A multi-level language toolkit for the Australian Curriculum: English

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Abstract

In its Language Strand, the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2012) refers to the importance of students learning to describe language as a system, paying attention to both structure (syntax) and meaning (semantics) at word, sentence and text levels. Yet English teachers in Australia remain uncertain about how to make principled connections between language as system and language as text. It is clear that the role of a linguistically informed knowledge must be addressed if teachers are to support their students to develop the 'dynamic and evolving' body of knowledge about language (KAL) required by the new Australian Curriculum. Focusing on persuasive texts, this paper uses the lenses provided by the Australian Curriculum: English to explore how language construes meaning at group, sentence and text level. The analysis contributes towards a multi-level language framework to help teachers to help students construct and appreciate the valued forms of argumentation required in the new Curriculum, as these draw variously on logical reasoning and emotional impact.

Knowledge about Language in subject English in contemporary Australia

The development of a national curriculum for English in Australia and the extensive consultative processes involved have generated much excitement and a genuine collaboration in knowledge-sharing amongst many educational stakeholders. However, this process has also crystallised an anxiety within the profession about the 'linguistic turn' in English teaching, and the need for teachers to renew their knowledge about language (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001; DEST, 2005; Harper & Rennie, 2009; Louden, Rohl, Gore, Greaves, McIntosh, Wright, Siemon & House, 2005). In its Language Strand, The Australian Curriculum: English refers to the importance of students learning to describe language as a system, paying attention to both structure (syntax) and meaning (semantics) at word, sentence and text levels. The systems of language it provides are robust enough to look outwards towards both literature and literacy; build on, but go beyond familiar prescriptive

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grammars, and are 'dynamic and evolving'. Yet, while this new Curriculum offers enormous opportunities, it also carries considerable challenges for teachers about how to work with language as a system of structural and meaning-making choices. These syntactic and semantic choices operate at clause, sentence and text levels and we aim to model, in the remainder of this article, how teachers can make principled connections across these levels in meaningful and productive ways.

We will focus on texts that persuade an audience to a point of view on a range of issues. Persuasion, like story-telling, is fundamental to human identity and meaning-making (Kress, 1985). As used in schooling, persuasive texts allow students to demonstrate a wide repertoire of literacy skills and understandings and their particular value is evidenced in their inclusion in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) writing task in 2011 (ACARA, 2011). Learning how to use the rhetorical tools of the trade to persuade others and to understand how others persuade is also fundamental to success in contexts outside of school – in workplaces, social networks, the media and civic life – where young people negotiate with powerful institutions.

Knowledge about Language and persuasive texts

While the teaching of persuasive writing has a rich history in the highly organised and rigorous analysis of traditional rhetoric, the 19th century shift to the study of language as syntactic rules resulted in a loss of attention to the overall meaning and organisation of text and a trivialisation of rhetoric as overgeneralised issues of 'style', 'vocabulary' or 'figures of speech' (see Christie, 1990 for a fuller historical overview). However, The Australian Curriculum, informed by the research of Australian educational linguists (see Derewianka this Issue) has allowed the descriptions of language to go beyond identifying discrete structural features and to explore how language is patterned to do its particular rhetorical work. The contextual view of language at the base of this Curriculum addresses insistent calls for the reintroduction of a more sustained approach to the teaching of rhetoric in English curricula (see for example, Green, 2009; Sawyer, 2009) and links 21st century English teaching with rhetorical traditions dating back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans, where oratory was the supreme political skill (see Higgins, 2008). Using this rhetorical toolkit, teachers and students can examine for example the resources modern orators use to galvanise public sentiment. They can examine resources used by students and academics to persuade their audiences that a particular position is valid and thus demonstrate and extend knowledge of their discipline. And they can examine the resources used by advertising and marketing to promote and sell products and ideas. Knowing how these different forms of persuasion unfold, and how the discursive and language choices function, provides deeper understandings about how

rhetorical choices impact particular audiences within a particular context.

Underpinned by this contextual view, language within The Australian Curriculum: English is importantly seen to function to do three important tasks simultaneously: to enable us to interact with others; to express and develop ideas; and to comprehend and create coherent texts. These tasks relate in important ways to the three metafunctions in a Hallidayan functional grammar described by Derewianka (this Issue). We can illustrate how choices of language at both clause, paragraph and text level function under these three headings, using selections from the Years 5, 7 and 9 Language strand of The Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2012) represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Selections of language features in terms of three functions, as represented in Years 5, 7 and 9 of the Australian Curriculum: English

Language for Expressing and Developing Ideas	Language for Interaction	Text Structure and Organisation
Year 5		
Understand how noun and adjective groups can be expanded in a variety of ways to provide a fuller description of the person, thing or idea	Understand how to move beyond making bare assertions and take account of differing perspectives and points of view	Understand the starting point of a sentence gives prominence to the message in the text and allow for prediction of how the text will unfold
Year 7		
Investigate vocabulary typical of extended and more academic texts and the role of abstract nouns, classification, description and generalisation in building specialised knowledge through language	Understand how language is used to evaluate texts and how evaluations about a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources	Understand that the coherence of more complex texts relies on devices that signal text structure and guide readers, for example, overviews, initial and concluding paragraphs and topic sentences, indexes or site maps or breadcrumb trails for online texts.
Year 9		
Explain how authors experiment with the structures of sentences and clauses to create particular effects	Investigate how evaluation can be expressed directly and indirectly using devices, for example allusion, evocative vocabulary and metaphor	Compare and contrast the use of cohesive devices in texts, focussing on how they serve to signpost ideas, to make connections and to build semantic associations between ideas.

In the remainder of this paper, we will explore how these and other language choices and patterns contribute to the three overarching functions as they enable the persuasive texts studied and produced in secondary English

to do their rhetorical work[1]. In doing so we hope to illustrate how English teachers can support their students not only to understand the structure of English as a language, but to develop their students' literacy (in terms of comprehending, evaluating and creating persuasive texts) and engage in a more informed appreciation of those persuasive texts which represent culturally valued forms of literature.

Analysing persuasive texts: genre

The four texts which have been chosen to illustrate the rhetorical resources of persuasion are all taken from one family of persuasive genres, which we call exposition. The exposition, which is sometimes called a one sided argument, is increasingly important to learning as students move into middle and secondary school. According to the American educator, Mary Schleppegrell (2004, p. 88), the expository essay 'is symbolic of students' success with language at school' and is used to assess learning across a range of subjects.

Expositions typically achieve their persuasive purpose through an introductory 'Position' or 'Thesis' stage, a series of Arguments and a concluding Reinforcement of the position. Text 1, written by a secondary English teacher as a model text for Year 8 students, is an example of an exposition which follows this prototypical unfolding.

Text 1: Year 8 Exposition (model) Mobile phones and children

Position or thesis (including Issue)

These days many parents are giving their children mobile phones so that they can keep in touch with them and keep them safe. In 2007, a quarter of seven to 10 year-olds owned a mobile phone, double the numbers from 2001. However, there is evidence that mobile phones themselves can be dangerous. Mobile phones can have a negative impact on children's health and lead to a decrease in the cognitive and communicative skills.

1 In The Australian Curriculum: English, resources associated with the textual metafunction, realising mode, are included with resources for structuring the unfolding stages of texts in relation to their purposes (i.e.. Genre). While textual features contribute greatly to the overall structure of the text, it is important that students are also made aware of the important role of field and tenor to the overall shape of the text. For example, evaluations and appeals are often amplified prosodically across stages of persuasive text as evidence is accumulated and counter-arguments rebutted.

Argument 1
The most important danger of mobile phones to children's health concerns the emission of radiation which could lead to cancer. Mobile phones transmit high frequency radio and micro waves which can penetrate the body. When this happens, the exposed molecules move around and cause friction and thus, heat. If the radiation is powerful enough, the body tissue will be burned. Recent studies by scientists in Washington shows that brain cells are damaged even by tiny doses of radio frequency, which could lead to memory loss, headaches and possibly cancer.

Argument 2
It is also possible that use of mobile phones could have an effect on children's ability to think and concentrate. While scientists do not fully understand the effects of performing two different types of tasks at the same time, there is evidence that mobile phone use in children was associated with faster and less accurate responses to certain cognitive tasks. Moreover, texting or talking during class or when studying may discourage the focussed and deep thinking necessary for cognitive development.

Argument 3
In addition to the effects on cognitive skills, scientists have also raised concerns about the effects of mobile phones on the communication skills of children and teenagers. A new study undertaken by Monash University suggests that many teenagers are losing their spelling skills because of text messaging and over time this has decreased the ability of teenagers to form extensive or coherent sentences. One student recently had her HSC essays rejected because they were all written in the shorthand of text messaging.

Reinforcement of the position
Although there is still no conclusive proof that mobile phones are unsafe for children, the evidence above suggests that concerns about the effects on health and cognitive and communicative skills need to be taken seriously.

Expositions like this, which are geared towards curriculum learning goals, have been distinguished by researchers (Martin, 1985; Humphrey, 1996) as analytical exposition because their specific purpose is to persuade audiences that a particular position or point of view is valid. In the academic domain, analytical exposition has become synonymous with the 'essay', with arguments presented as logical, objective reasons. The evidence or warrants used in analytical arguments typically draw on the specialised ideas developed

within a particular curriculum area of schooling and often take the form of explanation sequences or other embedded factual genres.

A different type of exposition functions to persuade audiences to take action on an issue and is called hortatory exposition. Hortatory exposition is used extensively beyond schooling to get things done in the community and is thus an important genre to work with within school. The educational linguist, James Martin (1985, p. 17), has argued that this kind of exposition is suitable for stirring people's emotions and persuading them to challenge the way things are. Text 2, a Blog by 16 year Lewis on the TakingITGlobal web site (Australia.tigweb.org) is an example of a hortatory exposition, written to persuade the audience to become involved in action.

Text 2: Lewis's blog from the TakingITGlobal web site

Position/Appeal, including background
Every 3 seconds, a child dies from hunger. This phrase, popularised by the MakePovertyHistory campaign along with the Live8 concerts, shows the world what state it is in. Worldwide, 208 million young people live on less than US$1 a day, and a further 515 million live on less than US$2 a day. 85% of young people live in developing countries and most of them live in rural areas where poverty and diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria cause havoc … What does this all mean? It means that the world needs to wake up and pay attention to the worldwide plight of poverty. We cannot rely on politicians to change the problem. Only a collective action from all people will move towards the eradication of poverty.

Argument 1, including statistical evidence
In 2000, 189 countries, under the United Nations Millennium Declaration, agreed to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015. In addition to this promise the leaders of these countries pledged to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of their country's Gross National Income (GNI). So far, no country has met their commitments. Australia is currently at 0.28% GNI and it doesn't look like that figure will increase any time soon.

Argument 2, including quantitative evidence
So where do young people fit in all of this? Everywhere. Young people are increasingly being recognised as important factors within global development. Since the United Nation's conception it has been calling for increased youth participation in global decision making. Unfortunately, many countries have overlooked the call. Only a small number of countries send youth delegates to the United Nation's General Assembly and at many international events young people are often brushed aside. But times are changing. At the World Summit of Sustainable Development in 2002 the WSSD Youth Caucus was the largest that had ever attended a global summit. Young people were allowed to speak at the plenary sessions: it was a victory for youth participation.

Appeal, including warrant from high status source
It cannot stop there. There is a global call for an end to poverty. Billions of people are calling for our governments to stand up and face poverty. Colin Powell said that the war on terror will not succeed unless the war on poverty is fought and won. Every day, thousands die needlessly.

Reiteration of appeal in the form of a question/ challenge/ call for action
Will you be brave enough to stand up and take a stance? We are the generation that can finally eradicate poverty. We have a responsibility to step up to the plate and tackle the issue head on. We can't escape it. Will you step up and be the change?

While there is no sharp line between hortatory and analytical exposition, recognition of distinct persuasive genres and of the contexts in which they are typically deployed is an important way in to building students' understandings of language use. Like analytical exposition, hortatory exposition may also use logical reasoning and embed factual genres. However this kind of persuasion may also draw on personal experience to make a case for change. Politicians regularly use personal experience and narrative sequences within their speeches in order to galvanise citizens to action, and many of these speeches have become texts studied for their literary as well as rhetorical power. One such speech is that of the former prime minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, whose Apology to the Stolen Generations deploys story to create a powerful motive for social change (2008). The story takes the form of biographical excerpts from Rudd's conversations with an elderly Aboriginal woman, Nana Nungala Fejo, and a short extract from that is presented below as Text 3.

Text 3 Extract from narrative sequence of Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations

> Nanna Nungala Fejo, as she prefers to be called, was born in the late 1920s. She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek. She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night ...
>
> But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men. Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could run and hide ... The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away. They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck ...
>
> Nanna Fejo's family had been broken up for a second time. She stayed at the mission until after the war, when she was allowed to leave for a prearranged job as a domestic in Darwin. She was 16. Nanna Fejo never saw her mum again. After she left the mission, her brother let her know that her mum had died years before, a broken woman fretting for the children that had literally been ripped away from her.

Rudd's speech, like many other political orations, can be seen as a macrogenre (Martin & Rose, 2008), incorporating a number of elemental genres which are juxtaposed to maximise their persuasive power. For example, Rudd (2008) juxtaposes the narrative sequence above with the more analytical argumentative sequence below, represented as Text 4.

Text 4 Extract from one argument phase of Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations

> But should there still be doubts as to why we must now act, let the Parliament reflect for a moment on the following facts: that, between 1910 and 1970, between 10 and 30% of indigenous children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers; that, as a result, up to 50,000 children were forcibly taken from their families; that this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to them under statute; that this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called mixed lineage were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with the problem of the Aboriginal population.

We can see immediately that Rudd (2008) uses very different language choices in the explicitly argumentative phase of his speech (Text 4) to those where he tells Nana's story (Text 3). The analysis which follows will show how

grammatical knowledge provides a toolkit for analysing such texts, helping to avoid the problem of genre being seen as a set of proformas for simply naming rather than developing a dynamic understanding of how texts achieve their purposes in particular social contexts. We will explore patterns of language selection used in the persuasive texts we have introduced here, whether these be analytical and/or hortatory; whether they be written or spoken; or whether constructed by students or adults. We will explore choices at text, paragraph and sentence level but also drill down to the word and group level, using two of the three lenses offered to us by The Australian Curriculum: English: language for expressing ideas and language for interacting with others.

Language for expressing and developing ideas

In expressing and developing ideas, distinctive sets of language choices are used to build experience (referred to as the experiential metafunction in Halliday's (1985) functional view of grammar). Speakers and writers of arguments use particular language choices that build a particular persuasive world. We can explore this world by considering the various entities or participants in it, expressed by noun groups and the types of processes they are engaged in.

Naming participants for persuasion

Many teachers would intuitively recognise that Kevin Rudd refers to people, places and things in different ways in the two phases of his speech represented in Texts 3 and 4 above. In recounting Nana Fejo's individual experiences (Text 3), Rudd typically names phenomena through nouns which are **concrete** (bush camp), **specific** (her family) and **everyday** (the truck). This is in stark contrast to the explicitly argumentative phases in the speech (e.g. Text 4), where he typically uses **abstract** nouns to describe phenomena in a highly conceptual way (e.g. policy, power), **general** nouns that refer to groups of people symbolically rather than as individuals (e.g. Parliament, indigenous children) and **technical** nouns to describe phenomena (e.g. 'the forced extractions'). The generality, abstraction and technicality of Rudd's choice of nouns in Text 4 contrasts markedly with the specific, concrete and everyday types of nouns selected in his narrative phase (Text 3).

Once patterns of lexical choice have been identified in this way, the next important step is to ask why have they been selected, and in particular, how these selections across different phases build certain types of experiences that contribute to the persuasive purpose of the text as a whole. Even focusing simply on patterns of noun choice as we have done, we can begin to answer this question. In choosing concrete, specific and everyday references to the world of one aboriginal woman, Rudd is making that world accessible to everyone in his audience, children or adults, well-educated or not, thus inviting all to share in this human experience. Once this empathy is established, he can extrapolate from it, creating the more general and abstract

argumentative point which draws on technical warrants to substantiate it (see Love & Macken Horarik, 2009 for an extended discussion of Rudd's rhetoric here).

However, even richer understandings of rhetorical choices and their effects can be made as we explore bigger grammatical units. The Australian Curriculum: English not only offers a metalanguage to name the types of participants realised by nouns but also to consider how nouns as individual lexical items can be expanded into **noun groups** that do distinctive persuasive work. The use of noun groups with pre- and post-modifiers to classify phenomenon is particularly important to analytical expositions and contributes to the construction of deeply layered and often technical taxonomies which organise the topics and sub-topics into arguments. In Text 1, for example choices of noun groups across sentences and phases effectively group the overall topic of 'the effects of mobile phones' into classes (i.e. health, skills) and sub-classes (e.g. cognitive and communication skills), and these in turn provide an analytical framework for arguments to be developed.

Another resource for building ideas and reasoning in persuasive texts is **nominalisation**, which works by turning words that are not normally nouns into nouns, typically creating abstract or technical concepts. Nominalisation is a very effective way to use specialised curriculum knowledge as evidence within the arguments of analytical exposition. For example, in the noun group 'the emission of radiation' (Text 1), the head noun 'emission' is the nominalised form of something that would more congruently be expressed as 'rays were emitted'. In this noun group, nominalisation contributes to naming a technical phenomenon i.e. 'radiation', which is explained in subsequent sentences. Representing such phenomena as nouns, the writer can now draw upon the resources of the noun group to describe and classify them (e.g. 'extensive' radiation), thus packing a great deal of information into the noun group.

Nominalisation is a powerful resource for building arguments in hortatory exposition, although writers also strategically use more congruent grammatical forms. In the following excerpt from his blog (Text 2), for example, Lewis represents young people and their actions as nominalisations (bolded), but refers to the actions of countries as verbs (underlined) with the institutions made explicit as the responsible participants.

> Since the United Nation's conception it has been calling for increased **youth participation** in global **decision making**. Unfortunately, many countries *have overlooked* the call. Only a small number of countries *send* youth delegates

Using nominalisation in this way, Lewis is able to build his argument by adjusting reference to the people responsible for the injustices, thus positioning his readers to support his call for change. Teachers who have an understanding of how noun groups can be expanded and how nominalisation works are in a strong position to model with their students how to use

these techniques authoritatively in their own writing and to identify what is achieved by other writers who use them for various persuasive purposes.

Process types for building persuasive worlds

The processes around which a clause is centred are realised through verb groups. A writer or speaker's choice of verbs helps to realise both the outward visible world of action and the inner world of participants. Persuasive texts, like narratives, draw on a full range of process types as they build persuasive ideas and reasoning. We can see this range in the opening paragraph of Lewis's Hortatory exposition (Text 2), where verbs are bolded and labelled in brackets as either action, relating, sensing, or saying/showing.

> Every 3 seconds, a child **dies** (action) from hunger. This phrase, popularised by the MakePovertyHistory campaign along with the Live8 concerts, **shows** (saying) the world what state **it** is in. Worldwide, 208 million young people **live** (action) on less than US$1 a day, and a further 515 million **live** (action) on less than US$2 a day. 85% of young people **live** (action) in developing countries and most of them **live** (action) in rural areas where poverty and diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria **cause** (relating) havoc ... What does this all **mean** (relating) **It means** (relating) that the world **needs to wake up (sensing) and pay attention** (sensing) to the worldwide plight of poverty. We **cannot rely** (action) on politicians to change the problem. Only a collective action from all people **will move** (action) towards the eradication of poverty.

Through his use of action verbs, Lewis builds a world in which children live or die, paralleled by a world in which the phenomenon are commented on (saying) and interpreted (relating) and others are called on to react to the phenomenon (sensing verbs). Through this range of process choices, Lewis weaves his arguments, moving from reporting action, to commenting and interpreting these actions.

While writers and speakers of hortatory expositions often express opinions through sensing verbs (I think, I believe), in analytical exposition, relating verbs are particularly crucial in setting up the position and making cause and effect relationships. Relating verbs are bolded in the following excerpt from the Position stage of Text 1.

> However, there **is** evidence that mobile phones themselves **can be** dangerous. Mobile phones **can have** a negative impact on children's health and **lead to** a decrease in the cognitive and communicative skills.

Combining relating verbs which realise cause/effect reasoning (e.g. lead to) with nominalisation (e.g. impact) allows this writer to expand meanings without creating complexity in the clause. Such expansion of meaning using compressed grammatical structures is highly valued in school English.

Clause structure and persuasion

Moving to even larger units of meaning making, we can similarly draw on what The Australian Curriculum: English has to offer by examining how ideas are related to each other across clauses and sentences, as they build persuasive meanings. One of the content descriptions for example in the Language strand for Year 10 is 'Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of a wide range of clause and sentence structures as authors design and craft texts.' (ACARA, 2012).

Just as noun groups can be expanded to pack in more meaning, we can look at examples of expansion in sentences, whereby the main or independent clause is expanded by adding dependent clauses or phrases or groups. For example, Lewis's hortatory exposition (Text 2) deploys many expansions of clauses, as he packs in evidence designed to buttress his arguments and persuade young readers to take action themselves. The following sentences from the Background stage of Text 2 have been annotated in Table 2 to show this expansion.

Table 2: Sentences and clauses

Sentence type	Clause type	Text
Simple	Independent clause	Every three seconds a child **dies** from hunger
Complex	Dependent clause (reporting) with an embedded clause (what is reported)	This phrase <<......>> **shows** the world [[what state **it is** in]]
	Dependent clause: non finite included	<<**popularised** by the MakePovertyHistory campaign along with the Live8 concerts>>
Compound	Independent clause	Worldwide, 208 million young people **live** on less than US$1 a day
	independent clause (adding)	and a further 515 million **live** on less than US$2 a day.
Compound/ complex	independent clause	85% of young people **live** in developing countries
	independent clause (adding)	and most of them **live** in rural areas,
	dependent clause	where poverty and diseases like HIV/ AIDS and malaria **cause** havoc

Throughout his hortatory exposition, Lewis juxtaposes simple and complex sentences in rhetorically effective ways that accumulate information and provide authority for the data he introduces as evidence. Analytical expositions also make use of a variety of sentence structures to build arguments and report evidence. However, because logical relationships such as cause and effect are often expressed within the clause (e.g., as verbs or nouns), rather than between clauses (as conjunctions), simple sentences, used effectively, can still package multiple ideas. In the following sentence from Text 1, for example, logical relations have been expressed as nouns (italicised,) creating

complex noun groups but leaving only one verb group (bolded) and therefore one independent clause.

> In addition to the *effects* on cognitive skills, scientists **have also raised** concerns about the *effects* of mobile phones on the communication skills of children and teenagers.

We have explored only some of the ways in which language choices at word, group and sentence level express and combine persuasive ideas. In its Language Strand, The Australian Curriculum: English offers further rich advice on how noun, verb and adverbial groups, and clauses can be expanded to further build the ideas central to effective persuasion.

Language for interacting with others

While speakers and writers of arguments use particular language choices that build their persuasive world, they are simultaneously engaging their listeners/readers in particular ways. These language resources are part of the interpersonal metafunction in Halliday's (1985) functional view of grammar and map onto the second system of language resources included in The Australian Curriculum: English those which enable speakers and writers to interact with their audiences to form different kinds of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal resources in persuasive texts vary considerably in response to influences such as the relative power of the writer or speaker in relation to the audience and the degree of solidarity – that is, to what extent the writer or speaker can assume that their audience is 'onside'. Persuasion is in fact only necessary in situations where people do not already have the institutional power or authority to make their audience think or act a certain way. Three of the language resources which enable writers and speakers to align their audiences in the analytical and hortatory expositions we have included here are evaluative vocabulary, grading and rhetorical devices. Collectively, these resources are known as Appraisal (Martin & White, 2005).

Evaluative vocabulary: expressing and grading attitudes directly and indirectly

Evaluative vocabulary refers to the sets of resources which express positive and negative attitudes (i.e. feelings, judgements and opinions). While feelings are seen to be at the heart of evaluation (Martin and White, 2005, p. 53), direct expressions of emotion (or Affect) in mature persuasion tend to be limited to narrative phases where personal story is used to create empathy. In the following excerpt from Text 3, Rudd (2008) uses Affect (underlined) persuasively to build empathy for Nanna Fejo.

> She remembers the <u>love</u> and the <u>warmth</u> and the <u>kinship</u> of those days long ago.

From a rhetorical perspective, Affect contributes to building an appeal

to 'pathos'. In order to ensure that the audience will be persuaded by the personal experiences of individuals, however, writers and speakers also choose resources of 'institutional' evaluative vocabulary, which judges people's behaviour and personality. In introducing Nanna Fejo, Rudd (2008) chooses a list of positive judgements (underlined) to build a rhetorical appeal of 'ethos' so that the audience is positioned to see her as a credible witness.

> Let me begin to answer by telling the parliament just a little of one person's story – an elegant, eloquent and wonderful woman in her 80s, full of life, full of funny stories, despite what has happened in her life's journey, …

Evaluative vocabulary is also important in analytical expositions. However, the pressure to establish objective and impersonal relationships in this form of persuasion results in a preference for evaluating things rather than people. In the terms of classical and contemporary rhetorical studies, this can be seen as contributing to logical appeals or 'logos'. In Text 1, for example, explicit evaluation is not made of children's behaviour in using mobile phones but of phenomena such as the consequences of the behaviour (e.g. a negative impact …; extensive and coherent sentences; if the radiation is powerful enough …).

As these examples show, mature persuasive writers use evaluative vocabulary from a range of grammatical categories to accumulate positive and negative evaluations. In addition to the adjectives and verbs used to evaluate the feelings of Nanna Fejo and her family, Rudd uses Attitudinal nouns (a form of nominalisation) to connect her story with the more general evaluations of the stolen generation (e.g. The **hurt**, the **humiliation**, the **degradation** and the sheer **brutality** of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep **assault** on our senses and on our most elemental **humanity**). Nominalisation is a powerful strategy for positioning audiences to agree with the writer or speaker's opinion because it presents the evaluation as already agreed upon or shared.

In addition to this explicit evaluative vocabulary, where attitude is inscribed within the wordings, the Australian Curriculum: English recognises the powerful rhetorical role of implicit evaluative expressions, such as, allusion, evocative vocabulary and metaphor. While implicit evaluation brings a degree of subjectivity to the reading, effective readers use devices such as these as signals to 'read in' evaluation. Allusion to shared cultural values and iconic events is particularly evocative as the associated attitudes are typically deeply felt and complex. For example, in referring to Nanna Fejo as 'a woman in her '80s', Rudd establishes the authority of his witness by calling on shared values of respect for age.

As the examples above show, Evaluation can also be invoked or amplified through a range of grammatical resources which are referred to in The Australian Curriculum: English as gradation (Year 2) or more technically

as graduation. Resources for grading meanings include grading adverbials (e.g. terribly), graded core vocabulary (e.g. searing, screams) and indirect graders such as metaphor, listing and punctuation (e.g. capitals, exclamations). The Australian Curriculum: English recognises that these resources typically accumulate across phases of text and interact with extra-linguistic features such as 'pace and tone' (Year 8) to adjust the intensity of emotions and attitudes.

Rhetorical devices: Expanding and contracting resources

Because of their goal of changing the minds or behaviours of the audience, The Australian Curriculum: English recognises that both spoken and written persuasive texts need to show their awareness of the possible positions their listeners or readers may hold – even when they are not immediately present. In this way they establish what the Russian philosopher and semiotician, Mikhail Bakhtin (1953/1986), referred to as a dialogue with the audience, expanding space for other opinions and contracting that space to create consensus. At Year 5 level, students 'understand how to move beyond making bare assertions and take account of differing perspectives and point of view' while at Year 7 they understand 'how evaluations about a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources'. (ACARA, 2012).

While the focus on the content or ideas in analytical expositions means that this form of persuasion appears as impersonal and objective, interaction with the reader through expanding dialogic space is essential. Expanding resources include modality to temper opinions and show the writer or speaker's awareness that even the most authoritative evidence may be questioned. In the following argument from Text 1, the underlined expressions allow for dialogue with those in the audience who support the use of mobile phones.

> It is also possible that use of mobile phones could have an effect on children's ability to think and concentrate.

Modality is also used in hortatory exposition – but this is typically modality of obligation, used to temper appeals and recommendations. The high degree of obligation used in the Appeal stage of the Apology speech (e.g. the parliaments of this nation must make this apology) can be attributed to the urgency of the action Rudd (2008) considers necessary and may also be a response to the solidarity he assumes with a 'like minded' audience.

In addition to straightforward grammatical resources for expressing modality, such as modal verbs (e.g. could, may, must), modality can also be expressed through indirect grammatical resources such as modal adjectives (e.g. responsible), modal nouns, and modal phrases and clauses (e.g. it is possible that.; it is time to.). Indirect expressions are often used to make opinions seem more objective and difficult to argue against and are thus vital for effective persuasion in academic contexts.

Closely related to modality are the expanding resources of attribution. Like debaters and barristers, effective persuasive writers and orators use attribution to strengthen their arguments, both by providing supporting evidence (e.g. allowing witnesses to speak) and by challenging or rebutting alternate positions (e.g. cross-examining witnesses).

While sources in analytical exposition are often generalised (e.g. researchers, evidence) or named only as texts (e.g. Martin & White, 2005), hortatory expositions achieve persuasion by naming particular sources who are highly regarded by the real or imagined audience. In the Apology above for example, Rudd (2008) attributes his appeal to *'a pretty basic Aussie belief'*. Similarly, in his blog, Lewis draws on the authority of high profile politicians as well as the collective global community to rally his audience to action. For example

> There is a global call for an end to poverty. Billions of people are calling for our governments to stand up and face poverty. Colin Powell said that the war on terror will not succeed unless the war on poverty is fought and won.

In both analytical and hortatory expositions, however, the status of sources can also be adjusted through the use of evaluative vocabulary and grading (e.g. **leading** child psychiatrist; **recent** research; **inexperienced** doctor, **billions of** people).

Another rhetorical resource frequently deployed in both analytical and hortatory exposition is concession. Concession involves summarising or referring to an argument which is counter to the position of the writer and then rebutting that argument. This is a strategic device because it appears to open space for other positions and suggests open-mindedness or objectivity – however it is in fact ultimately contracting because the audience is left with the writer's own argument – rebutted on their terms.

> While scientists do not fully understand the effects of performing two different types of tasks at the same time, there is evidence that mobile phone use in children was associated with faster and less accurate responses to certain cognitive tasks

Although space does not allow for a thorough investigation of textual resources, this example shows how the textual resource of grammatical theme contributes to persuasion. Foregrounding the concession in first or theme position is a powerful way of ensuring that the audience is left with the position held by the writer or speaker. The contrasting conjunction 'however', is also used effectively as a textual theme to indicate a shift from expansion to contraction of space.

Rhetorical resources which are more commonly found in hortatory exposition are the more directly contracting resources of comment adverbials (e.g. surely), which intrude the writer's attitude about issues; or rhetorical

questions, which challenge the audience directly to form the opinion directed by the text (e.g. Will you be brave enough? What does all this mean?). These resources work together in hortatory expositions to align audiences around shared values and rally them to action. However, in analytical expositions, they may appear overly subjective and need to be used with care.

Although our discussion of text organisational patterns has been necessarily selective (for a fuller account, see Humphrey, Love & Droga, 2011), understandings of Theme at text, paragraph and sentence level also have a significant role to play in organising persuasive texts cohesively. Teachers often underestimate what is involved for their students as they shift from using the organisational structures of speech to those of the 'written' mode. The evidence is clear (Christie, 2005) that an explicit knowledge of how texts are organised for various audiences at text, paragraph and sentence levels can be empowering for both students and teachers.

Conclusion

Learning to reason persuasively is highly valued in Australia's education systems and civic institutions. We therefore teach our students to construct effective persuasive texts, not simply to demonstrate a particular repertoire of literacy skills, but also so that they can participate fully in social, civic and workplace contexts. Our students' capacity to persuade various audiences and negotiate with more or less powerful institutions is enhanced by their teachers' access to a language toolkit that offers resources at word, sentence and text level. With this multi-layered toolkit, teachers and students can explicitly identify how language is patterned to do its particular persuasive work.

We have illustrated how selected aspects of this toolkit can take teachers beyond identifying discrete structural features in order to explore how powerful persuasive texts use language in two ways simultaneously: to marshal and express convincing ideas; and to engage audiences through deliberate patterned combinations of logos, pathos or ethos (logic, emotion, ethics).

It is these same resources for enabling people to express and exchange knowledge, attitudes, feelings and opinions in well-crafted texts that underpin The Australian Curriculum: English, resources that enables students to construct and read the persuasive texts of their contemporary world, while connecting them to the classic texts of the past in 'dynamic and evolving' ways. The Australian Curriculum: English offers teachers a third set of language systems besides those covered in this paper, those related to how writers or speakers organise their texts to achieve their persuasive purposes most cohesively. For reasons of space we have been unable to touch on this system in this paper.

We have illustrated how a multi-level approach could be used to examine

the ways in which persuasive texts such as a student's written blog and a Prime Minister's Apology Speech draw in patterned ways on selections of language resources to build their persuasive worlds and galvanise social change (see Humphrey, Love & Droga, 2011 for a more extensive modelling). Such a multi-level approach provides a way for teachers to support students in developing a coherent knowledge of spoken and written texts which makes sense of previously unrelated features; and provides a principled structure for their work with argument. It is through a systematic knowledge about the patterns of English usage and grammar at the levels of the word, the sentence and the extended text, and about the connections between these levels that teachers support their students to create and appreciate persuasive texts that truly engage with readers and listeners, that build and develop valued ideas, and that are structured coherently in crafted and considered ways. This multi-level grammatical toolkit is equal to the challenges of subject English the 21st century.

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