School is for me:

Pathways to student engagement

Fair Go Project

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CHAPTER 1

Student engagement and the Fair Go Project

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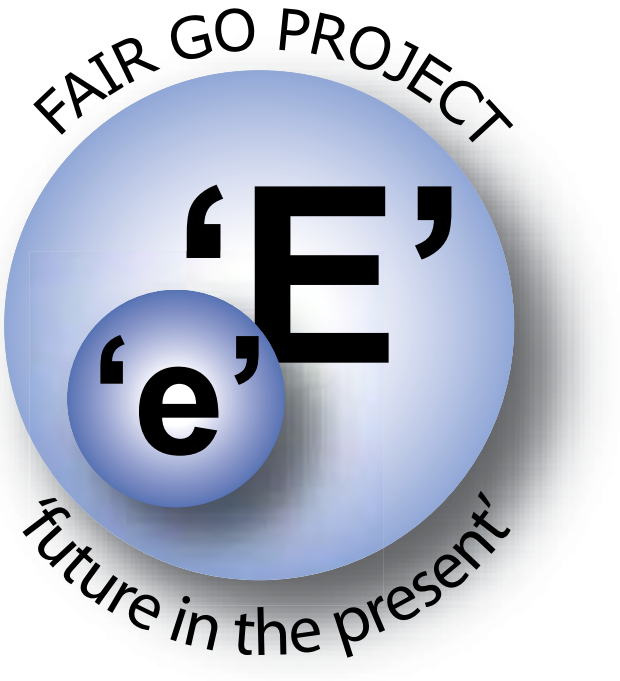
What is the Fair Go Project?

The Fair Go Project (FGP) is research into student engagement being conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Western Sydney (School of Education and Early Childhood Studies) and the Priority Schools Programs, formerly PSFP (NSW Department of Education and Training). The study brings together university researchers, school teachers, education consultants and community members. It is an action research project, which began as a pilot project in 2000 with teachers and university researchers implementing and evaluating changes to their classrooms through a focus on student engagement.



The schools in the Fair Go Project (FGP)

The schools involved in the Fair Go Project are located within Sydney's south-west. Nearly two million people live in this region, many of whom are from diverse cultural backgrounds, including the largest concentration of Aboriginal people in the country. Like all Priority Schools Programs (PSP) schools, the communities the project's schools serve are characterised by substantial numbers of families from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Families live either in modestly priced private housing or in the many public housing estates in the area. The region has high levels of unemployment, with youth unemployment a particular problem. Infrastructure, such as public transport and community services, has been historically lacking in comparison with more affluent areas. The schools are familiar with the emotional, social and financial stresses associated with socio-economic disadvantage, and are also faced with the challenges of high student mobility, negative media attention and

with improving student outcomes to levels comparable to schools in more advantaged areas. All schools have significant numbers of teachers in the first years of their teaching career. The schools are also characterised by high family expectations of school and education, and many have a history of positive home school relationships. The teachers involved in the project are strongly committed to ensuring their students achieve success. The following schools have been involved in the research reported in this book:

Ashcroft Public School is located in a public housing estate with 63% of the student population from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). Approximately 12% of the students are Aboriginal.

Cabramatta West Public School is in one of the most multicultural areas of Sydney with a 98% LBOTE student population (Australians of mostly Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds). Many students begin schooling speaking no English at all.

Carramar Public School is in an area of mixed public and private housing with an 87% LBOTE student population. These students are mainly Australians with Vietnamese, Chinese or Arabic cultural backgrounds.

Cartwright Public School is located in a public housing community with a 50% LBOTE student population. There are also a significant number of Aboriginal students attending the school.

Fairfield West Public School has a very diverse community with over 40 language groups represented in its 87% LBOTE student population. The main groups are Australians of Vietnamese, Arabic, Assyrian, Spanish and Khmer backgrounds.

Heckenberg Public School is a school in a mixed public and private housing area with 55% of its students from LBOTE. The main groups include Australians of Vietnamese and Arabic backgrounds. There is also a significant group of students from Aboriginal backgrounds.

Liverpool Public School serves a highly mobile community and very diverse with 94% of the student population with LBOTE. Its main language groups are Arabic, Serbian, Croatian and Hindi. Housing in the area is largely medium to high density with significant numbers of families living in public housing.

Although all the schools in the FGP serve communities with high concentrations of students from low SES backgrounds, the pathways to student engagement that have been described in this research are applicable to learners from all social and cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, student engagement is a central issue for Priority Schools.

Why is student engagement important for Priority Schools?

The aim of PSP is to reduce, with a view to eliminating, the achievement gap in student learning outcomes for concentrations of students who may be adversely affected in schooling due to their socio-economic circumstances (PSFP Support Document, 2004).

PSP are underpinned by principles of social justice and equity and are part of the NSW government's commitment to social justice. The programs focus on improving students' literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes.

Participation is defined in PSP's objectives as:

…the purposeful and sustained engagement of students in school, classroom and home learning activities. It involves the integration of strategies to improve students' literacy and numeracy outcomes through student engagement …. In schools with high concentrations of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds active participation of students needs to be understood as something more than attendance and retention. Isolated, compensatory activities that temporarily boost student self-esteem reflect tokenistic views of student participation in learning (PSFP 2005).

Since 1999 the program has conducted considerable local research into the issues of expectations and student engagement. The ongoing challenge for teachers in Priority Schools has been to identify, describe and implement those classroom practices that will increase student engagement in learning and participation in school and, as a result, work towards equitable school outcomes for students. Each research

team in the FGP explored and deepened the commonly held understandings about what active engagement in learning meant. The work of the research partners also challenged the teachers' expectations of what students could achieve in their learning, how this could be supported and what benefits it held for students.

Challenging expectations about students in low SES school communities - their place, their potential and their learning - is a complex task. It is made more complex by the persistence of low participation, unequal retention rates and poor academic achievement among low SES students, and inappropriate, though often well-intentioned, initiatives by some of their teachers. Students from low SES backgrounds traditionally have not received the same benefits from schooling as students from more advantaged communities. Teachers have had to work hard to provide an intellectually challenging and socially rewarding environment in which students can view themselves as successful learners and achieve at high levels. However, the achievement and participation gaps remain significant and unacceptable for students from low SES communities, who continue to experience difficulty with the demands of schooling and learning. The recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report confirmed this, showing that although the Australian education system as a whole was achieving high results, these results were inequitably distributed (OECD, 2004).

Why does the FGP focus on student engagement?

The initial theory for the project came from important research into 'authentic' (Newmann & Associates, 1996) and 'productive' pedagogy (Hayes, Lingard and Mills, 2000). Both of these studies have been influential in the development of the *Quality teaching in NSW public schools model* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). Student engagment is one of the elements in the Quality Teaching model. Many Priority Schools have been involved in researching student engagement in their local contexts. In the FGP the focus on student engagement and the connection with improving student learning outcomes has been explored in considerable depth.

This is because, unlike the studies into pedagogy mentioned above, the FGP is specifically concerned with students from low SES backgrounds. Studies have continually shown that even when (and often, especially when[1]) teachers' pedagogies are well-intended and theoretically sound, there is no guarantee that low SES students will accept and comply with them. Therefore the FGP believes that student engagement has to be a key factor in the successful implementation of classroom pedagogies and the follow-on to improved student learning outcomes for students in low SES communities. This belief means that the research concentrates on pedagogy as a process rather than a product. When pedagogy is seen as a product, the focus is narrowed to the teachers' planned practices that are to be adopted by students. On the other hand, when it is seen as a process, there is a wider idea that it is the 'playing out' in classrooms between students and teachers that is going to make pedagogies authentic or productive or quality, rather than just the teachers' intentions.

How is student engagement defined by the FGP?

Defining student engagement has been an important aspect of the FGP research. The first step was to challenge an unquestioning acceptance of the value of student compliance. This was risky, given that classroom management issues inevitably dominated the thoughts and practices of the teachers involved in the project. However, both the teachers and the university researchers believed that student compliance was a short-term pedagogical outcome that held no guarantees for enhanced academic and social outcomes. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there was strong research evidence showing that low SES students shaped classroom practices by resisting high level tasks and complying with low level tasks (see Jones, 1989, Haberman, 1991, Munns, 1996 and Munns, 2005). This was a process that had to be strongly challenged.

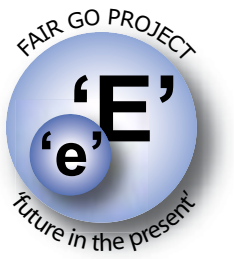
The FGP was committed to understanding engagement as a deeper student relationship with classroom work. In line with current thinking about student engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004), the project

argued that student engagement is multi-faceted. In fact, the project took up a strong view that when we talk about student engagement, we are thinking of times and situations when there is a strong combination of students' responses.

Student engagement operates at cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling) and operative (doing) levels. The FGP's definition of student engagement is that it is a consciousness and an educational identity. That is, it is not just students doing things but it is something happening inside their heads. It follows from this that when students are strongly engaged they are successfully involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and they have passionate, positive feelings about these tasks. Put another way, engagement is when the cognitive, the affective and the operative are occurring together at high levels. This view brings together and reshapes the definitions of engagement in the research literature. Most definitions of student engagement talk about it as being either cognitive (thinking and willingness to tackle challenging ideas and skills), emotional (positive feelings about schools, classrooms, teachers and peers) or behavioural (involvement in activities and following instructions) (see Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). The cognitive and emotional aspects of engagement were accepted by the FGP, although 'affective' was considered to offer a clearer pedagogical focus for teachers. Changing behavioural to 'operative' recognised not only the rejection of student compliance, but also a central research argument that for low SES students to be beneficially engaged, they need to be highly operational learners. Operative again provided a stronger pedagogical focus for teachers as well as an outcome focus for students.

'The future in the present': levels of engagement and the FGP

The project also saw the importance of thinking about two levels of engagement. At the first level was the substantive cognitive, affective and operative engagement with the learning experiences at hand. This is called *small 'e' engagement* and is characterised by students being 'in-task'. It is distinct from being 'on-task' or procedurally engaged, where students' compliance with teachers' wishes and instructions is the main aim. The second level is called *big 'E' engagement*, characterised by a sense of 'school is for me'. It is about more enduring engagement with schooling and education. The FGP believes that these levels of engagement are strongly linked. Small 'e'ngagement and big 'E'ngagement are happening at the same time, as classroom educational experiences build to an idea in students that their school education will become a resource that they can successfully use now and in the future. It is useful to think about these two levels of engagement as 'the future in the present.' Here is an exciting challenge for teachers working with students in low SES school communities. How can teachers encourage their students, by the nature of their classroom experiences and relationships, to see school as a place worth going to and education as a resource that they can successfully use both now and in the future? How can 'the future in the present' offer new possibilities for students to succeed in school and go on to have future success?



What messages are we sending to our students?

These questions have become central to the FGP research. The links between 'e'ngagement and 'E'ngagement are strongly influenced by the way classrooms operate as message systems. We have drawn on the important work of Bernstein (1996) here. There are powerful classroom messages that all students receive every day that contribute to the way they see themselves as learners, both in the present and in the future. These messages are significantly influenced by what teachers teach (curriculum), how they teach (pedagogy) and the judgments made about student progress and ability (assessment). In this process some students begin to feel that school is a place for them. Others come to a realisation that they are not valued, they do not really belong and they are going nowhere.

How does this happen? While students are processing and taking up positions within the powerful school and classroom message systems (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) they are also negotiating with their teachers

Table 1 - Disengaging messages for low SES students

Disengaging messages for low SES students		
Knowledge	"Why are we doing this?"	Restricted access to powerful knowledge
Ability	"I can't do this"	Feelings of not being able to achieve and a spiral of low expectations and aspirations
Control	"I'm not doing that"	Struggle over classroom time and space and debilitating consequences of resistance and compliance
Place	"I'm just a kid from"	Devalued as individual and learner
Voice	"Teacher tells us"	No say over learning with teacher as sole controller and judge

'discourses of power': knowledge, ability, control, place and voice. Issues such as –

- what counts as knowledge and who has access to really useful knowledge?
- who has ability?
- who controls the teaching space?
- who is valued as an individual and a learner?
- whose voice is given credence within the teaching space?

- all influence the way teachers teach and how students see themselves as learners.

To generalise, the common and recurring result of these negotiations for many students from low SES backgrounds is that they are receiving dis'e'ngaging messages. These messages are summarised in Table 1.

What classroom changes can teachers make?

The FGP project has been investigating how decisive changes to classrooms might turn dis'e'ngaging messages into 'e'ngaging messages for students in low SES school communities. The classroom changes are thought of as dual key vehicles that could carry these 'e'ngaging messages (see Figure 1). These are:

- classroom learning experiences designed to be high cognitive, high affective and high operative
- classroom processes designed to encourage a reflective learning community: the "Insider Classroom".

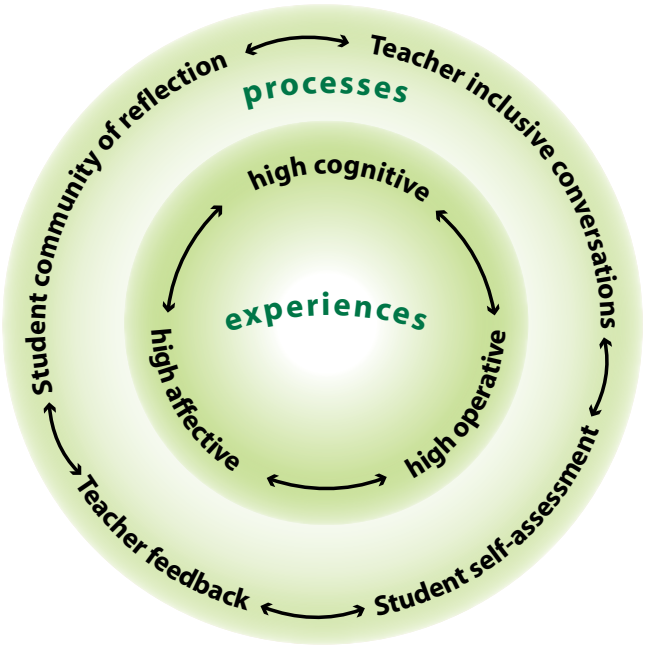


Figure 1 - Classroom changes

Classroom learning experiences

The nature of the experiences offered by teachers should target the FGP definition of engagement. The focal point for the design of the classroom learning experiences is the balanced interplay of the high cognitive (thinking), high affective (feeling) and high operative (doing). Within this balanced interplay, high

cognitive activities might consider elements from the intellectual quality dimension of 'productive pedagogies' or 'quality teaching'. The high operative component would pay careful attention to developing students as competent and empowered learners across all their classroom experiences. High affective assumes that the teacher and students are involved in conversations that negotiate learning situations to bring about mutually stimulating and enjoyable emotions associated with classroom work.

The insider classroom

The taking up of the term 'insiders' was influenced by the way the action research participants developed their thinking about student engagement during the project. Definitions drawn from the critical literacy literature captured ideas around the strong involvement that students could have within their classrooms and the work they were doing. Student engagement and the concept of 'insiders' meant:

> … finding ways of enabling and encouraging learners to enter into communities of practice, discourse and inquiry … to become an 'insider' in the culture of the classroom (Durrant & Green, 2000, p.103);

and

> … becoming identified and identifying oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group … playing a socially meaningful 'role' within that discourse community (Gee, 1990, p.143).

When students become 'insiders' in their classrooms they have a place and a say in the way that their classroom operates and in the learning that they are part of. It is critical that learners not only identify as insiders, but also are identified as insiders by teachers, students, parents, principals, community members and visitors. In this way all classroom participants have a vital role to play. This interactive framework with its critical elements is discussed and illustrated in the next chapter.

How can we send out 'e'ngaging classroom messages?

The FGP sees that the focus for teachers' pedagogical changes should reflect three important theoretical ideas. There should be learning experiences aimed at students' high cognitive, affective and operative levels. There should also be processes intended to make students 'insiders' in their classrooms. Simultaneously, teachers should seriously consider how to send 'e'ngaging messages daily to every student through these changes. Table 2 summarises the 'e'ngaging classroom messages that might result from these school and classroom changes.

School is for me

The work of the FGP is suggesting that when students are allowed to be active participants ('insiders') in classrooms where the emphasis is on 'e'ngagement (high cognitive, high affective, high operative), then classrooms are places where there are challenges to potentially dis'e'ngaging messages. Subsequently there can be real chances that students will develop a consciousness that 'school is for me' ('E'ngagement), rather than one of defeat, struggle and giving up.

As PSP moves into the future, the challenge will be to continue to identify, investigate and disseminate innovative ways schools are engaging students in learning and school life and to assist school teams to research the complex factors that enhance or impede students' engagement in learning. Current research in Priority Schools is useful in guiding schools towards such a future. The FGP has shown in its research that it is critical that learning of a high intellectual quality accompanies student engagement. This is essential in schools in low SES communities, where students rely on schools and teachers to create learning experiences that allow for engagement with, and achievement of, the educational outcomes expected of all students. It is a significant equity issue if students are taking part in activities that are viewed as fun, interesting and supposedly relevant, but not about real learning and achieving high outcomes.

Table 2 - Engaging messages for low SES students

Engaging messages for low SES students		
Knowledge	"We can see the connection and the meaning"	Reflectively constructed access to contextualised and powerful knowledge
Ability	"I am capable"	Feelings of being able to achieve and a spiral of high expectations and aspirations
Control	"We can do this together"	Sharing of classroom time and space: interdependence, mutuality and 'power with'
Place	"It's great to be a kid from"	Valued as individual and learner and feelings ofbelonging and ownership over learning
Voice	"We share"	Environment of discussion and reflection about learning with students and teachers playing reciprocal, meaningful roles

Engaging students demands a whole school commitment to a culture of learning. Successful Priority Schools encourage teams to work together on quality teaching and ways of engaging and supporting students. They also broker strong relationships with parents and community members that enrich learning experiences for individual students and the school community.

Creating the capacity for school change and a shift in thinking to promote high levels of student engagement is certainly a challenge for teachers, school leaders, parents and communities. In addressing this challenge, PSP identify three critical interrelated action areas that schools should consider when working to reduce the achievement gap in their local contexts: quality teaching and learning, home, school and community partnerships and classroom and school organisation and culture. Priority Schools are encouraged to plan and work within the three areas of action to find innovative solutions to address the identified needs of students within the context of their school community. These areas and the implications for implementing quality school organisational practices and developing a positive learning culture are expanded in Chapter 10.

Priority Schools have established a tradition of innovative practice, grassroots research and a model of flexible service delivery to school communities. The FGP continues the tradition of critically important research in challenging times. It provides some ways forward for school communities committed to the equity ideal of making a difference so that all students are engaged meaningfully on a long-term basis with schooling and their learning. These ways forward should not be seen as a set of practices to be adopted as a whole. Rather, they should be considered as a set of principles and classroom ideas that schools and teachers can take up as they work on their own 'points of engagement' and build their own places of learning.

The chapters that follow give examples from schools and classrooms where teachers working in the FGP have been implementing changes to their practices with the aim of encouraging engagement and improved academic outcomes. Many stories document the engagement of students as seen in the desire to continue tasks beyond designated time allocations and in the prevalence of talk about learning beyond the classroom walls. Note what students and teachers say about their classrooms and learning, and how well students can articulate this learning.

Chapter 2 describes research where the initial focus was on the link between engagement and student self-

assessment but later moved to a consideration of how to encourage an 'insider classroom'. This chapter highlights teacher changes in four classrooms at Carramar Public School and provides a useful beginning in understanding subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 documents a powerful challenge to student compliance. Drama was used to encourage thinking, participation and, ultimately, engagement in a group of students facing difficulties in literacy.

Chapter 4 focuses on enhancing literacy skills with Stage 3 students. Here students explore democracy and images of Australia through visual literacy. The changes in student engagement and subsequent improvement to their learning outcomes are remarkable.

Chapter 5 illustrates the engagement in the learning area of Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE). A Storypath approach is used to revitalise teacher and student interest. How Storypath supports student engagement is considered carefully.

Chapter 6 also explores ways of engaging students in HSIE by using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This is a powerful example of engaged students achieving enhanced skills and knowledge.

Chapter 7 describes a narrative approach. Teachers engage students in integrated literacy and HSIE and Science and Technology experiences that lead to engaging messages about student knowledge, ability, control, place and voice.

Chapter 8 focuses on the area of multiliteracies, incorporating the use of technology. In particular, it explores how to scaffold students' learning about a range of literacy practices. The experiences help the students to have a more powerful relationship with their learning in the classroom.

Chapter 9 considers the relationship between student engagement and home school literacies. In particular, it explores whether making strong home school partnerships at the level of classroom literacy practice might be a pathway to student engagement.

Chapter 10 explores implications and challenges for schools and classrooms as they work on their processes of student engagement. This chapter summarises many of the important ideas in the previous chapters.

The final section contains messages from the teachers involved in the FGP.

CHAPTER 2

Engagement and student self-assessment

Geoff Munns (University of Western Sydney)
Helen Woodward (University of Western Sydney)
John Koletti (Carramar Public School)

Carramar Public School has had a long history with the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the PSFP. These programs have helped the school develop a learning environment characterised by partnerships between teachers, students and parents. There has been a recent focus on engagement through student voice and reflective teaching practices.

The research partnership at Carramar was first established between Assistant Principal John Koletti and UWS researchers Geoff Munns and Helen Woodward. It began with the team considering the connections between student engagement and student self-assessment in John's composite Stage 2 classroom. We wanted to ask questions of each other and of the students about the relationship between 'e'ngaging tasks and students becoming 'insiders' in their learning processes. This research focus aimed to build on Carramar's ethos of encouraging students to have a voice in the way their school and classrooms operated.

As a team, we believed that there were critical connections between student engagement and student self-assessment. That is, at the same time as the kinds of 'e'ngaging experiences described in detail in other chapters of this book were being encouraged, we felt it was vital that a classroom philosophy of individual and collective self-assessment be promoted. This would allow opportunities for the students to share with each other and their teacher their thoughts and feelings about their learning at cognitive, affective and operative levels. We predicted that it would become a critical classroom element that would move

Using post-it-notes for self assessment

students closer to engagement. Importantly a classroom with a strong focus on student self-assessment would also be able to provide essential feedback to teachers about whether students were 'e'ngaged. The argument was that perhaps this would be the only way that we, as teachers, would know. This is because both 'e'ngagement and 'E'ngagement are internal feelings. They are difficult, and maybe impossible, to recognise by looking for external classroom signs, such as students quietly completing tasks, or even signs that might be more consistent with engagement, such as talking animatedly.

There was another important connection between student engagement and student self-assessment that we started to talk about in the research. At a theoretical and practical level student self-assessment is often seen as a set of tasks to be completed by students so that they make an appraisal of their learning (Hart, 1999; Bryant & Timmins, 2002). Of course, student self-assessment has a task component that can be set and monitored externally. But it can be much more. Since we, as teachers, were interested in 'e'ngagement and 'E'ngagement, we were challenged to think differently about the self-assessment tasks we were asking the students to do. In short, we needed to focus on the internal processes: the ways of encouraging students to think and talk seriously about the content, the processes and feelings relating to their learning.

This focus became the crucial preliminary aspect of our research in the classroom. The aim was to see how self-assessment could move from being a useful classroom tool to a vital pedagogical activity. There were three aspects to this investigation. Firstly, we wanted to examine how student self-assessment would encourage students to become more 'e'ngaged in their classroom. Secondly, we were keen to see how student self-assessment could help in the identification of when students were 'e'ngaged. Finally, the team's intention was to see the part student self-assessment could play in improving learning and teaching and changing the philosophy of the classroom.

As the research progressed there were a number of important developments that were later to become influential across the whole FGP. These first occurred as a result of work in John Koletti's class, and were then taken up in three other classrooms in the school.

From student self-assessment to the 'insider classroom'

Our first task was to consider and implement classroom changes that would encourage the children to take a greater part in their learning processes. As we began to put into place these changes, we saw a need to give children frequent and ongoing opportunities to make decisions about the nature of their classroom experiences designed to achieve their learning outcomes. We wanted to bring about a highly negotiated classroom environment with students involved in authentic decision making about what and how they would learn and how their work would be assessed. While this was happening we looked for differences between 'on-task' compliance and 'in-task' 'e'ngagement, and began to work on ways that we could gain access to students' thinking about all aspects of their learning. One of the first issues that arose was the necessity for the children to have the vocabulary enabling them to talk about both the content and processes of their learning. There needed to be regular sessions where the teacher took an active role in developing the language of student self-assessment and reflection. This process took oral and written forms, though one strategy became particularly effective. Children were given post-it notes to record their thoughts at various times during their learning experiences. The teacher provided a range of varying probes to scaffold their reflections. Some of these were: 'what I learnt'; 'what I liked'; 'what I didn't like'; 'what

I want to know'; 'what surprised me'. The post-its were placed on a chart under these headings. Other children were then able to muse individually and collectively about the responses. It was interesting and exciting to observe children having serious, shared conversations about each other's thoughts about their learning.

All children's responses were entered into a class assessment journal as a record of the learning journey we were all on. Using this and other strategies for student self-assessment and reflection, helped the children become more relaxed and familiar with the process, resulting in reflections becoming more detailed and expressive. As a result, both the teacher and the children were better able to understand the learning that was accomplished, which opened up future negotiated learning possibilities.

Another important development occurred during this research period. The team noticed that the nature of the responses and the language the teacher used assisted the children to refocus their work from trying to please the teacher to doing the best they could within their own understandings of the purpose of the work that was before them. Indeed, "Sir, is this right?" was practically eliminated as a classroom question. It was almost always met with teacher responses of: "What did we set out to do? What were the criteria? How do you feel you went? What did you learn?" We began to talk about wider aspects and components of classroom talk as key points for our classroom investigations. This broadening became conceptualised within the wider FGP as the 'insider classroom'.

Children sharing ideas about self-assessment

The 'insider classroom'

The taking up of the term 'insiders' was influenced by the different approaches to thinking about 'e'ngagement and 'E'ngagement and the definitions that had been found to capture these ideas (see definitions in Chapter 1). These definitions talked about students being important members of a learning community and playing meaningful 'insider' roles. If we were to encourage learners to enter into and play meaningful roles within the learning conversations and practices of the classroom community, then we had to carefully think about what were the critical elements of classrooms that had the potential to involve and include learners. We had entered into our research partnership to develop and evaluate practices of student self-assessment and reflection and these remained central. Now we had increasingly seen the importance of developing an engaging classroom philosophy. Classroom observations and some theoretical investigations helped us propose the following interactive framework.

Table 1 - Key elements of the 'insider classroom'

Student self-assessment	Continuous opportunities for students to think about and express ideas about the processes of their learning Focus on cognitive, affective and operative aspects of learning and towards deeper levels of reflection Movement away from teacher as sole judge and towards students taking more responsibility for evaluation of learning (see postscript)
Student community of reflection	A conscious environment of cooperative sharing of ideas and processes about learning Focus on substantive conversations encouraging student control and voice Movement away from compliance as a way of students responding to task completion and evaluation and towards shared ownership over all aspects of the learning experiences
Teacher inclusive conversations	Emphasis on sharing power with students rather than establishing power over students Visibility that encourages sharing of classroom culture – children are privy to and involved in discussions about classroom ethos and processes Promotion of thinking and opportunities for students to interact and share processes of learning Focus on learning, not behaviour Movement away from classroom discourse that is dominated by IRE (initiation, response, evaluation) towards conversations about learning (shared, mutual, reciprocal)
Teacher feedback	Awareness of power of written, oral and symbolic feedback on students' self-concept as learners Focus on staged process: 1. the task (talking explicitly about achievement and what students have done that is right or wrong) 2. processes (helping students acquire processes and better ways of doing tasks) 3. self-regulation (encouraging effort and confidence and helping students to stay committed to the learning experiences. Movement away from generalised and unrelated feedback towards feedback tied to investing more effort, more attention, or more confidence into the task being undertaken

This framework could also be shown as a diagram to highlight the interactivity of the four elements. *(See page 11)*

The 'insider classroom' framework in action

The next step in the project was to share the ideas with students and teachers in other classrooms. It was particularly important to investigate if and how the 'insider classroom' framework could be implemented across different stages of the school. Two Early Stage 1/Stage 1 classes and one Stage 3 class joined the Carramar research.

Kindergarten (Early Stage 1) - Lisa Tranter

Encouraging Kindergarten children to become reflective learners at such an early age was indeed an

exciting challenge. Lisa Tranter, the classroom teacher, took up the challenge enthusiastically and began by focusing on the affective aspect of their learning because it was considered important for these young learners to articulate their own feelings about what they were doing in their classroom.

The initial task was to build a language of reflection that could be used later when the children were linking individual feelings to their learning. A number of introductory activities set up this process. Charts, which displayed a variety of feelings children experienced in situations inside and outside school, were produced and discussed.

There were large dice with pictures and words built up about their feelings, which children rolled and then talked about in small groups and in front of the class. The children made 'brains' out of containers and regularly recorded what they had learned (content and

processes). Later they would retrieve these records and 'see' their learning, deconstructing and evaluating how their knowledge had been constructed. These kinds of activities helped develop a classroom environment of reflection and discussion, essential when children were describing their responses to classroom learning experiences.

For this process to be most effective the children had to be provided with the kinds of high cognitive, high affective and high operative activities being researched in other classrooms in the FGP. There is an illustration of such a coming together of reflection and learning in this Kindergarten class involving a project with the Australian Museum[2]. The learning team at the museum wanted school children (K-12) to visit and provide feedback about what helped them and hindered them in their learning. Lisa linked this reflective learning experience with a classroom unit on dinosaurs. Preparatory sessions in their own classroom focused on what the children liked and disliked in the classroom and what that meant for their learning. The teacher directed the conversation towards practices and resources that were connected with the work being investigated. There were discussions about "How does it make you feel inside?" when they liked or disliked aspects of their

classroom associated with dinosaurs. When they visited the museum they worked in small groups deciding on what they individually felt they liked and disliked regarding their learning. These affective, cognitive and operative responses were recorded with photographs, accompanied by field notes of the students' reasons for the learning position they had taken up. These were made up into posters and presented to the museum.

Kindergarten/Year 1 (Early Stage 1/Stage 1) - Julia Elks

The research focus for this class was on how students could develop an environment of negotiated and shared learning and the ways this environment could be supported and enhanced through individual student self-assessment. Early strategies were to give children choices in their weekly literacy rotations, letting them choose when they would attempt different activities. These were followed by whole class sharing sessions through which the children were able to have conversations about what they did and why. Julia directed the discussions towards how their work connected with other aspects of their learning. She also began to concentrate their attention towards criteria, feedback and judgment: "It's good work, but how do we know it's good?" These kinds of focused learning conversations paved the way for the students to enter into more formal and written self-assessments. As with Lisa's Kindergarten class, this process was accompanied by classroom experiences designed to be high affective, high cognitive and high operative. An example of this was a culminating activity for a unit of work on Australian animals. In groups the children designed and constructed maps of a zoo for the animals they had been learning about[3]. The zoo was on large pieces of cardboard with coloured paper for enclosures and pathways. When these were completed a problem was posed for the groups to solve. An overseas visitor who knew nothing about Australian animals was coming to their zoo. The visitor had limited time so could only visit five enclosures. The groups had to plot the itinerary and provide information cards to tell the visitor what to look for. For example, "look at the kangaroo's pouch and the way the kangaroo moves using its long tail". This task provided a useful revision and assessment of their content learning during the unit of work. It also presented a valuable structure for the student self-assessment probes that the students completed at the end of each session. These probes included: What did you do today? Did you like the activity? Why? What were the easy parts? What were the tricky parts? What did each person in your group do? What did you learn? Why did you do the activity? From a research viewpoint it was intriguing to see how such young learners seriously worked on their responses to these probes. It was also a sign of how far they had come as reflective learners that in response to the final probe they moved well past the standard earlier reaction, 'Because the teacher told us to', to sincere and thoughtful contemplations about their learning.

Year 5/Year 6 (Stage 3) – Hamish Woudsma

At the senior end of the school, Hamish was concerned that his students were not involved in serious reflections about their journal writing. Their entries were hurriedly completed and were not reaching expected syllabus writing outcomes. Furthermore, the students largely ignored the written feedback provided by the teacher which had taken considerable time to enter. Both students and teacher seemed to be gaining little from what was intended to be a valuable learning exercise. To address this, Hamish told the students he was going to give them greater responsibility for the whole process. They started by swapping their journals, suggesting changes and having conversations about why they felt the changes needed to be made. As a group, the students then shared all of the changes that had been made. This discussion was focused towards the kinds of criteria they were beginning to establish for knowing how well they had been writing. A chart was established with these criteria and the students prioritised the inclusions, interestingly deeming 'descriptive' as being the most valuable: 'In journal writing people need to express their feelings'. Student self-assessment probes that were responded to orally and in writing accompanied the whole process: What did I like? Why did I like it? What did I learn? How did I learn this? During the

next journal writing session, the task was for students to write in their journals and then assess each other's work using the criteria. Immediately noticeable was that the students were using the criteria as they wrote and were taking much more time to complete their journals. Here was a tangible sign that students were more 'e'ngaged in the process. A subsequent learning conversation involved the students in evaluating the criteria. The talk was about fairness in their assessment and really got to issues of subjectivity and objectivity. From here the students moved to group discussions about a journal entry using the new criteria. The conversations were concentrated and meaningful, with one group observed having a serious discussion about what criteria they should apply for an assessment of an entry that had issues around both tense and punctuation. Next they reconvened as a whole group to thrash out their assessment deliberations. Here was a substantive exchange that got to the heart of consistency of student judgment, not an easy task, but one that kept the students 'e'ngaged far beyond the anticipated time allowed for the session. Importantly, the discussion continued around the room without having to pass through the teacher's evaluative response. (Students engaging in tasks beyond allocated timeslots is seen throughout this book, including students working on projects until, and including, the last day of school. See Chapter 7). Indeed, the FGP recognises that a sign of student engagement is when learning extends 'beyond teacher, task and time'.

Year 5/Year 6 (Stage 3) – John Koletti

Throughout the project, John's classroom was a focus for the research team's expansion of ideas around the concept of the 'insider classroom'. As the framework emerged from our discussions and observations, it was further tested with the children. The following brief description of an episode from research field notes captures how the 'inclusive conversations' of the teacher encouraged children to take control of their learning and contributed to the developing sense of a community of reflection.

The lesson commences with the children undertaking a listening activity in the form of a game. After the game has finished John asks them, 'How can we use this in our learning?'

There are a number of different responses from the children: 'Doing our reading assessments'. 'Doing our projects'. 'Listening to understand.'

John uses their responses to expand the discussion with comments like: 'Tell me a bit more. Can that be linked in any way? What skills did we actually learn? Allow me to move you in a certain direction. What do we have to do in our minds? OK, we could be on the right track here. Are there any comments before we move on?' Notice how his comments move away from initiation-response-evaluation (IRE), the most common form of teacher talk in classrooms.

The children now move to Mathematics and an investigation of angles. They have made an 'angle-tester' and in groups test angles in the room and beyond, categorising and listing angles they find.

John maintains his presence while encouraging student control of the learning experience: 'I'm going to give you 15 minutes so you have to organise your time. Allocate your time. Explain to your partners why you agree or disagree with them. It's up to you how you want to present it. If you need to talk to me, I'm here. Some people have asked me if we can have more time. I'm happy if you need it. Do you? What do you think, 5 or 10 more minutes?' (The children agree on 10 and continue with their task).

A problem is posed to the group as they complete the activity: 'What if there were no angles?'

There was a lively discussion with plenty of animated talk and eye contact. Here the whole class definitely looked and sounded more 'e'ngaged. John keeps the momentum of the discussion going: 'One group says one thing, another says something different. How can this be? Does anyone want to take their idea any further? We'll think about this and come back to it later.'

The class is dismissed but a group of boys stays and discusses the problem further.

This kind of classroom conversation was typical of the way John attempted to work within the 'insider

classroom' framework. Our belief that was being tested through the research was that when this kind of atmosphere pervades the classroom there is a strong likelihood that children will move towards the levels of engagement discussed earlier in this chapter.

What did we learn?

The FGP research at Carramar Public School provided important theoretical and practical ideas for the whole project. It contributed to an awareness and understanding of the importance of classroom processes and learning conversations, provided a context for the 'insider classroom' framework and alerted us to the kinds of powerful and 'e'ngaging messages that classrooms can deliver to students in Priority Schools.

Postscript: Dimensions of student self-assessment

While the research at Carramar was taking place, there was a recognition that we needed to design ways of encouraging the students to think more deeply about their processes of learning and the relationship between reflection and 'e'ngaged learners. It was at this stage that we started to focus on the possibility of a framework that would help us see beyond the basic level of self-assessment. Biggs' (1995) *SOLO Taxonomy* opened the discussion and later became the foundation of our thinking as we developed a framework for self-assessment. Biggs put forward the idea that assessment items should be designed in such a way that the assessment product revealed different levels of understanding. The *SOLO Taxonomy* is a systematic way of increasing the structural complexity of learning and assessment tasks through unistructural, multistructural, relational and abstract sequences.

Developing a framework for student self-assessment

In applying the *SOLO Taxonomy* to student self-assessment, the intention was to promote deeper reflections about learning and work against self-assessments becoming compliant and routine among the students. We developed this model by relating it to what we were seeing in our research classrooms. First we restructured *SOLO Taxonomy* with what we felt were appropriate dimensions of self-assessment. We were careful not to look at these through a hierarchical lens but to focus on them as ideas that would lead to greater insights into the students' understandings. The notional dimensions and descriptions are described in Table 2 (reading from the bottom up).

Next we posed questions to stimulate the students into thinking about the various dimensions.

The final framework reflected the FGP's classroom interplay of cognitive, affective and operative.

As we started working with this framework, we found that we needed to establish probe categories that would assist those using it to unpack the meanings. The reason different kinds of probes were needed was to focus attention on the different aspects of learning. It is expected that these probes will cross all dimensions at every level. That is, different types of probes can be used at all levels for affective, cognitive and operative. The ones expressed here are by no means definitive and it is reasonable to believe that the list will be significantly added to as we explore this framework and as the framework is used by other teachers and students. These probes are shown in Table 2.

Encouraging student engagement and knowing when students are 'e'ngaged

The more we use and think about the framework, the more we are convinced that it has great possibilities for classrooms where the aim is for students to operate at high affective, high cognitive and high operative levels. We do not see the framework as a proforma, rather as a way of focusing attention on the processes of student reflection and encouraging students to feel and think more deeply about their work and achievement. It is our belief that these processes can play an integral role in the development of student 'e'ngagement and in helping teachers know when students are 'e'ngaged.

Table 2 - Dimensions of student self-assessment

Self-assessment levels applied to SOL0 Taxonomy

Conceptual	Translating ideas into concepts
Relational	Relating to other areas or processes
Multidimensional	Content plus process
Unidimensional	Basic content

Questions for students

Conceptual	Translating ideas into concepts	Why is it important for you to know/understand/ be able to do this?
Relational	Relating to other areas	How do these processes/content relate to or process something else you know?
Multidimensional	Content plus process	How did you learn this?
Unidimensional	Basic content	What did you learn?

Dimensions of self-assessment (Woodward/Munns)

Dimension	**Affective**	**Cognitive**	**Operative**
Conceptual - translating into concepts	Why is it important to acknowledge this feeling in your work?	Why is it important for you to know/ understand/ be able to do this?	Why is being able to do this important?
Relational - relational to other areas/ processes	Have you ever felt this way about something else? When? What was it?	How do these processes/content relate to something else you know?	Where else could you do this?
Multidimensional - content plus process	Why did you like/ dislike this?	How did you arrive at the conclusion/answer?	How did you do it?
Unidimensional - basic content	Did you like or dislike this work/unit?	What did you learn?	What did you do?

Probe categories for dimensions of student self-assessment

Probes

Thinking about achievement	Overcoming barriers	Looking for evidence	Reframing the task	Working with other people

CHAPTER 3

Dramatically 'e'ngaged

Margery Hertzberg (University of Western Sydney)
Kerrie Foord (Cartwright Public School)
Melissa Manga (Cartwright Public School)

The important feature of Cartwright Public School for our story is the diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. About 50 per cent of students are from LBOTE, with 40 per cent of students requiring additional assistance in academic English. Furthermore, many of the monolingual children require similar assistance.

Talking and listening was identified as a priority literacy focus for all students at Cartwright Public School, irrespective of language background. The English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers were responsible for instigating this focus, given the fundamental premise of ESL pedagogy that talking and listening in small groupwork situations must precede the reading and writing phase of any task/content experience (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). As well, both ESL teachers visit all classes making dissemination of ideas more expedient.

Since Margery lectures in both ESL and drama and has a research interest in using drama to enhance language and literacy development, she met with Melissa to discuss research partnership possibilities. Melissa stressed in meetings that the issue was not classroom management, but classroom engagement. With the usual few exceptions, children at Cartwright are well behaved. However, they avoid taking risks or actively engaging in demanding tasks - avoidance behaviour is common. And so a vicious cycle ensues. Children are loath to talk in sustained and demanding dialogues, responding more enthusiastically to solitary written worksheets.

We decided to find out if a drama methodology called educational drama might interrupt this cycle, because educational drama involves children engaging in a process termed enactment. Enactment involves children taking on roles using both verbal and non-verbal language to explore and interpret concepts and issues. Rather than re-enacting prescribed drama texts and stories, children use their own ideas. Activating prior experience and knowledge is central to the process. Although performance for an external audience is possible if this additional outcome is desired, for the purpose of cross-curricula learning the immediate intent is on using the drama process to enhance participants' cognitive, linguistic and affective experiences in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, the emphasis is on small groupwork.

Performance was not an aim for our research. Rather, we used this drama process for talking and listening experiences prior to reading and writing activities. Our principal aim therefore was to plan what we believed to be high cognitive, affective and operative learning experiences, and then collect data from these sessions in order to analyse if they did engage children in sustained and substantive conversations and, in so doing, improve their language and literacy development.

What did we do?

For 1½ hours each fortnight over three terms, Margery and Melissa team taught with two classes and their teachers - one composite 4/5 for Term 2 and one Year 6 for Terms 3 and 4. However, it is important to note that the original arrangement to withdraw 15 students with the greatest ESL needs from both Year 6 classes was changed after the first lesson. This event is highlighted because it is significant in terms of our commitment to the overarching theory of discourse of power. In summary, the change occurred this way. Both Year 6 teachers were reading the book *I am Jack* by Susanne Gervay as a class novel. The original plan was for Melissa to withdraw a small group of ESL students from both classes and concentrate on the grammatical features of this book in more depth. However, after the first session, Kerrie's students returned to their class for the 'end of the day whole class reflection activity' and were asked to share what they had done. Polite enough initial responses were fortunately interrupted when one girl shared her real thoughts. In essence she hated being withdrawn, believing it a pronouncement of her 'dumbness'. Other students then voiced similar opinions. With the best of intentions, because of timetable restrictions, numbers of students to ESL teachers and so forth, withdrawal had been programmed. Of course, after these comments this option was abandoned and withdrawal ceased. The maxim 'quality not quantity' was adopted. Melissa spent half of each term team teaching in both Year 6 classes but Margery stayed with Kerrie and her class.

When Margery was at the school she was the primary facilitator of the drama teaching, modelling the process for teachers and students. The teachers, however, took an active role in helping children during the groupwork stages within each lesson and implemented similar lessons when Margery was not there. In consultation with Kerrie, Margery and Melissa prepared drama plans that met specifically the needs of ESL children, but at the same time were appropriate for other students. Planning sessions were regular. One long planning session each term to establish the overall framework was held during relief time and other sessions by phone after school or during lunchtimes. A summary of the drama plans and major literacy focus follows.

Year 4/5 Drama plan for the narrative picture book Our Excursion by Kate Walker and David Cox

A thorough interpretation of this amusing picture book is realised only through a close reading and matching of both the written and visual texts. The drama strategies of sculpting, questioning in role, still image and non-scripted improvisation were used. The program requires children to develop a fictional play about an excursion. During the whole class writing block, two ESL children worked with Margery to jointly construct the narration for the play.

Years 4/5 and Year 6 Using pictures as a stimulus for developing substantive conversations

Using the drama strategy of questioning in role (sometimes referred to as hot-seating), the aim was to construct a substantive fictional story as the foundation for narrative story writing. The emphasis was using and sharing descriptive and expressive language through talk. Questioning in role encourages open-ended questions. Moreover, the language functions of, for example, inference, evaluation and justification are dominant.

Year 6 Drama Plan for the beginning chapters of the novel I am Jack by Susanne Gervay

The main literacy focus was to analyse the grammatical and linguistic structures of the text to examine how this language positions the reader's interpretation of a bullying scene using Readers Theatre as the tool.

Year 6 Drama plan to explore the concept of emotional abuse based on physical difference

Using the picture book *Six Perfectly Different Pigs* by Adrienne Geoghegan and Elisabeth Moseng, children examined the features of a fable and the concept of bullying, prior to training as peer support leaders.

Year 6 Integrating drama with an HSIE Storypath unit

Questioning in role was used to help students develop and sustain a more comprehensive and believable character for the Antarctica unit (strategies featured in a Storypath approach are explored further in Chapters 4 and 6).

What did we find?

In order to reflect on and analyse the above learning experiences, data were collected through teacher observation and discussion, student written work samples, video, photos, field notes and focus group, semi-structured, audio interviews with students and staff. Data were coded, based on emergent themes as they pertained to the 'e'ngaging messages framework.

Space precludes reporting all findings from this project. Therefore, snapshots of just some drama strategies used during sessions are described and then discussed in relation to language and literacy development and the 'e'ngaging messages inherent within.

Snapshot 1: Explanation to students about the outcomes we were working towards in that lesson

To begin most sessions, an overhead transparency displaying the most pertinent outcomes from the K-6 English Syllabus (Board of Studies, 1998) was discussed with students. For example, for the Drama plan *Six Perfectly Different Pigs,* the information in Figure 1 was displayed:

Anticipated Outcomes

- Communicates effectively for a range of purposes and with a variety of audiences to express well developed and well organised ideas.
- Interacts effectively in groups and pairs to tell a story.
- Understands the construction of the narrative form of fables.

Fable

Fables are short narratives written to express ideas about morals and how societies or communities could be better places.

The characters are usually animals, but they represent human characteristics. (The term for this is anthropomorphic).

Figure 1

Discussion and implications

There were several interrelated reasons for doing this. All of these reasons related to our aim of creating an 'insider' classroom discourse where sharing the educational reasons for the lessons (knowledge, control, voice and place) was valued. It also helped focus students on both the purpose and content of the program rather than second-guessing what we as teachers had planned. Furthermore, we felt this context might 'set the scene' in terms of the expectations we had of students (ability). Although each point was paraphrased in presentation, it was intentional to quote directly from the syllabus to help demystify these documents.

Snapshot 2: Using the drama strategy of sculpting as a comprehension tool

The lesson sequence was as follows:

1. Teacher read the book to students.
2. Overhead transperancy of excerpt displayed. This excerpt is about one pig (Paprika) being ridiculed by five other pigs for being different - having a straight tail.
3. In their journals, students were asked to write a response to the following question: How do you think Paprika felt and why?
4. Working in pairs, one student sculpted the other person in role as Paprika to show their interpretation of this scene.

5. Class viewed and discussed the different interpretations.

6. Students returned to their written work adding additional information to the question.

Discussion and implications

Students were asked to write their response *before* doing the drama activity, because we wanted to find out if they had more to write *after* the sculpting exercise. Most did. Josie's example follows:

(Before sculpting) Paprika must have felt like being the other person instead of the bullied one. She also must of felt alone.

(After sculpting) She felt depressed and the other person is feeling guilty. She felt discriminated (against). When I did the activity I felt that I was Paprika and felt alone.

Josie's sample demonstrates the use of more descriptive vocabulary to express further ideas gleaned from this four minute drama activity. Note also the affective response about feeling like Paprika. This response was not unique in the written samples and, in interview, students responded similarly. They frequently said that role helped clarify their opinions. As Manh said, 'Because you're actually being the person you have to work it out and see how it feels.'

Preparing the sculpture of Paprika

Sculpture of Paprika

Furthermore, in preparing the sculpture, all children were actively involved, discussing the concept and ideas in order to prepare their interpretations. It provided all children with the opportunity to debate the issue and also broke the traditional cycle of teacher initiates, student responds and teacher evaluates (IRE – see 'teacher inclusive conversations' as part of *Key elements of the 'insider classroom'* in previous chapter). As teachers moved between pairs, students' conversations were recorded using field notes. The excerpt below is one example:

Put your head down and sit kind of squashed up so you look really lonely and close your eyes to show that you want to ignore them, but look really sad too, because they are trying to discriminate against you and make you feel bad.

In interviews all children thought drama helped them write their ideas. Ahmed's statement is representative:

Like if you write it, you don't talk to anyone and you just think it out in your head … you don't get to give your opinions (like you do in drama) and then you can use them (in your writing).

Melissa's reflective notes following this session also noted the level of engagement:

… students are on task, excited about doing the activities requested … even the shy students are giving it a go. There is no apprehension or avoidance behaviour on their part.

We believe working in groups contributed to risk taking. Furthermore, groups were usually friendship groups. An unexpected outcome was the frequency of positive responses to small group work. The interview transcript below is characteristic.

Student: Working in groups makes it more fun, but also it helps you think more because they have more ideas and you can put all those ideas together.

Margery: What sorts of groups do you like working in?

Student: My friends.

Margery: Why?

Student: 'Cause you like them and they like you and then it's easier.

Margery: In what way is it easier?

Student: You don't worry about them laughing and all that, so you say things more.

Snapshot 3: Using Readers Theatre to improve both understanding and reading fluency

As children were unfamiliar with Readers Theatre (RT), a teacher-prepared script was written for the scene where Jack is bullied (pp. 26-29). This scene is seminal to the bullying theme throughout and Gervay releases the tension, but at the same time heightens the imagery through the use of humorous similes and colloquial language. For example:

George Hamel is a rugby player. He's a front forward. A big front forward with muscles that stick out of his chest like hamburgers. He's a real meathead. Joke, joke. Do you get it? Hamburger. Meat. (Gervay, 2000, p. 26)

Discussion and implications

For many ESL children, written English jokes are hard to get, often requiring explicit explanation. Listening to a good model (in this case the teacher) reading aloud and then participating in small groups in a dramatised reading is just one way to assist their understanding. In this case, the children followed the script as the teacher read. Many children laughed as it was read and were asked to explain the humour. They found this difficult to articulate, but knew, for example, that the reference to hamburgers was a joke, and at the same time telling the reader that George was strong and tough. All children were then asked to stand and make themselves look like a George Hamel, thus demonstrating their understanding using non-verbal language. The concept of simile was then discussed further.

In her reflective journal Melissa noted:

… there is increased student confidence and participation and increased inferential comprehension as well as improved fluency. As well the students are more 'e'ngaged with the book because they are taking on roles and have to really think about intonation and so forth. It's great to see children asking me questions to clarify their understanding, rather than waiting for me to ask them questions. Perhaps it's because they have real ownership over the work and want to do their best.

Kerrie also thought this RT fulfilled the requirements of a high cognitive, high affective, high operative learning experience and 'insider' classroom because of conversations noted as she moved between groups. Interesting, for example, was the amount of discussion

One group performing their Readers Theatre to other class members

that occurred while rehearsing. For instance, children helped each other with the pronunciation and/or word recognition of words such as 'ignorant'. They also discussed how to read specific lines. For example, Rona (ESL) said:

I reckon you should say it real sad and frustrated like, you know, how we did it before for the line, 'Oh boy, Mum knows nothing'.

Since then, Melissa has used RT extensively with classes across all stages. To date all scripts have been teacher written because the emphasis has been on improving reading fluency and comprehension and not script writing. Books used include: *Hattie and the Fox*, *Shoes from Grandpa*, *Wombat Stew* and *Peace at Last.* Melissa believes this strategy is helping. In interview she said:

Not only is reading fluency improving, this strategy also relies on communication between small groups where negotiation and decision making is necessary. Although the more vocal students still dominate at times, it is not so frequent, and in any case, because students are working in such small groups, there is more chance for all to take an active role.

Snapshot 4: Using questioning in role to enhance sustained conversation and higher order questioning to construct a character profile

Just the beginning of the lesson sequence follows:

1. An amusing picture of an elderly woman performing a difficult yoga movement was shown.
2. In small friendship groups students discussed the picture.
3. Students spent two minutes writing questions (in drama journals) that they wanted to ask about her life and returned to the drama circle.
4. Questioning in role: students asked teacher in role as the woman, questions to establish her life.
5. As a whole class students brainstormed descriptive language and recorded this on a retrieval chart, later to be used in voice collage.
6. In small groups students devised still images to depict a dramatic moment in her life.

Discussion and implications

For students and teachers alike, this lesson sequence was the most compelling in terms of students' commitment to the task. We therefore knew it important to report, but nearly did not. Often the kind of empathy developed through drama is difficult to record on paper and this is an example. It is easy to report the high rate of higher order thinking that occurred (analytical and synthesis type questions) enabling an in-depth and substantive story to unfold. Moreover, the amount of substantive discussion in groups when planning their still image was evident, and often reflective, as children problematised the stigma surrounding eccentricity and society's attitude to the elderly.

But there was an extra buzz during these lessons that in writing this chapter we have reflected on and tried to articulate. The 'e'ngaging messages of knowledge, ability, control, place and voice are central to educational drama pedagogy (although this body of research uses other terms) and we think these messages were surfacing more during these sessions. As well, the importance of imaginative thinking was evident, for as one student enthusiastically announced:

If I pretend that I'm doing drama (during the Basic Skills writing test) then I'll use my imagination and come up with some good ideas.

In all drama sessions, narrative has been the focus 'to enhance the significance of the substance of the lesson' (NSW DET, 2003, p. 50), but in this sequence students developed a unique story. Furthermore, educational drama pedagogy alters the common teacher/student relationship in which students try to second-guess the teacher's intentions. Rather, the emphasis is on students thinking about and probing issues and relationships more carefully for themselves.

However, frameworks were pre-planned to scaffold the drama's development or as one student said in interview:

The teacher gives you the bones of it and we have to act the muscles.

For instance, the teacher went into role as the woman because children were unfamiliar with the technique,

George proposes to Lizzie. 'Our still image is showing the time when George proposed to Lizzie. He is 25 and she is 21. They are so in love that they don't even notice the waitresses trying to take their order. We decided to do this scene because it shows that old people have good memories too and still laugh a lot.'

and 'framework questions' to aid students' planning of the scenario were provided. In interview Kerrie said:

All students were negotiating, planning and making decisions and then presented as a cohesive group. The feelings of 'I am capable' were unmistakable.

But now we do not think it was just ability. It was a feeling of collective ownership of a story that was believable and enjoyable, and at the same time enabled and allowed students to be as imaginative and fantastic as they wished, that helped move this from an 'on-task' to an 'in-task' learning experience.

Having observed this commitment, Kerrie and Margery continued using this strategy with students in the Storypath units, as it allowed students to develop a more thoughtful and deeper belief in their character. In their team teaching sessions this year (2004), Kerrie and Melissa continue to use drama in HSIE.

Links to student engagement

These selected snapshots highlight how our pedagogical approach is working towards fulfilling the 'e'ngaging messages discourse. In general terms there has been a pedagogical shift, with an increased emphasis on and commitment to talking and listening prior to reading and writing. As well, there is less chalk and talk and/or teacher IRE situations because in drama so much of the talking and listening is undertaken in small groups. This frequency of interaction between peers conforms to ESL research (Pica, 1994; Swain, 1995), and served to encourage the students to feel 'insiders' in their classrooms. Furthermore, current educational drama research supports the use of drama to enhance language and literacy development (for example: Booth & Neelands, 1998; Ewing, Simons & Hertzberg, 2004; Fleming & Baldwin, 2003; Hertzberg, 2000; Hertzberg, 2003; Koa & O'Neill, 1998; O'Mara, 2003 & Wagner, 1998).

Moreover, one of the most profound, yet unexpected, outcomes to date is the degree of risk taking. We

At George's funeral. 'Our still image is about George's funeral. He was 86 when he died. It must be hard for old people to lose their husband or wife because they'd feel so alone.'

believe risk taking increased because of a strong sense of ownership during the enactment process (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O'Toole, 1992) that affectively 'e'ngaged students. As one child said:

If you're acting you can be a little more passionate about it. Acting gives you more of a picture of what you're actually doing instead of just writing it. When you write it, it doesn't stay for long, but if you act it, it's a memory".

But are memorable experiences enough? We think not. For students from low SES backgrounds, learning experiences need to be guided by empathic teachers (Arnold, 2005) who engage children in rigorous activities of a high intellectual level using a combination of teaching practices, so learning progresses (Gardner, 1993; O'Toole, 2002). In our program we observed how role taking enabled students to delve deeper, learn about and apply 'big picture' issues within various units of work, as well as improved language and literacy development. However, it is acknowledged that there is insufficient longitudinal data to conclusively state this. This is our ongoing challenge. Nevertheless, data to date convincingly shows that students both enjoy and believe they are learning during drama.

We leave the last word to a student. Playing devil's advocate, Margery said in interview that drama might be fun but a bit of a waste of time to which the student (rather indignantly) responded:

It's (drama) not wasting time because wasting time means like you're out of it, like you're not doing anything you're just sitting there bored, but if you are in it, it's like it's fun and then you're learning.

CHAPTER 4

Visual literacy

Jon Callow (University of Western Sydney)
Debbie Hunter (Cartwright Public School)
Teresa Walsh (Liverpool Education Office)

Like now I know what perspective is, plein aire, all those things … I'm way more interested than I was before. Like all my best friends, we talk about it sometimes. Now I draw pictures at home, it's just fascinated me a lot (Dean, Year 6 student)

Hearing a comment like this from a boy who was more likely to disrupt classroom learning experiences is just one example of how the inclusion of visual literacy supported student engagement in Debbie's classroom. Debbie was aware of the need to support a range of achievement levels in the upper grades, particularly with the boys, whose literacy outcomes were low and disengagement in literacy tasks high.

Visual texts offer a unique way for students to explore a variety of concepts and ideas. As part of ongoing action research with the FGP, we observed that using and exploring visual images with students was a strong 'e'ngaging factor for many of them. There was a connection and interest for students in viewing and discussing images that was quite immediate, in a way that differed from written text. The willingness of students to 'e'ngage with images and the curriculum in which these images were embedded made strong connections to the larger focus of the research project on student engagement.

Visual texts and visual literacy

Visual literacy is not just about pictures or images being present in books, on web pages or on student worksheets. The term 'literacy' strongly suggests the need to develop actively used skills and concepts in working with all types of texts. In the case of visual texts, students need to be given opportunities to actively view, discuss and critique, as well as design and create these texts themselves. Visual literacy resides in the wider context of the work on multiliteracies. Engaging with our visually-dominated, global and technology-based cultures is essential (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Barnard, 2001; Brice Heath, 2000; Downes & Zammit, 2001; Kress, 2000), as well as enhancing students' understanding of paper based texts, such as children's literature and information books (Anstey & Bull, 2000; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Moline, 1995; Unsworth, 2002).

While the previous points about visual literacy are important, it is also pertinent to include understandings about visual images that are wider in scope than current educational literacy definitions. Scholars from fields such as philosophy, cultural studies and the visual arts bring other dimensions to the discussion about the role of visual images in our culture, which are also important in terms of student engagement. The affective role of images in our culture acknowledges the impact of visuals in a way that is different to understanding them from a more

'linguistic' or traditionally text based approach. Mirzoeff (1999) suggests that there is an immediacy in images which is not present in the written text. From an arts perspective, Raney argues that discussion of creativity, judgement and 'aesthetic openness' are not apparent when visual images are treated in the same way as language (Raney, 1998, p.41). Including these aspects in our discussion of visual literacy allows commentary on the apparent impact and pleasure students derive from viewing and creating their own visual and multimodal[4] texts, as well as acknowledging their development of key literacy skills in viewing and creating visual texts.

Visual literacy and engagement

Engaging all students in rigorous, meaningful and successful learning experiences was the focus of the research collaboration between Jon, Debbie and Teresa over a two-year period. Visual literacy was integrated into two units of work. The first focused on Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) issues of democracy and civics. In the second year, the HSIE topic dealt with the theme of Australian culture and identity, which was integrated with visual arts and various artists' representations of Australia. The common focus was to encourage student engagement with the curriculum and to explore how visual literacy might be integrated, taught and used to support 'e'ngaged learning in the classroom context. There was also a strong focus on 'insider' processes of student self-assessment in their learning and negotiating the curriculum to support students' interests.

Democracy in action

The Democracy in Action unit introduced the students to a variety of visual possibilities.

Developing students' knowledge of democracy and civics involves not only understanding how elections are run and bills are passed, but also becoming aware that political information, both visual and written, is constructed for particular purposes and needs. The nature of any political information needs to be questioned and discussed by voters and citizens. The HSIE topic for Year 6 at Cartwright Public School integrated democracy and civics with English, and students were involved in reading, writing, talking and listening activities, the use of technology, as well as viewing and creating visual texts. The unit of work built up the field knowledge of the story of Australian democracy and how the electoral system operates. Students were involved in creating an election pamphlet for the position of the Environmental Officer in the school. Visual literacy was incorporated by not only learning through visual texts but also by learning about visual texts, such as their design and layout (Callow, 1999). The inclusion of visual texts in this unit showed students 'e'ngaged in the affective, cognitive and operational aspects of their learning.

To understand how visual texts are used to persuade and influence people, our students were initially involved in a variety of activities to help them move from everyday knowledge about images to more critical understandings about what they viewed. These activities involved sorting a variety of photos from magazines into categories such as friendly or unfriendly, powerful or weak. Another sorting activity involved grouping images according to the purpose for which they could be used, such as for advertising, information books or family photos. Political pamphlets were collected and discussed in terms of layout and design, as well as the types of photos and written texts that were included. The pamphlets were also cut up 'electronically' on screen, so students could resize text and image and 'play' with the possible combinations. Viewing, discussion and manipulation of visual texts played a key role in 'e'ngaging our students and developing their literacy skills.

The use of angles and shot distance was a key aspect in helping the students understand how politicians might project a particular image. After grouping images under headings of high angle and low angle, the class discussed why low angled shots created a sense of power in the person being portrayed, while eye level shots suggested a sense of equality and friendliness. These concepts were then transferred to their own work when they were developing pamphlets to advertise for an Environmental Officer at the school. Students used a variety of shots for their pamphlets. Adrian, for example, used a close up shot with bushes in the background (see image) while Kyle used a long shot

Adrian's close up shot

Kyle's long shot

to show him looking at the plants in the playground gardens (see image).

Students used software programs such as PowerPoint to design their pamphlets.

The process of self-assessment and classroom discussion around all the activities, particularly the visual aspects, proved to be a key feature in 'e'ngaging students with their learning. Debbie skilfully opened up spaces where students could comment on their own work or the work of other students, discussing collaboratively with each other the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Student engagement at an operational level showed in their enthusiasm to take their photos and work on the design of their pamphlets. Their pride and interest in this task also showed an affective engagement, while the ongoing and final discussions about the pamphlets showed a deep understanding of how images can be used to persuade and inform, but also need to be critiqued and questioned. When discussion turned to how images were used by politicians, most students' comments showed an awareness that critical choices are made by politicians when they are presenting themselves visually.

Jon: What sort of photo would a politician put in their pamphlet? One that makes them look what?

Anthia: Strong and nice.

Jon: Why would that be important to put in?

Anthia: 'Cause then it would make them caring enough for people to vote for.

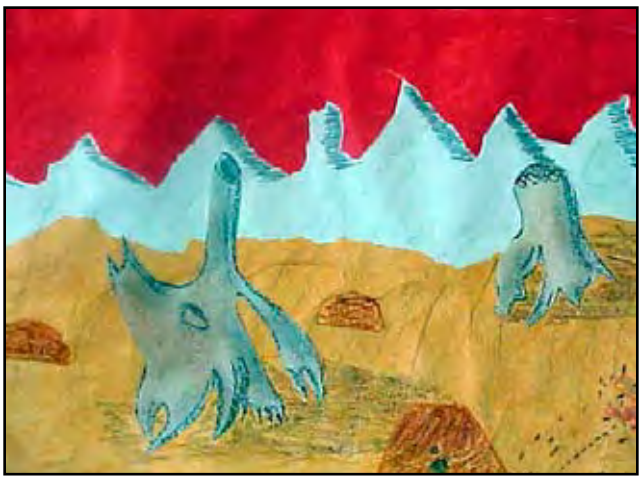
Images of Australia

Australian Identity was a unit of work designed to develop the students' understanding of visual and cultural images of Australia through the visual arts, building on their previous study of the Australian gold rushes. As part of the second year of our research collaboration, Debbie and Teresa developed a unit that integrated the visual arts, literacy, technology and HSIE. This new group of Year 6 students was introduced to four main artists that they would focus on as part of their studies. The artists were Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. Students were involved in designing questions about things they would like to know about these artists, and this helped scaffold a structure for the unit to evolve. They were then taught the reading and critical thinking skills necessary in accessing information from a variety of sources. These sources included Internet access to gallery sites, art books and particularly, artworks. Their research was complemented with immersion in viewing and creating artworks using some of the artists' styles, such as McCubbin's limited range of colours with lighter, tonal values, or Nolan's bolder use of colour and shape. The unit concluded with an oral presentation to an invited audience, where students talked about their artwork and its connection to their Australian identity.

Debbie used the senses to create a path into the artists' works. When viewing any work, she encouraged the students to imagine what they could see, hear, feel, smell and touch if they were to be in the landscapes they looked at. Combined with this aspect was the introduction of specific visual terms, such as colour, shape, line, texture and perspective. This initial approach proved very effective in that all students had a chance to voice their opinions and all were seen as valid – there was no right or wrong. The students were immediately 'e'ngaged by the use of the artworks, and their confidence was further strengthened by this initial discussion using the five senses. Debbie continued to develop a metalanguage for describing artworks, introducing further terms such as perspective and balance. The life and cultural context of the artists were also discussed, including where they had been born (England or Australia), the difference this seemed to have made to their representations of the Australian landscapes, as well as the practices they adopted, such as Frederick McCubbin's habit of painting outdoors, known as '*plein aire*'.

A significant aspect of the students' work with visual texts was producing and then discussing their artworks with each other and with Debbie. Studying some of the techniques and styles of the artists, engaging in discussion about their works, then having the opportunity to experiment with the various styles, proved to be a challenging and 'e'ngaging experience for the students (see images). As one student commented:

… what helped me was painting the painting and talking about why we painted it, and that helped me.



Student artwork depicting Drysdale style

Student artwork depicting Nolan style

The final component of the unit saw students paint their own work to represent their understanding of Australian Identity. This piece of work was to be presented as part of a formal presentation to peers, teachers, parents and visiting regional officers. In preparation for this, students viewed a video of an inner city artist talking about her own work. They organised their talk under headings using a proforma, and then rehearsed their talks with the assistance of palm cards. Their artworks were projected onto a large screen and each student had the chance to present key aspects of their work to the invited guests. The digitised works were also put onto a PowerPoint presentation, where students recorded a brief excerpt of their oral presentation onto the slides. Many students found the oral presentation a real challenge, especially with an audience of over 50 people, but commented that they had learned a lot by doing it. They were all quite proud of their artworks. The open ended task allowed for all students to have a feeling of achievement, while the oral presentation, though challenging, was seen as less threatening than a written presentation for a class with a wide range of literacy abilities. What these students had achieved was a retelling of their learning experiences, connected to a personally relevant context. All students were encouraged to present their art to the best of their abilities. Many presented simple yet clear descriptions of their work, such as Peter's description:

My picture shows a long deserted road, Uluru, and a dry Australian landscape. This shows what Australia is also famous for. At this stage, I sketched then painted all these

Peter's artwork

images. I was inspired by Sidney Nolan because he took lots of images and put them into one painting.

Here he was able to bring in both his understanding of the Australian landscape identity, as well as some comments about his own process and skills.

Anna's presentation showed a sophisticated understanding of visual representation:

At the bottom of my painting there is a railing from a balcony. From this balcony you can see a lake. Outlining this lake are luscious green leaves and slowly drifting away is a small sailing boat. The reflection of the sailing boat is showing as well as the sun's. As I live in a modern area, I am not used to seeing an area of this type. The balcony represents a modern life while the drifting boat makes me feel as if I am drifting away into another world, away from modernisation. The boat is there also to compare to the lake to show just how big Australia truly is.

Anna's artwork

Mark's presentation also showed a sophisticated understanding of visual representations:

I share the page with country and city life. With a sign in the city for a park, that is double the park size, but in the country all you can see is the grass, a fence and a couple of farms. In the city the sign has on it a title and a small map. I have made the sign double the grass size so I can try to mock city life, but in the country again, there is just a couple of farms, lots of grass and a couple of fences. I've used average amounts of water paints washed over the writing to make it visible, then used a gelling pen. I have tried to make it look as realistic as possible because it's supposed to show the differences between country and city lives. In the city it is crammed with houses and buildings, with more colours, lines and edges but in the country, again, there are just a couple of farms, open countryside and a couple of fences.

Mark's artwork

The students' ongoing self-assessment and reflection on the unit showed a strong sense of both 'e'ngagement and learning. At regular points, the students would jot down on post-it notes the aspects that they enjoyed, things that they would change, their major learning points and things they believed they still needed to learn. Post-it notes were used frequently in the FGP by students to record reflections (see Chapters 2 and 9). All students noted aspects of the unit that they enjoyed. While some listed just being able to paint as a learning point, many showed a deep understanding of the concepts in the unit. Some comments included:

I learnt that if you look more into the painting you could understand it better.

I liked looking at Tom Roberts' paintings, especially the Centenary of Federation 1901 because some of the paintings

were based on the Australian history [and] also based on the real life in the Australian outback.

I learnt that artists use angles on their paintings and how [it] changes the view of the picture.

One reluctant reader and writer noted that he liked researching and 'typing his written and oral presentation', which was seen as a significant improvement in his learning attitude.

What did we learn?

Visual literacy is a powerful component of literacy learning. It is part of the contemporary media driven world and it has a great relevance for our students. The combination of visual literacy with an explicit focus on student engagement led to a more purposeful student centred teaching approach for Debbie. Giving control to students can be threatening for a teacher. Taking risks and giving more ownership and control of learning to the students, however, actually proved to be very rewarding for the students and Debbie alike. Students reflecting on their own learning is a powerful tool for student assessment. It supports student engagement in ways described in Chapters 1 and 2. It also allowed Debbie to reflect upon the quality teaching practices that were supporting student learning in her classroom. Students were able to negotiate their learning and take responsibility for their learning, giving them an 'insider' role in the classroom. In doing this they were able to find a place to construct knowledge for themselves. The success of maintaining explicit and systematic teaching in the classroom as well as using 'rich tasks' to support syllabus outcomes has supported the need for continued use of 'e'ngaging (high cognitive, high affective, high operative) pedagogical practices in Debbie's classroom.

The content of the curriculum in this research was very hands-on and open-ended. The relevance to the outside world and the environment encouraged participation from the students. Debbie was able to provide students with the skills and the language of visual concepts which students then used to support their individual needs. The classroom was sending out powerful 'e'ngaging messages around knowledge, ability, control, place and voice. The students, who were initially struggling with literacy activities and were disengaged in learning, astonished Debbie, Jon and Teresa with the depth of knowledge and understanding in their learning as evidenced in their final presentations and in the research interviews.

Integrating visual literacy into the curriculum, combined with a focus on student engagement, proved to be a powerful combination. As students became aware of their desire to learn, individual goal setting developed. This shift in ownership of the curriculum from Debbie to the students was very positive and the actual classroom teaching and management became easier. Students found that they had a voice in shaping the direction of their learning and became 'insiders' in their learning. They enjoyed working co-operatively with each other and took pride in helping each other. A common language of learning was beginning to permeate the classroom. The classroom environment reflected the students' sense of achievement, confidence and risk taking in their learning.

CHAPTER 5

Storypath and engagement

Bronwyn Cole (University of Western Sydney)
Sonya Apostolovski (Ashcroft Public School)
Kerrie Foord (Cartwright Public School)

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" challenged Sophie as Class 5/6 at Cartwright Public School discussed the Bali bombings that had occurred during their October vacations. Students expressed concern for this tragedy and the loss of life because Bali had been a place where they were sending their customers for a holiday, as part of their 'Travel Agency' Storypath unit in the previous term. The 'Bali, Ain't it Beautiful!' brochure slogan, coined by Sophie and two of her classmates, had abruptly ceased to be so. Students drew on their previous term's learning about global aid and corporate responsibilities and transferred it to make sense of this real tragedy. They knowledgeably constructed their personal response.

Such investment in Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) lessons and emotive responses to citizenship issues have been common in classrooms at Cartwright Public School and Ashcroft Public School over the past three years. Students participating in HSIE units, constructed around the Storypath approach, became 'e'ngaged in learning in ways not seen with more conventional teaching approaches.

In a second example, two parents of students in Sonya's 1/2 Yellow class stopped her in the playground of Ashcroft to ask what they could do to help. The Cultural Diversity Parade their children had been planning, the culminating activity to 'The Parade' Storypath, was under threat. The students had received a 'letter from a resident' complaining about the noise, traffic congestion and litter that the advertised parade might cause, as well as the resident's dislike of the

'non patriotic' theme. Still incensed, students reported the problem to their parents that afternoon - taking their learning beyond the school gate! The 'letter' was part of a 'critical incident' introduced in the day's HSIE lessons to involve the students in critical discussions and citizenship problem solving.

How we got students in these two schools to engage with HSIE lessons and develop more meaningful understandings and positive citizenship dispositions and skills is the focus of this story.

Why we got involved in this research story of the Fair Go Project (FGP)

All three of us (Bronwyn, Sonya and Kerrie) are passionate about the importance of HSIE learning in students' lives. We also recognise that HSIE subject matter is a powerful tool for organising integrated learning experiences. When we began, Sonya, in 2000, and Kerrie, in 2001, felt their HSIE teaching was 'dry', lacking challenge and meaning for their students. Bronwyn had been implementing Storypath units with several classes for nearly ten years as part of her work with Dr Margit McGuire (Seattle University). In Storypath units a narrative, or 'storyline of episodes', is used as an alternative to a Focus Question and set of Contributing Questions, to sequence and connect HSIE lessons. Anecdotal data had repeatedly indicated that students participated well in Storypath units, learned a lot and increased their writing. There was something in these units making a difference.

The FGP provided us with three opportunities:

- Implementation of Storypath units with students from low SES backgrounds: would the approach have success with these kids - many of whom had shown resistance to classroom learning?
- More systematic exploration of the pedagogical features of Storypath units that encouraged student engagement and achievement: was it just the storyline structure that was having an effect?
- Revitalisation of Kerrie's and Sonya's passion for teaching integrated units based around core HSIE subject matter and outcomes: how could we enliven their HSIE units and teaching?

What is the Storypath approach for a unit?

The Storypath approach is characterised by two fundamental elements: a narrative structure to sequence salient HSIE content, and a teaching approach that is underpinned by social constructivist learning theory. Figure 1 outlines the typical narrative structure, or sequence of episodes, for a Storypath unit, each episode involving several lessons.

The teacher guides each student to create, and become, a character for the Storypath in order to establish personal connection with the 'real life' setting and the plot of the HSIE story that will unfold. Research, discussions and role-plays, in character, allow students to employ their minds in the setting, contextualise the story and construct meaning and relevance from the events (Bruner, 1965, 1990; Egan, 1988). The planned 'critical incidents', strategically introduced into the story, challenge the students' experiences and knowledge, and involve them in further enquiry and problem solving. Incident resolutions enable them to apply new, deeper understandings and make decisions about their social, cultural and environmental world (Cole & McGuire, 2002) – students participate as citizens.

Episodes in a Storypath unit

Creating the setting

Students create the setting by completing a frieze (mural) or other 3D visual representation of the place and time.

Creating characters

Students create characters for the story whose roles they will play during subsequent episodes.

Building context for plot development

Students participate in activities that stimulate them to research and think more deeply about the key subject matter of the unit.

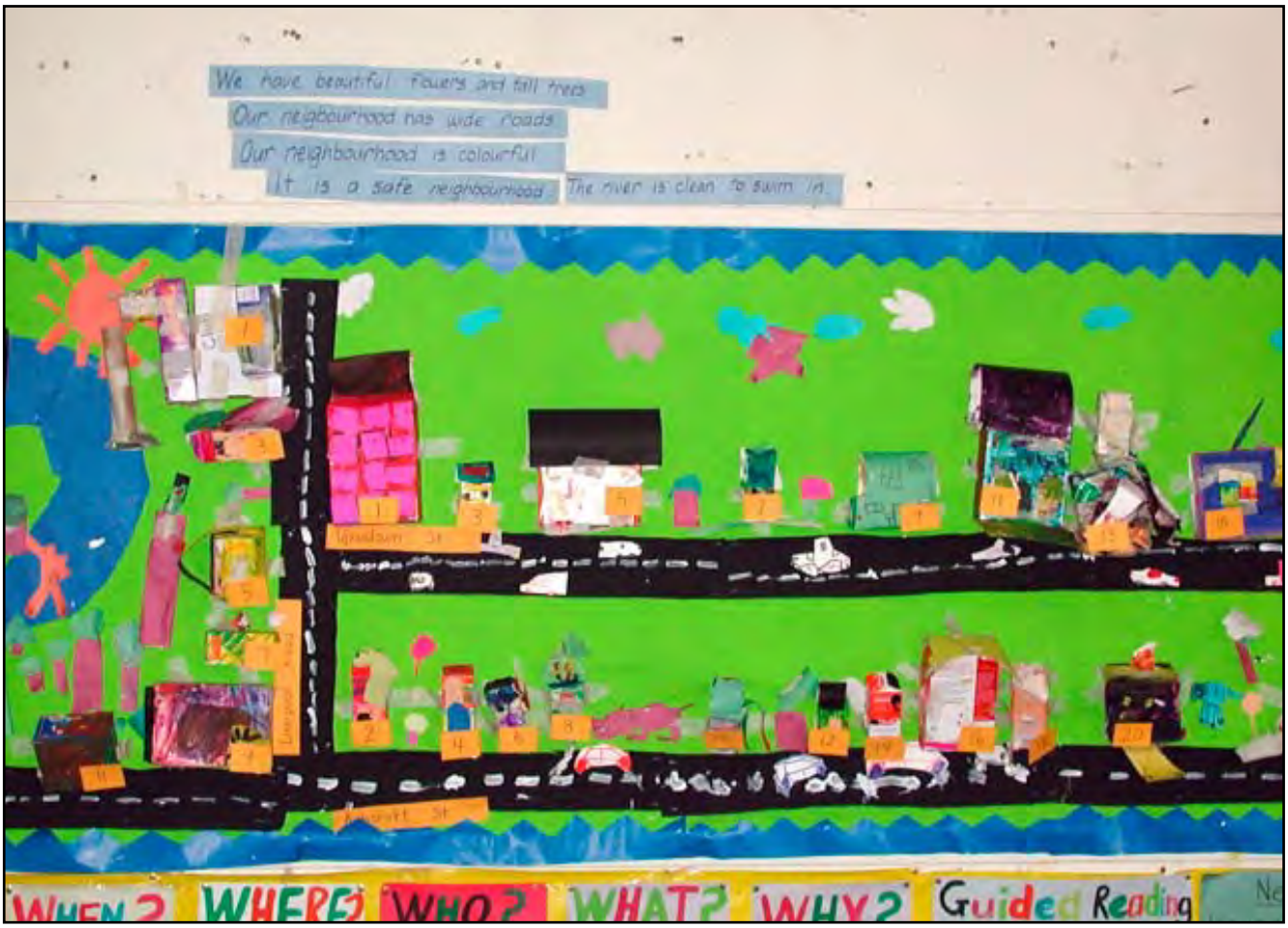
Critical incidents in the plot

Students, in character, confront problems typical of those faced by people of that time and place, applying their newly acquired knowledge, skills and values.

Concluding event

Students, in character, plan and participate in an activity that brings closure to the story.

Figure 1



Collage of neighbourhood frieze

The implementation of our FGP story

We began in Sonya's 1/2 Yellow classroom with a Storypath unit titled 'Families in their Neighbourhoods'. The students worked in pairs to create a 3D frieze of a neighbourhood on the classroom wall, each pair responsible for constructing a 'home'. Quickly, cardboard cereal, tissue and flour boxes were transformed into brightly coloured single or double storey homes or blocks of flats. Proud ownership of the completed frieze was immediately apparent as Sonya questioned the students about the natural and built, positive and negative features of the neighbourhood. Next, pairs constructed 3D models of families who lived in the homes and biographies for family members. Prompted by thoughtful teacher questioning, and drawing on their own family experiences, the students explored family roles, relationships, values and heritages, and similarities and differences amongst the neighbourhood families, all the time continuing to display immense pride and ownership of the work on display in the classroom.

Repeatedly, students asked when could they work more on their neighbourhood. Sonya reinforced their ownership and encouraged them to use imagination and 'live' the experiences about which they were learning by daily asking questions like:

Who lives in this (green) house?

That's right, the (Twist) family?

What has the (Twist) family been doing today?

Did they meet any of our other families when they did this?

Students responded in their family member roles.

One afternoon the students returned from lunch to find their neighbourhood frieze littered with chip packets, lunch wrappers and empty drink containers - the first of our critical incidents. They were horrified that their work had been interfered with. Again, prompted by questioning, the students, in their roles, discussed the matter at a formal neighbourhood meeting. Together they decided to organise a 'Clean Up' day, developed an associated advertising campaign, and proposed local council rubbish collections and recycling services,

Twist family shield

as well as the placement of garbage bins around their neighbourhood. In class, these facilities were added to the frieze. But, at home that night, several students constructed extra garbage bins, bringing them in to attach to their homes on the frieze the following day - the classroom learning experiences were extending beyond the school day. (The way learning can impact at home and vice versa is an aspect of student engagement explored in Chapter 9.)

At this time, Sonya noted two other occurrences. Parents visiting the school commented that their children were talking about their neighbourhood work at home, and students, some of whom were reluctant writers, began writing stories about events happening in the neighbourhood, the most dramatic of which was our second critical incident. In role, Bronwyn read a newspaper article about a child in one of the neighbourhood families who had been seriously injured by a speeding car. The students were silent. A young voice broke with, "Did that really happen?" A second formal neighbourhood meeting was held to analyse ways of managing traffic, the advantages and disadvantages of each measure, and authorities responsible for implementation. Students wrote letters to the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and the NSW Minister for Transport requesting a zebra crossing plus a 'lollipop lady' during school hours. When they chose to write about these events in their free writing times, we realised that Storypath was providing a common shared experience about which they could write.

Twist family

Bronwyn and Sonya talked, before, during and after each lesson – about what they were planning, how they would do it, what the students would do, what understandings they wanted them to develop, what questions they would ask, and what we thought was having a positive impact on the students' engagement and learning. (Note that the foregrounding of learning outcomes and processes is a feature of many of the stories within this book and is critical in setting up the 'insider' classroom.) They also photographed students' work samples and recorded their group and class discussions. In a conversation following the speeding car critical incident, Sonya commented:

I couldn't believe how they responded to the car accident. You could have heard a pin drop. They thought it was real ... I didn't think they could handle the neighbourhood meeting on their own but they were really good. That surprised me. Sitting in their family groups, they were really focused.

At the conclusion of the unit, we interviewed the students. They talked about why they had constructed their families as they did, giving responses such as:

Because … it's like my family.

It's the way we wanted it.

We wanted our family to be 'normal' this time.

We shared … he made two and I made these two.

They identified their major learning in the unit, with the more common responses being:

People need to cooperate.

It is important to be a good neighbour.

We need to clean up and throw rubbish in bins.

We can stop speeding cars with signs and crossings.

We know how to number houses.

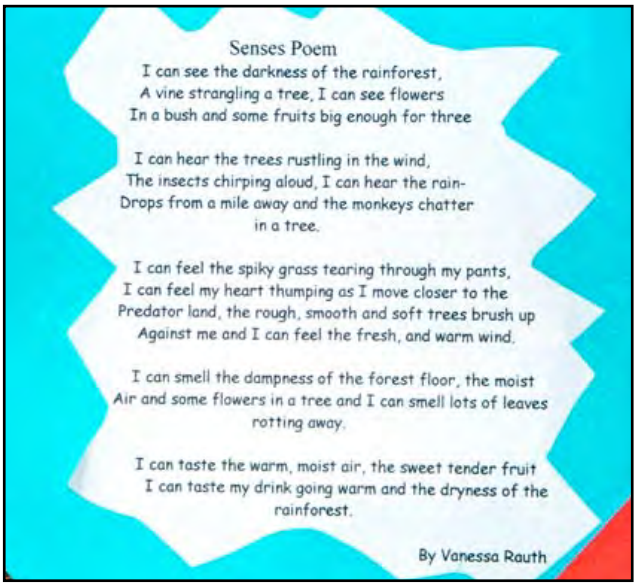
We know how to have a meeting.

Clearly, the students had developed concepts and values about families and citizenship beyond those explored in traditional HSIE units on families. They also expressed pride in their term's work.

The level of investment and sophistication of thinking by these young students in this unit was repeated later in the year with our second Storypath unit, 'The Parade', from which our earlier example is an anecdote. While resolution of the threats to the parade and the proud participation of the students, wearing national or cultural colours, carrying their floats, were obvious indicators of the students' levels of achievement and 'e'ngagement, the teaching highlight was when the students suggested 'a neighbourhood meeting' to solve the problems in the 'resident's letter' – we had transfer of learning from our previous Storypath!

Sonya had made changes in her pedagogy as a result of implementing the Storypath approach. She had adopted 'insider' classroom processes, increased her level of questioning and was allowing students to take more responsibility for ideas. She was also giving her students different types of experiences. They were making things, role-playing, talking and writing about substantial content and events, not just completing worksheets. These were 'e'ngaging experiences. But, we wondered, would we get the same success with older students?

In the second year of our study we continued co-teaching and co-researching in Sonya's 5/6 classroom, working


Senses Poem

I can see the darkness of the rainforest,
A vine strangling a tree, I can see flowers
In a bush and some fruits big enough for three

I can hear the trees rustling in the wind,
The insects chirping aloud, I can hear the rain-
Drops from a mile away and the monkeys chatter
in a tree.

I can feel the spiky grass tearing through my pants,
I can feel my heart thumping as I move closer to the
Predator land, the rough, smooth and soft trees brush up
Against me and I can feel the fresh, and warm wind.

I can smell the dampness of the forest floor, the moist
Air and some flowers in a tree and I can smell lots of leaves
rotting away.

I can taste the warm, moist air, the sweet tender fruit
I can taste my drink going warm and the dryness of the
rainforest.

By Vanessa Rauth

Rainforest senses poem

on 'The Space Colony' and 'The Rainforest' Storypaths. Kerrie joined, with her 5/6 class working on 'The Travel Agency'. In our third year Sonya implemented 'The Travel Agency' and Kerrie 'The Rainforest', both with Year 6 classes. The co-researching, action research model continued but Kerrie and Sonya did the teaching while Bronwyn focused more intently on observations. Common patterns of findings across the classrooms and schools have continued to emerge.

Rainforest frieze

What did we find?

Our observation memo notes have focused on students' participation and 'e'ngagement, as well as their development of HSIE understandings and citizenship problem resolutions. Sonya and Kerrie have written reflections on lessons, highlighting changes in their pedagogies as well as observations of students. Photographs of students' work samples, namely the characters and biographies, the friezes, 3D models, dioramas, travel brochures, classroom charts from discussions and students' writing samples, have been collected. Students have been interviewed at the end of each unit.

What does this mean?

We have noted that students, across the full ranges of abilities and years, are participating in the Storypath activities more so than in previous HSIE lessons. They are expressing their learning and displaying an emotional attachment to the products of their experiences. We can summarise our patterns of findings amongst the students, and some sample evidence, with the following:

- Students are willing to invest their time in learning in and out of the classroom. They frequently bring in items, including research from home for the Storypath products they are working on. Parents report that their children talk about what they are doing in their Storypaths and students have even requested to continue work on their Storypath products over lunch. Learning is extending 'beyond teacher, task and time' (See Chapter 2).
- Students demonstrate ownership of and personal connection to their learning. In every unit students have expressed pride in the friezes, characters and products they have created. Invariably, we have found that students attribute something of themselves to their characters' biographies, be it foods they like, talents, interests or ambitions. They are clearly finding ways of affectively connecting themselves with the learning experiences. One afternoon a student in Kerrie's class dramatically role-played the drudgery of truck driving in his interview for a job in the Travel Agency. At the end of his interview, he turned and said, "You know, I'm

talking about my father," – he'd played a familiar scene, but stepped beyond it and into a new role.

- Students construct understandings and responses that are meaningful to them. The subject matter of Storypath units is challenging and the learning tasks are complex. Representing a cultural group with symbols on a cardboard box, (for example, their floats for 'The Parade') is not easy for Year 1 and 2. What is a symbol? Sonya introduced the notion of national flags. Students constructed these, then researched and talked, at school and home, about other symbols. National flags and colours, samples of money, samples of writing and natural and built features of countries appeared on floats, and students shared these meaningful symbols with class members. We noted that students with strong ties to their countries of origin were particularly willing and able to share their knowledge about their country and float, providing them with new found status among their classmates.

- Students appreciate the multiple ways of learning and expressing learning. Students consistently discriminate between activities in which they learn the most from those they just enjoy. Friezes and characters are always enjoyable, but the more complex tasks required in the context building episodes of the Storypath are identified as both enjoyable and where the children believe they learn the most. For example, in depth research about countries is usually a remote and tedious task for students but when it was for the creation of expert travel brochures for the 'Pacific Rim Mighty Experts', the travel agency in Kerrie's room, the research was appreciated as worthwhile learning and an enjoyable task. Why? The students had purpose and they appreciated 'doing' things: using art and construction skills for the brochure, working in groups, talking and role playing as an expert travel agent, and writing meaningfully about their challenging topic. This was operative success!

Italian float

Sonya and Kerrie have identified common shifts in their pedagogical practices that they believe have made a difference in their classrooms. They have:

- used the narrative structure to connect the content of the unit, and help students make connections between lessons
- increased their amount and level of questioning, giving more room to students' voices and requiring them to think more and think critically
- allowed students to take more direction in formulating ideas and completing tasks. As Kerrie explains, "I've taken a step back so students are directing and organising their learning more, or organising how they will complete the task"
- accessed more resources to assist students, who now 'have a need to know', to complete tasks with intellectual quality
- involved students in more problem solving and citizenship activities through the critical incidents, requiring them to use their knowledge
- encouraged more groupwork with students sharing knowledge and valuing each other's contribution.

How our story links with the FGP framework

Consistently, we have found students in the Storypath units asking "Is this real?", "Is this really happening?" or "Is this one of those units that's real but not real?" This has prompted us to ask, "Why have the Storypath units engaged these traditionally disengaged students in making meaning and applying learning beyond the school gates?"

In Storypath a narrative is constructed to connect subject matter for a topic and to create a sequence of learning experiences. Employing a narrative to organise learning is educationally useful. The underlying story conveys factual information and describes events and actions relevant to the topic, while it affectively engages the students. As Kieran Egan explains:

The story form is a cultural universal; everyone everywhere enjoys stories. The story, then, is not just some casual entertainment; it reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of the world and experience (Egan, 1988, p.2).

As information processing theorists explain, people recall items more in narrative structures than in logically organised lists, and code knowledge more profoundly in memories by affective rather than by logical associations (Egan, 2001, p.50).

In a Storypath students participate in learning experiences from the viewpoint of a character in the narrative, engaging in research and role-plays that tread a path between imagination and reality. Students develop ownership of the learning experience and their imaginations are fostered as they consider their characters' responses to the events in the particular time and place. The role of imagination in learning is educationally powerful. As Egan (2001) highlights:

Imagination lies at a kind of crux where perception, memory, idea generation, emotion, metaphor, and no doubt other labelled features of our lives, intersect and interact (p.42).

By fostering students' imagination, a context is provided within which students can explore challenging ideas and understandings and bring enriched meanings to a set of complex tasks. Our FGP findings support these notions and suggest that students engage in Storypath units because they participate in cognitive, affective and operative aspects of the topic. That is, they imagine and 'live' their HSIE through the story.

The social constructivist practices of the Storypath units are also educationally potent. The construction of characters through which the students personalise and make sense of complex tasks, and the thoughtful teacher questioning, provide students with powerful 'e'ngaging messages that knowledge is personally constructed and should be meaningful. By including a little bit of themselves in their characters for the story students develop ownership and find a place for themselves to construct meaning. Working with their peers, in character, on complex tasks challenges students' understandings and requires them to use their voices to negotiate new meanings. And, successful completion of tasks provides a sense of ability as well as the message that they can make a valuable contribution to the resolution of incidents in the story, in their daily lives, and in the lives of others – the ultimate citizenship goal of HSIE!

In a well implemented Storypath, struggles for classroom space and control are removed as the teacher and students co-construct the story. High levels of cognitive, affective and operative involvement in learning experiences emerge and students are the beneficiaries because they are 'e'ngaged. Because of these engaging experiences, students became 'insiders' in their learning.

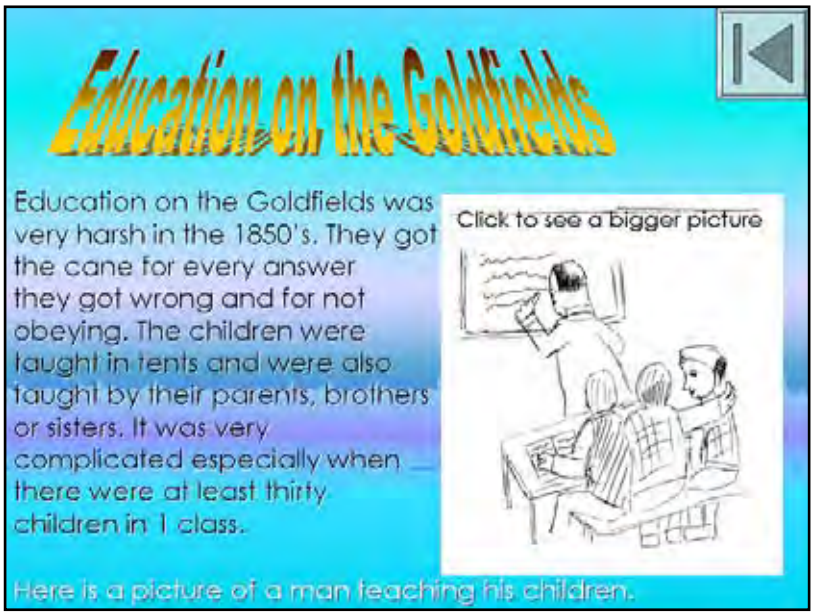
A word of caution and advice, however, as not all HSIE topics, nor all Science topics, lend themselves to a Storypath. The pedagogical practices of believing that students learn best when they are active participants in their own learning and their efforts to understand are placed at the centre of the educational enterprise, however, can be transferred into more traditionally designed units. But, this is not easy. It means 'letting go' of some of the decision making power that we have traditionally associated with the role of teaching to consciously foreground student learning.

CHAPTER 6

hypermedia@heckenberg

Phil Nanlohy (University of Western Sydney)
Pat Bull (Heckenberg Public School)

The FGP at Heckenberg Public School sought to enhance children's engagement with the content of the HSIE topics they were studying. Over the course of a school year the students integrated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into the research and publishing tasks of each topic they studied. This chapter summarises the progress of this innovation and tells the personal story of the teacher most closely involved.



Heckenberg nurtures a caring, child-centred learning environment with a strong focus on catering for individual needs. Many students require learning assistance and the school has put in place a number of support programs to cater for their identified needs. Each child is given encouragement to reach his or her potential, to develop high self-worth and so become a valued member of the school.

Why use technology to meet our students' needs?

The teachers in the school were motivated to find ways of working that would create a high interest level in the topics the senior primary class was investigating. They wanted to find engaging teaching strategies that would enhance their students' desire to learn. The choice to be involved in this aspect of the FGP was also a response to the teachers' analysis of the previous year's Computer Skills Assessment Year 6 (CSA6) trial. The teachers felt a need to upgrade their personal skills with ICT and those of their students. They identified particular areas of students'

use of ICT beyond the word processing and Internet browsing then in use. They believed assessment of student publications and publishing of HSIE research needed further development in the school.

Another aspect that made participation in the project attractive for the staff of the school was the new way of working with the local university that it offered. Phil Nanlohy offered a significant involvement in the work of the class. He worked in a co-teaching partnership with the class teacher and with the ICT coordinator, Brian Pirie, bringing pedagogical expertise that enabled students to develop their capacity to learn with technology. Team teaching was already a feature of the way this class worked, but this time it was with a co-teacher from outside the school. Additionally, the co-research process that is part of the FGP allowed the three teachers to carefully evaluate the innovation they were trialling with this class of senior primary students.

The project also provided an opportunity to work with types of text not fully described in syllabus documents. There was a belief that the advent of interactive computer-based texts had positive implications for classroom learning. Students were previously limited to using examples of these texts written by others. They had viewed CD-Rom encyclopaedia or sites on the Internet. The teachers felt that students needed to move beyond this passive use of ICT to the active design and construction of computer-based projects planned to achieve curriculum outcomes. They recognised that using such interactive learning resources would have implications for the way they approached their teaching and learning process, and for the level of control students might have over their learning. Engagement with texts within and beyond those described in the syllabus was also taken up at Cabramatta West Public School, in their multiliteracies project (see Chapter 8).

How was the project organised?

Often demonstrations of student knowledge in HSIE take the form of samples of student work, such as posters, projects, portfolios or pencil and paper tests. The teaching and learning sequence developed in this classroom sought to equip students to demonstrate what they had learnt in their HSIE topic by publishing in a digital medium. This additional element was used alongside instructional methods the teachers had traditionally used when teaching this part of the curriculum. The class was investigating the topics of Gold and Antarctica. They had used ICTs to research factual information around the topics. Pat, Brian and Phil developed a learning sequence that placed emphasis on communication of the students' learning to an imagined audience. They asked the students to demonstrate what they had learnt by creating a teaching resource for their peers.

Each cycle of hypermedia authoring had three phases and involved team teaching with Phil, Pat and Brian (see figure 1). Early in the sequence students were given explicit instruction in the use of the Microsoft PowerPoint program. The second phase concerned integration of the curriculum outcomes and content knowledge into the hypermedia projects the students were authoring. The third phase emphasised higher order thinking and constructive peer review of the students' projects. As the year progressed the students took an increasingly direct role in moving their projects through these stages.

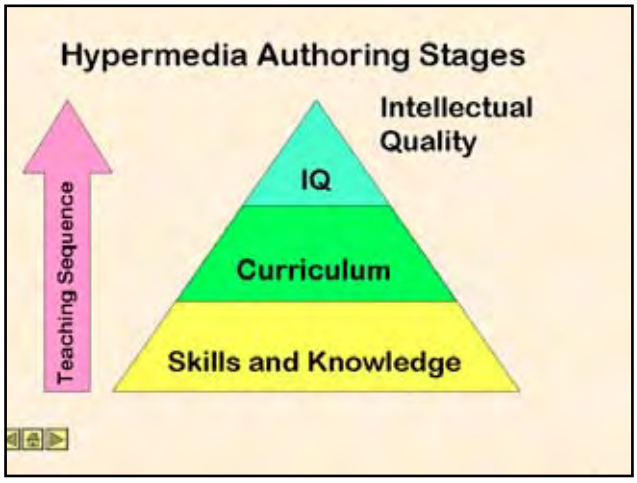


Figure 1 - Starting with authoring and research skills the students challenged their assumptions about their capabilities while completing curriculum tasks.

Skill development

The PowerPoint program was new to the majority of the students in this class. Working in pairs the students were shown how to build information rich screens from completely blank beginnings. The templates built

into the program were intentionally ignored and the students were asked to develop original screen designs that emphasised visual communication. The program's capacity to position text, graphics and other 'objects' on a screen was taught explicitly to the students in the early stages of the HSIE unit. Initially, the introduction to PowerPoint gave prominence to the text and graphic objects and to the second layer of design features found in the Draw toolbar.

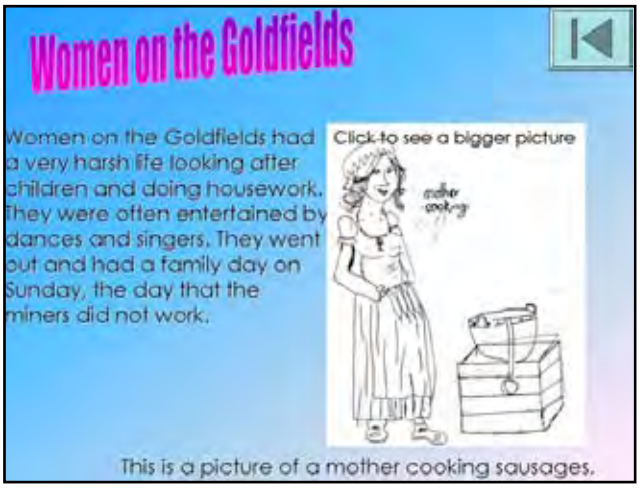
The students used texts of their own composition. They based their texts on teacher chosen resource materials, on direct teacher instruction and on library and Internet research. The teachers encouraged the use of graphics that the students had created themselves. These included scans of their own drawings and graphs they generated in spreadsheets. They also used images sourced from the Internet or from collections provided to them. Initially the sounds they used were limited to the samples built into the program but later grew to include student-recorded voiceovers. Our intention was to help the students develop fluency with the features of the program so that the role of technology could be moved to the background as the topics developed. This meant that syllabus content could be given more prominence, as the students became more confident using technology.

The students developed their hyperlinked projects over a term. Instruction in specific techniques was introduced as we felt they were needed or as the students discovered and popularised them. For example, we taught the students how to link an element on one screen to any other screen within the project. These 'hyperlinks' allowed the students to create non-linear structures within their projects. The hyperlinks served to both aid navigation through the project and to trigger the interactive elements designed to engage the audience. Some students discovered the sound capacities of the program. They worked out how to capture or record sounds and how to include these elements in their projects. Then they taught the teachers.

Curriculum

The students were presented with a process for developing their projects which began with a single 'concept' screen, and then were led to the structuring of information screens before the addition of some interactive elements. We explained to the students that they should consider their projects as having three layers. The first was the single opening screen that defined the chunk of the topic they were presenting. The second layer was made up of several screens hyperlinked to the initial screen. These screens were called the 'information' layer and were where the students presented the content knowledge they had chosen as being relevant to their report on the topic. Finally, the students were taught how to add interactivities that helped their audience engage with the content in the information layer.

Student PowerPoint: opening screen



Student PowerPoint: information layer

Early in the topic the students developed concept maps as the blueprint for the structure of their hypermedia projects. These helped to divide the HSIE topic into areas of content knowledge. The students made line drawings, used photography and constructed graphs

to expand the range of graphic elements they could incorporate into their projects. Some time was spent editing the blocks of text and considering the meanings that different versions of their text conveyed. Later the students were taught how to use the features in this program to create interactivities designed to engage an audience. These began with the use of the sound and animation features of the program but also included constructed hyperlinked interactions. The students were explicitly taught ways of including these interactivities in their projects. These included multiple choice quizzes linking answers to a section of the project that informed the audience whether they were correct or not and screen swaps that gave the appearance of objects 'popping up' and disappearing on a single screen.

In retrospect, it is possible that the structured way in which the authoring process was introduced limited some students' creativity and design options. This may have constrained the value of this exercise for cross-curricular integration. The students did, however, manage to invent new ways to use the program to interest their audience. They created screens that gave 'close ups' of smaller graphics or photo galleries that operated as an automatic loop.

Review

During the development of the hypermedia projects, students were taught to review and refine the information they had found and to work on ways to better communicate with their intended audience. Initially teacher-led deconstruction of partially completed student projects generated discussion of the authoring techniques used and this led to consideration of audience needs and more effective communication strategies (refer figure 2). The issues discussed included consistency of navigation, relative size of images and text blocks, balance between foreground and background colour and textures, and screen layout. The students were prepared for a more formal deconstruction of the final versions for their projects using 'Show and Tell' worksheets that were intended to help move these sessions from mainly teacher-led discussions to student-led questioning about their own efforts. The show and tell times with peers were repeated with parents during

Student PowerPoint: interactivity screen

an open day and with visitors to the school. The effect of this was to put the responsibility for review of the students' work in progress and of their finished projects firmly into their own hands.

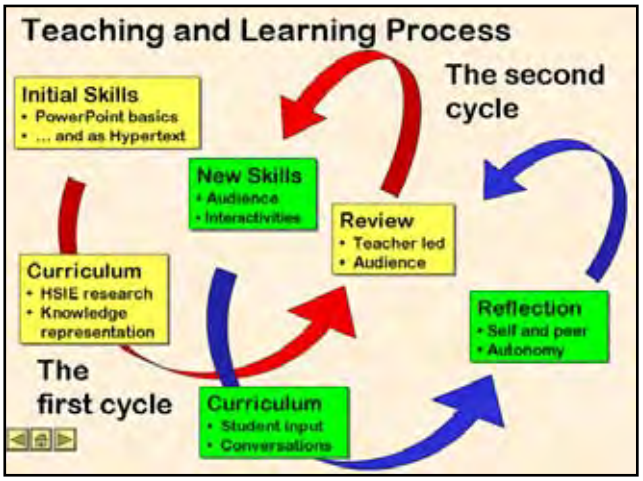


Figure 2

What evidence is there for what happened?

Phil routinely identified and collected evidence that became available during the day-to-day teaching and learning experiences of the class. The most common form of data collected was work samples. These were used to track developments in students' understanding of the content being covered and their growing ability to use the technology to demonstrate what they had learnt. At a number of stages during the progress of each HSIE unit informal interviews were audio recorded for later playback and reflection. These were recordings

of conversations between teachers and students and also between the teachers involved in the delivery of the units. Field notes describing the context and the progress of the intervention were written and used as a way to reflect on the progress made over the school year. Finally, other sources of data that arose from the evaluation of the school's external funding programs yielded useful insights into the teachers' and students' views of these developments in their school life.

The students were asked to draw concept maps around key ideas associated with each of the HSIE units they studied. These maps demonstrated students' vocabulary and content knowledge at different times during the units. The maps were initially used in the learning sequence as an aide for structuring the hypermedia projects. They were also used to organise students' investigations of library and internet resources as they collected information around the topic. The concept maps could finally be compared to the polished version of the student's PowerPoint hypertexts to assess any growth in depth or complexity. Copies of the PowerPoint files were also collected three or four times during each unit. This was done to gauge the development of the students' projects through the concept, information and interactivity phases explicitly taught as part of the learning sequence. Other class tasks such as the 'Show and Tell' worksheet formed part of the work sample collections.

For most students there were indications that they had acquired more content knowledge than they might otherwise have done. More importantly, their deeper 'e'ngagement in the authoring process had led to changes in their views of themselves as learners. Some of this is attributable to the students' increasing maturity as they progressed through their final year of primary schooling. However, this growth in autonomy is due, at least in part, to the opportunities for leadership and cooperative academic work offered by the development of the hypermedia projects. This suggests that high cognitive tasks can be linked to both student engagement and improved achievement of syllabus outcomes. For a few students the work samples showed content knowledge which was at least as good as the classroom teacher's estimate of these students' usual progress. However, even these students had developed additional software and research skills beyond their previous achievement levels.

With parental permission, audio recordings were completed unobtrusively using lapel microphones. These captured responses to teacher questioning and conversations between students who were in the vicinity of the teacher. In this way the usual class interactions were recorded and reviewed for evidence of the qualities of 'e'ngaged learning as described by the Fair Go 'Insider Classroom' framework. This method of audio recording was also used to capture conversations between teachers about the teaching and learning they were leading and observing. Some of the most fruitful of these conversations came from the discussions around, "What we will do next time?", where a recount of the just completed activity led into planning for the next visit of the university co-teacher.

The recordings of students demonstrated the ways in which they had developed as a community of learners. Particularly in the second and subsequent cycles of hypermedia construction, the students were taking responsibility for developing new skills as they were needed and for teaching other students who needed them. In the same way, they were also more likely to share the curriculum content they had researched and were supportive of students who were not as far advanced in their achievements as themselves. The recordings between teachers suggest that there was development in their understanding of the limitations and opportunities arising from the learning sequence they had planned. The teachers had to continually adjust the leadership roles they were playing to facilitate the growth in autonomy in the students. Sometimes they would lead the learning and at other times they would bring students to the fore to provide instruction to the group. The conversations between teachers suggest that student-led learning mostly happened informally and was provided on a need to know basis when requested by other students.

Evidence from other sources was also useful. In particular, the self-reporting surveys and students' presentations and the improved results of the subsequent CSA6 test. The evidence from evaluations suggested

that the students involved in the hypermedia class were not only highly 'e'ngaged by the results of their efforts but felt honoured to be asked to talk about their work with other people. They were able to talk freely about what they had done. They showed they had been thinking and talking about issues of learning and of how they communicated with their intended audience.

The classroom teacher's story – Pat Bull

Being involved in the FGP has had a very positive effect on me both as a learner and classroom practitioner. Initially, I questioned my theories on how children learn and what being an effective teacher really meant. Further involvement in the FGP encouraged me to analyse and recognise the importance of 'insider' processes of interactive conversation, teacher reflection, student reflection and self-assessment.

As a classroom teacher I now have a far greater interest in ICT, as my skills, confidence and level of knowledge increased substantially. For me, this has led to a renewed interest in, and positive attitude towards, ICT. I now plan lessons and units of work with a high priority to integrate technology. My attitude impacts positively on my students' attitudes and unexpectedly on my colleagues. My colleagues, particularly those teaching the same stage as me, became very interested in the involvement of my class with the FGP and the students' high standards of achievements. (This is consistent with ideas in the final chapter that engaged students need engaged teachers.)

It was expected my own and my students' skills would improve and our knowledge would increase. However, what was unexpected was the ever-increasing level of confidence exhibited by both the students and myself. When possible we willingly became peer tutors K-6, assisting both teachers and students. This in turn led to students and teachers being upskilled in ICT. As you can imagine, this built self-esteem and the students felt valued as individuals and learners, generating'e'ngaging messages about ability, place and voice.

Also, the students were able to apply the skills and knowledge they had learned when completing their first Basic Skills Test (BST) with over half the Year 6 students reaching above state level. Our Year 6 students completed the CSA6 test and performed particularly well in the Graphic/Multimedia component, which was the focus of our link with the FGP.

This was extremely pleasing, but also totally unexpected, as we had only been involved in the FGP for approximately ten weeks. Prior to this, their skills and knowledge were limited mainly to word processing.

Ensuing discussions with the students led to a change in the students' feelings about their ability to learn and achieve: 'e'ngaging messages about ability were being heard such as, "I didn't think I could do it, now I can!" This in turn increased their own expectations of their learning.

These unexpected outcomes prompted our staff to reappraise students' learning and capabilities involving ICT, which led to a review of the school's ICT scope and sequence policy. We (the computer coordinator, the Principal, fellow stage teachers, Phil and I) were surprised at what our Stage 3 students were really capable of achieving in ICT. Consequently, our expectations increased too.

Another unexpected outcome was the high skill levels and language fluency that developed, and were demonstrated, by the students and myself. The increasing competence experienced by the students allowed the teachers to take risks with the tasks they could ask of the students. Their success with the projects and their work with their partners (high affective) allowed us to ask more of them (high cognitive). Their improved ICT, research and reporting skills (high operative) led to more success as their projects developed. Individual students progressed at different rates through this cycle but the energetic peer support and peer tutoring that emerged was very noticeable. We often had to make them stop their work on their projects and go out to play as they became so 'e'ngaged ('beyond teacher, task and time'). Obviously, students were being intellectually challenged as they were functioning at a higher cognitive level. They were constantly thinking about, discussing and re-evaluating their projects, which was evidence to me that there were high levels of engagement occurring. This

demonstrated to me the importance of planning lessons that challenge student's thinking as this promoted 'e'ngagement.

Initially, my vocabulary increased as I used more explicit and appropriate technology terms, which transferred to the students. I gained the metalanguage necessary to implement and use software, as did the students. In their initial conversations they would use language relevant to their software program and discuss how they would use it to create a project.

Their use of language and understanding of its purpose developed and changed as the involvement in the program progressed. It became increasingly purposeful as the students' level of understanding of the software and its capabilities increased, as did their awareness of the importance of audience when designing and creating a digital project.

It was obvious that the students were becoming 'insiders'. Their conversations became far more focused on sharing knowledge and skills. Students interacted with partners and shared knowledge, developing each other's practical, organisational and communication skills through purposeful conversations and improved questioning technique:

How did you change your background?

How did you download that image?

Can you show me how to hyperlink?

Why did you place the image in the top right hand corner?

Questioning and answering improved as students' levels of learning and understanding deepened.

In peer tutoring situations, the tutor was encouraged to explain how to do something, not to do it for them. This generated a more purposeful discussion. It occurred on numerous occasions and students willingly helped or supported each other as there was a very caring attitude in the learning environment.

We reflected on working with partners versus working alone versus the teamwork effect that was generated by everyone because people helped and supported each other. This reflection strengthened and reinforced the positive culture that had developed within the learning environment. Everyone had a strong sense of belonging and felt free to explore and share their ideas with confidence. Students who needed assistance or were confused did not hesitate to ask.

Initially students were paired (limited computers available) and had to interact and engage in decision making processes to create their projects. This happened on numerous occasions which enhanced their cooperative and communication skills as they discussed the creation of their digital projects.

My teaching practice became less procedural because the students' dependency on Phil, Brian and I reduced considerably over time. The students were able to explore independently as I 'stepped aside' allowing them to have a voice as they gained more control and ownership of their learning. The more 'e'ngaged they were, the more knowledgeable they became about the computer software. This had a flow-on effect because they became more critical of their own and each other's work, in an effort to explore, refine, change and improve their projects.

This critical reflection further enhanced their projects as these became more interactive and less static. They discovered how to import animations, transitions and pop ups and some students used these techniques before being shown by teachers. They quickly shared these discoveries with their peers, using appropriate language.

As a teacher I have high expectations of students and have engaged them in conversations about their learning. However, one aspect that I had not knowingly discussed with them was how they felt about their learning. In the initial stages they expressed how they "knew nothing at first and now they know heaps!" They were always asking me, "When can we work on our projects again?" As they developed their ability, confidence and desire to share their feelings, I noted a genuine 'positiveness' being expressed about their learning experiences:

I feel really good because I'm learning how to use computers properly.

I like learning new things.

I like being allowed to make my own PowerPoint.

It was evident that all the students, regardless of their previous learning achievements, were highly involved

in a community of reflection, involved in substantive conversations and were creating work of which they were proud. I now ensure opportunities for 'insider' processes of interaction and reflection are built into lessons, as this needs to be nurtured and continued.

In addition, I now interpret these positive messages as a sign of students' high engagement level and the genuine pleasure when they succeed. I now encourage and generate conversations that involve not only thinking about their learning, but also how they feel about it. This promotes self-reflection and self-assessment, which are both integral and vital parts of the learning process.

A deeper learning emerged from this project as the students applied their learning to personal interests. Students were able to transfer and apply their learnt knowledge outside the classroom by creating their own hypermedia projects at home.

They engaged in peer tutoring outside the school and shared their learning with each other. Interested students met after school and were keen to create or help each other create their own hypermedia projects on topics of their own choice, such as sport, recreational activities and trading card games. One student even emailed their final product to our school principal.

This self-interest also extended to students wanting to utilise our computer room at lunch times, not to play games, but to continue working on their projects. This filtered through to students from other classes as they also wanted to learn how to create a hypermedia project.

It was expected that all students would create a hypermedia project. The surprising factor was the high standard that was achieved by the students. In creating their projects they were able to transfer knowledge from previous experiences across to new and novel uses of technology. They were also able to transfer learnt skills of text construction. This enabled them to produce a hypermedia project to the best of their ability.

As a small Christmas present, each child received their own CD containing all students' projects so a permanent record could be shared. Students eagerly designed a cover for their copy of the CD and approached this with overwhelming enthusiasm.

'e'ngaged hypermedia authors

The FGP work at Heckenberg offers a powerful illustration of the interplay of engagement processes that gathered exciting momentum among the students. The students were initially excited by using technology and this engaged their learning experiences from the outset. That is, the technology worked from the beginning at a high affective level. This is not unusual in classrooms. What became different was that the tasks set by the teachers moved them to a higher set of expectations: not a simple slide-show to present information but an interactive hypermedia text providing a learning experience for an intended audience of their peers. Here was an exciting interplay of the high affective and the high cognitive as students realised they had to rise to the challenge of the expectations of the audience. Furthermore, the high operative began strongly to 'kick in' as the students adopted a more autonomous approach to their learning in ICT.

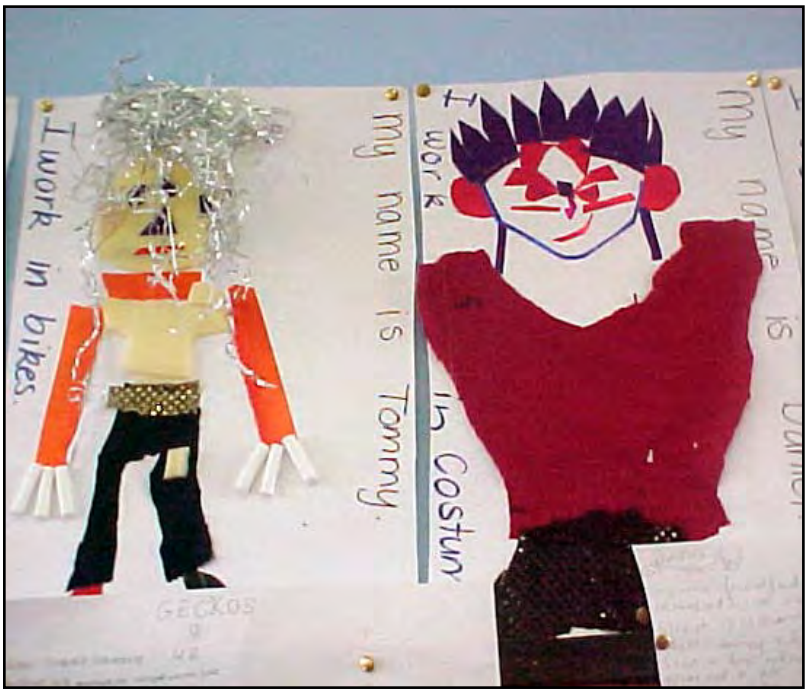
The result was that these students were now engaging with and creating texts beyond their previously demonstrated achievements. There was an 'insider' buzz in the classroom as students had a significantly enhanced say and share in their learning directions and outcomes. This looped back into all other aspects of their classroom work. The classroom abounded with 'e'ngaging messages. They collaboratively generated shared knowledge and enhanced their ability in applying these technologies to their collaborative research. There was a shared classroom space where teachers and students worked with, listened to and supported each other. The final product was an engaging message about how kids from Heckenberg could work together to create a valuable learning resource.

CHAPTER 7

Narrative connections to learning

Wendy Atkinson (Ashcroft Public School)
Vanessa Gordon (Ashcroft Public School)
Kathryn McLean (Liverpool Public School)
Jodie Hayes (Liverpool Education Office)
Geraldine Taylor (Liverpool Education Office)

This story reports on a project conducted in two schools, Ashcroft Public School and Liverpool Public School, both of which serve highly diverse communities with many students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). Common among the research partners in these two schools was a desire to develop greater understanding of pedagogies that would help teachers engage their highly diverse groups of students and provide support for their learning.



Both Ashcroft Primary School and Liverpool Public School had had some experiences with implementing Storypath units and the teachers were aware of the power of the narrative structure in connecting learning experiences for students in a meaningful way and providing opportunities for involving them in more real-life, problem solving activities. The research partners in both schools therefore decided to try to employ some of the elements of the Storypath approach that they had found successful in the design and implementation of new, integrated units of work. In both schools, the narrative structure was used to design the unit and the key experiences of developing a frieze to provide a shared setting for the learning, and constructing characters through which students would participate in the learning, were planned for the initial weeks of the units.

Geraldine Taylor (Science and Technology K-6 Consultant for the former Liverpool Education Office) became the partner for the

teachers at Ashcroft Public School, supporting Vanessa and Wendy in organising their unit with a strong Science and Technology syllabus and content focus. Students in their Stage 2 classroom constructed a frieze of a toy company[6] and set about building their field knowledge by considering the economics of their company's location and creating a company name. They then made models of themselves as employees in their toy company. Geraldine provided particular assistance in focusing the unit around the design and make processes, and helped link the process-based learning experiences with authentic assessment activities. Hence, the students designed and made toys and, in their roles as employees of the toy company, planned marketing and promotional strategies for their toys. The narrative structure in this unit was creating a purpose for the students to become active participants in the designing and making process.

Students developed characters for the narrative

The partners at Liverpool Public School worked in a similar way, but designed their unit around HSIE and English. Jodie Hayes (Literacy Consultant K-8 for Liverpool Education Office) supported Kathryn in focusing on pedagogies that encouraged talking to learn, a particularly relevant and effective teaching strategy for students with LBOTE. The Talking to Learn literacy focus was introduced in the context of a Communities unit. Kathryn initially endeavoured to engage the students by linking their prior knowledge and interests about the local community. She then gradually drew them more deeply into the process of learning by slowly relinquishing some of her control of the classroom space and allowing the students to jointly negotiate the direction of the learning experiences, and of the unit. As the narrative progressed, the students became involved in designing, role playing, talking and listening, creating and making. Control of the direction of the narrative continued to move more and more to the students and Kathryn found that she became more of a co-player, or co-learner, in her classroom. (Ways of improving literacy outcomes for ESL learners through engaging tasks are also discussed in Chapter 3, where drama is used to great effect.)

In the implementation of the units, the partnership teachers in both schools worked on incorporating appropriate teaching strategies. Some of the problem solving activities of the units were especially designed to encourage the students to think critically and creatively from several perspectives. This meant organising cooperative learning groups to share thinking, asking the students to adopt different 'thinking hats' (de Bono, 2000) in order to obtain diverse views, and questioning the students to promote sustained classroom conversations that would support students to clarify their ideas. In both classrooms, there was much talking, listening and role-playing before writing expositions,

Students used post-it notes to reflect on learning

procedures and recounts - all in keeping with social constructivist views of language learning. The teachers at both schools noted that employing such diversity of teaching strategies allowed them to cater for differences among the learners in their classrooms.

Teachers at Liverpool Public School specifically assessed the talking and listening outcomes, in English K-6, in both pre and post unit assessment tasks. The talking to learn outcomes were assessed and reported as part of the school's assessment and reporting process. Talking to learn activities, embedded throughout the unit, provided opportunities for the researchers to assess not only syllabus outcomes, but also the learning process itself.

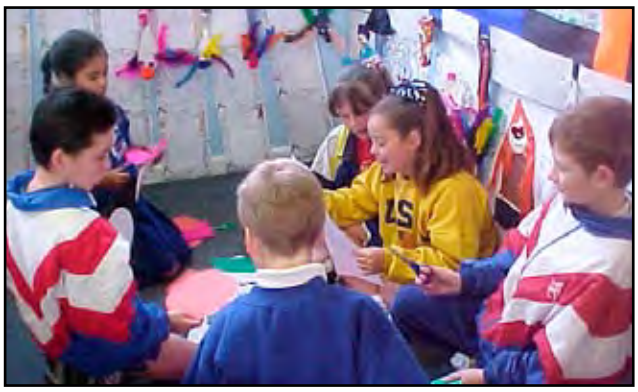
What did we collect?

Data collection was undertaken in several ways. While a co-researching methodology was employed at both schools, much of the specific data collecting was undertaken by the curriculum consultants. Essentially, the data consisted of classroom observations followed by discussions with the partners. A variety of student work samples was collected in the form of written work samples, student display boards and photographs of the classroom frieze and charts. Students were encouraged to reflect on their learning and these were recorded in students' books and in a class book that was developed by the teachers at Ashcroft Public School to show anecdotal records of the learning journey. Students were also interviewed about their learning process.

What did we find?

During the implementation of the units, the students' role playing in character was observed as particularly significant in arousing their affective domains. By creating and taking on the characters, the students developed strong emotional attachments and reactions to the activities, particularly the problem solving incidents.

Students were also observed as actively constructing meaning from the learning experiences at their level. For example, in one classroom students drew on familiar signs and symbols from their home environments and local community when they became involved in safety discussions about a road safety incident. Their



Co-operative groupwork encouraged talking and listening

discussions showed they were able to find relevance in the classroom work and were connecting it to their real life experiences.

The significant challenge at both schools was to consider and implement ways that all aspects of classroom talk could move towards the 'insider classroom' model. The aim was to give the students different and 'e'ngaging messages around what and how they were learning. The narrative framework taken up within the units of work guided the planning of teaching and learning activities and opened up the possibilities of engaging students. Since the teachers and students were active participants in the process, the teachers found that students were not only taking on the role of directing the process but also engaging in it. At the same time the students negotiated their learning through their ongoing reflections. The importance of the frieze as a physical space where cognitive, affective and operative met was a vital part of this process.

Throughout the implementation of the unit there were three aspects of classroom talk that were considered important for the research. The first was in the consideration about what was important and relevant to the learners' lives and how this could best be accommodated. A continual environment of student discussion and reflection enabled the teachers to access these understandings. The second was to discover how the talk in the classroom would facilitate deeper reflections about learning. Many opportunities were provided for students to engage in conversations about issues that directly concerned themselves and their community. On all occasions the students were encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions about

the most effective ways to approach the issue. The third aspect of changes to classroom talk was the provision of frequent and authentic opportunities for children to engage in conversations with each other and their teachers that moved away from traditional teacher led 'discussions' following the 'initiate, response, feedback' pattern (Cazden, 2001). These critical aspects of the 'insider classroom' not only helped the teachers in their planning but also opened up a pathway to engagement by involving students in all aspects of their learning processes. (This is strongly connected to the ideas developed at Carramar Public School discussed in Chapter 2.)

Across both schools this coming together of reflective processes resulted in positive outcomes for students and teachers. These outcomes reflected increased student engagement with clear links to student learning and evidence of increased levels of pedagogical and professional development for teachers.

What did we learn?

Students at both schools talked about the affective aspects of their classroom experiences and the amount of choice they were given. They commented that constructing the community and characters was fun because:

you could choose their life

you could be whoever you wanted

we got to choose.

Here was a clear demonstration that the students enjoyed their input into the narrative and found relevance and control in their learning. It was also evident in many of the biographies developed for the characters that students drew on their own family and community experiences. The continual display of the frieze and the characters reinforced the students' connection to the story throughout the unit and this ownership and personal connection appeared significant to students' investment in their learning. (The pedagogy implicit in Storypath likely to enhance student engagement is discussed comprehensively in Chapter 5.) Students were observed discussing their 'families' as they observed the frieze. It was also noticed that all students, including the lower achieving students asked to participate in activities outside the original scope of the unit. The multi-operational nature of the activities provided opportunities for more students to participate.

The experiences encouraging student engagement and indications of positive effects at both the schools for both students and teachers can be summarised within the Fair Go framework of 'e'ngaging messages:

Knowledge

- Students took the opportunity to build upon existing knowledge and this drove the formation of lesson planning.
- Students drew clear connections between what they were learning in class and the school and wider community they lived in.

Ability

- Students felt successful - they were always happy and wanting to share their work with others.
- Students valued work samples as an indication of understanding of content.

Control

- Students accepted ownership of the unit content – they were involved in directing the learning experiences through the reflection process.
- Students became free to experiment and were much more willing to take risks.
- Teachers were able to 'let go' of the control of the lesson.

Place

- Students and teachers built a common identity as both worked towards a shared goal.

Voice

- Students devised assessments, making them aware of the outcomes being assessed.
- Students were clearly and willingly articulating their learning to classroom visitors.

The research from this story shows how elements of Storypath may be complemented and integrated with other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) to produce powerful 'e'ngaging messages for students.

CHAPTER 8

Multiliteracies

Katina Zammit (University of Western Sydney)
Michelle Wilson (Cabramatta West Public School)

Two Year 4 classes at Cabramatta West Public School were involved in the project. Both classes took part initially and then one class became the focus for Terms 3 and 4. Michelle's class consisted of 27 children: 12 girls and 15 boys. Most of the students were Australians from a Vietnamese background, with others of Chinese, Samoan, Anglo and South American backgrounds.

We decided to focus on the area of multiliteracies incorporating the use of technology. In particular, we wanted to explore how to scaffold students' learning about a range of literacy practices.

There were many reasons for taking on this focus, with all relating to improving the engagement of students in education and schooling. Firstly, we recognised the need to integrate technology in a meaningful and authentic way into the classroom. Secondly, we wanted to broaden students' understanding of literacy and associated skills beyond the classroom, school or education environment, and link with texts beyond the walls of the classroom, and beyond the English K-6 Syllabus. In addition, we wanted to provide a supportive learning environment where students felt they could succeed, as well as investigate ways of scaffolding that were relevant, at point of need, and pushed students' cognitive, affective and operative skills and understandings beyond their current achievement levels.

Theoretical background

New literacies and multiliteracies are increasingly being recognised as important skills and understandings that students need access to in the twenty-first century if they are going to fully participate in a

global society (Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; The New London Group, 2000). Students from low SES backgrounds and/or with English as a second language depend heavily on the resources provided by educational institutions, like schools, if they are to have the resources to make positive life choices. Investigating how this is implemented in the classroom and the benefits to students from low SES backgrounds, and who may have English as a second or other language, is crucial, as these students historically have not been well served by schools. Theoretically, the assessment of the form and timing of scaffolding multimodal texts extends the work of Bernstein and Vygotsky beyond that of written texts. Consideration of the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and how these impact upon students' engagement in classroom tasks can assist pedagogical change to occur to benefit students from low SES backgrounds.

Literacy education needs to provide for the impact of new texts, new literacies and new information and communication technologies (ICTs). With the impact of ICTs on the nature and type of texts and the increasing dominance of the visual mode, there is a recognition of the need for critical media literacy or critical literacy to inform practices in schools in order to enable students to question the texts that they are exposed to, and to use this knowledge in the creation of texts in similar contexts (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Giroux, Simon, & contributors, 1989; Knobel & Healy, 1998; A. Luke, 2000; C. Luke, 1999; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Semali, 2003). Thus there is a need for a broader conceptualisation of literacy and literacy/language education (Goodman, 1996; The New London Group, 2000; Lemke, 1991; Leu et al. 2004; Street, 1998).

In order to develop this critical perspective, students need to be explicitly supported by teachers to develop understandings and skills about texts and a means to articulate and share their knowledge and understandings. They require a language to describe school and popular texts in a purposeful and constructive way, so they can discuss the techniques employed by authors and designers to convey meaning to the reader (Unsworth, 2002; Zammit & Downes, 2002). In order for children to talk about the written, visual or multimodal texts, students need to be apprenticed into a metalanguage: a language to talk about the different modes (Callow, 1999; The New London Group, 2000; Kress, 1997, 2003; Unsworth, 2001, 2002; Zammit & Downes, 2002).

Texts that draw upon a variety of communication modes – spoken, written, visual, spatial – at the same time, are multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.39). The deconstruction of multimodal texts is essential for learning today. It is also important to provide opportunities for students to create multimodal texts so they can demonstrate their understandings of the construction of these texts (Zammit & Downes, 2002; Kress, 2000). Practically, students expand their knowledge of what a text is, broaden their perceptions of multimodal texts and learn how to create multimodal texts using technology, to use a computer publishing/presentation program, and to analyse multimodal texts.

What did we do?

The project began with two Year 4 classes involved in an extensive classroom program that had students examining and critically analysing the various text types and components of newspapers. These activities were designed as a lead up to students producing their own class newspaper. Due to the high interest and engagement of the students, this program was extended to the exploration of the structure and features of magazines, with the main emphasis on a variety of magazines for children. The activities were high affective because they linked to children's popular culture. The cognitive challenge was in the construction of the tasks, and the reading and writing of the texts helped them to be more operative learners. The inclusion of real life authentic children's magazines changed the messages students received about student voice (discussed below). The use of magazines with children as the target audience was extremely stimulating for the students, making the written texts more accessible, so it was decided that working towards producing a magazine style publication would be more beneficial and engaging for the students.

Student analysis of magazines

The students were involved in a wide range of activities to deconstruct and examine the language structures and features of the text types found in magazines, that is, feature articles, reviews, procedural texts, persuasive texts, letters to the editor, games and fun pages. A key focus that worked towards affective engagement was visual literacy. Magazine pages were examined in terms of the use of colour, image choice, image size, layout/positioning of heading, written text and image, font style, size and colour.

A variety of scaffolding approaches were utilised to analyse and critically reflect on the purpose, style, audience, structure and language/grammatical features of the text types. Each text was dealt with separately in order to provide all students with knowledge about the different text types.

Support for each activity was provided through the teaching and learning cycle of deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction. This was achieved through the use of whole class deconstruction and/or joint completion of all or part of an activity before students independently undertook tasks in pairs or small groups. Scaffolding also involved the use of a curriculum cycle including: scaffolding learning using explicit teaching as a whole class; demonstrating how to complete the task; building knowledge about the text and content; and collaborative deconstruction in small groups with peer support. Students worked while we supported and questioned them as they worked to determine their level of understanding and engagement in the task. Through judicious foregrounding and backgrounding of our role as teachers, students felt capable as they developed their multiliteracy skills.

Initially, we talked about the purpose of the different children's magazines and other magazines, as well as the audience they were targeting. Students then worked in groups to look through magazines, finding examples of the different types of text. After we identified a range of texts and their purposes, students undertook an activity where they matched examples of different types of text with their label and purpose.

Similar scaffolding techniques were employed for the teaching of each text type, except the procedure. As a class, an example would be shown with identifiable elements of the multimodal text surrounding the example pasted on butcher's paper. We talked about the construction of the magazine text, its layout, use of images and written text, the structure of the written text and relevant language features. Alternatively, this deconstruction was written on to an example of the text type pasted onto a piece of butcher's paper. Following this class deconstruction, students worked in small groups identifying the elements similar to the example they were given. Another activity that followed the class deconstruction was the labelling of the text type with the features being provided for students to paste next to the feature or part of the text (visual or written). Students knew what to do and what was expected of them. In term 4 students would comment, "Can't we just get on with it?"

During the scaffolding of the structure of the multimodal texts in the children's magazines - the written and visual components of the different text types, as well as the language features - students were actively 'e'ngaged with learning a metalanguage to talk about the texts. The metalanguage of visual and written texts was introduced in a meaningful way to students through the investigation and analysis of authentic texts found in the everyday (outside school) life of the students. This was an interplay of high cognitive and affective engagement for the students.

For feature articles, there were two different sub-types of text identified and investigated. The 'question and answer' format and the 'descriptive writing format', including the fact files section, were discussed. The yellow (what we like), black (what we don't like) and green (what we'd like to change or have in our magazine) thinking hats were employed to draw out students' understandings and knowledge about feature articles (de Bono, 2000). To provide students with a better understanding of the question and answer format, the language of 'open' and 'closed' questions was covered, in addition to matching a paragraph to a question from a magazine article. The descriptive writing format was used to investigate the language of fact and opinion statements, so students became aware of how opinions could be written to appear as if they were facts.

In order to provide students with an opportunity to create and manipulate a multimodal magazine text, we used both a paper-based and a technological approach. Students were provided with an image and cut up written text from a feature article and created a feature article that looked like one from a children's magazine. A similar task was transferred to PowerPoint, but this time students could change the size of the boxes with the written text, image, heading and by-line and more easily manipulate where to place these elements on the page. Students gained technological skills while actively 'e'ngaged with a purposeful activity. The manipulation of a feature article was extended by another activity where the students were provided with a feature article in pieces, again in PowerPoint, but this time they could move and change the size of the image, the size, font, and colour of the writing, create a heading in Word Art and insert a background for the article. Students' reflections on the tasks and their learning were obtained using self-assessment techniques and so 'insider' classroom processes were also evident.

Learning about reviews centred on the language and structure of reviews. Similar scaffolding (for example, discussion of examples in magazines and joint construction of an example) were used. For reviews, we covered the language of opinion, which could be explicitly stated, and how to summarise the plot. Students wrote reviews on a set of children's picture books, for example, *The Jolly Postman* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg, *Possum Magic* by Mem Fox and *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* by Jeannie Baker, choosing which one they would review. Their written and scanned covers were manipulated and placed into a PowerPoint file. A sample reviews page was constructed in PowerPoint to allow students to discuss its layout, font colours, font size, details needed in the written review text and layering of coloured boxes or shapes. Students, with a partner, then chose the written reviews to cut and paste into their own sample page, including the image of the cover page, and manipulated the written and visual elements to create their own reviews page.

Students were given many opportunities to jointly and independently construct magazine text types as part of the activities leading up to producing a class magazine. Technology was an important aspect of the creation of these texts. Students used digital cameras, scanners and a variety of computer programs, including Word, PowerPoint and Publisher, to design and create texts. Small groups of students were shown how to use various forms of technology and these students became experts and were able to support other students who needed to access the technology, then those students could also assist others.

In working towards designing and publishing a class magazine, students were required to apply for a variety of positions on the magazine team. Each student completed a job application and provided supporting materials (for example, work samples) in preparation for the allocation of roles, including feature writer, fun pages writer, review writer and procedure writer. After roles were allocated, students were involved in many democratic team meetings to make decisions about the title, layout, and to discuss ideas for articles.

The production of the magazine involved students working in small teams to generate ideas for magazine articles. Teams set about researching, creating, drafting, editing and publishing their magazine articles. Students had a choice of working by themselves, in pairs or in small groups. All students had to construct their magazine page in landscape using the Publisher program, gather images from relevant sources such as

the Internet, scan them or take digital photographs. Students worked on their page up until the second last day of fourth term, often requesting extra time to do their work.

What did we collect?

Data was collected during the implementation of the project from all those involved - researcher, teacher, and the students. Charts, completed activity charts, worksheets, written reflections and samples of work were stored in one part of the classroom, in students' work folders or displayed around the room hanging from string, on wall display words and on display boards set up in the classroom. These were used as reference points for students.

We collected the following data:

- video of scaffolding lesson followed by group tasks
- taping of targeted group discussions
- use of a variety of reflective tools, for example, thinking hats/journals
- weekly teacher/academic email or face-to-face contact, reflecting on lessons and preparing for further ones
- teacher's and academic researcher's reflections and discussions following classroom sessions
- notes from meetings between teacher and academic
- work sample collections
- academic researcher observation notes
- student focus group interview
- final product of the magazine.

What does this mean?

Regarding pedagogy, there was a change in the classroom curriculum knowledge, and approaches to teaching and learning that reflected FGP principles of engagement (high cognitive, high affective and high operative) and the 'insider' classroom. Technology became an integrated part of the curriculum. Reflection on grouping variation and scaffolding became part of our teaching repertoire. The project also involved trying a variety of approaches, such as problem solving, thinking hats (de Bono, 2000), explicit teaching and scaffolding. Strategic withdrawal of support was used as we realised less was required as students 'knew' what to do. In relation to the content being covered, it demonstrated the need to include a full range of text types, the importance of using children's everyday and authentic texts – that is, popular culture in the classroom and the place of visual and multiple literacies as part of the daily curriculum. This was the means of engaging students in the curriculum.

Indicators of students' engagement came from our observations and the comments made by students. Students were still interested in completing tasks related to media and magazines even after two terms. They worked up until the last day of Term 4, then again when they returned to school the next year for two to three weeks. They were willing to attempt tasks, which was not the case for all students in Term 1. In addition, there was a desire to complete the task, not just 'have a go' as students requested time to complete tasks, for example, when writing their job applications.

Children wanted to stay in to finish their writing, they didn't want to go to recess, but stay in and complete the task (field notes).

As students received 'e'ngaging messages about voice (we value what you have to say about this text and your work) and place (the classroom is a shared learning space), student persistence with tasks increased. We noticed that students were quicker at completing tasks and were more on-task as well as 'e'ngaged. Another indicator of the engagement was reflected in the fact that the boys were more engaged in discussions and offering ideas, and more willing to participate in most activities than in the past. It was clear they were becoming classroom 'insiders'.

The K-6 English Syllabus includes factual and literary texts, such as the news story, reviews and procedures but not feature articles, letters to the editor or advice columns. Students wrote and gained an understanding of a variety of non-standard text types, as well as developing their visual and critical literacy in relation to these text types. They were able to critique and comment

on the visuals – the layout, images, colours and the use of them in magazines and in different text types. Students were not as accepting of the texts they read. In addition, students' use of a language to talk about the multimodal, visual and written texts as individual texts and as a whole text, increased as they gained a metalanguage. This was apparent in their self-reflections, both spoken and written, as well as the quality of the texts created by students. This provided an avenue for students to see their ideas and work as valued in the classroom, relating to the 'e'ngaging messages they received about place.

Evidence of interruptions to the discourses of power was provided throughout the project. 'e'ngaging messages about voice were developed when students:

- shared their understandings of the construction and language of procedures
- shared their deconstruction of a feature article with each other
- provided more detail orally than was recorded in writing around the article
- created a magazine page directed at themselves as a class as well as the rest of the school community
- selected their topic for the magazine with assistance and support to enable them to succeed
- self-reflected after the creation of paper-based, multimodal feature articles and
- critiqued the construction of the children's magazines and the different types of multimodal texts.

'e'ngaging messages about control in the classroom were achieved through:

- explicitly teaching the metalanguage related to the written and visual texts in the magazines
- shifting the level of scaffolding required for students as they demonstrated greater understanding and skills
- providing guidance and input for students, as well as opportunities for students to work independently
- allowing students to make decisions and change the direction of class tasks
- adjusting the class work to meet students' requests
- allowing students to decide when they worked on activities and for how long.

There was evidence to suggest the project provided positive messages to students about their ability. For example, students were given messages about being capable learners because they selected their position and text type on the basis of interest, not level of difficulty of the text or their literacy level. Another aspect of their capability was demonstrated by an increase in participation in discussion and completion of tasks by boys. We were not just looking at whether students could or could not do something but if they were taking part in the education process. During the project, students were involved in learning, not just completing the task. They had an investment in the learning through the direction of the final product.

There was also a notable increase in participation in group discussions from a wider range of students. The content provided 'e'ngaging messages about knowledge, especially students' ability to transform knowledge to meet their needs and purposes. The content focus also provided a venue to demonstrate that students' decisions can make a difference and have an impact. They also learnt that they could use their own knowledge and background to assist with their learning.

'e'ngaged critical thinkers

The students at Cabramatta West Public School who were involved in the FGP became different kinds of learners. The engaging experiences and the 'insider' processes helped them to have a more powerful relationship with their classroom.

If I tried these types of activities in term 2, they wouldn't have been able to problem solve and have engagement. But [it's] more than attitudinal. At the beginning of the year they wouldn't have a go. This has been a big turnaround in the class (Michelle).

Importantly, it also opened up the very real possibility that they would become more empowered learners in the future.

Now the students are in Year 6 and they are more critical and analytical about texts in any medium – magazine advertisements, newspapers, television … they are not as accepting of the messages that they are being bombarded with today in the visual and multimodal texts so prevalent everywhere you turn (Michelle).

CHAPTER 9

Linking learning between home and school

Justine Lawson (University of Western Sydney)
Vanessa Ey (Fairfield West Public School)
Vasva Smajlagic (Fairfield West Public School)

At first glance, Fairfield West Public School seems isolated from its community, surrounded by a large wall, insulating it from the traffic noise emanating from the adjacent six-lane highway. Fearing the symbolic impact of such a barrier (parents and community members being cut off from the school), previous school executive and staff argued against its construction. The persistent noise issue won over, however, and the wall went ahead. Maintaining a welcoming image in the face of such a physical barrier was essential.

The socio-economic status of the community has remained constant for some time, with a mix of families, languages, cultures and employment opportunities. The school has long embodied principles of equity, with a strong commitment to improved outcomes for all learners.

The ethos of Fairfield West Public School had focused on quality teaching and what was termed 'high engagement learning'. The former principal challenged student compliance, arguing that ESL learners were not well served by 'busy work' often characterised by quiet, worksheet tasks. The 'high engagement' focus was at that stage without a strong research foundation, with an emphasis on largely self-contained, reproducible, motivating lessons. Our work with the university

challenged us to theorise our teaching. We wanted to move beyond teaching lessons that seemed to be good at keeping students happy and interested, to learning experiences that had continuing value and so were more likely to encourage long-term engagement. That is, we were concerned with substantive 'e'ngagement. The school was a fertile site for teacher professional growth and intellectual work in the form of research.

Our story

Our story began with a school that had a history of positive relations with its community, often leading the region with initiatives for parents in the form of educational programs and short courses. However, we wanted to move beyond the welcoming face of the school and a focus on doing things for parents, to giving parents an immediate and valued voice in the home and classroom learning of their children. The wall might not have proved to be the barrier some staff worried it would be. Simply having parents on-site however, was insufficient for us. We wanted to reflect the integral place that parents, families and communities have in the learning of students in our classes.

The focus of our partnership was the relationship between student engagement and home-school literacies. We wanted to consider whether making strong home-school partnerships at the level of classroom literacy practice might be a pathway to student engagement. This was a particularly important research challenge in this context, as the school faced critical issues around literacy and had students from 41 different language backgrounds. We reasoned that one way to enhance 'e'ngagement and at the same time address improved literacy outcomes was through improved home and school relationships. This in turn led us to contemplate exactly what it was that brought children to school: not just when they begin school, but everyday and throughout their schooling. What did they read and watch at home? What literacy practices did families engage in? How could we foster engagement through school literacy by building on home literacies? What did parents believe about literacy? Like all action research, questions and data were generative. Initial focus group sessions with parents revealed a deep anxiety about an absence of book reading by their children at home. This led us to explore the notion of literacy as a social and diverse practice with both our students and their parents.

In order to bring together ideas around engagement and literacies, our work looked at theoretical foundations in the long-standing and recent work calling for teachers to be aware of community literacies and to build upon them in the classroom (Heath 1983; Cairney & Ruge, 1998). It also drew on the increasing body of literature pointing to the importance of effective home, school and community partnerships in enhancing educational outcomes for students from low SES communities in particular (Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995; Cairney & Munsie, 1995). The practical importance of our journey was about rethinking how we made connections between children's worlds outside school and inside the classroom. We thought that this connection might be key to encouraging 'e'ngagement.

Our goals

As a result of our research focusing on students, parents and teachers, we considered it vital to establish goals for these three stakeholders. The nature of these goals was in fact fluid, and as our research was implemented our goals were altered. Ultimately, we envisaged that all three partners would achieve goals that would encourage student engagement flowing on to positive educational outcomes supported by strengthened relationships within the school community. The goals were:

Parents

To understand literacy as a social practice.
To understand that teachers care and value them, their children and their home learning environment.

Students

To articulate learning experiences.
To reflect upon learning as a meaningful and relevant experience in which they have a directing role.

Teachers

To question what engagement is and understand it as a diverse and complicated state.
To achieve engagement through explicit connections between home and school.

Our journey included a range of experiences, including parent focus group interviews, children exploring personal perceptions of home and school reading, and introducing a language for talking about learning at home and at school. Throughout the project we were constantly engaged in reflection and found that our professional dialogue was increasingly grounded in theory and data.

Parent focus group interviews

A number of focus group interviews were conducted by the university partner and included a range of parents from different language and cultural backgrounds. Classroom teachers and the Community Liaison Officer identified parents who had had little or no role in school activities. These parents, along with other more 'active' parents, were then invited to take part in the group interviews. The discussions spanned topics of how school was similar or different to the parents' own experiences, how they felt about their children's school and learning and what they understood literacy to be. Critically, for many, this afforded the first opportunity where parents had been asked about their children and their learning. Parents had typically been the audience for information about such matters:

We're told how to read to our children. How to do the maths. None of it is like what we're used to and it's very helpful.

Many parents felt that the school was a welcoming place and articulated those practices that fostered such an ethos: regular newsletters, assemblies, notes and the provision of a Community Liaison Officer and community room. Regular, two-way communication was largely absent, however, with some parents seeing themselves as the ones responsible for initiating contact:

I should really go and see the teacher …

If parents aren't happy, they can go and see the teacher.

We felt that conversations about literacy and learning could have two benefits. Firstly, children would come to see that we valued their learning outside of school and wanted to make links between home and school learning. Secondly, we wanted the 'at school' experience to have an impact on home conversations, for students' learning to be worthy enough of talk at home. After all, when students are 'e'ngaged, the learning is not contained in single lessons within classrooms.

What else did these interviews reveal?

- Parents of all cultural and language backgrounds cared deeply about the happiness and education of their children.
- Homework was a continuing source of debate among families: some seeing it as an important link between home and school, others felt it as pressure and anxiety on what is already stressful family life (see letter by parent).

Dear Teacher

I'm so glad to have the opportunity to comment on my thoughts about homework.

I feel that for the first five years of our children's lives we nurture and encourage their development with great enthusiasm and anticipation. The look on your child's face when they read their first book or their first word they write are mammoth achievements and fun too. But as our children progress through the school system and the work becomes more difficult, so does our family life. Work that used to be fun becomes a chore and our afternoons often become a battlefield. What seems to be forgotten is that not all children find school work easy. It is these children, kids like mine who find their afternoons the most stressful. Their heads are still clouded by the day's schoolwork and yet they are expected to complete more work, often difficult work. when they come home.

Over the years I have really come to appreciate my children. We have such little ***real*** *time together and I would dearly love to spend our afternoons, or at least some evenings being pleasant instead of stressed. I understand that homework may be beneficial to some, more likely to those with brilliant parents, or a real desire to achieve, but with me – as the old saying goes – "YOU CAN LEAD A HORSE TO WATER BUT YOU CAN'T MAKE IT DRINK". Well my kids are seldom thirsty and I've got the grey hairs to prove it.*

Cathy

- Parents recognised the changing nature of discipline and learning in school today, and most, but not all, believed schools are friendlier and better places than when they went to school. (A couple of parents called for a return to stricter discipline and greater respect for teachers).
- Parents believed that their children did not engage enough with book-based texts outside school, being more focused on electronic games systems and television viewing.
- Parents were able to see that reading could involve interpreting media texts, community signs, menus, timetables, invitations and so on.
- Parents understood the critical role that individual teachers made to the lives of their children (see transcript).

Interviewer:

Are you happy with the way the school is working with the community?

Parent:

I think the teachers should find more time to find out why a kid is having problems in certain areas than just forget about it and say, 'Oh, this kid's got a problem', you know, forget about him and I'll just concentrate on the rest, 'cause that's what happened to my son last year. Like Jenny, I went through a divorce and my son was having a lot of difficulties and changing school at the same time, was, you know, more hard on him, and he found out that kids were picking on him, they kept knocking him and telling him to go back to his old school, but the teacher, every time he wanted to ask her something, she'd tell him to shut up and sit down, so that every morning I had to drag him to school, and he used to cry every single morning.

(later)

I thought the teacher could have made more effort to find out about his problems rather than just saying, 'OK, I won't pull my hair out, I don't know what to do with your son'. So I really had a lot of trouble with her last year … (his teacher now) is much better. I've had no problems sending him to school this year, he's much better. He gets up in the morning, gets dressed and comes to school, no problems, but last year I didn't know what to do. His teacher makes time for him, you know, doesn't criticise him. I don't know, maybe she's got a soft spot for him, I don't know, but whatever it is, he's flourishing under her, and that makes me feel, like, great. I wish he had her for next year. I'm crossing my fingers for it, but I doubt it.

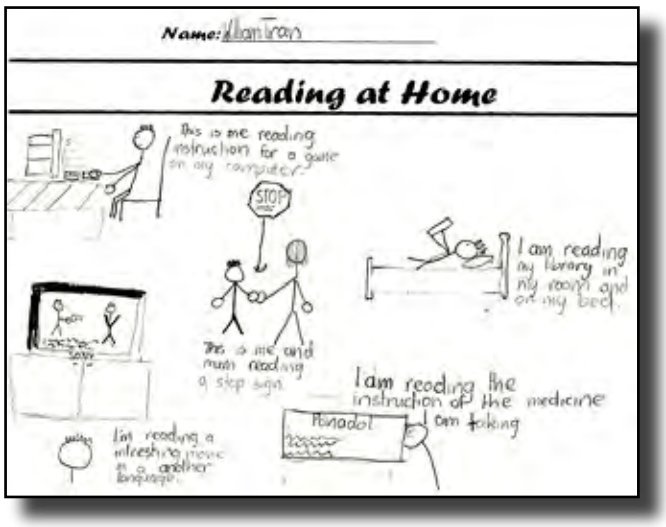
Parents know the power of individual teachers.

Home and school reading

Based on one of the common concerns of parents that their children were not engaging with books outside school, we decided to investigate what children did read at home and to contrast this with what they saw as reading at school. Implementing an idea from Susan Groundwater-Smith, we asked children to draw what reading looked like at home and at school. Upon analysing these drawings, some interesting themes emerged:

- The children's drawings revealed that they understood reading as a diverse practice that involved much more than reading books.
- At home, reading was depicted as a solitary pastime and involved watching television, reading community signs and playing electronic games. There appeared to be an individual purpose (reading, playing and viewing for oneself).
- At school, reading was depicted as social, where children could be the reader and be read to, as part of a group. It also involved reading charts, books, posters, flashcards, library texts, reading the blackboard/whiteboard and reading to, and for, teachers.
- Some gender differences were identified in the reading pastimes children engaged in. For older children, gender differences emerged as girls depicted themselves in bed reading books and boys playing computer or other electronic games.

The students had clear understandings that reading takes many forms. However, we found that they did not always have the language to be able to articulate to parents and others (perhaps even themselves) their learning experiences, not only in reading, but also in other Key Learning Areas. In order for children to share what they were learning at school with parents, we needed to show that we valued the knowledge, understandings and experiences, which they brought from home to the school environment. We needed to



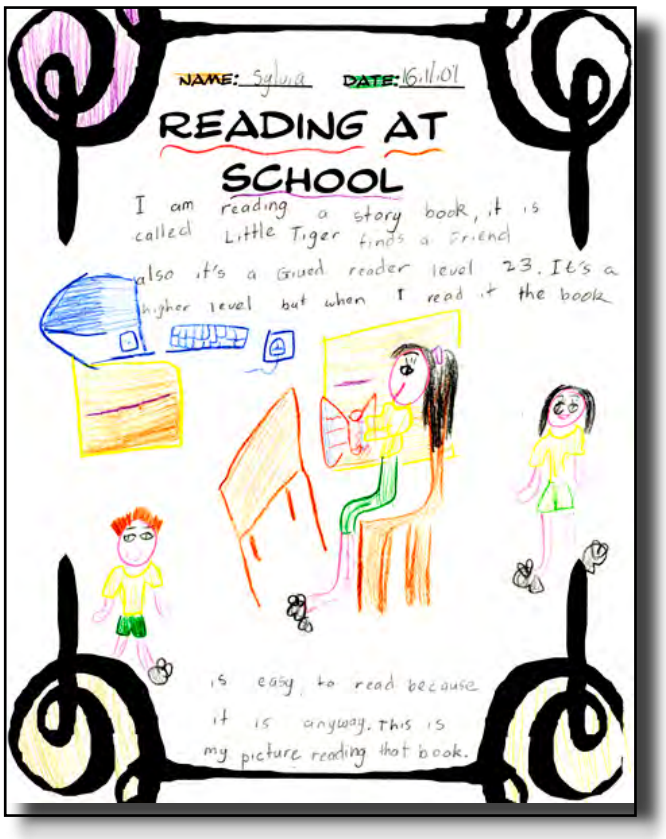
strengthen the bonds between home and school in order to also strengthen the levels of student engagement.

Introducing a language for talking about learning at home and at school

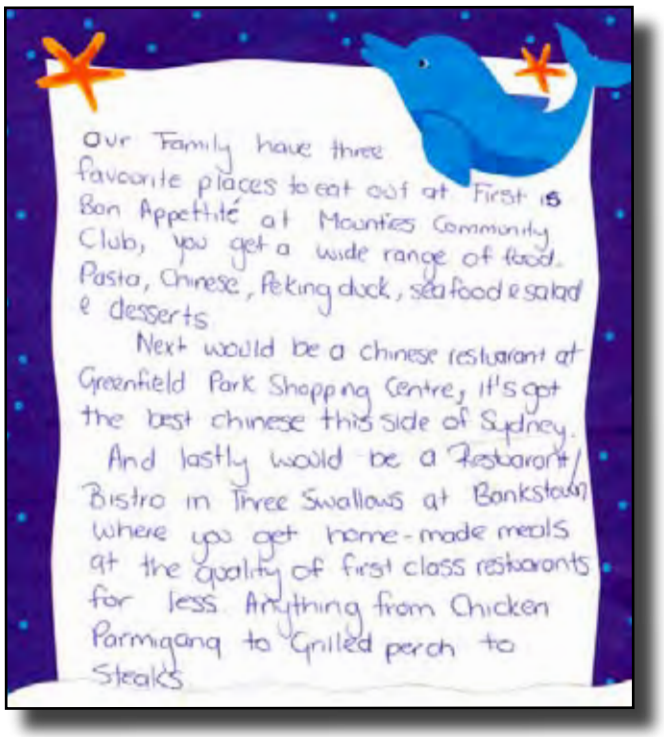
We will discuss here some of the strategies we used to encourage students to talk about home and school learning as well as learning itself. It must be noted however, that it was not necessarily these strategies in themselves that put us in good stead for student engagement; it was the teachers' mindset. Increasingly, in our conversations with other teachers and the other partners in the project, we wondered about engagement – what it looked like, what it sounded like and importantly, how it could be distinguished from on-task, compliant behaviour. Ideas pointed more and more towards the learners themselves. It was the children who could provide the greatest insight into their learning. This understanding is critical when reading the strategies below.

Research question of the day

One way we found to encourage children to talk about their learning was to have Research Questions of the Day, which were recorded in a class booklet. These questions were devised as a class and related to the integrated unit being studied. The children were encouraged to take the questions home on a post-it note and, together with their family, generate answers using multiple sources, such as first-hand knowledge, and electronic and print media. Children wrote their answers and shared their findings



with the class during a question reflection session. We found that many children went home eager with this non-compulsory activity and involved parents in this process. One clear example of this is included below where a parent (who to this point had had no contact with the school or teacher) responded to the Research Question of the Day by writing an extended response.


Our Family have three favourite places to eat out at. First is Bon Appetite at Mounties Community Club, you get a wide range of food. Pasta, Chinese, Peking duck, seafood & salad & desserts

Next would be a chinese restaurant at Greenfield Park Shopping Centre, it's got the best chinese this side of Sydney.

And lastly would be a Restaurant/ Bistro in Three Swallows at Bankstown where you get home-made meals at the quality of first class restaurants for less. Anything from Chicken Parmigana to Grilled perch to Steaks

Parent response to Research Question of the Day

Reflection sessions

This was a process where students were encouraged to consider such things as the major learning point of the lesson and to question and synthesise their understandings of the topic. They had to consider where the class should go to next with their learning, hence directing the class program. Providing students with the opportunity to critically reflect on specific learning experiences gave students more access to, and ownership of, learning. Such a practice, we felt, gave students 'e'ngaging messages about knowledge and control. We found that students showed a greater desire to acquire knowledge and understandings and, importantly, were simultaneously developing skills in reflection. The reflections indicated that students enjoyed experiences, therefore indicating a highly affective dimension of engagement. The reflections also pointed to high cognitive demands being placed on learners. Using such a process, that was both individual and collective, students were provided with a guided opportunity to share ideas and direct the path their learning should take. It made them confident learners who were proud of their discoveries (see Post-it note student reflections below).

Making learning public

The classes were told about the research we were part of and they welcomed the role of the university. They discussed explicitly the fact that they were part of the learning team along with teachers, parents and university partners. As such, students came to see learning as a partnership between parents, teachers and themselves. Some students may already have had this idea (particularly those for whom home and school practices and values were congruent), but it seemed that more adopted this concept throughout our journey. Their learning was generative; one child may have come up with a suggestion that the whole class followed with teacher guidance. The students saw learning as a cognitive and cooperative activity, or, in their words, 'brainish and team'.

Pedagogical changes

The unique nature of our focus meant that our initial research sat outside the classroom and with parents' feelings and understandings. That said, the data generated from the focus group interviews spurred us to think deeply about our learners and our teaching. There have been two significant pedagogical changes.

Classroom dialogue

The frequency and nature of conversations between participants improved along both intellectual and social/personal dimensions. This included dialogue between:

- teacher and student
- teacher and parent

Post-it note student reflections

This session made me think about working with friends and sharing your ideas together – Tahlia.

This session made me think about what I know about Italy and what I want to know about Italy. I was happy to do the sesssion because I love Italy. I think it is the best place. – John

Something that this session has made me think about is to co-operate because teamwork works and also to do something as a group and to finish something on time – Alexander.

I thought that all my life I've never really thought about Italy so this lesson really gave me a chance to think about me and my family's culture, and I like this lesson because I know and can learn about it – Rachelle.

Something this session has made me thinks about is Italy and about their culture, food, disasters and many more stuff about Italy. I think we did that activity about Italy so we learn more about Italy and the things that happen in Italy. I think that this activity was co-operative and individual – Fiona.

- student and student and
- teacher and teacher.

We developed more explicit scaffolding techniques and found that we included discussion at metacognitive levels daily. Such dialogue is strongly illustrative of an engaging message around 'voice', where students have a real say about their learning and enter meaningful and reciprocal discourses with their teachers. If students are having a real say, a real voice, in their learning, then it follows that negotiated programming has to be a feature of the classroom. This does not diminish the role of the teacher as scaffolder and guide, as teachers need to make decisions about structuring learning experiences. What it does, however, is give the engaging message about control; the classroom is a shared learning environment, with valuable contributions to be made by teachers and students alike.

Improving intellectual quality

Embedded in the importance of the role of the teacher, is the need to lift the intellectual demands made of students in their learning. Certainly students can and should contribute to what, how and when they want to learn, but the teacher can extend and enrich student's ideas, particularly through reflection. The teaching of metacognitive and reflective skills was intellectually challenging for both teachers and students. Intellectual quality is not only fostered in reflection, and we continue to think about how learning can be enhanced in tasks themselves. (The other partnerships have much to offer here. For example, see Chapters 2 and 3).

Indicators of student engagement

Our conversations with other teachers revealed that engagement looks, sounds and feels different to different people, adults and students alike. Most teachers suggest that if engagement is happening then there is a certain 'buzz' or energy emanating from the students, the work they produce and the discourse that is stimulated between the child and its family. For us, this buzz was seen in increased classroom talk and ideas and resources coming from home. Students were keen to talk about their learning with their parents, the university partner and us. They were 'insiders'.

With any travel, journeys seek destinations and experiences, and as we near one destination, we contemplate another. If student self-assessment plays a critical role in both facilitating and indicating student engagement (see Chapter 2), then perhaps home-school partnerships can do the same. If strong home-school relationships are fostered, then perhaps student engagement is more likely. We can show that our interest in, and valuing of, families, their beliefs and practices, leads in some ways to increased student interest at school. Simultaneous to this is increased talk at home about school – perhaps reflecting greater student engagement.

Our final comments relate to messages about 'place.' Teachers in Priority Schools know that students from low SES communities often face implicit and explicit deficit messages about themselves and their communities. These disengaging messages contained in lowered expectations and unproductive teaching often convince students that they will not be successful at school. On the other hand, improved and genuine relationships between teachers, students and their families offer potentially 'e'ngaging messages about place. A kid from a Priority School can know that 'school is for me'.

CHAPTER 10

'Insider' classrooms, 'Insider' schools

Catherine Sinclair (University of Western Sydney)
Kerry Johnson (Priority Schools Funding Program)

This chapter considers the ways classrooms and schools can be organised so that all participants - students, teachers, parents, school leaders and the wider community - can become 'insiders' in the culture of the school. In other words, this chapter explores how 'insider classrooms' and 'insider schools' can lead to student engagement, enhanced student outcomes and whole school change and improvement. Therefore, in this chapter, 'school is for me' refers to everyone in the school community.

While the 'insider' classroom refers to such interacting elements as teacher inclusive conversations, teacher feedback, student self-assessment and a student community of reflection; the 'insider school' parallels that model with the interacting elements of professional discourse, collegial talk, mentoring and collegial feedback and professional self-assessment (see Figure 1 below).

We interviewed and observed students, teachers and school leaders (school executive staff and principals) across school sites. We also viewed school documentation, such as school plans. The data gathered identified key elements in classroom and school organisation and culture that enable all participants to see themselves as 'insiders' in their classrooms and their schools.

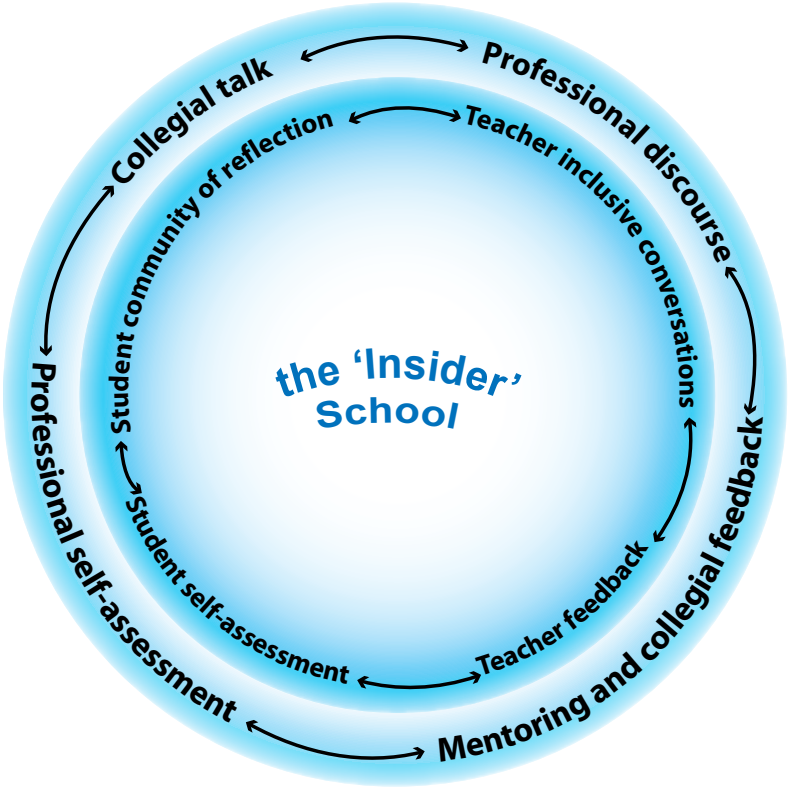


Figure 1 - The 'Insider' School: Teacher engagement in the process towards student engagement

What makes an 'insider' classroom?

Classroom organisation encompasses aspects such as the physical space of the classroom, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and relationships between teachers, students and parents. This research found that effective classrooms are organised in ways that enhance the conditions for learning for all students. They reflect the context of the local school community and connect with the challenges of the curriculum and wider community.

For students

In these classrooms students and their work are valued. They find school interesting and are learning something that is relevant to their lives now. Students want to be in these classrooms, are provided with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, and have the confidence to express themselves and take risks. They have a 'fair say' in what and how they are learning. At times students have the opportunity to do the teaching, and are encouraged to use their imagination to help them undertake cognitive tasks. As one school principal commented:

['e'ngaged] students are talking about what they are learning in class, excited about showing their work to me, or their parents, or the next class. I'll hear parents talking about what their children are learning and what the kids are saying at home. I'll see students proudly carrying their work home from school … I'll hear teachers sharing success stories in the staffroom.

Students feel that they belong in these classrooms as the physical space of the classroom represents a home for them. Their classrooms are organised and have a sense of purpose. These students know where resources can be found and have been taught how to access and use them appropriately. Important work, not just decorative work, is displayed and students and teachers engage in meaningful learning conversations about the displays during teaching. Seating is flexible and is organised to facilitate the particular learning task.

Students are 'e'ngaged in learning tasks that are negotiated with them so that they have some control over the choice of activity, pace, time and assessment criteria. 'e'ngaging tasks are set at an appropriate student level, integrate learning outcomes from a range of KLAs, are connected to what students care about, and are interesting, exciting and hands on. These tasks also have high intellectual quality, draw upon curriculum content that focuses on key concepts and 'big ideas', and allow the affective, operative and cognitive to come together. Students are involved in goal setting, self-assessment and peer assessment.

In the 'insider' classroom, the relationship between students and teachers exhibits a shared ownership of the learning space, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. There is an interaction and interdependence amongst students as well as between students and teachers. 'e'ngaged students can regulate their own behaviour, negotiate conditions for learning and, with their teachers, jointly set the standards for measuring the quality of their work.

For teachers

Teachers in 'insider' classrooms are enthusiastic and interested in their students and in their profession. These teachers have a positive approach to students and high expectations for student learning and achievement. They know their subject matter, so they can provide students with information at the point of 'need to know', and are not merely the holder of knowledge as much as leaders and guides.

These teachers create classroom environments where students feel safe, and motivate students to see how school is of value to them and their aspirations ('school is for me'). They make the purpose of learning overt and are explicit about what they are teaching and their role in the learning process. Their teaching strategies incorporate high cognitive, high affective and high operative dimensions and are flexibly geared to their students and the learning task. For example, teachers are likely to move from the foreground to background, from the role of transmitter to constructivist. This means that at times these teachers use more explicit techniques requiring a high level of student support (e.g. modelling) to teach their students the necessary skills for a learning task, and then 'let go' of control over

the task, being more implicit, so that students have a greater role in the construction of knowledge.

Teachers work towards creating 'insider' classrooms through the use of dynamic, flexible student learning teams, employing strategies such as cooperative learning and questioning. They ask questions for which they do not have a ready answer and challenge students on the answers they give to encourage problem solving and to push their thinking to higher levels. They enter into teaching conversations where talk is purposeful and praise is not empty but rather provides informative feedback to students.

For parents and the wider community

Teachers create welcoming and stimulating classroom environments where family and community members are not only invited to participate in a range of learning activities but to enter into a partnership to enhance student learning. This was explained by a teacher:

There has been a real shift to establishing relationships with parents and through those relationships they've come to trust us, and take a lead from us, allow us to lead.

What makes an 'insider' school'?

'Insider' schools operate as learning communities that have and enact commitment and vision focused on learning and improved student outcomes. For example, these schools ask themselves questions about pedagogy. One school principal said:

What do we want our students to learn? Why does it matter? How are our practices congruent with our beliefs? How can we promote quality teaching and learning, care of our students and student engagement? How will we light the intellectual fires?

School organisation in these schools involves using time, resources and structures to enhance learning for all members of the school community.

School structures provide guidance and support for teachers and students by building in and openly valuing time for reflection and professional discussion about teaching and learning (and for principals about leadership), rather than just about disruptive students or administration. These schools maximise the provision of additional resources and staffing supplementation to facilitate flexibility in timetabling, the way students are grouped for instruction (e.g. smaller class sizes) and use of school personnel. They allocate time and resources to support professional learning for all members of the school community. For example, classrooms are grouped to be close to buddy classes to facilitate collegial support and collaborative planning; special programs for parents are implemented; and peer mentoring, beginning teachers and student teacher programs are evident. Communication is open, honest and two-way, and collaborative and participatory decision-making occurs. Consider what one principal said about this:

Where possible we open doors. We've got one block that is completely open, so there is a lot of integration and teachers working to their strengths. Within grades, somebody becomes the mentor or expert in terms of a particular KLA or a style of teaching … All of our teams in the school have a supervisor and a mentor.

For students

Students in the schools are empowered and have a voice. They have a genuine say in school and classroom decision-making and are not only listened to, but heard. They have ownership of what they are doing and learning, and are part of a collective responsibility for what happens in their school. These students are involved in social relationships, achieve and have a sense of being valued. The following remarks by a principal explain this:

We need to give students a voice, through whole school structures (for example, class meetings, SRC) and a genuine say in school decision-making. Similarly, we need to listen properly and make sure that students are heard.

For teachers

Teachers in these schools are committed to 'e'ngaging and challenging students. As a teacher commented:

… we are all working together to do the best that we can to meet the needs of the students. We have a direction that we know we are working towards.

Teachers consider themselves part of their school communities. A principal put it this way:

The culture … is really strong. There is a strong relationship between the community and the staff… The leadership group that we currently have here have [sic] ensured that it's a risk taking school and we've looked at things that can make a difference in kids and try to … ensure that those things are happening.

These teachers are enthusiastic, open to change, collegial and work in support networks, such as learning teams or teaching teams. As one experienced teacher explained:

…. the dynamics of the staff is really important because it keeps you enthusiastic and keeps you excited about what you are doing. Sometimes when you get a little bit stale and tired, the enthusiasm of the other staff members is catching. It helps you remain enthusiastic.

In making decisions regarding classroom curriculum, these teachers cooperatively plan and program across stages and use specialist teachers (for example, the English as a Second Language Teacher, Support Teacher Learning Assistance, teacher librarians, Aboriginal Education Assistant and community members) to create 'e'ngaging experiences for their students. They may even team teach to their particular strengths and further their own teaching development by observing the strengths of teaching partners.

Teachers have ownership of, take on leadership roles within, and are part of, a collective responsibility for what happens in their school. They know the students in the school (smaller school) or across the stage (all schools) and the needs of those students. These teachers may be matched to their students in the formation of classes, value students' home backgrounds and focus on the whole child (the physical, emotional, academic and social). They enter into reciprocal learning relationships with their students, at times learning from their students. These ideas were highlighted by one teacher:

I think the fact that it's a small school enables you to get to know all the children, to know the children that have specific problems to be able to cater for those and to be able to get to know the staff. I see it as a family.

Teachers in these schools enjoy supportive, professional development aligned to the school vision, whole school needs, school plan, stage or group needs and individual needs. They are challenged to interrogate the quality of their work, feel free to try out their own ideas, take risks and at times 'fail'. As one teacher commented:

… you're constantly looking at how to better things by [looking at] what's immediately happening in your classroom each day. And when you're doing your assessment for your portfolio tasks, how well they're [the students are] performing on certain tasks that you think you've covered really well in the classroom and then you see, oops, they didn't do that as well as I thought they should have, maybe I should rethink my presentation of that particular concept.

For parents and the wider community

'Insider' schools support learning for the whole school community**,** promote a socially and culturally inclusive school environment, and enter into real partnerships with parents. Parents and the community play an active role with real responsibility and decision-making.

For school leaders

Principals in these schools are the 'leading learner[s] among a community of learners within their schools. They also provide opportunities for other members of their school communities to take on leadership roles. A principal stated how important this was:

There needs to be a focus on supporting learning, learning for the whole school community: students, teachers, parents, carers [and] others who share the learning in the school. We need to look for ways to facilitate learning for all members of our community, with the principal as the leading learner. There needs to be structures in place to provide guidance and support for students and teachers in the classroom.

So how can you create an 'insider' school?

Creating the capacity for school change and a shift in thinking to promote high levels of student engagement is certainly a challenge for teachers, school leaders, parents and communities. In addressing this challenge PSP identifies three critical interrelated action areas that schools should consider when working to find innovative and creative solutions to address the identified needs of students within the particular context of their school community and reduce the achievement gap in

their local contexts. The three action areas are: quality teaching and learning; home, school and community partnerships; and classroom and school organisation and school culture.

Quality teaching and learning

Teachers are encouraged to implement pedagogies of the 'insider' classroom, such as those highlighted throughout this book. At the core of improved educational outcomes is the quality of the classroom pedagogical relationship and the extent to which 'e'ngagement in learning occurs within the classroom.

Home, school and community partnerships

The importance of developing strong home, school and community partnerships is consistent with the view of a total learning community that develops when parents and students feel that the school is their place and where teachers identify with the families in the school. As this chapter has outlined, the relationship between home and school, and the school and the community needs to go beyond 'parent participation' and take into account the diverse nature of families. For example, in order to effectively engage students in literacy, teachers need to be aware of the home and community literacy experiences which their students bring to the classroom and value these by incorporating them into the curriculum, along with the literacy practices valued by the school. In this way students will be better able to bridge the gap between their home and school worlds (PSFP, 2003).

Classroom and school organisation and school culture

The degree to which students are prepared to engage in learning depends on the way schools and classrooms are organised and how positive is the school culture (PSFP, 2003). The quality of leadership at all levels of a school community, a culture of high expectations and whole school approaches, such as those expressed in this chapter, can combine to have a positive impact on student engagement in learning. Schools are encouraged to develop classroom and school organisational practices that can be measured by their capacity to lead change and support teachers to engage students in learning.

In conclusion

The curriculum we design and implement; our teaching and assessment practices; what we communicate and the way we communicate with all members of the school community; our relationships with each other (students, teachers, school leaders, parents and the wider community); and our school policies, practices and structures can send strong messages to each individual or group about whether or not school is relevant to them and their futures. If we become teachers in the first place because we want to help others or make a difference in the lives of our students (Sinclair, Dowson & McInerney, 2005, in press), then we owe it to our students and their families to implement classroom and school practices that will engage each one to enter "into communities of practice, discourse and inquiry … to become an 'insider' in the culture of the classroom" (Durrant & Green, 2002, p.103).

Postscript - Messages from our teachers

The following table provides some important ideas from our Fair Go classroom teachers that they believe needed to be considered and discussed. The changes discussed in this book have evolved over substantial periods of time and required considerable commitment. Nonetheless, teachers can begin almost immediately to change their classrooms in the following powerful ways.

Engaging messages about	What it means	What it means to students	What it can look like
Knowledge	Reflectively constructed access to contextualised and powerful knowledge	'we can see the connection and the meaning'	• students' local knowledge and experiences are used and valued as a contribution to everyone's knowledge and learning • frequent and serious conversations to show how learning has real life and immediate application
Ability	Feelings of being able to achieve and a spiral of high expectations and aspirations	'I am capable'	• tasks are positive and allow all students to demonstrate what they know and can do but also challenge them to learn more • students are encouraged and helped to see the connections between working well, thinking hard and feeling good
Control	Sharing of classroom time and space: inter-dependence, mutuality and shared power	'we can do this together'	• struggles over student behaviour are let go by teachers – they can't be won • students get chances to think about, discuss and look after their own behaviour
Place	Valued as individual and learner and feelings of belonging and ownership over learning	'it's great to be a kid from'	• within the full range of learning activities students are helped to make constructive connections with their own real world • continuous and positive affirmation about the importance of all learners within their own community
Voice	Environment of discussion and reflection about learning with students and teachers playing reciprocal, meaningful roles	'we share'	• students are given lots of time, opportunities and tools to reflect on, assess and drive classroom learning • classroom talk becomes more like a series of conversations between students, their teacher and each other

Engaged kids really need engaged teachers!

The final message from our Fair Go teachers is that if we are to take up seriously the challenge of 'e'ngaging and 'E'ngaging our students, then teachers and students all have to be in it together. Becoming an engaged teacher means:

- questioning engagement and what it really means and looks like in the classroom
- being passionate about engaging teaching
- focusing on learning, not behaviour
- setting high expectations about learners, learning and teaching
- engaging in professional dialogue and reflective teacher practices
- developing a whole school ethos that addresses quality teaching and student engagement in learning and school.

Glossary

affective refers to the feelings students have about what they are learning. When there is a high affective response by students it is more than simply liking the learning experiences, it is deeply valuing what they are doing.

authentic instruction is used by Newmann and Associates (1996) to describe classroom practices that will improve learning outcomes and reduce the achievement gap between high and low SES students. Authentic instruction is characterised by student construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry and connectedness to the world beyond school.

cognitive refers to the intellectual processes of students' learning experiences. When we talk about high cognition there is an understanding that students are doing more than simple memorisation and recall of facts but using self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and expertise.

'e'ngagement (small 'e' engagement) means a substantive engagement with learning experiences. When this happens students are thinking hard, feeling good and working well.

'E'ngagement (big 'E' engagement) is when students feel that school is a place that works for them and education is a resource that they can successfully use now and in the future. 'E'ngagement is summed up in the phrase 'school is for me'.

engaging messages are messages carried through 'e'ngaging classroom experiences and 'insider' classroom processes. They work towards 'E'ngagement.

'future in the present' is the phrase that captures the idea that 'e'ngagement and 'E'ngagement are strongly linked. When students frequently have powerful 'e'ngaging classroom experiences there is an increased chance that they will feel that 'school is for me'.

insiders refers to students becoming important players in the classroom learning processes.

operative refers to the students' development as learners. High operative means they are successfully involved in their learning and actively participating, rather than just following directions and 'going through the motions'. It is very important that student engagement for low SES learners is directly related to their development as highly effective learners.

productive pedagogy refers to a pedagogy described by the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study. It has dimensions of intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and valuing difference.

quality teaching model has been developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training from the productive pedagogies framework. There are dimensions of intellectual quality, quality learning environment and significance.

social constructivism draws on the work of Vygotsky. It refers to the ways students actively construct their knowledge within the social context of where the learning is taking place. The knowledge is constructed through the interaction the learner has with all aspects of the context – including materials, adults and other learners.

student engagement has a definition in the Fair Go Project as an interplay of high levels of cognitive, affective and operative, dimensions. This is much more than being on task. When students are strongly engaged they are successfully involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and they have passionate positive feelings about these tasks.

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(Endnotes)

1 See Jones (1989) and Haberman (1991) for discussions of how low SES and minority background students resist high level tasks and comply with low level tasks. In both studies there is a clear indication of students rejecting classroom practices consciously designed to improve their educational outcomes.

2 This project involved a collective of schools called the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools, convened by Professor Susan Groundwater-Smith at the Centre for Practitioner Research (Faculty of Education, Sydney University). This collective sees as its purpose: sharing ideas about evidence based practice; developing an interactive community of practice; making a contribution to a broader professional knowledge base; building research capability within schools by engaging teachers and students in research processes; and sharing methodologies which are appropriate to practitioner enquiry as a means of transforming teacher professional learning.

3 The class had earlier visited an Australian wildlife zoo and Julia had displayed maps of it in the classroom.

4 Multimodal texts draw upon a variety of communication modes – spoken, written, visual, and spatial – at the same time (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 39).

5 For further details on the Storypath strategy see, McGuire, M. (1997) *Storypath foundations: An innovative approach to teaching Social Studies.* Everyday Learning, Chicago.

6 A description of the Storypath unit, 'The Toy Company', by Margit McGuire, provided some of the initial thinking and design for this unit.

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