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STAY STILL, DIVE DEEP-APPROACHES TO READ TO WRITE AND THE CRAFT OF WRITING

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Jowen Hillyer and Rosemary Henzell give some practical advice on how to teach Reading to Write and Module C the Craft of Writing of HSC English Advanced and Standard syllabuses . . .

When we first encountered Module C there was a bit of confusion and in some cases trepidation. We found that reactions went a few ways:

1. Hooray I get to work on the intricacies of refining writing with my kids!
2. Oh great, a whole MODULE on writing with my kids (who barely pick up a pen)
3. So, we annotate and look mainly at language techniques, right?
4. If it's not a close study then what is it?

Really the answer lay somewhere in between and was often context dependant. Due to Covid blocking our initial Centre for Professional Learning (CPL) conference plans, we had a whole year to actually apply what we presented. Despite our very different contexts, we decided to trial a uniform approach in both our schools to see if it would be effective.

From there we presented some approaches that worked.

Ultimately the philosophy behind both Read to Write and Craft of Writing did not change between courses or context:

Stay still, dive deep

READ TO WRITE

Some early approaches to this module, which worked brilliantly in many contexts, did not work for us. Many teachers created exciting units with a focus area and worked with texts centred on that concept- such as 'Dystopian texts' or 'voices of protest'. While this helped us to tie things together in our minds it did not always work for students. Sometimes students saw the texts and the concept before they understood the module and their focus was diverted. Ultimately the module is not about a concept but about: incremental skill building, testing those skills and then expanding on them.

It was better to strip it back to the pure tools of writing where *form is the focus*. Asking students to consider the purpose of form was one of the most powerful things we uncovered.

In *Read to Write* we introduce students to "the writer's toolbox/toolkit"- Vocabulary & grammar, elements of style, elements of composition and the often neglected one- fine tuning and refining.

The last tool was very important because, although it appears in our syllabus documents, the temptation for students to say 'one and done' is great. This module offers a chance at a retraining of PROCESS.

We devised a few steps to keep us on track too:

- Read
- Discuss
- Zoom in
- Create

The secret to success was to not skip any steps. It is so tempting last period Friday with a recalcitrant group to not bother discussing and just annotate and write silently but we tried that too and it led to incomplete writing and running out of things to say. Skipping steps means skipping process and that is what this module is training students for - the process and particulars of writing. It is called Read to Write so that the focus is on the students wide reading- a springboard into having something to say.

Kicking off Reading to Write

To begin the unit, we would start with letters to themselves on their last day of year 12- it acts as goal setting, introduces you to them and allows you to have a good idea of where they are at with discursive writing.

Then we follow the process. An example might be Roald Dahl's Lamb to the Slaughter:

1. **We read aloud**, this helps students to hear the craft of the text and to understand performative aspects of text (as well as simply enjoying being read to)
2. **Discuss** - this is not random 'around the room with someone holding court' It must be a guided discussion. Using the 4Cs routine was our chosen thinking organiser – often in group work
3. **Zoom in** on the text using different lenses go over it once for vocabulary and grammar, then for elements of style, then elements of composition
4. **Create** Now that they understand how the text works and how they think and feel about it, they create a text which springboards from it- it could be an alternate version, a different context or even just an element of style or composition which was important in creating meaning in that text.

Our reflections

Students enjoyed it more- there is safety in structure. It gave us an opportunity to purposefully choose texts to dive into and model excellent examples of discursive and persuasive texts. Students reported seeing the practicality behind English, reading long form fiction for the first time in years and most importantly about why we read and write.

Connections How does this connect to previous knowledge? How does it connect to other texts we've looked at?	**Challenges** How does this text challenge your beliefs or opinions? What questions does the text make the reader ask themselves? What do you want to challenge in this text?
Concepts What themes or ideas does the text explore?	**Changes** Does the author's perspective change at all through the text? Does the author discuss any changes? How has the text changed or altered your understanding?

Table 1. The 4Cs routine (Hardvard Graduate School of Education, *Project Zero*)

CRAFT OF WRITING - THE EVOLUTION FROM READ TO WRITE

In *Read to Write* students engage with other's writing to build their own.

In *Craft of Writing* student's focus on their own authorship.

In *Read to Write* they are building a bicycle with an instruction manual (complete with scaffolded training wheels sometimes).

In *Craft of Writing*, they ride the bike.

In *Read to Write* we filled the tool kit.

In *Craft of Writing*, we build things- not well at first sometimes but practice is key with little bits of writing regularly.

In Module C the texts, on the prescriptions list, do not contribute to the pattern of study so it is a good opportunity to expose students to textual forms they are not as strong in or need development in. Not only does it assist with their crafting, but it helps strengthen the Paper 1 Section 1 muscle too.

Alongside the texts that teachers choose, students should be encouraged to read widely and in the 30 mandated hours for this course there can still be lots of other modelled texts to explore, alongside the prescribed ones selected.

Regardless of the course (Advanced or Standard), most Module C texts are hybrids.

The process doesn't change much from Read to Write in the way we approach texts. This is not a close study and extreme annotation is not the aim of the game.

The steps are:

1. Read & think- *what emotions/idea does it raise, why did the author write this?*
2. Zoom in- with a layers routine (*think of the text like a dish on MasterChef- look at the whole story, break it apart and look at the elements, look how it fits together so we understand the whole, evaluate*)

LAYERS Routine

NARRATIVE: What is it about? What is the story? (Basic 5Ws) The back story? (The history of the characters) The 'other' story? (Consider other characters' perspectives What is the hidden story? What is the message?	
AESTHETIC: Why is it appealing? What is the appeal (what pulls you in?) What is the reward of reading this work? How would you describe the craft/ the skill of the composer? What is new/ different/ unusual?	
MECHANICAL: How does it work? Identify the form/ structure of the work. Identify some prominent techniques used, and give examples. What symbolism is present?	

Table 2. Layers routine (Harvard Graduate School of Education *Project Zero*)

DYNAMIC: How does it move? Identify the moments of surprise, tension and emotion. Identify moments of growth or a shift in perspective. How are these created?	
CONNECTIONS: How does it link to other texts and knowledge? What connections can you make to other texts? What connections can you make to the world or the past? What connections can you make to your personal experience?	

Table 2. Layers routine continued (Harvard Graduate School of Education *Project Zero*)

3. Springboard from layers- look at FORM, DYNAMICS, THEMES/IDEAS
4. Create
5. Reflect- This is a structured activity. – we are not defending our work but making direct connections between our own writing and the techniques chosen from the texts we have read. **You are composer and critic** in Module C.

Ultimately, both *Read to Write*, and *The Craft of Writing* are about skill development through creative exploration. Students and teachers will find in these modules a space to explore great writing from all genres, times and places. Most importantly it is a space to work with students as they discover the power and versatility of language.

References

Harvard Graduate School of Education. (n.d.).***Project zero***. http://www.pz.harvard.edu/

About the Authors

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Jowen Hillyer is currently Head Teacher of English, HSIE and languages at Aurora College, the Department of Education's first selective virtual school for rural and remote students (7-10) and remote students in Stage 6.

Jowen has been a teacher, head teacher and teacher educator for 26 years, with experience in both rural and disadvantaged public schools, as well as 3 years as an Associate Lecturer at The University of Sydney.

In her current role Jowen leads a large, diverse faculty situated all over the state in new approaches, innovation, and student engagement. Her research interests are centred on project-based learning, boy's writing in the middle years and mentoring programs for beginning English teachers.

Jowen has also contributed to the Journal of Professional Learning and recently has had a peer reviewed article published on post pandemic teaching in the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.

Rosemary Henzell

Rosemary Henzell is an English and Drama Teacher at Willoughby Girls High School. Rosemary has a keen interest in project-based learning ranging from individual creative writing projects to building a whole-grade website exploring the modern relevance of Shakespeare.

As a senior member of her school's Professional Learning Team, she is helping lead the school-wide implementation of Costa's Habits of Mind, and Project Zero's Cultures of Thinking Project.

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