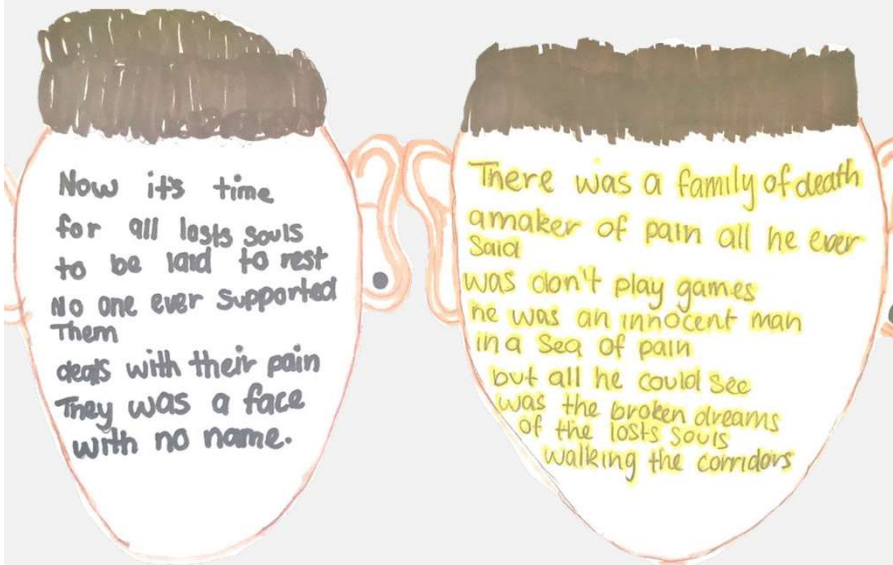


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Is this poem by a 'disengaged, non-writing student' or a student waiting to be empowered?



"Oh my goodness. Wow.

That is very, very deep for a Year 6 student... often disengaged, will do the bare minimum.

That's amazing. Thank you!"

*Rachael Cross,
Assistant Principal,
Bourke Public School*

Bringing purpose to writing

Is it possible in 1 day, in 1 town, in 1 school to connect a community to transform students' writing?

This case study tells the story of:

- the power of writing with purpose,
- the power of being an author and
- the power of identifying an audience.

The 'Secret Places of Bourke' is the story of the town through the eyes of Bourke Public School students. We found extraordinary writers in the classrooms, and a town who said "yes" to Pencil Up!



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Context

Following the 'Beach to Bush' initiative in Term 3, where 200 students across 4 schools wrote, published and shared their own life story, Rachael Cross, Assistant Principal and Year 5 and 6 teacher, initiated discussions with the LittleScribe team.

The teachers identified that in general, their students:

- were disengaged with writing
- had low self-efficacy
- had inconsistent school attendance
- had a diverse range of learning needs
- demonstrated achievement below expected levels in literacy

After receiving their printed books, and seeing their writing take on purpose, the students had demonstrated an interest in creating their own calendars, and the teachers wanted to harness this desire to write.

"All the students in all the 3 classes were very keen on the calendars the most and they were really interested in making something they could take home or share with their family and community. There was a lot of talk."

Rachael Cross, Bourke PS

The project

Aims of the project:

- Improve use of descriptive vocabulary
- Increase engagement and participation
- Improve independent writing skills
- Create a community text- texts that children engage with everyday
- Engage students to write for purpose
- Engage the community in making a commitment to reading children's writing
- Create a collaborative calendar of poems about a favourite place in Bourke

School:

Location:

School Type:

Enrolments:

Motto:

School vision:

Bourke Public School
Bourke, NSW, Australia
Rural & Remote
Approx. 230 K-6
Strive to Achieve
To provide the best education for all students

School background

Bourke Public School was erected in 1975. It is located in North West NSW on the banks of the Darling River. It's approximately 772km from Sydney and 930km from Brisbane.

Bourke Public School has around 230 students, 83% of whom are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. The school Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) is 164. A higher FOEI gives a greater level of funding from the NSW Department of Education.

Bourke Public School has an active Parents and Citizens committee (P&C) and Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) who both work in partnership with the school, supporting them through fundraising, consultation and support.

Bourke Public School has a focus on literacy, numeracy and technology in the 21st century to enhance students' knowledge and skills. The school endeavours to ensure students have a healthy lifestyle by providing opportunities to engage in a variety of sporting activities and kitchen and garden lessons which develop skills-based learning which extends across the entire curriculum.



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What happened?

Prior to the session, the students were led through a brainstorming activity, where they collected vocabulary and ideas for their writing.

The power of questions

The session started with the whole group being asked, 'Who reads your writing?' with the response being, "our teacher", "nobody" and occasionally "mum and dad". "Who would you WANT to read your writing?"

This is where they got creative, excited, and a little 'Megabonkeramus'! Responses included the police, the bakery, footballers, movie stars and the Royal family!

So, the challenge was set... every student had to commit to doing their 'best' writing, and we would go out to the community of Bourke to find them a real audience for their work.

Set up for success

The lesson for the first group was carefully scaffolded, as these students required a greater level of support. They brainstormed vocabulary they could use in their writing which reflected their experiences and feelings about the town of Bourke, then cut up their writing into individual words and phrases. It was then modelled how to reconstruct their writing into a poem.

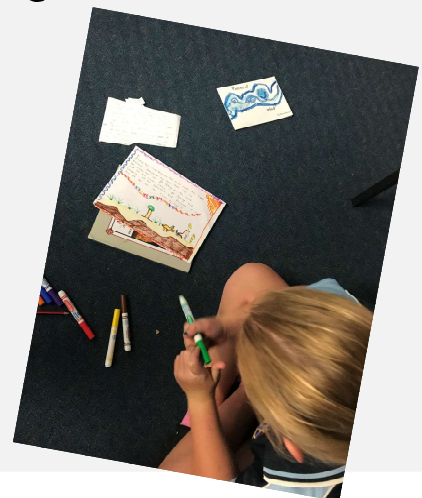
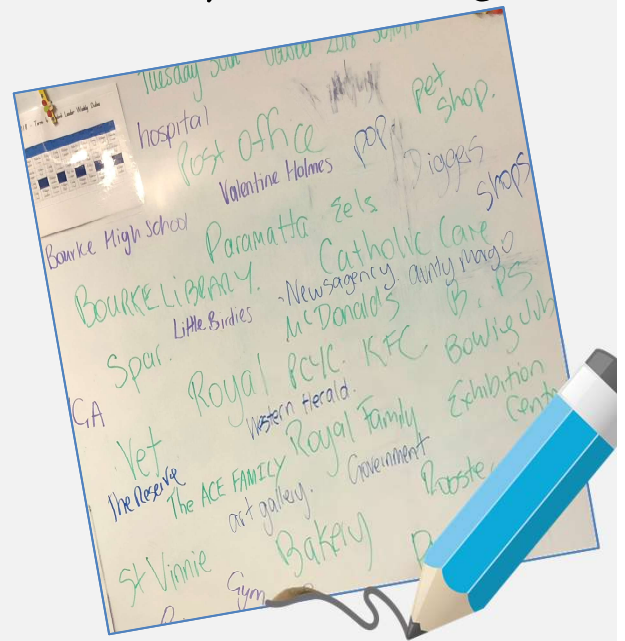
This was a challenge for some students who had not engaged in a technique like this before, but it was largely successful because it eliminated the need for redrafting and rewriting work for those students who lack skills and/or confidence in writing. It gave students permission to change the 'rules' of writing, and rather than experiencing 'failure', they could take control of their own work. With the smaller pieces of written work students were able to experiment with the visual layout of their work.

The power of 3 questions

1. Who reads your writing?

2. Who would you like to read your writing?

3. What form will your writing take?



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Positive association with writing

Using the visual part of their brain allowed for a higher level of competency when engaging with written words, and the literary part of the brain could be developed. These students have already experienced success in drawing and creating artwork, so this was used to build a positive association with writing.

"Drawing is not just about representation, it's about thinking. Trying to understand what you are looking at... The brain sends a signal to the hand and the hand sends one back and there is an endless conversation between them." (Milton Glaser, 2008)
Source: Glaser, M. & Thurman, J. (2008). Drawing is thinking. New York, USA: Overlook Press.

The lesson with the second group differed from the first based on more able and independent students, and some in-depth preparation work that had been done. Students had a bank of rich vocabulary and conceptual understanding on which to build on in this lesson.

Modelled writing

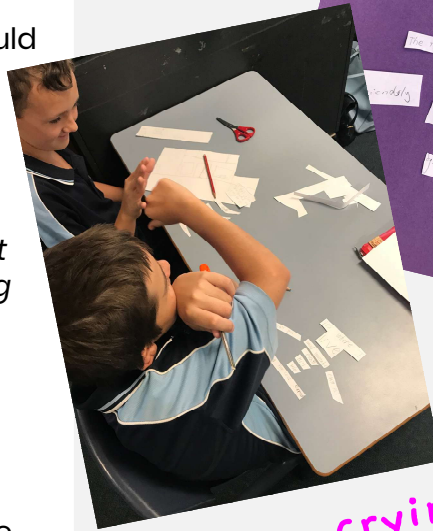
One of the student's brainstorms was used to model 'thinking out loud' and how to transform a mind-map into a short poem. The students participated by offering ideas and responses and together co-wrote a short poem about the cemetery, which was one of the topics chosen by the students.

Raise expectations

They were challenged to extend their vocabulary and edit and refine the short poem by using synonyms for certain words. The students worked largely independently to complete their poems, using their prepared mind maps.

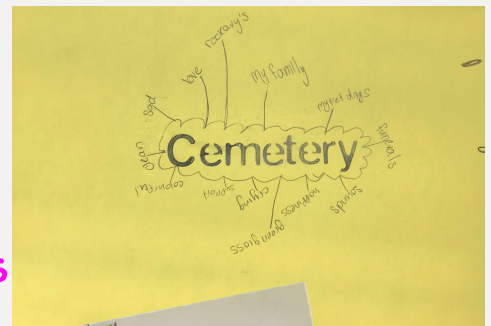
Power of children's writing as examples

Both groups viewed examples from the LittleScribe! library to challenge them to integrate writing with visual elements. This gave the students the confidence to explore and experiment with the layout and design of their work.

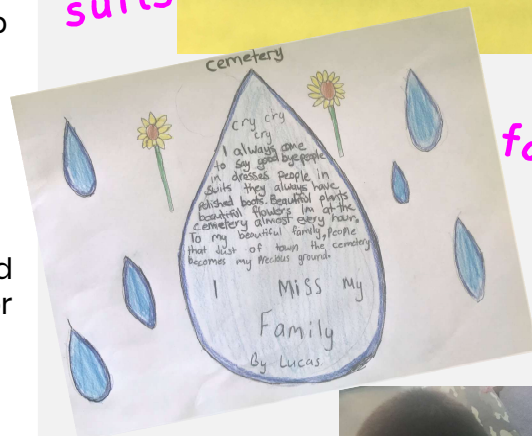


beautiful

crying

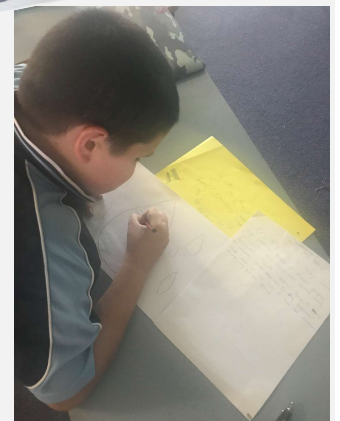


suits



family

flowers



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Empowerment – Your writing, your rules!

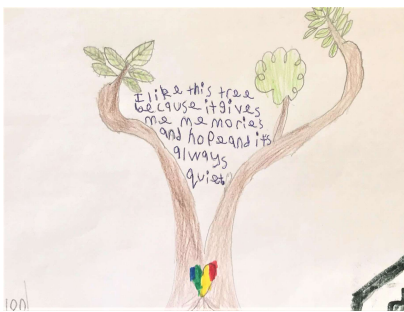
The idea that they are the authors and the decision makers about their own writing was something that was new to the students, and very engaging.

Every single student involved in the day wrote a poem about their favourite place in Bourke, and presented it as a page for a collaborative calendar. They were all engaged and did their 'best work'.

Meanwhile, countless commitments were made throughout the day: from the local news outlet, the council, the PCYC, Bourke library and a whole range of local businesses. The local council agreed to commission the work of the children. There was not one business or community group in the whole of Bourke who said no to 'Penciling Up' and getting behind the students' writing.

"I wasn't sure how children would go writing complete off the cusp, but I was really surprised. All the children were really engaged. Everyone completed quality work.
Rachael Cross, Bourke PS

Seeing the students' work for the first time...



*Year 6 student,
Bourke PS*

"For this particular student this means a lot to me because on a generally basis he is disengaged, not willing to write. So, to get a beautiful poem onto a piece of paper that is beautifully illustrated is very special to me.... it is not just words on a page. He thought about it. It is deep and has meaning."

Outcomes of the project



- ✓ Rachael stated that the calendar about Bourke 'fits in nicely' with the curriculum aims for the term of community texts
- ✓ High level of engagement from students. "These two students have not stayed in the classroom for a 2-hour session all year, and today they have stayed and produced some quality work." Rachael
- ✓ Students working independently and collaboratively to produce their texts
- ✓ Highly creative pieces of writing from often disengaged and unwilling writers
- ✓ Students became authors. They had control over their poem
- ✓ The community was highly engaged in supporting student writing and committed to reading and displaying the calendars
- ✓ Teachers interested in having some of the poetry turned into posters and cards to allow for celebration of Micro Moments of writing
- ✓ Teacher reflection on different writing practices to engage a range of students by using more hands-on and tactile methods



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Genuine amazement at what they achieved



Year 6 student,
Bourke PS

"This student is often unwilling to engage when their teacher is away... often not willing to participate most other times. For her to sit down and come up with some poetry is a really wonderful thing."

What made the difference?

"I think definitely for me I could target a few kids... instead of having a piece of paper or a book for planning and off they go, I will be more open now to target the kids that are bit more tactile... like we did today with their adjectives and use scissors and cut it out and move it around and play with words."
Rachael Cross, Bourke PS

At Brewarrina Central School, we used the LittleScribe! writing process and effective methods and techniques to engage a Year 6 class in the writing of their own, original 12-page book. The results are inspiring.

So, what is possible in just 1 day?

Well, 60 disengaged, disadvantaged, under-achieving kids can do their 'best' writing and each write their own, original poem about their favourite place in Bourke.

Those 60 kids can also present their writing to form part of a collaborative calendar, that will be commissioned and sold by Bourke Council, and displayed in every business and community building in the town of Bourke.

Their work will take pride of place on their bedroom wall for the whole of 2019. The calendar will allow each child to practice the Micro Moments of writing, every time they write on family birthdays, plan their week or term and record important dates.

Those same 60 kids now have an audience for their writing. Their work will be revered, respected and read. It will take on a true purpose.

Now, it's time to work on making a new normal, where all of us, including footballers, movie stars and the Royal family read our kids' writing...

Register Here

For 2019 Teacher Resources.

Includes LittleScribe writing process, reference books, videos, curriculum links and classroom resources.

A complete package.



littleScribe