

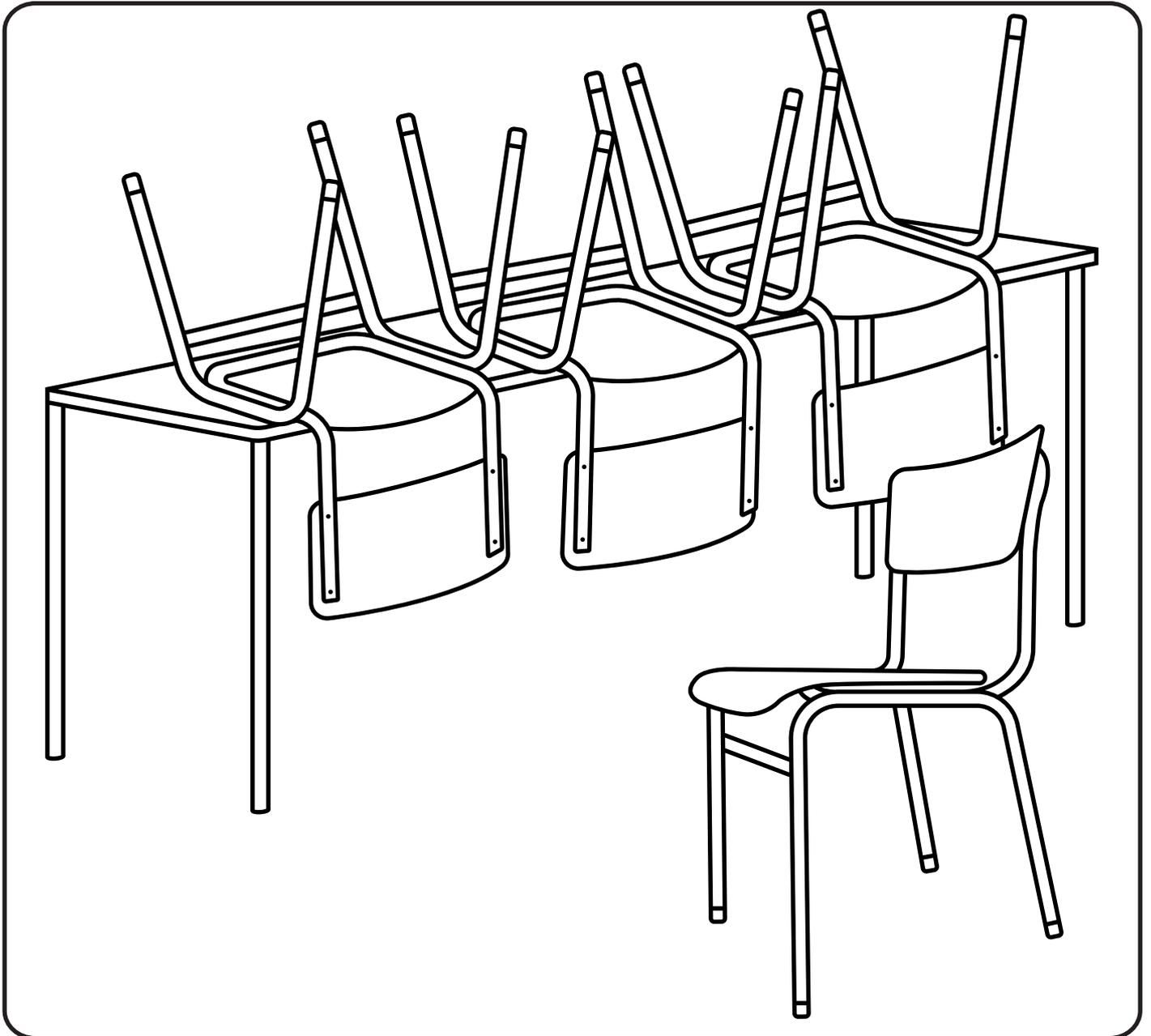
# MOVING THE FURNITURE

## REGISTRATION

 Concession  Individual  Organisation

**\$240** **\$260** **\$280**

Livestream registration options available



## MIDDLE YEARS CONFERENCE

22 May 2026  
ACMI @ Fed Square

Rearranging the room – literally or metaphorically – invites teachers to reimagine how they teach, asks students to rethink how they learn, and allows us to think about what kind of places our classrooms could be.

**VATE** **acmi**

## The 2026 VATE x ACMI Middle Years Conference explores how physical, instructional and intellectual spaces shape English learning in the middle years.

It celebrates negotiating the curriculum to make room for student voice, advocates for teacher autonomy and centres the pedagogical artistry of English subject specialists.

- How can we make more space for curiosity, creativity and collaboration in our current educational landscape?
- How do we know when it is time to move things around – our routines, assumptions and even our role as teachers – to foster a dialogic, inclusive and expansive English classroom?
- How do we balance curriculum requirements with the flexibility needed to teach responsively and imaginatively?
- What does it look like to ‘move the furniture’ in our units of work, in text selection, and in assessment practices to make room for student ownership?
- How do we build a culture where creative experimentation with teaching practices are seen as valuable as opposed to risky?

### Keynote address

## **OK, BOOMER: PUTTING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE, JUDGEMENT AND AGENCY TO WORK IN ‘MOVING THE FURNITURE’ OF SCHOOLING**

Before his untimely death in 1993, legendary Australian English teacher, curriculum thinker, and ‘scholar-practitioner’ Garth Boomer advanced a generative and inspirational vision of schooling with a particular focus on the teaching of English and the negotiation of the curriculum. An integral part of this vision was valuing and celebrating the professional knowledge, judgement and agency of the teaching profession. Boomer argued that teachers should be encouraged to be conscientious interrupters – to ‘move the furniture’ – by ‘teaching against the grain’. This keynote address revisits and reinterprets some of Boomer’s key ideas for the 21st century, asking what it is to ‘teach against the grain’ in our time, what a robust model of differentiation and negotiation of the curriculum might look like, what gets in the way, and what a pragmatic-radical orientation might bring to the teaching profession.

## **NICOLE MOCKLER**

University of Sydney



**Professor Nicole Mockler is Professor of Education at the Sydney School of Education and Social Work, with a background in secondary teaching and teacher professional learning. She has worked in education for the past 30 years as a classroom teacher, school leader and education consultant. Most recently, Nicole’s work has been as a teacher educator and educational researcher. Her research focuses on education policy, professional learning, and curriculum and pedagogy.**

Nicole has co-authored and edited several books, was the Editor in Chief of *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2017–2022) and currently serves on the editorial boards of *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *British Educational Research Journal*, and *Curriculum Perspectives*, as well as the International Advisory Board of *Educational Action Research*. She is a member of the Advisory Group at the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research, University College London Institute of Education.

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Register online at [vate.org.au](http://vate.org.au)

**VATE** **acmi**

9.20 - 9.30am **Welcome and introduction to ACMI exhibitions**  
Emma Jenkins, VATE and Garry Westmore, ACMI

9.30 - 10.00am **Vinyl Factory: Reverb**

10.00 - 11.00am **Keynote** **LS**  
Professor Nicole Mockler, University of Sydney

11.00 - 11.30am **Morning tea**

11.35am - 12.35pm **1A Making room for design thinking** **LS**  
Sophie Zebrowski and Adam Blau, Port Melbourne Secondary College

**1B Rearranging the space** **LS**  
Katharine Corrin and Rowena Morris, Kyabram P-12 College

**1C Poetry as art: A springboard for enjoying poetry in high school**  
Melissa Blacklock, Southern Cross Grammar

**1D Contrast: The most useful tool in narrative writing**  
Andrew Duval, Writelike.org

**1E Building Aboriginal cultural competency**  
Rob Hyatt, Koorie Heritage Trust

12.35 - 12.45pm **Transition to next workshop**

12.45 - 1.45pm **2A Leading by concept** **LS**  
Dylan Fox, St Francis Xavier College (ACT)

**2B From creative to critical: Strengthening thinking through writing** **LS**  
Dani Cantor and Bianca Prendergast, Balwyn High School

**2C Teaching critical lens theory to improve media literacy**  
Nicole Comelli, Port Melbourne Secondary College

**2D Infinite writing, finite time: Writing routines for the middle years**  
Ryan Bartok, Miners Rest Primary School

**2E Decolonising student voice**  
Helena Brain, Sacred Heart College

1.45 - 2.30pm **Lunch**

2.30 - 3.30pm **3A From panels to poetry: Engaging students through contemporary texts** **LS**  
Karys McEwen and Lauren Kyte, Salesian College Sunbury

**3B Discussion circles: Reinvigorating speaking and listening** **LS**  
Louise Leong and Belinda Crowe, Mount Alexander College

**3C Creative storytelling with ACMI resources**  
Susan Bye, ACMI

**3D Through a critical lens: A scaffolded approach to teaching students how to 'read' persuasive texts**  
Michelle Maglitto and Kate Ruzicka, Fintona Girls School

**3E Friend or foe? Reframing AI as a tool to improve writing**  
Carolyn Dunn, Mount Waverley Secondary College

**LS** Livestream

## Vinyl Factory: Reverb

Be among the first to see – and listen to – this impactful conversation-starting exhibition during an exclusive visit. Presented in partnership with Rising, Reverb celebrates the synergy of art and sound through immersive installations, moving image, and sound works. The exhibition highlights how music is deeply connected to society – as a form of political expression and as a legacy that continues to shape culture over time. Featured artists include William Kentridge, Es Devlin, Jeremy Deller, Virgil Abloh, Stan Douglas and Hito Steyerl.



IMAGE CREDIT: Carsten Nicolai, Bausatz Noto (1998)

### KEYNOTE **LS**

#### **OK, Boomer: Putting teacher professional knowledge, judgement and agency to work in ‘moving the furniture’ of schooling**

Before his untimely death in 1993, legendary Australian English teacher, curriculum thinker, and ‘scholar-practitioner’ Garth Boomer advanced a generative and inspirational vision of schooling with a particular focus on the teaching of English and the negotiation of the curriculum. An integral part of this vision was valuing and celebrating the professional knowledge, judgement and agency of the teaching profession. Boomer argued that teachers should be encouraged to be conscientious interrupters – to ‘move the furniture’ – by ‘teaching against the grain’. This keynote address revisits and reinterprets some of Boomer’s key ideas for the 21st century, asking what it is to ‘teach against the grain’ in our time, what a robust model of differentiation and negotiation of the curriculum might look like, what gets in the way, and what a pragmatic-radical orientation might bring to the teaching profession.

**Professor Nicole Mockler, University of Sydney**

## **1A Making room for design thinking**

**LS** Design thinking is a unique, multi-step framework that focuses on understanding human-centered needs to create innovative and practical solutions. At Port Melbourne Secondary College, this instructional model underpins all levels and disciplines of curriculum. Since 2022, we have pushed design thinking outside conventional boundaries for both staff and students to encourage the connection between learning and real-world scenarios. Our workshop will provide the opportunity for participants to engage in the process of design thinking and experience first-hand how we ‘move the furniture’ to foster an English classroom that promotes curiosity and student voice.

**Sophie Zebrowski and Adam Blau,  
Port Melbourne Secondary College**

## **1B Rearranging the space**

**LS** In the context of a new Victorian Curriculum F-10 2.0, ongoing staff shortages and falling engagement, we have decided to rearrange the space in which our middle years students learn. We will take participants through a journey of discovery, exploring the way our Years 9-10 vertical curriculum is structured, the thematic and skills based approach we are taking, and the ideas that have led to Year 9 students being actively enthused by their options for English study during these often challenging years.

**Katharine Corrin and Rowena Morris,  
Kyabram P-12 College**

## **1C Poetry as art: A springboard for enjoying poetry in high school**

This workshop will encourage teachers to introduce poetry into the secondary English classroom from Year 7 with a focus on joy. Drawing on ideas for a unit of work that emphasises skill development and language experimentation, teachers will be invited to view poetry as a catalyst for skill development, while also reflecting on the responsibility to expose students to both contemporary voices and works of ‘capital L’ literature. Participants will be invited to consider the ways that student interest can inform the design of the unit and will explore pathways that they can take in mapping poetry through each pre-VCE year level, equipping students with the skills and appreciation needed for senior English.

**Melissa Blacklock, Southern Cross Grammar**

## **1D Contrast: The most useful tool in narrative writing**

Got a problem in story writing? Contrast will fix it. Flat description? Add contrast. Static characters? Add contrast. Dull plot? Add contrast. In this workshop, we’ll look at three practical applications of contrast in descriptive detail, character development, and plot. With a few simple concepts and exercises, we’ll explore how you can quickly create interesting, vivid, and organically flowing stories in minutes.

**Andrew Duval, Writelike.org**

## 1E Building Aboriginal cultural competency

Join Rob Hyatt, educator at the Koorie Heritage Trust for a workshop on building your Aboriginal cultural competency. Participants will be guided to develop their understanding of Aboriginality and identity (in particular the diversity of First Nations people) and Australian history from an Aboriginal perspective – predominantly concentrating on Stolen Generations and its continuing impact today. The workshop will also assist in helping teachers to understand Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Australia today with a focus on working effectively and building relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

**Rob Hyatt, Koorie Heritage Trust**

## 2A Leading by concept

**LS** As our profession wrestles with education's latest 'knowledge-rich' frame (fad?), English teachers might begin with some uncomfortable but necessary questions: What exactly do we teach 'explicitly' in English? What comes first, and what must be built upon? What would happen if some learning was moved, replaced, or removed entirely? These questions are difficult to answer precisely. English is often framed as a set of generic skills where 'content' is reduced to text lists and text types. A risk of moving explicit instruction to the pedagogic foreground in English is that we may distill content to the point of reductive teaching. Ironically, our teaching could undermine what cognitive science points to as key: spaced, hierarchical sequences of learning that build a rich, functional mental schema of a complex discipline such as English. This workshop argues for re/organising Years 7–10 English around 'concepts' rather than skills or discrete 'content'. We will explore why this change matters: how concepts give English intellectual weight, allow explicit instruction to land with greater purpose, and help teachers and students see the subject as cumulative not repetitive.

**Dylan Fox, St Francis Xavier College (ACT)**

## 2B From creative to critical: Strengthening thinking through writing

**LS** In our classrooms, we are seeing a growing need to strengthen students' critical thinking skills. This creates an opportunity for middle years English teachers to support students to go beyond surface-level engagement with texts and ideas. This workshop will explore how we can harness students' natural creative thinking and channel it into deeper, more analytical responses. We will examine the intersection of literacy and thinking, asking how are our current literacy practices supporting critical capabilities, and how can writing become a tool for thinking, not just a way to demonstrate it? We will explore practical strategies for embedding structured writing tasks that build reasoning, reflection, and rigour. This workshop will offer space to experiment, share, and consider how we might reframe our approach to writing and thinking in the middle years.

**Dani Cantor and Bianca Prendergast,  
Balwyn High School**

## 2C Teaching critical lens theory to improve media literacy

This workshop will examine how introducing middle years learners to critical lens theory can deepen their ability to analyse texts thoughtfully and critically. By exploring how texts are shaped by and respond to social, cultural, and historical contexts, students can engage in more purposeful classroom discussions and produce writing that reflects a nuanced understanding of literature and the world around them. Through research insights and practical classroom examples, we'll explore strategies to make this approach accessible and impactful for young readers and writers.

**Nicole Comelli, Port Melbourne Secondary College**

## 2D Infinite writing, finite time: Writing routines for the middle years

How do we create more space for real writing in the tightest of timetables? In this practical workshop, we reimagine the middle years English classroom as a creative studio and ourselves as its feng shui specialists. Together we'll identify the 'hand-me-down furniture' that clutters learning (overlong tasks, one-shot assessments, silent compliance) and replace it with high-impact 'statement pieces' that open the room: mentor-texts, choice-rich tasks, visible conferencing and feedback, and quick opportunities to write daily.

**Ryan Bartok, Miners Rest Primary School**

## 2E Decolonising student voice

This workshop invites teachers to push back the desks and reconsider how we teach oral communication skills, exploring authentic ways to embed First Nations perspectives, pedagogies, and content into units that focus on the skills of delivering oral presentations. We will explore practical strategies to extinguish the fear of public speaking by incorporating incremental, low stakes speaking opportunities authentically aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing. Drawing on my experiences as a non-Indigenous teacher who took part in the 2025 VATE First Nations Fellowship, I will share insights into designing an oral presentation unit that strives to model a decolonised curriculum.

**Helena Brain, Sacred Heart College**

### 3A From panels to poetry: Engaging students through contemporary texts

LS

Verse novels and graphic novels are increasingly recognised as powerful gateway texts – bridging the gap between reading for pleasure and deeper literary analysis. With their visual immediacy, accessible formats, and emotional resonance, these contemporary works captivate readers and open opportunities for classroom discussion of themes, style, and craft. In this interactive workshop, librarians Karys McEwen and Lauren Kyte will share strategies for incorporating verse novels and graphic novels into the English classroom. Participants will leave with a curated list of recommended verse novels and graphic novels suited to different year levels, strategies for framing these texts as enjoyable reads and rich sources for close study, and ideas for fostering discussions that bridge visual literacy, poetic devices, and narrative structure.

**Karys McEwen and Lauren Kyte,**  
Salesian College Sunbury

### 3B Discussion circles: Reinvigorating speaking and listening

LS

The demands of the English curriculum often leave little room for a robust speaking and listening assessment. Individual oral presentations can be glorified writing exercises and do nothing to help us judge how well a student is listening. The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model (VTLM 2.0) invites us to make learning more visible, and the Victorian Curriculum F-10 2.0 provides us with the opportunity to be more creative with our assessment strategies. The discussion circle is a strategy we have introduced in the middle years at Mount Alexander College to assess all strands of the English curriculum in a single assessment with complexity and fidelity. In this workshop, we will explore a Year 10 crafting text assessment with a focus on ethics, but the methodology can be easily transferred beyond the English classroom as a whole school literacy strategy.

**Louise Leong and Belinda Crowe,**  
Mount Alexander College

### 3C Creative storytelling with ACMI resources

This workshop showcases ACMI's speculative fiction resource as a springboard for imaginative storytelling in English. From there, we'll explore how other ACMI resources – spanning film, television, games, and screen culture – can engage students in critical and creative learning.

**Susan Bye, ACMI**

### 3D Through a critical lens: A scaffolded approach to teaching students how to 'read' persuasive texts

This workshop focuses on teaching students how to analyse and explore arguments in a range of persuasive texts (audio-visual, printed images, and written). It showcases the scaffolded approach we use to develop the skill of 'reading' persuasive texts with a critical lens progressively from Years 7 to 12. Participants will gain practical strategies to guide students in unpacking persuasive techniques and constructing analysing argument responses.

**Michelle Maglitto and Kate Ruzicka,**  
Fintona Girls School

### 3E Friend or foe? Reframing AI as a tool to improve writing

AI has complicated the teaching of writing. Given the impossibility of preventing students from using these technologies, this workshop reframes AI use and presents strategies for reclaiming it as a tool for feedback and writing improvement. Throughout our lives as learners and teachers, the explicit teaching of research skills was standard practice. Students were taught how to research in libraries, and more recently, how to effectively use internet search engines. In this same vein, it is now our time to own the teaching of AI. This workshop explores the possibilities of teaching students to use AI in this new age of information technology. In the end, we want students to use AI not to do their writing, but to help them improve as writers.

**Carolyn Dunn, Mount Waverley Secondary**

## REGISTER NOW

Registrations close  
Wednesday 13 May  
unless sold out  
beforehand.

Register online at  
[vate.org.au](http://vate.org.au)

