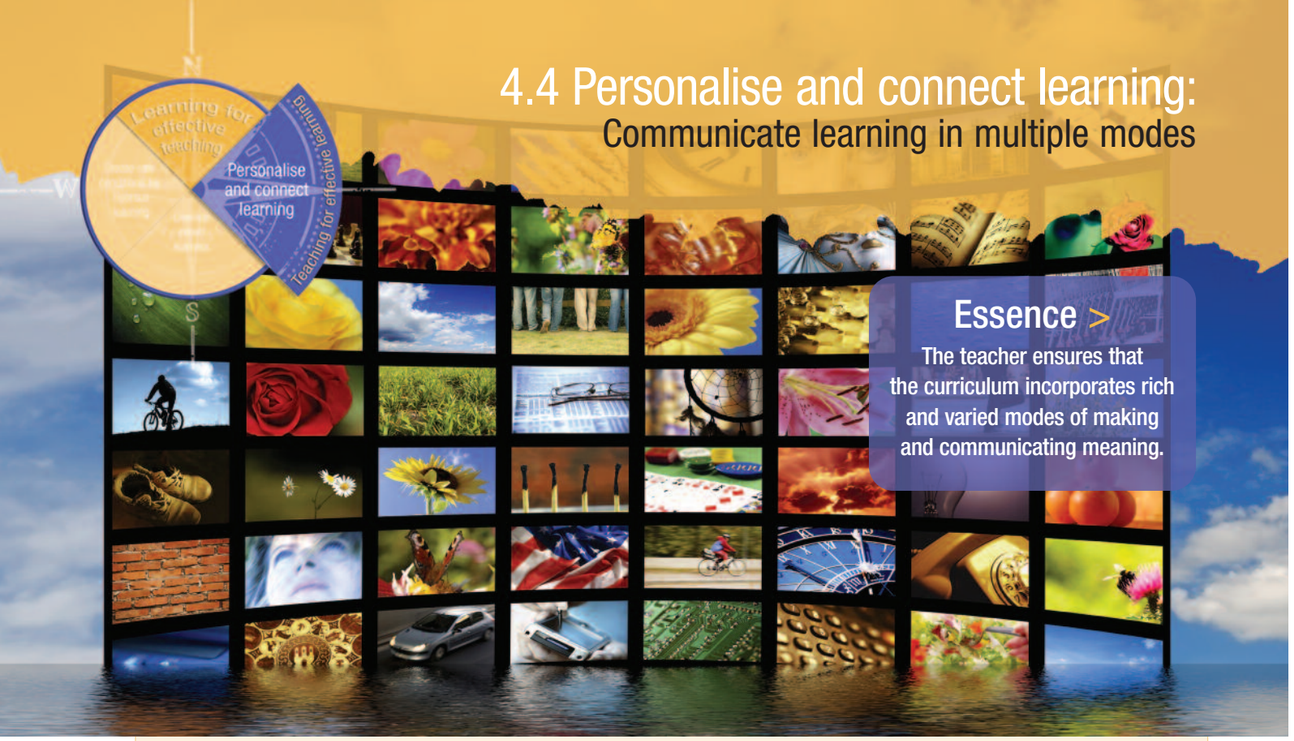


4.4 Personalise and connect learning:
Communicate learning in multiple modes

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

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 story-board 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

Justice alert

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

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.

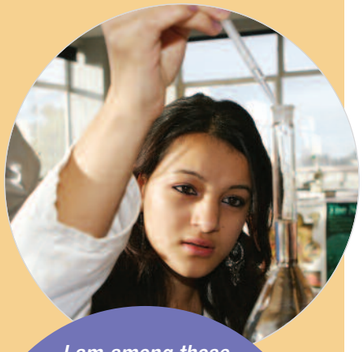
Continued page 78

4.4

communicate learning in multiple modes

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?

Notes:

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

Marcel Proust

making meaning with all our senses