Embedding the recommendations of AERO's report into the secondary school context

Hayley Harrison

2022

Contents

Introduction

In 2022, Hayley Harrison and Matilda Education partnered to create a series of student writing and literacy folios unlike any other resource available to Australian secondary schools. They called it *Connecting Literacy*.

Based on existing research, *Connecting Literacy* is designed as an explicit writing and literacy program with model texts, explicit instruction, application and formative assessment embedded in every unit.

Frameworks within the resource were originally drawn from experts, and from concepts such as Berninger's 'simple view of writing' and Sedita's 'writing rope'.

Specific content understanding and skill acquisition were built through texts including Van Cleave's *Writing Matters*; Hochman, Wexler and Lemov's *The Writing Revolution*; Wexler's *The Knowledge Gap*; Eide's *Uncovering the Logic of English*; Quigley's *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* and *Closing the Writing Gap* and Stone's *Spelling for Life*.

Instructional practices were embedded through principles from publications including Lemov's *Teach like a Champion*, Sweller's *Cognitive Load Theory*, and Quigley and Coleman's *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*.

This white paper – as a precursor to a 2023 efficacy study that will gather in-school data as evidence of the impact of *Connecting Literacy* – explores the degree to which *Connecting Literacy* will help schools to embed the findings and recommendations of a report recently published by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO): *Writing development: What does a decade of NAPLAN data reveal?* (published in October 2022).

This white paper is authored by Hayley Harrison for Matilda Education Australia and is not endorsed by AERO.

About the author

Hayley Harrison has worked as a classroom teacher, coach, leading teacher and educational consultant for over 15 years. Hayley has extensive experience in working with schools to audit curriculums, build resources, and formalise assessment practices, and is a seasoned presenter on the topics of whole-school literacy, curriculum development, and English-specific content.

Hayley is the author of Matilda Education's *Connecting Literacy* series and the co-author of the upcoming *VCE English and EAL* series.

About the report

'AERO's 2022 analysis of student writing data is the most extensive investigation into this area ever conducted in Australia. [AERO's] researchers analysed more than 10 million NAPLAN writing results, spanning 2011 to 2021, and 366 samples of students' NAPLAN writing. This report primarily focuses on analyses of students' persuasive writing from 2011 to 2018 (excluding 2016)' (p. 1, Report Summary).

'The key aim of the "writing" element of the project has been to gain a greater understanding of how students' writing skills progress over time' (p. x, Full Report).

'A mixed-methods approach to analysis, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, was implemented [by AERO's researchers]' (p. x, Full Report).

AERO investigated not only trends in student writing performance over time but also:
- the development of writing achievement between year levels
- strengths and weaknesses in student writing
- the differences between performance on paper and online
- the alignment of expected standards of writing and actual student writing achievement.

AERO's report exposes alarmingly negative trends in Year 9 students' writing skills and articulates significant implications for educational institutions and resource creators. From these implications, the report presents key recommendations specific to policymakers, teachers and researchers.

These recommendations are further supported through the evidence-based findings of the report published by AERO in February 2022, *Writing and writing instruction: An overview of the literature*, which prescribes more specific pathways for initial teacher education, policy development, education management, school leadership, and in the classroom.

AERO's key findings

1

Student achievement in persuasive writing skills has declined.

2

The writing performance of high-achieving students in persuasive writing performance has declined over time.

3

The gap between low- and high-achieving students has widened across learning stages.

4

There is a misalignment between expected performance standards in curriculum documents and actual student achievements.

5

Online and paper assessments produce different results.

AERO's stated implications

Increasing focus on teaching and learning writing across the curriculum can help reverse the decline in student performance.

Existing syllabus and curriculum guidance expect students to write at levels beyond what the data shows they can demonstrate.

Investigating the decline in performance of high–achieving students can help identify strategies to reverse this trend.

Examining differences in performance between online and paper tests, considering the increasing expectation in school and beyond for online writing, can provide valuable teaching and assessment information.

Providing targeted and intensive support for low–achieving students can stop them from falling further behind on their learning trajectories.

AERO's stated recommendations

In its October 2022 report, *Writing development: What does a decade of NAPLAN data reveal?*, AERO made six recommendations to drive improvement in student writing (pp. 6–8, Report Summary); these are grouped into policy recommendations, research recommendations, and teaching practice recommendations.

This white paper explicitly addresses how AERO's teaching practice recommendations can be embedded into the secondary school context using the *Connecting Literacy* series. Due to the nature of the resource, only the teaching practice recommendations are cited and addressed in the table below.

TEACHING PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	EMBEDDED IN *CONNECTING LITERACY*
Recommendation 3: Elevate the importance of the teaching and learning of writing across the curriculum in schools.	
3a. Initiate a whole-school approach to writing so that the explicit teaching of writing skills across all subject areas is prioritised. A whole-school approach emphasises the importance of incorporating the explicit teaching of writing throughout all learning areas.	*Connecting Literacy*: • explicitly teaches the skills and knowledge required for writing and facilitates the transferral of these skills to other subjects • examines multidisciplinary text types and content • can be used to develop a whole-school approach to writing by using the activating prior knowledge activities, comprehension strategies, writing templates, and the How-to sections to build a consistent metalanguage around writing (and reading, speaking and listening skills and content).

TEACHING PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS	EMBEDDED IN *CONNECTING LITERACY*
3b. Prioritise 'time to write' across the whole school to provide more opportunities for sustained writing time in the classroom.	*Connecting Literacy*: • asks students to individually draft and revise a sustained writing task in every unit • requires students to create different text types and provides multiple writing points across the resource • supplements the established curriculum and increases the opportunities for students to complete sustained writing tasks.

Recommendation 4:
Increase teacher access to evidence-based resources on best practice writing pedagogies.

4a.
Create, collate and disseminate evidence-based resources on writing instruction for teachers.
	Connecting Literacy:
	• is designed to develop teacher knowledge and efficacy
	• guides teachers through tasks:
	   ○ establishing learning goals
	   ○ connecting writing strategies to specific tasks
	   ○ embedding reflective practices
	   ○ maximising knowledge retrieval opportunities
	   ○ explicitly using students' self-assessment of their learning in formative and developmental processes
	   ○ interleaving reading, writing, speaking and listening skills alongside explicit syntactic, punctuation and spelling practices with authentic and purposeful ways
	• uses evidence-based practices.

Conclusion

While no single resource will ever meet the needs of every classroom context, we assert that *Connecting Literacy* will help teachers to embed the findings and teaching practice recommendations of AERO's writing development report into their unique school context.

Connecting Literacy is an evidence-based resource informed by best practice writing pedagogies. The series seeks to elevate the importance of the teaching and learning of writing across the curriculum in schools.

The degree to which *Connecting Literacy* helps to improve the writing outcomes of students in one Australian school will be subject to examination in an efficacy study that will be conducted in 2023.

This efficacy study will examine the following research questions:
- Did students realise improvement in their writing skills throughout the period of the research study?
- Did reported levels of student 'reluctance to write' improve over the period of the study?
- Did reported teacher confidence improve over the period of the study?

We invite you to stay abreast of Matilda Education's research and access other free *Connecting Literacy* resources by following the QR code below.

References

- Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Ltd. (February 2022), *Writing and writing instruction: An overview of the literature*, edresearch.edu.au
- Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Ltd. (October 2022), *Writing development: What does a decade of NAPLAN data reveal?*, edresearch.edu.au.
- Berninger, VW et al. (2002) 'Teaching spelling and composition alone and together: Implications for the simple view of writing', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 291–304.
- Eide, D (2012) *Uncovering the Logic of English: A Common-sense approach to Reading, Spelling and Literacy*.
- Graham, S, MacArthur, CA and Fitzgerald, J (eds) (2007) *Best Practice in Writing Instruction*. Routledge.
- Hochman, JC, Wexler, N and Lemov, D (2017) *The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking through Writing in all Subjects and Grades*. The Writing Revolution, New York.
- Lemov, D (2021) *Teach like a Champion 3.0*. Jossey-Bass.
- Quigley, A (2018) *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*. Routledge.
- Quigley, A (2022) *Closing the Writing Gap*. Routledge.
- Quigley, A and Coleman, R (2019) *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools: Guidance Report*. Education Endowment Foundation, London.
- Sedita, J (2022) *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects*. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore.
- Stone, L (2021) *Spelling for Life: Uncovering the Simplicity and Science of Spelling*. Routledge.
- Sweller, J, Ayres, P and Kalyuga, S (2011) *Cognitive Load Theory*. Springer.
- Van Cleave, W (2020) *Writing Matters: Developing Sentence Skills in Students of All Ages*. W.V.C.ED.
- Wexler, N (2019) *The Knowledge Gap*. Avery.

What teachers want next

Acknowledgement of Country

Matilda Education Australia and Hayley Harrison acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians of Country and recognise their continuing connection to land, sea, culture, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.