



## Domain 4

### Teaching for effective learning: Personalise and connect learning

Curriculum that is connected to students' lives and the communities in which they live enhances the relevance and rigour of learning. An important step in this process is establishing students' prior knowledge in order to design and provide learning experiences that build on this knowledge.

Inquiring into the cultural practices and knowledge valued in students' homes and communities enables real world issues to be used as curriculum organisers that connect learning to sites beyond school. Teachers who understand and value the capacities, experience and aspirations all students bring to school communicate their belief in the importance of learning in a range of different forms. The provision of opportunities for all students to employ and build upon their strengths as learners is a crucial element for supportive learning environments.

Learning is deepened when students are required to develop and apply knowledge to real-life problems and issues. This means that teachers themselves learn about changing local and global contexts and the demands these will place on students in the future. One such opportunity is the transition from exclusively print-based literacies to multiple literacies and new forms of communication. Teachers thus can ensure that the curriculum enables students to engage with and develop proficiency in various modes of making meaning. Connecting learning requires starting with students' existing knowledge and capacities in order to promote learning that addresses the issues and problems that students must engage with beyond school.

***Do my curriculum and pedagogy connect to the lives of students and the values, needs and demands of local and global contexts beyond school?***



## 4.1 Personalise and connect learning: Build on learners' understandings



### Essence >

The teacher identifies students' prior knowledge and cultural practices as a starting point for curriculum.

### Begin with what we know

Several years ago I attended a 'Teaching about Other Places' workshop at the Global Education Centre (SA). The focus on concept-driven learning resonated with me. This was an approach I really wanted to explore with my students.

Back in the classroom, I thought about how they would respond best to the new challenge. I gathered some basic resources: an unmarked world wall map and the ever-popular 'sticky notes'. The initial task was an open invitation: 'How many countries can you think of? Write each one on a sticky note and then put it where you think it belongs on the world map'.

That captured their imagination. Sticky notes were being stripped frenetically, dialogue was animated, and the map filled rapidly with a patchwork of place names—countries, continents, states, regions and cities.

Then the debate began. Which ones were countries and which weren't? Their knowledge was impressive, but already they were realising how much they didn't know. I was able to draw out their misconceptions.

Rather than send the students straight to a definitive source for answers, I asked them to form small groups. Providing only one

sticky note per group, I posed the questions, 'What is a country? Can you give it your own definition?'.

Discussions were intense, reflective and purposeful. The students were constructing their own conceptual understandings. We compared definitions and questioned, clarified and refined each other's thinking. Sticky notes were juggled around, rewritten, moved or removed altogether. That school term, the world map was the focal point.

We went on to create our own 'countries', exploring general concepts of world geography, exploration and migration, citizenship and cultural identity, government, economic growth and tourism. With each deeper understanding, students were ready to make links to new, explicit learning about the world. We had laid the foundation for a rigorous learning journey.

Over the years I've introduced 'Learning about Other Places' to three different classes, and each group has brought to the task its own unique perspectives and dimensions. Each time the journey has been a new one—it's always different because they are different.

*Country primary school teacher*



## Justice alert

Whose prior knowledge and cultural practices are seen as valid for building upon?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Value prior knowledge as fundamental to new learning, seek out what the students already know, can do and understand, and use this to inform planning
- Approach a new topic openly with students, discussing why we need to explore it, how we will share the learning and how we might use it in the future
- Capture and record these initial responses as a starting point for mapping the shared learning journey
- Ensure that all ideas are acknowledged, misconceptions explored and deliberate guidance towards accuracy provided
- Pose guiding questions and listen closely to each student's response, to elicit understanding
- Support learners to identify and clear up basic misunderstandings
- Find hooks to create student interest and meaning making by responding to students' energies and enthusiasm
- Deepen students' curiosity by linking new meanings to what they already know, and discuss how each of us may see these links in our own unique way
- Challenge students to question what they don't know
- Use visualisation, mind mapping and concept maps to capture students' thinking
- Help learners to build on each other's understandings by teaching the skills of reflective listening, paraphrasing and questioning
- Teach skills that enable students to show their understanding in a range of ways such as writing, artwork, practical tasks, roleplays and multimedia presentations
- Design learning challenges that are open and stimulate further questions
- Develop processes for students' active, ongoing reflection (eg where they have come from, what they now know, and where their new learning will lead)

### Key actions: Students

- Talk with my friends and teachers about what I already know and what I need to know next
- Record what I know and understand by writing, drawing or other ways that show it best
- Use technology to talk with others beyond the class
- Ask questions to help me understand better
- Think about how my new learning connects to my family and my life
- Listen to other people's ideas and compare them with mine

### Ways to build on learners' understandings

**Graphic organisers:** Use visual ways to connect with what students already know and understand, so that misconceptions can be explored. Examples are:

- Mind Maps
- Lotus Diagrams ▶
- KWS (what I **K**now, **W**ant to learn, and possible **S**ources).

Graphic organisers can be sourced from [www.teachervision.com/graphic-organizers/printable/6293.html](http://www.teachervision.com/graphic-organizers/printable/6293.html) and [www.educationoasis.com/printables/graphic-organizers/](http://www.educationoasis.com/printables/graphic-organizers/).

▶ **Reflection partners:** Students work with a partner to reflect on their learning. Useful starters are: 'I know what I'm learning about because ...', 'I could use this learning elsewhere by ...', 'This is my understanding ... This is how I got to it ...', 'I came to this conclusion because ...', 'I heard you say ... Is this what you meant ...?'.

▶ **Correlation chart:** This chart can be used for evaluating relationships between factors through looking at responses from a group and showing areas of agreement and difference. On a graph, the axes represent the two factors and each axis has a continuum. For example, when reviewing a task or new topic:

- X axis—'what I learnt' with a continuum of *nothing, something, quite a lot, heaps*
- Y axis—'how useful it will be for me' with a continuum of *not at all, quite useful, very useful, extremely useful*.

Students stick a coloured dot at the point that captures their own response. The results can inform further learning and planning.

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*... the challenge for educators is to help individuals construct, for themselves, the understandings that other minds have discovered before them. Left to chance, or open discovery, my belief is that you would have to be Einstein, or Einstein-like, to discover what he discovered.*

Julia Atkin

# 4.1

# understandings

# 4.1

**Gallery walk:** This technique can be used to share work/ideas on a central theme. It enables 'piggy back' thinking to build consensus/ connections between ideas. Display students' work/ideas as in an art gallery. Agree on a focus for the viewing (eg generating/adding ideas, feedback, writing questions). Students spend dedicated time in the gallery. Individuals or groups move from one exhibit to another, using the agreed focus to discuss/respond to the exhibits.

**DIY museum:** Students create a display of artefacts with 'question labels' rather than information labels. Classmates can then develop labels on the basis of their own prior knowledge and inference (not research).

**Starting from scratch:** Pose brainteasers to create new challenges for students. Some triggers might include:

- Structures in nature—what use are they to us?
- Light—who needs it?
- Time—is it the same for everyone?
- Taste—how do we change it?
- What can't we measure?

After students choose a brainteaser, ask them what they make of it, what is the big concept, how much do they already know about it, and how many ways can their thinking go. Have fun with all the interpretations and build new knowledge together.



## Language that teachers can use to build on learners' understandings

- What is the meaning of ...?  
Can you give it your own definition?
- How does this fit with your experience?  
Can you see the connections with ...?
- What else do you know about ...?  
Is there a link between ... and ...?
- How is this different from what you thought or felt before?
- Can you explain a bit more about ...?  
What is another way you could say that same thing?
- What might be some different perspectives?
- What strategy could you use to develop this idea? How could you find out more about it?
- How and when can we use this new information?
- What if ...? Could you predict ...?
- Why might this be important for you in the next stage?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- There is an assumption that, for students to learn, the teachers have to impart the knowledge to them
- The teacher plans learning tasks without first considering students' prior experiences as an important part of the planning process
- Knowledge is viewed as only content—facts or topics—rather than concepts, personalised understandings and beliefs
- Students are disengaged or cannot see relevance in what they are learning
- Teachers ignore current technologies and students' expertise as powerful mediums for new learning
- All students are expected to show their understandings in the same way

## Practice check

- What opportunities do my students have to share ideas and show what they know?
- How have I used students' prior knowledge when planning and programming?
- To what degree do I consider my students' cultural differences?
- How do I respond when my students demonstrate misconceptions and need to explore new meaning?
- Do I use questioning techniques to build on the complexity of their understandings (eg Bloom's Taxonomy)?

*In a constructivist classroom the teacher searches for students' understandings of concepts, and then structures opportunities for students to refine or revise these understandings by posing contradictions, presenting new information, asking questions, encouraging research, and/or engaging students in inquiries designed to challenge current concepts.*

Jacqueline Brooks & Martin Brooks



begin with

# 4.1

Notes:

*We confuse the need for the child to construct her own knowledge with a form of pedagogy which sees it as the child's responsibility to achieve that.*

*We focus on the action of the student in the construction of knowledge, rather than the action of the teacher in engaging with the child's current misconceptions and structuring experiences to challenge those misconceptions ... The constructivist theory of knowing has been used to justify a non-interventionist theory of pedagogy, whereas it is a fair interpretation to argue that constructivism requires vigorous interventionist teaching: how, after all, is a student with misconceptions supposed to challenge them unaided? How does she even know they are misconceptions?*

Ken Rowe

what they know



## 4.2 Personalise and connect learning: Connect learning to students' lives and aspirations



### Essence >

The teacher ensures that learning builds on the resources, skills, knowledge and goals that students develop in their homes and communities.

### Multicultural or Eurocentric?

My own schooling had been Eurocentric, my background was European and my tertiary studies were based on European, American and white Australian 'dead, white, male' artists.

Our school is a very multicultural school in an outer suburban region. Vietnamese and Cambodian families have made this area their home over the past twenty years, and a strong community has evolved.

Until three years ago, racial harmony had been the norm in our community. Then a serious incident occurred. For me, that upheaval was the catalyst for significant curriculum reform.

Initially, I was incensed at the disruption that the incident caused for our school, the untrue claims and the way in which prejudice was fuelled. I began to think more deeply about prejudice. I reflected on and, for the first time, really questioned my own values and beliefs.

Was I providing learning opportunities that built on the diverse cultural understandings of students in my classes? I realised that even though many of my students were of Asian background, what I taught was predominantly Eurocentric.

In reality, I knew very little about my students' cultural identity—their history, religion, language and arts. There was a gap in my own understanding of a major part of the world's geography and history, despite Australia's close proximity to Asia and my pivotal role in the learning journey for my Asian students.

That disruptive incident was an awakening for me. I now recognise that my students have rich cultural backgrounds that we can explore in developing curriculum that connects to their experiences, interests and enthusiasms.

*Adapted from McRae (2001)*

Cultural competency means becoming aware of the cultural differences that exist—appreciating and having an understanding of those differences and accepting them and being prepared to guard against accepting your own behaviours, beliefs and actions as the norm.

Dominant culture behaviour is 'unthinking behaviour' because the dominant culture prevails.

Members of the dominant culture are granted automatic presumption of innocence, worthiness and competence.

# connect learning to students'

## Justice alert

Whose goals are seen as legitimate and whose are questioned?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Genuinely acknowledge the personal significance of my students' contexts, cultures and aspirations
- Recognise learner interest is both what the students bring through the door and what is generated in the classroom
- Support students to know themselves and their passions and strengths as learners
- Focus on essential questions and big ideas that inspire students
- Listen open-mindedly to students' perspectives, and encourage discussion to help explore reasons for differing views
- Pose guiding questions that lead students to view familiar topics in more complex ways
- Create space in the program where students can investigate and share their learning interests
- Identify and develop topics that demonstrate relevance to life beyond the classroom
- Encourage students to connect learning with issues of personal, local or national significance
- Use contemporary technologies (eg podcasts, social networking websites) in meaningful ways
- Actively seek opportunities for linking the community with programming and planning
- Enrich learning by ensuring a range of purposes and community audiences for students' work
- Create opportunities to involve families in ways that acknowledge and support their contexts, cultures and aspirations for their children
- Value individual self-expression and capitalise on students' unique strengths to convey their meaning

### Key actions: Students

- Understand we're all different and say what's important to me
- Listen to my classmates and try to understand their views
- Be confident to talk about my hopes and dreams, fears and concerns
- Link my classroom learning to the things I do at home
- Use technology skills to help my learning
- Understand that learning happens everywhere, not just at school, and try new activities in the community



*When students are able to use their own cultural information and experiences to connect to academic lessons, they develop a deeper understanding of the content.*

Geneva Gay

### Ways to connect learning to students' lives and aspirations

#### Community-based learning:

Access programs and connect students with people/organisations that promote lifestyle choices, community involvement, and career and job opportunities. Make connections with role models in the local and wider community.

**Have a go:** Talk with students about their interests, and link with community groups and sporting clubs. Plan 'have a go' sessions for some of the identified activities. Encourage students to seek out more of these opportunities. Support them to make contacts and coordinate new sessions.

**Student leadership:** Promote SRC/forums/committees and student governance as important vehicles for all students to have a say when issues arise. Facilitate activities where all students can have levels of leadership in their class, school and community. Use current issues for students to take a lead role in change, and be flexible in programming to capitalise on emerging learning opportunities.

#### Strengthening aspirations:

Support programs where students are able to visit workplaces and/or have first hand experience in the workforce (eg work experience).

Invite visiting speakers from allied health professions, volunteer organisations and education institutions. Engage in follow-up activities, such as Driver Education programs for secondary students. Integrate these into the subject offerings. For example, liaise with community representatives for sessions on vehicle maintenance/insurance/drivers' legal obligations.

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# 4.2

# lives and aspirations



# 4.2



**Anticipating outcomes:** Ask students to predict possible applications remote from the learning context. For example:

- After students have practised a thinking skill or other skill, ask, 'Where might you use this or adapt it? Let's brainstorm. Be creative.' List ideas and discuss some.
- After teaching students about velocity, ask, 'Who may use this knowledge?' (eg crash investigator, town planner, bridge architect, boat builder, building demolition expert), 'When may they use this knowledge?' (eg to work out the speed of cars and impact after a crash, to establish gradients).

## ▶ How does this fit with me?:

After establishing a new learning topic, ask students to individually complete questions that make the topic more pertinent:

- How can I use this at home/in my life outside of school?
- How do other groups or cultures use this knowledge, skill, strategy?
- How might I use this in the future?
- Is this learning important to me? Why? Why not?
- What do I want to know about this? Why?

## Play The Connection Cube:

The Connection Cube is an interactive thinking game on the Active Learning Practice for Schools (ALPS) website.

The Connection Cube can be accessed at <<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps/thinking>>.

## Language that teachers can use to connect learning to students' lives and aspirations

- How can we use your strengths and enthusiasm to make your school learning really meaningful for you?
- When you watched that program, how did it connect to your life?
- Who might see this differently?
- You're on the computer all the time at home. Let's use your IT skills to get the most out of this learning task. Any new ideas?
- What do you hope for your future?
- Are there extra skills you think you need? How can we support you?
- How can you use this learning in other ways?
- There are community agencies that may be able to help you with this issue? Do you know how to get in touch?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- Teachers fail to consider their students' and their families' needs/interests and enthusiasms when planning for learning
- A monocultural perspective prevails in the classroom
- Racist, sexist, ageist and class conscious comments and perspectives are expressed and not challenged
- Teachers predominantly teach and value only traditional print literacies from the pre-digital world
- Teachers avoid engaging in conversation with students about current, complex social issues

## Practice check

- Have I created an environment where students feel comfortable in sharing their families' stories, rituals and traditions?
- Do I know what my students aspire to?
- What links can I make with the community to broaden my students' opportunities and encourage their aspirations?
- Do students feel safe to disagree with each other and me?
- In my classroom, do I make the most of each student's individuality?
- Do I listen to students' perspectives and pick up on their knowledge?



*... training across many cultures is a mighty challenge—people have different ways of learning, different views about assessing competency, different approaches.*

Kate Horwood

go beyond



# 4.2

## Notes:

*When a teacher is familiar with aspects of a child's culture, then the teacher may be better able to assess the child's competence. Many teachers, unfamiliar with the language, the metaphors, or the environments of the children they teach, may easily underestimate the children's competence.*

*I have also discovered that to effectively monitor and assess the needs of children who may come from a different cultural background, the notion of basic skills often needs to be turned on its head.*

Lisa Delpit

## 4.3 Personalise and connect learning: Apply and assess learning in authentic contexts



### Essence >

The teacher structures the curriculum so that students apply their learning in real-world/authentic contexts.

### Presentation or demonstration: how to make learning relevant

In the SACE Stage 1 English course, an oral presentation is one requirement. My group of students struggled with their learning—in fact, encouraging them to stay in school was a challenge in itself. They made it quite clear that talking in front of the class was not going to happen. As I wanted them to complete the requirement, I had to reconsider the activity.

Perhaps they'd relate better to an oral 'demonstration'? In this way, students could speak on any topic that interested them and bring along whatever props they needed to complete the task.

As I sat discussing the new approach with them, the body language began to change—the enthusiasm was building. Ideas were flooding in. Preparation was underway. We worked together to negotiate the criteria by which oral demonstrations would be assessed. We negotiated what makes a good oral demonstration and we specified the success criteria in a rubric. Their commitment was unprecedented.

We had students energetically demonstrating and talking explicitly about their interests. One student showed us how to decorate biscuits for a child's party and we joined in. Another brought in a complete car brake system to demonstrate how it worked. Later, we all found ourselves down in the student car park with a student

earnestly demonstrating the under-the-bonnet workings of all the engine parts. We learnt how to make scones, use eBay, play a guitar, and on and on it went.

I discovered that these students had vast background knowledge to share; they could speak with ease and confidence when they were sharing their passions. They addressed the class competently, spoke clearly, used expressive body language, and they were interesting to listen to. Many of the demonstrations called for active class participation, with students listening attentively to instructions and keenly following the student lead.

The peer audience rewarded the students' efforts; they were highly supportive of each other, and were very honest in their appraisal of the oral demonstration as they used the assessment rubric to guide their feedback.

What had started off as a bit of a gamble had quickly become one of the best moves I could have made. The students made real connections, our class dialogue became much more meaningful, they provided constructive, targeted and useful feedback and, above all, these students experienced success.

*Senior secondary English teacher*

## Justice alert

Do the dominant assessment practices regularly exclude certain ways of demonstrating understanding?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Build connections with my students, align curriculum outcomes with real-world settings and model lifelong learning where school is part of the wider community
- Develop topics and assessment through issues and projects that are real to my students and use assessment criteria relevant to these
- Use digital resources and *Scootle* learning objects to simulate real-life situations and assessment scenarios
- Incorporate deliberate and impromptu self and peer evaluation into everyday class activities, focusing on the quality of performance demonstrated in learning skills, understandings and knowledge
- Teach the skills of self and peer assessment
- Scaffold learners' efforts to conduct their own inquiry processes, experimentation and problem solving
- Allocate time for students to share their work with peers, to discuss their thinking and their plans
- Ensure my students learn about their own thinking processes (the metacognitive work of learning) to develop self-monitoring skills
- Negotiate with students how they will demonstrate their learning by directly linking to the intended learning outcomes
- Involve students in local community initiatives to 'make a difference' in contexts that matter to them
- Connect students with authentic audiences face-to-face and online
- Develop students' skills and confidence to take on advocacy roles within the school and the community
- Provide scaffolds for students to participate in authentic contexts (eg coordinate mentor partnerships across year levels)
- Give 'just in time', relevant developmental feedback

### Key actions: Students

- Use different situations to show what I know, can do and understand
- Develop projects about issues that matter to me
- Assess whether I achieved what I set out to do
- Give feedback to others and accept it from people who are helping me
- Make sure I check with others to see how I'm going and to get new ideas

*Teachers need to see assessment data as saying something about them, what they are doing and what they need to do. Our eventual success depends on our ferreting out student responses and adjusting our performance, not just theirs, in light of results.*

Grant Wiggins

### Ways to apply and assess learning in authentic contexts

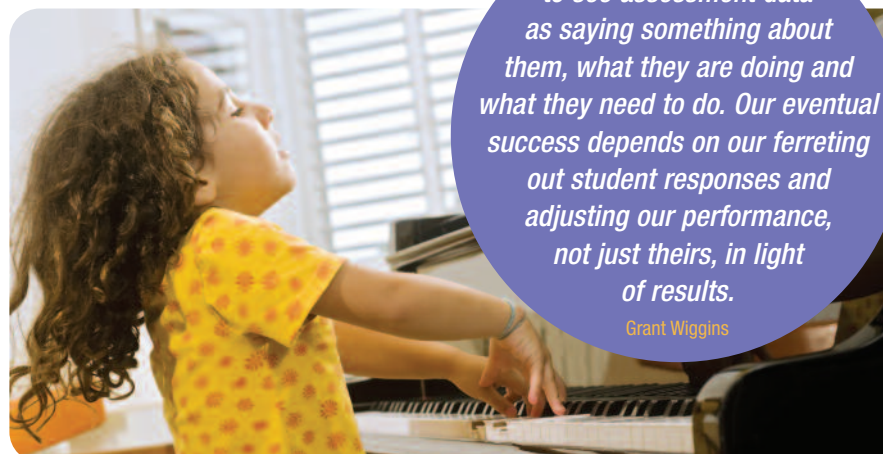
**Learning shots:** Students use digital cameras to capture 'learning moments' throughout a unit of work. Students develop captions for each shot that describe their thinking and progress made at each stage. Post these on the wall to create a 'Learning moments' wall collage. (Ensure that permission for photographs to be taken has been obtained from parents/guardians.)

**Hamburger rubric:** Three students are to do a well known task—constructing hamburgers. Three other students write a confidential set of criteria that they think a good hamburger should have. Stars can be used to indicate the quality of the hamburger on a rubric; for example:

☆☆	Superb job of placing burger in bun
☆☆	All parts in respective places
	Used sauce to draw a smiley face on the patty
	Wrapped neatly in a folded origami swan
☆☆	Burger in bun
☆	Lettuce piled neatly on patty
	Sauce on inside of bun
	Pickle centred
	Wrapped nicely
☆☆	Burger in bun
	Lettuce in bun
	Sauce on inside of bun
	Pickle in bun, but a little off centre
☆	Burger hanging out of bun
	Lettuce hanging out
	Sauce all over the bun
	Pickle on floor

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# 4.3





# 4.3

Hamburgers are then assessed against those criteria. This evokes discussion on how important it is to know the criteria for success when working on any task (eg 'If I knew you wanted me to put the pickle right in the centre, then I would have!').

**Learning expo:** Students organise an expo to showcase their learning, inviting other classes, parents and community members.

An example of such an expo is provided by a class that studied local marine environments. Students consulted with experts and reported outcomes, interviewed local residents and participated in learning programs with the Maritime Museum and conservation groups. They gave mini-presentations with interactive tasks to demonstrate issues of human impact. They displayed photographs of their learning journeys, including processes and end products.

## Getting communities online:

Set up blogs for community members. Students can make photo stories to share online and get feedback. They can link with other schools and participate in online challenges, both nationally and globally. (Ensure school cyber-safety policy is adhered to.)

**Round table conference:** This is a forum for students to immerse themselves in their heart, hand and mind interests and share their passion with others. Each student plans and gives a presentation/demonstration on an issue/activity in which they feel knowledgeable and confident. The panel members can be peers and/or adults, from within the school or across the broader community. Dialogue is question-driven and spontaneous.

*When implemented well, formative assessment can double the speed of students' learning.*

Dylan William



## Language that teachers can use to apply and assess learning in authentic contexts

- What could you do next? Do you know other ways to do this? Which might you choose and why?
- Who feels confident enough to teach this to others?
- Where else could you use these skills and ideas?
- Where have you seen them used before? How could you use what you learnt last week to help you now?
- What were you thinking while you were doing this?
- If this didn't work, why do you think it didn't and what else can you do?
- What are you doing? Why are you doing it? How might you use this in your life?
- Who would you like to invite to this forum?
- How are you intending to report on your findings?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- The links to real life are talked about, rather than experienced, by students
- Teachers plan authentic learning activities, but assessment is linked to final product only
- Assessment is teacher-driven and students feel unsure of the marking criteria or their relevance to intended learning outcomes
- Teachers always determine the audience for specific learning presentations
- Assessment is always summative, not formative

## Practice check

- Am I giving ongoing opportunities for my students to apply their learning in real-life contexts?
- Do I know my community and what it has to offer?
- How does the assessment align with the learning intention? Do I ask my students to show the processes and not just the end product?
- Do I consider my students' cultural backgrounds, interests, skills and attitudes when I plan assessment tasks?
- Are my students receiving constructive feedback and advice from a range of people?



# ongoing assessment

# 4.3

Notes:

*Effective, healthy learning occurs in relationship to community rather than in isolation. Learning is not restricted to educational institutions, it occurs in communities and workplaces just as frequently. Thus, if a person has the skills to navigate the relational elements of the learning experience, he or she can carry those skills from classroom to classroom, to non-traditional learning environments, to work, and to the larger community with success and confidence as well as the ability to function in the current world of increasing change and challenge.*

George Otero

informs learning

## 4.4 Personalise and connect learning: Communicate learning in multiple modes



### Essence >

The teacher ensures that the curriculum incorporates rich and varied modes of making and communicating meaning.

### Australia Day—to watch the cricket or the tennis?

We had all enjoyed the Australia Day holiday, but I was surprised at how little my Year 6–7 students knew about Australia. How could I help them appreciate what it is to 'be Australian'?

We brainstormed all the important aspects of what being Australian means. The students sorted and categorised the ideas into *history*, *customs/traditions*, *language*, *unique to Australia*, and *lifestyle*. I introduced the learning intentions:

- to research information about aspects of Australian life and present their understandings to an audience
- to find and use the mode of presentation most appropriate for the aspect of 'being Australian' that they were demonstrating.

We all engaged in lively conversation, clarifying what these learning intentions entailed. The students discussed different modes of communicating information. They considered the advantages and disadvantages and impact of each, and the resources needed. Now the students were ready to begin.

I randomly selected five teams to develop presentations that would be shared at the school assembly. The design brief included the following requirements:

- each aspect of Australian life had to be demonstrated in a different mode, one that was most appropriate for the topic
- the presentation was to provide targeted information for the audience
- all group members needed to contribute to the development and presentation
- all presentations were to be previewed by the whole class, with their feedback used to refine the end product.

Time was dedicated daily for groups to plan, rehearse, organise props and write scripts. The five presentations were:

- 'Australia's history', through a debate entitled: 'Was it colonisation or invasion?'
- 'Lifestyles around the Australian barbecue'—a dramatic re-enactment
- 'Customs and traditions' highlighted by video snippets of community members as they talked about their family activities
- 'Language through time', in a PowerPoint presentation, 'Do you remember when ...?', with vignettes showing the evolution of language as history and technology impacted on Australians
- 'Uniqueness to Australia', depicted by the music and dances peculiar to Australia, with audience participation in 'Do the Stomp!'

As each group gave its presentation to the class audience, the group members invited instantaneous oral feedback around the messages that were presented. They refined and improved their performances and then presented them at a school assembly.

The whole school audience gave authentic evaluation and honest feedback—there was applause, students were invited to the microphone to respond and, afterwards, classes sent written feedback that was highly valued.

As we reflected on our learning and all the different modes we'd used in telling our story, it was clear that not only did we now share a richer meaning of 'being Australian', but we had communicated that meaning to our entire school community.

*Upper primary teacher*

communicate learning



## Justice alert

Whose ways of communicating are being privileged in the culture of the classroom?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Monitor my planning and design of activities to ensure a balance of communication modes
- Ensure students consider how to present their learning using the mode that best suits the purpose and audience
- Structure learning tasks where students must use varied modes for accessing, processing and presenting information
- Develop in my students the skills to critique what they see, hear and feel through various modes of communication, and model strategies of how to do this
- Reinforce a culture of risk taking where we all explore new media and modes of communicating learning
- Teach safety considerations in each mode, such as safe use of art tools, warm up and cool down requirements in dance or drama, and safety online
- Model being open to many modes of accessing, processing and presenting information (eg Twitter, Wikis, written and oral text)
- Teach the conventions and specialist terms for each mode (eg how to create a storyboard for a video production, how to use different camera shots, the position of the camera and panning to tell a story and communicate different moods through film)
- Design activities where students learn in two different modes and make comparisons (eg character development in a book and in a film)
- Ensure students show what they've learnt in different modes over time
- Teach students to challenge different communication modes by asking questions that encourage critical responses
- Recognise that all students are expert in something, which may be demonstrated in ways not usually recognised in school, and dedicate time to sharing this expertise

### Key actions: Students

- Use research from many sources and show the same information in different ways
- Talk with others to understand the main ideas and to decide on a form of presentation
- Suggest ways to use media that I'm skilled in, and offer to help other people
- Try new technologies and ask others for help
- Practise communicating better by varying my voice, body language and using the space well
- Challenge myself to present my learning in a new way, to suit the purpose and get the best audience response



*There are many ways to see and interpret the world ... The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.*

Elliot Eisner

### Ways to communicate learning in multiple modes

**A kaleidoscope is the metaphor:** Think of the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope as modes of learning. Each mode helps students to see meaning from a different perspective. Just as a kaleidoscope lens makes a pattern from the glass pieces, so students make connections between learning modes to create their own meaning. When the kaleidoscope is turned, different patterns emerge. Students' life experiences give different 'patterns' to learning. Knowledge and understandings are ever-changing through our own unique lenses.

#### Create a flexible learning environment:

- **Organise the space** and the curriculum so that students can be involved in multiple tasks.
- **Engage all the senses** so that students work with sound, movement, pictures, practical activities, and both verbal and non-verbal role play.
- **Develop a shared inventory of ideas** for communicating learning in influential ways, such as traditional modes, new technologies and skills drawn from all curriculum areas.
- **Use 'spotlight' sessions** in which students share their favourite mode of communication (eg playing an instrument, drawing, computer animation, mime, lecture or demonstration).

#### Teach specific strategies:

Treat each mode of learning as a 'language' and teach specific decoding and critiquing strategies. For example, teach students how to organise electronic folders; 'mash' information from several websites; create mood through colour, sound or camera shots; or make different types of puppets. Directly teach students skills such as how to organise electronic folders, safely use glue guns and electrical equipment, write scripts, and add voice-overs to PowerPoints.

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# 4.4

**Focus on intention:** Encourage students to ask the question, 'What does this mode offer that another doesn't in terms of what needs to be communicated?'. Include assessment criteria that focus on intention; for example, how do student choices of font, colour, image and sound in a PowerPoint combine to communicate the intended message? Encourage students to nominate a target audience (eg family, school, community) and use this to direct their planning focus.

**Surprising photos:** Display photographs around the school that astonish or that portray something from unexpected perspectives. Use pictures which seem to pose questions that do not have neat answers. Intriguing images on the walls will stimulate the imagination at a subliminal level. Engage students in dialogue about the pictures, either directly or via comments boards. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 25.)



*I am among those who think that science has a great beauty. A scientist in his laboratory is not only a technician: he is also a child placed before natural phenomena which impress him like a fairy tale.*

Marie Curie

## Language that teachers can use to communicate learning in multiple modes

- What are the assumptions in this art work (or performance or text)?
- Whose voices are included or excluded? Is there bias? How might this influence people's perceptions?
- What role does music play in telling the story in a performance (or television program)? What purpose does silence play during the performance?
- What message are you trying to give? What mode will you use to communicate this clearly to other people?
- Where and how will you research this question? What are you likely to learn from each source?
- What does this remind you of? Can you think of a metaphor?
- Could you create an animation to teach that process? What character would you develop? Why?
- When you learnt how to ... which instructions helped you most—the DVD, printed booklet or fold-out diagrams? How did they add meaning to each other? What mode of instruction will you use when you're showing people how to ...?
- From this painting/performance, what can you tell about the artist's views?
- When you watched this demonstration, how did the expert show what she/he wanted to prove?
- How does the film version compare with the book? In what ways are the film characters similar to or different from those you imagined when reading the book? What effects did the music and silence have in the film?
- Could you find another way to demonstrate what you know? What will be your biggest challenge?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- Written communication dominates
- Students and teachers stay in their comfort zone, using a range of tried and trusted modes of communication
- Different modes are used without links to the learning purpose
- Electronic/live text/symbol systems are used just for decoration or entertainment

## Practice check

- What communication modes did my students use today?
- To give students real choice, does everyone have the chance to develop multimodal skills?
- Are my students challenging and critiquing information from multiple sources?
- Am I helping my students to translate meaning from one mode to another?
- How do I monitor the modes students use? Do I extend them?
- Do I encourage modes of learning that engage all the senses—learning through sound, gesture, movement, pictures, practical activities and role playing with and without spoken language?

making meaning

# 4.4

Notes:

*The only real  
voyage of discovery  
consists not in seeking  
new landscapes but in  
having new eyes.*

Marcel Proust

with all our senses