

snapshots

of the English Classroom

Support Materials for Teachers of English

No 4



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Snapshots of the English Classroom

The purpose of this document

This is the fourth in the series entitled *Curriculum Planning and Course Support Materials* designed to support the implementation of the English priority program. The document will help teachers reflect on their teaching practices and consider some new teaching approaches. It will also help schools audit and develop the English curriculum for students. The document shows the practical application of some of the key ideas expressed in previous documents in the series and should be used in conjunction with them.

The snapshots provide a lively description of English classrooms at four bands of schooling: early childhood, primary school, high school and college. Because of the breadth of the development of students during the early childhood period, there are two snapshots to cover this Band. The snapshots do not attempt to describe a complete English curriculum; rather, they focus on certain

aspects of it. The snapshots have been prepared by practising teachers in Tasmanian schools and colleges. They demonstrate collections of best practice that have taken the writers time to develop. Teachers will be familiar with many of the teaching approaches described in the snapshots; however, it is hoped that they will find some new ideas to incorporate into their practice.

The document contains a number of workshop activities that can be undertaken by the whole staff or teachers working in groups under the leadership of the English coordinator. Most teachers will focus initially on the snapshot that is most closely representative of their own classroom. However, teachers who wish to use the snapshots to investigate scope and sequence, transition points and student development or to audit their curriculum will take note of more than one snapshot.

About the snapshots

These snapshots:

- Show English classrooms which focus on the interrelated strands of learning in English: text and language.
- Show the teacher's role in supporting the development of speaking and listening, reading and viewing and writing.
- Demonstrate a range of teaching and learning approaches, including different ways of working with texts.
- Spotlight a particular student, but describe the work of a whole class over a period of time.
- Demonstrate classroom management and the use of a variety of resources by teachers and students.
- Present a range of perspectives on English teaching.
- Show a progression in student development throughout the bands of schooling.
- Show links between English and other learning areas.

Workshop activities

These activities should be led by an English curriculum officer or the school English coordinator. The activities should be undertaken during a series of sessions.

- 1 Choose one of the snapshots of the English classroom and note the teacher's role in supporting the development of reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening. What are the main teaching strategies used by the teacher? Discuss with a partner similar and different strategies you use in your classroom. As a group, brainstorm key teaching strategies that support students' learning in English.

Identify a strategy you would like to know more about. Work with another teacher to explore one example of this strategy. Try out the strategy in your classroom and reflect with your colleague on its effectiveness with your students.
- 2 As a group, comment on the classroom management of the teacher in one of the snapshots of the English classroom. What would the students need to know and be able to do in order to work in the way described? What strategies would the teacher have employed to establish this learning environment?
- 3 Undertake a graffiti exercise using the five perspectives on English teaching (see the previous document in the series, *What is English?*) and one or two of the snapshots of the English classroom. Establish a different graffiti station for each perspective. At each station, write down information from the snapshot that reflects this perspective. After the exercise, make observations as a group about the balance of the perspectives in the classroom. What does this suggest about the values of the teacher involved? How does your classroom compare? What does this suggest about your values as a teacher of English?
- 4 The snapshots provide only a partial view of an English program. Choose one of the snapshots and discuss other areas you think the teacher should focus on to offer a full and balanced program. If you were a guest in the teacher's classroom, what questions would you ask about his/her approach to English teaching?
- 5 As a group, discuss the support that would have to be in place in order for the teachers in the snapshots to teach in the way they do? Consider school organisation, school leadership, learning area leadership, resources and professional development. How could these areas be strengthened in your school? What strategies and practices need to be consistent across all bands in your school?
- 6 These snapshots describe classrooms mainly from an English perspective. Work in pairs to read one of the snapshots and highlight where other learning areas and cross-curricular issues are evident. What other teaching and learning opportunities would you create to incorporate an integrated approach?
- 7 Over a period of a year, create a snapshot of your own classroom. Begin by brainstorming some ideas with a partner. You could undertake this activity to help you monitor your English program. However, there are wider purposes and audiences for snapshots of the English classroom. For example, the school could develop a sequence of snapshots to inform parents about the English program, help induct new teachers into the school, or support teachers in training.

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It is Wayne's second year at a medium-sized, outer-suburban primary school which is situated in an area of high unemployment. The school provides a strong focus and meeting place for the community.

Wayne is an active, outgoing child who has difficulty maintaining concentration in the classroom. He is sometimes aggressive and, although well meaning, finds it hard to maintain good relationships with his peers. There are twenty-four students in the class, several of whom have been identified as needing extra support for their learning. These students receive teacher aide support every morning and further help is provided by a teacher from the District Support Team on a regular basis.

Wayne's classroom consists of a large carpeted area, a small wet area and an adjoining quiet room which is shared with the adjacent Prep/1 class. In the room, tables are clustered together in groups and children are able to move freely with easy access to all materials.

Wayne's teacher, Helen, has established a warm, colourful working environment for the children in her care. Classroom walls display children's artwork, writing and mathematics as well as questions, signs and labels which invite young readers to engage with displays and information. Visual texts in the form of photographs, posters and symbols are placed strategically around the room to support the emergent and non-readers. The room has an inviting language area consisting of cushions, cane chairs, baskets and shelving which contains a variety of reading materials. A variety of non-fiction and fiction books are displayed - an 'author collection' of books and posters is the current focus for the area. Next to the reading corner, two tables are set up for writing with a range of publishing materials. These include paper, pens, dictionaries, word banks, writing folders and examples of children's and commercially published writing. Children are encouraged to write, illustrate and construct their own books and are assisted to use the computer to word process their own stories.

Helen is aiming to establish a collaborative relationship with her children's families. Displays in the entrance and corridor areas near the classroom provide information for parents and community visitors about class programs and offer practical suggestions for parents about literacy, numeracy, health and child management.

Every morning, Helen discusses with the whole class the set learning tasks for the day. These often extend over a period of time. Activities are organised around the room for children to work on both independently and in small groups. During this time Helen models particular writing and reading skills. The writing is related to topics of class interest and children are involved in the construction of the text. These texts are often deconstructed for revision of literacy skills.

One of Helen's main aims is to develop a supportive learning environment which incorporates carefully established routines, negotiated class rules and respect for other people and their property. Wayne has difficulty in working independently and being a responsible learner. He has freedom to choose and negotiate his learning tasks but often needs guidance and adult intervention to assist his learning. During the morning Wayne works in a small group on language tasks including a cloze activity and spelling game to consolidate his reading and writing skills. The children record completion of each task by ticking a box next to their name on a class chart. This provides both teacher and child with a quick record of learning tasks completed. This record particularly helps Wayne to focus on completing a learning task within a set time and learning simple time management skills. Helen

and other adults in the room working with children also keep observational notes and checklists on children's progress.

Helen is fortunate to have the daily support of another early childhood teacher, Jenny, to work with all children in the class either in small groups or individually. Jenny and Helen meet regularly and jointly plan the class focus and teaching objectives for the week. Jenny also records and evaluates each child's reading and writing progress.

When Wayne started his year in Prep/1 his main interests were computers, construction and physical play. Wayne was aware of print, could write his name but disliked writing tasks. He enjoyed browsing and looking at the class book collection and liked borrowing class books daily and sharing these with his Mum. Wayne's Mum was keen to support him with his reading and interested in finding out how to support her son's language development. She attended a six week Parent Literacy Program which provided an opportunity for Helen and the parents to share their experiences and develop a greater understanding of the many ways in which children learn to read and write.

Wayne is beginning to read short books and Helen encourages him to share these books at home because she knows this activity reinforces vocabulary and language practised at school. Helen likes to hear everyone in the class read from different texts at different times during the day. Individual children read aloud whole class news, sentences from big books, their own writing, environmental print and reading from commercial fiction and non-fiction texts. Books are grouped in different baskets according to difficulty of vocabulary and sentence structure and the amount of text in each book. Children are encouraged to choose either a fiction or non-fiction text from any of the baskets. If children are confronted with difficult text, they are encouraged to share the book with an older student or an adult.

Each week, the class share paired reading with an older primary grade. Wayne's buddy, Stephanie, has developed a trusting relationship with him. They enjoy sharing books and reading aloud to each other. Wayne often takes a more dominant role in the sharing. Their relationship has assisted Wayne's behaviour in the playground as Stephanie often assumes a mediating role with younger children in the school.

A letter and word display consisting of labelled objects, words and dictionaries is added to and developed weekly by the children. A focus on letters is one way of integrating language activities with the general theme or topic of interest. For example, children in the class had collected tadpoles for a class study. The 't' for tadpole and tadpole words became part of the language activities about tadpoles. Children were organised into groups of four and were encouraged to think of questions they would like to ask about tadpoles. These questions were collated, typed and placed on the display for others in the class to read. Photos were taken of the establishment of the tadpole tank and children wrote about the procedures involved. This writing provided other young readers in the class with a model of a procedural genre in a particular learning context. Wayne was part of the group who assisted in establishing the display of materials, books, pictures and other resources for the tadpole interest area. He learned how to locate

books about frogs and tadpoles in the non-fiction section of the school library. In helping to set up an information display for others, Wayne learnt simple research skills and became involved in creating an attractive classroom environment.



In Helen's classroom, writing is done for real purposes and relates to the children's experiences. Helen encourages all children to "have a go" and take risks when writing. Children learn to write in a variety of genres. Spelling is important. Children are encouraged to have a go at spelling a word before seeing the correct model which is provided in their individual *Have a Go Dictionary*. Words from the dictionary and writing form the basis of their *Individual Spelling List*.

Wayne is beginning to take risks with his writing and attempting difficult vocabulary. Helen often uses simple narratives as models for children to write. Oral retelling is an important part of the class program and children take turns in retelling a favourite story. Helen aims for children to be confident in retelling a story or a series of events in a recount.

Helen uses the Key Intended Literacy Outcomes and English Profile as a basis for her reading assessment and makes regular observations and notes on each child's reading development. Helen likes to have regular discussions with parents about their child's language development and places particular emphasis on the school and family working together. Parents are encouraged to record observations and positive written feedback in their child's home reading card.

The class is learning to work and play cooperatively through practical activities such as role play and class sharing circle. Social skills of taking turns, disagreeing in an pleasant way, effective listening, sharing equipment and space are practised and modelled and continually being evaluated through a Y chart. Wayne has made progress in being able to take turns but sometimes forgets and becomes agitated if he doesn't receive the attention he demands.

The class sharing circle provides an opportunity for the development of speaking and listening skills. Children receive positive feedback on good listening skills and each day a time is allocated for a small group of children to speak to the large group. Helen encourages children to bring objects or books of interest from home. Children often have a pair/share activity and share in small groups of four. Other children in the class ask questions and so become involved in a wider sharing. Modelling of questions and extension activities from *Speaking and Listening (First Steps)* has provided Helen with further resources. Heather, the school Speech Pathologist, has been a valuable resource person in this area and provided listening games for classroom use. Poetry and verse by Michael Rosen has stimulated children to learn verse and recite aloud nonsense poems. Parents have enjoyed their children recounting stories in rhyme and supported their children by borrowing other poetry books from the library. Wayne delights

in being able to read and listen to poems and stories set up on the listening post in the room. His favourite tape is the *Michael Rosen Rap* which he often chooses during quiet reading time.

Each week Helen introduces different media to the class. She is aiming to develop her children as critical viewers as well as critical readers. Photos, prints, videos and advertisements are some of the media she has used this year. She finds the videos from *Weston Woods* to be suitable for young language users and helps students make comparisons with the printed text. Wayne's favourite is the video of *How the Elephant Got His Trunk* by Rudyard Kipling. Wayne made clay models of the characters and collage representations of the story. After viewing the story

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many times children were motivated to write their own story and illustrate using different media. The story was also retold through dramatic play which provided an

opportunity to discuss resolving conflict with others. Children in the class made their own published books and presented their re-enactments of the story to a school assembly which provided another audience for the class.

Helen also uses familiar visual texts such as the *Ferals* or *Rug Rats* which are viewed at home to deconstruct and discuss meaning. These programs often raise issues and values of our society and children are encouraged to respond in a positive way to problems introduced in these programs.



Kym is an eight year old Grade 3 student in a Grade 2/3/4 class of 26 children at a medium-sized school in a semi-rural community. The single classroom has a cloakroom at one end which incorporates a small wet area. The teacher, Suellen, takes care to provide a stimulating working environment, with an emphasis on the display and celebration of children's work.

On the walls there are also ideas for publishing, handwriting models, class rules and spelling strategies. In the reading corner a range of texts, both student composed and commercially produced, is displayed along with reference materials including dictionaries, thesauruses and atlases. Students are responsible for maintaining this area. In the classroom the tables are arranged in clusters, with children having a storage place for their materials, but no set individual work space. There is a balance of individual, small group and whole class activity; a contract system is the prime organiser of the working day. This kind of organisation enables Suellen to plan for a range of ability levels and learning needs. The children work on individual contracts relating to a variety of learning centres that focus on the different learning areas.

Kym and Suellen discuss the list of tasks for the week and together they negotiate Kym's contract.

Kym enjoys working with a variety of friends. She is usually confident to make decisions independently, although re-assurance from Suellen is occasionally needed. She is very organised and methodical in her approach to learning. Kym's parents are interested in her learning development and particularly encourage her enthusiasm for writing. Suellen promotes and extends this interest by having regular discussions with Kym's parents about strategies she uses in the classroom. She also discusses Kym's progress and shares samples of her work.

Often, after silent reading, the class share aspects of their reading material, sometimes with a particular focus such as a character analysis. This may be either in pairs or with a larger audience. Kym willingly shares her responses to material she reads. Her oral presentation skills are well developed. She makes eye contact with her audience, speaking audibly but very quickly. Children in the class feel comfortable about giving relevant and constructive feedback regarding speaking presentations. At the beginning of the year, Suellen and other members of the school staff

identified oral language as a key growth area for the year. Having participated in a series of school-based workshops, Suellen has become much more explicit and intentional in providing speaking and listening opportunities, where students are aware of purpose and the varying structures applicable to different situations and audiences. For example, in class meetings, students understand the need for each person to speak without being interrupted and they do this by turning over their name card when they wish to be heard.

At the beginning of the year, extensive work was undertaken on listening skills and communicating with others. A variety of strategies were used including the construction of 'Effective Speaking' and 'Effective Listening' Y-Charts (looks like, feels like, sounds like), role playing, practising and sharing effective listening and speaking behaviours. Assessment of speaking and listening is primarily through teacher observation and informal peer evaluation. Recently, students have been making audio-tapes of their own texts, which will provide valuable material for assessment.

Each day the class has a silent writing session, during which students select their own topics, format and style. During this time, students may

be re-drafting with the help of a partner, self-editing or conferencing with their teacher, word-processing their text or publishing work in a variety of forms. Children may be developing a report about witchetty grubs, a recipe for honey-comb, a fairy-tale story, a Grand Final or sporting page advertisements. Suellen is aware of the breadth of texts intended for the English learning area, and her contracts reflect this balance and range.

Recently, for example, Kym chose to design a new wrapper for a chocolate bar. As an introduction to this activity, Suellen and the children discussed the features of this everyday text, focusing on what appeals to varying audiences. A related activity involved Kym interviewing class members to collect information about their favourite chocolate bars for a class graph and enjoying scrumptious chocolate coated honey-comb another student had made.

In Kym's class there is an integrated approach to many learning areas. Within the curriculum, Suellen intentionally inter-weaves the language modes. For example, reading often offers a model

for writing in Suellen's class. After reading *The Jolly Postman* with a friend, Kym and her partner wrote their own literature text entitled *Kym's Busy Day*. It took considerable time and sustained effort to work through the writing process to produce this co-operative publication. Suellen is aware of the importance of providing authentic audiences, not only to reflect real practice but also to celebrate success. Younger classes and the adults they share the book with enjoyed *Kym's Busy Day*.

Suellen believes it is important to present spelling within authentic contexts. The spelling program in this class is closely related to writing across the curriculum, with errors forming the basis of students'

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individualised spelling list. Lists of demon words, study of word families, letter clusters and theme words all enhance the spelling program. From writing conferences, Suellen keeps anecdotal records about her students' language development which inform the composition of her teaching groups. For example, Kym recently worked with her teacher and three of her peers on speech marks using a big book and student selected texts for modelling and reference.

Anecdotal records, in conjunction with AKILOs checklists, give valuable information about individual progress and needs in writing. As with spelling, this monitoring informs the structure of some of Suellen's teaching groups. For example, Kym was a member of a group looking at the linguistic structures and features of various kinds of letters, an identified need while writing *Kym's Busy Day*. Students maintain a draft and a published work folder which includes a 'What I can do list'. Children may submit written work with self annotation for inclusion in the Personal Records folder. Suellen also selects work to highlight particular features of children's development.

As with writing, students in Suellen's class have a silent reading session each day, during which they select from the class library which includes a selection of literature, mass media and everyday texts. Suellen herself reads during part of this time; she conducts reading conferences with individual students during the remainder of the session. In the reading program, students sometimes read to parents and community members. The reading program also involves serialised stories, author and illustrator studies and texts relating to themes. For example, Aboriginal Studies is a SOSE focus within Suellen' classroom and throughout the school. As an extension of studying Aboriginal art forms, Suellen read the children *Enora and the Black Crane*, a picture book of an Aboriginal Dreaming. Students were able to re-tell the story in a narrative form, as a flow chart or in sequenced picture format with or without print.

Within the reading program, the contract system allows Suellen to address the identified needs of her students whilst recognising their independence, encouraging responsibility and allowing flexibility in choice. 'Reading' activities may include paired reading, reviewing reading material utilising a variety of formats, cloze passages from texts, oral presentations to the class and matching activities

relating to print and visual text. Children keep a variety of reading records in Suellen' class. Kym has a self-selected reader accompanied by a reading card where comments from both parents and Suellen are recorded.

In responding to a shared text, *Snow White in New York*, Suellen and her students focused on aspects of contextual understanding; specifically how our cultural positioning determines our 'reading' of texts. Suellen taught her students to question stereotypical treatments and interpret texts from various perspectives. After brainstorming in pairs words to describe the women in the story, the class listed the descriptive words which reflected 'good' and 'evil' assumptions. Suellen and her students explored colour and dress codes used to construct meaning in the illustrations in this text. Kym chose to respond to the text by designing and presenting a billboard announcing the death of Snow White. Kym considered colour and lettering codes in her construction of this text, using soft colours and flowing lines. Kym was also involved in a group role-play of the 'Snow White' story.



The daily silent reading session was over. Leigh was surprised that he had been reading for 15 minutes. He got out his reading record card and worked out how many pages he had read today.

This book was good. It had chapters, but still had pictures and the print was quite large. Leigh is learning that it is all right to read books with pictures in Grade 5 - that it's really important to understand and enjoy what you are reading. Even though Leigh chose this book for its brightness and newness (practising a newly acquired skill of finding the publication date!) he had access to an interesting variety of books for selection, including student-written texts.

Anne, teacher of this group of 26 heterogeneous students at a large country school, sees it as vitally important to nurture her students towards becoming independent, enthusiastic readers able to make appropriate and rewarding choices about what they read. She realises that for many students who have been immersed in imaginative experiences via television rather than print, this task is an increasingly challenging one. Making the most of incidental opportunities to discuss reading with her students individually, Anne uses the silent reading session as an opportunity to model her own enthusiasm for reading.

The book corner is bedecked with student-compiled author lists and book reviews. All the walls in this single, older style classroom are decorated with relevant display material and print covering several learning areas. Care is taken with the display of the students' own work.

Recently a student lent Anne a copy of John Marsden's *Looking for Trouble* and insisted on comparing reactions after every reading session. This student has become the class expert on John Marsden, her interest growing from the first shared novel for the year - *Staying Alive in Year Five*. Anne reads aloud to Leigh's class almost every day. The diet has been mainly quality Australian fiction from a variety of authors. There is a lot of discussion and prediction associated with these experiences, as well as role play and other activities and some written work. A favourite activity with the students is a 'Meet the Main Characters' forum with children

role-playing people from the current novel and the rest interviewing them about the things that have happened in the story. Leigh couldn't wait to ask 'Mr Murlin' if he thought it was fair that Wesley was suspended for peeing on the teacher!

Aware of the struggle some of her students have with 'chapter books', Anne has included picture books for older readers in her read-aloud program. She recognizes their value in providing cameo opportunities to explore important issues and their importance in teaching and learning about visual texts. Leigh likes the way he has been able to copy border and colour ideas for his own work from the picture books they have read. He knows it's been really good for his friend Peter who has quite a lot of difficulty with reading. Peter borrows picture books and practises until he knows the story (Leigh sometimes helps). Then Peter reads the stories to his buddy in Grade 1 and the buddy thinks Peter is just great! Leigh often helps Peter with reading, such as when they both did research on Tasmanian devils. Every week Peter goes off with a parent tutor to do extra reading, writing and spelling. Last time the class did group play readings, everyone commented on how well Peter read his part.

Leigh's class are just about to embark on another round of book discussion groups. Anne is pleased that she has enough parents willing and able to lead groups. Anne will have time to work intensively with the five students of greatest need. They too will have a book to read and discuss, but

the text will be at an appropriate level of difficulty. There will be time for modelling, talking about and practising the reading strategies that Anne's assessments indicate are still needed. Leigh, who will not be in Anne's group, is looking forward to the book discussion sessions even though he knows he will have to do some reading at home. He finds it easier to persist when there is an agreed target. The discussions help him to understand the story more clearly.

Leigh prefers participating in groups rather than speaking on his own in front of the class. His class has had a number of short speaking tasks this year. Sometimes there is little preparation time, for example, when reporting for a group or explaining why you agreed or disagreed with a particular idea. At other times, there is discussion time with others or overnight preparation. Anne, in seeking to promote oral communication, has provided lots of opportunities for practice and has emphasised to her students the importance of both content and delivery. Initially, Leigh just read from what he had written down. When the other students had to make comments, they reported that they couldn't



hear him. The peer assessments don't say that any more and Anne told him about improvements she'd noticed, such as making eye contact and ending in an interesting way. Leigh doesn't

enjoy this task, but he feels he's improving and he knows what to work on to do well at these tasks.

Leigh is surprised at the range of writing he's done this year. There's a chart on the back wall with the names of different kinds of writing. When Anne talked about 'genre' at the start of the year, Leigh didn't really understand, but now his work folder has selections from journal writing, stories, recounts, retellings, procedural writing, newspaper-type stories, letters to the editor and more. The annotations on the pieces in this folder relate to Leigh's achievements based on KILOs and English profile outcomes for writing. Leigh shared this work with his mum at parent-teacher discussion time. Anne has stored relevant duplicates as evidence of his developing linguistic prowess for the school record. A piece of writing of which Leigh is really satisfied is his recount of the recent class trip to Cadbury's. Anne

commented on the way he included all the main events of the day and the way he finished with comments on what he'd thought about all the things that happened, including how awful it must have been for Davey being sick on the bus. This piece was published in the school newsletter. Leigh had never had anything published for parents to read before.

Early in the year, Anne and her students negotiated the steps to follow when publishing a piece of writing. Each student has a copy for reference. Some of the steps are general - for example, proof-read your own work, share it with a friend, preferably your editing partner (these are needs-based teacher selected pairs), hand your work in to the teacher who will discuss it with you or write to you about it.

Not all the pieces written are published. Any daily writing session may see different groups of students working at different stages in the writing process - planning, proof reading, conferencing, word-processing or publishing. At times the focus is more specific as when a new genre is being explored or when the students are writing to reflect on their learning, and set goals and strategies for new learning. Leigh knows he is expected to publish one piece a term to share with others. Last term was a record - he had three to choose from and Lisa taught him how to save his work on the computer, so he was able to produce a good copy in word-processed format.

Recently the class has been involved in an in-depth study of Antarctica. Much of the work has explored ideas and information centred around SOSE and Science. The students are just embarking on the writing of a survival story set in Antarctica as one of the summative assessment tasks. They have listened to and read stories of Scott, Mawson and Shackleton and watched videos and researched factual information. They have also read survival stories such as *Adrift* and *The Cay*. Anne finds that integrated learning such as this provides her less able students, especially, with a much better frame of reference from which to construct their own texts and interpret the writings of others. Leigh, who tends to be a very brief writer, has almost filled a page with ships being crushed by ice and people falling down crevasses and other such adventures.

One recent task has been a poetry writing session using sea music and large Antarctic landscape photographs as the stimulus material. Anne was impressed with the descriptive

vocabulary used in the poems. Anne is hoping that a successful experience like this one, which resulted in the students deciding to make a class book of the final drafts of their poems, will help writers like Leigh improve the descriptive content of their stories. This learning experience also provided a manageable task so that those who had not had an opportunity to publish much work on computer could do so.

Leigh found writing the poem more difficult than he thought. There were several choices of format (acrostic, haiku, cinquain, free verse) following samples read and written earlier in the year. Leigh's choice of the haiku led him into a discussion with Belinda, his editing partner, as to the number of syllables in a particular word. Anne intervened to suggest they look again at Leigh's original word list and from there Leigh found another word he liked and Belinda agreed that it fitted. Leigh told Anne that he preferred 'doing poems' like "The Highwayman" and the "Death of Ben Hall". The class had particularly enjoyed the big book format of these narrative poems.

Each student has a personal writing goal to work on. Leigh's was the correct use of full stops, but with practice, modelling and specific punctuation exercises, he has made considerable improvement and is now working with a group focus on using speech marks correctly. Anne finds that she is increasingly assessing her students' performance in relation to the Year 5-6 KILOs, rather than the Year 3-4 ones she used earlier in the year. The students are encouraged to have-a-go at the spelling of unknown words and at the proof-reading stage to use their partner or a dictionary to find the correct spelling, or underline the word to indicate to Anne that they do not think it is correct. Anne uses her knowledge of her students to correct spelling and discuss with them words to practise.

Spelling words are copied into Individual Spelling memos. Lists to practise may be individual or group theme words, and daily spelling routines are well-established in the class. They include personal, partner and at-home practice games and other activities designed to reinforce retention. The class timetable also allows for regular sessions for practising and improving handwriting with the aim that work to be read by others should always be legible.

It is Anne's intention to revisit some work on Viewing which she found successful earlier in the year. A local area study using old photos developed

into an exploration of the decisions involved in taking photographs and concluded with the children taking photographs of their own. Now, the class will build on this knowledge to explore and deconstruct magazine advertisements. Anne deliberately scheduled this work late in the year so that the students would have covered a relevant study of colour, for example warm and cool colours in Art, to add to their understanding of the impact of advertisements. Since Anne became familiar with the Viewing strand of the English Statement and Profile she has successfully included aspects of it in her English curriculum. She finds all her students have a wealth of knowledge in this area and enthusiasm for learning more about it. For instance, Leigh and Peter were proud of their low angle 'monster' photographs and they used them as the basis of a storyboard version of a 'monster' story.

A final, major task for the year is a negotiated one, growing out of comments made by students at a recent class meeting. Leigh and Belinda expressed considerable envy at the involvement of another Year 5 class in the production of a newspaper and suggested that they could make an end of year one. Pleased by the way her students are taking responsibility for their learning, Anne has let them organise interviews with the other class, set up a production committee and helped them set guidelines for selecting items to be included. This activity enables her to observe the strategies her students use in this complex task and the opportunity it provides for her students to produce a piece of work suitable for their end-of-year self-assessments. Anne will make comparisons with the accounts they wrote of holiday activities at the beginning of the year.

Leigh has the job of reporting about the upcoming Grandparents Day. Peter also has to write about the special day, as well as take photographs and write the captions for them. The boys are really hoping that something funny will happen and their story will be interesting enough to be on the front page.



Susan is a member of 8 Green, a heterogeneous class of twenty-eight students in a large, city high school. Susan is in a group which has acted out their own scripted version of the fable, *The Mouse and the Lion*.

Tony, Susan's English teacher, began the current series of lessons by orally presenting some models of fables before asking the students to list the features of the fable form and to predict morals. Using an example from Kate Walker, Susan then composed a fable of her own.

These tasks were part of a unit looking at traditional stories.

The English curriculum emanates from the school's syllabus document for years 7 and 8 which has recently been revised to incorporate the key ideas of the English statement and profile. Tony aims to provide a supportive language environment where students have the opportunity to achieve learning outcomes by working with a range of texts. His main aims are to foster students' enjoyment and critical appreciation of literature, mass media and everyday texts and develop their skills in speaking and listening, reading and viewing and writing.

As well as experiencing a curriculum based around short units of work, often focussing on particular texts, Susan is encouraged to work independently on ongoing reading and writing programs. A reading and writing environment is established within the classroom. There are dictionaries, thesauruses, resource books and a work box of skills cards. There is a wall chart showing the assessment criteria and mind maps showing some examples of evidences for each criterion. There is a collection of appropriate fiction and non-fiction, picture and poetry books which is on loan from the library and changed according to the class focus at the time. Student work is displayed on the walls and examples of past student work - class poetry anthologies, magazines and picture books - are available for perusal.

Each lesson for Susan's class begins with ten minutes of silent sustained reading. Susan is reading *The Hunting of Shadroth* by Victor Kelleher. At the beginning of the year students wrote

personal reading profiles - outlining their experience, level of interest, strengths and weaknesses in reading. They set some personal goals for reading and constructed a reading log for the year. A simple star rating was devised to indicate their preferences. Susan indicated an interest in reading, although her experience was restricted to 'relationship' and 'horse' stories. Her goal was to read more books.

For the first two months Susan chose her own reading book. She read two books - *Living with Leanne* and *Pulling the Moves*, both by Margaret Clark. At the end of this period Susan gave a short oral review of *Pulling the Moves* at a class sharing session. Since then, Tony has structured silent sustained reading to link closely with on-going class work. At the time of the unit on fables and mythology, students were given a selection of fantasy and science fiction books of varying levels of difficulty from which to choose and to which to respond. Hence Susan's choice of *The Hunting of Shadroth*. Tony included fables and some Paul Jennings' short stories to ensure that the interests and abilities of all students were met.

Earlier in the year the class shared the reading of the novel, *Thunderwith* by Libby Hathorn. Tony carefully paced the reading of the novel - reading sections aloud, allowing silent reading time for individual reading, setting sections for homework and monitoring, and reading sections with the small group of non-independent readers in the class. He used the novel to introduce the class to the elements of plot, character, setting and

theme. In groups, students graphed the events of the story, drew sociograms, illustrated the setting and wrote character profiles.

After the fable/mythology unit the students will read, in groups, selecting from a series of small reading sets. Susan will read *At Ardilla*, by Gillian Rubinstein, with her group. She will complete set tasks mirroring those elements covered in the study of the class novel. The group will undertake the same processes - graphing the events, drawing a sociogram, illustrating the setting and charting the development of the main character. Susan will then participate in her group's oral presentation of an aspect of the novel.

Later in the year, silent sustained reading time will focus on an Australian author. Tony will introduce the elements of short stories by some well known Australian authors. After choosing an author for study, Susan will research some biographical details of the author and select some works for reading. The presentation of her work will be in the form of a wall chart under the headings of *His/Her Life*, *Her/His Writing* and *My Reading*. An Australian film such as *Playing Beattie Bow* or *The Fire in the Stone* will be viewed as part of this unit.



Creative writing experiences are spread throughout the year with students required to maintain a writing folio.

In the course of her ongoing work, Susan will also read short stories, poems, newspaper and magazine articles, picture books and non-fiction material. To conclude the reading program for the year Susan will publish a brochure, a *Guide to Grade 8 Reading*. In this, she will make suggestions to next year's class about good books to read. To do this, Susan will need to refer back to her reading profile, reflect on the reading she has recorded in her log, assess herself as a reader and comment on her development in Grade 8, listing and describing at least three titles she would recommend to next year's Grade 8 students.

Tony will incorporate viewing into his teaching program through a study of the short-listed picture books as part of Children's Book Week. Students will also study a film, *The Bear*. Tony will introduce the language of the study of film when teaching the basic elements of film construction and cinematic techniques. Each student will be given a specific viewing task (finding examples of close-ups, long shots, sound effects, etc.) in addition to following the narrative. After the film, students with the same viewing task will cooperatively share their ideas and then present to the class examples of the technique and its effect on the film. Students will then be required to write a formal response to the question: *The film often gave us the point of view of the bear cub. Describe how the feelings, perceptions and memories of the cub were conveyed to us as if they were real. Why does the director choose to give us the cub's view of things?*

The introduction of formal writing in response to text will come towards the end of the year. Susan began the year using a writing journal, referred to as a 'scrapbook'. In her first entry she wrote some autobiographical information as well as describing herself as a student of English. She wrote that she enjoyed English, that she read regularly, particularly enjoying horse stories, that she sometimes liked writing but had difficulty finishing off stories and that she would like to improve her spelling. She was not used to speaking in front of others and was nervous about this aspect of English.

Susan's journal serves a dual purpose. It is a learning journal where, at times, she is asked to record her progress, to comment on her work, to be reflective and to set goals. For example, after the mythology unit she reflected on her ability to



write a fable and after watching *The Bear* she will be asked to write about her reactions to the film. The journal also serves as a writing book. With the support of a list of possible writing topics for each term covering a range of genre, including some linked to the ongoing work, Susan experiments with first draft writing and personal response. The topics sheet allows Susan to devise topics of her own. In Term 1 she completed 4 tasks: one narrative, a story beginning - "It wasn't easy..."; one journalistic - a newspaper article about her netball team; one creative - devising and publishing a green menu; and one autobiographical where Susan wrote about how her family celebrates special events like birthdays and Christmas.

Students are encouraged to focus on individual writing skills. Susan uses a set format to maintain an Individual Spelling List and she regularly undertakes a series of exercises to learn her spelling words. Other specific needs are dealt with through a set of work cards. Susan has completed the cards dealing with sentence structure, the use of direct speech and paragraphing. She enjoys completing the vocabulary extension activities and is experimenting with word usage in her writing.

Creative writing experiences are spread throughout the year with students required to maintain a writing folio. Writing stems from responses to texts, from specific units on writing and from the writing tasks set as part of the Scrapbook.

Early in the year, Susan published a poetry anthology in response to a variety of patterns and stimuli. Tony discussed with the class how poets use metaphor, simile, personification and alliteration to create effect. Susan was required to choose a poem to contribute to a group poetry poster showing how the use of figurative language enhanced the meaning of the poem. Tony presented models for writing poetry. Susan used her basic word processing skills to publish her poetry. Tony feels poetry is well suited to word processing because it allows experimentation with format and presentation. Susan's alphabet poem, *The Car Trip*, was published in the class anthology.

Susan is encouraged to write in different genres - descriptive, narrative and expository. A focus on the processes of writing - drafting, editing and proofreading - is practised and is linked to all aspects of the English curriculum.

As she did for her mid year report, Susan will spend some time at the end of the year selecting and polishing examples of her writing for her writing folio to present for assessment. This will include her poetry anthology, examples of prose writing chosen from exercises completed in class or from her writing Scrapbook, a piece of journalistic writing, a fable or a myth and some responses to texts. She will present her writing folio with a self-assessment form. These folios are shared in groups and peers make written comments about the writing on a pro-forma.

The development of speaking and listening is incorporated into each aspect of the course but is a specific focus in the group presentation of the scripted fable, the group novel response, and the presentation of some performance poetry. A number of class activities are structured using co-operative learning strategies and group skills are monitored through peer and self-assessment.



Jeffrey is in a Grade 11 heterogeneous English class. There are twenty-four other students in the class, including a twenty-six year old mature age student and several students with special needs. Some of the students will go on to each of the three pre-tertiary English courses next year, others will choose a more vocationally-oriented course.

To keep the students' options open and give them a wide range of skills, Jeffrey's teacher, Kate, aims to include elements of all these kinds of courses in her Grade 11 program. She negotiates with the students as much as possible to meet their needs and tailors units of work to suit their requirements. One of Kate's main aims in the course is to increase the degree of autonomy the students are able to exercise. She teaches them how to organise their time effectively and also how to access community resources. The more independently, skilfully and confidently the students are working by the end of the course, the more successful she feels it has been.

At the moment Jeffrey is working with a small group to design a community action campaign. His team decided to focus on raising public awareness about what they feel are some problems with Austudy. They have produced letters, a poster and information brochures.

One of Jeffrey's contributions was to interview someone from DEETYA about students receiving Austudy in Tasmania. He also surveyed students to get a breakdown of expenses for students in different circumstances and used this to write a student newspaper article arguing that Austudy rates are inadequate and inequitable. His group's next task is to present the information about Austudy and their views on it orally to an appropriate audience. They have been discussing possibilities for the audience such as the SRC, parent groups, their local politicians, the college board and DEETYA officers.

Issues being tackled by other groups include child safety awareness and discrimination against people with disabilities. Today some of the students are in the library, others are in the community gathering information. Jeffrey has been working in the nearby computer lab revising his newspaper article. He e-mailed it to the DEETYA officer who had agreed to make a final check for accuracy.

This current unit of work on persuasion has also included an examination of the part that the media play in shaping opinion. The class watched the film, *Evil Angels*, and compared the construction of events and people depicted with other media reports about the Lindy Chamberlain case. They considered the composition of images from the film and newspaper reports and the messages these implied about the key players.

Looking at the language used in headlines over time was also highly revealing. Each student chose a particular news report to rewrite using the same information but from a different angle. Using the skills they had learned from this work, Jeffrey's group then analysed the coverage given by the local paper to students and students' issues over a fortnight, to identify the ways in which particular images of students and their role in society were being constructed.

Usually Jeffrey's class works on focused units like the one on persuasion as well as ongoing programs of reading and writing. Most lessons include silent reading and Jeffrey keeps a log of what he has read. His teacher, Kate, talks to several students in every lesson about their reading logs and the journals in which they record their responses to reading. In their last discussion, she noted that Jeffrey's log has some science fiction,

John Marsden and Stephen King novels and most recently Alan Duff's book *Once Were Warriors*. The style Alan Duff uses intrigues Jeffrey. Kate discussed with him a possible negotiated study comparing the book and film of *Once Were Warriors* - particularly in the light of the author's criticisms of the film. Jeffrey is using his reading journal to record his evolving impressions of the characters and the issues raised in the book. Kate taught the students how to use reading journals effectively early on in the course, when they worked on a short story together. She also monitors each student's reading preferences and makes suggestions about future choices.

Because of the wide range of abilities and interests in Jeffrey's class, the texts Kate uses with the whole class tend to be films, short stories and poems rather than novels. One of the class's first shared reading experiences was based on the Australian short story collection, *The Blue Dress*. Reading "The First Dance", the students first discussed the issues and their personal responses to the story in some detail and then broke into a jigsaw to investigate particular aspects such as the varied uses of the beach setting, the impact of shifts in point of view, the ways in which contrast is used, and the construction of characters. Back in their home groups, they were able to make links between the techniques the writer had used and the emotional impact they had noted in their first responses. Noting that the story was targeted mainly at young adults, the students also considered how other audiences could interpret it.

Through these kinds of experiences, Jeffrey is learning to construct sophisticated interpretations of texts. He will be able to use many of the skills he has learned in small group

exploration of novels later in the year. Over a few lessons, Kate read extracts from the ten possible novels students could choose and told them a little bit about each one. She then asked them to choose a novel that at least two other students were also interested in reading. After some discussion, Jeffrey has chosen David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter*. The students in his group have met together briefly to set deadlines for reading sections of the book.

At the start of the year, Jeffrey was asked to reflect on his English experience so far and to set some goals for this year's course. Kate offered the students a wide range of possibilities to help them define their goals. Jeffrey decided he didn't have very good group working skills and he also



wanted to get better at speaking to groups of people and to improve his creative writing. He regularly reviews his progress towards these goals in his journal.

Formal student interviews are conducted twice through the course. Students are handed a record of interview sheet on which the criteria are printed and asked to note any points for discussion and proposed future action. Kate collects these back to add her own discussion points, puts ratings against criteria and think about possible ways of dealing with students' concerns. Each student then has an interview with Kate in which they go over the discussion points and agree on future directions. A copy of the sheet is made and the original goes to the student.

Regular silent writing time has helped Jeffrey to get started on a longish science fiction detective story that he is really enjoying. Kate gets the students to do a lot of first draft writing of various kinds and then choose which ones to revise for publication. Jeffrey enjoyed the monologues they tried and also the work they did on sentence structure and sound effects. He has used these techniques in his own writing to create a quirky narrator with a penchant for exaggeration. Later in the course, the students will select work to put into either a small group or class publication. Copies will be made for each student with extras for the English classrooms, common room and other public areas of the college.

When possible, writers are invited to the college to work with the students. Earlier this year, Jeffrey's class was able to work with a visiting Victorian writer, Lauren Williams, as a result of which he's written some intriguing poetry with strong concrete images. The students have been introduced to the work of local writers too. Jeffrey particularly enjoyed Margaret Scott's poem, "Hobart Show".

Co-operative learning strategies have helped Jeffrey to learn more about group work skills. As part of his first negotiated study he interviewed a person working in his chosen career of hotel management and learned that being able to work productively with other people was one of the most important skills he could acquire. So he's learning how to curb his natural inclination to grab hold of the material and 'just get on with it'. He's learned how to involve other people more and make sure that everyone in the group understands the task and has a specific role to play. His current group skill focus is to be able to let other people know in an assertive but polite way when he feels they are not pulling their weight.

Although this part of his course has been one of the most challenging for Jeffrey, both he and Kate have been able to see a big improvement in the way he works.

Both Jeffrey and Kate think it is important for him to develop his oral presentation skills. One of the non-negotiables of the student's first negotiated study, the minor study, was that it had to include an interview. While preparing for this, the students did a lot of work on active listening skills and clear oral presentations. They started getting feedback from each other and reviewing their own speaking and listening skills. Throughout the course they will revisit this aspect of English to consciously develop their skills. Panel presentations, debates and individual presentations are some of the strategies used.

Most students currently arrive from Grade 10 having completed comprehensive and enjoyable studies. Kate aims to build on this by asking students for details of their previous studies and then helping them to design strong minor and major negotiated studies that do not repeat the work done earlier. She sets two non-negotiable elements in the minor study. The

student must use an interview to gain information, and the information must be transformed into a 'real-world' genre, such as a biography or feature article. Some students create biographies and others carry out research on a career or area of interest. Students are encouraged to use more than one primary source where possible, and to highly craft the final product. For Jeffrey's piece on hotel managers he interviewed a friend of the family who runs a hotel and other members of the manager's family. He wrote a short feature article suitable for a metropolitan daily newspaper with an appropriate tone and style.

In course work accompanying their minor study, students learned how to conduct an interview, how to make good notes, and how to craft notes into a final, cohesive product with a central theme. The writing skills covered included writing effective titles, leads, and conclusions, and selecting and incorporating direct quotes for maximum effect.

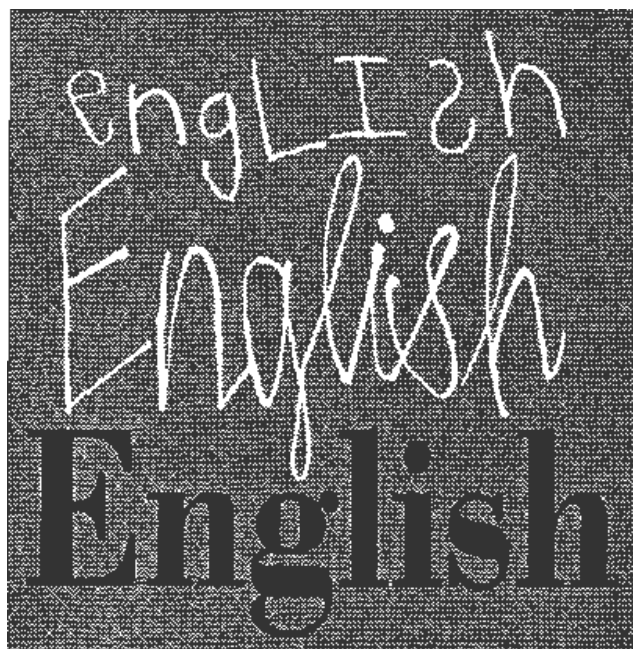
“Although room has always been tight at the College Jeffrey attends, it's been a deliberate policy to set aside specialist rooms for English wherever possible. When the students walk into this room, there is no doubt what its purpose is.”

For their major negotiated study, students in year 11 focus on one or more aspects of English. The only non-negotiable conditions Kate sets are that the study must enable the students to meet the English criteria they have established as particularly important to them and that it must be both sufficiently challenging and achievable within the 15 hour time limit. Jeffrey has decided on his analytical project comparing the book and film of *Once Were Warriors*, but someone else at his table is writing a short story and a third student is creating a short radio program as a joint Audio Design/English project.

Jeffrey's spelling is something that he is working on. He has always seen himself as a poor speller, an image that Kate has tried hard to dispel. A diagnosis of twenty of Jeffrey's spelling errors revealed few patterns of error but a tendency to spell words in several alternative ways. It seemed that a strong focus on proof-reading, and learning to spell 'new' words correctly would be the best way to go. Tutorials are run within class time for students who need to work on conventions such as spelling and punctuation. Like most of the other students, Jeffrey maintains an individual spelling list.

Although room has always been tight at the College Jeffrey attends, it's been a deliberate policy to set aside specialist rooms for English

wherever possible. When the students walk into this room, there is no doubt what its purpose is. On the walls there is a display of students' poetry, posters with author details, interesting pictures and reminders about class rules and procedures and negotiated deadlines. On a bench at the side there are plastic baskets of dictionaries, short stories, and poetry anthologies. Every year the English Department tops these up out of its budget so that there is a good and current range. They have found that this more cost-effective than buying class sets of novels. Bookstands are used to display collections of student writing. To make it easy for students to move into small groups, the desks are arranged in clusters so that students sit facing each other. Butchers paper and textas are stored on shelves so students can grab them quickly when they need to record group discussions, or to make mind maps or plot profiles. In the store room along the corridor there is a television with VCR and a portable stereo system.



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