



The English Teachers  
Association of Queensland Inc.

Providing professional support  
and advocacy for English teachers

## ETAQ Saturday Seminar 2-2015

# Meeting in the Middle

Saturday 30 May, 2015

Brisbane Grammar School, 24 Gregory Terrace, Brisbane QLD 4000

### Context

"The middle years are an important period of learning, in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines is developed, yet this is also a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning. Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical, and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching, with learning activities and learning environments that specifically consider the needs of middle years students." (Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young People, Dec 2008, p. 12)

### Purpose

With the arrival of Year 7 learners in Queensland high schools in 2015, English teachers have been presented with the exciting opportunity to develop and renew our knowledge and understanding of the learning needs of the Millennium Generation. While new school structures may have been built and new learning spaces created to accommodate their arrival, we know that it is the pedagogy, curriculum and assessment employed in our English classrooms that is the real key to engaging and motivating young adolescent readers, writers, speakers and thinkers. This seminar aims to provide an opportunity for us to share our ideas, resources and experience of teaching English in the middle years.

### Keynote Address:

#### The Millennials and Learning: What teachers need to know



Keynote presenter: Prof Donna Pendergast

### Abstract

In 2015 Queensland schools engaged in what is argued to be the most significant education reform

in the last 50 years - Year 7 shifted from primary schools to high schools in all state and non-state schools.

Along with this major structural reform, growing recognition of the ways to work with middle years students has become an important part of school agendas. For example, in addition to the shift of Year 7, the Junior Secondary approach for Years 7, 8 and 9 was fully implemented in government schools. This approach is informed by 6 Guiding Principles with a strong focus on quality teaching to meet the unique needs of this age group. Students are known by some collective terms including: Alpha generation; Millennials; and the i-generation. Much has been written about this current cohort of students using this socio-cultural lens. In the context of the reforms in the middle years and the unique cohort now in our schools, this presentation will focus on the changing nature of middle years' learners. The presentation will unpack what is different about middle years education in 2015 for learners, teachers and schools; what distinguishes the unique characteristics of these "Millennials", particularly with literacy learning and reading; and finally will consider what future middle schooling trends are emerging. All teachers of English will benefit from these insights.

## Keynote Presenter

**Professor Donna Pendergast** is Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. She has an international profile in the field of teacher education, particularly in the Junior Secondary years of schooling, which focuses on the unique challenges of teaching and learning in the early adolescent years. She has successfully completed competitive research tenders commissioned by state and federal authorities valued at more than \$2 million in this field over the last decade. This includes delivering the Leading Change Program to all secondary school leaders in state schools in Queensland in 2014 to ensure readiness for the move of Year 7 students and the full implementation of the Junior Secondary initiative. Donna was appointed to lead and develop the first dedicated middle years teacher education program in Australia at The University of Queensland more than a decade ago. Since this time she has been a prominent player in the state and national agendas related to junior secondary reform in Australia. She developed the Educational Change Model for middle years reform which underpinned the shift of year 7 into secondary and which was adapted and is currently employed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority to transform practice in the early years of learning.

## Program

Time	Activity
From 8:30	Registration & tea/coffee
9:00 – 10:15	Keynote address + questions
10:20 – 10:55	Morning tea Informal networking and perusal of resources
11:00 – 12:00	Workshop session 1
12:05 – 1:05	Workshop session 2

This activity constitutes **3 hours & 40 minutes** of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

## Workshop Sessions

Details of the workshops on offer are shown below. Participants will have the opportunity to attend **two 60-minute** sessions (11.00-12.00 and 12.05-1.05pm).

## Workshop A

**Strategies for enhancing inferential comprehension skills for 'poor' and 'good' readers** - Beryl Exley

### Abstract

Time and again, students' inferential comprehension performance is poorer than their literal comprehension performance. However, it doesn't need to be this way. Inferencing is not an inherently difficult task; students infer regularly in their non-school lives. In addition, seminal research shows the effectiveness of two easy to implement training procedures: (i) using inferential comprehension strategies before reading and (ii) flipping the diet of 80% literal and 20% inferential comprehension questions to 80% inferential and 20% literal comprehension questions. Both strategies teach students to view texts as something to be interpreted rather than something to be remembered and both strategies enhance the inferential comprehension performance of 'poor' and 'good' readers (when compared to a control group). Implications, however, exist for the choice of texts and the ceiling effects on 'advanced' readers. In this session, participants will work through a series of demonstration lessons using Boori Monty Pryor and Meme McDonald's "Maybe Tomorrow" (Allen & Unwin, 2010), the inspirational yet confronting biography of one strong and proud Indigenous man. *Cautionary note: these demonstration lessons will draw on the section of text that describes multiple suicides and the death of a thirteen year old child in a car accident.*

### Presenter

**Beryl Exley** works in teacher education within the Faculty of Education at the Queensland University of Technology. She has a special interest in the teaching of grammar in classroom contexts, especially as it interfaces with multimodal texts (including visual design) and demands for engaging pedagogies that connect to students' lived realities. Beryl has recently co-authored *Exploring with Grammar in the Primary Years* with Lisa Kervin and Jessica Mantei (Australian Literacy Educators' Association, 2015). Details of Beryl's research publications are available at

[http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Exley,\\_Beryl.html](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Exley,_Beryl.html)

## Workshop B

**What if? Reimagining science fiction for Generation Z – Kathryn Emtage and Anna Sanderson**

### Abstract

*“Science fiction is the most important literature in the history of the world because it’s the history of ideas, the history of our civilization birthing itself. Science fiction is central to everything we’ve ever done.”* Ray Bradbury

In 2015, the language and imagery of the science fiction genre populates our students’ choice of their favourite books, films and television shows. The blending of dystopian science fiction themes, with audacious modern technologies, shines focus on literature where ‘what if?’ questions enable the exploration of the human condition amongst spaces that are both other and familiar.

*What if you thought you were the last survivor on earth?*

*What if you were wrong?*

These questions frame the 1974 novel, *Z for Zachariah* which sits on the cusp of a new surge in popularity with a modern film release imminent. Using the novel as a basis for introducing students to the conventions of the science fiction genre, this unit encourages students to develop their interest in other worlds, write descriptively and think imaginatively about how science fiction does indeed showcase ‘the history of ideas’.

This workshop will explore what happened when Year 8 students were introduced to the science fiction genre over the course of a ten week unit that culminated in the crafting of a science fiction based short story. The interplay between Generation Z and a futuristic novel published in the (seemingly) distant past called for some reimagining of the genre and provided an opportunity to bring the ideas of yesterday, to today’s world and beyond...

### Presenters

**Kathryn Emtage** is the Assistant Head of English at Brisbane Grammar School where she has

taught for the past 15 years. She has worked in a range of areas across the School including Academic Services, Marketing and Communications and co-ordinating the academic enrichment program for boarders.

**Anna Sanderson** is a Middle School English teacher at Brisbane Grammar School. Prior to joining BGS in 2014, Anna spent six years teaching in international schools in Russia and Brunei.

## Workshop C

**Exciting literature for the middle school – Lindsay Williams**

### Abstract

Choosing literature for middle school students is complex. Teachers must juggle a number of competing and even conflicting needs: a book that students will actually read and enjoy (or at least not turn them off reading for life); a selection that can be defended as worthwhile and worthy; a story containing plenty of ‘teachable moments’ aligned to the *Australian Curriculum*. In this workshop, then, participants will explore a number of recent - but perhaps overlooked - novels that could be considered for use in the English classroom and are likely to fulfil all these needs, e.g. *Song of the Slums* by Richard Harland, *Prince of Afghanistan* by Louis Nowra and *Against the Odds* by Marjolijn Hof. More importantly, we will consider a variety of ways these novels can be used to extend all students and develop their understanding of how fiction texts work at a level way beyond a traditional focus on plot, characters, setting and theme. For example, these are novels that can be used to learn about: moving from the ability to write short to long texts; the interplay of story stages and phases; techniques of persuasion; the power of images. All of the books to be mentioned in this workshop are accompanied by comprehensive teacher notes that can form the basis of units in the middle school.

### Presenter

**Lindsay Williams** has taught English for over thirty years and was a Head of English for many years. Currently, he is (still) undertaking his PhD through the University of New England, coordinates English curriculum courses at the University of Queensland, and runs Wordsmart Consulting. Recently, he produced a unit on Tim Flannery’s *Here on Earth* for the Reading Australia website. Follow him on twitter: @Lindsayguru.

## Workshop D

### Teaching students to read a script or to deliver an effective speech? – Lindsay Williams

#### Abstract

Based on anecdotal evidence, it appears that spoken skills are frequently taught superficially, with an emphasis on the quality of the (written) script. Sure, students are encouraged to speak clearly, audibly using vocal and gestural variation. However, it could be argued that this is the equivalent of emphasising tense consistency, use of full stops and correct spelling in writing; these features are important, but are they the most critical features of successful writing? We know now that they are not. It is time, then, to turn our attention to what really matters in spoken tasks. In the hopes of opening a conversation, Lindsay will present some (further) findings from his PhD research on how presenters build positive relationships with audiences. His case studies have been comedians, who are very skilful at making connections and interacting with audience members, and these abilities are key to the success of their performances. Participants will consider practical implications of this research and discuss ways these ideas might be used to greatly enhance middle school students' engagement with and delivery of spoken tasks.

#### Presenter

**Lindsay Williams** has taught English for over thirty years and was a Head of English for many years. Currently, he is (still) undertaking his PhD through the University of New England, coordinates English curriculum courses at the University of Queensland, and runs Wordsmart Consulting. Recently, he produced a unit on Tim Flannery's *Here on Earth* for the Reading Australia website. Follow him on twitter: @Lindsayguru.

## Workshop E

### Engaging 21st century learners in the writing process – Karen Eyre and Melodie Nelson

#### Abstract

As English teachers, how can we engage digital natives in the classroom and also improve student engagement in the writing process?

The rationale for this unit was to improve student engagement in the writing process and also to create a "Hero's Journey" storytelling unit for Year 8 that aligned with ACARA outcomes, 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning skills and also the Dimensions of Learning pedagogical framework.

This workshop will look at how to create collaboratively planned and written enhanced ebooks and could be easily adapted for any year level.

#### Presenters

**Karen Eyre** is a Secondary English teacher at Ormiston College in Brisbane's Bayside area. With a double degree from the University of New England in English and Geography, Karen's interest lay in how to merge the aesthetics, history and traditions of literature studies with the values of sustainability, technological evolution and skills that students need to take their place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Melodie Nelson** is a Secondary English teacher at Ormiston College in Brisbane's Bayside area. Graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Literature and History) and a Bachelor of Education from Griffith University in 2009, Melodie began her teaching career in the United Kingdom. While in the UK, Melodie was rated as an Outstanding teacher by HMI OFSTED for her innovative and engaging learning experiences. Since returning to Australia, Melodie has begun her Masters of Education (Leadership) and aspires to be at the forefront of 21<sup>st</sup> century educational learning design.

## Workshop F

### Beyond compliance: Holistic engagement in middle years literacy learning – Ana Culic and Hannah Brennan-Silwood

#### Abstract

Are our young people actually engaged, or are they merely compliant? Adolescent engagement is not about attendance and acquiescence but rather deep emotional and cognitive connection to the learning, including perceived relevance, choice and support. Our pedagogy must reflect this integral interconnectedness of emotion and intellect to truly engage each young learner.

By applying our Positive Education framework, SOARING (Strong Outcomes, Activity, Relationships, Interests, Noticing and Giving) to the design of learning that is Personalised, Co-created, Integrated and Connected, as core to our

Middle Years Learning Framework, we at John Paul College have developed a Year 7 English Unit that invites personal investment in literacy learning.

Blended learning, catering to kinaesthetic and visual learning styles, choice of learning conditions and connection to learner lifeworlds have all been utilized in the learning of clauses, phrases, verb types, tense, syntax, sensory description and narrative writing in a way that stimulates and sustains holistic engagement and wellbeing.

As a result, students have expressed enjoyment, emotional connection and cognitive investment whilst demonstrating improved narrative writing ability between pre-testing and final assessment.

Picture a pair giggling through the costume run of the verb lecture they've prepared, while a number of focused girls and boys quietly tap away at detailed presentation slides even as a group of boys just outside roll down the hill and rehearse their fake fight, punctuated by cries of "Helping verb!" and "Doing verb!" to demonstrate their learning.

This is just one snapshot that will form part of the colourful array of evidence in our paper and presentation to demonstrate the practical pedagogies that can flow from a philosophical commitment to fostering successful life-long learners through the holistic emotional and cognitive engagement of each individual.

### Presenters

**Ana Culic's** passion for education stems from her dual passions for learning and for the young people in her care. Now in her third year of teaching, she has begun to specialise in the middle years, keen to nurture the love of learning sometimes lost in adolescents during this critical phase.

**Hannah Brennan-Silwood** is an enthusiastic graduate teacher. Her pedagogical practice is centred on the philosophy of teaching students not just subjects. She believes that student wellbeing should be at the core of curriculum planning to provide students with holistic, interactive and engaging learning experiences.

## Workshop G

### Poetic power: Poetry memorisation and presentation for twenty-first century middle school students – Karina Hepner

#### Abstract

Our parents – and grandparents! – recall, often fondly, having to recite from memory classic poetry: from Chaucer to Shakespeare to Tennyson to Paterson. But is learning poetry by heart still relevant for our technologically and visually savvy middle school students?

This workshop will cite a current University of Cambridge study, *The Poetry and Memory Project*, that seeks to identify the relationship between memorisation, recitation and understanding poetic texts. Using 'Banjo' Paterson's iconic ballad, *The Man from Snowy River*, as an example poetic text to memorise, this session will also present various practical activities to engage and excite students and their teachers in the process of learning and reciting poetry. Furthermore, these suggested strategies will provide opportunities for students to access and utilise the myriad learning spaces on a school campus. And poetry memorisation and presentation become agents of empowerment and enlightenment for the middle years that, in turn, also help prepare them for the demands of senior English oral assessment.

#### Presenter

**Karina Hepner** has had the privilege of teaching year 7 students for over 20 years in Australia, France and Canada. Although she is predominantly a senior English teacher, she believes that middle school classes keep her humble, creative and current. Above all, she agrees with Shelley: "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted".

## Workshop H

### Writing well: Building creative capacity in the middle years – Julie Arnold and Dr Georgina Barton

#### Abstract

The notion of creativity, and what it means to be able to write and think creatively in the 21st century, presents a unique and exciting challenge for the middle school. How do we teach students to write well? How do we prepare them for the creative demands of the senior school? Indeed, how do we prepare them with the creative and critical skills to produce contemporary texts unprecedented in their diversity and multimodal complexity in their worlds beyond school?

This workshop will share one school's approach to developing writing assessment and learning experiences. It will also value the way in which a school can work with a critical friend and partner at the tertiary level to maintain a culture of continuous improvement. Such a relationship can assist the English faculty to prioritise creativity and multimodal expression, which are valued in our national curriculum but not always provided with the necessary time in the high-stakes standardised testing environment that characterises the middle school. We intend to share our rationale for task design - what we think it takes for middle years learners to become skilful creative writers who can critically and creatively engage their intended audiences. We will also share and discuss samples of assessment tasks and student work, so that we can together examine evidence of student performance and development.

#### Presenters

**Julie Arnold** is Head of Department English Corinda SHS, which means she is a Teacher. She has taught English in Queensland schools for 20 years, 15 as Head of Department and 2 as Literacy Coach across schools in the Brisbane metropolitan region. She currently leads an inspirational, enormous, amorphous, wonderful English team. She chairs the Professional Development Committee for The English Teachers Association of Queensland and is a Queensland Studies Authority District Panellist for English. In 2013, she published *English in Practice*, a textbook for English Communication, with Lynda Wall and Cambridge University Press.

**Dr Georgina Barton** is a lecturer in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. She has been a teacher in both primary and secondary schools for over twenty years. In this role she has been responsible for whole school literacy design and programs and lead teacher in literacy intervention. Her experience has been mainly in socio-disadvantaged areas and aims to improve student outcomes using an arts-based approach for literacy learning. Georgina's research focuses on English and literacy education, music and arts education.

## Workshop I

### Stepping outside lived experiences - Peter Hoens

#### Abstract

It is acknowledged that sophisticated thinkers and writers are able to step outside their own lived experience to embrace the wider world. However, how can this be accomplished with 11 and 12 year old students whose lived experiences may be restricted to their local suburbs? In this unit Jules Verne (*Around the World in 80 Days*) is combined with Lync/Skype and blogs. Within the context of teaching and learning specific to the ACARA General Capabilities (Literacy, ICTs, and Intercultural understanding), students engage in a simulated trip around the world. This interactive unit provides students with opportunities to collaboratively problem-solve while engaging with a range of cultural perspectives to acquire a broader general knowledge of the world.

#### Presenter

**Peter Hoens** is Head of English and Drama at Ormiston College. With the introduction of the 2010 English syllabus, his attention has been predominantly focused on the Senior School. However, the introduction of Year 7 to secondary school at Ormiston College in 2013 provided the motivation to refocus attention on curriculum in the middle years. Peter firmly believes that outcomes of Senior students are firmly rooted in the curriculum they encounter in early secondary school.

## Workshop Program

	Session 1 (11:00 – 12:00)	Session 2 (12:05 – 1:05)
<b>Workshop A</b> Strategies for enhancing inferential comprehension skills for 'poor' and 'good' readers (A/Prof Beryl Exley)	✓	✓
<b>Workshop B</b> What if? Reimagining science fiction for Generation Z (Kathryn Emtage and Anna Sanderson)	✓	✓
<b>Workshop C</b> Exciting literature for the middle school (Lindsay Williams)	Session 1 only ✓	
<b>Workshop D</b> Teaching students to read a script or deliver an effective speech? (Lindsay Williams)		Session 2 only ✓
<b>Workshop E</b> Engaging 21 <sup>st</sup> century learners in the writing process (Karen Eyre and Melodie Nelson)	✓	✓
<b>Workshop F</b> Beyond compliance: Holistic engagement in middle years literacy learning (Ana Culic and Hannah Brennan-Silwood)	Session 1 only ✓	
<b>Workshop G</b> Poetic power: Poetry memorization and presentation for 21 <sup>st</sup> century middle school students (Karina Hepner )	✓	✓
<b>Workshop H</b> Writing well: Building creative capacity in the middle years (Julie Arnold and Georgina Barton )	✓	✓
<b>Workshop I</b> Stepping outside lived experiences (Peter Hoens )	✓	✓

**Map of Brisbane Grammar School**  
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