

Shaping resources to support the Australian Curriculum

By Deborah Cohen

The Australian Curriculum, through ACARA, will designate areas of study and content for teachers in all state and territories. The direction of these curriculums will be new to teachers and take some time to be adopted. New resources are needed to support teachers with implementation of the new curriculum. An important aspect of 21st century teaching resources is that they are multi-platform, accessible and interactive, offering components that can be delivered directly to students and be highly usable with interactive white boards, online and other digital technologies. They should allow for both passive and active content with scope for students to adapt models for their own learning.

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum paper(s) clearly state that the national curriculum will be the basis of planning, teaching and assessment in Australian schools and will guide the work of teachers. While the curriculum will guide the development of school-based curriculum planning and will frame assessment and reporting, the missing link is the pedagogical support that teachers require in order to implement these documents. Since ACARA will not produce teaching resources to support curriculum elaborations, it will be the responsibility of the state and territory education jurisdictions as well as the independent publishing sector to provide aligned resources. It is through these approaches that cultural change and acceptance will happen.

The development of these resources is important to address not only curriculum objectives but also provide a link to multimodal and digital formats required for 21st century classrooms. Information discovery and delivery is changing and, with the introduction of and uptake of interactive white boards and laptop access, what teachers and students need is ease of access to free digital downloadable material that is aligned explicitly with the Australian curriculum expectations.

The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) has been working with different partners to develop digital learning resources that are uniquely Australian, use digital clip formats with suggested teaching activities, engage students with multimedia, support all disciplines and are aligned directly with the topics and pedagogical frameworks for current curriculums. But that's not all (*you get six steak knives as well!*), the ACTF also promotes digital authoring by students to synthesise and apply their knowledge and understanding into a 'new package' as a digital response. This can be shared (virtually or print-based) and delivered as part of their personal (e) portfolio. Students spend 80-90% of their research time online. In the process they have developed new research tactics to engage with web information. But what they get online is still highly text-based. A major consideration for this generation of students (and young teachers) is visual multi-media, not only to engage but also to entertain. Without the entertainment factor the level of engagement is low.

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Professor Len Unsworth (UNE) in his paper *Negotiating New Literacies in Literacy Learning and Teaching*, 2008, states that we live in a digital multi-media age for which new skills and strategies are required. There is now a

dynamic integrative relationship between new literacies and traditional literacies which changes the whole continuum. We have to grasp that because the use of new literacies generates innovation, literacies from now on will be constantly changing.

Students today are also very savvy at media creation. They use digital technologies every day and upload 'snippets' of their life to share through their personal FaceBook pages or YouTube, among other sites. The English Shaping paper clearly outlines in 'creating' the production of multimodal texts. This indicates a specific mode of communication and a valid strategy across all three strands, Literature, Language and Literacy. What may be daunting for teachers is how to authentically use digital authoring to gain information about student achievement. Are teachers sufficiently expert in digital authoring to embed it into their programs and effectively assess the production of items against curriculum objectives/outcomes.

ACTF is currently involved with an ARC Linkage Partnership lead by Professor Unsworth and Dr Anglela Thomas (USyd.) to produce a pedagogical framework for digital authoring and a valid standards rubric for assessment. It has been found that while students are quick to use digital authoring software and become skillful in the applied processes, very few students apply an aesthetic intelligence to discern which elements of creation are the most effective in communicating meaning. The research is finding that students need to be introduced to digital materials very early in their schooling to be proficient producers and consumers later on.

It is imperative that teachers engage students with digital media both through creating and critical visual literacy. The web resources recently developed by ACTF and partners clearly address the scope of the new Australian curriculums for English and History. As an example, *Screen Asia* (www.actf.com.au) was a partnership between the Asia Education Foundation, Screen Australia Digital Learning and the ACTF. The free web resource supports Asia literacy with 20 film clips (live action, documentary and animation) and teaching strategies linked to selected outcomes and objectives from the Asia Scope and Sequences for English, SOSE and the Arts, published by the Asia Education Foundation. Within the 20 digital resources are four Kahootz animations as examples of digital responses to common curriculum themes for studies of Asia. The Xpressions feature children as background audio speaking in Asian languages to enhance the animations: *Japanese Seasons*, *The Journey* (Vietnamese), *Quiet Night: Remembering* (Chinese), *The Message* (Indian).

Double Trouble is another source of strong digital content developed by NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) and the ACTF. The series *Double Trouble* is a light-hearted comedy drama about identical Indigenous twins, separated at birth to circumvent an old tradition. One lives in a central Australian desert and one in Sydney. One day they find themselves face to face and that meeting changes their lives. The web resource provides 45 digital film clips aligned to teaching strategies that address English, Visual Arts, HPE (personal development), Music, Drama and Dance. It is a rich resource that addresses significant Indigenous perspectives within each discipline as well as the thematic organisation of materials by Self, Family, Place and World. NSW DET worked with three Sydney schools to develop the teaching content for a secondary Curriculum Outcomes Group (COG).

A third web resource available from March 2010 is *My Place for Teachers*. The ACTF is developing this resource with The Le@rning Federation (TLF) to support the release of the Australian curriculums for both English and History. *My Place* was originally a children's book written by Nadia Wheatley and illustrated by Donna Rawlins to celebrate Australia's Bicentenary. The ABC will screen the *My Place* TV on ABC3 in December 2009 and on ABC1 at 7.30pm from 28 February 2010. It is at this time that the TLF and ACTF will launch a website for teachers. The website offers 39 digital clips extracted from the series, with aligned teaching resources and a Decade Timeline with relevant historical, social and cultural information that underpins the stories and the content of Australian life in each decade. The teaching activities showcase ideas for Years 3-6 and beyond.

The use of a TV series to introduce key topics for English and History isn't new but the use of Web 2.0 tools means that there is also space for teachers to upload their own ideas on how to use the series, the book and the resources and upload stories from their own students. They will also have the capacity to share their strategies with other teachers through an online forum. The website and the TV series is a celebration of Australian diversity, thus the website will provide passive and interactive opportunities for teachers to engage their students.

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