Peeling the PEEL: Integrating language and literacy in the middle years

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ABSTRACT
This paper reports on a middle years literacy project which aimed to build explicit knowledge about language as a resource for reading and writing development in all Key Learning Areas. The initial stage of the project, A Metalanguage for Embedding Literacies in the KLAs (MELK), was conducted between Richmond High School in New South Wales and the Australian Catholic University from 2013–2014. We focus in this paper on how teachers expanded and applied their knowledge of language and literacy pedagogy through ‘4x4’ metalanguage toolkits. We describe the professional journey of one teacher, Tara, as she used the toolkit to support her Year 8 English class to develop their ideas in written response texts.

Introduction
Nea Stewart-Dore led the way in Australia in challenging, encouraging and empowering all teachers to be literacy educators. The writers of this paper honour Nea by reporting on how middle years teachers have taken on the challenge of supporting their students’ curriculum literacies through engaging in professional learning to expand their own knowledge. Tara, Head Teacher Teaching and Learning of Richmond High School, NSW, and her colleagues have worked closely over the past 18 months with academic partners, Sally and Tina from the Australian Catholic University, on a design based research project called a Metalanguage for Embedding Literacies in the Key Learning Areas (MELK). The stories we present in the paper begin with the challenges Tara and her colleagues experienced in supporting their students’ literacies prior to the MELK project. Sally and Tina then share the professional learning resources used to address these challenges, including a shared literacy and language toolkit for core curriculum business and a text-based scaffolding pedagogy for integrating language, literacy and curriculum knowledge. Finally, Tara returns to discuss how she shared her knowledge with her Year 8 English class and to present findings of her students’ growth in writing, growth which attests to her own ongoing commitment to professional learning and to the effectiveness of explicit and integrated language instruction.

Tara’s story: Teachers’ need for a metalanguage
As for many early career English teachers, the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and the subsequent NSW Syllabus has presented me with some major challenges and alerted me to significant gaps in my knowledge. I understand and accept that my core curriculum business includes enabling students ‘to understand and use language effectively, appreciate, reflect on and enjoy the English language’ (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013), but the curriculum, with its emphasis on explicit knowledge about language as a resource for literacy development, has made me realise that the instruction about language I had received at school and university was limited. My colleagues in all faculties also recognise the need to expand their knowledge base to better support their students’ curriculum literacies.
Prior to beginning the MELK project, teachers at Richmond High School had drawn on a range of resources to help our students use and expand their communicative repertoires. In supporting students to write extended persuasive and interpretative responses, for example, we used an acronym a number of us had learned at school as a guide to structure a paragraph. This is called PEEL:

- P (Point)
- E (Elaboration)
- E (Evidence)
- L (Link)

My knowledge of the PEEL structure has been valuable in helping students who struggle to develop their ideas in writing. Max (pseudonym), whose text is below, is an example of one of my Year 8 boys who was well able to expand his ideas in class discussion but tended to pump them all into one long-winded sentence in writing. Here for example, is his entire response to a question, ‘Do you think National Parks are important?’ , which was provided to practise persuasive writing.

National parks aren’t around just for the history they are also used for entertainment, their beauty or even their adventures that you can take while you are in one.

With explicit modelling of the PEEL paragraph structure and following extensive work exploring literary and film techniques, Max produced the following paragraph in an extended response to the question, ‘How is the Hero’s Journey represented in the final scene of Shrek?’

I have added highlighted annotations to show how Max has effectively used PEEL:

Camera angles have been used in this film, but are mostly used in the final scene (Point). Camera angles have given the characters more personality throughout the final scene (Elaboration). An example of the use of camera angles is when Fiona floats up into the air with a low angle. This then moves into a high angle shot as she is transforming. When Shrek runs into the Church he is given a high angle shot which turns into an above angle shot as he is climbing up the stage (Evidence). The director has used these camera angles to show the Hero’s Journey for Shrek (Link).

Personally, I was thrilled with this response. Max shows a good understanding of one of the film techniques we had focused on in class, camera angles, and he is able to give multiple examples of the different kinds of angles used in the scene. Using the shared understanding of the PEEL structure, I was able to point out to Max how well developed his Example section was in my feedback and suggest that he might now work on developing his Elaboration and Link sections so that he could explain the effect of the camera angles. However, before engaging in the professional learning offered in the MELK project, neither I nor my colleagues were able to talk to Max about how he might develop these sections of his paragraph. PEEL gave us a great start for talking about the development of ideas, but it was too general to explain the mechanics of elaborating in a way that could enable students like Max to grow their ideas in writing.

That’s about where I was when my school, Richmond High School, began our research partnership with Sally and Tina in 2011. The school had received funding to address the literacy difficulties of our students, most starkly revealed in consistently below average results in both the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Higher School Certificate as well as in the ‘spoken-like’ style of writing revealed in Max’s National Parks text. Colleagues at Belmore Boys High School, in Sydney, had reported that their continuing research partnership with the Australian Catholic University had focussed on teachers’ professional learning – and particularly on building a metalanguage – which they described as a language to talk to students and each other about language and literacy. All teachers at Richmond looked forward to sharing a metalanguage toolkit, to talk about academic language patterns used across the curriculum as well as specialised patterns of curriculum areas. Before I continue with my own story of developing and applying a toolkit to use in my Year 8 English class, Sally and Tina will provide an overview of their work in designing and implementing the MELK project.
Sally’s story: MELK and the 4x4 toolkit

Like Tara, I started my teaching career in Australia as a middle years English teacher. Unlike Tara, I was of the generation who was taught grammar, but I didn’t find the grammar I was taught terribly useful in my work. Luckily, in the 90s I happened upon the language model of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), developed largely by Michael Halliday and his colleagues at the University of Sydney (e.g., Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday & Martin, 1993). Working then as a literacy consultant at the Metropolitan East Disadvantaged Schools Program in Sydney, I was fortunate to work with middle years teachers across the curriculum to develop and apply their functional metalanguage and I witnessed many students grow in their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of language.

The Australian Curriculum: English incorporates functional descriptions of language from F-10. This has resulted in a range of professional learning resources to support teachers’ knowledge about language for literacy. One popular metaphor that has emerged for framing knowledge about the language systems of the Australian Curriculum is that of a ‘toolkit’ (Love & Humphrey, 2012; Macken-Horarik, 2012). As a builder’s daughter, I am very aware that workers in different trades equip their toolkits with a particular set of tools to build a house – some tools might be shared across trades and bought from the same warehouse but these tools may be used differently. I am also very aware that it would be quite difficult to find tools in a warehouse if you didn’t know that they are typically organised according to the work they do.

The warehouse and toolkit metaphor is useful for describing the systems of language available to teachers as well as the specific language knowledge used in middle years literacy contexts. Like Tara, many teachers have knowledge of language but their toolkits were not set up around systems of meanings, nor around the work they needed to do. Over the past three years, I have worked closely with middle years teachers to apply language descriptions of the Australian Curriculum: English and SFL (which we refer to as ‘the language warehouse’) to build discipline specific toolkits for each faculties’ core literacy business (Humphrey, 2013). These are conceptualised as ‘4x4’ toolkits because they are framed in terms of four meaning ‘organisers’ and four levels of text. The meaning organisers, which are called metafunctions in the SFL model, are also used to organise the language descriptions in the Australian Curriculum. They are:

- language for expressing ideas;
- language for developing ideas;
- language for interacting with others;
- language for organising cohesive texts.

These are shown on the vertical dimension of Table 1 along with the elements of context they connect to (i.e., field, tenor and mode). This table also shows the four levels of text that comprise the horizontal dimension of the toolkit. They are:

- Whole text;
- Paragraph/phase;
- Sentence/clause level;
- Word level.

The inclusion of multiple levels recognises that much of our language work, like the PEEL structure Tara has worked with, occurs above the word and below the whole text. The 4x4 is an attempt to bring the potentially overwhelming language tools into some kind of manageable meaning organisation.

To illustrate how toolkits were designed for professional learning within faculties, we have chosen a literacy context that is particularly important in middle years English, Music, Visual Arts and Drama. This context is appreciating and responding to literary and media works – including written and spoken texts, films, artworks, musical compositions and performances. A text type that can help
students to expand their knowledge of technical aspects of these works and prepare them for a deeper focus on literary themes in the senior years is a Compositional Interpretation. The 4x4 toolkit shown in Table 1 is designed to give teachers a metalanguage for talking about the language patterns of this kind of response writing.

Table 1. A 4x4 perspective on text response in the academic domain (compositional interpretation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language to</th>
<th>Whole text</th>
<th>Paragraph/phase</th>
<th>Sentence/clause level</th>
<th>Word level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>express ideas Experiential meanings (field)</td>
<td>Ideas about the work (including text, artwork or performance) unfold as stages of • context • analysis • judgement</td>
<td>Paragraphs relate to specific aspects of the work, e.g., • point (theme and composition) • elaboration • evidence • link</td>
<td>Extended noun groups describe and classify things and abstract ideas. Abstract verb groups refer to work of text/composer (e.g., depict, portray, employ, use) and effect (e.g., reveal, reflect, convey). Adverbials specify place in text.</td>
<td>Technical nouns name literary techniques and parts of text (e.g., scene, excerpt, verse).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develop ideas Logical meanings (field)</td>
<td>Ideas are expanded logically and analytically e.g., as aspects, techniques.</td>
<td>Phases of text are linked logically (e.g., time, cause elaboration)</td>
<td>Ideas in groups and clauses expand in well-structured: • simple sentences to identify and describe • complex sentences to explain</td>
<td>Reasoning verbs (e.g., creates) rather than conjunctions (e.g., because)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interact Interpersonal meanings (tenor)</td>
<td>Author takes expert role to inform audience and evaluate text.</td>
<td>Claims are supported, justified and reinforced.</td>
<td>Evaluations expressed implicitly in analysis stage and explicitly in judgement stage.</td>
<td>Objective evaluative vocabulary related to composition and value of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organise cohesive texts Textual meanings (mode)</td>
<td>Text organisation made clear through layout and text openers.</td>
<td>Condensed paragraph openers predict and organise layers of information.</td>
<td>Sentence openers focus attention on the topic and flow of information. Nominalisation recasts processes, qualities and relations.</td>
<td>Abstract nouns track ideas (e.g., concern technique, theme). Spelling and punctuation assist meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This toolkit for response writing has many resources and teachers need to make a principled selection of those they need to teach and assess at each stage of students’ writing development. In this paper, we will focus only on the language tools we have highlighted in Table 1. These are the resources Tara and her colleagues at Richmond used to start ‘Peeling the PEEL’, which is a metaphor we adopted for examining the meaning building blocks within sentences of each paragraph.

Introducing the toolkit in the English and Creative and Performing Arts faculties
Professional learning to build teachers’ knowledge of language and metalanguage was conducted initially within faculties or groups of faculties, over six fortnightly faculty meetings in Term 3 of 2013. Dedicating so many meetings to knowledge about language was only possible because of the commitment of all teachers and school leaders to making a change. To ensure that professional learning was applied immediately, the starting point of building knowledge was the faculty teaching program.
For example, the Year 8 English program for the following term included a study of film techniques and teachers realised that the professional learning would be immediately relevant.

We began by modeling language from the perspective of field, with a focus on the paragraph and sentence level issues raised by Tara. This included PEEL as a language feature to express ideas at paragraph level because, even though this feature is not included in the Australian Curriculum, or within the systems of SFL, the structural units provided an ideal way in to more technical grammatical knowledge. To be effective for professional learning purposes, a 4x4 toolkit needs to be flexible enough to build on the already existing and working knowledge teachers bring to their literacy instruction. From a linguistic perspective, the elements of PEEL can be interpreted as phases, which can be glossed as stretches of text that have consistent language patterns (Gregory & Malcolm, 1981).

Most teachers using PEEL are not aware of the linguistic patterns that make the Point, Elaboration, Evidence or Link phases and, like Tara, may struggle to explain to students how to compose them. For that reason, it was necessary to ‘peel the PEEL’. We started by examining sentence types that are typical of Elaboration phases in middle years response texts. In the 4x4 this is expressed as:

Ideas in groups and clauses expand in well-structured:

- simple sentences to identify and describe
- complex sentences to explain.

Working with highly valued samples of response writing, some of which were composed by the Richmond teachers themselves, we identified simple sentences that function to identify or describe an aspect of a musical, literary or artistic piece. For example:

- The guitar is almost angelic in delivery. (Music)
- The work depicts three horses in a landscape of rolling hills. (Visual Arts)

We also identified a number of complex sentences, which were used to explain literary or artistic effects. In the following example, the convention of /// is used to show the boundary between the two clauses of the complex sentence.

Baz Luhrman utilizes a number of visual techniques /// to reveal the theme of forbidden love. (English)

Teachers became quickly confident in identifying ‘explain’, ‘identify’ and ‘describe’ sentences and used this ‘bridging metalanguage’ to discuss the effect of these sentences in developing ideas. Similar ways of talking about language were introduced in other faculties for identifying sentence functions in explanations (e.g., Science, Geography) and evaluation reports (e.g., Technology and Applied Sciences). This shared metalanguage created consistency for students going from class to class.

Identifying the grammatical patterns within ‘explain’ clauses and sentences often becomes quite technical. The process of identifying grammatical functions and structures with teachers began with groups that combine in clauses to express ideas. Three groups are included in the 4x4, along with glosses of their function in response texts:

- Extended noun groups to describe and classify;
- Abstract verb groups refer to the work of the text/composer and the effect of techniques;
- Adverbials specify circumstances, including place in text.

A bridging metalanguage was also useful in identifying common meaning patterns in the model texts. Labels such as ‘working verbs’ and ‘representing verbs’ are shown in the top row of Table 2. Teachers practised identifying similar patterns in other extracts of texts (facilitated by the use of highlighters) and then worked with differently structured sentences, where the same grammatical groups were used in a different order. Some examples are shown in Table 3.

Only when teachers were comfortable with identifying and manipulating meaning units were grammatical forms introduced. These are shown in the final row of Table 2. We include here further
technical information relating to the structure of expanded noun groups (e.g., classifiers, qualifying phrase) but this level of delicacy was not introduced to teachers in the initial workshops.

Table 2. Group patterns to express ideas in ‘explain’ sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer/text</th>
<th>‘Working’ verbs</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Representing verb</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baz Luhrman</td>
<td>utilises</td>
<td>diegetic folk pipe music</td>
<td>to reflect</td>
<td>the traditional context [of Shakespeare’s text].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare’s original play</td>
<td>relies on</td>
<td>powerful dialogue</td>
<td>to reveal</td>
<td>the passion [between the two characters].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun group (specific)</td>
<td>Verb group</td>
<td>Noun group with classifiers</td>
<td>Verb group</td>
<td>Extended noun group with [qualifying phrase]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Further examples of complex ‘explain’ sentences

1. Diegetic folk pipe music is utilised in the scene to reflect the traditional context of Shakespeare’s text.
2. The romantic tone is established through the diegetic folk pipe music.
3. Luhrman is able to link the modern and traditional eras through depicting the scene as a costume party.
4. One particularly effective visual technique is through crosscutting close ups of the couple.

Adverbial groups, used to specify location within the text, were also explicitly introduced in the faculty workshops. As highlighted in the following example, adverbials often occur as ‘sentence openers’ in response texts. For example, they provide cohesion by signalling the relationships of contrast between phases. Students who are able to use sentence openers strategically are well prepared for the complex writing of senior extended responses (Christie & Humphrey, 2008).

In the ‘first sight’ scene of the film version of Romeo and Juliet, Luhrman depicts both the love between Romeo and Juliet and the forbidden nature of their affections. The romantic tone is established through the diegetic folk pipe music, which also reflects the traditional context of Shakespeare’s text. Luhrman uses both the lyrics and rhythm of the music in the scene to portray the emotions of the characters. In the original play, however, Shakespeare relies on the powerful dialogue to reveal the passion between the two characters.

The language features introduced in the initial faculty based professional learning in English and Creative and Performing Arts significantly expanded the metalanguage toolkit available to Tara and other teachers. Teachers worked extensively with these tools of expressing and developing ideas before further resources of the 4x4 were introduced in ongoing ‘elbow to elbow’ sessions with individual teachers as they applied their knowledge in the classroom.

Tina’s story: MELK and the model of pedagogy

My introduction to Nea Stewart-Dore’s work was when studying for my Graduate Diploma in TESOL in the mid-80s and her book Learning to learn from text: Effective reading in the content areas (Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984) was the textbook for one of my subjects. I was working as a middle years English/ESL teacher at the time and the model Nea designed with Bert Morris, commonly referred to as the ERICA model, gave me a detailed, staged teaching model to support my students’ reading skills in content areas. With Tara and her colleagues at Richmond, I integrated many of the ERICA
model strategies into ‘text based’ units of work (de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2012), so that students could have a better understanding of the material they were required to read and be more effective writers.

**Introduction to a text-based pedagogy**

In addition to descriptions of language and other semiotic systems, educational researchers using SFL theory have developed so called ‘scaffolding’ teaching and learning models (Gibbons, 2009; Hammond, 2001). The Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) was originally designed by Callaghan and Rothery (1988) in primary school contexts and was adapted for use in middle and secondary contexts in the 1990s. This cycle was designed to support students, through use of a shared metalanguage, towards control of a particular genre and/or knowledge goal and included stages of negotiating the context, modelling, joint construction and independent construction. At each of the stages, the learners’ attention is drawn to the cultural and social context of the text, the structure and content of the text, and any characteristic language features of the text (Martin, 2009).

My main role in the MELK project was to support Tara and the other classroom teachers, through ‘elbow to elbow’ meetings, to apply and extend their knowledge in their everyday teaching practice. Each planning session began with the syllabus-derived outcomes of the particular program with which teachers were working. Together we formulated an authentic and challenging assessment task towards which the class could work to meet language, literacy and literature outcomes, as required by the Australian Curriculum. The assessment question determined which text type would be the focus of the unit and therefore which aspects of grammar might be relevant from the 4x4 framework. In the Year 8 film unit, the assessment question we formulated was ‘How is the Hero’s Journey represented in the final scene of Shrek?’ We deliberately chose a ‘How’ question to encourage students to respond with a Compositional Interpretation, which Sally introduced earlier.

The next important step was to write a similar question and response to use as a model of the language patterns students needed to use. This was easy for the Year 8 teachers, who used the same film and theme but chose a different scene to write a response. The question they responded to was ‘How is the Hero’s Journey represented in the opening scene of Shrek?’.

Because the model question was so close to the assessment question, it provided a great deal of scaffolding. Teachers drew on the principle of ‘high challenge and high support’ (Hammond, 2006) and introduced patterns of academic language that were not already in the communicative repertoire of students.

Although writing the response was the most challenging for all the teachers, it was also the place of deep learning because the teachers were required to apply their new knowledge of language. This part of the process also highlighted strengths and gaps in the individual teacher’s knowledge and gave us the opportunity to address issues ‘at point of need’.

Once the model text was completed we looked together at the 4x4 toolkit and the model text to choose language features to focus on, considering also the level and experience of the students. In the unit developed on the film *Shrek*, the focus of explicit teaching of language was on the resources to express and develop ideas. We developed engaging activities for students to develop familiarity with the whole text and PEEL paragraph structure and to identify the grammatical groups of explain sentences, which Sally introduced earlier. It was also important to develop field-building activities for the unit of work. Teachers were comfortable with this stage of the cycle and familiar with activities taken or adapted from Nea Stewart-Dore’s literacy work such as structured overview, cloze and three level guides (see Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984). We focused particularly on scaffolding students’ learning through oral discussion to develop knowledge through reading challenging written and multimodal texts.

The support provided by these professional learning sessions and by colleagues within the faculty ensured that the teachers were confident to implement the unit and to evaluate and adapt it to best meet the needs of their students. I was particularly impressed when, after a short period of time,
teachers reported trying out their new knowledge of language in other classes. They also shared their successes with colleagues during informal staff room chats and became excited when their students used the metalanguage to make connections with the knowledge of language and literacy they were gaining in other learning area classes.

**Tara's story continued: Using my knowledge to support students’ writing**

As a result of the MELK professional learning with Sally and Tina, I have drawn extensively on my knowledge of language and pedagogy to support my middle years students to expand their literacy repertoire within my classes. Initially, as Tina has outlined, my focus was on scaffolding response writing in Year 8. Using the metalanguage of the 4x4 response toolkit, I led the students in deconstructing and jointly constructing texts and then continued to provide guidance and feedback as students took control and drafted responses independently.

Towards the end of 2013, I became increasingly aware that the explicit teaching of language and guided practice that was now incorporated into my teaching practice and the practice of the other curriculum teachers was having an impact on other writing of my Year 8 class. I began to find evidence, for example, that students were using their knowledge, not only of paragraph level language features such as PEEL, but also of complex explain sentences and sentence openers in persuasive writing as well as in literary responses. Unfortunately space does not allow me to include Max’s full text, produced in response to a post-test of persuasive writing we conducted for our MELK project in June 2014. However, the following paragraph shows how he was able to develop one of his arguments.

I have again annotated the text and also highlighted the main logical links that Max has used to explain in his Elaboration phase. These are Max’s exact words:

Whales are a part of the ecosystem and if extinct we may alter how the world works (Point). If all whales are killed there will be nothing for sea animals to eat, which means they will go extinct as well or even krill and plankton numbers will grow until we are overrun by them. The reason for this is because whales eat plankton and krill (Elaboration). The Southern Blue whale population has dropped catastrophically from 240K in 1903 to 1,700 in 1996. 7 out of 13 species of whales are classified as endangered (Evidence – Example).

With my knowledge of the grammatical patterns of complex explain sentences the MELK project introduced me to, I was able to talk to Max about how he had effectively developed all elements of his PEEL. I feel very confident that Max will continue to be supported with his writing throughout his years at Richmond High School.

Max and other students from my Year 8 class completed the NAPLAN persuasive writing task when they were in Year 9 in May 2014. The growth of these students’ writing from Year 7 to Year 9 has been quite dramatic. Students from the 2013 Year 8 class produced a scaled growth score of 53, which was almost double the State average growth of 27.1. This is shown in Figure 1.

![Naplan writing Year 7, 2012 - Year 9, 2014](image_url)

Figure 1. The Year 8 class’s scaled growth score in comparison to state scores
We middle years teachers are certain that our own growing knowledge of language and our changed pedagogies are significant factors in our students’ literacy development. We also look forward to further expanding our toolkits in all areas to provide continuing support as students move through the middle years and beyond.

Conclusion
In this paper we have provided an overview of a middle years literacy research project, which focused on the professional learning of teachers. Tara and her colleagues at Richmond were well aware of the challenges of supporting their students’ literacy and learning in the context of a new curriculum, increased accountability and high stakes testing. Supported by the school executive, they met the challenge head on with great success. A very encouraging aspect of the results of Richmond students on the internal and external assessment of writing is that both lower and higher achieving students showed improvement. This suggests that embedding language and literacy in units of work across the curriculum is not merely a remedial support strategy but also benefits students with greater control of academic writing. Results across all Year 9 classes in writing indicate that the achievement gap which motivated the MELK project has closed significantly and all teachers are highly motivated to continue their learning journey.

We are very aware of the challenges in sustaining and growing professional learning and pedagogical change, particularly when many large-scale collegiate structures set up to support teachers and students in disadvantaged schools have been dismantled (Hayes, 2011). However, we are very confident that the culture of professional learning at Richmond High School and the structures established through the MELK project for whole school and faculty knowledge building will lead to continued and sustained support for students’ academic literacies for learning in all disciplines.

Note
For teachers unfamiliar with the SFL model and how it can be applied to a classroom context, the following list of resources could be used to extend knowledge of language for the Australian Curriculum.


References


Sally Humphrey is Senior Lecturer in literacy education at the Australian Catholic University. She has worked for many years as a TESOL teacher, teacher trainer and educational linguist. Her teaching and research have focused on supporting adolescent learners to develop the literacies needed for participation in academic and civic life.

Tina Sharpe has worked for many years as a literacy consultant with teachers across all educational sectors and all discipline areas to support students to access complex reading and writing materials. She is currently working with Dr Sally Humphrey from ACU, Strathfield, to support schools to work with a ‘4x4 literacy toolkit’ for building teachers’ metasemiotic resources.

Tara Cullen is Head Teacher, Teaching and Learning, at Richmond High School. In this role, she coordinates the targeted literacy project, Metalanguage for Embedding Literacies in the KLAs (MELK). As a member of the English faculty, she is active in developing programs and units of work in response to the Australian Curriculum: English.