This paper reflects on a 2008 project in which a teacher invited two parents of students in his class to coteach with him on the topic of *War and Refugees* (Willis, 2013). Although the project occurred in a Year eight context, it has utility for all teachers in showing how the four resources model (FRM) (Freebody & Luke, 1990) of language and literacy teaching and learning may provide a viewing platform for seeing the benefits and potential of coteaching for parent-school-community engagement. For decades, governments nationally and internationally have actively supported parent-school-community involvement initiatives. In Australia, these include the establishment in 2008 of *The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau* and its recent publication, *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research* (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012). These initiatives derive from strong, consistent research evidence that parent involvement in schools not only benefits students, teachers, and schools but also has wide-ranging implications for education reform, employers and communities, and ultimately Australia’s future economic prosperity. These initiatives also continue to inform the *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership* (AITSL) in identifying ways teachers and school leaders can generate and sustain professional engagement with colleagues, parents, and the community to meet new national teaching standards.

Despite the research evidence and concomitant systemic imperatives that have helped teachers recognise what they have known intuitively about the importance of parent engagement in their children’s education, teachers also know it is difficult to enact. Hence, immersion in language and literacy learning through reading and writing activities and games at school and home, continues to provide an effective channel for primary school teachers to encourage parent involvement in their children’s education, but may not constitute engagement. The challenge involves first having a clear idea of what engagement actually means. This is made more difficult because the term is often used interchangeably with others including: involvement, participation, partnership, cooperation and collaboration. One way to think of engagement is using an analogy of a car’s gears. When the gears engage, forward motion is possible. For teachers to engage with parents, implies that both are integral and essential to the action. Engagement can therefore challenge teachers to reconceptualise their interactions and relationships with parents to recognise parents’ vast knowledge of children, of teaching and learning, and that all parents have strengths (Pushor, 2013).

The cotaught *War and Refugees* project exemplifies engagement. Coteaching is when two or more individuals decide to purposefully combine their knowledge, skills, experiences and expertise to further teaching and learning outcomes. In this project, two parents volunteered at the teacher’s invitation to coteach his class. The teacher and parents met several times before introducing the topic to the students, then met each week for a term to work in the classroom and afterward to discuss what happened, ways to improve and what to do next. These discussions were set up so that the teacher and parents adopted respectful and inclusive practices such as active listening, continually inviting each one to participate, valuing all ideas and suggestions, and seeing each one’s contributions as valuable. Hence, coteaching the topic saw the teacher’s knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment become entwined with the parents’ knowledge of their children, the class, the school and community, their professional worlds, and education and the world generally.

Their mutual work led the teacher and parents to ask the students to take on various roles as war-zone workers for a non-government aid organisation (NGO). In turn, the students produced a range of text types for different audiences. These are set out in Table 1 below:

The different texts were presented by the students in their project roles at a showcase evening to all of their parents at the end of the project.

Freebody and Luke’s (1990) FRM offers a vantage point for seeing how coteaching built student language and literacy competencies by facilitating parent-school-community engagement throughout the project. According to the FRM, literacy learners
capacity for participating in texts. As text users, students develop competence for understanding the purpose of different texts. And as text analysts, they draw on their knowledge of different social contexts to build their resources for critiquing and transforming texts. Although each is necessary, no one role is sufficient for building student literacy competency: all four roles need to be thought of non-hierarchically and as operating together at all stages of student language and literacy development.

In reflecting on the project, the model helps to show how the teacher and parents developed the students’ four sets of resources. During planning, the coteachers considered different opportunities and activities to provide the students with high-quality teaching and learning experiences. Coteaching multiplied the possibilities, since the arrangement with the parents expanded the networks of relationships and acquaintances usually available to the teacher. This led to a number of activities including one classroom visit by a Federal Member of Parliament (MP) and another by a teenage refugee accompanied by a refugee advocate. As well, a fieldtrip to a simulated refugee camp was organised. Although all of these experiences encouraged all four resources, Table 2 shows how each one built student literacy capacities in particular ways. Together the experiences allowed the students to play all four literacy-learner roles.

### Table 1: Student roles, tasks and text types for the War and Refugees topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student project roles</th>
<th>Group tasks</th>
<th>Text types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Officers</td>
<td>Grant application for the school’s parents</td>
<td>information and expository texts detailing the NGO and its funding needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions Officers</td>
<td>Advertising campaign for the school and general community</td>
<td>persuasive texts promoting the NGO’s work and seeking to attract overseas workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Officers</td>
<td>Education pack for Nigerian aid workers</td>
<td>information and procedural texts for managing infectious diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Awareness Officers</td>
<td>Panel of experts for a national television audience</td>
<td>expository and discussion texts highlighting the moral dilemmas surrounding the refugee issue in Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Students built their resources playing different literacy roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Literacy role</th>
<th>Resources encouraged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Member of Parliament</td>
<td>Code breaking resources were encouraged through: introduction of new vocabulary, key terms and acronyms about the topic: • displaced people • illegal immigrant • asylum seeker • UNHCR = United Nations Human Rights Commission • PPV = permanent protection visa</td>
<td>Students heard these words and terms in context, building their metalanguage for subsequent class discussions and text construction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage refugee</td>
<td>Meaning making resources were promoted as the students listened to the refugee’s story of how his father was forced to flee Afghanistan and lived for six years in Australia’s Woomera Detention Centre. The students also gained insights into life in Afghanistan and living in fear of the Taliban.</td>
<td>The students made links with their prior knowledge about the topic. This included knowledge gained from reading their class text, <em>Boy Overboard</em>. The students built impressions about the problems and impacts of war and developed empathy for others in similar circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated refugee camp fieldtrip</td>
<td>Text using resources were encouraged as the students encountered a range of text types that informed them about diseases, provided data about refugee hotspots, highlighted the plight of refugees and requested support for overseas aid efforts.</td>
<td>The students gained knowledge about different text types and the ways they are used in different contexts and for different purposes. They later interacted with one another about the suitability of these texts for their purposes as project officers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee advocate</td>
<td>Text analyst resources were built as the students reflected on the advocate’s perspectives about refugee treatment in Australia.</td>
<td>The students were enabled to recognise and describe the advocate’s views on refugees and how his language choices positioned them. They compared his bias to that of the MP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and enabled the teacher and parents to provide a comprehensive, balanced approach to literacy teaching and learning in the classroom.

Consistent with the FRM, as the students built their language and literacy resources, so did the teacher and parents. In turn, they facilitated the students’ literacy learning and development. This ability to assist the students to complete their project tasks was not just because the teacher and parents were present in the classroom and at different activities where they experienced learning together. It was also because they could remind the students of the different sets of resources they had built and could help them make purposeful connections among all four.

This example of a teacher and two parents who entered into a coteaching arrangement to teach the topic of War and Refugees illustrates engagement. Not only did the teacher engage with the parents, they, together with the students, in turn engaged with the community. Using the FRM in this paper brings into focus the benefits and possibilities of coteaching for parent-school-community engagement to enhance students’ language and literacy learning and development.

Note
1. The meaning of, ‘parent’, may be best understood as a verb rather than a noun to reflect a relationship of primary care and responsibility by a biological parent or grandparent, guardian, or caregiver for a child’s well-being.

References


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