Literature and Language. Literacy is also embedded in each teaching subject of the *Australian Curriculum* as a general capability, and is tested externally by the literacy elements of the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing regime which takes place in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 of an Australian student's schooling (ACARA, n.d). The results of the mandatory NAPLAN tests function as a diagnostic tool for improving student learning outcomes and for teacher and school improvement. They also provide data on

every Australian school's NAPLAN results for publication on the ACARA's 'My School' website (ACARA, n.d).

Teachers of English frequently feel that they are blamed for low results on NAPLAN, despite the cross-curriculum literacy dimensions of the Australian Curriculum and the compelling socio-economic contextual factors militating against success in some schools (Cormack & Cromer, 2013). As a result, English teachers can feel compelled to change their practice and may rely on poorly understood data-based, objective measures. These can shift attention away from professional knowledge of students and result in a questioning of teachers' sense of professional competence (Brass, 2015; Comber, 2012; O'Mara, 2014). Teachers may also be influenced to make pedagogical decisions that contradict their professional knowledge and invoke a narrowed, pedagogical repertoire to function more 'safely' in the standardised testing context.

This paper describes a university-school professional learning initiative that uses syllabus aligned, research-informed English practice to improve literacy and language outcomes for secondary students with Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) or for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) LBOTE or EAL/D. The professional learning project has since become a larger ethics approved research study, the findings of which will be reported in the near future. This 'Identity Text Professional Learning Project' offers insights into the ways that the linguistic and cultural resources LBOTE students bring to school can be honoured, appreciated and ultimately recognised by teachers as the starting point for the development and mastery of English language and literacy. It also seeks to show how identity can be affirmed, and therefore wellbeing supported, in school settings – especially in light of the fact that learning the home or first language is not supported in all schools (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). The project also invites consideration of the way drama pedagogy might be employed to nurture student engagement and build confidence and skills in the transition from spoken to written mode. Importantly, the project also sheds light on ways English teachers can teach creatively and effectively while balancing on the high-stakes English 'highwire' (Dutton, 2017).

English Teaching on the 'Highwire': Negotiating the Pressure of High-Stakes Testing

English teachers in Australia find themselves uniquely placed in the aforementioned movement towards

increased regulation and accountability. The common conflation of subject English with literacy (O'Sullivan, 2016) shapes a view that teachers of English are solely responsible for achieving improved literacy outcomes and therefore NAPLAN test results, despite the shared literacy teaching responsibilities outlined above. Research highlights how high-stakes standardised tests, such as NAPLAN, can challenge the ways English teachers situate learning and assessment in their classrooms (Brass, 2015), with teachers responding to explicit or implied 'advice' by changing their pedagogy to strategically prepare students for the NAPLAN tests. This is despite the promotion of NAPLAN as a skills-based test for which test preparation is said to be unnecessary. Pedagogy aimed at NAPLAN success has been shown to infiltrate everyday teaching practice (Brass, 2015; Comber, 2012), influence resource allocation, and involve significant emotional labour on the part of teachers (Comber, 2012; Cormack & Cromer, 2013; Parr, Bulfin & Rutherford, 2013).

The ongoing impact of NAPLAN on teachers' pedagogy and assessment in English is significant. Following Gilborn and Youdell (2000), O'Mara (2014) has noted that in response to NAPLAN, society, schools and teachers resorting to a form of 'educational triage'. This is undertaken to maximise the impact of scarce resources (Gilborn & Youdell, as cited in O'Mara, 2014), often with unanticipated consequences for marginalised groups and activities within a school. Australian schools function in a highly competitive 'My School' informed market and NAPLAN results play a significant role in shaping community perceptions. It is not surprising therefore that schools shift to 'triage mode' when responding to the literacy 'emergency' of low NAPLAN scores. O'Mara's data revealed the following key responses to a situation she labels 'Code Red NAPLAN':

- Blame the workers under you.
- Keep 'poor performing' students away.
- Move on 'poor performing' students.
- Reduce other activities so you can focus on NAPLAN.
- Teach to the test: Make NAPLAN the curriculum. (2014, p. 13)

Another impact of NAPLAN is the narrowing of English curricula and teachers' pedagogical repertoire. Faced with the pressures to produce high test scores amidst time constraints, teachers make changes in both content and strategies (Berliner, 2011) and,

especially when working with less familiar syllabus documents, may reach for less engaging ready-to-teach resources and skate along the surface (O'Sullivan, Carroll & Cavanagh, 2008). NAPLAN has been found to directly reduce the type and variety of writing undertaken in English classes, such as when narrative and storytelling were marginalised for a period after 2009, when persuasive writing became the sole writing task required in NAPLAN (Parr, Bulfin & Rutherford, 2013). As evidence of this trend of reducing curriculum breadth, O'Mara (2014) cites a deputy principal who argued his school could not make use of a literacy-rich animation program on the grounds that his school's NAPLAN results were low and that they therefore had to focus on the 'basics' in order to improve test results.

The 'Identity Text Professional Learning Project': English Teaching Beyond 'Triage Mode'

The 'Identity Texts Professional Learning Project' is an ongoing professional learning initiative that emerged from the keen desire of a group of teachers and we, as their university partners, to eschew the aforementioned propensity to narrow curriculum and pedagogical repertoire in response to the perceived pressure of a high-stakes testing context. The teachers involved in the professional learning project were from the English department of a secondary girls' school in south-west Sydney, NSW, Australia. The school has a high proportion of students who could be defined as having Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), or for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), and therefore speaking one or more languages other than English. The participants range in years of teaching experience, including several early career teachers and two teachers who had previously completed their teaching practicum at the school.

As colleagues and mentors, we had worked with these teachers for several years prior to the project supporting their professional learning around the teaching of English, language and literacy. The university-school relationship at the basis of this project initially emerged from ongoing professional dialogue commenced through our facilitation of professional learning courses, and was sustained by our work in the school as tertiary mentors during our pre-service teachers' in-school professional experiences. The university-school partnership developed from this close working relationship resulting in support for pre-service teachers to undertake their first professional experience and in the placement of interns with the school. In turn,

we provided professional learning for staff, both costed and accredited courses and on-site professional learning, as part of our service role in supporting schools and communities. As teacher educators, we continue to see our connection with the teachers as a reciprocal relationship in that we and the teachers bring to our dialogue distinctive understandings shaped by our in-school teaching experiences, knowledge of the research-based practices of English teaching, and the contextual factors impacting on students and school communities.

After initial dialogue with the English Co-ordinator and English teachers, and with support from the Principal, the following dimensions of the professional learning project were agreed to: a commitment to an 'elbow to elbow' model for working in the space between existing and new teacher professional knowledge; and, the research-informed decision to incorporate *identity texts* (Cummins & Early, 2011) and drama-based pedagogy into the English department's existing units of work, with a view to further develop student literacy. These dimensions of the project are outlined below.

Working in the Liminal Space: 'Elbow To Elbow' professional dialogue

To support the English teachers' professional learning, a conscious decision was made to work 'elbow to elbow' with the teachers at the planning and programming stages of this project. Especially in these times of increasing accountability and regulation of teachers' work, classroom teachers can feel that they are bombarded by special projects and increasing demands on their time (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Implementing pedagogical change involves a period of flux or transition while existing practices and beliefs are 'tested' in light of new knowledge and ways of doing. In any period of transition, including during teacher professional learning, this period of being 'betwixt or between' or in the liminal period (see also Cook-Sather, 2006; van Gennep, 1977; Nelson & Harper, 2006; Turner, 1964) can invoke feelings of confusion and challenge. By choosing to work as colleagues, 'elbow to elbow', with the teachers we sought to support the teachers to develop the knowledge and skills to address their immediately identified needs but that was understood in ways that could also help them address future teaching and learning issues (see also Timperley, 2011).

To respond to the challenges of their work in subject

English, the teachers began by positioning students at the heart of their professional learning process with the goals they established allowed student learning and wellbeing to function as the touchstone in their planning of the learning activities and pedagogies (see also Timperley, 2011). EAL/D learners are simultaneously learning English, learning through English and learning about English (Halliday, 2004). Teachers therefore need support to meet the pedagogical challenges of teaching students who are also meeting the challenges of learning in and about a new language, and this became a focus for the project.

With the support of school leadership, the teachers established opportunities for professional learning both in and outside school hours that involved ongoing collaboration with each other and we as guiding colleagues. In these meetings, we identified the literacy needs of the students, probed potential resources with a view to enhancing students' learning, and designed rich, syllabus aligned ways to prepare students for NAPLAN – all actions indicative of the resilience and passion of those who teach English (Manuel, 2004; Manuel & Carter, 2016). The aim was to develop units of work for Years 7 to 10 that would not only improve student literacy, but would also maximise student engagement, develop deep thinking, and implement creative pedagogy (Jefferson & Anderson, 2017).

Having previously identified a need for knowledge and skills in grammar, all teachers in this project had already completed one or more courses focused on teaching grammar in context. The teachers were already using this knowledge to inform their teaching, so the aim of this project was to broaden the pedagogical repertoire of teachers so that the teachers could embed explicit literacy development as well as engage and support their students. The teachers' existing English units of work for Years 7 to 10 were therefore used as the basis for developing new strategies and material, a process shaped by our view that there is no expert who knows better about a classroom than the teacher in that classroom (Timperley, 2011).

Ultimately, what we had to offer in this project were research-informed perspectives on why we might engage students in the crafting of *identity texts* and how that might be achieved through drama-based pedagogy. These perspectives are outlined below.

Why identity texts?

Research shows that literacy gains can be achieved when students are given the opportunity to represent

identity and negotiate aspects of their culture (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert & Muspratt, 2002). Furthermore, 'EALD learners ... have diverse talents and capabilities and a range of prior learning experiences and levels of literacy in their first language and in English' (NESA, p. 7). Given the LBOTE/EAL/D context of the school, we suggested using *identity texts* (Cummins & Early, 2011) as a pedagogical tool to engage students, support development in writing, and affirm students' identities as 'intelligent, imaginative and linguistically talented' (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 4). In suggesting this focus, we were mindful of the view that:

language-minority students' educational progress is strongly influenced by the extent to which individual educators become advocates for the promotion of students' linguistic talents, actively encourage community participation in developing students' academic and cultural resources, and implement pedagogical approaches that succeed in liberating students from instructional dependence. (Cummins, 1986, p. 32)

While the construct of identity may not always be the focus of current discussions about student achievement and teacher effectiveness, Cummins, Hu, Markus and Montero (2015) argue that educational achievement is related to the confirmation of identity; they use the term *identity text* to 'draw attention to the essential link between identity affirmation, societal power relations, and literacy engagement' (p. 556). They further argue that pedagogies that affirm identity will impact on learning, and that, if educational responses to underachievement by students from marginalised communities do not address the causal role of identity devaluation, they are unlikely to be successful (Cummins et al., 2015).

Developing an *identity text* allows students to use material and experiences from their own backgrounds including their own linguistic resources and involves the opportunity for first language use. An *identity text* can be an oral text, a written text, a visual text or a multimodal text, but it will be a text that connects to the student's community. It will also be a text that disrupts a transmission pedagogy that views the student as a blank slate (Freire, 1975) and, as such, is a pedagogical tool that wholly aligns with the emphases of the Australian Curriculum's general capability of Intercultural Understanding:

[S]tudents develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped,

and the variable and changing nature of culture ... Intercultural understanding combines personal, interpersonal and social knowledge and skills. (ACARA, 2014).

By invoking students' prior cultural resources, *identity texts* enable students to learn more about the cultural backgrounds that shape their own identities, and those of others. The creation of these texts goes beyond a mere 'feel good experience' and applies rigorous teaching and learning that offers equitable access to knowledge (Cummins & Early, 2011). At the core of Cummins's transformational pedagogy using *identity texts* is empowerment – understood as the collaborative creation of power that results from classroom interactions that enable students to relate curriculum content to their individual and collective experiences and to analyse social issues relevant to their lives (Cummins, 2000, p. 246).

Furthermore, experiences with *identity texts* draw on what students bring to the classroom and can help link these primary discourses to secondary academic discourses. While *identity texts* can function as highly valued texts in their own right, they can also function as an 'interim discourse' in that they can be employed to build on students' 'primary discourses' and move them closer towards the 'secondary discourse' or more academic discourse (Gee, 2000) typical of much writing in schools. *Identity texts* can thus occupy an interim space and facilitate the process of moving towards these secondary discourses. Cummins argues that when teachers encourage students to value their prior knowledge and experiences and draw on their home languages and cultures in their classroom work, they set in motion a process of challenging preconceived views of marginalised, linguistic and cultural groups in society (Cummins, 1981; Cummins & Early, 2011).

To this end, and after the initial meetings, a series of workshops was held to outline some of the strategies that could be used to incorporate *identity texts* and the reasons for doing so. The wellbeing of the students was supported by addressing the issue of subtractive bilingualism (Collier & Thomas, 2001) as a barrier to educational success. This was done by welcoming and providing opportunities for the use of home languages in the classroom and creating opportunities for students to interact with their community when crafting texts about their own lives. As Cummins et al., state, '... teachers [can] expand the instructional space beyond simply an English-only zone to include

students' and parents' multilingual and multimodal repertoires even when they themselves [don't] speak the multiple languages represented in their classrooms' (2015, p. 557). This focus on language, especially first languages, was also seen as a key to strengthening ties with the local communities – it supported students to create imaginative texts using their individual cultural and linguistic resources with support from their communities.

Drama-based english pedagogy and literacy: a creative response to NAPLAN

To incorporate *identity texts* into the teachers' classroom practice, we looked to drama-based pedagogy as an effective teaching and learning tool. Significant to the literacy focus of the project is the increasing evidence to support the positive impact of drama-based pedagogy on additional language learning (Dunn & Stinson, 2011; Piazzoli, 2011; Stinson & Freebody, 2006) with the affective space created by drama strategies having been shown to reduce the anxiety of second language learners and build confidence and capacity for communicating in the spoken mode (Piazzoli, 2011). With its process-oriented approach to learning (Lee, Patall, Cawthon & Steingut, 2015, p. 4) drama pedagogy aligns with the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2014) general capabilities of Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, and Intercultural Understanding, and has been shown to work towards positive academic and wellbeing outcomes for students (Ewing, 2010; Ewing & Saunders, 2016; Lee et al., 2015). Imagination is a means through which students can assemble a coherent world and cultivate empathy (Greene, 1995), while embodiment and enactment are 'often important precursors to other ways of knowing' and can thus facilitate deep learning (Ewing, 2012, p. 9). The connection between language development and the use of drama as a pedagogical approach has been well established (Dunn, Stinson & Winston, 2011; Ewing, 2012). More specifically, drama's kinaesthetic engagement can promote broader student engagement in learning (Lee et al., 2015; Rothwell, 2011).

Oral language is central to developing student literacy, given its relevance to both the 'telling' of identity stories and writing. Mercer argues that group talking activities, such as those in collaborative drama activities, provide opportunities for learners to 'practise and evaluate ways of using language to think collectively, away from the teacher's authoritative presence' (2002, p. 19). The leadership of a teacher can then support

students to practise using the genres of their culture and to 'think together about their experience in the communities in which they are cultural apprentices' (Mercer, 2002, p. 11). Drama-based pedagogy can offer both this safe 'space' for practising language and the opportunity for teacher leadership in framing and interpreting the language learning in the activity.

Drama-based pedagogy also offers a vehicle for encouraging students to collaboratively develop spoken and then written *identity texts* that can foreground individual voices. In classrooms where talk is valued and fostered as a key learning tool, conversation becomes key to learning and language development. When opportunities for talk are abundant (Gibbons, 2006), a teacher can use many strategies, including their own in-depth knowledge about language, to assist students to not only draw on their oral language but also move to the educationally valued written form (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014, p. 2).

The teachers therefore planned activities emphasising the importance of rich immersion in the oral mode using drama-based pedagogy, with the group nature of the tasks scaffolding students in their learning. Teachers then worked slowly along the mode continuum (Martin, 1985) from speaking to writing, providing support as students created written texts based on the drama activities (see also Derewianka, 2014; Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014). The examples outlined below demonstrate how the written texts created in response to drama activities can sit in a space of transition between spoken and written mode in that they are written representations of the spoken word. This can help make the progression to writing feel 'safe' and therefore more achievable for students, particular those who are not working in their first language.

The strategies for teaching writing in this project included explicit teaching about language, and were based on teacher judgements about students' language needs. The development of vocabulary was identified as a particular literacy focus based on NAPLAN, classroom observations, and student work samples. The focus was on developing engagement and knowledge in subject English while supporting students to creatively choose how to use the English language as well as their first language to express themselves and articulate their identities. The students could therefore draw on authentic, meaningful personal experiences and, with drama pedagogy as the initial vehicle, be afforded safe opportunities to develop literacy and to support reflective thinking about their identities as individuals and

in relation to their families and broader communities.

This decision to employ drama-based pedagogy in this project is notably counter to the trend that sees the creative arts falling victim to the narrowing of curriculum typical of the educational triage response discussed earlier (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, cited in O'Mara, 2014). The teachers in this project, like English teachers across Australia, are aware of the significance given to NAPLAN results. They are, however, equally cognisant of the need to avoid making NAPLAN *the* curriculum and of marginalising student engagement and wellbeing in a misguided drive to improve results. Given the reasons outlined above and because drama-based pedagogy also provides an opportunity to negotiate 'ways of coming to understand and make connections across different kinds of knowledge' (Ewing, 2010, p. 7), the implementation of drama-based pedagogy to create *identity texts* was seen as a valuable way to improve engagement and enhance the learning and wellbeing of the students whose teachers were involved in this project.

Implementing identity texts through drama-based pedagogy

Prior to the project, the English teachers had made use of drama pedagogy in units of work based on drama texts, but had rarely used it to facilitate learning for non-drama content. They were, however, familiar with some strategies for role-play and improvisation. Given that the level of teacher artistry has a potential impact on learning outcomes (Dunn & Stinson, 2011), we facilitated professional learning that refined and extended the teachers' prior knowledge of drama strategies and supported them as they implemented the strategies in their English literacy activities. The strategy 'Advance/Detail' (Ewing & Simons, 2016) was implemented to support students to tell their own stories with prompting from a partner to provide additional details and description when needed. The strategies of 'walking in role' and 'conscience alley' (see Ewing & Simons, 2016) were selected to give students the opportunity to clearly focus on understanding an individual's motivation and to help identify the key moments in their story that allow them to develop and act on these motivations. All the strategies were offered as possibilities for developing identity firstly in oral and then, with further preparation and scaffolding, in written texts. In all activities, aesthetically charged (Dunn & Stinson, 2011), personally relevant *identity texts* were used, and this afforded ways to engage students and support

them to refine their use of language, and especially develop their vocabulary.

The following sequence of activities that employs the strategy of oral Storytelling, Advance/Detail and Readers' Theatre was offered as a suggestion:

1. Students develop a story, an *identity text*, by speaking to their parents or caregivers to discover and re-tell a story from home. The power of story and the invitation to use their home language in the telling provides an authentic link between the home and the school, and between curriculum and culture (Cummins, 2000; Cummins & Early, 2011). The use of the home language can range from the use of some key words within a text written in English to producing a whole text in the home language with the idea of translating it later.
2. When these stories are brought back to the class it is suggested that the 'Advance/Detail' strategy (see also Ewing & Simons, 2016) be used to tell the story to a partner.
3. Then, in a pair/share activity, the students can use criteria, previously developed by the group, to decide which story would make the best dramatic presentation of the story. The link between curriculum and culture is further affirmed through the use of the language of appraisal encouraging students to make judgements about the work and the story in the same way that the English syllabus requires them to make evaluations of texts (for example ACELT 1627; 1629).
4. When the choice is made, the group can then be provided with a scaffold to support the collaborative development of a 'Readers' Theatre' presentation (see also Ewing & Simons, 2016) of the *identity text*. A narrator can easily manage the presence of one or more home languages and this allows students to collaborate in a shared production using several home languages.
5. After the 'Readers' Theatre' is written, it can then be presented to the class or recorded and presented at an event to which parents and community members are invited.

These steps provide opportunities for students to develop the macro skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. They also afford opportunities for the teacher to recast language (Gibbons, 2006) and to develop knowledge about the structure and features of texts at all levels from text, to paragraph, sentence, group and word (Derewianka, 2011) while

also developing vocabulary. Welcoming the use of the home language in the classroom not only has an impact on the emotional wellbeing of students but it also provides the opportunity for the robust discussion of language itself (D'Warte, 2014). Learning is enhanced when students are provided with a meaningful context in which to explore their language choices; the above sequence of activities provides a non-confrontational way for students to share knowledge about language and to also share their personal language resources.

Teachers in the project were also supported by the suggested sequence of activities as it afforded opportunities to alternate between the creation of oral and written texts and allowed opportunities for discussion about those texts, while at the same time utilising and building on the students' linguistic resources. This extract is from a Readers' Theatre collaboratively developed by four Year 7 students, who did not share the same cultural or linguistic backgrounds, but worked together to dramatise a story. To develop their text, they had to each tell their stories orally and then listen to them and evaluate them. After selecting the story they wanted to develop into a Readers' Theatre, they worked together to produce the written text and then performed it, reading the lines they had written. The following extract from one of the student scripts demonstrates the multilingual approach to their storytelling:

Mother: (Running after her son ...) ALIA!! (She yelled).
Narrator: As the mother ran after her son, at the exact same moment, an explosion erupted!
William: Woah! (He said with fefe, running backwards.)
Narrator: Just as William ran backwards, he didn't see the pole behind him. As William fainted, his uso came searching for him.
James: Will! (James cried out) faamolemole, tell me you're not dead! (He pleaded as he found his uso lying on the ground.)
 Faamolemole! Not after our tama passed away!
 ...
 *The students also provided a key to the language they used in the play: *fefe* – fear; *uso* – brother; *faamolemole* – please.

Importantly, when working with *identity texts*, teachers are able to choose from a suite of strategies in a way that suits them and their students. There is no mandated program; rather, teachers are encouraged to use their own knowledge of their students and their professional judgements to modify their units of work to incorporate the drama-based pedagogy and *identity texts*.

Conclusion

Identity texts and drama-based pedagogy can therefore offer rich possibilities for developing literacy and affirming identity. The findings from the ethics approved research phase of 'The Identity Texts Professional Learning Project' will be fully reported in the near future. Teachers who have participated in the project report they now perceive drama as a valuable component of their creative pedagogical repertoire in all units in English and an effective way to develop student literacy. As one teacher of Year 8 observed, 'Drama – I used to only do it when I absolutely had to in drama units – but now I use it all the time. It's just what I do when I teach English.' They also value the way *identity texts* work to confirm identity and strengthen links with community. We believe that this project thus offers an approach to literacy development that aligns with the teachers' professional beliefs and knowledge about teaching, student engagement and wellbeing, and subject English. The approach helps facilitate the improvement in student literacy needed to meet the NAPLAN literacy goals of schools and sectors. Therefore, the professional learning project is both timely and significant in the current context.

We hope that more teachers begin to address the pressure to improve NAPLAN results or literacy generally by focusing on student engagement and by building on all the linguistic and cultural capital that students bring to the classroom. The Quality Teaching Framework (DET, 2008) suggests that deep knowledge and deep understanding are best developed when students are supported to become engaged, self-directed, self-regulated learners in a context that focuses on cultural knowledge and inclusivity. While there are many challenges to achieving this goal, some of the practical strategies employed in the 'Identity Texts Professional Learning Project' can support individual teachers to develop a pedagogy which explicitly addresses these aspects of teaching while simultaneously addressing the demands made by the testing regimes currently used to assess both students and their teachers.

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NAPLAN: The Writing is on the Wall but Who is Actually Reading It?

Paul Gardner, Curtin University, Western Australia

Abstract: The 2017 NAPLAN results were followed by political and media attention focusing on a decline in achievement in writing. This article analyses NAPLAN data to identify the locus of the decline. Contrary to media reports in which it was suggested Year 3 was problematic, the article systematically compares NAPLAN results between 2011 and 2017 to demonstrate that the actual decline is most evident in Year 7. Variations in achievement are influenced by such factors as gender, parents' occupation and geographic location. The case for systematic, large-scale research of writing pedagogy is suggested. It is also suggested the learning of grammar and the development of the complexities of writing should be embedded in students' authentic compositions. The importance of recognising students' agency as writers is emphasised. The paper suggests that the focus for intervention should be placed on developing compositional skills beyond Year 3 in order to raise achievement in the upper primary and lower secondary phases of schooling.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, various governments have become increasingly concerned that their country's economic competitiveness might be affected by falling literacy levels. Locke (2015, p. 24) notes that these concerns emphasise reading rather than writing. This is perhaps not surprising given that 'literacy' in different jurisdictions has been assessed by means of international surveys such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLs) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), both of which focus exclusively on reading. According to Snyder (2008), the politicisation of reading was accentuated by a media campaign that reached its zenith in 2004. This culminated in the Australian Government commissioning an investigation into the state of literacy. However, the subsequent report dealt exclusively with the teaching of reading (Rowe, 2005). Elsewhere, reading was also the primary concern of governments. In the UK, the Blair Government commissioned two reports on early reading (Rose, 2006; Torgerson, Brooks & Hall, 2006) and the Bush administration based the 'Reading First' component of the *No Child Left Behind Act 2001* on an interpretation of the findings of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development NICHD, 2000). In all these jurisdictions, writing appears to have been the 'poor relation' of literacy, subordinated to reading. Therefore, reading levels tend to be the international benchmarks against which judgements are made about standards in literacy. Recently, media reports of the 2017 NAPLAN data in Australia concluded that results had stagnated over a 10-year period. However, the analysis exclusively interrogated results in reading and maths (Robinson, 2018).

Given that in the 'official' discourse around literacy, reading has attracted greater attention than writing, with the apparent result that writing appears to be the 'poor relation' of literacy, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that Cremin (2015, p. 53), should find that teachers tend to be more enthusiastic about reading than writing, even when English is their subject specialism. However, Brandt (2005, p. 166) has suggested that writing is a key capability in the 'knowledge economy'. Given Brandt's assertion, it is likely that writing may attract greater political attention in the future because of its increasingly significant contribution to national economies.

Indeed, the political concern about attainment levels in writing may have already begun. Following the publication of the 2017 NAPLAN results, political and media attention was given to a general decline in achievement in writing. The political soundbites focused on the results of Year 3 students who were singled out as showing the steepest decline (Chang, 2017). The danger of making judgements on the basis of partial data and superficial analysis is the construction of flawed solutions and the erroneous targeting of resources. Federal Minister Simon Birmingham was quoted as saying, ‘there needed to be a bigger bang for the buck’ (Chang, 2017), implying that better results were needed in Year 3. But, is this where ‘the buck needs to stop’?

It is vital that attention, and subsequent action, is targeted appropriately, but before we can do that, systematic interrogation of the issue is essential. To that end, this paper begins by investigating the extent of the decline in writing by comparing results for each Year Group tested between 2011 and 2017. It then compares results across different groups of students, using the *National Assessment Program 2017 National Report* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority ACARA, 2017). Based on these observations, future directions in writing pedagogy are offered.

NAPLAN writing results compared 2011–2017

Whilst the difference in mean score between 2016 and 2017 for Year 3 was -7.1 points, the largest of all Year Groups for the same period (see Table 1a), the extent of any decline is dependent upon the comparative point of reference. With the exception of Year 9, Table 1a shows there has been no improvement in writing for other cohorts since 2016 and indicates the dip in Year 3 referred to by Senator Birmingham. However, further investigation reveals the finer detail in the short history of NAPLAN writing assessments.

As demonstrated in Table 1b, a comparison of the 2017 mean score for Year 3 with that of the 2011 cohort reduces the decline to -2.3 points. The year 2011 was chosen as the point of comparison because, since then, there has been only one genre consistently tested by NAPLAN: persuasive texts. Comparison of the 2011 and 2017 results, across all Year Groups, demonstrates that the extent of the decline is less marked in Year 3 students than in other Year Groups. The difference in mean scores between 2011 and 2017 for Year 5 students is -10.1. In the same period, achievement in writing of Year 7 students has fallen by -16.1 points, and for Year

Table 1a. NAPLAN Results for Writing: 2016–2017

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
2016	420.7	475.6	515	549.1
2017	413.6	472.5	513	551.9
Variation 2016–2017	-7.1	-3.1	-2	+2.8

Table 1b. NAPLAN Results for Writing: 2011–2017.

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
2011	415.9	482.6	529.1	565.9
2016	420.7	475.6	515	549.1
2017	413.6	472.5	513	551.9
Variation 2016–2017	-7.1	-3.1	-2	+2.8
Variation 2011–2017	-2.3	-10.1	-16.1	-14

9 students, who saw an improvement of +2.8 points over the results of 2016, there has actually been a longer-term decline of -14 points. What this comparison demonstrates is that, on the basis of NAPLAN data over the past six years, the evidence substantiates the claim that achievement in writing has declined. However, whilst this is the case for all Year Groups, it is erroneous to suggest that the biggest decline is in Year 3. In fact, the converse is true because this is the Year Group with the smallest margin of negative difference compared to the 2011 cohort. The comparative evidence shows that the biggest decline since 2011 is to be found in the Year 7 results, closely followed by Year 9 and then Year 5.

The 2017 Results: Patterns and trends

Whilst comparisons of data over time reveal general trends for whole cohorts, there is a danger in assuming each cohort is a homogenous group, with the result that other comparative trends may be lost. Table 2a shows the 2017 NAPLAN mean scores for writing based on parents’ Occupational Group, which can be interpreted as a proxy for Socio-Economic Status (SES). Two trends are discernible from these data. Firstly, they show that the highest performing students in all Year Groups tested are those who have parents in Occupational Group G1 (senior managers and qualified professionals). Using the results of this group as the benchmark against which to judge the students of parents in other Occupational/socio-economic groups, we see the first trend emerging. By re-presenting the data in Table 2b as variations in outcomes for Occupational Groups, the data clearly show a progressive decline in achievement for all Year Groups as the parents’ Occupational Group changes. The difference between each Occupational Group in each Year Group is approximately -20 points, but the most marked difference is between G1–G4.

Table 2a. NAPLAN Results for Writing by Parental Occupation 2017

Occupational Group	Year 3 students	Year 5 students	Year 7 students	Year 9 students
G1 – senior managers, qualified professionals	437.5	497.2	543	588
G2 – other business managers, associate professionals	424.9	482.8	523.8	565
G3 – Trades people, skilled office, sales and service staff	408.3	466.6	503.6	541.9
G4 – machine operators, hospitality staff, assistants and labourers	395.2	454.2	488.6	524.2
Not in paid work	377.3	436.7	466.4	500.3
Variation between G1 & G2	-12.6	-14.4	-19.2	-23
Variation between G1 & G3	-29.2	-30.6	-39.4	-46.1
Variation between G1 & G4	-42.3	-43	-54.4	-63.8
Variation between G1 & not in paid work	-60.2	-60.5	-76.6	-87.7

Table 2b 2017 NAPLAN Results – Variation between scores by parental occupation

Occupational Group	Year 3 students	Year 5 students	Year 7 students	Year 9 students
Variation between G1 & G2	-12.6	-14.4	-19.2	-23
Variation between G1 & G3	-29.2	-30.6	-39.4	-46.1
Variation between G1 & G4	-42.3	-43	-54.4	-63.8
Variation between G1 & not in paid work	-60.2	-60.5	-76.6	-87.7

In Year 3 there is a difference of -42.3 points, but by Year 9 the gap widens to -63.8. As can be seen in Table 2b, the gap begins to widen in Year 7. This is a trend that correlates with the general decline in achievement identified in Table 1b. It might be argued that the students being 'stretched' the least are those whose parents are in the lowest Occupational Groups. Reay (2017) makes the same point about educational achievement of low SES students in the UK who experience an education that includes restricted curricular opportunities, poor resources, high staff turnover, and direct instruction, emphasising 'back to basics' literacy. In addition, they tend to be assigned to the poorest schools and the lowest streams in an increasingly competitive educational market.

The outcome is a cohort of students who become alienated because they realise they are materially and symbolically marginalised by a school system that reflects and replicates material, cultural, and symbolic divisions in society (Reay, 2017). It appears that the extent of this alienation is reflected in the widening gap between students of G1 parents and students of parents in lower Occupational Groups, after Year 3, which suggests that current literacy practice is ineffective in improving educational outcomes for children in low SES groups and implies these students are not getting 'a fair go'.

The finding that achievement is unevenly distributed

across socio-economic groups is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, Reay (2017, p. 186) asserts that the implementation of state education for all in the UK was designed to restrict working class ambitions and that effective policy to improve the life chances of working class students would require a radical overhaul of current economic and social inequalities. Holmes-Smith (2006) found that SES in Australia significantly impacts achievement in literacy. Schools with a high proportion of students from high socio-economic backgrounds consistently achieve better results in literacy than schools in poorer socio-economic areas. Luke (2010) posits several reasons for this, including a higher proportion of experienced teachers in schools serving high SES communities and more time spent on higher order literacy education in these schools than in schools in low SES areas. According to a recent report based on PISA data (Hetherington, 2018), disparity between socio-economic groups continues to grow with achievement amongst poorest students falling 50% more than their higher SES counterparts.

The division of geographic location

Even more marked are the outcomes of students in different geographic locations (see Table 3a). The results for all Year Groups are highest amongst students in the cities.

Results in Table 3b have been used as a normative

Table 3a. 2017 NAPLAN Results – Comparison of outcomes by geographic location

	Cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote
Year 3	421.8	402.8	391.2	370.4	293.3
Year 5	480.9	460.6	451	431.5	355.9
Year 7	522.7	496.8	486.6	460.5	358.5
Year 9	562.9	534.1	521.6	489.2	388.3

Table 3b. 2017 NAPLAN Results – Comparison of variation of outcomes by geographic location in relation to those for city students

	Cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote
Year 3	421.8	402.8 (-19)	391.2 (-30.6)	370.4 (-51.4)	293.3 (-128.5)
Year 5	480.9	460.6 (-20.3)	451 (-29.9)	431.5 (-49.4)	355.9 (-125)
Year 7	522.7	496.8 (-25.9)	486.6 (-36.1)	460.5 (-62.2)	358.5 (-164.2)
Year 9	562.9	534.1 (-28.8)	521.6 (-41.3)	489.2 (-73.7)	388.3 (-174.6)

benchmark against which to compare the results of students in other locations. What is immediately evident is that the further one moves from the cities, there is a corresponding fall in achievement. The difference in achievement between students in inner regional areas and their peers in the cities is -19 in Year 3, falling to -28.8 in Year 9. Students in outer regions start -30.6 points behind city students in Year 3 but by Year 9 they are trailing by -41.3. The downward trend is even more marked in remote areas where Year 3 students are -51.4 behind city students and Year 9 students are behind by -73.7. In very remote regions, underachievement reaches chronic proportions with students -128.5 points behind in Year 3 and -174.6 points behind in Year 9.

In addition to this trend of the progressive underachievement of students outside urban areas when compared with their city counterparts, within each region the gap begins to widen further in Year 7. For example, the negative difference in achievement between Year 3 and Year 5 for outer regional students is -30.6 and -29.9 respectively. So, the gap narrows slightly by +0.6, but by Year 7, any advance is reversed by a fall of -6.2 points. In remote areas on the same comparison, the difference in Year 7 is -12.8, whereas the gap decreases between Years 3 and 5 by +2. The same trend appears in very remote areas where an improvement is seen between Year 3 and 5 of +3.5, but by Year 7, the gap has widened to -39.2 points.

Whilst there may be extenuating historic, economic and socio-political causes for some of these variations, they should not be used to obviate the construction of carefully designed pedagogy to ameliorate outcomes. Pedagogy is more than teaching methods

and strategies; it encompasses a paradigm in which the cultures and communities of marginalised students are valued and are seen as integral to learning in the classroom. Heath's anthropological study (1983) was the first to draw attention to the relationship between home and school literacies. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1999) explored students' 'funds of knowledge' acquired in the home and community, and the implications for school-based learning if valued as knowledge by teachers. Attention has also been drawn to the importance of acknowledging each student's agency as a writer, and how the student's personal and inherited narratives provide a fruitful source of material during the writing process (Gardner, 2018). However, such pedagogy is unlikely to thrive in a climate of 'high stakes testing' and professional accountability tethered to reductionist benchmarks of success. Indeed Perelman (2018) is so critical of the current NAPLAN writing tests that he suggests they possibly even subvert the effective teaching of writing.

Gender disparity

A comparison of gender (Table 4) shows that girls achieve higher results than boys in Year 3 and not only continue to do so as they progress through the Years, but again, the evidence corroborates the pattern of widening achievement in Year 7. Although the data trains the spotlight on Year 7, it is probable that the decline begins earlier. Therefore, ameliorative action is likely to be required from the upper primary years through to high school.

What is happening to writing?

Based on these findings, questions need to be asked

Table 4. 2017 NAPLAN Results – Comparison of outcomes by gender and variation across year groups

	Mean score (male)	Mean score (female)	Variation between female – male scores
Year 3	401.3	426.4	+25.1
Year 6	460.1	485.4	+25.3
Year 7	496.8	529.7	+32.9
Year 9	534.2	570.5	+36.3

around what is happening to students' writing, and the teaching of writing that is causing the decline, especially in the upper primary years and particularly for boys, non-city based students, and those whose parents are in non-professional occupations. We might identify a number of variables for which the data are unknown. For example, comparisons are being made between different cohorts of students over time. The same point applies to different cohorts of teachers teaching those students. The wording of the tests change from year to year and variations in the use of language may have an impact on students' understanding of what is required of them. This issue was raised after the 2014 NAPLAN results were published (Smith, 2014), showing a steep decline in the results at Years 3 and 5, compared to Years 7 and 9. In the following year, it was decided not to give all Year Groups the same task; instead, Years 3 and 5 were given a different task to the other two cohorts. This had a positive impact on the 2015 results in writing for the younger cohorts, but since then, achievement has plateaued. What has remained constant since 2011 is the genre in which students write (persuasive texts), but since 2015 schools have not known until the day before the tests whether persuasive or narrative genre will be selected. In the absence of rigorous past research around variables for which we do not have data, we are forced to interpret data we do have, but it is incumbent upon policy makers and their advisors to undertake close scrutiny of these data rather than opting for cursory analysis that is inevitably superficial. Scant interrogation of these data is likely to induce 'knee-jerk' responses that emphasise urgent calls for a 'return to the basics', the re-allocation of resources to those students close to the 'success benchmark', and a narrowing of the subject of English in order to drive up standards. Although there was no reference to writing, such a call was made by the authors of the Review of the Australian Curriculum (Donnelly and Wiltshire, 2014), who recommended a more structured approach to phonics and greater emphasis on reading literature

than creating it. The reciprocal nature of reading and writing was overlooked by Donnelly and Wiltshire. Bazerman (1980) acknowledged the significance of reading as a valuable resource for developing writers and Perelman (2018) also identified the importance of students reading genres they were expected to write. The complementary relationship of reading and writing is not a one-way process; Graham and Hebert (2010) report that writing enhances students' reading comprehension. So, it is important that policy makers take a broad view of research evidence before making speedy decisions about the future direction of literacy education.

Double dipping: The assessment of spelling, grammar, and punctuation

If we consider the 'back to basics' of writing to be skills associated with spelling, grammar, and punctuation, we need to acknowledge that they are already taught and tested. Their inclusion in NAPLAN means they are already given due attention in literacy teaching. This being so, and if advocates of a 'back to basics' agenda are correct and knowledge of spelling and grammar improves writing, we would expect there to be strong evidence of this in these data. So, careful analysis of these data should help us discern patterns that lead to the identification of the issues in writing and possible pathways to solutions. Table 5 is a collation of data extrapolated from the NAPLAN report (ACARA, 2017). It provides a comparison of the national scores in writing for each Year Group against those for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. As can be seen in Table 5, scores for spelling, grammar, and punctuation are consistently higher than those for writing in every Year Group. Although the spelling and grammar/punctuation scores improve from Year 3 to Year 7, they then dip in Year 9. Other noteworthy points are the huge spike in spelling scores between Year 3 and Year 5 (+25.6) and the plateauing of performance in grammar and punctuation from Year 3 to Year 7. Once again, the spike in trends is most noticeable in Year 7.

Irrespective of the reasons for these trends, the most significant result, for the purposes of this paper, is the difference between the scores in the 'basics' and the global score for writing. If teaching the basics of spelling and grammar and punctuation had a positive impact on writing, we might expect there to be something closer to parity between the scores in each category for each Year Group. However, this is not the case. The scores for writing in each Year Group are

Table 5. NAPLAN – Comparison of results for writing, spelling, grammar, and punctuation

	Writing	Spelling	Variation (spelling and writing)	Grammar and punctuation	Variation (grammar/punctuation and writing)
Year 3	413.6	416.3	+2.7	439.2	+25.6
Year 5	472.5	500.8	+28.3	499.3	+26.8
Year 7	513	549.5	+36.5	541.5	+28.5
Year 9	551.9	581.4	+29.5	573.6	+21.7

depressed relative to the scores for spelling, grammar/punctuation. This finding raises questions over the long-standing argument about the efficacy of teaching grammatical knowledge as a means of improving students' writing. One unknown variable, however, is information about the exact pedagogies used by teachers when preparing students for the respective NAPLAN assessments, especially the grammar and punctuation tests. In the absence of systematically collected data, one influential indicator might be the advice currently being offered teachers. The *Australian Society for Evidence Based Teaching* website (Killian, 2014) suggests that teachers should identify grammar and punctuation in real texts, but then advises the explicit teaching of grammar and punctuation and the use of direct instruction in the teaching of spelling. If this advice is being translated into 'direct instruction' and is implemented nationwide, it would appear to be not wholly effective as a means of raising achievement in writing. However, it is not surprising that teachers focus on the 'basics' when the elements of spelling, grammar, and punctuation are assessed twice; once by means of discrete tests and again as criteria used for marking the writing test. Again, Perelman's (2018) recent comprehensive critique of the NAPLAN tests asserted that transcriptional aspects of writing are being privileged over higher order aspects of writing, and that this is one factor in the ineffectual nature of the current tests.

Alternative approaches to the teaching of writing and its assessment

Following discussion of ongoing arguments about the best way to teach grammar as a means of improving writing, Myhill, Jones, Lines and Watson's (2012) intervention study investigated the impact of contextualised grammar teaching on students' writing and metalinguistic understanding. The investigation, involving 32 Year 8 classes with 744 participants, was the first large-scale study in any country of the impact of teaching grammar through authentic writing tasks (p. 161).

It included intervention and comparison groups that were subject to the same learning objectives, genres, time-frames, outcomes, and stimulus materials. The research team devised pedagogical materials in which the following principles were applied:

- grammatical metalanguage explained through examples and patterns;
 - links made between the feature introduced and how it might enhance the writing being tackled;
 - the use of 'imitation': offering model patterns for students to play with and then use in their own writing;
 - the inclusion of activities which encourage talking about language and effects;
 - the use of authentic examples from authentic texts;
 - the use of activities which support students in making choices and being designers of writing;
 - the encouragement of language play, experimentation and games.
- (Myhill et al., 2012, p. 148)

In the intervention group, an emphasis was placed on the use of grammar to create effects and construct meanings in students' writing rather than learning grammatical terminology. Both the intervention and comparison groups were taught for three weeks each term for three terms. The genres covered were narrative fiction, persuasive writing, and poetry. The major finding from the study was that contextualising grammar teaching, as social practice, in the process of writing, positively impacted on writing attainment. Although the writing of both the intervention and the comparison groups improved, improvements by the intervention groups were, on average, 5.11% above the comparison groups. Myhill et al. (2012) attribute the difference to teaching that enabled students to explore a 'repertoire of possibilities' for creating meanings in playful ways in their written work, using linguistic and syntactic devices, rather than being taught prescriptive, formulaic grammatical structures.

An additional finding was the importance of teachers' linguistic subject knowledge. Students of teachers with a confident knowledge of grammar were more successful than their counterparts taught by teachers who were less confident in their subject knowledge. The reason for this was that these teachers were able to explicitly articulate the functions and effects of grammatical devices being used by students. In turn, these students improved their own metalinguistic awareness and ability to discuss why their writing was effective. Myhill et al.'s (2012) findings suggest that the best way to teach grammar, as a means of improving writing, is in the context of students' texts as they are being composed, rather than by means of discrete, decontextualised activities. Other studies support these findings (Andrews, 2006; Weaver, Bush, Anderson & Bills, 2006). The evidence also suggests that 'teaching to the test', by means of repetitious grammar and punctuation exercises, may not be the best way to improve students' attainment in writing (Perelman, 2018). However, Hattie's (2008) meta-analysis has been influential in promoting direct instruction as the most effective pedagogy to raise achievement. The pedagogy has appealed to successive Federal Ministers of Education, possibly because it is easily identifiable and appears to be an efficient form of education. However, appearances can be deceptive and direct instruction has not gone uncontested. Indeed, Luke (2014) suggests that, although direct instruction gives the initial appearance of improving attainment in the short term, it is questionable whether it leads to deep sustained learning: the effect may 'wash out' in later schooling. The Year 9 spelling, grammar, and punctuation results of the 2017 NAPLAN tests appear to endorse this view, as do the writing results in the upper primary and lower secondary phases.

Adoniou (2018) has argued that, rather than giving more attention to the basics, which appear to be adeptly covered, given the data in Table 5, the more complex aspects of literacy are being given less thorough attention and that this is the main causal reason for the decline in the quality of writing as students progress through upper primary and into secondary schooling. Historically, a dip in achievement has been identified at the point of transition between schools (Year 7), but this does not explain the variation in outcomes between cohorts of students in this Year Group between 2011 and 2017. Scrutiny of the NAPLAN marking criteria shows a fairly even distribution of marks across compositional and transcriptional

features of writing (see Table 6). Apart from the fact that spelling, grammar, and punctuation are tested twice by NAPLAN, it is possible for a student to score average to high marks through technical accuracy by performing well in several features in columns two and three. However, these same students are unlikely to achieve the highest marks, unless they are able to satisfy the features in the first column. The results imply that, in the main, students possess sufficient knowledge at sentence and word level. However, either this knowledge is not transferrable to the processes of written composition, which is suggested by Myhill et al. (2012), or if it is, then, as suggested above, students are unable to successfully construct texts that demonstrate engagement with audience, the articulation of ideas, persuasive devices, and vocabulary appropriate to genre. Perelman (2018) is critical of the complexity of the 10 item criteria and the privileging of the basic skills of spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and grammar over higher order writing skills. For example, he notes that spelling attracts more marks than ideas. To attain the highest mark for spelling, a student must spell all words correctly; there must be a minimum of 10 'difficult words' and some challenging words. However, writers choose words that meet their needs, purpose, and the mood they want to create for the audience. Take, for example, the opening lines of Ted Hughes's classic children's story, 'The Iron Man':

The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff.

How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.
(Hughes, 2005, p. 1)

Presumably Hughes's writing would not attract the highest NAPLAN marks because his language is simple, in both its orthography and syntax. It is possible that the writing of students in high SES bands is scored more highly than that of students in low SES bands and remote regions because they may use, and correctly spell, more polysyllabic words, but this alone does not necessarily make for better writing.

Elsewhere, it is suggested that transcriptional features of writing, including paragraphing and structure, tend to be the aspects of writing on which teachers focus most attention because they are more easily identified and assessed than the higher order aspects of writing (D'Arcy, 1999; Gardner, 2012). The corollary of placing a greater emphasis on transcriptional features is a discourse of writing that privileges these features over compositional ones, leading some students to

Table 6. NAPLAN Marking criteria (Persuasive Writing)

Compositional features/marks	Textual features/marks	Grammatical and transcriptional features/marks
Audience 6	Structure 4	Grammar 6
Ideas 5	Cohesion 4	Punctuation 5
Persuasive devices 4	Paragraphs 3	Spelling 6
Vocabulary 5		
Total 20	Total 11	Total 17

self-identify as poor writers if they have orthographic difficulties or even lack fine motor control and are told their handwriting is unsatisfactory (Gardner, 2013). In the latter case, handwriting and writing often become conflated. Furthermore, adherence to the basics diminishes students' agency as writers and constrains teachers' agency as teachers of writing. Hence, the teaching of writing can become the application of grammatical rules, precise spelling, and punctuation, delivered by teachers positioned as technicians by prescriptive, often commercially published, pedagogic programs. The 'teachers as writers' movement that began in the USA and has subsequently spread to Britain and New Zealand has been an attempt to ground teachers' understanding of writing in their own practice, as writers, thereby creating authentic knowledge which can be translated into an effective pedagogy of writing (Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Locke, 2015). There is, perhaps, a need for such a movement in Australia as a means of developing teachers' efficacy as writers. Certainly, if it is the case that current writing pedagogy focuses on transcriptional and structural aspects of writing, the suggested paradigm shift must move beyond teaching the 'basics'. Instead, we need a pedagogy of writing that both integrates grammar, punctuation, and spelling in authentic writing experiences, whilst also enhancing a student's ability to engage the reader by means of appropriate vocabulary, precise articulation of ideas, and creative uses of language for effect.

Conclusion

Based on this largely theoretical discussion, which systematically draws on quantitative evidence extrapolated from NAPLAN data, this paper argues for an urgent need for large-scale, systematic research capable of identifying the causes of the decline in writing. This should be accompanied by intervention studies based on programs designed to raise achievement, particularly amongst groups where underachievement is most

marked, that is, students from low SES backgrounds, boys, and those who live outside the metropolitan areas. Contrary to initial reactions to the 2017 results, this paper demonstrates that, whilst a more effective pedagogy of writing might enhance achievement across all Year Groups, the primary focus for intervention should not be Year 3, as some have suggested (Chang, 2017), but upper primary and lower secondary. This assertion is based on the finding across all data sets that the recorded achievement gap begins to widen in Year 7. It is suggested that the primary cause of the decline in achievement is due to pedagogies of writing that continue to focus on the technical skills of writing at the expense of the more complex and creative aspects of written composition. The importance of acknowledging students' identities as writers, positioned in personal and socio-cultural narratives, as well as their 'funds of knowledge', has been posited as integral features of a new pedagogy of writing. However, rather than being some loosely framed pedagogy, it is one that must be bolstered by teachers who possess good subject knowledge, have confidence in themselves as writers in order to teach writing from an 'insider perspective', and who are able to scaffold developing writers by applying explicit teaching of spelling, grammar, and punctuation at appropriate moments as students compose authentic texts that have meaning to them.

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Secondary School English Teachers Caught in the NAPLAN Fray: Effects of the Disparate Responses

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Abstract: Since 2008, secondary school English teachers have been at the receiving end of contradictory advice on how to best prepare their students for the literacy component of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). On the one hand, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) asserts that the 'best preparation for NAPLAN is to continue focusing on teaching the curriculum' (ACARA, 2018a). Yet in Queensland, systems and schools are in the midst of responding to an externally mandated assessment culture (Klenowski, 2011; Hardy, 2014). Our pilot study explores open-answer survey responses from 30 Queensland secondary school English teachers who provided varying accounts of their school's responses to these competing agendas. Employing theories from Bernstein's (2000) sociology of education, we examine what the teacher participants say about (i) NAPLAN's relationship with the English learning area, and (ii) who controls the pedagogic practice for NAPLAN preparation in their school. The article concludes by considering the potential effects of these disparate arrangements.

NAPLAN – the Pros and Cons

The last ten years have seen standardised testing in Literacy becoming *de rigueur* in Australian secondary schooling. Proponents of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) claim that these tests and their public reporting reduces educational inequality, increases objectivity in the awarding of achievement standards, increases accountability (Johnston, 2016), ensures funding is directed to where it is needed, permits better tracking of transient students, allows for more meaningful international comparisons (Dreher, 2012; MCEETYA, 2008), and does not necessarily cause a negative impact on wellbeing (Rogers, Barblett & Robinson, 2016).

For its part, ACARA provides the following advice to schools: 'the best preparation for NAPLAN is to continue focusing on teaching the curriculum' (ACARA, 2018a). The NAPLAN literacy component assesses three domains: reading, writing, and language conventions, with the latter including sub-domains of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. ACARA links each domain to the English learning area:

- Reading domain: 'Knowledge and interpretation of language conventions in context are also an important part of reading and are drawn upon in many reading questions' (ACARA, 2018b).
- Writing domain: 'To date the text types that students have been tested on are narrative writing and persuasive writing' (ACARA, 2018c).
- Language conventions domain: 'The tools of language, including language conventions, are explicitly developed in the English learning area. Therefore the content assessed in

the language conventions tests is aligned to the Australian Curriculum: English' (ACARA, 2018d).

In and of itself, the advice provided by ACARA is not problematic, until it's understood within a high-stakes neoliberal testing environment and the development of statistical data on schools. Much research provides hard evidence that the datafication of schooling through NAPLAN testing puts misplaced emphasis on 'performative input/output efficiency equations' and 'policy as numbers, which lead to the recasting of education purposes and practices' (Lingard, Thompson & Sellar, 2015, p. 2) and unhealthy competition between schools (Lobascher, 2011). Much of the literature currently written about NAPLAN discusses its use as a draconian tool for teacher and school accountability, and the negative impacts thereof (Belcastro & Boon, 2012). Much of teaching is now aimed at improving NAPLAN scores (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012), especially for students near benchmarks, which ironically serves to increase inequality for certain populations of students (Creagh, 2016). Other negative effects have been a narrowing of curriculum options (Woods, Dooley, Luke & Exley, 2014), more time spent on test-readiness (Hardy, 2014), increased levels of teachers feeling responsible for scores (Cormack & Comber, 2013), increased anxiety and anger in primary and secondary students, and the changing role of the teacher from 'mentor or helper' to 'supervisor' (Howell, 2015, p. 179). Wu's (2015) statistical analysis reveals reliability and validity issues associated with the scoring of students' performance levels. The detrimental effects on teacher professionalism and the displacement of trust by the public have been noted (Gorur, 2015), as has the print media's reinforcement of the public's existential fear of an underperforming education system (Exley & Singh, 2011) and teachers as self-protective (Mockler, 2015). There is also evidence that principals appointed to Low Socio-Economic Status National Partnership funded schools have instructed teachers to shift their focus from learning area curricula to NAPLAN preparation because of the pressures of external reporting and the performance management of principals (Brennan, Zipin & Sellar, 2015).

Of note is the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (O'Mara et al., 2013). Responses were collected from 88 VATE members over 4 days, many of which were described as 'very lengthy and

extremely affecting' (O'Mara et al., 2013, p. 2). This 20-page submission provided first-hand accounts from secondary school English teachers about the unintended consequences of NAPLAN, including the added stressors to teachers and students, interruption to, and distortion of, the English learning area in favour of teaching to the NAPLAN test, decontextualised teaching practices, and less teaching based on student need (O'Mara et al., 2013). In a similar follow-up survey conducted by VATE (2017), 35 out of 216 (17.5%) respondents indicated that NAPLAN had a negative impact on the English learning area. Respondents wrote about reactive teaching, the curriculum being pushed aside, and modifications to assessment so as to model NAPLAN questions. One respondent provided a lengthy account stating that NAPLAN 'isn't relevant to the actual teaching of English that we do – text study, poetic forms, analytical writing, language analysis, etc. But we are forced to reduce our teaching down to the basics in order to accommodate it' (VATE, 2017, p. 9). Such sentiments were repeated by Loyden, the Head of Department at Spinifex State College in Mt Isa (Queensland), who drew attention to the rapidly evolving curriculum and assessment movement and noted the constant (re)negotiation foisted upon English teachers in response to neoliberal mandates and accountability regimes (Loyden, 2015).

The study

In this paper, we are interested in how secondary school English teachers from Queensland reconcile the advice from ACARA 'to continue focusing on teaching the curriculum' (2018a) *vis-à-vis* the neoliberal agendas filtering into schools via new roles and directions for school principals. This pilot study focuses on the following research question: 'How are secondary school English teachers reconciling NAPLAN's relationship to the English learning area with the relations of control over pedagogies for preparing students for the literacy component of NAPLAN?'

Like Thompson and Harbaugh's (2013) survey with Western Australian and South Australian teachers, O'Mara et al.'s, (2013) and VATE's (2017) surveys of Victorian English teachers, and Loyden's (2015) experiences as an English teacher in Queensland, we undertook research on the perspectives of the teachers who are working in schools preparing students for NAPLAN assessment. As a point of difference to these aforementioned studies, we invited secondary school English teachers from Queensland to participate in an online

open-answer six-item survey. Queensland secondary school English teachers are of interest for two reasons: (i) the particular pressure on Queensland teachers, given Queensland's performance in NAPLAN rankings (see Brennan, Zipin & Sellar, 2015; Exley & Singh, 2011; Klenowski, 2011; Lingard, Thompson & Sellar, 2015); and (ii) the commitment of Queensland teachers to their disciplinary specialisations rather than General Capabilities such as Literacy (see Hannant & Jetnikoff, 2015; Loyden, 2015).

To explore our research question further, we utilise Bernstein's (2000) focus on 'relations within' education. More specifically, we draw on his theorisation of the classification of curriculum knowledge and the framing of pedagogic practice as an analytic framework to map our participants' responses to the open-ended survey questions. The following section introduces this theory and explains how we employed the analytical tool for mapping the teachers' survey responses.

Bernstein's classification and framing

Bernstein's sociology of education (2000) is a useful way of thinking about the distribution of power and control relations as high-stakes initiatives are introduced into education. Two of his basic analytical tools are useful here, that of classification and framing (see also Barrett & Moore, 2016).

At its most general, *classification* refers to the strength or weakness of the power relationship between categories (Bernstein, 2000). In this research, the concept of classification is used to examine the strength or weakness of the power relations between the literacy component of NAPLAN, the English learning area and other learning areas. We examine each teacher's open-ended survey response to determine if the literacy component of NAPLAN and the English learning area are strongly bounded from other learning areas. If the literacy component of NAPLAN and the English learning area are strongly bounded from the other learning areas, this is called *stronger classification* (represented as +C) or *strongest classification* (represented as ++C). In this case, the *stronger/strongest classification* shows that NAPLAN holds power over the English learning area only. If the literacy component of NAPLAN and the English learning area is weakly bounded from the other learning areas, we call that *weaker classification* (-C) or *weakest classification* (--C). In this case, the *weaker/weakest classification* shows that NAPLAN holds no more power over the English learning area than over the other learning areas.

At its most general, *framing* refers to the locus of control of the selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria of the knowledge to be acquired (Bernstein, 2000). In this research, the concept of framing is used to examine the strength or weakness of the control relations of pedagogic practice, that is, who has control over the pedagogical practices of NAPLAN preparation. We examine each teacher's open-ended survey response to determine if the school's administration (e.g. Principal, Deputy Principals (DP), Heads of Department (HoD) and so forth) has stronger control over the pedagogies for NAPLAN preparation. We call this *stronger framing* (represented as +F) or *strongest framing* (represented as ++F). In the case of *stronger/strongest framing*, school administration dictates the pedagogies for instruction. It might be that the teachers are involved in implementing the pedagogical plan, but their expertise is not drawn upon in the selection, sequencing, pacing, and criteria of the knowledge to be acquired. If the English teachers are left to draw on their own professional decisions to prepare their students for NAPLAN, we call this *weaker framing* (represented as -F) or *weakest framing* (represented as --F). In the case of *weaker/weakest framing*, individual teachers work in isolation or with a disciplinary teaching collaborative without overarching administrative direction.

Bernstein's (2000) theories are appropriate for use in this study as they help to analyse and understand the ramifications of disparate uptakes in curriculum and pedagogy (see also Barrett & Moore, 2016). Rather than constructing choices around *stronger/weaker curriculum* and *stronger/weaker pedagogy* as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, we talk through the pros and cons of each in the paper's conclusion.

Method

An open-ended survey method was employed in this study, wherein an invitation distributed via email recruited English teacher respondents from the English Teachers Association of Queensland (hereafter ETAQ). This study used nonprobability purposive expert sampling. In total, 34 responses were recorded, although not all surveys were completely filled. We thus report on the 30 completed responses. Although respondents reported to be from a variety of secondary schools around Queensland, both government and independent schools, no claim is made for representativeness of school contexts in Queensland. The six open-ended questions are listed in Table 1 and were

all based on the concepts of classification of NAPLAN/ learning area knowledge (C1, C2, C3), and framing of pedagogy (F1, F2, F3).

Table 1. Survey items

Item	Question
C1	How does your school prepare for NAPLAN testing?
C2	Who is responsible for NAPLAN preparation at your school?
C3	How much do different departments in your school work together for NAPLAN?
F1	How much control do individual teachers have over NAPLAN preparation?
F2	How much control does the administration have over NAPLAN preparation?
F3	When NAPLAN results are published, how are these results relayed to you?

To analyse the survey participants' written responses, a Cartesian Plane was adapted from Exley, Kervin and Mantei's (2016) work on the classification of curriculum knowledge and the framing of pedagogic practice. A horizontal classification continuum ranged from strongest classification (++C) on the right-hand anchor to weakest classification (--C) on the left-hand anchor. Points of weaker (-C) and stronger (+C) classification were included as appropriate. A vertical framing continuum ranged from strongest framing (++F) at the top anchor to weakest framing (--F) at the bottom anchor. Points of weaker (-F) and stronger (+F) framing were included as appropriate. This produced four quadrants, as per Figure 1.

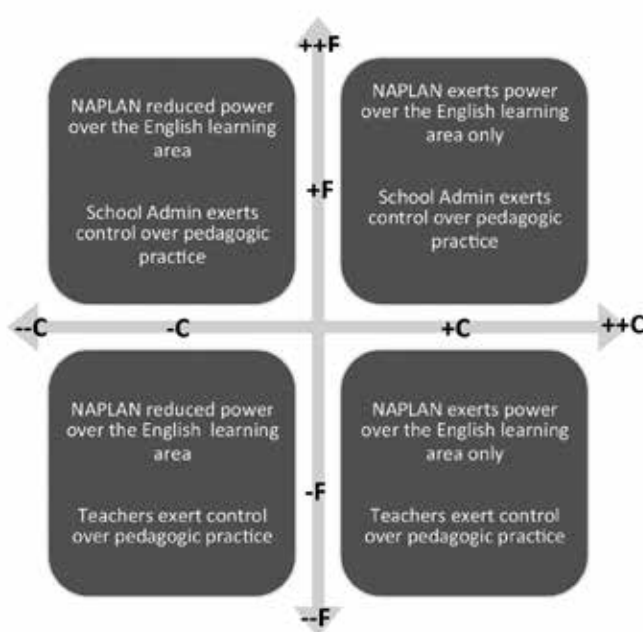


Figure 1. A Cartesian Plane representing NAPLAN's relations with the English learning area and control over pedagogic practice

Each quadrant in Figure 1 represents a different degree of both who holds control over pedagogical framing for NAPLAN preparation, and NAPLAN's power over the curriculum. The upper left quadrant, called 'Quadrant 1', represents a weakly classified and strongly framed school context where responsibility for NAPLAN preparation is distributed over the learning areas, but where school administration has control over pedagogic practice. The upper right quadrant, called 'Quadrant 2', represents strongly classified and strongly framed school contexts where only the English learning area is responsible for NAPLAN preparation and this occurs at the direction of the school administration. The lower right quadrant, called 'Quadrant 3', represents a strongly classified and weakly framed school context where NAPLAN preparation is undertaken within the English learning area only and pedagogic control is with the teachers. The lower left quadrant, called 'Quadrant 4', represents a weakly classified and weakly framed school context where many learning areas share responsibility for NAPLAN preparation with pedagogic practice being determined by the teachers.

Analysis: Step One

The analysis section of this paper details sample responses from each of the six open-ended survey questions. Analysis was undertaken in a two-step process. First, responses were determined to be examples of *weakest*, *weaker*, *stronger* or *strongest classification and/or framing*. The next section provides the per cent of participants whose responses were coded as such. Direct quotes from the data are shown in italics and elided text is shown in square brackets.

Responses to C1: 'How does your school prepare for NAPLAN testing?'

Forty-seven per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest classification*. Participants detailed school contexts where test preparation only included using NAPLAN style questions to familiarise students with the style of question, or ones that undertook very little preparation. One participant said that teachers offered 'practice tests to familiarise the students with the process of NAPLAN testing only', instead preferring '[h]olistic teaching of the concepts covered in the NAPLAN test'. Twenty-seven per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker classification*, mainly stating that students were made aware of NAPLAN concepts.

On the other end of the continuum, 13 per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger classification* and another 13 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest classification*. One response that was coded as the strongest classification is as follows:

[The] English curriculum is discarded for 20 plus weeks – term 4 year 8 and term 1 year 9, to prepare students for ‘the test’. Students are told repeatedly that their English work at these times is ‘for NAPLAN’. In year 8, students complete a practice writing task for a persuasive text. In year 9, students do practice writing tests – both narrative and persuasive, and practice reading and language convention exams using past papers. These are regarded as assessment items – the numerical score is converted to an A – E grade and used to calculate semester grades for reporting. The first 4 weeks of Term 2 are used to drill those aspects of the tests the students performed less well in. Needless to say, the students are bored witless by this approach. They are well aware that the NAPLAN exam is unlike other exams because it has no CONSEQUENCES for them – no prizes for doing well and no brickbats for doing badly. They are not motivated to perform.

Responses to C2: ‘Who is responsible for NAPLAN preparation at your school?’

Twenty-seven per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest classification*. Participants detailed school contexts where test preparation responsibility did not lie with just one person, but with everyone, or a large group of people, such as classroom teachers, or all English teachers. In some cases, this was a deliberate choice on the part of administration, however in others, this was not so. Blurred leadership and responsibility is a hallmark of the *weakest classification*: ‘Responsibilities [are] not overseen in a consistent manner. There have been assigned responsibilities in the past but restructuring of DP and HoD roles has blurred leadership.’ Thirty per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker classification*, mainly stating that students were made aware of NAPLAN concepts.

On the other end of the continuum, 20 per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger classification* and another 23 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest classification*. Those responses which were identified as *strongest classification* noted that power over NAPLAN preparation existed with a single person, or a few people with defined roles from the English Department, to the exclusion of others. For example, one participant

confirmed this arrangement: ‘[The Heads of English] analyse results each year and come up with an action plan to improve results. They determine what preparation will be done based on this plan.’

Responses to C3: ‘How much do different departments in your school work together for NAPLAN?’

Twenty-seven per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest classification*. Participants described meetings between departments, and joint responsibilities for NAPLAN. One participant in this group mentioned that ‘All departments are required to teach the persuasive genre, reading and writing’. This perception of a collaborative effort was questioned by one participant who said that, although their school charged each faculty with exposing students to designated texts, there was no quality assurance to ensure that this happened. Nine per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker classification*.

On the other end of the continuum, nine per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger classification* and another 55 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest classification*. Responses which were identified as *stronger/strongest classification* said that there was no collaboration between departments.

Responses to F1: ‘How much control do individual teachers have over NAPLAN preparation?’

Twenty-seven per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest framing*. Participants detailed contexts in which individual teachers had almost full control over NAPLAN preparation. Thirty-three per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker framing*. For example, school contexts were likely to include those where there was oversight of teachers, sometimes in the vein of teachers being given resources, but where they were left to their own devices as to how to approach these resources with their classes.

On the other end of the continuum, three per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger framing* and another 37 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest framing*. In responses coded as *strongest framing*, teachers had little to no pedagogic control. One respondent explained, ‘There is known input, but by and large the expectations are made as top-down instructions’. Another participant used the term ‘scripted’

to describe teaching in this context, and another said that ‘focus areas are identified through data analysis and instructions are given on what needs to be taught’.

Responses to F2: ‘How much control does the administration have over NAPLAN preparation?’

Twenty-two per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest framing*. Nineteen per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker framing*. For example, these participants tended to state that the administration had *little*, or only *some* control over NAPLAN preparation. In some cases, the administration was only responsible for administering the test, rather than the actual preparation.

On the other end of the continuum, 11 per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger framing* and another 48 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest framing*. There was ‘significant control’ by Heads of Department, and administrative staff. One response stated that administration ‘[told] us what to do in terms of remedial teaching’. Another participant described their administration as ‘the owners of the decisions’.

Responses to F3: ‘When NAPLAN results are published, how are these results relayed to you?’

Eleven per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as the *weakest framing* and 32 per cent provided responses that were coded as *weaker framing*. Participants described scenarios where results were either not made available to teaching staff, or were ‘somewhat available on a database’, and it was up to the teacher to locate and analyse the relevant data.

On the other end of the continuum, 28.5 per cent of the participants provided responses that were coded as *stronger framing* and another 28.5 per cent provided responses that were coded as the *strongest framing*. Participants described staff being notified by email or at a staff meeting about results, and then given an analysis, or collaboratively analysing the results. One participant described a school where each teacher was given 15 questions to answer, which had to be returned to a HoD and then discussed with a relevant Deputy; however, the participant also stated that there was neither further action taken concerning the weaknesses revealed, nor were alternative strategies suggested.

Analysis: Step Two

Step Two of the analysis involved mapping each participant onto the Cartesian Plane diagram from Figure 1. Participant responses for the three classification questions and the three framing questions were averaged and mapped onto the Cartesian Plane as per Figure 2. The numerical values displayed in Figure 2 represent the number of participants who were mapped onto a sub-quadrant. The averaging of the three classification questions and the three framing questions meant that some participants didn’t align with a sub-quadrant but were mapped onto a midpoint between sub-quadrants. Eight participants were mapped onto an axis. We explain how we deal with these data later. Sub-quadrants with no participants have been marked as 0 (zero).

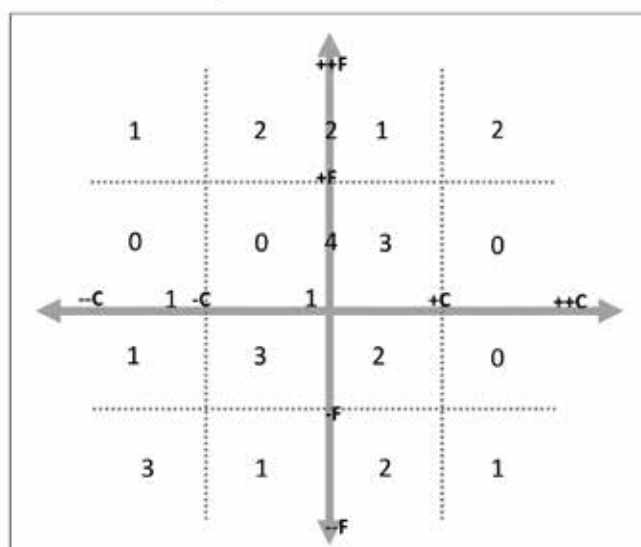


Figure 2. Number of participants who were mapped onto the sub-quadrants of Classification and Framing Cartesian Plane

At the most basic level of analysis, we consider the placement of participants on each axis, noting the positive and negative arms and the midpoints. Figure 2 shows a relatively even distribution of participants across the *classification* axis, with 11 participants mapped onto the positive arm, six participants mapped onto the midway point and 13 participants mapped onto the negative arm. This relatively even distribution of participants across the classification axis indicates a range of experiences in terms of NAPLAN’s power over the English learning area (*stronger/strongest classification*) and NAPLAN’s power over a range of learning areas (*weaker/weakest classification*). Figure 2 shows a relatively even distribution of participants across the *framing* axis, with 15 participants mapped onto the positive arm,

two participants mapped onto the midway point and 13 participants mapped onto the negative arm. This relatively even distribution of participants across the *framing* axis indicates a range of experiences in terms of contexts where school administration controls the pedagogies for NAPLAN preparation (*stronger/strongest framing*) and where teachers control the pedagogies for NAPLAN preparation (*weaker/weakest framing*).

Analysis: Step Three

At the next level of analysis, we consider the placement of participants within each quadrant, this time taking into account how participants' placement of *classification* of NAPLAN with learning areas intersect with their placement for *framing* of pedagogic practice. Tallying the number of participants within a quadrant had to also account for those participants who were previously mapped onto an axis and therefore not definitely in one quadrant or another. The eight participants who were mapped onto an axis were equally distributed to the neighbouring quadrants. Quadrant 1, which is represented by NAPLAN having reduced power over the English learning area and school administration exerting control over pedagogic practice, ended up with seven participants. Quadrant 2, which is represented by NAPLAN exerting power over the English learning area only and school administration exerting control over pedagogic practice, ended up with nine participants. Quadrant 3, which is represented by NAPLAN exerting power over the English learning area only and teachers exerting control over pedagogic practice, was the least populated of the quadrants with five participants. Quadrant 4, which is represented by NAPLAN having reduced power over the English learning area and teachers exerting control over pedagogic practice, ended up with nine participants.

This distribution of participants into quadrants shows a more nuanced analysis of the data compared with the basic level of *classification* and *framing* analysis in Step Two. Whilst a spread of experiences across the four quadrants is noted, this time, participant concentrations are fewer in Quadrant 3 (a total of five) which is most closely aligned to ACARA's advice that the 'best preparation for NAPLAN is to continue focusing on teaching the curriculum' (ACARA, 2018a). Quadrant 1 is the furthest position from ACARA's (2018a) advice, and is more highly populated than Quadrant 3 with seven participants. Quadrants 2 and 4, with nine participants each, are also contrary to ACARA's (2018a) advice, and also are more populated than Quadrant 3.

Findings and discussion

The small sample size of this pilot research and the self-reporting of participants' experiences mean that findings need to be treated with caution. We, however, make a few conclusions that also point to the need for further large-scale research.

The first finding is that in this era of high-stakes national testing of Literacy, the accounts of Queensland secondary school English teachers vary, a finding that mirrors the studies conducted by O'Mara et al., (2013) and VATE (2017). An overt focus on NAPLAN content and pedagogic practice does afford students the opportunity to access the coding orientations of schooling assessment (Barrett & Moore, 2016). However, we need to consider this affordance in light of other implications for the English learning area.

The second finding is that, according to the participants of this pilot study, the English learning area is a space of competing agendas, sometimes where content is overpowered and narrowed by NAPLAN and where English teachers have very little, if any, control over the pedagogic practices. Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012) have already reported on the 'NAPLAN effect' and the narrowing of the English learning area curriculum. At its most extreme, data from one participant indicated 20 weeks of English learning area time was handed over to NAPLAN practice in the lead-up to a NAPLAN sitting. If this scenario is repeated four times in a student's school life as preparation for NAPLAN in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, that equates to two years of English learning area content and pedagogies being forsaken for NAPLAN practice.

We view this as problematic for a number of reasons: the disregard for the English learning area and its focus on multiple contemporary text forms and its traditions of assessment (Loyden, 2015); the disregard for the local context; the disregard for students' English learning area needs; and the disempowerment of English learning area specialists. As found in Portelli and O'Sullivan's small case study research provided by Year 9 English teachers in New South Wales,

[a] focus on skills and measurable improvement around reading print based texts as a consequence of systemic and school policy, reveals a model of English that reduces the flexibility of the pedagogical choices of individual teachers, limiting their professional agency, and thus potentially, reducing the opportunities to address the diverse learning needs of their students. (2016, p. 78)

The third finding is that only a minority of participants recounted practices that aligned with ACARA's

advice that the 'best preparation for NAPLAN is to continue focusing on teaching the curriculum' (ACARA, 2018a). These pilot data show that the majority of the teacher respondents were caught in the fray, seemingly unable to enact ACARA's advice. A more potent force is controlling teaching and learning in the English learning area for some Queensland secondary school teachers. These conclusions are not entirely surprising, as noted in Au's (2008) caution over a decade ago about high-stakes national assessments.

All things considered, more research is warranted to identify if alternative approaches to high-stakes national testing can deliver the evidence of teaching quality sought by the NAPLAN regime without the negative implications identified in this pilot study. Klenowski (2011) called for such a direction in 2011. Her words are still ringing.

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Learning-driven Data: Tracking Improvement Within a Formative Assessment Cycle in English

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Abstract: This paper provides a description of practice outlining changes made to English assessment structures for the purpose of facilitating improved teaching and learning. These changes, which included marking, feedback, reporting, and the evaluation of the efficacy of teaching, were implemented across Years 7 to 10 English classes in an independent boys' school in the ACT. The current approach, which evolved incrementally over time, developed primarily through two stages. The first was a reimagining of rubric design, with criteria reflecting continua of transferable skills, based on the developmental nature of the National Curriculum. This initial change provided rich data but in itself did not lead to the desired impact on teaching and learning. The second stage involved a systematic approach to the formative assessment cycle. Within this cycle the collection of data generated from assessment marking has begun to fulfil its original intention of supporting teaching and learning through progress tracking, targeted feedback, differentiated grouping and improved evaluation of the impact of instruction on student learning.

Introduction: The background of the practice

Changes to assessment structures in English began with the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum*, in particular the concept of learning descriptors that progressed and built over the years of study, in conjunction with the achievement standards as described in the work sample portfolios (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority ACARA, n.d.b). Alongside these mandated changes, it was evident that the existing approaches to assessment, marking, and feedback were not fully meeting the needs of our students, nor our teachers. External data, most pointedly NAPLAN results, but also the ACT Scaling Test, which students sit in Year 12 in the ACT system, showed merely adequate student progress, and in neither case were results trending in an upward direction. More pointedly, teachers in the English Faculty discussed in this paper often expressed frustration that there was not enough time to build skills and understandings, but instead felt that they were constantly lurching from assessment to assessment, with both students and teachers struggling to keep up. Existing assessment structures did not seem to be facilitating teaching and learning practices that were being discussed as crucial to creating substantive and demonstrable student gains. Across the school, improved formative feedback practices, (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), the development of a genuine growth mindset in our students and our staff (Dweck, 2015), and more effective collection and use of data (Goss & Hunter, 2015), were identified as three areas where there was the most potential for improved practice to lead directly to improved results. For these changes to be able to occur within the English Faculty, it was clear that a change in approach to assessment was necessary.

Improving the quality of data collected was identified as the first step toward improved classroom teaching practices. In the past, dozens of data points would have been collected on any given student, but because each assessment item was of a different type, and each item

was indicated by a single mark, this data on the whole revealed very little about whether or not the student had been learning, nothing specific about what the student had learned, nor what that student needed to do to improve further. If the data could be made to more effectively show whether and how students were improving, teachers would be in a better position to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practices (Goss & Hunter, 2015). Moreover, if improvement could be effectively tracked, the improvement itself could be celebrated, contributing to a growth mindset culture in the school (Dweck, 2015). Finally, if the data could convey what understandings and skills a student needed to show in order to improve, this would provide a powerful asset in offering useful and timely feedback to students (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005).

More effective collection of data, therefore, became a lynchpin to change. However, it was important that data collection was not understood as an endpoint, but as a means to facilitate and encourage effective teaching practices. Progress tracking could not, for example, come at the cost of the authenticity of assessment if it was to contribute to, rather than detract from, student engagement (Gulikers, Bastiaens & Kirschner, 2004). Data could be utilised to create learning groups that were differentiated according to achievement levels within a given skill; however, the extent of positive interdependence within those activities would likely be much more important than quality of data in achieving learning transfer (Cohen, 1994; Pai, Sears & Maeda, 2015), the ultimate goal of process. Changing the approach to assessment, in other words, was always made with teaching and learning outcomes firmly in mind.

Step 1: Changing the rubric

The demands were high on what data derived from assessment needed to provide in order to facilitate teaching practices that would, in theory, lead to increased student learning. The first significant change made in the approach was an overhaul in the way marking was conceptualised through the use of rubrics. Prior to the changes, rubrics with very similar indicators and quality criteria were used throughout the Faculty's area of responsibility, which includes Years 7 to 12. These rubrics were interpreted holistically to derive grades and marks. In the ACT, Years 11 and 12 run under a separate system. In this system, accurate marking and especially ranking of assessment is essential in calculating students' Australian Tertiary

Admission Rank. Assessment instruments, including any rubrics that may be employed to assist marking, are regularly reviewed as part of the moderation process. One reason for this is to ensure that these instruments align with standards provided by the ACT Board of Secondary Studies. Year 11 and 12 assessment marking is partially standards-referenced and partially norm-referenced. Moreover, there are inherent advantages in holistic marking to derive grades and marks (Sadler, 2009). Because of these two factors, the existing rubrics in Years 11 and 12 were retained. With Years 7 to 10, however, in order for the rubrics to generate more useful data, priority needed to shift away from the allocation of marks and rankings as the primary purpose of assessment. Instead, the primary purpose of assessment needed to be the identification of what a student was doing well, and what the student could do to improve further. With regards to the rubrics, 'quality of definitions', (Dawson, 2017), as opposed to other factors, would need to take precedence.

This increased explicitness was intended to offer students and their teachers more useful feedback, especially in providing feedback that could be acted upon (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). In order to achieve this, the rubric criteria all had to be framed positively, as opposed to relatively, and in a cumulative manner. If the student did anything, then the rubric had to show that they did something. Then the subsequent descriptor would suggest what the student needed to do to improve further (Figure 1). Writing each criterion in this manner supported a developmental approach to assessment design (Griffin, 2018). While the pre-existing rubrics offered feedback on what to improve, they did not necessarily provide strategies for how to improve. For example, our pre-existing rubrics might have indicated that a student needed to show greater sophistication in his use of evidence in order to achieve an 'A' grade, but they provided little indication of what sophisticated use of evidence might entail. The new rubrics were redesigned as an attempt to provide a continuum of explicit strategies that might be implemented to increase the sophistication of a student's work in incremental steps. In the continuum model, if a student is not using direct evidence in an analytical response, for example, the first incremental step toward a highly sophisticated use of evidence is to include some direct evidence. This accomplished, the student can then be instructed to increase the breadth and then the quality of evidence included. Beyond this, the student can be guided to work on the skill

Stage 8 Descriptor	Stage 7 Descriptor	Stage 6 Descriptor	Stage 5 Descriptor
Stage 7 + examination of direct evidence leads to in-depth exploration of the text(s) and concepts explored.	Stage 6 + thoughtful selection and inclusion of multiple pieces of evidence demonstrates careful and thorough reading of text(s).	Stage 5 + interpretation is supported by direct textual reference.	Stage 4 + specific textual reference is made to support and explain assertions/ observations made.

Figure 1: New rubric extract, 'Use of Evidence' Criteria, Stages 5–8

back. This consistency was key. Teachers using different language to explain similar concepts can create confusion in students, and even higher education students may frequently struggle to understand written feedback (Chanock, 2000). Moreover, efficiency gains could be found not only in the reduction of what needed to be included as written comment, but also in the way that those suggestions for improvement could be stored as data points and later recalled with ease.

Along with explicitness, a concurrent goal of the redesigned rubrics was to articulate different expectations for different year levels, something the previous rubrics did not do. Because the Australian Curriculum is intentionally developmental, the identification of key descriptors offered a useful map against which the rubrics were re-written (ACARA, n.d.b). For example, a Year 7 *Literature and Context* descriptor states that students should '[i]dentify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts' (ACELT1619). In Year 8, they '[e]xplore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups' (ACELT1626). The Year 7 descriptor begins with identification and moves to exploration. The Year 8 descriptor, in essence, assumes this identification, starts with exploration, and then moves toward an interpretation of the impact on the individual. This progression of higher order thinking, rather than the detail of each descriptor, forms the basis of the rubric criteria 'Understanding Audience and Meaning', which, for Stage 7, describes work that shows an ability to recognise and explain viewpoints, as compared to Stage 8 work which demonstrates distinct critical thinking skills, for example in evaluating point of view and purpose, based on that recognition. Not every ACARA descriptor was translated into a rubric criterion, and not every rubric criterion is based on an ACARA descriptor, but this basis in the curriculum has provided an increased level of clarity in describing the differences in expectations between year levels. In turn, this means that students not

curriculum that puts a cap on the level of complexity of content students are exposed to based on chronological age. Like the student working below grade level, the gifted student can be provided with systematic feedback that provides guidance and structure to his or her learning; the complexity of the learning, and the pace at which new concepts are introduced, is determined by the level of readiness evident in the work that the student is producing. Tailoring the pace and complexity of learning to the student are two essential components of effective curriculum differentiation for teaching gifted students (Gross & Sleep, 2001).

The change in the rubrics meant that data generated from entering results could be made more valuable both for the student and the teacher. The rubrics use the language of 'stages' to identify where the student sits within each criterion and these are entered as numerical values into a database. Some criteria have been grouped together as aspects of Receptive Mode learning, and Reading is the primary Receptive Mode outcome that we report against. The other criteria are grouped together in the Productive Mode, and Writing is the most frequent Productive Mode outcome. The Receptive Mode and Productive Mode sides of the rubric are weighted equally in determining the overall grade, even though there are more Writing than Reading criteria. Weighting assessment by Mode, rather than equally weighting each criterion, is intended to create balance in valuing *what* ideas and understandings are being communicated with *how* those ideas and understandings are communicated. In this way, engaging with writing as a communicative, as opposed to technical, undertaking (Wilkinson, 1987) is emphasised as the primary purpose of any written response.

Entering numerical values for each criterion into a database enables the tracking of student improvement as they move up through the learning stages within isolated skill continua, in grouped outcomes, or related to their overall progress. This progress monitoring can be done for individuals, classes, and year levels. It can be presented as simple line graphs which provide an overall impression of whether or not learning transfer is evident. The manner in which the rubrics are

Reading Average: 5**Understanding Audience and Meaning Stage: 5**

The response made a connection between text(s) and ideas explored in class.

To improve: read the text(s) thoughtfully and identify key features, for example consider and discuss in your response how authors engage the audience and what themes and social values are explored in the text(s).

Rationale Stage: 5

A clear and substantial rationale was produced that referred to specific choices made in the planning and execution of the response.

To improve: be sure to explain the intention of your creative choices and how these choices relate to the purpose of the task. Also be sure to revise and edit your rationale carefully.

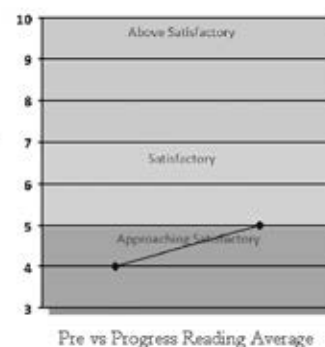


Figure 2: Year 7 Student report extract with achievement and improvement statements plus reading progress tracking

constructed also means that, based on what stage a student had achieved for a given criterion, precise improvement statements can be pre-programmed and automatically generated (Figure 2). These statements can be provided to students as feedback, as well as 'feed forward' (Frey & Fisher, 2011), and used as learning goals for subsequent classroom activities. Along with assisting teachers in setting targeted, individualised learning goals, entering values for each assessment criterion facilitates the grouping of students for collaborative learning appropriate to their Zone of Proximal Development (Doolittle, 1997). In this way, a virtuous cycle of learning can be entered into, with evidence of successful teaching and learning readily available, and evidence-based learning goals ready-made for further achievement. This, at least, was the theory.

Progress, more problems, and our response to these: A systematic approach to formative assessment

While the rubrics generated meaningful data, analysis of that data didn't suggest significant gains in learning. That is not to say that the changes made had not been beneficial. Firstly, the changes to the rubrics led to a refinement of our assessment tasks. The nature of the rubrics meant that the tasks had to have as their primary purpose the identification of what skills students had demonstrated, and what they needed to do to improve. The explicit Receptive Mode and Productive Mode aspects of the rubrics further clarified, and put demands on, the kinds of thinking that students needed to be able to show in their work. Tasks that were so complex that they detracted from some students' willingness to make a meaningful attempt, or that did not deliberately allow the student the

opportunity to show evidence of higher order thinking beyond their grade level, could not be used. The tasks that remained, either through refinement or redesign, were more consistently in line with a theory of 'assessment as a search for evidence of learning' (Griffin, 2018, p. 15), in that they were not designed to assess whether or not a student could do something, but rather to find out at what level the student was able to work.

Secondly, as a benefit – although one that would turn out to be double-edged – the analytic scoring strategy that translated the rubric 'stages' into grades brought our results much more closely in line with the higher standards set out by ACARA, which has been explicit in setting a standard that 'embodies high expectations of learning achievement' (ACARA, n.d.a). Intra-Faculty trialling of the rubrics, which was done by applying them to individual pieces of work within the exemplar portfolios provided by ACARA, produced grades that were in line with the 'Below Satisfactory', 'Satisfactory', and 'Above Satisfactory' designations with a high degree of consistency. For a large percentage of our students, unfortunately, the application of these standards resulted in 'Below Satisfactory' outcomes, and the number of students failing English increased significantly. Students were responding emotionally to the grades and the improvement feedback was not taken on board. Consequently, some teachers became reluctant to interpret the rubrics strictly, undermining the value of the data they produced.

In retrospect, this should not have been a surprise. The idea that teacher expectations play a large role in student achievement is long established (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006). However, codifying increased expectations

through higher grading standards is somewhat fraught. Emotional, ego-involved responses to assessment feedback, especially when that feedback is accompanied by a grade, may in some cases not only inhibit the uptake of that feedback, but be detrimental to overall learning and motivation (Butler, 1988; Carless, 2006). In practice, while raising achievement standards may have a positive impact on learning gains in some students, such gains may come at the cost of the discouragement and disengagement of others (Betts & Grogger, 2003). These negative aspects of higher grading standards were manifesting themselves in the classroom, outweighing whatever advantages that raising the standards might have bestowed.

Clearly, further change was needed in order to reap the benefits of higher expectations, but at the same time ameliorate the potentially detrimental consequences of higher grading standards. Moreover, for both teachers and students, greater clarity was necessary for the rubrics, and the data generated from them, to be seen as useful learning tools. The rubrics were conceptualised so that, depending on the task type, different criteria would be included. In this way they could be made task-specific, but as there would always be at least some shared criteria linking the previous and upcoming assessment, the feedback derived from them would still be useful in providing guidance for future learning. However, this intended continuity was not explicit enough to be effective. As had occurred previously, in changing between task types, the intended emphasis on skill transfer was frequently lost.

Our response to these challenges came in the form of a more explicit, systematic approach to formative assessment. This was not done so much as a way to implement formative teaching practices as they are typically described (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Rather, we sought to borrow formative learning concepts and language to more effectively establish assessment conditions which would support student learning, especially related to providing feedback in a way that made it clear how and when that feedback was to be implemented (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). Within the Faculty, the first part of this change was that some of our assessment, although it would be assigned, collected and marked as usual, would not count toward students' semester grades. We labelled and discussed these unweighted assessments as 'formative', and we referred to the assessments that counted toward the semester grade as 'summative'. To the students, we emphasised that the value of submitting

The Formative Assessment Cycle: Assessment for Learning



Figure 3. The formative assessment cycle graphic for students

an assessment item was not solely or primarily in the grade, but in the feedback they would get from it (Figure 3). The second part of this change was that, whereas in the past, students would respond in a different form for each assessment, in our new structure, the students would do a second response of the same type, but with a different stimulus. In other words, if they wrote a story based on a particular poem for their formative assessment, they would then write another story – this time based on a different text – for their summative response. This made the opportunity for the students to implement the feedback more explicit and more timely.

While increasing the use of formative feedback strategies was initially intended to be a matter of classroom practice, shifting to this systematic formative approach made the intended emphasis on transfer of skills much more explicit. Because the criteria did not change, reports that not only tracked student progress, but that also isolated and clarified for each criterion what the student had achieved and what they needed to do to improve, became much more meaningful. This emphasis on transferable skills also meant that teachers were more likely to use targeted group learning as a strategy in their classrooms.

The system in practice: Year 7 class example

While we moved to a systematic approach to formative learning in Years 7 to 10, we prioritised formative as compared to summative assessment most strenuously in Year 7. In Semester One, students wrote three narrative responses which were each based on

a notion of textual intervention as a way to explore and adapt meaning (Pope, 1995). All three narratives were completed in class and the first two were unweighted. The first was a response to a poem, which was completed early in the first term. Initially in teaching poetry we emphasised meaning, both narrative and thematic, alongside of the emotional responses that different poems evoked. We examined poetic techniques as they are used to convey meaning and evoke feeling, and discussed their parallels in the narrative form. The second assessment was a response to a film study and the third was a response to a class novel study. All three tasks included a rationale component.

While there were initial concerns about students resisting having to repeat 'story writing' three times, in practice, this didn't prove to be an issue. Because there were a number of skills and understandings to address, and there were new skills to acquire whenever one had been demonstrated, there was ample opportunity for reinforcement, but little tendency toward redundancy. The combination of variety in the text types studied, but consistency in the text types created, offered a useful balance between breadth and depth of teaching and learning. Contrasting the language and effect of poetic technique as compared to filmmaking and narrative techniques, for example, provided effective reference points which led to meaningful considerations of each form. At the same time, not having to teach the basics of how to craft a response in a different medium with each unit of study meant that students were able to build upon their understanding of narrative construction and technique with each iteration of the task.

The data, too, became more meaningful. Entering the results of the first assessment into the database resulted in three primary outputs. Firstly, the Access program that we had set up generated reports for each student. One feature of the reports was a chart that showed where the work that they had produced sat as compared to the Satisfactory standard for Reading, Writing, and Overall (combined) Literacy. Visually, it reinforced the idea of a learning journey, conceptualised on one hand as semester long, and on the other hand as one that they had entered into that would continue over the next four years. The reports also included achievement and improvement statements. In the first instance, these reports were distributed to students to be taken home, signed by parents, and returned. This generated a positive response from parents, but the students didn't necessarily engage with

the reports as we had hoped. With the second iteration of the reports, a lesson was given to the students about using the reports to set targeted goals, and this proved to have a much more significant effect.

Secondly, the data could be analysed for various purposes. Comparing class averages for given criteria offered a snapshot of strengths and weaknesses. For example, on the Receptive Mode side of the rubric, the writing of a rationale – that is, an explanation of the ideas that underlie the creative response – was identified as a relative weakness. On the Productive Mode side, the 'Accuracy' criterion, which includes capitalisation, sentence structure, and punctuation, was identified as the area needing the most improvement. Along with suggesting points of focus for instruction, the data further provided baselines against which future performance could be compared.

Thirdly, entering results into the database allowed us to group students together according to their achievement in any given criterion. Between the first and second assessment, we shifted our attention to film study. Three criteria were targeted and each was allocated a week's worth of class time as a point of focus. Because each student showed different strengths and weaknesses, the groupings were not static but changed each week. Activities were structured with introductory, guided practice, and independent practice/mastery steps. Whole class instruction still occurred, but the students spent the majority of their class time working on skills specific to what they needed to demonstrate in their upcoming assessment in order to show improvement. In this way, a number of content descriptors were meaningfully covered in line with the intention of the curriculum as learning goals addressed in context – not according to grade level, but according to readiness.

The data which compared the first and second assessments proved to be particularly valuable for reflection. While we were pleased with what a systematic approach to formative assessment had contributed in terms of the classroom culture, an initial comparison of pre- and progress-assessment results from my own class did not demonstrate improvement overall, although it did do so for the Faculty on the whole. Students showed progress in some of the targeted areas, but, even setting aside those students who hadn't fully engaged in the learning activities, not all of the learning that had been observed in the classroom had transferred into the assessment. Some students had acquired new skills, but had not applied them, instead returning to old habits once they set to work independently.

This tendency was addressed more explicitly in the subsequent unit of study, to seemingly positive effect. Assessment data showed greater improvement between the students' second and third attempts than they did between the first and second, and on average, over the course of the semester the class had improved to a respectable extent. In terms of individuals, however, this picture of moderate but steady growth belied the variable nature of the improvement. While a handful of students improved overall by greater than a full stage, in essence demonstrating more than a full year's worth of improvement, an equal number achieved results on their third assessment lower than that of their original response. On the one hand, this reinforced my observation that there was room to improve the learning activities themselves. On the other hand, it suggested that the system did work as intended when there was buy-in on the part of the student, but that the system itself wasn't sufficient without that buy-in.

Faculty results

Anecdotally, the teachers in the Faculty, and the vast majority of students and parents, responded extremely positively to the shift to a systematic approach to formative assessment, both in its concept and in practice. It allowed a much-improved comparison of student work and therefore improved our ability to evaluate the efficacy of our practices. Taking an explicitly formative approach to assessment, one that highlighted growth and de-emphasised grades, initially led to more rigorous assessment of student work. This rigour did not lead to widespread discouragement as it had done in the past, but in fact encouraged collaboration between students and teachers. At the end of Semester Two, students from across the faculty self-reported a strong sense of improvement on their surveys, on average nearly half a point higher than the previous year when asked, on a five-point scale, about the extent to which they felt they had improved their reading and writing skills over the course of the semester.

For Year 7, Semester Two followed a similar pattern to the first, the difference being that rather than narratives, students wrote analytical responses. In my class, as well as across the Faculty as a whole, there was evidence of steady improvement across both semesters, as well as some transfer of skills between the assessment types, in that the students began Semester Two with higher averages than Semester One (Figure 4).

In other year groups, similarly positive signs were evident. Semester One progress reports for Year 9, for

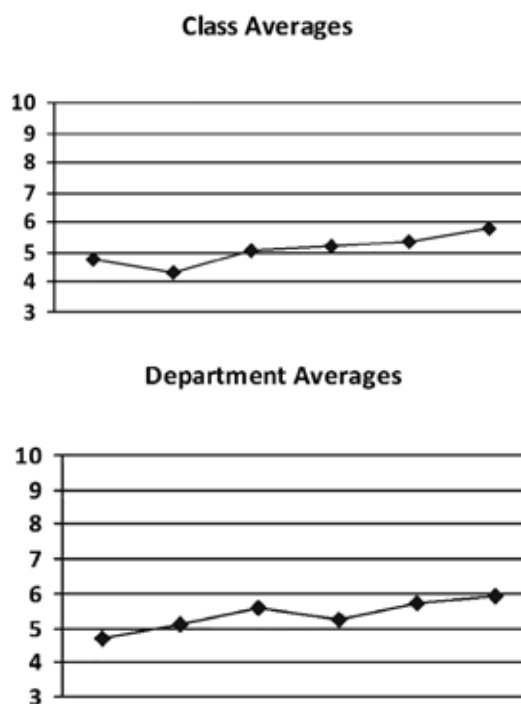


Figure 4 Class and faculty average scores, Year 7

example, showed that 42% of the cohort was submitting work that their teachers characterised as 'Below Satisfactory'. This was a higher percentage than typical. However, by the end of the semester, only 12% of the cohort were achieving 'Below Satisfactory' results.

Although there remains room for refinement of our teaching practices within the system, our internal data reflected improvement, varying in extent but consistently significant in both semesters and in all year groups.

Discussion: Ongoing challenges and next steps

Several changes have been implemented to create an assessment system that supports teachers and students, and therefore teaching and learning. These changes have already made positive impacts in the classroom. Still, there is quite a bit of work to be done. While some group activities targeting specific skills have been developed, they do not necessarily require the positive interdependence that characterises the most effective learning transfer (Cohen, 1994; Pai, Sears & Maeda, 2015). Designing activities that target different skills is time-consuming. The creation, implementation, and refinement of these activities is a work in progress.

Blind moderation of student work within the Faculty further shows that interpretation of the rubrics, while it has become more closely aligned through the moderation process itself, remains substantially subjective, even if less so than with the previous rubrics. Drawing

experienced teachers out of a context and experience-based approach to marking will likely be an ongoing challenge (Bolt, 2011), especially when teachers come in new to the system. Consistency of marking will be of particular importance going forward, both because the marking will generate improvement statements, and because their results will be tracked, and therefore compared, across year levels.

Furthermore, there is concern that students may become complacent and not put their full effort into their formative assessment. This was, in fact, one of the main concerns of teachers prior to the implementation of unweighted assessment. Observation does not suggest that students are not trying their best when the work is completed in class, at least not on the whole. Failure to complete take-home formative assessment, or the completion of this work to a reduced standard, remains a concern. This is especially the case with the older year groups. While the Year 10 students showed the largest improvement of all the cohorts when they completed both their formative and summative responses, for example, they also failed to submit their formative assessment at the highest rate when the work was not completed in class.

The plan, therefore, is to consolidate our current assessment structure and focus on improving teaching practices within it. In other areas, we are still hoping to progress further. One area is in reporting, with the goal of configuring our reporting system so that automatically generated reports can replace our traditional reports, in which comments have to be manually written or else selected from a list. This would allow students and their parents the ability to access more detailed reports more frequently and in a more timely manner, with less administrative burden on the teacher.

Conclusion

Our assessment structures as they are currently configured provide us with rich data. These data allow us to track the development of skills, as well as to identify specific areas for improvement for individuals, classes, and year groups. The intention was not to change our approach for the sake of the data, however. The intention was to collect better data for the sake of improved teaching and learning. The redesigned rubrics allow a much larger portion of the knowledge we gain about our students when we assess their work to be stored in our databases. This knowledge can then be more readily fed forward into our teaching. A systematic

approach to formative assessment has allowed us to be both more rigorous, as well as more supportive, in our assessment of student work. Progress tracking offers accountability and encouragement, but perhaps the most important effect of the change in combining data tracking with an explicit approach to formative assessment has been the culture shift: a move away from an emphasis on letter grades to an emphasis on improvement. This has allowed us to articulate to students and parents with greater precision what they need to learn in order to improve, and how we intend for them to learn. It places the onus for doing the cognitive work that will lead to learning distinctly upon the student, but it also puts the teacher in a position where they are there to support, encourage, and eventually share in each student's success. Although the larger school reporting structures remain grade-driven, this more nuanced understanding of success is equally attainable by, and equally challenging for, all students in the classroom, with grades retaining significance as achievement levels to work toward, but not as the be-all and end-all of education. In this way, it is a system that endeavours to support a positive relationship between teacher and student wherein both parties are in a position to succeed and to have that success acknowledged.

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Sparking Ideas: English Teacher Use of Online Tools for Professional Learning

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Abstract: Tension persists around online professional learning practices, with little known about the way English teachers interact with online tools on a daily basis to build professional knowledge and skills. This article reports on a small-scale, qualitative study investigating English teacher use of online tools for professional learning. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an analytical method allows us to frame teachers' perceptions of their experiences and enables us to understand the features of professional learning that teachers experience. Findings reveal that teachers experience valuable professional learning that is transitional and transformative, through highly personalised and strategic use of online tools. This suggests that it is worth reconceptualising the value and possible roles of online professional learning for teachers in the contemporary environment.

Introduction

Teacher professional learning attracts a great deal of attention in the contemporary education environment. Teacher participation in effective professional learning is highly valued (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2005; Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), 2015) as a means of meeting demands for continually improving classroom teaching and student learning (Cole, 2012; Piovarchy & D'Olimpio, 2016). Teacher-active, situated, ongoing participation in collaborative, collegial learning action that develops subject content knowledge and knowledge about student learning has been reported as effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). It is also recognised that teachers can meet personally identified teacher and teaching learning needs (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011) through relevant professional reading, participation in formal courses and study, and the accessing of online resources (VIT, 2015).

Teachers can access different-styled professional learning opportunities, designed to meet different teacher and teaching needs, that contribute to different learning outcomes. The four metaphors of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), retooling, remodelling, revitalising, and re-imagining (Sachs, 2007), can inform understanding of teachers' access, engagement, and outcomes in professional learning. Retooling and remodelling approaches adopt traditional, transmission-style presentations of knowledge and information, where teachers act as passive recipients of knowledge seeking to upgrade skills (retooling), or uncritical consumers seeking to modify existing practices (remodelling). Revitalising and re-imagining approaches are associated with, respectively, transitional and transformative practices. Revitalising approaches engage teachers in collaborative professional learning enabling rethinking and renewing practice. Re-imagining approaches engage teachers in mutual interrogation of practice and knowledge creation (Sachs, 2007).

This study takes place in an environment where continuing teacher registration is linked

to participation in mandated hours of acceptable professional learning (VIT, 2015), maintenance of detailed records, and relating professional learning action to teacher professional standards (AITSL, 2011). Guidelines for acceptable forms of professional learning present a range of formal and informal, individual and collegial, professional development activities (VIT, 2015). Teacher professional learning standards require teachers to categorise professional learning experiences in the following ways: identifying and planning professional learning needs (6.1); engaging in learning (6.2); engaging with colleagues (6.3); and applying professional learning (6.4) for improved practice (AITSL, 2011). Teachers are urged to identify relevant professional learning needs and approaches (VIT, 2015; DET, 2005) and maintain a sense of agency through driving their own professional learning action to meet their specific professional learning needs (Sachs, 2007).

As teachers are encouraged to participate in ongoing professional learning opportunities, concerns are raised around increasing teacher workloads (Cross, 2014) and increasing financial costs associated with traditional forms of teacher professional learning (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005). Additionally, dissatisfaction is expressed about traditional, off-site, face-to-face teacher professional learning practices (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Flint, Zisook & Fischer, 2011). Teacher use of online tools to engage with professional learning opportunities is presented as a practical, cost-effective alternative for meeting teacher professional learning needs (Anderson & Henderson, 2004; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010; McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland & Zbar, 2001).

Online teacher professional learning is a contested area. A number of advantages associated with this form of learning are reported (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Henderson 2006; Salazar et al., 2010), along with reports of teachers experiencing valuable professional learning (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Vavasseur & MacGregor, 2008). Concurrently, a range of challenges associated with accessing professional learning through online opportunities are identified (Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell & Kaminski, 2015; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015; Roskos et al., 2007; Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005). Online professional learning opportunities can be considered an underused resource (Hicks & Turner, 2013; Rodesiler & Pace, 2015; Rodesiler & Tripp, 2012), with a gap claimed to exist between the potential and actual teacher use of online learning resources (Carr

& Chambers, 2006; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010; Skyring, 2014). Limited knowledge exists about English teachers' online professional learning, their daily use of online tools for this purpose, how they integrate online learning into their daily professional lives, and how they perceive online professional learning.

Anecdotal evidence presents a similar picture with a range of teacher reports about online professional learning, including valuable knowledge-building experiences and some associated challenges. Some teachers speak enthusiastically about the great ideas and exciting resources found online and the inspiration derived from reading other teachers' sharing of practice and reflections. Others relate tales of frustration around time scarcity and pressures of competing work and life demands. Seeking to answer the seemingly persistent tension in this area, this study investigates what is actually happening with teacher online professional learning. It seeks to better understand teacher quotidian use of online tools to build teaching and teacher knowledge.

This small-scale research study set out to address the identified gap in knowledge by investigating the ways in which selected English teachers use online tools for professional learning in their daily lives. The study was driven by the research question: What are the experiences of three English teachers in Victoria of using online tools for teacher professional learning?

Setting the context: The online imperative

A number of advantages are reported about teachers engaging with online professional learning. Reduced travel costs and less time out of school (Boling & Martin, 2005) make online professional learning a more cost-effective option than traditional, off-site professional development sessions (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit & McCloskey, 2009; Harlen & Doubler, 2004). Online professional learning opportunities can be accessed quickly, easily and conveniently (Carter, 2004; McLean, Dixon & Verenikina, 2014) and from a variety of locations (Brown & Green, 2003). Teachers can interact with colleagues across geographical, social and philosophical boundaries for practice sharing and professional discussion, and isolation disadvantage is reduced (Dede et al., 2009; Hur & Brush, 2009; Kelly, Reushle, Chakrabarty & Kinnane, 2014).

Online access to existing, organisational websites (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Hur & Brush, 2009), a range of experts (Kelly et al., 2014; Salazar et al., 2010), and teacher resource networks (McLean et al., 2014)

provides opportunities to engage with new information and resources to inform immediate teaching needs (Duncan-Howell, 2010; McLean et al., 2014) and construct locally specific teaching approaches (Hur & Brush, 2009). Valuable professional learning can be experienced through participating in collegial discussion, practice sharing and accessing teaching resources in online learning communities (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Stuckey & Barab, 2007; Vavasseur & MacGregor, 2008), and online workshops (Yang & Liu, 2004).

English teachers report experiences of personalising their professional learning and participating in discussion with same-subject colleagues using email, microblogging, blogging and teacher social networking websites. Such engagement offers stimulus for reflection on teaching and being a teacher (Rodesiler & Pace, 2015); sharing practice on subject-specific social networking sites contributes to professional learning for improved classroom practice (Rodesiler et al., 2014). Specifically, email – using a listserv – has fostered collegial conversations and resource sharing to build professional knowledge about teaching writing (Swenson, 2003).

Microblogging (in the form of Twitter) has been shown to enable self-directed, personalised professional learning through ‘following’ a wide range of self-selected colleagues and subject experts, for collegial discussion and to build subject-specific knowledge (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015). Interactions using Twitter and blogging with self-selected colleagues across boundaries can contribute to collegial co-construction of teaching approaches relevant to immediate and changing teaching needs (Alderton, Brunzell & Bariexca, 2011; Rodesiler et al., 2014). Capacity to take personal control over who they contact about which issues, the flexibility of ‘anytime contact’, the wide range of colleagues available for support and advice, and the speed and pertinence of responses to their immediate needs are reported by teachers as valuable to professional learning (Alderton et al., 2011).

Blogging has been used to support face-to-face interaction in a collaborative enquiry, including co-construction of teaching approaches (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015), and for professional learning for improving specific areas of teaching (Hunt-Barron et al., 2015). Facilitator-supported, ongoing, online discussion forums (Henderson, 2006) and subject content discussion for co-construction of teaching approaches using blog spaces can complement face-to-face professional learning sessions (Vavasseur & MacGregor, 2008).

This study investigated teacher use of online tools for professional learning to build on existing knowledge and inform thinking about some of the persisting tensions.

This study

To understand the complexity of the unique, lived experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) of each teacher’s use of online tools for professional learning, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology is used for this study. The flexibility of IPA enables detailed investigation of the way each teacher interacts with online professional learning and makes sense of experiences within a specific context (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This study takes the form of a multiple, inductive case study (Yin, 2003) as it sets out to generate knowledge through investigating three cases. Case study is a common form of IPA research and enables concentration on the lived experiences of a small number (Smith et al., 2009) of secondary English teachers in their use of online tools for professional learning.

IPA is a combination of phenomenological, idiographic and hermeneutic elements. It is phenomenological in that it focuses on individuals’ lived experiences and the meaning they make from those experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It is idiographic as it draws on small numbers of participants, seeking to examine each individual’s experiences (Smith, 2011), entering the individual’s lived world to explore the experiences from within that world (Moran & Mooney, 2002). It is hermeneutic in that it seeks to interpret the experiences of individuals by moving through a process of examining and re-examining data, taking into consideration the meaning attributed by the individuals to their experiences, to come to deeper understanding of those experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Researchers strive to set aside (or bracket) existing assumptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010) to remain open to seeing the phenomenon under study from the participant’s perspective (Finlay, 2008), to get as close as possible to the sense individuals are making of their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

With ethics approval, data were generated using individual, semi-structured interviews. Interaction with researchers through interviews can give voice to participants’ perspectives (Patterson, Markey & Somers, 2012), with a conversational, semi-structured format enabling some flexibility (Bryman, 2001; Smith & Osborn, 2008) for teachers to consider their own

Table 1. Teacher Professional Learning and Development Grid (adapted from Sachs, 2007, p. 18)

	Retooling	Remodelling	Revitalising	Re-imagining
Purpose	Upgrading skills	Modifying existing practice	Rethink and renew practices	Transformative practices
Learning processes	Passive recipient of knowledge	Uncritical consumer	Collaboration	Mutual engagement and knowledge creation
Professional learning opportunity approaches	One-off seminars, outside expert	Programs devised by an external expert over an extended time	Collaborative learning circles, networks, action research	Practitioner enquiry or action research, enquiry as stance
Conceptualisation of teacher ongoing learning and development	Transmission	Transmission	Transitional	Transformative

perspective in terms of emerging concepts and issues (Brenner, 2006).

Participants

Three English teachers at an independent college in Victoria, Grace, Peter, and Elizabeth (pseudonyms), participated in the study. The college is an Early Learning to Year 12 independent school in bayside Melbourne. English is taught in Years 7 to 12, with Victorian Certificate of Education and International Baccalaureate (IB) English subjects taught in Years 11 and 12. All study participants teach English exclusively, with teaching experience ranging from two to nine years (Peter, two years; Grace, three years; and Elizabeth, nine years).

Interviews conducted in a teacher-selected, quiet room at the school were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Initial data analysis took a three-stage iterative process enabling development of deeper understanding (Seidman, 2006). The process comprised initial descriptive notes and comments, followed by formulation of emerging themes, then clustering themes to form superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Comparison and discussion of independent, line-by-line analysis (Callary, Rathwell & Young, 2015) by the researcher and study supervisor/co-researcher revealed superordinate themes of 'personalisation' and 'strategising', as well as a collection of quotations to inform reporting of findings of the study (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Following an iterative data analysis process, researcher collegial reflection on interpretations of data, and members' checks of interview transcripts, contributed to the trustworthiness of the study (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012).

To reach deeper understanding about teacher professional learning experiences, data analysis was guided by the relevant characteristics of the four metaphors of Continuing Professional Development (CPD): retooling, remodelling, revitalising and re-imagining (Sachs,

2007) as a guide. The categories of *purpose*, *learning processes*, *approaches of professional learning opportunities*, and *conceptualisation of teacher learning and development* were selected to reveal information about the motivations behind teacher use of particular online tools and the type of professional learning experienced. Data units were examined and compared with the descriptors in each category to enable a picture of the features of professional learning that the teachers experienced.

Findings

Asking the research question about English teacher quotidian use of online tools for professional learning enabled emergence of the superordinate themes of personalisation and strategising, and revealed information about the features of professional learning experienced.

Online professional learning formed one part of the teachers' broader professional learning experiences, including mandated school-based seminars, workshops and professional readings, onsite, collegial, informal and team-based reflection and discussion, off-site, face-to-face sessions, school-based, peer, teaching observations, and small-team, collegial, focused investigation into teaching practice. All teachers reported participating in informal online professional learning only. This form of learning occurred additionally to face-to-face activity, was accessed both within and outside school hours (predominantly the latter), and was generally not 'counted' in formal reports of professional learning action as 'it's too hard to prove you've actually done that' (Grace).

Personalisation

Each teacher presented a unique picture of self-driven, online professional learning, using a selection of online tools in individual ways to meet immediate and specific teaching and teacher needs. Grace demonstrated comfort and familiarity engaging with a range of online tools, including email (both internal

and external to the school), various teacher resource internet websites, an English teachers' association and two university websites, online newspapers, podcasts, a blog, *YouTube* clips, student Study Boards, another (Melbourne) school's website, and *Facebook* (news feeds, social sharing posts, messaging and one teacher discussion group) to inform immediate, specific teaching needs.

'Always on the alert', Grace reported opportunistically drawing from 'anything that comes up' in email alerts and *Facebook* messages from 'friends'. Eclectically selecting from 'what I come across' through interacting with various online tools, including podcasts, *YouTube* clips, and teacher resource websites, she sought to 'make connections' for her immediate classroom teaching. Using *Facebook* to draw from memes, general newsfeeds, teacher related posts, and a teacher discussion group, and having a 'poke around on the internet' to see if she could 'find anything', helped to stimulate her thinking and 'spark ideas' for immediate teaching. She cited collegially co-constructing teaching approaches and resources using *Facebook* tagging and messaging with onsite colleagues, and frequently sharing classroom practice and 'pretty much anything I make' with onsite colleagues.

Peter portrayed a sense of measured caution in using the online tools of email (internal to the school), a university website, a selected, small number of teacher resource websites, *YouTube* clips, videos accessed online, and online streamed teaching documentaries and dramas for informing his immediate, specific teaching and teacher needs. He showed reluctance to take on the 'enormous task' of searching through 'tens of millions' of internet resources looking for 'worthwhile, useful resources', and expressed concern about 'the quality of different resources' on some teacher sharing websites, explaining, 'I'm not quite sure what the provenance is'.

To inform his immediate teaching needs, Peter cited preference for accessing academic journals on a university website or 'trusted' teacher resource websites, believing 'a lot of thought and care would have been put into' such resources. He reported experiencing valuable professional learning through reflecting on teaching and teacher professionalism stimulated by watching online, streamed, teaching documentaries and dramas. He explained that watching various scenarios in different teaching and learning environments 'makes me more aware of things that I wouldn't otherwise think about'.

Elizabeth conveyed a sense of confidence and

considered balance in using online tools, seeking to integrate her preferred 'personal, in-person' face-to-face learning experiences with use of email (internal to the school), podcasts, blogs, *Facebook* (newsfeeds, social sharing posts, messaging and a teacher discussion group), teacher resource internet websites, online newspapers, online databases, a *Wiki* site, and an online teacher network for professional learning. She opined that valuable professional learning occurs as a dynamic and reflexive interchange between online and face-to-face action, suggesting that the process can be represented by 'one of those double-sided arrows'. She described professional learning as an 'evolving' process arising from continually balancing 'constant dialogue between what you're doing in your work and in your classrooms and in your professional conversations'.

Elizabeth cited using email for 'in-the-moment conversations and sharing of resources' with onsite colleagues to 'keep that thread running through' between team reflection and planning meetings, and co-constructing locally specific and relevant teaching approaches through ongoing *Facebook* 'tagging and conversations' with onsite colleagues. Using a *Wiki* space, she maintained contact with a group arising 'out of in-person professional development' for teaching IB students, accessing and sharing resources for further discussion and planning for teaching in new and diverse ways.

Strategising

Each teacher strategised online tool use for professional learning in the following ways: in the combination of online tools selected and used to build professional learning; in drawing upon these tools – individually or in combination – to inform teaching and teacher needs; and in incorporating online learning into their overall professional learning. All three teachers clearly stated that they were not using online tools to find activities to present to students, nor to access ready-made lesson plans to present in classrooms. Peter typified this stance when stating he seeks to 'engage with ideas' to inform his teaching approach. Grace provided detail supporting this stance, describing 'getting to the core of' learning activities found online to inform construction of 'learning opportunities' designed 'to suit my students and the curriculum, and my teaching style as well'.

Peter demonstrated the strategy of selectively and minimally using online tools for his professional learning, through searching online for 'a few ideas' to

inform his teaching approach, only 'if I didn't have any face-to-face' options available. He targeted established, organisational websites, seeking 'specific articles about specific things' to inform his 'immediate or pressing concern' in his teaching. Peter called on streamed online teaching documentaries and drama programs about schools and teaching as a 'consciousness-raising and awareness-raising' exercise enabling vicarious experiences of various teaching and learning scenarios. He used these programs to 'sort of zoom out' to build 'more insight into the trade', suggesting that the process of contemplating scenarios and reflection on teaching and being a teacher 'could make me a more empathic and understanding teacher'.

Elizabeth and Grace preferred to interact more actively and more frequently with online tools, capitalising on the ease of time and the convenience of storing podcasts to 'go back to' for listening and consideration in out-of-school hours. Elizabeth strategised to ensure manageable interaction with online tools for professional learning, systematically 'filter[ing] down to those things that are really useful to me' and selecting to remain connected to easily accessed and navigable 'networks and such'. She diverted 'things to folders' for later retrieval, and adopted 'lurking' participation in a *Facebook* discussion group for 'making use of resources and ideas' shared in the group in construction of locally specific teaching approaches. She consciously worked to maintain 'constant dialogue' between online and face-to-face professional learning, by selecting to use a *Wiki* space, an online teacher network, and email, in order to maximise her opportunities to move back and forth between online and in-person interaction in co-construction of teaching approaches with onsite colleagues.

Grace reported moving strategically through a process of casting a broad net for identifying and capturing ideas, making connections, and synthesising stimuli encountered online with face-to-face experiences, and considering student-specific abilities and needs for constructing locally specific teaching approaches. She allowed 'information to come to me a lot of the time' through organisations' 'really good systems' of email alerts. Strategic participation in *Facebook* discussion groups enabled access to 'really good stuff about teaching reading comprehension' which she often used 'as a springboard' for developing new, locally specific teaching approaches. Through a strategy of 'toggl[ing] back and forth to different websites', drawing from 'something I know a colleague

did', with 'something someone found on *Facebook*', and 'modifying them while I go', Grace combined a seemingly serendipitous approach of using a range of online tools to 'look for connections' and 'synthesise a number of different things' to construct a teaching approach to meet the learning needs of 'the kids in front of me'.

Discussion

Findings from this study support and extend existing knowledge about teacher online professional learning. All teachers can be seen to be agentive in their online professional learning action (Sachs, 2007), through identifying individual and immediate professional learning needs and using selected online tools to access and engage in relevant professional learning (AITSL, 2011). Onsite practice and idea sharing using *Facebook* and email shows engagement with colleagues for professional learning (AITSL, 2011).

Participants' selection and use of online tools for informing specific and immediate classroom teaching and teacher needs resonates with recent findings about teachers valuing opportunities to access online tools selectively and in a personalised way (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Rodesiler et al., 2014; Rodesiler & Pace, 2015; Skyring, 2014). Each participant's unique combination of various online tools, selected and engaged for personalised professional learning, extends existing understanding of teacher use of a single online tool, such as *Twitter* (Alderton et al., 2011; Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Skyring, 2014), or use of a combination of two or three online tools – *Twitter*, blogs and teacher social networking sites – in personalised ways to inform immediate, locally specific teaching needs (Rodesiler & Pace, 2015).

All participants selectively use online tools that are conveniently (Brown & Green, 2003), quickly, and easily accessible and navigable (Carter, 2004; McLean et al., 2014), and use email for collegial ideas, resource, and practice sharing (Swenson, 2003). They use selected online tools to move beyond school boundaries (Dede et al., 2009; Hur & Brush, 2009; Kelly et al., 2014) to engage with ideas and interact with off-site colleagues to build subject-specific knowledge (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014), and to develop locally specific teaching approaches (Hur & Brush, 2009). In this action, participants can be seen to be engaging in transitional professional learning as they work in collaboration with both onsite and off-site colleagues to rethink and renew teaching practice (Sachs, 2007).

Peter seeks information through accessing academic journals using trusted internet and university websites, while Grace and Elizabeth use a range of online tools to seek new and specific information relevant to immediate and specific teaching (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015; Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Duncan-Howell, 2010; Hur & Brush, 2009). Elizabeth learns vicariously through 'read only' participation in online learning in a *Facebook* group (Hur & Brush, 2009; Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005). She uses a *Wiki* space to complement face-to-face professional learning (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015; Henderson, 2006) and to interact with relevant experts to inform specific, immediate teaching needs (Kelly et al., 2014; Salazar et al., 2010). The teachers can be seen to be engaging in transitional professional learning through critically consuming knowledge from a range of external experts to inform rethinking and renewal of teaching practice (Sachs, 2007). Elizabeth's expression of needing to find a balance between online and face-to-face professional learning contributes new knowledge about English teacher use of online tools for professional learning.

Grace's and Elizabeth's Facebook use is a form of ongoing, collegial interaction which interrogates existing teaching practice and co-constructs teaching approaches by the sharing of ideas and reflections. This finding adds to existing knowledge and complements understanding of teacher ongoing sharing and collegial co-construction of teaching approaches using blog posts (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015). Their action in co-constructing new teaching approaches, and sharing with onsite colleagues, can be seen as transformative professional learning through mutual engagement and knowledge construction through collaborative enquiry into practice. Similarly, Elizabeth can be seen to be engaging in transformative professional learning through mutual engagement and knowledge creation (Sachs, 2007) when examining existing practice with onsite and offsite colleagues, for reflection and idea sharing using email and a *Wiki* site, to inform co-construction of new IB teaching approaches.

Peter's use of online, streamed documentaries and dramas to stimulate and inform personal reflections about teaching practice and teacher professionalism adds to existing knowledge about teachers using the online tools of *Twitter*, blogs, and teacher social networking sites to connect with colleagues for discussion and practice sharing, leading to personal reflections on teaching philosophies and practice (Rodesiler & Pace, 2015; Rodesiler et al., 2014). In this action,

Peter is engaging in transformative professional learning as he adopts an enquiry stance to interrogate his existing perceptions of teacher identity and enactment of teaching (Sachs, 2007).

Grace's explanation of moving back and forth between online tools (including organisational websites, *Facebook*, email, and podcasts) and face-to-face collegial conversations in her construction of teaching approaches reveals insight into ways in which English teachers may coordinate and integrate various online tools for professional learning. It contributes new knowledge about ways in which English teachers may integrate the use of online tools and face-to-face professional learning to build knowledge for teaching practice.

Conclusion and implications

This small-scale, qualitative study reveals detailed knowledge about the unique and lived experiences of three teachers at a single site, and their quotidian use of online tools for professional learning. Teacher agentic professional learning is revealed through personalised and strategic selection and use of a unique combination of online tools to meet immediate and specific teacher and teaching and learning needs, as and when they deem necessary. Teachers can be seen to be using online tools to participate in collaborative learning processes, and mutual engagement for knowledge creation, for professional learning that is transitional and transformative.

Recognition of teacher authority to drive personal and specific professional learning, and recognition of time spent accessing and interacting with online tools to inform immediate teaching and teacher needs may help principals and teacher registration authorities reconfigure expectations of the ways in which teachers can meet mandated professional learning requirements. Making more time available in the workplace for teachers to participate in individually relevant, online professional learning opportunities may increase the likelihood of teacher productive and generative use of online tools for this purpose.

Recognition of personalised ways in which teachers interact with online tools for professional learning may encourage professional learning providers to make online learning available in a range of formats and to include teacher voice in the determination of possible and acceptable ways of participation. Schools may explore the construction of internal online professional learning opportunities and use of externally

available online professional learning opportunities aimed at specific teacher professional learning needs. Teacher associations may reconsider ways in which they conceptualise and approach professional learning opportunities for their members.

Findings about the ways in which these English teachers interact with a selected range of online tools may inform other English teachers about the types of online tools available for professional learning and the ways in which these can be used to inform teaching and teacher development. It may also assist reconsideration of the way they currently use and value online professional learning opportunities.

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Why Can't it Mark This One? A Qualitative Analysis of Student Writing Rejected by an Automated Essay Scoring System

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Abstract: The difference in how humans read and how Automated Essay Scoring (AES) systems process written language leads to a situation where a portion of student responses will be comprehensible to human markers, but unable to be parsed by AES systems. This paper examines a number of pieces of student writing that were marked by trained human markers, but subsequently rejected by an AES system during the development of a scoring model for the eWrite online writing assessment that is offered by The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The features of these 'unscorable' responses are examined through a qualitative analysis. The paper reports on the features common to a number of the rejected scripts, and considers the appropriateness of the computer-generated error codes as descriptors of the writing. Finally, it considers the implications of the results for teachers using AES in assessing writing.

Automated scoring of student writing is increasingly used in a variety of high-stakes tests across the world. Its proposed use in a large-scale national assessment program in Australia has recently been a contentious topic and the proposal was abandoned as a result (Robinson, 2018). The public debate has not allayed, and perhaps has even increased, suspicion about how Automated Essay Scoring (AES) systems score. Of greater importance to teachers, though, is that the use of AES in writing assessments is not limited to high-stakes or large-scale assessments; it is also used in assessments designed for classroom-based assessment. There is little available evidence about the uptake of automatically-scored writing assessments in Australian schools, but we do know that in the last four years, well over 200,000 pieces of student writing has been scored by just the one AES system this paper focuses on (see Table 1). Moreover, it is not the only automatically-scored writing assessment available.

With increasing awareness of AES in Australia, and its current use in Australian classrooms, it is important that teachers know about and understand the strengths and weaknesses of AES generally. Teachers also need to know about the strengths and weaknesses of the specific assessments available to them.

One of the aspects of AES that receives little attention is what happens to student writing that cannot be parsed by the AES system. The difference in how humans read and how AES systems process written language leads to a situation where a portion of student responses will be comprehensible to human markers, but unable to be processed by scoring systems. This paper explores the differences in what can and cannot be scored through the examination of 23 pieces of de-identified student writing that were marked by humans, and subsequently rejected by an AES system during a development process.

It almost doesn't bear repeating that writing is an act of communication between humans, and that the act of writing is an attempt to communicate ideas to a reader. The reason for

restating the obvious here, is that it is because of this fundamental communicative intent that it is rare for a human marker not to be able to interpret at least some part of a student's writing, and thus it is rare for a human to be completely unable to assign a score based on a judgement of the written work's quality.

It might be at this point that a question arises about whether the rejection of scripts by the AES system is simply due to students' typing skills or the computer system not recognising badly misspelled words. As you will see later, there are indeed scripts that are rejected because a computer system does not recognise enough words, but there are also scripts which received high scores from human markers that were rejected by the AES being examined in this research. These scripts in particular beg for more investigation: observations about their individual qualities and the qualities they share with other rejected writing can shed light on some of the limitations of this particular AES system when it comes to judging student work, and may contribute to discussion on the broader issues around using AES in assessing student writing.

Background

Unscoreable scripts

The limitations of AES have received attention in published research (e.g., Deane, 2013; McCurry, 2010a, 2010b; Perelman 2014), in addition to a body of research that has examined whether or not AES is a fair, reliable, appropriate, and/or valid assessment method (e.g., Bennet & Zhang, 2016; Shermis & Burstein, 2013). However, there has been comparatively little reported about the particular situation of what happens when AES systems cannot parse the submitted writing, and even less consideration about whether it is only the poorest writing that is rejected by AES systems. A discussion of the rate and reasons for rejection of scripts is often absent from research reports, validity arguments and reliability studies.

Yet there is an opportunity to use rejected scripts in the evaluation of AES systems. In the first place, the proportion of scripts that will have to be manually marked is a factor in the efficiency of the assessment. In the second place, it can be used to more deeply investigate the agreement between the AES and human raters. Evaluating AES systems on statistical agreement rates with human markers is a practice that has been called the 'gold standard' of AES validation (Powers, Escoffery & Duchnowski, 2015). What has not been

done often is to examine the scripts on which the AES system and the human raters had a difference of 'opinion', (as much as an artificial intelligence can be said to have one), to investigate whether human raters value features of the writing differently.

So, unscoreable scripts are worthy of further investigation on two grounds: first, they provide information on the operational efficiency of an AES system when evaluating its merits for a particular application; second, such an investigation may offer insight into the differences between the reading practices of human markers and the textual analysis process of AES algorithms.

eWrite

The online writing assessment from which the data for this analysis was collected is eWrite, a tool offered by ACER since 2014. The assessment is intended to be a classroom assessment, recommended for grades five to eight, that provides data to a teacher for the purpose of informing the teacher's own practice. The teacher selects one of the writing tasks developed by ACER, and made available through the online interface, for their class to respond to. There are four available genres of prompt: narrative, persuasive, descriptive, or report. The students complete the assessment online with a 25-minute time limit.

eWrite's AES system uses Vantage Learning's IntelliMetric scoring engine. The scoring models were developed for ACER by Vantage Learning from corpuses of student work sampled from ACER's trials of the writing prompts. Before being accepted for use and made available to clients, there is an evaluation of the reliability of the scoring model. During the development of the scoring model, Vantage Learning withholds 50 scripts from the supplied sample of student writing and has these marked by the system after the scoring model has been developed. The scores for these 50 scripts are compared to the scores the scripts were assigned by trained human raters, and the results of this comparison are reported to ACER for the purpose of evaluating whether the scoring model is fit for purpose.

The AES system is able to almost instantly score the student work upon its submission, and the scores are made available to the teacher through the online system immediately after the scoring is complete – except for those cases where the AES is unable to mark the student's work. In such cases, the reports for those students are blank, and the teacher or school has the

Table 1. Automated scoring model rejection rates 2014–2017

Scripts	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Total (n)	22,728	31,278	84,538	92,301	230,845
Unscoreable (n)	1,357	1,855	4,048	6,741	14,001
Unscoreable as a percentage of total (%)	5.97	5.93	4.79	7.30	6.06

Table 2. Errors codes generated by the eWrite automated scoring system

Error	Definition
Off-topic	essay does not contain a minimum number of words from the prompt-specific lexicon built during creation of the scoring model
Bad syntax	insufficient punctuation/too many run-on sentences; syntax errors which prevent understanding
Bad vocabulary	spelling is overwhelmingly poor or essay is written in a foreign language
Repetitious	text or sentence structure is repeated

Table 3. Error codes for unscoreable scripts in a training sample from 2016, with total scores assigned by human raters

AES Error Code(s)	Frequency	Total Scores Assigned by Human Raters
Bad syntax	12	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 15, 16, 17
Off-topic	6	0, 1, 2, 8, 17, 17
Bad vocabulary	1	3
Repetitious	1	15
Bad syntax; off-topic;	2	0, 0
Bad Syntax; bad vocabulary; off-topic	1	0

(n=531)

option to request for the scripts to be marked manually by a trained marker, or to attempt to apply the marking guide provided in the test's documentation.

The eWrite marking guide, used by human markers only, is an analytical marking guide with a varying number of criteria depending on the genre. For example, the persuasive writing task is marked on nine criteria, with varying numbers of score points, and the total available number of marks is 28. AES systems do not apply marking guides, but the reports returned to teachers contain scores labelled with the same criteria, and the maximum number of score points in each criterion and in total is the same.

Unscoreable scripts and eWrite

From 2014 to the end of 2017, there were 230,845 scripts submitted to eWrite through ACER's Online Assessment and Reporting System. Table 1 displays the number of scripts that have been rejected by the AES system in the last four years. As can be seen, approximately 6% of all the student writing has been unable to be marked by the AES system, although the annual rate varies from 4.8% to 7.3%. In other words, if a teacher has a class of 30 students who sit an eWrite task, it is likely that one or two students will have no scores

returned by eWrite.

When the eWrite AES system encounters a script it cannot process, it records one of a number of possible error codes, which are displayed in Table 2. If one were to judge only by the names of the errors, it may appear that the AES system is incapable only of marking error-prone writing: scripts full of words misspelled in such a way as to be unrecognisable, or scripts that have very poor grammar. However, this is not always the case.

A new prompt was trialled at the beginning of 2016, and 531 marked scripts from that trial were sent to Vantage Learning for the purpose of developing a scoring model for that prompt. Of those 531 scored scripts, 23 were rejected by Intellimetric with error codes. Table 3 displays the frequencies of the error codes generated for these 23 unscoreable scripts, alongside the total raw scores that were assigned by a human rater to those scripts.

At this point, there are several aspects of these data deserving of comment. First, three scripts were assigned multiple error codes. It may be reassuring that these scripts had all received total raw scores of zero from the human markers, which can be taken to indicate that these pieces were in significant need of revision in some way. The second point deserving of

comment is that six scripts were coded as off-topic by Intellimetric, but that those scripts had been assigned a range of scores between zero and 17 by human markers, and the higher scores in particular raise the question of why they were identified as being off-topic by Intellimetric. The third point is the wide range of scores for the scripts that were assigned a 'Bad Syntax' code. Clearly there is a wide range of quality in the writing that has been identified as unscorable and there are questions to ask about why scripts that appear to be of moderately good quality have been rejected.

Aims

This paper will address two aspects of the 23 scripts that were rejected by the eWrite AES system during the development of a new persuasive writing task in early 2016. First, it aims to identify writing features that may be shared between several of the pieces of writing. Second, it intends to identify whether the computer-generated error codes are appropriate descriptions of the writing. These questions provide teachers who use eWrite insights into the reasons a student's writing may be rejected, and there is a possibility that these insights might be generalisable to other automatically-scored assessments, though any generalisations would require further research. Deeper understanding of the limitations of this AES system, such as what it can and cannot score, will hopefully lead to better evaluations of when it may be an appropriate assessment method.

The above aims of this research can be expressed as two research questions:

1. What writing features are shared between scripts rejected by the eWrite AES?
2. Are the computer-generated error codes appropriate descriptors of the rejected writing?

Methods

As referred to previously, a new persuasive writing prompt was developed, trialled and added to the eWrite assessment in 2016. The task is a writing prompt that asks students to write to convince a reader to accept their opinions about the value of books. The participants in the trial were 1050 students from 11 schools, comprising both independent and state schools from Victoria and Western Australia. The ages of students were not collected, but the trial sample included a range of grades from Year 4 to Year 10. The writing was collected under ACER's Online Assessment and Reporting System (OARS) Terms and Conditions, which explicitly allow for de-identified data collected

through OARS to be used for research purposes, both by ACER and by third parties.

A training sample of 531 scripts from the trial sample was prepared for submission to Vantage Learning to develop the automated scoring model. The scripts were selected to approximate a normal distribution of scores across the entire score range. Of those 531 scripts, 23 were rejected during the development process by the AES system. These 23 scripts were located in the test data and extracted, forming the sample for analysis in this paper.

The analysis of the scripts followed the Interactive Model of analysis as described by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014). The model outlines a process that comprises four components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing or verifying conclusions from the data. These components in the Interactive Model are considered as part of an iterative, concurrent process.

The author supervised the marking of the trial assessment which provided the data for this research. As such, he was familiar with the assessment task, the marking guide, and had read and scored a range of student responses. To investigate the rejected scripts in more detail, he read through each of the 23 scripts, and recorded a general comment without viewing the script's score or error code. He focused rather on describing observations about apparent strengths and weaknesses in the scripts. This process was undertaken in order to condense the information in the data in preparation for coding. The comments were then read over, again by the author, in conjunction with the scores and error code. Codes were created organically and iteratively with increasing levels of abstraction, with names for the codes being selected to represent commonly observed features of the scripts, such as 'missing punctuation'. After coding, a simple visual display was constructed in order to identify common qualities of the scripts. The visual display was a table, where each row was a script, and each column a code. Where the code was attributed to a script, the corresponding cell was shaded, using a different colour for each code. From the comparison of common features, the scripts were grouped into four broad categories that are described below.

Results

The scripts were divided into four categories according to their score attribute and the codes assigned to them, as described below. The categories arose during

the coding process, and are used to abstractly represent scripts that were judged to share some qualities.

Category one

This category comprised three scripts that were rejected by the AES system with multiple error codes. All three were tagged with both 'Bad Syntax' and 'Off-Topic', and one was additionally tagged as 'Bad Vocabulary'. All three scripts had been scored zero by human raters, and upon examination the reasons were apparent. Take as an example Writing Sample (WS) 307, which was the script tagged with all three error codes: 'i LIKE DSADQDADADSSDADSDADADADADADADA DAADADADADSSDADSDADADADADADADADA DAADAD' (WS307). The limitations of the script are evident enough that not much discussion is warranted: the three codes are wholly appropriate.

However, WS 2554 was a little different. It was tagged as 'Bad Syntax' and 'Off-Topic', and reads, 'books are important because they do't use power they'. An insufficient response, certainly, but a human scorer would probably not recognise this script as being off-topic – there is an idea here about books. It is undeveloped, very short, and unfinished, but the student has attempted to engage with the writing prompt. A score in the lowest category is warranted, but it is not an off-topic script. The 'Bad Syntax' error code appears to be suitable, although making such a judgement based on so little writing is difficult.

Category two

All the scripts in the score range of 0–6 ($n=13$) were coded as 'Lacking Punctuation', and this classification was used to define the boundary between categories two and three. Because four of those 13 scripts were classified into category one because of multiple error codes, there are nine scripts in category two. Writing sample 39 is illustrative of scripts in this category:

i think reading is more useful than finding stuff on a computer could either be fake or not a very good source which is why i would rather a book because it has to go through a publisher where as books on a computer can be posted by anyone and might not have true facts in it if its a fiction book and might be written by an amateur where as books are written by professionals if its for eductionation purposes. (WS39)

The writer of this script has an opinion, and reasons for it. The writing is able to justify the writer's opinion to a limited extent, and the communicative intent is clear. There are a handful of spelling errors,

and the major flaws of the writing are the absence of punctuation and the fact that the whole text is a single, run-on sentence. The AES system rejected this particular text with a 'Bad Syntax' code, which does seem appropriate. Six of the nine scripts in this category that were coded as 'lacking punctuation' received the same computer-generated error code. This suggests there may be a relationship between lack of punctuation and the AES system being unable to parse the writing.

One of the more remarkable scripts in this category was rejected for 'Bad Vocabulary'. It reads, in part:

When I ferst read a book I thort that it was boring aswell but when I got to the midole of the book

I fand it realy intresting. I think books are good because thay help you with your speling and comperhenchen.

My thorts on books are that you are use you amagenachon and it can cume you down when you are strest. (WS723)

Some of the words in this passage are spelled in a way that suggests a reliance on phonetic approximation. The words are interpretable (for a human) despite the flawed spelling. One can infer from the computer-generated error code, though, that misspelling to this extent interferes with the computer's ability to analyse the text.

There were two scripts in this category that were labelled 'Off-Topic' by the AES system. Both were very short scripts, but each contains a statement about books. For example, WS 1871 begins with the statement: 'Books have been used for over a thousand years and they seem to have no end in sight.' This appears to be an inappropriate error code and the same is true of the other script with this tag in this category. Taken with the other off-topic error code in the previous category (WS 2554), it appears there may be a relationship between very short scripts and the AES assigning an off-topic error code.

Category three

This category was defined as the scripts which were generally correct in terms of surface language conventions (punctuation, spelling, etc.), but those that were not coded as 'developed' like the scripts in category four. Using this definition, this category comprises seven scripts with a score range of eight to 15. The computer-generated error codes allocated five scripts with 'Major Syntax Error,' one with 'Repetitious,' and one with 'Off-Topic.' The extract below is indicative of the general standard of scripts in this category:

First of all you should read books to improve your comprehension because you use your comprehension from any age and you use it in all subjects. If you are good at comprehension you can understand all hard questions that you are asked. If you can not read well you will struggle in highschool in all of your core subjects and you may find it harder to get a job when your an adult. (WS 674)

It is a piece of writing that is generally correct in its spelling and punctuation, that expresses an opinion in mostly correct language, but that does not fully develop its idea nor strongly convince the reader to accept the idea it presents. The computer-generated error code for WS 674 is 'Bad Syntax.' It is difficult, not only in the extract above, but in the whole piece of writing, to identify what these major errors might be. There are certainly some misspellings, and the sentence structures are not elegant, but it is difficult to justify calling them major errors. In fact, it would probably be more appropriate to attribute the misspellings to carelessness rather than evidence of spelling ability as the misspelled words ('comprehension' and 'subjects') are each spelled correctly once in the paragraph in addition to the instances where they are misspelled.

The same error was generated for WS 3900 which is a stronger piece of writing, though it too does not quite reach the level of a developed argument, and its logic, syntax and vocabulary exhibit some errors. Here is an extract:

Books teach us an understandable and easy way to learn about new topics that we have not heard before, they also make you think and take you on an amazing adventure and rollercoaster around the world. Books also capture for anyone and everyone as there a lot of different genres and different types of writing. (WS900)

Once again, to reject this as unscorable for 'Bad Syntax' seems difficult to explain – there are errors, but the errors do not amount to the script being incomprehensible for a reader. One other script in this category received the same error code and there is a similar difficulty in justifying that label. In three other scripts, the possible relationship observed earlier with regards to punctuation errors and the 'Bad Syntax' code would help to explain the reason for those scripts being labelled with that error code: they did not lack punctuation, but there were frequent errors in punctuation.

There were two category three scripts different to the others in terms of their error codes. One was deemed 'Off-Topic' and the other 'Repetitious.' The 'Off-Topic' script certainly bears discussion because the

student has written a narrative response to the prompt, and the script is different to the majority of other responses for doing so. The narrative is about a boy who gets in trouble for coming home late because he loves books and lost track of time while at the library. Such a narrative was clearly written as a response to aspects of the prompt, and could conceivably be an attempt to convince a reader to sympathise with the protagonist's opinion of books:

'Jimmy have you any idea of what time it is?' scolded his mother.

Jimmy knew that this was one of those questions were she already knew the answer and he didn't understand why she asked.

'why do you spend all that time at that stupid book thingie?' again with these questions Jimmy just didn't get it.

'because i love books' retorted Jimmy using every strain of courage in his body. He ran to his room without dinner and cried for a while. (WS 3988)

There is creativity here, and a self-reflectiveness in the observation of the mother's pointless questions. This is writing that it is easy to imagine English teachers encouraging. Yet, it certainly is different to most responses, and that uncommon approach to the prompt appears to have been identified and rejected by the AES system. However, labelling such a script 'Off-Topic' would likely be a contentious point among human markers: at the least it would be a topic for discussion and clarification.

The 'Repetitious' error code that was received by one script in this category does seem to be an appropriate descriptor of the writing. It was a persuasive text with one main idea, and each paragraph was a minor variation of the idea, and some words and phrases are repeated a number of times across the script.

Category four

This category comprises the three scripts that were coded as 'developed,' and all three were the top-scoring scripts in the sample with scores of 17. One suffers from frequent misspellings and received the 'Bad Syntax' error code, though why that code was allocated rather than the 'Bad Vocabulary' code is unclear.

Two scripts were narratives and they both received the 'Off-Topic' error code. One of them begins with a dream in which the protagonist is delivering a speech to her class:

'Books are a way to communicate stories and important information. The first great civilisations created books.

We are ancestors of these great civilisations, why do we insist on changing these simple ideas. They survived for thousands of years, yet all we have done is develop our instrument, our tools, we have not developed our minds. Books allow us to do this. We need books. They are an important part of our social lives, we recommend books to friends and peers, then we can talk about the events in the books. If we don't have books, we don't have education. 'I finished My debate with a bow and a smile. Everyone in the audience applauded me. Then the principle walked in, everyone went silent. (WS3964)

The narrative proceeds to change into one where the protagonist's brother gets magically sucked into the pages of a book, and ends with the protagonist going in after him. Is this piece of student writing off-topic? It is certainly dissimilar to the majority of responses to the prompt, but the opening paragraph is a better persuasive piece than some of the category one and two scripts, and does directly engage with the writing prompt.

The other category four, 'Off-Topic' narrative is a dystopian vision of computers rising up to take over the world. They are defeated when a messianic figure named Chris recreates a book. The people of that world revere it as a holy object and then overthrow their robot overlords. However,

The people had spent so long without computers they took books for granted. This made them easy prey for the minions of the computers. Soon Chris was defeated and his followers all killed or converted. The computers then went on to make sure that humans could never believe in books again. (WS 3978)

Once again, we are faced with the question of whether this is an off-topic response. It is very different to the majority of scripts, but it is centred on books and their value. Whether its purpose is to convince a reader to accept an opinion, though, is far less clear, and it would not be too hard to imagine human markers disagreeing about whether this is on- or off-topic, in which case perhaps the AES rejecting such pieces could be seen as a feature, rather than a software 'bug.'

Discussion

This research aimed to answer two questions: whether there were common features among scripts rejected by the eWrite AES, and whether the error codes generated by the eWrite AES system for the rejected scripts were appropriate.

Common qualities of rejected student writing

There was a total of 23 scripts rejected by the eWrite AES system: Twelve of those were coded as 'lacking punctuation,' with a further two described in the initial commentary as missing some punctuation. Eleven of those 14 scripts with punctuation problems were rejected by the AES system with the 'Bad Syntax' error code. While this is too small a number of scripts from which to draw firm conclusions, it does indicate that punctuation errors are a common factor that contributes to scripts being rejected by the eWrite AES system. This is, perhaps, unsurprising if one considers punctuation as being a way for a writer to indicate the boundaries of words and sentences; automated analysis appears to struggle when such boundaries must be inferred rather than observed.

Appropriateness of error codes

There were two computer-generated error codes where the qualitative analysis indicated the codes may not be wholly appropriate. The most common error code across all categories was 'Bad Syntax,' and, while the code seemed appropriate in most cases, there were three cases where the AES error code does not appear to describe the writing. The sample is too small to draw firm conclusions, and, while these error codes seem inappropriate in these instances, more research is needed to argue that the error codes are incorrect. For example, a quantitative analysis of a larger sample to investigate an error to length ratio might possibly explain why these scripts were rejected.

However, every instance of the 'Off-Topic' error code was found to be hard to justify. In categories one and two, it was associated with very short pieces of writing. But even in the few words that were written there, the qualitative analysis found that the writing at least referenced key words in the writing prompt. More seriously, though, was the 'Off-Topic' error code being applied to narrative responses to the writing task in categories three and four. All three narratives among the reject scripts were tagged as 'Off-Topic,' but all three referred to aspects of the writing task, though they arguably lacked in persuasive effect. The rejection of scripts that take an alternative or oblique approach to the writing task supports McCurry's analyses (2010a, 2010b), which suggests that automated scoring is less likely to be able to deal with 'broad and open' writing (2010, p. 119, and is more appropriate for constrained tasks.

There is not enough of a basis to conclude that

writing of the 'wrong' genre will always be rejected by the eWrite AES system; however, there is an indication that such writing is likely to be labelled as 'Off-Topic' and not scored by the AES system. This is in accordance with the literature that has found that the writing construct that is assessed by AES systems is restricted and mostly provides evidence about surface features of writing rather than features such as content, form and effectiveness (Condon, 2013; Deane, 2013). What is new about the research being reported in this paper is that these narrative pieces of writing were included in the training corpus, yet were rejected with an error *despite* the fact that the training corpus is explicitly intended to form the basis of the scoring system's development. This suggests that including a broader range of writing styles in the training corpus will not result in an AES system that is more able to score a broader range of types of responses. This raises questions about the development process that ought to be the subject of further research.

Whether the rejection of writing for being dissimilar to the majority of scripts used in the development of a scoring system is an acceptable feature of eWrite will depend upon the purpose a teacher or school has for administering the assessment. If the teacher assigns a persuasive task to their class for the purpose of assessing the students' persuasive writing, then rejecting writing that does not have an obvious persuasive intent might be useful as it would ensure the teacher has an opportunity to review the piece and make a professional judgement about the writing performance. However, if the purpose is to assess a broad writing construct, then rejecting any piece of writing that does not match the style or content of the training sample will likely lead to a higher rejection rate. This would significantly undermine one of the intended advantages of automatic scoring: providing scores quickly.

Conclusion

The processes by which automated systems score student writing are unlike the processes used by human markers. This leads to a situation where some scripts, as seen in this research on the eWrite assessment, cannot be marked by an AES system despite being competent acts of communication between writer and reader. Rejecting scripts that have very poor punctuation or spelling is, perhaps, understandable. The majority of rejected scripts in this small sample featured missing or incorrect punctuation, suggesting that the AES system relies more heavily on this feature to process

written language than does a human marker, and this is unsurprising given previous research (Condon, 2013; Deane, 2013).

The main implication for users of eWrite (or similar assessments) from this present research, is that some writing that receives moderate to high scores from human markers will be rejected as unscorable and 'Off-Topic' because it is dissimilar to the majority of the training corpus. Teachers and school administrators ought to bear this in mind when deciding whether or not to use an automatically-scored assessment in a particular context, for a particular purpose. In the context of using AES in a classroom assessment, though, it is unlikely to be a serious issue.

The findings of this paper support a recommendation that teachers' professional judgements should be used in reviewing scores from the eWrite assessment alongside the scored scripts as well as closely examining the 'unscorable,' to ensure that the error codes and scores are appropriate, before using the scores as the basis for providing feedback to students. Where a student's writing has some features that are dissimilar to the majority of responses, there is some likelihood that the scoring may not be accurate. This recommendation is likely to be good practice for any classroom-based, automatically-scored writing assessment.

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Imaginative Writing and Its Assessment in Secondary School English

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Abstract: This article examines the publicly available English Examination Notes from the New South Wales Higher School Certificate (HSC) Marking Centre, alongside past research on writing development, to understand the summative assessment of writing and the qualities of writing that examiners identified as discriminating between samples of different grades. The paper draws on the work of the 1980 Crediton Project to code the Examination Notes according to four 'models' of writing development. The dimensions of writing that were identified from students' writing in the 1980s provide an analytical frame through which to read the Examination Notes and consider what they suggest about current approaches to assessing writing.

My interest in the problem of assessing imaginative writing arose in my third year of teaching prior to my Higher School Certificate (HSC) students' English exams. I tried to reassure them, and tried to reassure myself, that there was value in the compositions they were memorising in preparation for the exam. Doecke and Parr wrote about these difficulties: 'for all the emphasis on the imaginative "flair" or "ability" shown by the "best" exam essays, the ritual of examinations reduces language to a preexisting body of agreed conventions to which students are obliged to conform (something that is painfully obvious when you encounter the naïve handling of the conventions of essay text literacy in papers of an 'inferior' quality)' (2005, p. 7). Doecke and Parr's comments resonated with me. Do those same conventions apply to the imaginative writing section of English Examinations? Some of my students were nervous, some were confident, some were unsure. The most uncertain one had written a beautiful piece of creative writing. The sentence structure was not grammatically correct, and there was little evidence of narrative structure, but the words and the tone – the 'voice', if you will – were beautiful. It was only four short paragraphs long but I wanted to give him full marks. I wondered what the English Examination markers would think of it. I wanted to know what markers were looking for when they assessed imaginative writing at the end of secondary school, and so did my students. I still need to know how I can best prepare my students, and what feedback I can give them that will help to develop their writing in ways that are shaped by, but perhaps not restricted to, the marking criteria in current English syllabuses.

In HSC English in NSW, students sit two examinations. The first is organised around a common core concept (known as the Area of Study) in which students are required to respond to a series of short unseen texts, compose an imaginative response, and write an essay related to a common text studied in class. The second examination requires students to write three essays in response to texts studied within three focused modules, for example, 'Distinctive Voices', 'Close Study', and 'Texts and Society'. The core concepts, list of texts for study, and module topics are prescribed by the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA, previously known as the NSW Board of Studies); individual schools and

teachers are responsible for determining a program of study and marking school-based assessments, which represent one half of a student's final mark in addition to the marks gained in exams. Examinations are overseen by NESA and marked by English teachers with recent experience teaching the HSC course, who participate in corporate briefing sessions to establish samples that represent grades from A to E. Participation in HSC marking is viewed as valuable professional development for teachers who return to schools with insights gained from the marking process. These insights may serve to ensure the success of their students in the future, reinforce the conventions valued in the marking process, and, perhaps, perpetuate the problem raised by Doecke and Parr. This was particularly true of the school I was teaching in while undertaking this research, a south-western Sydney school classified as disadvantaged due to low socioeconomic status and the language background of the students. The high percentage of students from language backgrounds other than English added to teacher concerns about literacy and the conventions of imaginative writing.

There are many potential purposes for student writing that go beyond the obvious imperative of gaining a sound result in an English Examination. Earlier writers had much to say on this question, including Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson, who suggested several reasons for student writing:

trying to clarify an experience, to express how one regards it; trying to understand people, and to understand one's own nature; trying to represent to oneself the whole span of human life, or an entire aspect of human nature. All these processes are essentially reflexive; the writers wanted to clarify for themselves, to understand for themselves, and so on. (1973, p. 34).

But these reasons, which are echoed by a range of writers on the subject of student writing (Arnold, 1991; Cooper & Odell, 1977; Graves, 1981 & 1983; Johnston, 1987; Wilkinson, 1986), have little to do with the indicators of success in state English Examinations and summative assessments. I also wonder about 'real world' applications for imaginative writing. I started out thinking about how to teach students to write more successful creative pieces, both from the point of view of a reader and the criteria for school examination. This led to further consideration of what we are trying to measure or assess when we mark imaginative writing pieces from the English Examination and other summative assessment tasks.

The voice booms through

Authors and researchers from the past considered the developmental trajectories of student writing and writing assessment in ways that are very different to the present. For example, Stratta et al.'s description of a writing process seems far outside the scope of NESA descriptors:

The writer discovers his own uniqueness; he discovers the uniqueness of words to express this uniqueness – only this word will do, that is too vague, that has the wrong associations; he discovers the uniqueness of form – that the form is chosen as a result of the nature of the uniqueness it has to formulate. (1973, p. 15)

Within 'personal growth' paradigms, the individuality of each student's writing development was emphasised, but assessment also played an important role. Strategies for formative assessment detailed by Stratta et al. may also provide insights into the possibilities for understanding language and writing progress in today's classrooms. The 'staging points' suggested by Stratta and Dixon (1981) require a familiarity with a 'literary tradition' to support writers' attempts to convey 'subtle nuance'; teachers need to retain 'at the back of their minds a much more clearly defined understanding of the forms mature writers are actually using' (pp. 21–22). Moffett and Wagner's (1976) concept of 'growth sequences' helped to evaluate writing composed of topics selected by the students themselves: 'Our data show that when a writer makes a good choice of subject, the voice booms through' (Graves, 1983, p. 229). This supports Moffett's (1992) assertion that imaginative writing needs to be relevant to students and to have purpose beyond a grade or mark.

Teachers' knowledge of writing development and nuanced understanding of writing qualities are central to the work of English teachers. Arnold (1991) considered it important to develop teachers' understanding of 'what is happening in writing and to apply that understanding to its assessment' (p. vii), while Stibbs (1979), when looking closely at the assessment of a single piece of writing, pondered the range of possibilities for marking:

faulty spelling, the enjoyable overall effect, the help she sought from us and her neighbour, the apparent over-concern with grades, the way it is to be followed up, or a comparison with other stories by the writer (p. 10)

Similarly, Stratta, Dixon, and Wilkinson (1973) question 'the exact qualities he [the teacher] is searching for: is it the spontaneous and not the reflective? – the

personally involved and never the sympathetically aware? – the uninhibited instead of the intuitively controlled?’ (p. 3). Graves (1981) concerns himself with audience and how over-awareness of audience may affect voice, while McGregor and Meiers (1991) suggest that form will come with less concentration on final product.

While formative and individualised assessment are emphasised by these authors, summative assessment is also considered important. Johnston presents a pragmatic view of assessment: ‘assessment should be a clear-cut matter of reporting whether the student has been engaged in the specified requirements of the course, and where they are required, judgements of the quality of the student’s work’ (1987, p. 127).

McGregor and Meiers (1991) also acknowledge the importance of preparing work for assessment ‘so that any piece of writing is appropriate for the intended audience and purpose’ (p. 41). Johnston (1987) expresses concern that powerful, extrinsic rewards and mechanical rules reduce students’ enjoyment of writing, although he agrees that a ‘sense of progress towards institutionally recognised goals – or towards an excellent product – is also important’ (p. 127). Stibbs (1979) likewise suggests that examinations can present a stimulus for a ‘leap forward’ in displaying one’s abilities by rising to a high-stakes occasion.

The final high-stakes examination for NSW students is the external HSC, for which all students complete a compulsory course in subject English. The Examination Notes for the HSC are published yearly on NESA’s website and these Examination Notes from markers of the imaginative writing section provide a detailed account of what is valued in this mode of writing, and how relative quality is understood and measured.

This article examines the English Examination Notes from the HSC Marking Centre between 2001 and 2010,¹ alongside past research on writing development, to understand the summative assessment of writing. English Examination Notes are compiled annually from teacher-marker comments about the range of responses, and reveal some of those innate and shared assessment criteria applied to the assessment of student writing. While the notes could be considered bureaucratic documents that direct the work of teachers rather than nuanced developmental descriptors of student writing, they do reflect the qualities of writing that examiners identified as discriminating between writing samples of different grades. They provide insights into the dimensions of writing that are

currently valued, and an opportunity to contrast these with earlier approaches. The next section of the paper draws on the work of Wilkinson, Barnsley, Hanna and Swan in the Crediton Project (1980). The dimensions of writing that were identified from students’ writing in the 1980s provide an analytical frame through which to read the Examination Notes and what they suggest about current approaches to assessing writing.

Back to the Eighties: The Crediton Project

Wilkinson et al.’s Crediton Project is a detailed analysis of student writing undertaken in England in 1980, following a spirited and hopeful period of change in English teaching and attention to student writing that was heralded by the Dartmouth Conference of 1966 (Yandell, 2016). Wilkinson agreed with others from that time that ‘the method of assessment chosen is related to one’s belief about one’s role as a teacher of language’, and that marking schemes tended to be both too narrow and too vague; instead, teachers should consider ‘the quality of thought, of the feeling, and of the moral stance ... as well as style’ (1986, p. 14). It is, however, difficult to investigate current attitudes and research about student writing without frequent reminders of the lack of autonomy faced by teachers in the current atmosphere of testing and accountability, and of the public discussion regarding ‘traditional’ methods and the so-called ‘reintroduction’ of grammar teaching (Wyse, Pandya & Doecke, 2012; Sawyer, 2006).

Despite the vastly different context and times, Crediton remains a high point in attention to writing development. The four areas of focus or ‘models’ identified by Wilkinson et al. (1980) in the Crediton Project are the Cognitive, Affective, Moral and Stylistic. These models prompted the coding approach used for this paper because they reflect common themes in the HSC Examination Notes and also provide another layer of discourse through which to consider student writing development and achievement. The research examined the development of children’s writing in four different composition forms: autobiography, narrative, explanatory, and argumentative. 100 children, aged seven, 10 and 13, were recruited from a secondary school and its feeder primary school to complete writing tasks in the context of their normal lessons. The four models incorporated levels of progression, or ‘developmental features’ that established increasing levels of sophistication and complexity (Wilkinson et al., 1980), and were coded for ease of analysis.

Table 1: Models of writing development (Wilkinson et al., 1980)

Cognitive	Affective	Moral	Stylistic*
C1: Describing – from labelling to reporting (C1.1 to C1.5)	A1: Self – from expressing own emotion to showing a general attitude (A1.1 to A1.5)	M1: Judging self/others by physical characteristics or consequences	S1: Syntax
C2: Interpreting – from explaining (C2.1), to inferring (C2.2), to deducing (C2.3)	A2: Other people – from recording the existence of others to the ability to see a person and their interactions in an extended context (A2.1 to A2.6)	M2: Judging self/others in terms of punishments/ rewards	S2: Verbal competence
C3: Generalising – from abstracting to classifying (C3.1 to C3.6)	A3: Reader – from not catering for the reader to catering specifically (A3.1 to A3.3)	M3: Judging self/others according to the status quo	S3: Organisation
C4: Speculating – from irrelevant to theorising (C4.1 to C4.6)	A4: Environment – from assuming the environment to choosing environmental items for effect (A4.1 to A4.4)	M4: Judging self/others in terms of conventional norms/rules	S4: Cohesion
	A5: Reality – from confusion of the subjective and objective world to interpreting reality symbolically (A5.1 to A5.5)	M5: Judging self/others in terms of intention or motive, regardless of status or power	S5: Writer's awareness of reader
		M6: Judging self/others in terms of abstract concepts	S6: Appropriateness
		M7: Judging self/others in terms of a personally developed value system	S7: Effectiveness *Similar progressions exist within each feature of the Stylistic model, however, these are too numerous to include here.

In the writing samples considered by the Crediton Project, little evidence of writing at the upper end of the four models' developmental features was discovered; however, given that the children were no older than thirteen, this was to be expected. In considering the usual age of HSC students (17 or 18 years), the assessment of writing is focused on those upper ends of the developmental sequence as evidenced by specific pieces of writing. Wilkinson et al.'s models allow English teachers to see the base from which their older students are developing.

The Cognitive model 'reflects movement from concrete to abstract' (Wilkinson et al., 1980, p. 65) and includes 'interpretation', for example, within which the writer moves from explaining, to inferring, to deducing. The Affective model considers 'the presentation of emotion' and follows the process whereby the 'literal/factual becomes metaphorical/affective' (p. 133). In the Moral model, developmental features are sequential and follow the development of children's basis for judgements. These move from judgements made 'in terms of punishments/rewards and in terms of physical consequences of action' to making 'judgements

in terms of making good relations with others in the immediate social context' (p. 170). In the findings from the Crediton Project, researchers established that 'by age thirteen children are capable of judgement in terms of both fairness and intention' (p. 170). Autonomy – self-regulation and the development of individual values and an ethical code – was not yet evident in these students' writing samples. Wilkinson et al. acknowledged the difficulties and limitations of the Moral model, notably, that what one writes may not be the same as how one acts. Yet, they believed it was worthwhile considering the 'moral dimension' of student writing, particularly 'in any discussion of the nature of personal growth with which teachers are so essentially concerned' (p. 170). As noted, the authors thus aligned themselves with the personal growth model of English.

The Stylistic model is the most detailed, with seven developmental features, which each progress through five or six levels. For example, S5 'Writer's awareness of reader' moves from S5.1 'Writer assumes the reader's awareness of the context' to S5.2 'More elaboration of detail but without focus or reference' and S5.3 'Detail

related clearly to a theme or focus', before arriving at S5.5 'Writer communicates with reader by sophisticated means'. The features of the Stylistic model follow the 'general movement from partial to complete organisation' of the writing and may be important in demonstrating successful development in the other models, for example, growing cognitive abilities may lead to the emergence of more appropriate organisation. Form is recognised as an important feature of writing choices and a reflection of the 'cognisance of the code necessary'. The authors also draw attention to writing that may seem 'insincere', but which may be recognised as 'an attempt to discover one's own language by trying on other people's' (p. 184).

Recognising that English is not just about writing development, Wilkinson et al. suggested a far broader scope by considering the development of the 'communicating being'. The researchers were clear that the models were 'not meant for use as a day to day marking scheme' (1980, p. 223), and that all attempts to define or decide criteria had been identified as challenging. Definitions mean omissions. However, the models and their developmental features do provide fresh insights into marking criteria used in secondary school English Examinations, and suggest possibilities for framing comments for students as they try to understand how to improve their writing. To that end, Wilkinson et al.'s codes were applied to individual comments from the Examination Notes to establish the dominant model and developmental features being assessed. For example, this comment from the 2001 exam, 'responses were either unclear in indicating a possible audience or ineffective in attempting to hold audience interest' was coded S5, S6 and S7. The 2005 comments, 'The candidates presented a broad range of responses to the question. It was pleasing to note that all candidates were able to exhibit reasonable control of language' were coded S1, S2, S3, S4; and the comment, 'It is important to note that the mechanics of language, punctuation, sentence structure and paragraphing are important elements of writing,' was coded S1, S3, S4.

Elements of three of the four models can be found in the Examination Notes from throughout the 2000s. However, the Moral model¹ is not obviously present anywhere in the commentary on student writing for English. The developmental features of the Moral model may be evident in the writing of the students who, for example, 'explored the challenges of belonging and not belonging with insight, complexity and/or subtlety' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011c), but if so, the

examiners do not mention it explicitly in terms of a moral stance in the text. Throughout the 10-year period from 2001, the focus of the English Examination Notes has been on the execution and elements of students' writing that reflect an understanding of the core concepts. The whole 'communicating being' envisaged by Wilkinson et al. (1980) is not present. The complexity and ambiguity inherent in attempts to classify or finally mark student writing were reflected in attempts to code all comments according to the four models. Many cross-overs were apparent.

The de facto syllabus: English examination notes

This section presents an overview of the focus in the English Examination Notes after the introduction of each new core concept for the English curriculum in 2001, 2005 and 2009. The Examination Notes from the first year of each concept are important because teachers draw on these comments as official discourse to direct their teaching: 'Some educators have even seen the HSC exam as operating as a de facto syllabus' (Rosser, 2002, p. 93).

English HSC examination notes 2001

For the 2001 HSC exam, candidates were asked to write a story about the concept of change in relation to one of three topics:

- (a) Dancing to a different beat.
- (b) Now it's their turn to choose.
- (c) An image of a person leaving a chair/situation.

A student's ability to 'demonstrate their concept' represented the cognitive demands around 'interpreting' and 'abstracting.' Comments regarding a student's understanding of the core concept ('Change') reflected three of the Cognitive model's developmental features. 'Interpreting' (C2) is evident in comments about a student's ability to identify the 'flexibility in the question [which] allowed all candidates the opportunity to respond in ways that best demonstrated their concept of change' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011a). 'Generalising' (C3) is apparent in comments about compositions at the higher end of the scale: 'stronger responses successfully developed or displayed a complex understanding of change in relation to the chosen topic' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011a). Wilkinson et al. (1980) describe reflecting as 'generalising with reference to external rules or principles' (p. 228), which corresponds to comments about a student's ability to link their ideas with general ideas about the core concept. Finally, 'speculating' (C4) may reflect the English marking

criteria through the comment about a student's 'ability to effectively use the topic to explore or develop notions of change' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011a).

At various points in the analysis, it is difficult to establish clear divisions between the four models, but the focus of the examiners is apparent in these comments. An initial comment in the 2001 Examination Notes that the 'question allowed candidates the scope to determine the type of story they would write and the type of school magazine and audience for whom they were writing' indicates Affective and Stylistic model concerns about awareness of the reader (A3, S5), however, the emphasis in the comments on the interpretation of the question led to its coding in the Cognitive model. Other comments highlight the importance of awareness and understanding of form, which links to the Affective model in terms of 'catering for the reader' (A3), as well as the Stylistic model features of 'writer's awareness of the reader' (S5), 'appropriateness' (S6) and 'effectiveness' (S7). Again, these multiple ideas and language around writing for an audience, whether perceived or unknown, are useful in calling attention to areas for development in students' writing.

On the other hand, comments that reflect the Stylistic model's focus on 'control' are less clear in terms of conveying meaning to students. The examiners refer to 'effective control of language,' 'controlled use of a strong, sustained and distinctive voice or persona' and 'effective control of a range of language features' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011a) as features of 'stronger' responses. The descriptions of the corresponding Stylistic model features provide greater clarity: 'greater control and facility with sentence structures' (S1); 'control of choice' of words (S2); 'capacity to control ideas and organise structure by a variety of means' (S3), and 'in more sophisticated expressive and poetic writing, various devices are employed deliberately to control the reader by implicit means' (S5) (Wilkinson et al., 1980, pp. 232–233).

The Affective model focuses on the ability of a student to engage their audience through emotional connections and the ability 'to construct a persona and communicate directly with the perceived audience' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011a). The examiners largely link engagement with form, voice and the ability to convey ideas metaphorically, which suggest stylistic elements. However, within the Affective feature, 'reader awareness' (A3), the authors clarify: 'this category is similar to that of 'reader awareness' in the stylistic

categories ... but here we are concerned with the degree of empathy rather than with the nature of the register used' (1980, p. 68).

The examiners' frequent comments about audience and purpose lack the clarity of the Affective and Stylistic models in terms of issues that concern teachers – which elements of audience and purpose are the most important? Can students use their 'spoken-like' voice to create 'authentic' voices or will this diminish their capacity to convey their mastery of syntax or verbal competence? If they have not mastered syntax or verbal competence and write with their authentic voice, will this be regarded as a deliberate device or a lack of mastery?

The criteria related to audience engagement is a clear discriminator for 'better candidates' of English and, despite its importance to both the examiners and Wilkinson et al., it is interesting to also note another quality of this element within their discussion of 'effectiveness' (S7):

objective criteria will never wholly supply the place of the personal judgement and personal response in assessing a piece of writing. The realisation of an experience in writing, the unity and coherence of a composition, ultimately depend upon an interaction between writer and reader in which the reader creates for himself from what the writer has offered. (Wilkinson et al., 1980, p. 236)

English HSC examination notes 2005

In 2005, students were asked to respond to the following prompt, which was accompanied by images of stamps, detour signs, an adult hand holding a child's and a waving caterpillar:

Your local community is publishing a collection of young people's imaginative writing about Journeys.

Choose ONE image from the noticeboard. Use this image as the basis for your contribution to the collection.

Examiners described it as 'pleasing' that 'all candidates were able to exhibit reasonable control of language' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011b), but the expectations had increased beyond 'control' with the new 'Journeys' concept. Candidates were exhorted to 'take advantage of the opportunity the examination presents to respond with originality and insight to the question' (NSW Board of Studies) and were 'reminded that imaginative writing is a syllabus requirement and does not specifically refer to imaginative journeys' (NSW Board of Studies). The ability to imagine falls into the Affective and Stylistic models. Wilkinson et

al. refer to the writer's ability to accommodate the reader and reflect the feature of 'empathy' (A3): 'the imaginative leap of the writer into the minds of others so as to grasp what terms have meaning for them must characterise effective communication' (1980, p. 74). 'Awareness of reality' (A5) is demonstrated by the imaginative interpretation of reality, 'perhaps symbolically or metaphorically' (p. 75). These features of writing reflect the Stylistic model's reference to 'awareness of reader' (S5) and the associated use of 'sophisticated' and 'literary' language techniques or effects, as well as the writing's 'effectiveness' (S7) that is established through a 'fully realised and imaginatively satisfying narrative' (p. 82). As the Examination Notes suggest, 'A simple story well told continues to be an engaging option' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011b).

Execution, purpose, and investigation of form were also the focus of the examiners in 2005, along with the exploration of concepts and context. Comments about characterisation, structure and voice, sense of place, and emotional connotations addressed a broad range of elements for success and possible improvement for students. However, when it came to the comments that differentiated between the ranges A to E, the commentary was overwhelmingly focused on language and investigation of the core concept. Voice is a difficult concept to explain to students and, as the examiners noted, among the less successful students were those who were unable to create and sustain a 'convincing voice.' The focus on context, place and character in this year's comments reflected the developmental features of the Affective model: 'reader awareness' (A3), 'social and physical environment' (A4), and 'other people' (A2), or character understanding. The latter feature describes a development from recording 'the mere existence of other people' to a 'consistently realised presentation of another person' and the 'ability to see a person and his interactions in extended context' (Wilkinson et al., 1980, pp. 73–74). The students' ability to fulfil the Stylistic model's demands is linked to the Affective throughout the Examination Notes, for instance, 'the manipulation of structure and voice showed control of register, syntax and vocabulary' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011b).

English HSC examination notes 2009

In 2009, students were given two quotes, and asked to choose one as the basis for an imaginative piece that celebrates the ways relationships contribute to a sense of belonging:

'Human beings, like plants, grow in the soil of acceptance, not in the atmosphere of rejection.'

'When someone prizes us just as we are, he or she confirms our existence.'

This question accompanied the introduction of the new core concept ('Belonging') and, although the commentary was brief regarding students' ability to write on this new concept, students used 'language appropriate to their chosen form' and 'responses displayed originality and artistry and the mechanics of language were applied skilfully' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011c). Students were criticised for being clichéd and simplistic, both in their writing and their examination of the new topic, with weaker writing lacking credibility and featuring 'flawed mechanics' of language. This year, the Examination Notes were not only brief, but they bundled several elements into single comments, which were divided by range: Better, Average, Weaker. The examiners considered 'better' compositions to have 'explored the ways relationships contribute to a sense of belonging with insight, complexity and/or subtlety' (NSW Board of Studies, 2011c). This description does not reveal how the students' exploration occurred, although the comment does link to many features of the Stylistic model. The 'verbal competence' feature (S2) describes 'the writer's capacity to express his meanings effectively, to define his terms adequately and communicate successfully an increasingly wide range of experience' (Wilkinson et al., 1980, p. 77). The writer may have been assessed on a feature of the Cognitive model, that is, 'speculating' (C4), including 'exploring ... projecting ... theorising' (pp. 72–73). Similarly, the writer's ability to consider their own emotions (A1), other people (A2), the reader (A3) and the social environment (A4) in their understanding of belonging may have been apparent. References to the 'mechanics of language' are also unclear. It is possible to guess that the examiners are referring to grammar, spelling, punctuation, but this is not certain. Do they mean 'syntax' (S1), 'verbal competence' (S2), 'organisation' (S3), 'cohesion' (S4), 'appropriateness' (S6) or effectiveness (S7)? A lack of development in any of these features may contribute to 'flawed mechanics,' however, English teachers and students are not given further detail to direct their writing development.

The face beneath the page

According to Bechervaise (2004), English teachers will often claim to assess on the basis of an 'innate

understanding of what constitutes excellent performance [however] research strongly suggests that most have a highly developed set of assessment criteria which they apply to the task' (p. 322). Wilkins recognises here a subjectivity in marking: 'the very existence of criteria-based marking guides is proof' (2009, p. 29). Imaginative writing is marked against a rubric but these are interpreted by the examiners with a recognition of the subjectivity inherent in this process and the need for double-marking to ensure consistency (NESA, 2017). The elements characteristic of 'better' or 'stronger' imaginative compositions are largely stylistic and cognitive, and evidently designed to demonstrate a student's understanding of language and concepts, rather than a student's ethical stance or broader understanding of the world. The criteria, as revealed by the Examination Notes, suggest that a particular cultural capital is valued, which involves an understanding of literary tradition, sophistication, grammar, or the 'mechanics' of language, the ability to replicate or play with form, and knowledge of the audience as determined by the state Education Standards Authority. Students are writing for anonymous examiners and may be asked to write in a variety of forms for a specified audience in the examination. The concept of audience, the ability to write to a particular audience through form, and evidence of purpose, recurred frequently in the examiners' comments. However, in the examination situation this seems a problematic focus. Wilkinson (1986) suggested that the concept of audience not be included as a dimension for assessment, 'perhaps because in an 'examination' it is difficult to control' (p. 26), and in this case, must be regarded as an obvious artifice. 'We may write, as Virginia Woolf says, for the 'face beneath the page' – but that face is often shadowy, and sometimes it is not there at all' (Wilkinson et al., 1980, p. 215).

One of those students from my early HSC class rewrote his imaginative writing piece at least ten times, finally completely changing it days before the exam. I asked him why he had changed it. He shrugged and said that he had read the copy of Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* I had annotated with post-it notes and lent him in the holidays. He felt as though he finally understood something more about 'good' writing, and his new story had just come. He wrote himself into a mark of 84% in the exam. Did we manage to strike a balance between writing for examiners and the act of creating? Did he read the book just at the right time or did I actually give it to him too late? Did he write with the three

teachers who helped to mark his work over and over in mind, and did he gain a greater sense of his audience through this process? The divisions between responding and composing in this story are blurred. While I'd like to feel as though I have reached a point at which I can give my students meaningful, detailed feedback using Wilkinson et al.'s commentary, the use of the exam format to assess imaginative writing remains problematic. A focus on establishing audiences for students that they can imagine and write for continues to be an important aim for teachers interested in the development of their students as 'communicating beings' who are able to move beyond the classroom and examination room to tackle meaningful high-stakes occasions. Future studies could examine how the assessment of imaginative writing develops and is reported by examiners from 2019 onward, following changes to the structure of the HSC English syllabus and examination.

Notes

- 1 The original research included an analysis of the HSC subject English Extension Two Markers Notes from 2002 to 2010. In the NSW HSC course, students can choose to study Extension Two English in which they produce an extended piece of writing that may take the form of extended narrative, short story, poetry, essay, play, and so on. Students who undertake the additional Extension Two English course are required to demonstrate understanding of their compulsory English Studies in their writing project.
- 2 The Moral model is perhaps more closely aligned with ethics as described by Misson (2011), Misson and Morgan (2006), and Patterson (2008).

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Silent Reading and Discussion of Self-Selected Books in the Contemporary Classroom

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Abstract: Silent reading and book discussion about books read for pleasure can increase reading frequency and support the strengthening of student engagement in the beneficial practice of recreational reading. However, little is known about children's attitudes toward and experiences of these pedagogical activities. Qualitative findings from 47 children aged eight to 11 across 24 elementary schools in Western Australia provide insight into this area of research. Silent reading is typically enjoyable, though dependent on the book, choice, access and reading environment, and it is vulnerable to inconsistent delivery. Very few children had the opportunity to discuss self-selected reading material in the classroom context, though the potential of this discussion for promoting a shared social experience and book recommendations was recognised. These mutually supportive strategies are best delivered separately, and greater consideration and value should be given to them, despite the current assessment-focused, high-stakes learning contexts of contemporary Australian schools.

Introduction

Engagement in and enjoyment of reading is strongly associated with reading achievement (e.g., Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2011), though relatively few studies focus on the importance of reading for pleasure (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Manuel, 2012), and the role of classroom practice in promoting this (Merga, 2015). As research finds a consistent decline in students' attitudes toward, and frequency of, engagement in reading beyond the early years (e.g., Clark & Douglas, 2011; OECD, 2011), exploring older children's experiences of classroom practices designed to support the development and maintenance of their motivation to read for enjoyment is an important consideration when seeking to mitigate this decline. As children shift from learning to read, to reading to learn (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin, 1990), they have increasing opportunity to engage in both independent and interactive experiences around reading for enjoyment. Using class time to make the most of these opportunities can play an important role in providing an opportunity for students to read with greater volume and frequency, enabling access to books and book recommendations, and communicating the importance of reading beyond skill acquisition. This article will explore children's attitudes toward, and experiences of, silent reading and discussion of self-selected books, with a view to optimising student reading engagement.

Silent reading

While recently an occasional subject of controversy (e.g., Reutzel, Fawson & Smith, 2008), it can be contended that Sustained Silent Reading offers significant literacy benefits over time for participants, on the basis of consistent findings around the relationship between frequency and volume of reading and improved literacy outcomes (e.g., Anderson, Wilson

& Fielding, 1988; Clark & Douglas, 2011; Mol & Bus 2011; OECD, 2010; Samuels & Wu, 2001), and research that has specifically focused on the benefits of silent reading during class time (e.g., Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990). From the age of around eight, silent reading is a developmentally appropriate means by which students can develop their reading fluency (Reutzel, Petscher & Spichtig, 2012), as well as increase reading stamina, foster independent reading skills and increase student enjoyment of reading (Merga, 2013). Where adolescents were currently or previously exposed to silent reading opportunities, they generally enjoyed the activity, finding it 'better than working', 'relaxing' (Merga, 2013, p. 235), enjoyable, and an opportunity to engage in a sustained and concentrated reading experience. However, there is limited research that looks at *children's* attitudes toward silent reading, and this paper is responsive to this gap.

Silent reading has evolved from earlier models with a reading stamina focus (e.g., McCracken, 1971) and is generally responsive to unique contextual circumstances. However, contemporary Silent Reading is generally conceived as 'a time in which a class, or in some cases an entire school, reads quietly together' from self-selected reading materials, ideally with an 'adult to model the habits, choices, comments and attitudes good readers develop' (Gardiner, 2005, p. 15). Such reading is usually not subject to any formal assessment. In recent times, researchers exploring silent reading have increasingly expounded the value of increasing teacher intervention in this space to improve student engagement. Reutzel, Petscher and Spichtig believe that when 'the challenge level of texts and the task of reading independently and silently [is] carefully scaffolded and guided by the teacher' (2012, p. 3), this can enable even students on the lowest end of independent reading ability to become engaged in reading. Silent Reading is also known by a number of different names, including, but not limited to, Sustained Silent Reading, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, Free Voluntary Reading, and Drop Everything and Read (Gardiner, 2005, p. 15).

Even silent reading may be an interactive experience, with recent research suggesting that place, space and social interaction can influence university students' engagement in reading for pleasure. Kuzmičová et al. explain that silent reading was often 'experienced as a social practice, and sometimes purposefully performed as such', and that 'participants reported enjoying reading together with other members of their

household, sharing not only the same space and time for reading, but also exchanging related comments' (2017, p. 11). As such, 'silent' reading was not always a silent and solitary experience. While silent reading and discussion of books seem to be separate activities, they are complementary pursuits. Providing opportunities to verbally interact around books and reading is responsive to both sociocultural understandings of reading as a social practice, and the value of drawing on this understanding to promote greater engagement in reading, both within the classroom and beyond. When considering the use of classroom instructional practices to encourage reading frequency, educators need to understand the relationship between students' motivations, social interactions and their reading outcomes (Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012).

Discussion of books

Discussion around books recognises the importance of communal interaction for young people, which Alvermann, Young, Green and Wisenbaker have previously explored in relation to adolescents' need for interactions that enable them to 'negotiate, reinvent and jointly create their lifeworlds with others of their own age and with the adults who share their worlds' (1999, p. 222). In their exploration of adolescents' perceptions of an after-school read and talk club, Alvermann et al. found that they provided a valuable social outlet for readers, they facilitated 'real' discussions (1999, p. 242), and that the financial remuneration for participation as an extrinsic motivator was appreciated by participants.

Discussion of self-selected books foregrounds the social situation of reading, and ignoring this facet can lead to some students' disengagement. Bryan, Fawson and Reutzel contend that some children 'derive little benefit from, and fail to make good use of, silent reading time', with behavioural issues and student disengagement leading to some schools discontinuing the practice (2003, p. 50). Social interactions around reading have been found to 'encourage engaged reading practice' (p. 50), with discussions of books supporting greater focus in silent reading. Situating reading as an enjoyable social practice can be integral to promoting adolescent enjoyment of books (Nieuwenhuizen, 2001). Opportunities to talk about reading during silent reading have been identified by Ivey and Johnston as potentially beneficial, as 'engaging books' can lead to 'intense experiences that needed to be discussed immediately', with children negotiating 'a shift from

silent reading to somewhat silent reading to allow them to take up these conversations as they arose' (2013, p. 268). They found that students 'were not disrupted by conversations among other students and preferred to be able to solicit conversation at the point of need, developing strategies for soliciting conversations only from willing peers' (p. 272). As such, discussion of self-selected books can be a valuable adjunct to optimise student enjoyment in and engagement during Sustained Silent Reading.

This social engagement offers potential benefit for improving reading comprehension and students' ability to draw upon textual resources to support their positions about books. Book discussions enable students to develop their reading comprehension through 'negotiating meaning socially', as 'conversation not only raises the status of independent silent reading from a time filler to an important part of the reading program; it also gives students another opportunity to practice and build comprehension skills collaboratively' (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Opportunities for discussion have also been found to offer valuable opportunities for promoting the social status of books and reading, and to support students' future book choices through the provision of peer book recommendations, making reading purposeful through providing opportunities to interact around books, and begin to draw on textual evidence to support their arguments (Moses, Ogden & Kelly, 2015). They can also provide opportunities for students struggling with reading comprehension to further their understanding of books (Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2017).

However, it should be noted that student-centred discussion which includes texts selected by children is central to the success of much of the book discussions explored in the literature. If reading is 'shaped and regulated by the social circumstances in which texts are shared' (Maybin & Moss, 1993, p. 146), and the only discussion around books in the classroom relates to teacher-selected texts, what does this inadvertently communicate about the value of reading self-selected materials for recreation? Focusing purely on skill and knowledge acquisition within the classroom without consideration of the affective and social aspects of reading can inadvertently lead students to regard reading as something with a purely functional purpose, rather than a beneficial activity to be regularly engaged in within the classroom and beyond. In contrast, it can be contended that 'engagement in reading should be one of the important goals of all

educators' (Bryan, Fawson & Reutzel, 2003, p. 69).

In addition, issues of engagement similar to those identified with regards to student engagement in silent reading may also impact upon students' willingness to engage in discussions around books and reading. Hall's research (2012a; 2012b) has found that students' reading identities, which relate to their attitudes toward reading, and their sense of self-efficacy and ability in reading, are related to their willingness to engage in discussion around texts, and that 'students with negative reading identities often say very little about texts' (Hall, 2016).

The research purpose

While the call to make discussion of self-selected books a regular learning experience within the classroom, perhaps situated before or after Sustained Silent Reading (Fielding & Pearson, 1994), is not new, the extent to which schools use silent reading and self-selected book discussion, and contemporary children's attitudes toward these practices, is not well understood. There is relatively little recent research exploring older children's experiences of both practices, particularly in relation to their enjoyment of them, or otherwise. The 2016 *Western Australian Study in Children's Book Reading (WASCBR)* collected data from students aged eight to 12 at 24 schools, in Years 4 and 6 in Western Australia, to investigate older children's attitudes toward silent reading and discussing books, to enable researchers and educators to better understand their experiences of these practices within the contemporary primary school classroom. While the study focused on children in upper primary, the findings have implications for junior secondary teachers, offering insights for teachers of older children who seek to understand the previous reading engagement attitudes and opportunities of their pupils. This is particularly relevant in the context of the recent shift toward earlier entry into high school in Western Australia, where this research was conducted. In 2015, Year 7 shifted from primary school to high school, meaning that students as young as 11 now enter high school a year earlier. Meeting the needs of younger pupils and understanding their attitudes and motivations has since become an increasing priority for contemporary English teachers in Western Australia. In addition, as explored previously (e.g., Merga, 2013; Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2017), it can be contended that silent reading programs and book discussion remain important well into the secondary years. In addition, this study extends a research

inquiry initiated in the 2012 *Western Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading (WASABR)*, which focused on older children. Like the WASABR, this study explores students' attitudes toward silent reading (Merga, 2013); however, the WASCBR findings reported on herein shift the lens to a younger sample and extend the inquiry to include another reading supportive practice – book discussion.

As such, this research seeks to determine the following:

1. How are the practices of silent reading and book discussion enacted in the contemporary upper primary classroom, according to children who participate in them?
2. What are children's attitudes toward these practices?

These new insights can illuminate the current positioning of these practices in the classroom, as well as children's experiences of them, informing future directions for reading engagement.

Method

This paper reports on qualitative data derived exclusively from responses to the semi-structured interviews in the WASCBR. The research tools were rigorously developed and tested, and were adapted from previous tools used in the WASABR, which previously collected data from older, high school students. By shifting the lens to earlier in the schooling experience, more could be learned about what shapes children's reading engagement beyond the period of independent reading skill acquisition. Once ethics approvals were obtained, the adapted tools were tested and refined in a pilot at a local school on March 8, 2016. Cognitive piloting, the process by which researchers confirm with a pilot sample that survey and interview questions are typically understood as intended (Collins, 2003), had previously been conducted to confirm comprehension of the research instrument items. A comprehensive pilot was also undertaken in a school; this pilot indicated a need for minor changes to improve the suitability of the tool for the younger respondent sample to meet age-related cognitive implications (e.g., Borgers, de Leeuw & Hox, 2000). Once these changes were approved, data collection was conducted from March 23 until June 21, 2016. To recruit semi-structured interview respondents, two students were randomly sampled from the body of consenting fourth grade and sixth grade students at each of the 24 participating schools, controlled only for gender and year group. All

interview respondents were between eight and 11 years of age, and a total of 47 students took part.

Schools were recruited using purposive sampling in order to achieve representative diversity, and the final data set included rural and metropolitan schools, public and private schools, and schools in varying geographic and socio-economic environments. Australian schools are publicly ranked on an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), and the ICSEA was used during recruitment in order to recruit a range of schools with an ultimate ICSEA value close to the average (1000). ICSEA values can be obtained online at the *My School* website (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016). The average ICSEA for participating schools was close to the overall average, at 1040.9. The study was not limited to include only schools with formal silent reading or book discussion programs; this inquiry was a subset within a much larger and more complex project of investigation, with findings from diverse areas such as reading aloud (Merga, 2017b) and parental influence on children's reading (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018).

Due to the size and scope of the study, the semi-structured interview schedule was designed to capture insights into a diverse range of research interests. This paper reports exclusively on the data relating to children's perceptions of silent reading and book discussions. The 47 semi-structured interview respondents were asked if they experienced silent reading, and if so, if they enjoyed it. They were also asked if they had in-class book discussions, and how they felt about discussing self-selected books in general. Interview data were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed. Interview respondents have been provided with pseudonyms to protect their identities, and access to descriptive data has been limited to prevent identification via deductive disclosure of participant identities (Kaiser, 2009). The age of the respondent appears in parentheses after the pseudonym for reader interest.

The responses provided by the students were subsequently analysed using a constant comparative method, allowing me to generate new insights in this area that were not shaped by existing perspectives (Glaser, 1965). Smagorinsky (2008) and others urge greater transparency in description of this process undertaken in qualitative research, so I attempt to provide a clear description of the process I undertook in analysing the data post-transcription, though, as the

sole interviewer, my analytical process began in situ during the interviews.

First, I went through the data and drew out all of the conversation around silent reading and all of the data around book discussion, and placed the data into two subsets. This included identifying instances where the children began to talk about these issues in relation to other, unrelated questions.

Second, I iteratively coded the data subsets to determine these emerging themes within the subsets, continually adapting and revising my thematic scope (Boeije, 2002; Kolb, 2012). Codes that did not recur were discarded unless related to more robust codes as a compelling tangential manifestation.

Third, I endeavoured to avoid becoming desensitised to the possibilities of the data through sustained and uninterrupted exposure. The process of analysis needed to be done over a few months to allow for gaps in exposure to the data, so that I could continually come to the data with a comparatively 'fresh' perspective, which enabled me to refine the codes more effectively. When codes are closely interrelated, as they were in this instance, such breaks in exposure to the data set were imperative to determine which codes should stand alone, and which should be combined or subsumed. This qualitative pilot study was intended to identify the range of issues with currency in this space. I intend to use the findings reported as a foundation for future quantitative research in this area with sufficient sample size to allow for generalisability.

Results

Silent Reading

Not all respondents were experiencing silent reading as part of their typical classroom activities, though all had experienced it at some point in their schooling lives and could therefore speak from a position of experience on the subject. Tom (11) had experienced silent reading in class some time before the interviews, so he could not remember if it had been enjoyable. While most students enjoyed the practice, a number of recurring qualifying themes emerged with implications for implementation for classroom teachers.

Relaxing and enjoyable

Children typically had a positive attitude toward silent reading for recreation during class time. Anna (11) explained that 'I just find it really relaxing, after lunch time, just like to cool down and stuff', and Jason (9)

also valued the opportunity to 'relax after lunch' and catch up with his book, which he read exclusively at school. Clare (9) enjoyed silent reading as she found that it built her sustained motivation to read, explaining that 'you close the book, there's already something you want to know about it, but you know you can't read it, so it's like you wonder about it'. Part of Gina's (9) enjoyment from silent reading related to its educative opportunity, as 'I get to do more reading and more learning about new words as well'. For Craig (11), silent reading was so enjoyable that it triggered an enduring interest in reading for pleasure:

We did silent reading in my classroom in Year 2 and I found this spy book and then started reading it for a little bit and I was like, I like this book and then I kept on reading it. That's how I really like them.

Neil (9) described silent reading as 'a break from school', unallocated time during his school day in which he could engage in his book:

... because I always want to catch up with my book and I always bring it to school. So, I always bring it to school and then I always want to read it. Because say if we're waiting for the teacher I'll get my book out and I'll start reading it like, while the others are drawing I'll just read.

For some children, some of the enjoyment came out of the shared communal immersion in reading. Rachel (11) explained,

I love it because you can just read, like everybody else sort of thing. Everybody's reading, so that's why it's silent. And like sometimes, you will hear somebody laughing about something in their book, and then somebody would whisper to the other person 'Oh, that was so sad', or something. It's just everybody reading; it's really cool.

As such, while Rachel was reading alone, sharing the experience with her peers helped her to sustain her own engagement.

Choice

One of the favoured aspects of silent reading was the possibility for choice, with access to books closely related to enjoyment of the activity. Kara (9) enjoyed silent reading, and when asked why, she explained,

we get to choose different books, and we don't have to ... well when we feel like we don't want to read this book we can go put it back, and sometimes if like you're really stuck into it, they might give you five more minutes of extra time. That's really cool.

The freedom to change a book that is a poor fit for one more engaging facilitated enjoyment. This freedom of choice could lead to provision of access to books in the home; as children move through the years of schooling, they are less likely to have books sent home with them through the school, and they are less likely to have time allocated to library access at school (Merga & Mat Roni, 2017a), so this opportunity could be very important for these children. Lucy explained that 'we go to the library at school, and we borrow a book, so we take like one or two home, and then we keep the other one at school, 'cos we get to borrow three books'. As such, the enjoyment of the silent reading experience was closely related to the enjoyment of the book.

In contrast, where students were not able to access a more engaging book, the experience can be far less enjoyable. Sarah (9) typically enjoyed silent reading, though she explained that it depended on the book:

Sometimes I want it to go for the rest of the afternoon, but I know we have spelling and stuff like that. And sometimes it feels like a really long time, 'cos I'm not enjoying the book as much as I would with others.

Theo (9) also enjoyed silent reading, because 'the book I'm reading now is really good'; when asked about his enjoyment of silent reading, Marco (11) explained that it was 'because of the books I have ... I'm really into this book that I have at silent reading, I really like that'. As such, this code was closely interrelated with provision of support for choosing appealing books and access to appealing books. It also has implications for this seeking to implement whole-school silent reading times, which, while situating reading as a whole-school priority and communicating a powerful valuing of time spent reading as an essential educational activity, can also often be implemented in classrooms with limited access to books rather than in a school library.

Opportunity for sustained and silent reading

These codes were originally separate as 'opportunity for reading' and 'opportunity for sustained attention to reading' as they relate to two different but closely associated themes. However, as they were typically strongly associated in the data, they were brought together through the iterative process of coding in order to constitute a more authentic representation of trends in the data. Students often brought them together, such as David (9), who enjoyed silent reading because 'it's nice and quiet and we get time to read as well'. While as previously described, Rachel and some

others were accepting and even appreciative of some minor background noise that indicated that students were enjoying their books, it was perhaps more typical for respondents to stress the value of silence; Naomi (11) enjoyed silent reading because it meant 'having some time in the day to actually read a book with no noise, and then everybody is just quiet, and I can get a few pages done'. Students really appreciated the time to read, but it was also significant that this reading was occurring in an atmosphere conducive to the activity.

The value of the opportunity alone cannot be overstated; for some students, silent reading at school was the bulk, or even all, of the recreational reading they did. While Matt (11) did tend to read at home for recreation, he had reservations about his peers doing likewise. He explained:

I think it's because the class is always ... they never have time to read, and you have to read during silent reading time, because kids probably ... some kids might not read at home, so I think it's good that they got to read at school, and be able to get the books that they have at school, they can't take home.

Other students such as Michael (11) also valued silent reading for the time it afforded, though the opportunity for reading wasn't just about time; it was also related to a chance to apply sustained attention in an environment conducive to reading. Marco (11) benefited from silent reading at school as it provided an opportunity with fewer distractions. He commented that

at school, I like to read a bit better, because like at home, 'cos at school I'm not really allowed to do, like, play on my video games as well at school, so then when I go home, I have the opportunity to play them, and then I also have martial arts and stuff that I do, so I have to go to those, and I have all these after school clubs, and stuff. So I prefer reading more at school.

While Marco appreciated the respite from screen time and other extracurricular activities provided in the silent reading environment at school, Maria (age indecipherable) appreciated the break from her tempestuous friendship group. She liked silent reading as 'my friends won't bother me, because normally we have a little bit of fires, like friendship fires, but we normally sort them out'. Silent reading provided a break from these tensions. Bruce (8) also appreciated the social respite in silent reading, explaining that he enjoyed it 'because I get to read the stuff that I like, and I get to read it without people. Sometimes I have to read to my

brother, and he gets annoying when I read to him’.

While discussion about books is a valuable adjunct to silent reading, it may be advisable to keep it occurring before and/or after the silent reading period, as allowing discussion during the period can be very distracting for some children, affecting their reading comprehension. For example, Sarah (9) explains why interruptions cause her to lose her place in the book:

if it’s like during I’m reading, I don’t really like anyone to interrupt me, ‘cos I’m just, say if I’m in the middle of the sentence and then I forget which sentence or line it’s in, then I can’t get back to it, and with most of my books that normally happens, so I end up reading from the start again which is just fine, just I know what happens.

Diana (9) also liked silent reading ‘because when it’s really loud, I find it hard to read’, with the best thing about silent reading being ‘that it’s quiet and you can just focus on the book’. One of the only students who did not like silent reading was Brett (10), and this was due to his feeling that ‘people always talk so I don’t really like silent reading’. However, where silent reading had been better managed in earlier years and actually silent, he had enjoyed it. Like Sarah, he struggled with interruption, explaining that ‘if you look at a word and people want to talk to you, you don’t know where the word is’. He tried to ignore his friends, but they responded by ‘tapping’ him, as ‘some of them want to get attention, some of them want to – they just want to talk’. Brett found this very frustrating as he preferred to focus on his book, explaining that ‘I want to have the adventure of reading the book by myself’; he was not interested in discussing his book, or the book that his friends were reading, during this time.

However, it was also interesting to note that some children struggled to focus on a book for the period of time provided. Gary (11) did not enjoy silent reading ‘because I don’t like to sit there and read books for like 15 minutes, I only read for some, I prefer 10 minutes (rather) than 15’, further explaining that ‘for like ten or five minutes it’s fun, it’s easy for me, but then I start losing ... losing (focus) and getting distracted when I read’. This highlights the potential importance of regular silent reading opportunities to support the building of reading stamina.

Not privileged in the classroom

Despite the enjoyment of silent reading and its benefits, the responses of some students showed that the activity was not privileged in the contemporary classroom,

and thus was often inconsistently experienced. For instance, in discussion with Samuel (9), it became apparent that silent reading time could be readily replaced by other classroom activities, as ‘sometimes in the silent reading things we *do* silent reading, but sometimes the silent reading is just for another thing ... so, if it had silent reading, instead of doing silent reading, we would do writing’.

Similarly, for Lucian (9), silent reading time in class was sometimes interchangeable with time on an educational software program, so it was sometimes spent ‘on our laptops’, though he also had silent reading time during his library sessions. Craig (11) really enjoyed sharing around books, ‘because I love reading books and that. I think everyone else can hear what I’ve been going through and that’; however, this opportunity was only provided ‘one day a term or something’. As such, not all students who were experiencing silent reading had regular and reliable exposure to the activity, and it did not provide screen respite for all students.

Book discussion

The data reported about book discussion in the classroom is relatively sparse. Few students reported engaging in classroom-based discussion of books that were read for enjoyment; rather, there was discussion of books read for educational purposes. For example, Clare (9) compared the limited opportunity to talk about reading for recreation to class book discussion, explaining that, after silent reading, ‘when everyone’s putting their books away, you might be able to tell somebody a little bit about it. But mostly, in the books that we read in class time, our class books’. Similarly, when I asked Rachel (11) if there was any time in her class when she was allowed to talk about the books that she reads for fun, she explained that ‘no, I don’t really think so, I think ... not in class time, but if at recess or lunch you want to, then you’re allowed to’.

Students were also asked about their experiences of book discussion more generally, to garner insights into discussion beyond the classroom. While some conversed with friends or family, not all students had someone with whom they would or could discuss books and reading. This could be for a range of reasons, including, but not limited to, a lack of interest in books and reading, or a lack of interested supporting social agents in their lives. While Rose (11) was only allowed to discuss class books in class time, she enjoyed opportunities to talk about the books that she read in general, ‘because other people get interested and

then they start reading it. So I feel like I'm giving them a story that they're going to be reading as well'. This suggests that for Rose, greater opportunities for book discussion in class are likely to be well-received.

Discussion in class

Gina (9) had opportunities to talk about books in class that related to writing activities, and she enjoyed these chances to share recommendations:

If we ever have to write a story about it or some lines about it, I will always try to put my hand up to try and tell everyone about this book so [that] maybe I could encourage them to read it.

Gina's teacher also occasionally provided opportunities for a student to share their attitudes toward the book they were reading during silent reading, as 'sometimes the teacher gets us to stand on our chair and tell the whole class about what we read and what the genre was about and how exciting you got with the book'. Gina was looking forward to having this opportunity to share, explaining that 'I haven't got a chance yet because she's always chosen the boys'. Listening to those who had been selected was felt to be highly motivating, as 'the way they use the expression in the way that they describe the book, it just sounds so amazing'.

Michael (11) was also one of the two students who engaged in class-based discussion of books that were read for pleasure. Around twice a week he was given opportunities to 'talk about and write down what we think about a book that we've chosen to read', an activity that he enjoyed because 'we get to read books that we like, we get to choose which book', rather than being expected to discuss class books.

However, most in-class discussions about books were not sanctioned; for instance, Edward (11) was 'not really' allowed to talk during silent reading, but that was the only time he discussed reading books for pleasure surreptitiously with the students sitting around him. David (9) was allowed to discuss books in class but only 'in free time when we've finished our work'; Karen (11) could also sometimes talk about books in a similar context:

[W]e just kind of do it whenever people are finishing work and need a – just wait until they're all finished. And so sometimes people come up and be like, do you have another book that I can read or what sort of book are you reading? And they'd ask to read the blurb and stuff so, yes, we can kind of talk about it.

For Veronica (11), opportunities to discuss books

read for pleasure were lost as she got older, as she explained that 'we used to do that when we were little but now it's just reading, for fun and all that'. Veronica did not mind this transition, as she preferred to read books than discuss them, explaining that 'I'm more interested to continue reading it than saying what I've already read, because they can read the book and learn what I've already read'. In-class discussion of books read for pleasure was seen as a luxury that could not be met within the limited time constraints of the classroom. For example, Tanya (9) explained that discussion of books could only happen during 'recess and lunch 'cos then we'll not like wasting time for Ms O'Reilly'.

Shared enjoyment and recommendations outside the classroom

There were some instances of shared enjoyment and recommendations beyond the classroom that can be drawn upon to provide an illustrative model. For instance, Tom (11) liked talking about the books that he read with his 'little brother' as 'he laughs a lot when I tell him about it'. When asked if he would like opportunities to talk about the books that he reads, Matt (11) felt that he would as, 'if a student has a really good book and I'm like, 'Oh that's really cool', and he would tell me about it, then I'm like, "Okay, I could read that." So I could read more books'. Clare (9) enjoyed discussing books with two of her friends, 'cos they always listen', and the discussions she had with her friend meant that she was already planning to read the series that her friend was reading as soon as she finished her current book.

While Zac (11) didn't have opportunities to share discussion about books during class, he occasionally discussed them with his friends, explaining that 'my friends do sometimes, and at recess we just stop and talk about our books and then in library we're just telling jokes about the different part of the books'. He and his friends were reading the same book series at the time of the interview, and when he had to choose books, friend recommendations were privileged along with online ratings, as 'I actually ask other people if they give me suggestions and how good it is and then I see its ratings, how people like it'.

Limited opportunity

Outside the classroom, there were often limitations to their opportunity even where a discussion partner was found. Theo (9) explained that he liked talking to his Dad about the books that he read, but his Dad was only

interested in hearing about books related to baseball. As Theo also enjoyed reading other kinds of books, this meant that he was somewhat limited in his opportunities to discuss his reading with his father. Lucy (9) had one friend that she could talk about reading with, though she explained that generally, 'my friends don't really talk about reading, they just talk about random stuff, like dogs', and there were no opportunities to talk about reading provided in class time, typical of the whole interview group.

Diana (9) liked talking about the books that she read, as she liked 'talking to my mum and Dad about it, and saying it's like a really interesting book, so you should maybe try and read it one day'. However, when asked if her parents had followed her recommendations, Diana explained 'no, because they've never found time'. As such, her recommendations were not visibly valued.

Other students also enjoyed book discussions for the opportunity to recommend or receive recommendations, as explained below. Neil (9) enjoyed sharing his reading experiences with his parents, but like Diana, they were not always fully supportive as 'they sometimes listen, other times they're busy doing other things like cooking'. However, Neil would still persist if they were busy, as 'I just follow them around which is automatic. I'm not sure if they're listening or not'. Neil would have appreciated their attention in this case, but was pragmatic, and persisted, shadowing them while unsure of the degree to which he held their attention. Neither of these exchanges could be characterised as high-quality discussions grounded in mutual interest and enjoyment.

Discussion

Silent reading: Popular but not always privileged

Both independent and interactive reading experiences offer value in contemporary upper primary classrooms. Enjoyment of silent reading was typically high, and few students described disengagement with the practice. As such, the presence of Bryan, Fawson and Reutzel's (2003) children who are disengaged from the practice was marginal in this sample, and in these instances, reticence to engage in silent reading was typically related to poor teacher implementation and/or student concentration issues. The children who were experiencing silent reading tended to value the practice, situating it as a valuable and enjoyable opportunity to read, and to share the reading experience with

peers. As such, the practice could contribute to building a positive attitude toward reading more broadly, and therefore, 'as long as a functional model of silent reading is employed, where students are reading, and enjoyment of reading is encouraged through provision of an appropriate context' (Merga, 2013, p. 241), silent reading should be a regular feature in classroom practice. If we want reading for recreation to be valued beyond the classroom, we need to assign value to the practice in the classroom by affording time for silent reading and book discussion.

However, silent reading was positioned as an optional extra in some contexts, which made it vulnerable to inconsistent delivery. Where silent reading was not privileged, and was readily replaced by other activities, as observed by Samuel, this has implications beyond limiting students' opportunity to engage in the beneficial reading experience, which for some students was the only recreational reading they engaged in. Infrequent opportunity could also challenge students' abilities to remember and focus on the plots in the books they were reading, particularly if they were struggling readers and/or readers who were not willing or able to continue reading the books at home. Interchanging reading with screen-based activities, where reading is typically engaged in the paper book form preferred by young people (Merga & Mat Roni, 2017b), can also limit opportunities for screen respite, as identified by Marco, a limitation which is beneficial for attentional and health purposes (e.g., Merga & Williams, 2016).

Book discussion: Underrepresented in the classroom

While some time seems to be often given to silent reading, book discussion of self-selected texts is neglected in the classroom, leaving only varied opportunities at home and in the social space. Discussion about these texts in the classroom was so low that it brings into question how effectively the research in this area has been translated to the educator domain, beyond academia. This could also be reflective of the fact that much of the research around book discussion in the classroom focuses on structured discussions of teacher-selected texts, rather than self-selected texts for recreational reading (e.g., Petrich, 2015). Despite an emerging body of research-based literature highlighting the benefits of 'using reading to understand and affiliate with others and the pleasure of using reading to make a place for ourselves in our social worlds' (Wilhelm & Smith, 2015, p. 9), and the positive

attitudinal effects of socially situated peer discussion around books (e.g., Lapp & Fisher, 2009; McKool, 2007; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009), this doesn't seem to have trickled down into practice. Only one student, Zac (11), mentioned a school-based book club which was not used to discuss books that were self-selected for pleasure, but instead focused on teacher-selected books. Likewise, as only two of the responses had sanctioned opportunities to discuss books read for pleasure in the classroom context, very little data could be collected about this experience.

Mutually supportive strategies

While best delivered separately, silent reading and book discussion clearly have the potential to be highly mutually supportive. Children benefit from self-selection of books, rather than having choices imposed upon them (e.g., Krashen, 2004), however, schools are not necessarily effective at teaching children how to make appropriate choices (Mackey, 2014). In recent times, young people have identified issues with book choice as a key barrier to their reading frequency (Merga, 2016a; Merga & Mat Roni, 2017a). This paper suggests that enjoyment of silent reading can be very much dependent on enjoyment of the selected book, and peer recommendation through book discussions is a particularly powerful tool in addressing these issues with book selection, as 'recommendations gained in book discussions provided exposure to a broader range of books and genres, supporting future book choices' (Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2017, p. 9), and they were favourably viewed by respondents in this study also.

Best delivered separately

However, findings would tend to suggest caution when considering blending silent reading with book discussion, with book discussion best situated before or after the silent reading experience, and minimised during. While some children enjoyed the opportunity for quiet discussion during silent reading, far more found this distracting. While this research suggests that silent reading is favourably perceived, and that book discussion could be enjoyable for students, blending of the two is not advised. Firstly, not all readers want to socialise around books; just as there are types of adolescent (Howard, 2008) or adult (Merga, 2017a) readers who prefer their reading to be a solitary experience, some children, as Brett so succinctly explained, desire 'to have the adventure of reading the book' by themselves. While some of these students may be

happy to discuss books should the opportunity arise when it is not limiting reading time, we can't unequivocally assume that just because reading is a social practice and increasing the social capital of reading can be associated with positive attitudes toward reading, that all students will necessarily enjoy this, particularly if they fit the profile of Howard's (2008) Voluntary Solitary Readers, who do not desire to 'discuss their reading with their peers' (p. 115), or Merga's escapist reader, who may even use books as 'a shield against unwanted social interactions' (p. 152). Secondly, it is the silent opportunity for reading that is most attractive to many students, as highlighted by a number of respondents in this research. Finally, quality of discussion and mutual interest of respondents would need to also be considered; while some of the young respondents showed remarkable persistence in the face of parental disinterest, unsurprisingly, shared interest has been previously identified as a key variable in fostering book discussion in adolescence (e.g., Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2017), and it is likely that this factor may also apply to this younger demographic. Further research should explore these areas, ideally collecting survey data from a large quantitative sample, in order to determine if these findings have generalisability, and to capture further data around reader profiles and preferences.

Limitations

While this paper draws on experiences from children across 24 Western Australian schools, the sample is small and the data are qualitative; though they provide valuable exploratory findings, generalisability is limited. The study is also subject to the limitations of self-report.

Conclusion

While both silent reading and book discussions have the potential to be powerful, mutually supportive strategies to improve students' value of reading and frequency of engagement in the practice, these strategies are not always privileged within the contemporary classroom, with book discussions around reading for pleasure particularly neglected. These strategies should form part of a regular school-wide incentive to increase young people's engagement in reading in response to the decline in reading frequency as children move through the years of schooling, and they should be delivered consistently and separately, though in close relation to each other.

However, I acknowledge the challenges to this recommendation presented by the current assessment-focused, high-stakes context of contemporary schools. This outcomes-driven neo-liberal environment which emphasises assessment denies an environment that fosters engagement and enjoyment as valued components of the learning experience. Teachers and schools must face the challenges of an overburdened curriculum and the competing interests it encompasses, along with persistent pressures to prepare students for high-stakes testing (Polesel, Rice & Dulfer, 2014). This emphasis is not without impact on children's perception of reading; previous research from the WASCBR suggests that many children view reading as something to be done for the purposes of assessment, and that 'students may transition from learning to read, to reading to learn, with reading for pleasure resolutely side-lined in favour of functional, test-oriented reading' (Merga, 2016b, p. 262).

In addition, silent reading and book discussion differ from the typical experience of texts in contemporary schools, where books are often encountered 'as fragments, a few pages read each lesson stretched over many weeks, the reading interrupted by oral and written literary analysis where teachers assume that students have comprehended what they read' (Westbrook, Sutherland, Oakhill & Sullivan, 2018, p. 1). As such, activities responsive to both reading enjoyment and skill development do not always adhere to the typical traits of traditional learning experiences using books, which can also influence teachers' willingness to engage in these practices.

Nonetheless, despite these challenges, school cultures and classrooms should actively attempt to increase their use of effective models of both silent reading and book discussions. As I have explored elsewhere, the Australian Curriculum and whole-school literacy plans and policies give insufficient attention to the role of enjoyment in reading engagement and related literacy skill development and maintenance (Merga & Gardiner, 2018). Promoting the position of reading for enjoyment in the curriculum is likely to have a significant impact on school policy and the adoption of practices that support engagement such as those described in this paper. This curricular recognition should be given as soon as possible.

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Commonplace Books: Writing and a Sense of Self in the 21st Century English Classroom

Pauline Griffiths

Abstract: The ancient literary form of commonplace books offers rich possibilities to students and teachers of English in Australian schools in the 21st century. By briefly tracing early uses of commonplace books and examining contemporary approaches to the teaching of writing, this paper re-imagines the 15th century commonplace book as a personal learning tool capable of revitalising the writing-thinking-learning connection for English students in Australian schools.

In its most customary form, 'commonplacing', as it was called, involved transcribing interesting or inspirational passages from one's reading, assembling a personalised encyclopedia of quotations. Steven Johnson (2010) describes this type of writing in the following way: as

It was a kind of solitary version of the original web logs: an archive of interesting tidbits that one encountered during one's textual browsing. The great minds of the period – Milton, Bacon, Locke – were zealous believers in the memory-enhancing powers of the commonplace book.

Historian Robert Darnton (2000) claims that the era of the commonplace book reached its peak in the late Renaissance, although commonplacing as a practice probably began in the 12th century and remained widespread among the Victorians. John Locke, the scholar most often associated with this practice, used a commonplace book during his studies at Oxford in 1652. His widely studied book, *A New Method for Making Common-Place-Books* (1706), proposes an index system for compiling, classifying and systematising information. Locke further identifies two reasons for maintaining a commonplace book: first, to help understand why we collect information; second, to commit to remembering the content we have chosen to remember.

In her essay, *Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Lucia Dacome (2004) identifies a nexus between Locke's conception of commonplacing as an arena for compiling and ordering knowledge for self-improvement and understanding of the world, and his conception of a sense of self that lies in conscious memory. This nexus is worthy of examination by 21st century teachers of English and may connect directly with methods for teaching and curriculum outcomes. Lockean commonplacing, widespread in the 18th century, was practiced within a discursive context to do with the nature of the self. Dacome points out that, while it may now be a widely shared assumption of Western (post)modernity that the 'self lies in the mind', during Locke's time, the idea that self-identity is coextensive and interdependent on memory and self-knowledge was controversial (2004, p. 605).

The context within which learning occurs in Australian schools has elements in common with learners and thinkers of earlier centuries. The concern for reducing vast amounts of knowledge to a manageable form that characterises our information age was also important for 17th, 18th and 19th century scholars who lived at a time of 'increasing concern for the

uncontrollable growth of the “Stock of Knowledge” (Blair, as cited in Dacome, 2004, p. 604).

Similarly, the connection between learning and a sense of self is just as vital for 21st century students as it was for those in the 17th century. In his work, *Creative Schools*, Ken Robinson notes that ‘learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills and [that] from the moment they are born, young children have a voracious attitude for learning’ (2015, p. xx). Robinson’s call for a ‘revolution’ in schooling, informed by ‘the value of the individual, the right to self-determination, the potential to evolve and live a fulfilled life and the importance of civic responsibility and respect for others’, (ibid. p. xxiv) suggests that learning and self-identity remain closely related, resonating with the Lockean debate defined above.

Commonplace books are intellectual spaces where writers identify and select ideas worthy of close study. They can be handwritten or digital, often taking time, care and even love. They can be shared intimately or exhibited formally. Their use can grow over time, eventually becoming integral to a student’s life. Commonplace books are cherished connections or ‘tangled mixes’ of writing and reading, suitable for students in a postmodern world who share some of the reading and learning habits of early commonplacers who, according to historian Darnton,

read in fits and starts and jumped from book to book. They broke texts into fragments and assembled them into new patterns by transcribing them in different sections of their notebooks. Then they reread the copies and rearranged the patterns while adding more excerpts. Reading and writing were therefore inseparable activities. They belonged to a continuous effort to make sense of things, for the world was full of signs: you could read your way through it; and by keeping an account of your readings, you made a book of your own, one stamped with your personality. (Darnton, as cited in Johnson, 2010)

The writing-thinking-learning connection

The intersection between commonplace books and learning may lie in the writing-thinking-learning connection. This concept, outlined by Roslyn Petelin in her book, *How Writing Works* (2017), notes that writing helps us think, learn and understand. Professional writers have long been aware of this connection. Author Stephen King describes writing as ‘refined thinking’ (2001, p. 131). Similarly, E.M. Forster has said, ‘How do I know what I think until I see what I say?’ and Joan Didian once wrote, ‘Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would

have been no reason to write’ (Forster and Didian, as cited in Petelin, 2017, p. 5). Thus, writing is epistemic: it constructs and creates knowledge. It generates ideas, as Petelin suggests:

When we start to put words on the page or on the screen, we discover what we are really thinking much more deeply than when we mentally visualise our topic before we write. We think about what we’ve learned and learn about what we think, which makes the whole process circular and generative. (2017, p. 6)

In his analysis of theories of teaching writing, Ken Hyland surveys a number of teaching methods that he categorises as ‘writer-oriented approaches to teaching’ (2016, p. 154), which emphasise the writer as an independent producer of texts. Hyland categorises these approaches as being characterised by personal creativity, cognitive processes, and the writer’s immediate social context.

The first of these, termed ‘writing as self-expression’, has the goal of fostering students’ expressive abilities, encouraging them to find their own voices to produce writing that is fresh and spontaneous (Hyland, 2016, p. 154). The second approach, ‘writing as a cognitive process’, Hyland argues is a teaching method which recognises that basic cognitive processes are central to writing activity and stress the need to develop students’ abilities to plan, define a rhetorical problem and propose and evaluate solutions (2016, p. 155). This extends the ‘expressivist approach to provide students with the resources to produce texts modelled on the processes of expert writers.(Hyland, 2016, p. 268)’ Hyland describes a third approach of writer-oriented teaching as ‘writing as a situated act,(2016, p. 156)’ a concept particularly important for schoolteachers. This approach sees writing as a socially situated process of making meaning through texts; therefore, becoming a competent writer is not just a linguistic or cognitive process, but also a sociocultural one that requires learners to appropriate the meanings created in the contexts within which they operate.

Each of Hyland’s three types of writer-oriented teaching methods illustrates the writing-thinking-learning connection, giving students opportunities to put a concrete form to their ideas, pursue an idea by writing about it, moving from the simple trivial and generalised to the more complex and significant, and developing an internal monologue on the ideas under consideration via the use of phrasing, connectors, signposts, inclusions, exclusions and structure. In these ways, the writing-thinking-learning connection helps

'generate self-awareness of the writer's social position and literate possibilities' (Freire, as cited in Hyland, 2016, p. 8), as well as facilitate 'clear thinking, effective relating and satisfying self-expression' (Moffat, as cited in Hyland, p. 12).

Commonplace books and writing for self-expression

The commonplace book, a form of journal, is an example of the first of Hyland's writer-oriented approaches to the teaching of writing. Today, practitioners of wide-ranging professional fields espouse the practice of journalling in, for example, business management, medicine, tourism, professional writing, science, visual arts, and drama, to name just a few. Creating and maintaining a journal develops the writing-thinking-learning connection by allowing the author to be introspective and self-aware of their own thoughts. It can be a private conversation with oneself and a safe place to experiment with different writing styles. It is a place for brainstorming, keeping lists, or being organised and focused. It is a place to record past accomplishments and milestones and for storing source materials, such as snippets of writing, images, videos, and websites for sharing with others in blogs and assignments. According to Petelin, 'double-entry' journals are particularly valuable because they allow for deeper learning:

A double-entry journal – that is, a journal in which you reflect in a meta-entry on what you have written previously ... [allows you to] expand on your learning, achieve perspective, remember and take stock of where you have been, synthesise, self-evaluate, and delight in your progress. (2017, p. 8)

When teachers encourage students to keep a journal, they usually see their teaching role as providing opportunities for students to make their own meanings within a positive and cooperative environment with minimal teacher intervention; the offering of models and suggestions is also minimal. This sort of autonomy is powerful. It was well understood by prominent journal keepers such as John Milton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, E.M. Forster, Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain and New Zealand's 2001–2003 Poet Laureate, Elizabeth Smither. Virginia Woolf writes about her habit of commonplacing:

Let us take down one of those old notebooks which we have all, at one time or another, had a passion for beginning ... Here we have written down the names of great

writers in their order of merit; here we have copied out fine passages from the classics; here are lists of books to be read; and here, most interesting of all, lists of books that have actually been read, as the reader testifies with some youthful vanity by a dash of red ink. (Woolf, as cited in Eagan, 2016)

These writers show that when personal writing, in the form of a commonplace book or journal, is treated as a thinking-learning problem-solving process, it can be pleasurable, and pleasure can lead to what Ken Macrorie calls the first requirement of good writing: truth. Truthful writing is not *the* truth (who knows what that is?). Rather, it is 'some kind of truth – a connection between the things written about, the words used in the writing and, [the writer's] real experience of the world as [they] know it' (Macrorie, 1984, p. 14).

Commonplace books and writing as a cognitive process

While journalling, a heavily personalised form of writing and learning, is certainly one type that allows students to pursue the writing-thinking-learning connection, the cognitive process model of writing is also important. Texts produced by cognitive process approaches to writing are more commonly referred to by teachers as 'academic writing', a term used to describe the day-to-day writing that school students do that shows what they know and think (Meyers, 2005; Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Academic writing is usually non-fiction, but not always. It can be free writing that explores ideas or short answer questions for classmates, teachers or examiners. It can be a paragraph defining or comparing concepts, or extended writing that investigates a subject deeply. It can be an 'exit slip' where students write a brief statement about what they have learned during the lesson. It can be writing that informs, persuades, or entertains; it can be assessed or unassessed. In short, it is all the writing, formal and informal, that students do in schools in the course of their learning.

Academic writing does many of the things that journal writing does not: it has its own set of quite rigid rules and practices which are organised around a formal order or structure in which to present ideas; it ensures that ideas are supported by author citations in the literature. Academic writing deals with the underlying concepts and causes which govern the processes and practices in everyday life, and explores alternative explanations for these events. It has a particular 'tone' and adheres to traditional conventions of punctuation, grammar, and spelling.

The best research on the teaching of academic writing for school students comes from the field of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and academic support centres at universities where it has been used to assist a wide range of students with diverse needs (Casanave, 2004; Leki, Cumming & Silver, Hyland, 2016, p. 155). Support units in universities such as those of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Massey University, and the University of Canberra provide teachers and students with explicit tools to master academic writing.

Like universities, Australian schools have students from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds with diverse learning needs. Such diversity requires the teaching of the writing-thinking-learning connection to be inclusive and personalised, as well as explicit and rule-based.

As commonplace books are effective tools for teaching students to collect, classify, question, evaluate, and apply information knowledge and ideas, they are useful spaces for embracing the complex material often required of writing tasks. Writing scholar Joseph Williams recommends the use of such tools in his seminal work *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*:

When presenting complex new knowledge, first sketch a thematic structure that is too simple to reflect the complex reality of the subject; only then qualify, elaborate and modify it (1990, p. xvi).

Thus, commonplace books are useful writing-thinking-learning places for students to acquire and practice the tools and techniques of academic writing.

Commonplace books and writing as a situated act

Schools privilege writing over other modes of communication, particularly in assessment tasks, for example, Year 12 examinations and formal tasks throughout secondary school. While this may not have been so much the case in previous times – for example, in Locke’s time, literacy was still somewhat rarefied and speaking was the main mode of communication – today, everyone is a writer, or at least expected to be.

Yet even though students engage in some kind of writing nearly every day of their school lives, many reach Year 12 feeling incompetent, unconfident and disengaged from the act of writing. They often believe they don’t know how to write well and they feel they have learned habits of writing falsely. This is worrying because, just as Robertson describes young children as voracious learners, so too they are voracious writers. Early years students are often eager writers,

thrilled by the discovery of it, the possibilities of it, and the newness of learning that it allows. Early learners usually want to write, are excited by it, and feel like giants when they learn. Yet, some eleven or so years later, the picture is very different for many senior students. Macrorie claims, ‘At times, children make memorable statements in writing ... [b]ut as they advance in school, their language turns ever duller and emptier’ (1984, p. 100). He calls this kind of writing ‘Engfish’ (1984, p. 12), a sort of fishing around for words that is evident in our writing; teachers sometimes also describe this ‘as over writing’.

Perhaps it is the situation of the classroom and the wider culture of the school that, somewhat ironically, causes students to produce writing that is pretentious and phony, perhaps imitating the style of adults who themselves are often poor writers. Instead, the classroom situation needs to provide students with learning experiences that enable them to produce texts that are authentic and truthful.

Therefore, classroom arrangements are important considerations in shaping the situation within which students write. Grouping practices – how students are asked to work together with tools like computers and resources – can mediate their relations and set up classrooms as sites for interactions and relationships. By acknowledging and understanding the role that the culture of the classroom has on the writing process, teachers can then see it as a resource for teaching writing and understand that writing involves not just the expressive and cognitive strategies of journaling and academic writing but is also impacted by the personal histories of the individual learners and teachers within it – in other words, classroom and school culture. Thus, the classroom situational context within which students write can both assist or constrain acts of writing, depending on how the teacher facilitates things.

Assessment of students’ writing by their teachers is another part of the situation in which students learn to write, and two defining documents frame the assessment process. First is the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, published by the Australian Institute for School Leadership (AITSL, 2011), which teachers use to gauge their practice. These Standards, organised around three areas – Professional Knowledge, Practice and Engagement – define the way English teachers approach the task of organising their classrooms, implementing methods and pedagogies, and reporting on student progress along a continuum of career

stages. Second is the *Australian Curriculum: English* published by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which lists and maps the content through each of the developmental stages of schooling. Organised around the three Strands – Language, Literature and Literacy – the many content descriptions are the areas in which students must demonstrate achievement. These two administrative frameworks, along with others, which may vary from school to school, faculty to faculty, and sector to sector, are very much a part of the situation within which students practice their writing.

In these situations, the use of a commonplace book can be an effective strategy that allows students to negotiate their way through the events that shape their daily writing: commonplace books can build a writer's confidence; are conducive to classroom arrangements that cultivate a writing culture; and may assist students to more confidently navigate their way through the assessment regime.

Conclusion

When personalised writing in the form of commonplace books and cognitive process writing in the form of academic writing practices are offered to students, along with strategies to assist their understanding of how their classroom and school environment impacts them as writers, then the conditions for good writing are created. Students may then be able to produce texts that illustrate some of the writing behaviours outlined by Macrorie:

[Good writers] do not waste words and they choose words wisely; they speak in an authentic voice and they put the reader there, make them believe; they cause things to happen for the reader and they create contrasts and oppositions; they build; they ask something of the reader and they reward the reader with meaning; they present ideas, actions or details that are solid, like an apple with its core and flesh, and however small or momentary, are rounded and complete in themselves. (1984)

Being a good writer is what every English teacher wants for their students who live, think and learn in 'the writing-reliant arenas of the 21st century' (Petelin 2017, ix). Indeed, in the knowledge economy, Deborah Brandt says that 'writing has become the work of our time' (as cited in Petelin, 2017, p. 1). And, journalist Clive Thompson claims that, worldwide, people produce 3.6 trillion words on the Web every day (as cited in Petelin, 2017, p. 1). Indeed, with the rise of

the Internet, people who can 'research, analyse, write, edit, think critically and creatively with technological competence and design sensibility' are the workers of the future (2017, p. 1).

This paper puts forward the case for a re-imagined use of the 18th century commonplace book as a daily writing-thinking-learning tool for students. New and innovative uses of the commonplace book can sustain the joy of learning. A curiosity and love of learning is a trait evident in students in the early years of schooling, but it often diminishes as students move through school. A commonplace book that is guided by the research on writer-oriented teaching approaches and other elements of good writing can assist all students and teachers to confidently explore ideas, rules, models, and exemplars from an infinite variety of sources as they practise the art and craft of writing.

Notes

- 1 One of the best contemporary digital commonplace books is Maria Popova's Brain Pickings: <https://www.brainpickings.org>.
- 2 Here, Hyland cites T. Kostouli's work, (Ed.) (2005). *Writing in context(s): Textual practices and learning processes in sociocultural settings* (New York: Springer), as an example of research that reports that the social group of the class is likely to interact with the situated personal histories of the individual learners within it.
- 3 See the RMIT Learning Lab: <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/welcome>; Massey University's Online Writing and Learning Link: <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/main/about.php>; and the University of Canberra's Study Skills Centre: <https://www.canberra.edu.au/current-students/canberra-students/student-support/study-skills>.

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PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

In this section, Graeme Withers provides a personal perspective on his experience developing a national guide to literacy in the 1980s.

National Guide to Literacy – Graeme Withers

Introduction: Before the fall: A pre-lapsarian view of literacy education before the Australian Curriculum, NAPLAN, Genre etc.

The main intent of this article is to provide a brief introduction to a document which is available in full on the AATE website, in the section *AATE Archive*. That document is:

Withers, G.P. (1989) *National Guide to Literacy, Volume One: Teaching and Assessing for Literacy – 8 year olds*

I wrote the bulk of this work (*NGL* hereafter) in 1988, and the state you will see on the website was achieved early in 1989. The timing and circumstances of its preparation, and the educational context of language instruction and assessment at the time are key themes here. To these I add some observations about the passage of almost thirty years, and the changes and innovations in language instruction and assessment that teachers might now be interested in responding to.

The very origin of this book is as clear in my mind as yesterday. The UNESCO International Year of Literacy – 1989 – was looming, and as an Australian celebration, the Commonwealth, through its Schools Commission, was proposing preparation of a three-part study dealing with teaching, assessing, and learning for literacy amongst 8, 10 and 12 year olds. The eventual product was to be what Schools Commission Chairman, Garth Boomer, described to me as a ‘coffee-table book’, full of illustrations as well as text, and distributed to all Australian schools. I was at the time a senior research officer in the Measurement and Evaluation division of the Australian Council for Educational Research and I started work early in 1988, and the sand-boy feeling grew as I found the research design to be even more effective than I’d first envisaged. By the beginning of 1989, the dream was over. The contract had been suspended with no

explanation offered. ‘Whole-language learning’ and ‘language across the curriculum’ had been supplanted by powerful new pushes on the block – more ‘rigorous’ classroom approaches and more academic styles of teacher training. No-one was to know it had ever been otherwise.

I hurriedly printed two copies of the text, hid them in my office, and more or less complied with the government ukase. Over time, all the materials intended for illustrations were lost, as were the administrative files that included the list of participating teachers. In the AATE website copy, I’ve recorded the first names of the 29 teachers whose work is used in the text – there were teachers from every state and territory, from State, Catholic and independent systems, and inner-suburban, outer suburban and country schools. I also have a letter from a later director of the Curriculum Corporation withdrawing the embargo and assigning me permission to publish with my own copyright, which I have now assigned on to AATE. Should any readers of this article recognise themselves as participants in the study, I would love to hear from them.

It seems to me that the late 1980s were a particularly happy time in the lives of Australian teachers, particularly English teachers: strong professional associations, nationally and in the states; independence in their classrooms; curriculum documents in each state and territory (and AATE itself) which gave advice and reference points for classroom practice in instruction and assessment (remarkably consistent in their point of view as the review of them in the *NGL* shows). There were multiple opportunities for in-service education and a steady stream of visitors from overseas, particularly the ‘British invasion’ starting in 1980 from the London Association for the Teaching of English: James Britton, Harold Rosen, John Dixon – and the books, articles and presentations they brought as luggage. Of all these things, teacher independence was the greatest, with an amazing degree of respect for, and responsiveness to, teachers’ responsibilities, as the *NGL* demonstrates. So it was, at evening in the Garden of Eden.

Why open this time capsule now? Many of the children learning in the classrooms I visited are teachers

themselves. I retired from ACER ten years ago, and since then ex-colleagues and others have consistently put pressure on me to offer the *NGL* for publication. More recently I had to dig out some material on another issue, I opened the capsule, found the *NGL* copies, and re-read the text. Maybe it still has relevance to 2018? Good practice never goes away. Maybe that wheel has turned. Minor emendations and excisions have been made to the original text on the AATE website, for clarity, and to cover missing materials. But available at last will be what remains of 'the coffee-table' book, and some justice belatedly offered to the participants.

Some idea of the scope and sequence of the *NGL* is given by its Table of Contents and the chapter headings. For example:

- 2 *What the Curriculum Documents Tell Us About Assessment*
- 4 *Assessing the Products of the Writing Process*
- 5 *Assessment in a Reading Rich Environment*
- 6 *Language Across the Curriculum*
- 7 *Literature Across the Curriculum;*
- 8 *Purposes and Audiences: Forms and Genres*
- 9 *Programming for Literacy Achievement*
- 10 *Recording and Reporting Assessment of Literacy Achievement*
- 11 *Developing a School Language Policy*
- 12 *Special Issues in Literacy Assessment (Aborigines; ESL; Girls and Gender Equity: Gifted Children)*

These chapters are supported by several summary or overview segments:

- 1 *What This Book is About*
- 3 *What Two Teachers Tell Us About Assessment*
- 13 *The State of the Art*

The research design was simple. Senior officers in State and Catholic systems were asked to nominate teachers known to them as excellent professionals – in city and country schools – and make the initial contact using a flier from me giving a general indication of intention. Teachers who agreed contacted me directly and I sent each an 'opinionaire' which sought their views on a number of issues, to give me a start in planning visits, and covering the ground I had in mind given the chapter headings above. They replied to the opinionaire in writing or on tape, and from these replies I made a final selection. One or two whom I discarded from that list wrote back saying how disappointed they were at being excluded, so back they went on to the list! Given the nature of primary school

staffing, the great majority were women, so I had to be careful to grab all the males on offer.

When the time came for their visit, I contacted each again to find out exactly what might be happening in their classroom on the day. Several would be team teaching; one was fostering an intern – and these others got to be involved in the project too. Everything was tape-recorded. Chapter 3 is a record of a team teaching period, and is particularly interesting in the way the discussion and insights built from the interactions and diversity of viewpoint. At the conclusion of the meeting, I hit the school's photocopier and copied the student work which had been discussed, and when the interview tapes had been transcribed back at ACER, I mailed back copies to the teachers in case they had any second thoughts about what they had said. A few did. Sometimes, I carried away copies of documents the students wanted me to have: illustrations, Big Books, other work they were proud of. Later, I would sometimes get additional material from a teacher, often at great length: the material about Aboriginal education from Michael, a teacher in Arnhem Land, reprinted in Chapter 12, was – no, is still – a magnificent contribution to the *NGL* and its potential to inform the Australian teaching profession as a whole, not just on language matters.

One more nugget: it's not the intention of this paper to summarise everything that remains valuable in the *NGL*, but here's a case of something being buried in the text that took a while to become obvious elsewhere. In a Catholic primary school in suburban Melbourne in the 20th century, Geraldine made the following comment:

ESL students in our school are rather fortunate because they are so few in number that they are assimilated very quickly. However the disadvantage may be that the children miss out on maintaining mother-tongue skills. *If children can maintain mother tongue-skills they are able to work at their cognitive level.* But if their mother-tongue skills slip back waiting for their English skills to develop, it forms a platform in their cognitive development.

Had the *NGL* been available, the insight might well have reached the light of day and common practice a bit earlier than it did otherwise.

When I was discussing the possibility of a paper introducing publication of the *NGL* with an ex-colleague, he said that one thing I should/could do is 'see how it racks up against the national curriculum'. I groaned at the prospect of coming to terms with a document I'd never read, no doubt extensive and complicated.

How curriculum docs have changed over the last 30 years! In the 1980s there were Frameworks, but then in the 90s curriculum docs got more and more detailed; remember the Curriculum and Standards Framework that was the size of the contemporary phone book? But then things got stripped back in the 2000s. When I opened the website to find the section on Year 4, I was surprised to find how slim-line the corpus of documentation was. And how limited the assessment levels: just three – *Satisfactory*, *Above Satisfactory* and *Below Satisfactory* – with various portfolios attached. It wasn't going to take weeks of reading after all.

What, by comparison with the *NGL*, is missing from the national curriculum exemplars is a rich store of actual student work, of various kinds, with students at various stages of development working on the same task and teachers talking about how they deal with this diversity, in classroom practice and during assessment. My estimate is that over 90% of the text of the *NGL* consists of transcriptions of teachers and students speaking and writing in their classrooms, during, or in connection with, the school visits I made. The national curriculum documents offer a number of work samples, in a limited range of situations, and a commentary alongside saying what salient features of the work sample might be. But the document doesn't give precise information about how a practising teacher might regard them, deal with them, or fit them into a classwide development program or individual student improvement strategy. I have no doubt the teams that developed the national curriculum itself and the Learning Progressions did so scrupulously, and have been duly edited out of the acknowledgements, as have the teachers who participated in trialling. But that's part of the problem: where's the whiff of the classroom? And where is the variety of such classrooms, State and Catholic, city, country, to enliven and drive the understandings and practice of *their* successors?

Last year, when I was first considering the prospect of a paper discussing the *NGL* and proposing its wider dissemination, the news came through that ACARA had commissioned a paper from Stanley Rabinowitz, an American computer expert, exploring the possibility of computer-scoring of NAPLAN writing papers, to save time and money. My immediate reaction was a rise in blood pressure and the realisation that this, if implemented, would be the final straw in a long history of insulting English teachers, reducing their independence and denigrating their expertise by making them totally superfluous to the business of national literacy

assessment. So I decided to go ahead with this paper, and an attempt to get the *NGL* into circulation. Since the Rabinowitz commission was executed and received by ACARA, things have improved a little. Professor Les Perelman from MIT became involved, facilitated by the NSW Teacher's Federation. Les's work has had a wonderful impact. The NSW Education Minister said he would not support computer scoring, and it eventually died as an idea.

NAPLAN itself is now under scrutiny. ACER has a long history of cutting-edge development of writing tests, of which it can be proud, which continues to 2018 and will further. These include diagnostic tests, achievement tests, for scholarship and public exam rooms, and for teachers to apply in their classrooms. The test represented by the 'L' in NAPLAN is emphatically not one of them: one, sometimes two, prompts to writing at a particular level, and the student's product to be assessed against all of a list of 10 (later 11) descriptors or characteristics that the marker might find in the writing. The descriptors have various 'scales' attached – some are marked out of 3, some 5. Later versions loaded the rubric of the test with 'direct instructions' on how to complete it. Shades of the old 'five-paragraph essay' our teachers loved: 'I strongly believe/ Firstly/Secondly/ Thirdly/ In conclusion, I strongly believe ...'. We have surely moved on from there. The results of such a paltry and denatured view of writing ability and standards are those that the press, State education departments, school Principals and even classroom teachers wax lyrical about on the day that the results are released. I'm not surprised that Departments and schools complain about declining standards as measured by this annual testing. Students know what's coming, know it's no big deal, and can't be bothered putting in the effort – that's my guess.

The reported decline in NAPLAN writing performance at grades 7 and 9 has occurred particularly since the turn to persuasive writing. The NAPLAN rubric encourages candidates to write a piece with an introduction, body and conclusion, in fact 'formulaic writing'. If this is taken to be the five paragraph formula above (as it is by many, apparently), encouraging older students to use it will depress performance. So what the NAPLAN materials create is a situation where persuasive writing will, all on its own, inhibit and depress performance. The more the formula is taught to older students, the weaker their performance is likely to be. Today's teachers will, I hope, read and be interested in the teacher talk in the *NGL* in a way that

they may not be interested in latter-day curriculum documents or the *NAPLAN Persuasive Marking Guide*. Here are three samples of such talk:

Chris: 'It's sort of hard to talk about one piece of work from a child you know really well, and just trying to isolate it from the rest of their work.'

Dale: 'I don't think you can take just this example from this one lesson and make judgements on the whole child from it ... you've got to know the children.'

Jill: 'I think to assess a child you've got to know so much more, extra information about what you gave them to do, and how it came about.'

This is what life could have been like for you had you been a teacher of 8-year-olds in the late 1980s. This is what the prevailing curriculum contexts, professional freedom and craft knowledge offered you. Summative assessment and reporting of student progress, such as no doubt occurred at the ends of terms and years, if contemporary student report books from the States are any guide, are not on display in the *NGL*. The focus is firmly on classroom process. There are many, many more examples of student work than are offered in the portfolios attached to the national curriculum. While none of it is reproduced in student handwriting, I can assure you the transcription to type has been

scrupulous, and checked by the teachers who participated. And not only quantity but variety as well. And on the hundreds, nay thousands, of pieces of student work I saw there was not a mark or a grade on any.

There can, of course, be no full-scale return to the Garden of Eden; Australia and its education systems have changed too radically for that to happen. But I'm publishing the *NGL* for two reasons. One is to do justice to the teachers who participated, expecting to be read and heard. The second is the hope that current and future members of the AATE and its state branches might dip into its pages, and occasionally come across something that chimes with their practice. And not just teachers of 8-year-olds, but those who teach in secondary schools as well. Participant teachers used to write to me after the project was finished, adding anything from fresh insights to details of their subsequent personal histories. I would be delighted if any of today's practitioners were ever moved to do likewise. I would love to hear from them, and I'm sure AATE would pass the comments on. And so, dear colleagues, here on the AATE website, is the *National Guide to Literacy* at last.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

Perspectives from the Past: *Achievements in Writing at 16+*, John Dixon and Leslie Stratta

Introduction by Wayne Sawyer and Larissa McLean Davies

Graeme Withers' piece in this section on *Perspectives from the Past* draws attention to the curriculum culture of the 1980s, which was a key period of rich and interesting worldwide work on assessment in English. Graeme there provides an introduction to his *National Guide to Literacy*, written in the late 1980s and now available on the AATE website in the archives. More broadly on assessment in the 1980s, in Australia Brian Johnston was showing us how to do formative assessment well and how to teach self assessment, as well as advocating for Work Required Assessment in place of simple grading, and in the UK Andrew Stibbs was presenting clear principles for assessment across reading and writing modes. But it was also a period in which generative work was being done in suggesting continua of development in areas of English – in writing in particular. Jennifer Dove in her article in this edition of *English in Australia* refers to the Crediton Project as a touchstone of such work. Wilkinson et al. in this project produced what still remains today a remarkable study of the long-term writing development of students. In order to gain their picture of writing development over time, the Crediton team set over a hundred students from three schools four written tasks. The students were given the tasks as part of their normal school work over a period of three months and the pieces were assessed in three age groups: ages seven, ten and thirteen. From this sample, the team attempted, in effect, to describe the characteristics of writing at these three age levels. From their analyses of the pieces produced by students in response to the four tasks, they derived four dimensions of growth in writing, two of which were a *Cognitive* model, based on language development in terms of sub-sets of 'Describing', 'Interpreting', 'Generalising' and 'Speculating' and a *Stylistic* model based on language development in terms of sub-sets of 'Syntax', 'Verbal Competence', 'Organisation',

'Cohesion', 'Writer's awareness of the reader' and 'Effectiveness' as well as a series of specific sub-sets for each of the four written tasks.

The extract we are presenting here is from one of a series of monographs produced by John Dixon and Leslie Stratta for the UK Schools Council in which they analysed writing submitted in coursework folders for the 16+ General Certificate of Education/Certificate of Secondary Education examination. Each monograph presented a different genre of writing, such as 'Narratives based on personal experience' and 'Narratives based on imagined experience'. In their work on analysing these narratives in particular, Dixon and Stratta produced a series of criteria against which to measure development. These 'staging points' of writing development arose out of their answering the following questions about the relevant coursework writing:

- What resources are used in setting and situation? (for imagined experience only)
- What kinds of ordering occur in the narratives? (for imagined and personal experience)
- What sort of readers are assumed in the narratives? (for imagined and personal experience)
- How comprehensive a viewpoint is presented by the writer? (for personal experience only) What significance is there in the point of view presented? (for imagined experience only)
- What are examples of significant uses of language? (for imagined and personal experience)

We present here an extract from their monograph on personal experience narratives. In this extract, one of the pieces chosen as representing an early staging point in the development of personal experience narratives ('The Outcast') is presented and analysed. Then, later in the extract, Dixon and Stratta discuss a model

of development they are hypothesising from examining these narratives of personal experience. Here we find student writing being analysed in significant terms that go far beyond concern with formulaic text-level structures or easily observable surface features, and attempting to say something of significance about the achievement of the piece, however 'elementary' this may be in the chosen example. It is interesting that they refer to their model as 'literary', a label that is appropriate in many ways. A mindset one might call 'literary' and directed towards language development or language analysis throws up, as we see here, a rich set of rhetorical possibilities for considering development as a writer. Here Dixon and Stratta consider areas such as point of view, commentary, sense of audience, plot structure, sentence structures, voice, tone (such as the potential for irony), the place of dialogue and characterisation.

Introducing a section into the journal titled *Perspectives from the Past* is not about creating a culture of 'everything was better in the past'. It does, however, represent a position on the importance of history and

of an historical perspective on curriculum. As with all the historical documents that will go into this section of the journal and into the AATE archives, *Achievements in Writing at 16+* represents the rich work (in this case on assessment) that constitutes the history of subject English and reminds us that things can be, and have been, done differently.

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PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

Extract from:

Achievements in Writing at 16+: Paper 1. Staging points reached in narratives based on personal experience. By John Dixon and Leslie Stratta. London Schools Council, 1981. Pages 1–3; 16–22.

1. Narratives based on personal experience (fictionalised or treated as fact).

Telling stories about ourselves and others is one of the early purposes that we all learn to use extended stretches of language for, and it remains vitally important throughout our lives. For a long time teachers of English have recognised the value of getting this kind of experience into words, first in oral story telling and then, additionally, in writing.... Yet, development in using writing to explore and understand personal experience is very uneven by this age. What different kinds of achievements can be expected, and how can they all be described, from the most elementary to the most complex? In this paper we offer a provisional way of answering these key questions, for discussion, criticism and modification. We have found in close scrutiny of the texts that the following four questions are central to our argument and effectively form a set of criteria:

- (a) What kinds of ordering or re-ordering occur as the writer imaginatively recovers the events of the past? And to what effect? For example, is the sequence retraced in an elementary way, or are there more complex transformations? Are past events re-organised at any point from a later position, with the benefit of hindsight?...
- (b) Is the writer automatically assuming or taking for granted a reader who is already acquainted with the setting, or the characters, or the events? Does s/he implicitly take into account readers without exactly similar experience, and possibly with different attitudes or points of view?
- (c) Does the writer remain largely egocentric, or is there a more comprehensive perspective developing in which thoughts and feelings of other participants are more fully acknowledged or realised? (This is a question about the authorial point of view, which may at times be ironically

at odds with the "I" of the story.)

- (d) What actual or potential understanding of the uses of language could be pointed to as significant? In what ways is the writer beginning to move from a relatively restricted range of choices (in the use of vocabulary and structure), and to develop a sense of appropriate forms and tacit or conscious rhetorical strategies to evoke more complex textures of experiences?
- (e) In answering all four questions we hope to be able to show the set of features in the language which support or validate our judgements. We realise that answers to any one question frequently interlock with the answers to others. Nevertheless, in analysing our examples we shall follow this framework, for the reader's convenience, indicating the focal questions in shorthand form.

2 An elementary example

The Outcast

I have got a friend and his name is les he comes up to his Grams every week and he works at the Back of the Kelvin flats he is 17 years old we go to the Baths every week and one week we went one Girl kept her eyes on les and I knew it But les didnt after a bit I told him about the Girl and he went red all of a sudden and showing off he started throwing me about in the water and Ducking me after everything he did he looked at the girl so I thought that I should go over and ask the Girl if She would go out with him and She Said yes then I went Back over and asked les I had already to him that she Said yes and he Said he didnt know and went Back in the water and Started Showing off again throwing me in the water he was ducking me and he was Still red and he was Blushing then it was time for me and les to go out, he wasnt reraly Bothered about the Girl So we went home.

What kinds of ordering? First, a friend is introduced, in a very simple fashion – his name, place of work and age. This friend appropriately is the focus of the story that follows. The writer retraces an elementary sequence of events, interpolating only one comment ('I knew it but Les didn't') and two minor interpretations

of Les's behaviour ('Started showing off'; 'wasn't really bothered').

What sort of readers? Told with animation to a circle of friends the story would certainly raise a laugh – more so if the group knew Les too. The bare reference to 'the Kelvin Flats' suggests that such a group is assumed unconsciously. For some adult readers there may be a specific interest in the simple and ingenuous quality of this account of adolescent behaviour, seen through the eyes of a participant. Nevertheless, we believe that most external readers would like to know more, to have the participants and some of the key moments more fully realised.

How comprehensive a viewpoint? The writer is interested in his friend – indeed the point of the story is Les's response as the girl watches him and as she agrees to go out with him. Although brief, the observation here is pointed and even shrewd. By contrast 'the girl' is totally unrealised. As author, his perceptions seem to have gained little from distancing: they may be simply those of himself at the time.

What significant uses of language? The language seems to be almost completely unselfconscious. The focus is on actions, evoked in the simplest of vocabulary and sentence structures. Whenever speech occurs it is reported as briefly as possible – there is no demonstrable quotation.

There is no evidence that the writer recognises written sentences – in fact, he hasn't assimilated the contrast between capitals and lower case. (Is this related to the absence of any literary echo?)

The one point of elaboration worth mentioning is the quite careful indication of timing ('after a bit', 'all of a sudden', 'after everything he did ...').

In general, then, the writer is drawing on very elementary resources of written language, and within those limitations, he writes entertainingly for an audience that knows him.

A tentative hypothesis

The oral model

It seems from narratives such as 'The Outcast' that at an elementary staging point the main organising principles rely heavily on spoken models. There are four features particularly that were noted in the spoken narratives of 13–16 year olds collected by Edina Eisikovits, and analysed in her joint paper with John

Dixon:

1. a reliance on simple clauses
2. connected by an elementary set of conjunctions (and, but, then)
3. with almost exclusive use of central verbs (said, went ...)
4. and a minimum use of 'commentary' associated with the main sequence of events (the 'plot')

These are common features throughout 'The Outcast'. It could be, of course, that writers at this stage are severely constrained by their struggles with the written medium and that in their oral stories they are already organising their stories in more sophisticated ways. If so, writing represents a relative regression in their ability to organise stories with a more complex structure. It would be interesting to check whether this is so, or not, especially in the light of Edina Eisikovits' tapes, drawn from 'remedial' groups – which seem to suggest that difference lies in the growing lengths of story and the increasing proportion of 'commentary'.

We note, in addition, that the emphasis in such stories seems to fall on external behaviour, though some 'internal' events are beginning to be registered, embryonically. What's more, because of the thinness of commentary, the reader is often left uncertain as to how to interpret important actions (and accompanying feelings, which are generally left very unshaped or inexplicit). Thus, from a teaching point of view, such stories *need* to be read aloud (as effectively as possible) to bring out potential significance.

In treating this as a script for reading aloud, however, the teacher is left with a fair degree of uncertainty about what interpretation to give. Perhaps in part this is because the action verbs are so basic: '*kept* her eyes on ... I *knew* it ... Les *didn't*' – there's no hint here to suggest amusement, irony, knowingness, or any of the effects one could easily bring out in a dramatic rendering. (This suggests a line for later development.) So to tell this story well, one has to fill out its significance imaginatively, and because it is in an oral tradition, a good reader won't find that too difficult. There are powerful dramatic possibilities well beyond the simplicity of the text.

Equally, stories as simple as this need to be read with care: we know from earlier literary texts (notably the Bible) and from modern authors who deliberately choose this model, that it is capable of a wide range of narrative effects. In a story like 'The Good Samaritan', for instance, the clauses are elementary, but the structure of the story implies a more comprehensive

perspective on the people and the events. Writers who realise such possibilities are at a later stage of development than our first student.

Perhaps the first question for us as teacher is whether this writer is able to do more, if we look at other stories he has produced. If not, how can we help him to produce stories with a wider significance for himself and his listeners? The discussion of the next three staging points may suggest some lines of direction.

A transitional phase?

There are many features of the oral model still present in 'My First Date', as we showed in an earlier analysis: simple clauses, an elementary set of conjunctions, many central verbs. Nevertheless, at least three changes of importance have occurred:

1. Paragraphing has emerged because the writer is shaping the story into episodes, each marking a new step in the action,
2. Forward and backward-looking commentary by the narrator is beginning to interpret the main actions.
3. Speech is beginning to take an important role in the story, and to be rendered reasonably faithfully.

If the writer of 'The Outcast' was struggling with the written medium, this writer seems to be much more at ease and able to write extensively – despite the heavier demands of paragraphing and speech punctuation. He is beginning to convey some actions a little more delicately: 'John gave me a nudge and said ... I said enquiringly ... I interrupted their conversation once more and asked ... I quickly said.' These are the kind of cues that were missing in 'The Outcast' and which help to round out a dramatic reading. Equally, other features such as comments from the narrator ('I could see I was the one ... I felt a bit of relief ...') begin to suggest something of his personality.

Of course, these changes could well develop within the spoken model. Are there any signs that the writer is aware of other models? The way the episodes are marked, step by step, seem to suggest an acquaintance with simply literary forms:

All of a sudden

So I started the conversation

Our first advance on them did not ...

The two girls were just about to leave ...

So we set off ...

As we arrived ...

This effect is reinforced by the way the steps are laid

out as paragraphs on the page. However, the transition is still an elementary one.

The tendency at times to move into a rather formal style is further evidence, in our view, that the writer is moving away from a strictly oral model. We have already mentioned a number of phrases that give this impression: they suggest an uneasy tension between a basic oral model and a developing feel for a literary model. Is this a characteristic problem for a developing writer who is less than steeped in literary forms? If so, this may often result – as here – in awkward turns of phrase that detract from the authenticity of the piece. However, there are also signs that at appropriate moments a more casual style is being mastered, as we have already pointed out.

The other two features we have drawn attention to (commentary forward and backward, and speech) belong equally to an oral and literary tradition. The development they point to lies in the complexity of the story's significance, and the way the writer is able to use these features to present and interpret it. They seem to work in complementary directions. Reflective glances, and glances ahead, open the way for more complex interpretation of the events, and it is significant that this writer has only begun the process. Extensive use of speech, on the other hand, helps to develop and round out the characters, to present them dramatically and directly, rather than interpret them. Each of these features can develop independently, or both may develop together.

Writers who are in transition from oral to literary models are almost bound to veer between one and the other. So there is an unevenness of tone, which teachers have remarked on. Nevertheless, we would expect to find a large group of students in this transitional phase, when writing narratives, even at the age of 16. For teachers the problem seems to be how to assist the fundamental transition, rather than merely comment on surface infelicities.

The literary model: an early phase

Perhaps the most striking change is the relative rarity of conjunctions like *and*, *but* or *then*, and the rarity of simple clauses, other than in speech. The building blocks of the oral model have now been discarded. What replaces them is a range of choices. So when simple sentences are used, they are deliberately chosen to suggest, for example, laconic speech or inertia.

'Everybody thought. It was always the same. Nothing to Do.'

The writer even eliminates the verb, and gains an effect by this choice. The model incorporates:

1. a choice from a variety of simple and complex sentences
2. a choice of whether to use conjunctions to suggest certain effects (flow or continuity of action), or to omit them in order to imply other effects;
3. some variation on the central verbs;
4. the development of dialogue – rather than commentary in this case – and especially as an indication of character and in furthering the action

In effect, this new range of choices enables the writer to evoke, through a delicate range of rhythmic variation, more complex shifts in mood than we have seen in the earlier pieces. The first five paragraphs, if they are read aloud, quickly establish the new importance of rhythm and confirm that these effects are central to the writer's intention. There is a movement from cheerful bustle (from which the narrator stands rather aloft) to the boredom in the café.

These rhythmic effects are achieved both within the narrative and within the dialogue. At the opening, the writer is more expansive; thus the clauses are longer and more complex. As the story gathers pace, the effect is achieved partly by the dialogue, which is staccato at key moments –

'No. I need too much money ...'

'I've got it ...'

'Yeh. That's good.'

– and partly by the deft way in which the writer selects, prunes and juxtaposes her paragraphs.

'We'll meet here tomorrow at around ten ...'

At a quarter past ten most of us had gathered

When we reached the house ...'

'Whose going first? Jack you'd better ...'

The way these four paragraphs have been put together, with a minimum of connecting links and conjunctions, nevertheless establishes the passing of time and the shifts of place, and makes an ironic comment on the fact that they are late and that not all turn up, despite Bill's injunction: 'An' don't anyone be late.'

In context, and compared with the opening, the economy of these brief paragraphs suggests a new staging point in writing.

As a result, when we reach the climax, our expectations as readers are high. However, here – it seems to us – both the rhythms and the imaginative grasp of the story are less sure.

In this story the writer chooses to use dialogue to sketch in character to further the action. What kinds of problems does this pose for her? She needs a naturalistic style to make the close-knit gang convincing to the reader. She has to suggest the personality of the dominant character.

Bill's role is clear from the start:

'Now. What can we do over the next week, everybody think up something.'

His attitudes are quickly sketched in:

'Not till I can pinch some anyway ... Now's our chance with the old bag away.'

Bill constantly takes the lead in the planning. He is the one who gives instructions throughout the first part of their escapade, and these are clipped and to the point. Indeed, when another character – Tom, who has not been introduced earlier – makes the crucial suggestion that they break into the house, it hardly rings true.

Bill's character is realised mainly through dialogue. But the other central character, the narrator, is evoked by a different method. From the start she is more delicately realised. She is aware of the way others react to the gang:

'I could notice that most people crossed over the road ... or ... would look into a shop window'

It's interesting that she specifically makes this a conscious observation, rather than the simple report that 'Most people crossed over ...' More implicitly, when she is given a leg-up, the reader is made to feel that she is not perhaps wholeheartedly wanting to 'go along'.

'I made it up easily, but just sat on top of the wall looking down.'

It's also interesting to note how at this moment she is able to use a simple conjunction – 'but just' – subtly to suggest her mental uneasiness. In addition, as we have already indicated, she conveys an ironic distancing from Bill and the gang in her comments (implicit and explicit) on their response to his instruction to meet at ten.

Readers will notice that this piece is longer than the first two – and our final example is longer still. While we don't want to regress into the naïve notion that length is the main feature of development in writing, we do consider that the length of each of these pieces is not accidental. In order to explore *in a narrative* features

such as characters and their interplay, or a changing sequence of moods, or a dramatic build-up to a climax, or more than one perspective on an event (and to do so in increasingly complex ways), writers will tend to produce more as they become more accomplished.

Towards a mature literary model

What's begun in the third stage is extended with increasing complexity and control in the fourth. There are several key features we can point to: the pattern of events, the emotional responses, the social perspective, the rhetorical choices ...

In our earlier analysis we drew attention to the dense web of inter-relationships between the events of 'Amsterdam Monday'. As readers perceive these complex relations they are drawn into a deeper understanding of the felt meaning of the experience for the participants. This complexity is not a matter then of sheer sophistication or the exhibiting of expertise: it evokes a sense of shock not too dissimilar from that of 'Trapped', but offers more penetrating insights.

Equally, emotional responses are explored more fully and more delicately as shifts of mood occur and the action moves forward to a climax. What's impressive is the effort not only to explore the feelings of the central participants, but imaginatively to realise the feelings of the crowd at particular moments in the action.

The narrator, in taking a more comprehensive point of view and entering into the feelings of different groups, also achieves a broader social perspective, so that the reactions of the various participants are viewed from an independent and somewhat more objective standpoint.

All three of these effects can only be realised by a writer with a refined sense of the appropriate choice of word, sentence or paragraph structure. To that degree, more delicate and exact impressions can be evoked, as we have tried to show earlier.

Indeed, despite the writer's youth there are obvious parallels with a good deal of published autobiography or documentary reporting. So at this point we feel there is no need to pursue or seek to define further staging points. The central question becomes, what is the quality of vision within the story?

When one is reading with this kind of expectation, there may be slight misgivings about one aspect of 'Amsterdam Monday', the tendency to over-write, to focus on the language at the expense of the imaginative experience. Such a comment would be out of place

with the earlier writers, perhaps, and is a tribute to the maturity of this writer.

From spoken to written: the teacher's understanding of development

As children move from speech to writing they inevitably lose the powerful expressive effects of voice, facial expressions and gesture. Without the aid of these additional symbolic forms their texts normally appear flat and lacking in indications of attitude, emotion or mood. This is a problem that faces all writers. How can they use lexis and syntax alone, to convey all the subtle nuances in implication, feeling or attitude that intonation and gesture naturally supply? This is one of the questions that a literary tradition has to help to answer.

As they write personal and imaginative stories there are perhaps two main ways in which children learn to cope with this problem. First, they unconsciously assimilate the methods of authors they have read and enjoyed. Second, they can become more consciously aware of the choices available, as they are led into imaginative and perceptive discussion of these forms of language by their teachers.

To illustrate this, if we turn back to 'The Outcast' there are several points, as we have said, where the reader is left uncertain what interpretation to give. This affects the whole significance of the story – the feelings, relationships and attitudes. For instance, what is the reader to make of the concluding statement? –

'he wasn't really bothered about the girl so we went home'.

Is the writer intending to convey an amused knowingness? – a casual nonchalance? – a flat matter-of-factness? We can't know; there are no indications in the written text to throw light on this ambiguity. In contrast, as we mentioned in discussing 'Trapped', at crucial moments the writer has found ways to indicate feeling or attitude (implicitly or explicitly).

As a result, her story takes on a deeper significance. It is not merely an external narrative of being 'trapped' in the garden, in the act of theft; it is also an expression of feeling trapped into a set of actions one is increasingly unhappy to 'go along with'.

It is this kind of insight and reflective awareness of experience that teachers of English hope to encourage in narratives based on personal or imagined experiences. At their best, such narratives are reaching towards mature literature. The first question is, how aware are teachers of the developing choices

in language that are needed if writing is to become as expressive in its own right as speech? In order to convey more complex feelings, attitudes and evaluations pupils need encouragement to learn how to select the appropriate phrase, inner commentary or structuring of the story. Simply to recognise where they have succeeded, teachers have to be conscious of the range of choices that the literary tradition – at its best – has made possible. At present we feel this consciousness is often lacking, or it is piecemeal and without overview.

It is true that there is a distaste for a certain kind of rhetorical analysis, associated with clumsy attempts to inculcate 'devices' and 'skills', with no relationship to intuitive or developing perceptions of the writer. This has certainly led in the past to a divorce between form and experience.

Nevertheless, without an awareness of rhetorical choices, teachers have no internal guidelines for their own perceptions – not to mention ruling out the possibility of direct and tactful comments, encouraging their pupils to recognise what important choices are available.

The second question, then, is whether in the course of reading literature, pupils can learn to enjoy and appreciate the new ways their author is using language to convey his felt perceptions, by a wide variety of forms within the written language. Instead of 'hunting the metaphor', perhaps the class should be savouring the exact ways whereby the writer's phrase, sentence or wider structuring reveals the deeper meaning of the story? If so, teachers need at the back of their minds a much more clearly defined understanding of the forms mature writers are actually using.

24/7

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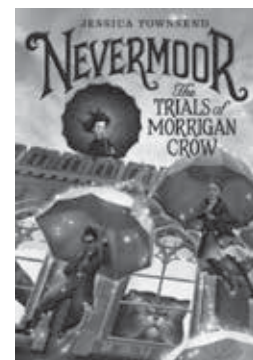
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& READING VIEWING

with Deb McPherson



At the start of 2018 I took a look back at the texts I have reviewed over the past eight years. There were novels I loved, picture books that entranced me, plays that shook me up, poetry that provided solace and inspiration and films, websites and digital essays that showed how wonderfully the concept of literature has been expanded. Now I am faced with a new year and a whole new set of texts to explore. Like many teachers I always relished the Christmas holiday break when the time for reading and viewing was such a pleasure and I have not been disappointed. One of my favourite texts was the short black-and-white video by Taika Waititi supporting the New Zealand Human Rights Commission's 'Give Nothing to Racism' campaign. In a series of answers to short, frequently asked questions Waititi asks viewers what they can 'give to racism'. It's classic Kiwi humour from the creator of *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and would be wonderful to use in the classroom from Year 7 to Year 12. You can find the video at <https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2017/jun/15/thor-ragnarok-director-taika-waititi-takes-on-racism-video> or on YouTube.

Fiction for Years 7 and 8

Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow

Jessica Townsend. (2107) Little Brown 480 pp.

This novel immediately draws readers into a different world and invites us to go exploring with young Morrigan Crow. She's just shy of eleven years and has a pretty miserable time of it at home. She appears to be cursed and the cause of any misfortune to people and places nearby. Her father is resentfully paying out a stream of compensation for her supposed misdeeds while Morrigan is forced to write apology letters to the people concerned. Morrigan is doomed to die on the stroke of her eleventh birthday on Eventide so she could be excused for being fairly depressed. But she is dogged and inquisitive and the possessor of a keen sense of humour, so readers quickly warm to her.

Fortunately for both Morrigan and her readers, she is rescued from her fate by an eccentric stranger, called Jupiter North of the Wunderous Society, just as a set of horrible shadow hounds pursue her. Jupiter takes her to Nevermoor, a city in which she has the opportunity to join the Wunderous Society but only after going through a series of demanding trials which uncover extraordinary talent. Unfortunately, Morrigan doesn't think she has any special talent at all.

Nevermoor is a delight to read with a really deceitful villain, giant Magnificats (they are just what you might expect from that splendid name) and a magical transport system. Morrigan's room in the Hotel Deucalion even changes to gradually reflect her personality. The trials are varied and exciting and it will probably surprise few readers to discover that Morrigan has a talent after all – but just what it is will keep everyone guessing.

Students in Year 7 will lap this novel up, and as it is the first of a series they can be reassured that there are more adventures to come.

The Girl Who Drank the Moon Kelly Barnhill (2016) Piccadilly Press 386 pp.

Magic spills out of this story. I was captivated in the first few pages by Kelly Barnhill's enchanting and enthralling tale.

The Protectorate is a gloomy place, ruled by an ageing Council of Elders and policed by the Sisters of the Star. It has a fog hanging perpetually over it and sorrow too, as each year a baby must be sacrificed to a witch to keep the populace safe. No-one has seen the witch though stories about her swirl around the community. The Elders use the Day of Sacrifice ritual to keep the population compliant and themselves in comfort. Luna is one of the babies left to die but she is

rescued by Xan, the witch who has taken all the abandoned babies and found them good homes in the Free Cities. But Luna is accidentally filled with moon magic and Xan must bring her up so she can control her magic when it emerges. A cast of wonderful characters fill the story, Glerk the Bog monster, Fyrian the tiny dragon, Antain the decent and honourable nephew of the Grand Elder, Sister Ignatia, the evil sorrow eater, and many more. But Luna, the entrancing Luna, who stumbles through childhood blocked from magic as she is too young to use it wisely, who easily wins the hearts of those she meets, will certainly win yours. The forest, the Bog, the mountainous volcano, the Free Cities all come alive through Barnhill's exuberant prose. The blue and silver lines of magic that thread through the land when Luna comes into her magic help her protect those she loves. No-one is flawless in this novel; Luna, Xan and Clerk tell lies through love and fear while others tell lies to hurt and harm but truth wins out and hope is restored. Many Year 7 and 8 students would be happy if they had the opportunity to read and discuss *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* and to use the ways stories are told in it to create their own. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* won the Newberry Medal in 2017.

***The Blue Cat* Ursula Dubosarsky (2107)
Allen & Unwin 159 pp.**



Ursula Dubosarsky is a renowned Australian writer and in *The Blue Cat* she effortlessly transports the reader to Sydney during World War 11. Columba (Latin for dove) is a young schoolgirl and the story is told from her point of view. As she dreams and wanders we see what life is like at home and follow her to school to meet her loud friend, Hillary. These are dangerous and fearful times as the girls hear of

the war and local events filtered through bits of conversation and teacher comments. A blue cat has appeared in the neighbourhood and then gone missing and it assumes importance as the story continues.

At school Columba notices a new boy and is told to be kind to him. His name is Ellery and he is a silent refugee who speaks no English. A book written in German is his constant companion. Columba and Hillary befriend him and wag school one day to find the blue cat. They all end up at Luna Park and adventures and mystery, in

which the cat plays a part, engulf them.

Dubosarsky's beautiful prose creates an uncertain, and at times surreal atmosphere, especially as Columba struggles to make sense of the world around her. The ending, (beautifully described by Dani Solomon in the *Readings* review 'sort of fades out slowly so you only catch misty snatches of a near future ...'), will challenge readers and certainly promote discussion in the classroom. Archival material from the period (photographs, notices, pictures, poems and information) is scattered throughout the narrative and extensive and helpful background information and resources can be found on Ursula Dubosarsky's webpage: <http://ursuladubosarsky.squarespace.com/the-blue-cat/> including teaching notes and activities from Allen & Unwin.

***How to Bee*
Bren MacDibble (2017)
Allen & Unwin 212 pp.**

Bren MacDibble takes the reader to a future Australia where famine has killed the bees and orchards must be manually pollinated. The population is split into the country poor and the city rich. The story is set in the Goulburn Valley and its protagonist is Peony, a feisty nearly ten-year-old who yearns to be 'a bee'. The 'bees' are the fleetest and deftest workers, able to go out on slim branches and pollinate the flowers by hand. Peony lives with her grandfather and sister and while life is hard she has enough to eat, a place to sleep and love. But Rosie, her mother, returns with her new and violent boyfriend (christened 'the Ape' by Peony) and drags Peony to the city to be a servant in Mrs Pasquale's house. Peony befriends her daughter, Esmeralda who is too frightened to go outside. It is with Peony's help that she conquers her fears and with Esmeralda's help that Peony escapes and finally makes her way back to the farm. The ending is tinged with sorrow as Rosie's final child is delivered to the family by 'the Ape' but Honey, as she is called ('sweet and precious'), will be loved.



Peony is tough and clever; she survives despite the violence in her mother's life. This story will delight many readers and should find a ready audience in Year 7: they will be cheering for Peony as she fights to get back to her real home.

Fiction for Years 9 and 10

Poe: Stories and Poems adapted by Gareth Hinds
(2017) Candlewick Press 120 pp.

While the stories (including 'The Pit and the Pendulum', 'A Cask of Amontillado', 'The Masque of the Black Death' and 'The Tell Tale Heart') are well known, Hinds' powerful images bring them to a whole new audience with a fresh vibrancy. I shivered anew as a man is led to a slow death and again as the scythe descended close to the naked flesh of a bound prisoner. Poe is a master of gothic horror and will win new fans with this inspired adaptation. The three poems ('The Raven', 'The Bells' and 'Annabel Lee') intersperse the stories and the whole collection should re-engage disengaged readers and prompt reluctant readers to have a look at the pictures and then be hooked by the bloodcurdling stories. This graphic novel would enhance any horror genre study in Year 9.



Genuine Fraud E. Lockhart, (2017) Allen & Unwin, 262 pp.

Fly on the Wall E. Lockhart, (2006) A&U 182 pp.

The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks
E. Lockhart (2015) A&U 345 pp.

E. Lockhart creates unforgettable stories and I have grouped these three novels together as they would make a wonderful author study in Year 10. You could throw in *We Were Liars* as well (reviewed in *English in Australia* Vol. 49 No. 3, 2014) to have four novels to divide up in the classroom. Whilst all are set in elitist circles, their fascinating characters and intricate plots have much to offer in the classroom, including a critique of elitism.

Genuine Fraud is Lockhart's latest novel in which she puts a female spin on *The Talented Mr Ripley*. This novel is more sinister than *We Were Liars* although subterfuge, false identities, betrayal and an unreliable narrator are again on the menu. The main characters, Jule

and Imogen, are fascinating but unlikable, so there is a thrill in questioning what will happen to them next that keeps you reading. Jule is the unreliable narrator who tells the story in reverse chronology. She is small and attractive as well as fit and a fighter, but her intense friendship with Imogen 'will take a dark turn'. Imogen is an heiress who runs away from her family to enjoy a hedonistic life, well supported by the unlimited funds she can access. With the action moving between the US, the UK and Mexico it's a fast-paced thriller indeed. It's difficult to add more details without spoiling the enjoyment of this finely plotted tale.

Fly on the Wall is a wonderful nod and a wink to Kafka. Gretchen Kaufman Lee attends Manhattan High School for the Arts where her love of drawing comics puts her in some conflict with the art teacher. As her family breaks apart and her crush on fellow Art Rat student, Titus, shows no sign of taking off, she frets about her art assignment on Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. She awakes as a fly on the wall in the boys' locker room and spends days there with a perspective on boys not offered to any other girls at the school, including watching them change out of their sports gear. But Gretchen is no voyeur (although there are definite giggles at the boy's equipment) and she's desperate to get back into her human form. But her time on the wall does give her fresh insight into the boys she thought she knew, including those revealed as bullies and bigots. When finally released back into her body she finds her own metamorphosis has given her the courage to ask Titus out and he responds with delight. Two teenagers, at times somewhat inarticulate, find love and the reader finds a great deal of humour, including some amusing commentary on the male form.

The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks introduces the reader to Frankie, who starts out as the innocent rich girl at the elite private college and ends up capable of being a criminal mastermind. I admit I love fearless Frankie. She has been brought up to know that girls have to follow the rules (just because they are girls). Irritated by the old boys (one is her father) who make the rules and the young boys who have all the fun with their secret society, 'The Loyal Order of the Basset Hounds', she decides to beat them at their own game. Her fierce intelligence and Machiavellian abilities create a series of pranks as she subverts and manipulates the boys' secret society. The results are hilarious and while Frankie is asked to leave the school you suspect she could go on to change the world.

These books will provide a rich feast in the

classroom. You could balance them with an author study such as Patrick Ness's *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*, *More Than This* and *Release* with a strong male perspective or Sarah Crossan's *Moonrise, We Come Apart* and *One* with their verse novel style. There is so much in these novels to provide an interesting mix for class discussion.

Mallee Boys Charlie Archbold (2017)

Wakefield Press 284 pp.

Two brothers

One farm

One hell of a year.

I can't better the blurb description of this powerful and authentic story about two brothers growing up and living in the bush. Sandy is fifteen, still at school, and liking it, unlike his mates. He feels a bit out of place on the farm. Red is eighteen and working hard on the family land; he's prone to sudden rage and is often looking for a fight. Red calls Sandy a thinker while he categorises himself as a 'charger' (he can't be 'arsed weighing things up and thinking things through.) Tom Douglas, their father, is doing his best to help both his boys, but all three suffer from an inability to discuss or deal with a deep grief. Ellie Douglas, Tom's wife and the boys' mother, died a year ago, the victim of a reckless driver, and no-one in the family has come to terms with it.

Life in the Mallee is harsh. The region lies across two states, north east South Australia and north-west Victoria; it's a hot, dry and mostly flat district where farming is a tough occupation. Archbold, drawing on her teaching experiences in the area, captures the setting and the characters with realism and accuracy. Sandy and Red voice alternating chapters in the novel and the reader comes to understand the different ways they look at life, deal with problems and interact with each other and their dad. The novel commences with Sandy's reflection on his near drowning in the river. He manages to infuse his tale with wry humour, and when Red takes over the narrative we get his perspective. We see the battles with the great brown snake that lives under the house, and share the companionship of Ringer, his dog. The reader learns that Tom is worried about Red's new mate, Ryan, an itinerant worker, and that Sandy is struggling to gain a scholarship to

continue his Year 11 and 12 studies in Adelaide. As time passes relationships begin to form, with Lisa entering Red's life while Sandy is keen on Becky at school. Footy, dirt biking and community get-togethers form a backdrop to rural life. When thefts from farms in the area begin to occur, they lead to a dangerous confrontation that ultimately leaves the Douglas family reunited and able to grieve together.

Mallee Boys is about small communities, their closeness and their isolation. It's about families and how they fracture and how they heal and about friendships and honesty. With an exuberant cover, compelling characterisation and a rural sensibility this novel will be an excellent choice for many Year 9 to 11 classrooms, in the bush and in the city. *Mallee Boys* won the 2016 Adelaide Festival Unpublished Manuscript Award, and is shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year for Older Readers.

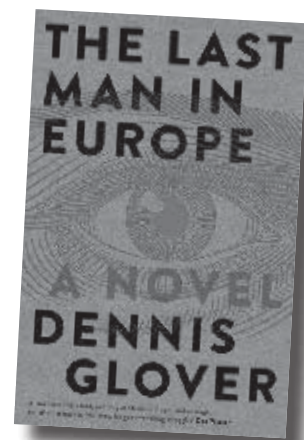
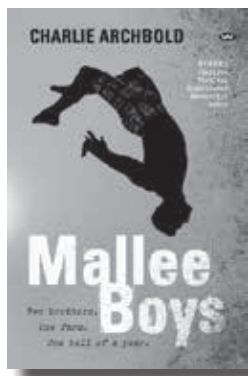
Year 11 Fiction

The Last Man in Europe Dennis Glover (2017)

Black Inc. 282 pp.

Dennis Glover has presented teachers and students studying Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the perfect Christmas gift. In this debut novel, Glover presents an imaginative recreation of Orwell's path to writing his final story, and in so doing reveals insights into Orwell's motivations, life and courage in an astonishing tour de force. Glover uses Orwell's own style in an accurate, accomplished and scholarly tribute that reflects on the political forces at work in our own times as well as in the 20th century.

The novel opens with a prologue in April 1947 in a farmhouse on a remote Scottish island as 44-year-old Orwell, fighting end-stage tuberculosis, struggles to complete his novel of humanity betrayed by the communism, fascism and nationalism that was threatening democracy and freedom. From this point the reader is moved back to March 1935 as we follow Orwell through his early battles to be published, his poverty, his observations of Mosley and the fascist movement in Britain, his period fighting the anti-Franco forces in Spain, and marriage to Eileen and the adoption of his son. Her death in 1945 at the age of 39 is too early to see his success with *Animal Farm*.



Orwell's long battle with tuberculosis is vividly captured by Glover. The agonising coughing, the tortuous treatments, the blood loss and the pain. Although warned to rest, Orwell pushed the disease aside to complete his novel. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was finally published on 8 June 1949. The reviews poured in: 'profound, terrifying and wholly fascinating', 'thanks for a writer ... who is able to speak seriously of the nature of reality and the terrors of power'. He would be dead six months later on 21 January 1950 at the age of just 46.

Orwell's observations of the great betrayals of humanity in the thirties and forties propelled him into writing *The Last Man in Europe*, (the original title of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). He saw the show trials, the two-minute hate ('a good old hate' at the Mosely meeting) the party slogans, the newspeak, the disappearance of objective truth, the dual standards of truth, and they all found their way into his novel. Orwell's style itself is a subject of the novel. In an excellent interview with Glover by Scott Simon from National Public Radio (at <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/25/566438867/george-orwells-life-in-the-last-man-in-europe>) Glover explains:

Orwell wrote some 20 volumes of collected works. And once you read those over and over again, you begin to intuit the way he thinks and the way he writes. He was a simple prose stylist, and it's actually a good lesson – reading lots of Orwell to learn how to write clearly yourself.

The austerity of the ending of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also something Glover explores. His proposition, put forth in the novel (and in Glover's foreword to Black Inc.'s latest edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) is that Orwell did not intend Winston's end to be so bleak and that he was still capable of 'thoughtcrime', despite his brainwashing. It is a truly remarkable and eminently possible conclusion.

Glover is an Australian academic, columnist, speechwriter and historian. He has given readers a unique opportunity to become acquainted with Orwell – a literary giant of the 20th century and a man of great political insight and thought – in this astonishing and compelling novel. Any teacher or student contemplating the study of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 2018 will find reading this book a wonderful companion to Orwell's novel. *The Last Man in Europe* joins *Exit West* and *Lincoln in the Bardo* as one of my top three novels of 2017.

Poetry

The Hollow of the Hand P.J. Harvey and Seamus Murphy (2105) Bloomsbury 231 pp.

This poetry collection is a beautiful and stark collaboration between the word and the image.

P.J. Harvey and Seamus Murphy travelled together to Kosovo, Afghanistan and Washington DC. One uses words, the other, pictures. The results are impressive, with the powerful connections between the words and the pictures bringing a more vivid experience of war torn places and people.

*I thought I saw a young girl
between two pock-marked walls ...
I looked for the girl upstairs. Found
A comb, dried flowers, a ball of red wool
unravelling. A plum tree grew through the window,
on the window ledge a photograph
In black and white, but her mouth is missing,
perished and flaked to a white nothing ...*

This anthology would provide students with an authentic model for their own collaborations with images and reflections. Groups could form potent partnerships to create a school- or issues-based anthology that could be published digitally or in print form

A Poem for Every Night of the Year Allie Esiri (ed). (2106) Macmillian 512 pp. and *A Poem for Every Day of the Year* Allie Esiri (ed). (2107) Macmillian 556 pp.

What wonderful poetry collections these are to share in the classroom. A wide range of poems are laid out under all the dates in a year. Of course, the first thing everybody does will be to look up the poem for their birthday. Some will be delighted and others disappointed or puzzled. The most obvious challenge to those not pleased with their selection is to find the perfect poem for their birthday among the other poems on display. So, the quest is on, and with 365 poems to choose from most students will find some success. And then there are other poems to look up for other members of the family and for friends old and young.

I was really delighted to find that 'For My Niece', a poem by one of my favourite writers, the British performance poet, playwright and novelist Kate Tempest, had been selected for my birthday in *A Poem for Every Day of the Year*. Mary Ann Hoberman's 'Brother' (a lovely bit of



tongue twisting about a bothersome brother) was my fare in *A Poem for Every Night of the Year*.

These two anthologies are perfect for the poetry book box for students in Year 7–10 and provide a magical template for a class anthology. Groups could be given responsibility for selecting poems for particular months and giving them an Australian flavour to contrast with the northern hemisphere orientation of the Esiri collections.

***Contemporary Asian Australian Poets* edited by Kim Cheng Boey Michelle Cahill and Adam Aitken (2017) Puncher & Wattmann 255 pp.**

There are three introductions to this impressive anthology which has recently been listed on the prescribed text list for some English courses for the NSW Higher School Certificate. Kim Cheng Boey focuses on the experience of migration, the writing of first-generation immigrants and their 'comparative or bifocal vision'. Michelle Cahill champions the prominence of Asian Australian women poets, and Adam Aitken considers the choices that Asian-Australian poets may make

to speak as a member of a minority culture and to be strategically essentialist, or to use the resources to speak doubly, to hybridise oneself, to reveal or to hide, to wear disguise, to ironise and parody oneself and others ...

Readers will find a range of poems from the traditional and formal to the highly experimental. There are poems about the pain of loss of home and culture, poems that explore cultural duality or hybridity, poems about power, home, memory and gender, and poems about many other aspects of life and experience. As Jonathon Shaw pointed out at the launch of the anthology 'It's the poets who are Asian Australian, not necessarily the poetry'. Merlinda Bobis and Jaya Savige are among the poets set for study.

Merlinda Bobis's poem 'This is where it begins' is delivered in Filipino, English, Spanish and Bikol (the language of the Southern region of the Luzon Island in the Philippines) and establishes a multicultural heritage and a tradition of oral story telling. It involves many family members using story, word and gesture in building a community, a collective of 'conjurers'. This thoughtful and beautifully balanced poem uses repetition and image to link to past storytellers. Her lines 'Story, word, gesture/All under my skin' evoke an image stronger than a tattoo; imprinted 'under', not 'on', the skin.

Jaya Savige's poem, 'Circular Breathing', provides an unexpected sense of national identity and acknowledgement of Indigenous Australia. The poem is dedicated to Indigenous poet and activist, Samuel Wagan Watson. The title refers to the breathing technique of a didgeridoo player that requires breathing in through the nose whilst simultaneously expelling stored air out of the mouth using the tongue and cheeks. The poet, an Australian traveller, observes a man playing a didgeridoo in Rome near the church of Santa Maria. Children are drawn together to hear the strange music, a music the poet recognises and associates with home. The antiquity of Aboriginal culture

... far older
Even than the Forum ...

is expressed in the music and Savige pays homage to it and wants to claim 'that sound as the sound of my home'. His cultural heritage is Indonesian/Australian and the music sets home before him, fills his stomach with passionate 'fire' and with memories of his own land, far away under different stars.

This anthology will have a place in many Year 10, 11 and 12 classrooms. Students will be able to explore these sophisticated, skilful and deeply engaging poems and gain fresh insights into Asian Australian experiences and perspectives. They could also be inspired to create their own poems by reflecting on the comment poet Merlinda Bobis made about the gifts that writing brings, to both the writer and the reader:

'Writing visits like grace. Its greatest gift is the comfort if not the joy of transformation. In an inspired moment, we almost believe that anguish can be made bearable and injustice can be overturned, because they can be named. And if we're lucky, joy can even be multiplied a hundredfold, so we may have reserves in the cupboard for the lean times.'

Source: <http://www.merlindabobis.com.au>

As another year unfolds may you have exciting times with literature in your classrooms. Special good wishes to all those English teachers in NSW as they implement the new senior syllabus. In my next column, I'm hoping to focus on drama texts for the senior school and finding more novels to engage boys in the classroom. Happy reading and viewing.

AATE matters

AATE Matters e-bulletins have become regular way of sharing news from the national English teaching umbrella Association with educators from across Australia. Two editions have been published thus far in 2018. Here we highlight some of the key messages shared in the February and April AATE Matters e-bulletins.

New AATE President – Erika Boas

We thank Wendy Cody for her service as AATE President over the past year and a bit. Wendy now takes on the role as Past President and mentor. Wendy is one of the co-convenors and a highly valued member of the 2018 Perth Conference Committee and we all look forward to the Perth National Conference in July.

We now welcome our new President, Erika Boas, to the role.

Erika has served as President of the Tasmanian Association for the Teaching of English (TATE), since 2012 and as Delegate to National Council since 2014. She is an experienced high school English teacher of 17 years, an Assistant Principal and a published author.

In 2016, Erika co-edited the highly acclaimed and award-winning AATE publication, *The Artful English Teacher*, with Susan Gazis. She has also authored and co-authored a number of units and digital resources in Australia and Canada. Erika has regularly presented at state and national conferences, managed collaborative projects and initiated new partnerships.

Erika looks forward to working with AATE members in this new role.

New members of AATE Council

We extend our sincerest thanks to two out-going state delegates – Tim Nolan (VIC) and Cara Shipp (ACT). Tim served on AATE Council for three years and his input and actions were invaluable. We wish Tim the very best as he continues to focus on his teaching career. Cara served on Council for just over a year but her work within ACTATE spanned ten years. Cara is making the move to Queensland and she will be sorely missed by her Canberra colleagues and friends. We wish her all the very best with the change in her career path.

We welcome Alex Bacalja as the new Victorian Delegate to Council, and a new delegate from the ACT will be appointed after ACTATE hold their AGM in May.

We also announce that Professor Philip Mead is the successful applicant in the position of Research Officer for AATE. We look forward to enacting national research initiatives and opportunities in the months to come. Welcome to the team, Philip.

AATE Bookshop: Special Offer

AATE is offering a special deal of two of its publications: *Teaching Australian Literature* and *Teenagers and Reading*. Both publications can be purchased as a bundled package for \$40 (including postage and handling) from the AATE Bookstore.

Teaching Australian Literature: from classroom conversations to national imaginings is edited by Brenton Doecke, Larissa McLean Davies and Philip Mead. This collection of essays examines Australian literature and its role in:

- engaging students
- classroom teaching
- text selection
- concepts of nation and national writing

Teenagers and Reading: literary heritages, cultural contexts and contemporary reading practices is edited by Jacqueline Manuel and Sue Brindley

This collection of essays explores the ‘what, how, when, where and why’ of adolescents’ reading. It offers evidence-based approaches to engaging the diversity of students in purposeful, enjoyable, relevant and meaningful ways within and beyond the classroom.

What’s happening across the ETAs?

There are so many wonderful initiatives and events occurring across Australia through the tireless work of the ETAs. In this newsletter we feature the following events:

ACTATE held its annual state conference on Friday 11 May. The ‘Sharing the Secrets of Success’ conference saw presentation and workshops from invited keynote presenters as well as teacher workshops. The Association is also running an online course entitled, *Teaching Writing Digitally*. Interested educators can register online at www.actate.org.au.

ETAQ has introduced Vision 2020, a series of PD to assist teachers to be informed and to engage collegially as Queensland heads to a new senior system including new externally marked and set exams. More information is available at www.etaq.org.au.

SAETA held its annual conference on Saturday 5 May. The conference caters for middle and senior years and presented a large number of exciting papers and workshops which dealt with a wide range of texts and topics.

TATE is partnering with its local history and geography teachers' associations (THTA and TGTA) for the first time to deliver a humanities conference, entitled 'The Heart of the Discipline'. Morris Gleitzman and Jackie French are two of the invited presenters. More information is available at www.tate.org.au.

ETANT is running a combined conference with GHTANT (Geography and History Teachers' Association of NT) on Saturday 26 May. The keynote address was presented by Danielle Hazelton.

AATE Matters session in Perth

A regular feature of the national conference is a forum conducted by AATE. The forum is called 'AATE Matters' and this session is for those attending the 'Art of English' conference who are also interested in discussing national and international English teaching matters. All delegates are welcome to attend and special invitation is extended to ETA Scholarship winners, Early Career English teachers and first time National Conference attendees.

When: Monday 9th July 4.30pm – 5.30pm

Where: MRI (130)

Includes: A drink and nibbles

RSVP to erika.boas@gmail.com

The Garret resources

The Garret is a series of freely accessible on-line interviews that celebrate the craft of authors through a series of personal in-depth interviews. The writers represent many genres and discuss the best ways to start, draft, complete and market their writing. Authors include, Benjamin Law, Anita Heiss, John Marsden, Christos Tsiolkas and more! The interviews can be accessed via the web or through iTunes.

Go to www.thegarretpodcast.com.

Every episode is published with notes and transcripts to increase educational value and access. A great resource for writers of all ages, including those working on their craft in our English classrooms!

AATE is currently in a working partnership with *The Garret*, producing free on-line teaching resources to accompany many of the interviews. The first teaching resource is now available and was created by English teacher, Emma Jenkins. Emma is the Tasmanian Delegate to AATE Council. Visit the Reading Australia website to access these resources are more: www.readingaustralia.com.au.

Accessing English in Australia online

If you are a member of ACTATE, ETANT, SAETA or TATE you can access digital copies via the AATE website.

Members of ETANSW, ETAQ, ETAWA and VATE should consult their Association website for details, or contact their own association to request online access.

AATE Council

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AATE

English in Australia

Members of Associations affiliated with the Australian Association for the Teaching of English receive the Journal from their association.

(Refer to address list below.)

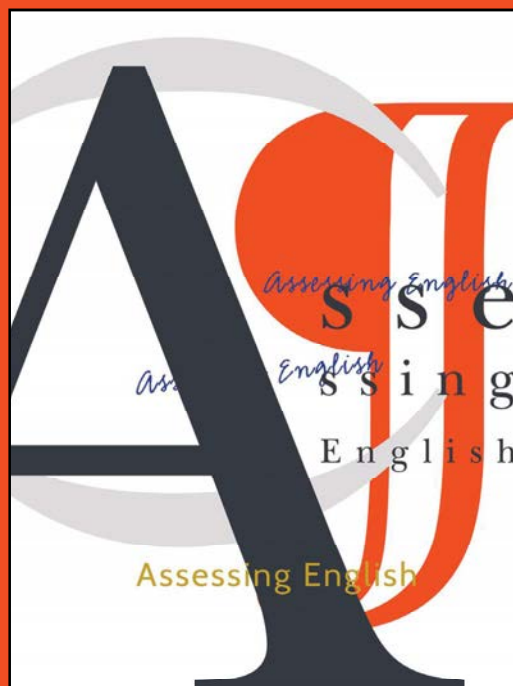
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Membership of AATE is available through your state/territory English teaching association.

Readers interested in membership should contact:

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