



Educational Rationale

This paper has been written for teachers, parents and carers as a guide to the educational purpose and basis for the development of the *WordFlyers* website. The teaching and learning of the English language and literacy is a matter of pressing concern to Australian educators in Australian educational contexts. *WordFlyers* addresses the specifications of the Australian Curriculum: English, which has a clear emphasis on the teaching and learning of a wide range of language and literacy skills. This paper discusses the pedagogic principles and research underlying the development of the resource, with particular reference to the explicit teaching of skills and the use of scaffolding to support student learning. It shows how the unifying theme of travel provides students with an engaging, 'real-world' environment that increases the likelihood of transfer of skills to other areas of learning and activities beyond school.

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1.0 Introduction

WordFlyers is an innovative literacy teaching and learning resource designed for use with students in Years 7 to 10. Built around a unifying theme of travel, the resource has been constructed to appeal to a range of student interests, with sub-themes and topics such as adventure, sport and identity developed in a mature, 'real-world' manner. The curriculum content of the resource is derived from the Australian Curriculum: English, specifically the Language and Literacy strands but also, to a lesser extent, the Literature strand. *WordFlyers* comprises Australian content for Australian schools, with topics and texts that reflect Australian students' experiences of the world and provide connections with local, national and global communities.

The core of *WordFlyers* consists of units of lessons developed around 128 high-interest, real-world texts created by professional writers on a variety of topics and issues. These texts are relatively short and encompass imaginative, informative and persuasive contexts and text types (e.g. Narrative, Report and Discussion). A variety of text forms is represented within these text types, including traditional and contemporary forms such as short stories, web articles and online discussion threads. There are also high levels of variability in the design elements of the texts, including multimedia presentations and texts with strong visual and aural elements. Each text is the focus of a unit of lessons exploring selected aspects of punctuation, vocabulary, spelling, grammar, reading comprehension, writing skills and understandings in context.

As well as the texts and lessons, *WordFlyers* comprises layers of rewards including quizzes, immediate feedback on student learning and opportunities for social interaction to promote student engagement with content and activities. The resource also includes NAPLAN*-style sets of questions based on each text or lesson unit that provide further feedback for both teachers and students on learning achievements. Teachers and students can also make choices about learning pathways within *WordFlyers*, within or across the year-level organisation within the resource.

WordFlyers is dedicated to building high levels of literacy and language skills and understanding within the English curriculum but also functions as a basis for learning across the curriculum and meeting the challenges associated with living and working in a complex social world. The texts and lessons are designed to scaffold successful learning of language and literacy skills, with multiple opportunities for repeated readings of texts; opportunities for practice and consolidation of learning; and deliberate links with real-world topics and issues. The resource enables a significant level of curriculum differentiation, based on learners' skills and abilities, interests or prior knowledge. With its focus on explicit teaching, the resource is also designed to support 'learning about learning' and the development of metalanguage related to English language and literacy practices. These and other underpinning principles of the resource are discussed in the sections that follow.

2.0 English language and literacy teaching and learning as a curriculum priority in Years 7 to 10

In broad terms, the teaching and learning of English language and literacy is a significant priority in the junior secondary school years. This is a period of intense curriculum specialisation, with students being challenged to move from everyday to technical vocabulary and from spoken to written grammatical structures in every subject area. In the short term, the development of more specialised and academic language and literacy skills in Years 7, 8 and 9 enables students' achievement throughout their secondary school years; in the longer term, it contributes to the development of individuals who are prepared to meet the demands of living and working in increasingly complex social, economic and political contexts.

For Australian educators, this is a pressing concern. As the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) have shown over the last decade, the literacy levels of Australian 15-year-olds have been declining with respect to their peers in other high performing OECD countries, especially in terms of their reading literacy (ACER, 2010; 2013). This decline is evident across the full range of students involved in these studies,



showing correlations with gender and socio-economic status. However, the most significant decline appears to be primarily among high-achieving students, with Australia's best students falling behind their peers in other countries. This alone would suggest that Australian schools need to address the issue of literacy teaching and learning more productively before the gap widens further and our 15-year-olds become less prepared than their international peers to fulfil their educational potential.

At a more specific level, the explicit teaching of the grammar of English has been identified as a key curriculum priority in the junior secondary school years. The teaching of grammar in schools has been the subject of much debate, at least in Australian educational contexts, since the late 1980s, with genre theorists such as Francis Christie and Beverly Derewianka developing and supporting the implementation of many curriculum innovations related to this area of the English curriculum. The Australian Curriculum: English, with its clear emphasis on the teaching and learning of a wide range of language and literacy skills, including grammar, is the most recent acknowledgement of this priority for secondary schools.

Associated with this renewed commitment to the teaching and learning of language and literacy in secondary schools is the recognition that today's students, like no others before them, need to learn about language in context. The school curriculum is crowded, the information available to individuals is extensive, and the demands to use language for a myriad of social, economic and political purposes are complex. Students in the 21st century need to learn how language and literacy work, in real contexts of use, rather than learning isolated skills or rules. Learning about language and literacy as these systems are used to convey and respond to meanings in authentic texts and social contexts, supports students' lifelong learning. It also enhances their engagement in school-related contexts, creating optimum conditions for significant and personalised learning.

WordFlyers represents a deliberate, systematic and dynamic response to these priorities in the teaching and learning of language and literacy in the junior secondary school years. Above all, the resource is designed to support teachers and learners in this key area of the curriculum by providing high-quality, engaging and relevant materials that can be used in Years 7 to 10 classrooms. It also offers teachers and learners access to carefully developed but flexible instructional sequences based on the use and study of real-world texts, in ways that engage and reward learners for their active participation in the language and literacy curriculum. These design guidelines are described in the section that follows.

3.0 Design guidelines in WordFlyers

3.1 Meeting the demands of a mandated curriculum

WordFlyers has been designed to address the content specifications of the Australian Curriculum: English for Years 7 to 10, across the Language, Literacy and Literature strands. Particular emphasis is placed on the Language and Literacy strands within the resource, with units of study incorporating opportunities for students to engage with and achieve the full range of learning outcomes identified within these strands at Years 7 to 10. The resource also provides students with opportunities to engage with a smaller number of key learning outcomes within the Literature strand. With respect to the Language strand, *WordFlyers* texts, units and individual lessons address content from the sub-strands of Language variation and change, Text structure and organisation and Expressing and developing ideas. In addressing the Literacy strand, *WordFlyers* places a central focus on the sub-strands of Texts in context and Interpreting, analysing and evaluating. In terms of the Literature strand, *WordFlyers* provides students with opportunities to engage with learning outcomes from the sub-strands of Literature in context, Responding to literature and Examining literature.



In keeping with the intentions of the Australian Curriculum: English, the units of study within *WordFlyers* are based on the view that learning within the three strands needs to be inter-related, sequential in scope, text-based and related to both school and community contexts. The texts, units of study and individual lessons in *WordFlyers* also reflect the shift in focus that is evident with the Australian Curriculum: English from Years 7 to 10: from learning language and literacy skills in the first years of the secondary curriculum to using these skills to learn in the more senior years.

In addition, key content specifications from the Language and Literacy strands associated with the primary years are addressed in the Review levels (Review 7, Review 8, Review 9 and Review 10) and Level 7.1, to ensure that this resource can be used to meet the needs of a wide range of Year 7 students in their first year of secondary schooling and by older students who need to revisit primary years content.

The content specifications as described above were mapped into a Content Matrix as one of the first steps in the development of the teaching and learning component of *WordFlyers*. The Content Matrix was then used to generate text and lesson structures and sequences and assessment tasks across the levels of the resource. This was done to ensure that *WordFlyers* represents a systematic resource for meeting the teaching and learning demands of the Australian Curriculum: English, especially within its Language and Literacy strands.

3.2 Explicit teaching and the development of metalanguage

WordFlyers is based on a commitment to explicit teaching of key skills and understandings required for success in the study and use of texts in the English classroom and beyond. All lessons within the resource are designed to present students with a clear and unambiguous explanation of the lesson focus; several 'fail-proof' opportunities to review their new learning; and additional activities where their learning is consolidated. For example, each lesson in the resource includes a Tutorial where the lesson focus is identified and explained (e.g. the language features of Discussions). This is always followed by a series of Show Activities involving three 'true' or 'false' questions where the student is required to respond to statements that repeat or represent information from the Tutorial in slightly different but highly accessible ways (e.g. Discussions typically contain words and phrases that express a positive or negative judgement about some aspect of an issue). Finally, students are presented with a series of Lesson Activities which allow them to apply the lesson content in ways that reinforce and consolidate their learning. The Lesson Activities include multiple-choice questions, matching-items activities and drag-and-drop tasks. Students receive immediate feedback about the accuracy of their responses, with opportunities to review the Tutorial or Text or repeat the Lesson Activities.

The units in the *WordFlyers* Review levels feature tutorials and lesson activities that have been refined to further assist students who are struggling to develop their literacy skills. This includes shorter tutorials that focus on just one area of content and text formatted so that it is easy to read and understand.

The sequence of instruction described above includes the use of specialised language terms, referred to as metalanguage (e.g. *nominalisation*, *exposition*, *irony*). Each term is used in context, with an explanation that is couched in everyday language. The intention here is to ensure that students build up a specialised vocabulary for referring to and reflecting on their learning.



3.3 Scaffolding student learning

WordFlyers is a resource that focuses on scaffolding student learning rather than testing the acquisition of isolated skills. All aspects of the teaching and learning component of *WordFlyers* have been developed in accordance with Vygotskian principles of teaching and learning (see also section 5.2 Scaffolding as a pedagogic principle). Essentially, all teaching and learning components within this resource are designed to ensure that all students experience high levels of success in learning the content presented to them. This success is deliberately and systematically scaffolded, through sequential development of content across the resource and through the internal structures of the lessons themselves. The game contexts also provide opportunities for revision of selected aspects of lesson content, in situations where repeated opportunities for practice and review, with immediate feedback, provide high levels of student success.

The teaching and learning component of *WordFlyers* also incorporates a variety of presentation modes. All texts, tutorials and lesson activities are presented in the written mode, as expected in a resource of this nature. However, the texts themselves are also presented in a variety of written formats incorporating strong visual design elements. All texts and tutorials are also narrated, providing students with the opportunity to engage with the learning materials and content in the aural mode. Some texts are also presented in a multimedia mode, allowing students to engage with visual, aural and verbal representations of meaning. Collectively, this diversity of presentation modes introduces variety into the resource, enhancing student engagement with the instructional materials and heightening opportunities for learning success.

Some students, especially the most able in any cohort, may initially feel that 'it's easy to get the answers correct' in any lesson. This is intentional – the resource is designed to scaffold or lead students to make the 'correct' choices, so that focus skills and understandings are reiterated and reinforced. Students who read the information presented in Tutorials, think about the Show Activities in light of that information, read or refer back to the focus text, and then complete the Lesson Activities *will* experience high levels of success. Similarly, students who have worked through all the lessons associated with a particular text should find the NAPLAN*-style tests relatively easy.

3.4 Contextualising skills-based learning and teaching

WordFlyers is a teaching and learning resource that presents students with the opportunity to learn about and use language skills in context. In the tradition of well-established mainstream English curricula from the 1970s, all *WordFlyers* lessons are centred on short, coherent and complete 'real-world' texts. The texts were commissioned specifically for use in the resource, and were written by a variety of authors to reflect a wide range of social purposes, topics, issues and voices. Each text has been used to develop a unit of work, focusing on specific aspects of language and literacy skills at different levels of complexity (e.g. use of technical language; distinguishing between phrases and clauses; inferential comprehension). Students are encouraged or directed to read the texts before and during lessons; direct reference is made to the focus text in many of the lessons; and examples of vocabulary and grammatical structures used in lessons are drawn directly from the focus text. Thus, students are constantly observing and using language skills in context, and increasing the likelihood of transfer of learning from the resource to other areas of their school studies and activities beyond school.

There are 128 individual texts included in the resource. These are variously imaginative, informative or persuasive in purpose, reflecting the broad categories identified in the Australian Curriculum: English. Ten different text types are represented: Narratives, Poetry, Descriptions, Recounts, Procedures, Reports, Explanations, Discussions, Expositions and Text Responses. These text types are used at each level in the *WordFlyers* resource, but to different degrees to reflect changing curriculum priorities and learner interests across Years 7 to 10 (see Table 1 on the next page).



Table 1: Distribution of text types across year levels

Text type	Year 7				Year 8			
	Review 7	Level 7.1	Level 7.2	Level 7.3	Review 8	Level 8.1	Level 8.2	Level 8.3
Narrative	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Poetry	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	0
Description	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0
Recount	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Procedure	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
Report	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Explanation	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
Discussion	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Exposition	1	0	2	1	2	1	2	2
Text Response	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1

Text type	Year 9				Year 10			
	Review 9	Level 9.1	Level 9.2	Level 9.3	Review 10	Level 10.1	Level 10.2	Level 10.3
Narrative	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Poetry	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Description	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Recount	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Procedure	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Report	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Explanation	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
Discussion	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1
Exposition	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2
Text Response	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1

The texts relate to a wide range of themes, topics and issues typically encountered across the junior secondary school curriculum or of relevance to students in their local, regional or global contexts. For example, many texts raise health issues (e.g. *Why cyberbullying has such intense effects*); others explore science topics (e.g. *Wind energy – what’s your take?*) and some draw on the Arts curriculum (e.g. *Beatles to Bollywood*). The texts also explore topics and issues related to particular ages and stages during the early and later adolescent years, including popular culture, body image and careers (e.g. *My life is NOT a Twilight movie*; *Skin deep*; *Ally’s big break*).

There is also a wide variety of text forms, including newspaper articles, short essays, dramatic monologues and social media texts (e.g. Twitter thread – *Teen adventure camps under scrutiny*). Some texts are transcriptions of spoken texts (e.g. a transcript of on-the-spot interviews – *Hand back the skulls of our ancestors*), others are written or multimodal (e.g. a critique of Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*; a video-clip of a speech – *The rat was framed!*). *WordFlyers* is not designed to replace the traditional study of literature in the English classroom, but a number of literary forms are included, principally short stories and styles of poetry (e.g. a jingle – *Good bugs, bad bugs*; lyric poem – *To me: a citizen of the world*; and a free verse poem – *Memories in a suitcase*). Many of the texts address cross-curriculum priorities, including the exploration of Asian contexts (e.g. *Toyotomi Hideyoshi: an unlikely but powerful ruler*); historical and contemporary issues related to Indigenous Australians (e.g. *Keeping the old ways alive*); and environmental sustainability challenges (e.g. *No ecotourism in the Asmat Swamp*).



In each lesson, students are referred to the focus text, or examples of language use are drawn from the focus text. All texts are narrated so that students may hear them read aloud and a small number of texts are also presented as video clips or audio files. Students have access to the focus text during all of the online lessons; instructional text and onscreen popups also encourage them to refer back to this text to find the correct answers to lesson activities.

3.5 Differentiation within a common curriculum

WordFlyers offers a common learning program, based on the Australian Curriculum: English, for all students in mainstream English classes from Years 7 to 10. At all levels within the resource, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills and understandings identified as expected language and literacy outcomes in a nationally mandated curriculum. Students who engage with and complete the units of study offered at different year levels can be assured that they have covered the specified content for that level, particularly within the Language and Literacy strands of the Australian Curriculum: English.

However, *WordFlyers* also offers students and teachers considerable opportunities for differentiated learning programs. These include opportunities for different instructional needs within particular year levels; opportunities for variable pathways through the text and lesson components, for class, group and individual students; and opportunities for using the resource as a whole-class teaching resource, an individualised classroom-based program or an independent study or homework resource.

With respect to different instructional needs, each year level of the resource contains four sub-levels of texts and lessons. For example, *WordFlyers* Year 7 consists of Review 7, 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3. The texts and units in Review 7 and Level 7.1 are designed to teach and consolidate curriculum content from previous year levels, as specified in the Australian Curriculum: English. By comparison, the texts and units of study in Levels 7.2 and 7.3 present content outcomes from Year 7 of the Australian Curriculum: English. At Level 7.3, the subject matter presented in the texts is slightly more complex and wide ranging to appeal to more advanced students, and the lesson content is described and explained in a more comprehensive or academic manner. This pattern of organisation is repeated throughout the resource (see Table 2 on the next page) and provides teachers with opportunities to differentiate the English curriculum according to the learning needs and abilities of specific cohorts of students.



Table 2: Curriculum content by levels

Each level consists of 8 units and a total of 80 lessons. There are 10 lessons in each unit.

Review 7	Level 7.1	Level 7.2	Level 7.3
<p>Revision of Years 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3) written at a level suitable for low-literacy students.</p>	<p>Revision of Year 5 and Year 6 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 7.2 and 7.3).</p>	<p>Year 7 level content as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English and a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 7.1 and 7.3)</p>	<p>Covers same content as Level 7.2 but assumes greater prior knowledge, requires deeper levels of independent thought and includes more challenging questions.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 7.1 and 7.2)</p>
Review 8	Level 8.1	Level 8.2	Level 8.3
<p>Revision of Years 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3) written at a level suitable for low-literacy students.</p>	<p>Revision of Year 7 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 8.2 and 8.3)</p>	<p>Year 8 level content as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English and a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 8.1 and 8.3)</p>	<p>Covers same content as Level 8.2 but assumes greater prior knowledge, requires deeper levels of independent thought and includes more challenging questions.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 8.1 and 8.2)</p>
Review 8	Level 9.1	Level 9.2	Level 9.3
<p>Revision of Years 6, 7 and 8 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3) written at a level suitable for low-literacy students.</p>	<p>Revision of Year 8 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 9.2 and 9.3)</p>	<p>Year 9 level content as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English and a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 9.1 and 9.3)</p>	<p>Covers same content as Level 9.2 but assumes greater prior knowledge, requires deeper levels of independent thought and includes more challenging questions.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 9.1 and 9.2)</p>
Review 10	Level 10.1 (8 texts)	Level 10.2 (8 texts)	Level 10.3 (8 texts)
<p>Revision of Years 6, 7 and 8 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3) written at a level suitable for low-literacy students.</p>	<p>Revision of Year 9 content, as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English, with a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 10.2 and 10.3)</p>	<p>Year 10 level content as indicated in Australian Curriculum: English and a high level of teaching and learning support.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 10.1 and 10.3)</p>	<p>Covers same content as Level 10.2 but assumes greater prior knowledge, requires deeper levels of independent thought and includes more challenging questions.</p> <p>Age/stage appropriate texts/topics (similar to those featured in 10.1 and 10.2)</p>



Teachers can also create variable pathways through the *WordFlyers* teaching and learning components according to the needs of a particular class, group within a class or individual students. For example, teachers could select all the lessons in a level (or levels) related to grammar or punctuation and assign them to a class, group or individual student for completion. Similarly, all the texts and lessons related to short stories could be selected to complement a broader curriculum unit on Narrative texts. Students can also be encouraged to create their own pathways through the resource, within a framework set by their teacher or independently. This could be used to support personal goal-setting and reflection on learning needs.

The teaching and learning components can also be used in different instructional contexts. For example, the resource can be used entirely as an independent, online learning package in classrooms or for independent study or homework assignments. Alternatively, teachers can choose to use aspects of the resource in whole-class, direct-instruction contexts. For example, specific texts may be displayed and read together using a data projector or interactive whiteboard; individual lesson tutorials can be displayed for use by teachers with their whole class or a small group; or lesson activities can be displayed for whole-class, group or individual review. Similarly, the NAPLAN*-style activities can be displayed to identify and address successful test-taking strategies.

3.6 Student engagement

3.6.1 Real-world texts and contexts

WordFlyers uses real-world texts and contexts designed to engage student interest (e.g. *Training diary of an elite athlete*; *How to create your own mehndi*; *Buying bike parts online*; *Programmed to plank*). Some are typical of the texts that students currently study in English classes (e.g. short stories and poetry), but most are texts that students would expect to see and read outside of school contexts. This helps students to perceive their learning as being related to their present and future social worlds. The texts explore topics and issues drawn from the wider world (e.g. sport, adventure, entertainment) and represent a wide variety of text types and forms (e.g. Narratives, Descriptions, Expositions; short stories, character profiles, editorials). Several social media texts are included (e.g. Facebook thread, SMS text) and a number of the texts are accompanied by a visual or multimedia component (e.g. slideshow presentation, video-clip).

The texts are relatively short, with most being approximately 250–300 words in length and Review level texts of 200 words or less. Most students in Years 7 to 10 will be able to read the texts quickly and successfully, with or without narration. Each text is also formatted in a manner designed to recreate the social context in which it would normally appear (e.g. an editorial in a newspaper; a short poem in a book of poetry; a report in a government publication). This creates a strong element of diversity in the 'look' of the texts that reflects their differences in purpose and style and is designed once again to enhance student engagement with the texts and, thus, their associated lessons.

3.6.2 Tutorials, practice activities and hints

Each lesson in the *WordFlyers* resource comprises a predictable cycle of elements designed to engage students in productive learning episodes, including short tutorials, practice activities and consolidation activities. The short tutorials at the beginning of each lesson provide 'bite-sized' units of instruction that students can read, view and/or listen to, according to their learning preference. The practice activities that follow each tutorial provide students with immediate and high levels of learning success, further enhancing student engagement. Hints are then provided in the consolidation activities to assist students to apply their new learning successfully.



3.6.3 Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards

WordFlyers provides students with access to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in order to support and intensify their commitment to learning and practising of new skills. For example, the resource has a well-developed and layered system of travel points awarded for successful completion of practice and consolidation activities. Within this system, students are given three opportunities or 'rounds' to provide correct answers to questions in individual lessons. Students are encouraged to read and re-read the text and tutorial associated with each lesson, thereby ensuring that they answer or complete lesson activities correctly in the first round. For this, they are rewarded with 1000 points the first time they reach 80% or above in a lesson. They earn 500 bonus points when they score 100% in a lesson. Students are discouraged from guessing answers without utilising the text and tutorials – they only earn the base and bonus points for each lesson once. The accumulated points can be used to 'buy' souvenirs, play games and travel to virtual destinations within the *WordFlyers* environment.

Students can also compare their learning achievements with those of classmates and other students using *WordFlyers*. For many students, these extrinsic rewards heighten their commitment to learning tasks. All students also have access to the intrinsic rewards associated with being a successful learner in the *WordFlyers* environment, including a growing sense of personal achievement and satisfaction arising from completing lessons at a high level of proficiency.

3.6.4 Choice of learning pathways

WordFlyers provides teachers and students with many opportunities to make choices about their learning pathways. For example, teachers can select lessons with a specific focus (e.g. writing persuasive texts) or students can choose the order in which to complete the series of lessons associated with a specific text (e.g. the Punctuation lesson before the Writing lessons associated with a short story such as *The mirror of murder*). For students, this level of flexibility can enhance their engagement with learning tasks.

Teachers and students are also able to make decisions about where to begin class, group or individual learning pathways within *WordFlyers*. As described earlier, the units of study within the resource are organised in year levels, following the Australian Curriculum: English. Hence, teachers could begin all of the students in a year level cohort at the relevant 'at standard' *WordFlyers* level (e.g. Year 8 students at *WordFlyers* Level 8.2, Unit 1).

In the beta release of *WordFlyers*, all levels are 'open' to students regardless of their year level or teacher assigned learning pathway. This is designed to provide students with an initial opportunity to explore texts, units of study and individual lessons across the resource.

3.6.5 Self-paced learning

As well as providing opportunities for flexible learning pathways, *WordFlyers* offers students the chance to work at their own pace through a sequence of teaching and learning activities, NAPLAN*-style tests and quizzes. For example, students can take as much time as they need to read and listen to the focus text, to understand the main points presented in the Tutorials and to consider their responses to Show and Lesson activities. Similarly, confident students can move quickly through the NAPLAN*-style activities or complete levels. These opportunities for self-paced learning allow students to engage with the resource in a manner that suits their needs and abilities in general and will allow the development of mastery over specific skills and concepts.



3.6.6 Opportunities for repeated practice

Students are also provided with many opportunities for repeated practice of skills and understandings in *WordFlyers*. The content of the resource is presented to students in cycles of horizontal and vertical organisation, through both the activities and lesson components. For example, the resource contains lessons about different types of sentences across and beyond each year level; comprehension strategies are taught and practised in every unit of study at every level; and the structural and grammatical features of different text types are examined at increasing levels of sophistication from the Review levels through to level 10.3. Similarly, students receive numerous opportunities to practise the same core language skills, including spelling and punctuation, at introductory, intermediate and advanced levels with the activities component of the resource. The focus texts are also available for students to read in each lesson within a particular unit, as directed or according to personal choice, thus providing the opportunity and incentive for repeated readings.

3.6.7 Formative and summative assessment contexts

WordFlyers has been developed in such a way that students receive immediate feedback about their learning progress. This level of feedback – providing students with an ‘in-the-moment’ or formative assessment – is designed to support successful learning. From the moment a student attempts their first True/False activity in a lesson, they are provided with a clear and unambiguous confirmation that they have understood the content of the lesson or that they need to review the Tutorial points, the text or the question concerned. These feedback experiences assist students to build new skills and understandings efficiently and confidently.

In addition, teachers and students also have access to the NAPLAN*-style tests provided for every unit of study. In these assessment contexts, students are provided with opportunities to demonstrate their new learning at some distance from instruction.

3.7 Teaching reading comprehension skills and strategies

The teaching of reading comprehension skills and strategies is a significant aspect of the *WordFlyers* resource. Four of the 10 lessons in every unit of study associated with a particular focus text are devoted to this dimension of the English curriculum. These lessons are structured around Freebody and Luke’s (1990) Four Resources model of reading comprehension and are designed to teach students how to use effective reading processes; recognise the purpose and intended audience of a text; understand texts at literal and inferential levels; and analyse and evaluate texts from a more critical perspective. At all levels within the resource, students are encouraged to use processes, such as skimming, scanning, connecting ideas and identifying where and how writers are attempting to influence readers.

3.8 Teaching grammar

WordFlyers also places strong emphasis on the teaching of grammar at word, phrase, clause and sentence levels. Following the direction indicated in the Australian Curriculum: English, this resource draws on a functional model of language, as first proposed by MAK Halliday (1975) and offers explicit instruction in how different grammatical elements function in the construction of meaning. Emphasis is placed on helping students understand how language works, but students are also introduced to technical language terms which they can then use to develop their skills and understandings further (e.g. prepositional phrase, adverbial clause, nominalisation).



3.9 Supporting teacher professional learning and practice

3.9.1 Professional learning opportunities within the resource

English teachers of today are often trained in the discipline of literature rather than language or literacy; many are also unfamiliar with the content of the Language and Literacy strands of the Australian Curriculum: English. The *WordFlyers* teaching and learning component provides teachers with a detailed resource to support their own professional learning and practice. For example, teachers who are unfamiliar with or unsure about aspects of grammar referred to in the Australian Curriculum: English could use *WordFlyers* tutorials and lesson activities to update their own skills and understandings, individually or as a staff group. Similarly, the grammar lessons in the resource could be used as the focus of whole-class lessons, using data projectors or interactive whiteboards, thereby reducing teacher preparation time and increasing consistency of teaching and learning across year levels within a school or system context.

3.9.2 Online marking and generation of reports on student achievement and progress

All lesson activities are marked onscreen as the student completes them. Students are provided with immediate feedback if they select incorrect answers to assist them to choose the correct answers in the next rounds. The student's pass rate appears onscreen at the end of each lesson. Points are also awarded at the end of each lesson. Students can view the points they have earned on the passport image at the top right of the website page.

Teachers keep track of their students' and classes' progress through the units, and their pass rates for lessons, in the Teacher Management section of the website. These results can be included in school reports and other forms of school assessment.

3.9.3 Texts, tutorials and lesson activities that can be used in whole-class contexts

WordFlyers is designed as a stand-alone, online resource for self-paced student learning within the English curriculum. Ideal for differentiated, independent learning within the classroom, *WordFlyers* can also be used as a regular home-study program. However, the teaching-learning components contained within the resource also provide valuable resources for teacher-directed whole-class and small-group lessons. For example, the short stories included in the resource represent a wide range of styles within the broad Narrative genre (e.g. crime fiction, horror, romance) and could comprise the basis of a unit of study on popular fiction. Similarly, the lessons on writing persuasive texts could provide timely whole-class revision prior to system-level testing. For group, class or school contexts where inferential comprehension has been identified as a problematic area of student achievement, the extensive range of comprehension lessons included in *WordFlyers* could be used as the basis of a targeted program of instruction. The built-in flexibility of the resource ensures that teachers (and students) can use it to meet specific curriculum needs in a wide range of contexts.

3.9.4 Materials that support teacher understandings of grammar concepts and skills

The teaching and learning of grammar concepts and skills has been identified as a major curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum: English. As discussed earlier, this is not an area in which all English teachers feel competent to teach, especially since many of the elements identified in the curriculum are drawn from a functional model of language rather than traditional grammar. *WordFlyers* offers support for teachers and students alike to engage successfully with this area of learning without compromising the core business of the English curriculum – the study and use of texts. The grammar concepts and skills encompassed in *WordFlyers* are those that build student understanding of how language works, and how to use language to express a range of meanings in a variety of texts and contexts, for different purposes and audiences.



3.9.5 Learning, social, motivational and competitive aspects of the website's travel theme

The website's theme of travel is experienced by students through the visual design of the lesson activities and throughout the varied social, motivational and competitive parts of the site. The experience or concept of travel is one that is enjoyed by most young people, especially young Australians. Travel is aspired to and even when not achieved continues to hold many individuals' interest. Through the website theme, students are exposed to different world cultures and destinations that will expand their knowledge of the world and help them to understand their place in it.

4.0 Experienced writers/consultants/designers and utilising teacher and student feedback

WordFlyers has been prepared using a team of experienced teachers, professional writers, curriculum consultants and web-based designers. Practising teachers from around Australia have been consulted at every stage of the website's development, each time providing feedback that assisted in further developing an online resource that would suit the requirements of students and teachers.

In June 2014, six Australian schools and several hundred students took part in a trial of some of the website's resources. And again in October 2014, students and teachers from thirteen schools took part in a beta trial review of the complete website.

5.0 Informing theories and research

5.1 Literacy as a social construct

WordFlyers is a teaching and learning resource underpinned by a view of literacy as a social construct or phenomenon. This view arises out of research traditions in social psychology and cultural anthropology, and is most clearly identified in the work of eminent linguist MAK Halliday (1975; 1985). In essence, a view of literacy as a social construct asserts that:

a text is to be understood as functioning in a context, where context is said to operate at two levels: at the level of *register*, where *field* (social activity), *tenor* (the interpersonal relationships among people using language), and *mode* (the part played by language in building communication) all have consequences for the choices made in the linguistic system; and at the level of *genre*, where the *social purpose* in using the language also has consequences for the linguistic choices made. For any given instance of language use, a genre is selected (be that a report, a narrative, a trade encounter, etc.), and particular choices are made with respect to field, tenor, and mode, all of which are in turn realised in language choices. (Christie 1992, 142–3)

5.2 Scaffolding as a pedagogic principle

The teaching and learning approach featured in *WordFlyers* uses scaffolding as one of its central pedagogic principles, with all lessons providing extensive support to assist students to accomplish learning tasks and develop new skills and understandings. Based on initial research by Russian psychologist LS Vygotsky (1978), the principle of scaffolding has become a core element of contemporary teaching pedagogies from early childhood to tertiary contexts (Hammond, 2001). At its simplest level, scaffolding involves building temporary supports that enable learners to achieve what they could not do independently. The most effective scaffolding occurs at two levels: the macro level, involving broad and comprehensive program frameworks with clearly articulated goals and outcomes; and the micro level, with targeted moment-by-moment interactions between students and teachers in relation to learning tasks and materials. In its best-practice application, systematic use of scaffolding leads to the creation



of effective learning contexts where learners experience high levels of challenge along with high support to meet those challenges, usually provided by a more expert or knowledgeable 'other'. The *WordFlyers* lessons are designed to provide students with just this combination of challenge and support.

5.3 A functional model of language

WordFlyers is based on a functional model of language, first proposed by Halliday (1975; 1985). To a large degree, this model also underpins the Australian Curriculum: English. Within this model, language is understood as a system of resources for making meaning in particular contexts of use. Learning language – spoken or written – thus involves learning how to use language in particular ways to achieve a wide variety of purposes, including the broad categories of informing, entertaining and persuading. The texts that are created in order to achieve these purposes are said to differ not only in purpose and function, but in overall structure and specific linguistic features. Types of texts designed to achieve particular social purposes, with similar structural and linguistic features, are referred to as genres. Similarly, the social context in which texts are created is said to determine many, if not most of the choices speakers and writers can make. From a teaching perspective, a functional model of language is associated with the use of instructional contexts designed to extend a student's potential to express and respond to meanings organised as text.

5.4 Reading comprehension: the 'Four Resources' model

WordFlyers draws on a view of reading as a repertoire of practices that can be used to access and respond to the meanings in texts, following the model of reading comprehension first proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990) and popularly known as the 'Four Resources' model. In this model, and thus in the *WordFlyers* reading comprehension lessons, effective readers are seen as having a broad and flexible set of roles or resources that they can use to make meaning from the texts they encounter. These resources allow them to break the code of texts; understand the social purpose of texts; identify and respond to literal and inferential meanings in texts; and evaluate the ideas, views and techniques used in texts. The four reading comprehension lessons in each unit of *WordFlyers* lessons are deliberately designed to teach students how to adopt these roles in the context of specific texts. In addition, students are encouraged to use comprehension strategies such as skimming, scanning, predicting and monitoring meaning.

5.5 Writing: genres in the English curriculum

Students are expected to be able to write a wide range of text types or genres within the English curriculum. *WordFlyers* provides students with opportunities to study ten different genres, in a variety of forms, at every year level within the resource. These genres are Narrative, Recount, Description, Procedure, Report, Explanation, Text Response, Discussion, Exposition and Poetry. Students are also expected to write using many of these genres, in various forms, in subjects other than English, so the resource provides students with rich opportunities for cross-curriculum learning.

5.6 Teaching the 'basics' – spelling and punctuation

WordFlyers is an educational resource that incorporates the teaching and learning of spelling and punctuation, referred to widely as two of the 'basics' of literacy. As in other components of the resource, the spelling and punctuation lessons address key skills and understandings that have been identified within the Australian Curriculum: English. These skills and understandings are also presented within the context of reading and writing specific, real-world texts. For example, spelling lessons build up graphophonic, morphological and etymological spelling strategies using words that students are expected to read in the focus texts and use in their own writing. Emphasis is placed on alerting students to various 'rules' that can be used to spell new and unfamiliar words correctly, especially those that are associated with themes and topics explored across the resource and the Years 7 to 10 curriculum in general. In punctuation lessons, the role of punctuation in making written meanings



clear and unambiguous is always emphasised. A wide range of simple and more sophisticated sentence punctuation is explored, including full stops, commas, colons and quotation marks; apostrophes of omission/contraction and possession are also taught.

6.0 Concluding comments

WordFlyers is a rich and innovative resource designed to engage students in Years 7 to 10 in deep learning related to key aspects of the English curriculum. It aims to support the work of teachers, as they build their students' skills and understandings about and through language. Located in the online environment, with clear links to worlds outside of school, the resource offers students opportunities to engage in 21st-century learning contexts. *WordFlyers* also provides opportunities for high levels of personalised and differentiated learning within the context of a core curriculum. Informed by well-respected theoretical positions on language, teaching and learning, the resource also addresses practical concerns, including the time constraints of busy teachers and the need for regular and accurate reporting of student learning achievements and needs. *WordFlyers* offers students an engaging and real-world environment in which to participate, with its focus on diverse texts and virtual travel experiences. In the final analysis, however, the most outstanding characteristic of *WordFlyers* is its capacity to provide students with opportunities to learn and practise those language and literacy skills that contribute to lifelong learning.

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