

These national newsletters are produced by the **Secondary Student Achievement** national facilitation team, as part of supplementary PLD support for schools, from the University of Auckland and Mau ki te Ako project partners (University of Canterbury, University of Otago and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu).

National Newsletter: English

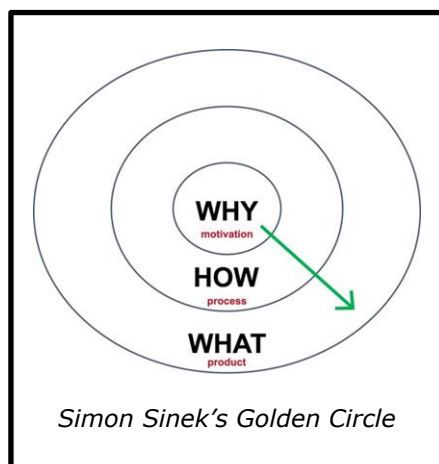
Information and resources for middle leaders in secondary schools | Term 1 2016

Kia ora tātou

Welcome back for 2016. This term's newsletter has a focus on the IDEAS achievement objective. It's something we will be talking about a lot this year. We hope the newsletter will be of use as you begin your planning for 2016.

Why are we doing this, Miss?

One of the most soul-destroying questions I've been asked in the classroom, delivered in a bored or challenging tone is, 'Why are we even doing this?' The instinctive response, "Because I told you to - now get on with it!" is seldom helpful. This early stage of the year is a good time to remind ourselves that some students don't really get English. It can be difficult to engage learners who think English is simply about reading and writing in a language they already know. Leadership expert Simon Sinek talks about starting with the 'why' rather than the 'what'. His 'golden circle' is well known and while it is often applied to business, it also makes sense in the classroom. Engaging learners with the broad concepts at the heart of our learning area is one way to encourage greater motivation.



The Secondary Learning Guides on the TKI website identify **story**, **identity**, **communication** and **meaning** as the key concepts in the subject of English. It is easy for us to see how these big ideas are linked and how they underpin all that we typically do in the English classroom. Is this also clear to our learners? Creating opportunities for students to engage with the richness and significance of these ideas will help them to understand why English is such an important subject at high school. It is about so much more than books, movies and essays.

Let's consider **story**, for example. At first glance, it appears to be a straightforward idea, but your students might be surprised to find that the Oxford Online Dictionary's entry for story stretches to 18 pages (and that doesn't even include reference to the fashion context Kelly Osbourne was getting at when she had 'stories' tattooed on the side of her head). Consider the multiple uses of the word. How is a tall story different from a news story? What's the difference between a traditional story and a fairy story? Your students may never before have thought about why, throughout the ages, people have always told stories. Are stories more important in some cultures than others? Do your students know their own stories?

Sinek claims that 'people don't buy what you do. They buy why you do it'. These four key concepts offer a way that we might sell our subject to our students, help them get to the heart of it, and get some real buy-in.

2016 free National Workshops – enrol now

The focus of this year's national workshops will be on **the importance of IDEAS in English (NZC Levels 6-8)**.

This workshop will explore the centrality of the Ideas Achievement Objective to student achievement and engagement, especially in the Creating Meaning strand of the curriculum, and the external standards. The workshops are free. Morning tea is provided. BYO lunch.

Northern and Central North workshops

To enrol, click on the link below (which is the underlined location).

Auckland: 9 May

Northland (Whangarei): 11 May

Far North (Kerikeri): 13 May

East Coast (Gisborne): 13 May

Waikato (Hamilton): 18 May

Bay of Plenty (Rotorua): 19 May

Hawkes Bay (Napier): 23 May

Enquiries to c.orr@auckland.ac.nz

Central South and Southern workshops

[Click here to enrol](#)

Wellington: 11 May

Invercargill: 16 May

Dunedin: 18 May

Christchurch: 20 May

Palmerston North: 24 May

New Plymouth: 26 May

Enquiries to essadmin@otago.ac.nz

Reading unfamiliar texts – it's what we do

Just at this moment, this text is unfamiliar to you. You'll also have decided, by the end of this sentence, whether or not you want to read on. So far it's not threatening. Or earth shattering. You're not required to discuss the effect of that minor sentence, or worry about whether 'earth shattering' is hyperbole or metaphor. Your prior knowledge and grasp of idiom will help you to infer what it's attempting to imply, and you'll be shaping an idea of where the text might be going.

All the texts we give students to read, in any subject for that matter, are unfamiliar at first. The very point at which they begin to make sense of that text is the step which, 'makes or foredoes [us] quite.' It is the very engine of English teaching and learning: the point at which the prior knowledge and experience of the learner strike the text like a match on the side of the box. Sense is made by the reader, not by the text. All students make some sense of any text, even when they deny it. If that flash point can be given oxygen, then the reader will develop confidence.

Reading is, as Greenleaf, Schoenbach and Murphy tell us, a complex problem solving process, and students are, 'individuals who bring powerful resources that can be tapped in a learning environment that is safe, respectful and collaborative.' (Greenleaf, C., Schoenbach, R. & Murphy, L., 2012.)

They go on to remind us that 'skills-in-a-box solutions' are not effective as they:

.... feature discrete skills practice and decontextualized reading of short paragraphs or passages...," and, "... fail to help students gain the kind of deeper comprehension skills and practice that are needed for high-level literacy demands. (Ibid.)

Every year, fewer students are entered for the Unfamiliar Text external standard than the other two, and many who do attempt it rely on learned acronyms and structures, showing little evidence of actual engagement with the text and therefore seldom getting more than Achieved. (See the [2014 Assessment Report](#)).

Rebecca Feerick, at Hutt Valley High School, has a student-centered approach to the teaching of Unfamiliar Text, which she has kindly agreed to share [here](#). It works by letting the students build their understanding of the text by finding patterns and sharing and discussing them. Through this process, the unfamiliar becomes familiar and the students develop a positive self-concept as readers. Here it is in a nutshell. Click on the above link for more detail and exemplars.

Unfamiliar text: word grouping

Word grouping:

- Start by circling and linking words or short phrases that seem to you to go together in some way.
- When you have done this, write out the groups of words on your page and give the group as specific a title as you can manage.
- The idea is that you will begin to find a way in to a poem or passage. You will see patterns and cohesion within the text and gradually be able to make meaning.
- You will also have obvious points of discussion for your unfamiliar questions – vocab choices/lexical choices, tone, contrast etc.
- This approach works well from Level One to Scholarship.

References

Greenleaf, C., Schoenbach, R., & Murphy, L., (2012) *Reading for understanding* San Francisco, Josey Bass.

Useful links

Video resources

The National Co-ordinators are developing a range of short videos to support teachers. To access the videos go to:

[Information literacy standard](#)

[Purpose and Audience](#)

[Assessing connections](#)

Index of previous newsletters

All [newsletters](#) are archived on TKI.

Previous newsletters included:

2012

Term 3: a discussion on information literacy; a "how to find" guide for key documents on the NZQA and TKI websites.

2013

Term 1: Using portfolios to improve writing; literacy in English.

Term 2: Thoughts about AS 91479.

Term 3: An inquiry approach to preparation for externals.

Term 4: Unpacking the Create Visual Texts standards at all levels.

2014

Term 1: Analysing your NCEA data; supporting reading.

Term 2: Ka Hikitia and effective teaching for Pasifika learners; preparing students for scholarship; encouraging personal reading.

Term 4: Reviewing your curriculum; unpacking the external essay based assessments.

2015

Term 1: Knowing your learners.

Term 2: SEN and inclusion; encouraging Māori student voice in our English classes: the information literacy standards at Levels 1-2.

Term 3: 21st Century learning.

Term 4: Valid assessment – equality vs equity; unpacking external standards; unpacking internal standards.

English Online

<http://englishonline.tki.org.nz/>

ESOL Online

<http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/>

Literacy Online

<http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/>

Choosing the 'magic' text

One of the things teachers are often looking for is the "magic text", the new, great book that will engage all the readers in the class at the appropriate level and has everything in it to allow students to achieve success at all levels in the external exam. Well, this piece is not about that book, although hopefully it will provide you with some important things to consider in relation to the texts you choose, or perhaps have already chosen, for your classes this year so that those texts can be magical for your students.

The most valuable resource that you have when it comes to choosing and teaching a text is the students themselves. All texts provide us with the opportunity to consider social interactions, history, universal themes/truths, ethical questions, cultures and world views, people and places and literary genres - and all students have knowledge and understandings about these things in relation to their life and experiences. Finding ways to make the connections between the students' understanding and the text is when the magic happens.

Identity

Through English, people learn about and celebrate who they are, where they come from, and where they're going. English helps people connect with their communities and to appreciate and participate in them.

Everything we do in the classroom either validates or undermines students' growing sense of identity. We have a shared responsibility for the impact we have on the forming of each other's identities.

The culture of the child cannot enter the classroom until it has entered the consciousness of the teacher.

Basil Bernstein

(English Senior Teaching and Learning Guide
<http://seniorsecondary.tki.org.nz/English>)

One way to do this is to find out about the students' prior reading experiences, interests, other subjects, hobbies, sports, family and culture, and then look for texts that reflect the students' lives and self concepts. There might be enough commonality within your class to make these connections by studying one class text, by studying together a variety of texts or by offering a range of texts, from the which the students choose for themselves. Even these texts - chosen because it is set in our city, is about a boy who likes to surf just like the boys in my class, or has a strong female protagonist struggling with the relationship with her parents as many of my girls are, should do more than clarify the known for students, it should also illuminate the unknown.

It is also possible to put the students at the centre of a text chosen by you because of its wider literary worth. The crucial thing is helping the students to understand that what they are learning is not abstract and that it is personal to them.

For example, while we might struggle to accept Othello's stupidity in being duped by Iago, there are times when we may have felt like an outsider and have taken advice from people who did not have our best interests at heart, in the hope that we might fit in. In going beyond the text to think about our own experiences, we will also be better placed to build empathy for the characters in the text and their situation.

With either approach it is essential to validate students' ideas and to be interested in where those ideas might have come from.

That's when the magic will happen.

What's new?



NZQA on FB

To keep up to date with any changes and development you can follow English NZQA on Facebook.



NZATE 2016 conference: re:generation

This year's NZATE conference will be hosted in Christchurch / Otautahi and take place on Wednesday 13th to Friday 15th July.

For more information visit the conference website:

<http://nzateconference.co.nz>



Recent national reports from ERO

- [Accelerating student achievement: a resource for schools \(December 2015\)](#)
- [Raising student achievement through targeted actions \(December 2015\)](#)
- [Internal evaluation: good practice \(November 2015\)*](#)
- [Educationally powerful connections with parents and whānau \(November 2015\)*](#)
- [Secondary-Tertiary Programmes \(Trades Academies\): What works and next steps \(June 2015\)*](#)

A calendar for middle leaders

Term 1

- Achievement specifications for external standards are published.
- Any changes to achievement standards are signaled through the NZQA Facebook page and a change to the version number on the standard.
- NZATE (and regional subject association) annual membership renewal.
- School 2015 NCEA data is available for analysis
- Look for professional learning opportunities for staff (NZQA Best Practice workshops; courses in the local area etc.)
- Checkpoint for achievement: is each student in each class/course on track to achieve?

Term 2

- Our SSA (Secondary Student Achievement) national workshops are on offer across the country.
- National achievement data is published.
- Examiner's reports for external standards are published.
- Checkpoint for achievement: is each student in each class/course on track to achieve?
- Plan school-based practice exams (if offered in your school). There are companies that produce these or you can develop your own.
- NZATE national conference, week 1 of the holidays.

Term 3

- Finalising entries for NCEA externally assessed standards.
- Checkpoint for achievement: is each student in each class/course on track to achieve?

Term 4

- Big Days Out – one day mini-conferences are run by regional subject associations across the country.
- Request department PLD time to review this year's programmes and to plan any changes for next year.

For more information about middle leadership practice go to:

<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Secondary-middle-leaders>

This year Tania Linley-Richardson will be returning to our SSA contract as an English Facilitator with Team Solutions in the Northern region. This will be a part-time 0.5 position combining with Tania's work in the Starpath Project. It will be fantastic having Tania working with us again and we know that her Starpath literacy work will be hugely beneficial and will be an important contribution to our work.

If you need to contact Tania, or any of the team, our details are in the side bar to the right on this page.

Did you know?

RSS (Rich Site Summary) is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. RSS allows you to easily stay informed by retrieving the latest content from the sites you are interested in, who regularly changes their content etc. You save time by not needing to visit each site individually and it ensures your privacy by not needing to join each site's email newsletter.

Feed Reader software allows you to grab the RSS feeds from various sites and display them for you to read and use. Add a Feed Reader app to [Chrome](#), [Firefox](#), [Explorer](#), or [Safari](#) or any browser you use. Once you have your Feed Reader add sites, such as TKI, to the list, your Feed Reader checks to easily stay up to date with new material.

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All schools should receive both a digital and hard copy of this newsletter. Newsletters can also be accessed through the [Secondary middle leaders](#) portal on TKI.

If you are aware of anyone whom you think would benefit from receiving it (particularly any new heads of department in your area) we would appreciate hearing from you.

Suggestions for improvements and possible content for future newsletters are welcome.