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## Empowering Adolescents for Activist Literacies

Sally L Humphrey, [Sally.humphrey@acu.edu.au](mailto:Sally.humphrey@acu.edu.au)

Australian Catholic University, Strathfield, AU

### Abstract

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An essential requirement for supporting the activist literacies of adolescents is a critical understanding of the purposes, practices and roles of engaged citizens and of the linguistic and broader semiotic resources they deploy in response to their multi-layered contexts. Drawing on theories from social semiotic and rhetorical traditions as well as socio-culturally informed genre-based pedagogies, I discuss how teachers and adolescent learners have developed their knowledge of rhetoric and grammar from a close study of the texts of adolescent activists to inform their own activist literacies.

Keywords: activist literacies, adolescent literacies, appraisal, audience, rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics

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## Introduction

The term *activist literacies*, originally coined by Campano & Simon (2010), allows for a range of perspectives, experiences, and responses by educators concerned to make a difference in the lives of young people. On the one hand we are invited, as practitioners and theorists, to attend to the literacy practices and counter-practices of those seeking to bring about social change, including social activists within our own schools and communities. This attention may involve developing further understandings of the socio-cultural and political contexts of participatory citizenship, resistance, and transformation of the rhetorical and semiotic resources deployed by activists. Recent research that has greatly expanded our notion of “what counts” as activist literacies in this sense includes: investigations of the shifting clusters of affinity spaces that mediate adolescent participatory citizenship; the affordances of technology in building affiliations; and the blurred boundaries among the private, social, academic and civic worlds of adolescents (Alvermann, 2006, 2008; Campano & Ghiso, 2011; Gee, 2003, 2005; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Humphrey, 2006, 2010; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Kress, 2003; Thomas, 2008).

A further perspective offered by the term *activist literacies* relates to the contribution of educators themselves in developing literacy pedagogies that inspire, engage, create and transform communities (JOLLE@UGA, 2013). In recent years a range of pedagogies for developing activist literacies have been documented, influenced by critical, new, and multiliteracy theories (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2000) and in some cases also by linguistic and multi-modal discourse analysis (Kress, 2003; Martin, 2000, 2004; Unsworth, 2001, 2008). Although methodologically diverse, these pedagogies share an understanding of literacy that extends beyond school-sanctioned print media, a concern to create spaces for marginalized groups and a desire to expand the repertoire of students’ resources for participating within and beyond schooling. While critical literacy pedagogies are widely acknowledged for engaging adolescents, who are defined by their age as “other than dominant (adult) culture” (Cohen et al., 1998, p. 307), several literacy researchers have called for more visible pedagogic practices to centralize the “powerful versions of literacy” (Collins & Halverson, 2009) that adolescents need to participate “most agentively in their social and economic futures” (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010, p. 85).

In this paper I report on a participatory research project that responds to both of the above perspectives on activist literacies. This project, part of a wider project to embed literacies within the curricula of middle years’ classes, was conducted in Australia by a small group of English teachers and their three Grade 8 classes. With the support of academic research partners, these teachers have made use of their developing knowledge of rhetoric and social semiotics to support their adolescent learners to engage actively and critically in what they have termed the *civic domain* (Humphrey, 2010). This report aims to demonstrate how these understandings and a meta-language developed to talk about language enabled teachers to make visible and accessible to their students the resources used by adolescent activists to achieve their social and political goals. Through substantive conversations around these textual practices and guided construction of their own texts, these students have been able to creatively appropriate rhetorical and grammatical resources to expand their own activist repertoires.

### **A Context for Activist Literacies**

The activist literacies reported on in this paper have been developed across three Grade 8 classes at a metropolitan secondary school in Australia. The vast majority of students at this school, referred to here as Metro Secondary School, are Muslims from low socio-economic and diverse language backgrounds. As such they are growing up in a social and political climate of fear and hostility following the events of September 11, 2001 (Corlett, 2002). In Australia hostility has been further inflamed by negative media portrayals of undocumented asylum seekers who have arrived from Afghanistan and other countries with similar demographic profiles.

The three activist teachers of these students are participants in an action research project called Embedded Literacies in Key Learning Areas (ELK). Guided by social theories of Bernstein (1975), participant researchers adhere to the principle that to ensure equitable outcomes for all students, the expectations and resources required of the literacies of schooling (and other institutions) need to be made explicit via a shared meta-language, that is, a language for talking about language. The explicit literacy pedagogy that has been adopted at Metro, known as genre-based pedagogy (Rothery 1995), unfolds through first building shared knowledge of the context of the target text, including, importantly, knowledge of the field, purpose, and audience. On this basis examples of texts that have achieved their purposes are modeled and deconstructed, and students are then led in jointly composing further examples of texts in fields that have been built in class or through guided research. By supporting students through these stages, teachers aim to approximate the “guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience” that has primacy in child spoken language development (Martin, 1999, p. 126). While appreciating the need for students to develop their own independent voice, the teachers involved in the project are confident that, given their own mastery of activist literacies, they are well qualified to apprentice their students into the crafting of texts that could be heard by diverse and potentially hostile audiences. With this stance, teachers share the view of New Literacies educators that:

Adolescents who create derivative texts are far from being “mindless consumers” and reproducers of existing media, as they actively engage with, rework and appropriate the ideological messages and materials of the original text. (Black, 2008, p. xiii)

Over the first year of the ELK project, English teachers at Metro developed significant knowledge of the core text types needed to inform, persuade, and respond to literature within the English curriculum. However, over that time they also became increasingly concerned with supporting their students to develop the literacies they needed to participate actively and critically in wider socio-political debates. One reason for this need was that, when provided with opportunities to debate issues in forums other than class discussion, students tended to draw only on knowledge developed in the everyday domains of their lives and to express their views in conversational language that is not valued in the academic domain (Cummins, 2007; Gibbons, 2009). Arguments such as that shown in Text 1 are typical of the Year 8 responses to the issues-based writing task set as a pre-test for the ELK project and are also typical of their responses to national persuasive writing tasks. The argument in this text addresses the question, “Should people do more exercise?”

**Text 1**

*I strongly believe that people should do more exercise because while people are young they eat too much and when they are young they are not allowed to go to the gym.*

The limited repertoire available for students to express their opinions and debate issues of consequence was also apparent in contexts beyond schooling. In 2012, many local Muslim young people, including students from the school, participated in riots to protest against the making of an anti-Islam film. This riot was widely condemned by Muslim leaders in the community, who called upon fellow Muslims “to engage in a process of educating our fellow citizens on the reasons for our discomfort and hurt when our religious feelings and sacred spaces are intentionally invaded” and to ‘use the route of rationality, education and negotiation’ (Yasmeen, 2012, n.p.).

In response, teachers of subject English at Metro decided to pursue an activist literacies agenda for their next unit of work, using the genre-based pedagogy of the ELK project. Focusing on their Grade 8 class, they worked with academic partners to develop a unit of work called “Persuade Me!” with the goal of supporting students to deliver a speech to their classmates and other relevant individuals and groups on an issue that concerned them. Teachers at Metro were particularly keen to explore with students a range of texts generated by adolescent activists, and to model resources that their students could appropriate to express their concerns and win over even potentially hostile audiences in their civic and social lives.

Among the exemplar texts chosen were a number of speeches, essays, and blogs produced by a group of young local Muslim refugee activists, who had participated for a number of years in a multiple intersecting grassroots affiliations oriented to achieving justice for asylum seekers, particularly in regard to the policy of mandatory detention of children and their families in Immigration Detention Centres. The activist literacies of these young people have had a significant impact on swaying public attitudes toward asylum seekers in Australia. Text 2 is an extended excerpt from a refugee’s speech presented at a World Refugee Day rally in 2004. Key rhetorical and semiotic resources of the text that were modelled within the unit will be discussed further in Sections 3 and 4 of this paper.

**Text 2: A Young Refugee’s Plea**

*I am an 18-year-old female refugee from Bamiyan, Afghanistan. I am in year 12 at Holroyd High School and I am studying for my HSC [High School Certificate]. I came to Australia in September 2000.*

*We left Afghanistan because of civil war, persecution, ethnic cleansing of my people, the Hazara, the dangerous environment and the unfair treatment of girls and women. We children had no educational opportunities at all. We knew our escape route would involve a lot of danger. We knew we might die of starvation and thirst, or be killed by pirates or storms at sea. We knew our mother might die, because she was pregnant. However we decided to go because we were desperate...*

*There were six of us: me, then aged 14, my little sisters, 13 and 3, my little brother, 9, my father and mother. A smuggler hid us in the back of a truck for our escape from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Then we were smuggled to Indonesia where we had to stay in hiding. My mother had*

*to go to hospital to give birth. The rest of us were locked in a terrible flat 24 hours a day, until it was our turn to get on the boat.... I was one of 30 children and babies on board.*

*Finally, in September 2000, our boat was guided by the Royal Australian Navy and landed on Australian land safely. I was happy because my miserable life was over, and a new horizon with no more death and killing was welcoming us.*

*But my dream wasn't over, since I found myself in a prison. We arrived the day before the Olympic Games started. We were sent to a detention centre in the desert with fences around it. It was scary and we never felt safe because we were in a compound with single men who had been there a long time and had gone crazy. ... ..*

*We were in that detention centre for two months, and then we got refugee status and were freed... We have been waiting nearly four years for Australia to say yes to us.*

*On Thursday, it happened. We proved that we are still refugees who would be persecuted if we were sent back to Afghanistan. We are now permanent residents, and we can't wait to get our Australian citizenship.....*

Like the *testimonio* of Latin American activists, autobiographical texts such as Text 2 function to make “an outside world join the cause for that the group is fighting and writing” (Jeherson, 1995). As testimony, they are told from both the insider perspective of victim of injustice and from the perspective of advocate.

In addition to insider testimonies such as these, teachers also chose digital and print texts produced by adolescents for a global audience. Text 3 shown below, an extended extract from a blog post, was produced within a loosely bound international online community of young people called TakingITGlobal (TIG), that hosts a number of forums to connect “youth around the world to find inspiration, information and get involved in improving their local and global communities” ([www.TakingITGlobal](http://www.TakingITGlobal)). The composer of this text, known as BoNo\_FaN (hereafter Bonofan), was an active and valued participant of the TIG community from the age of twelve to seventeen, contributing over 200 blog entries, as well as numerous discussion board posts and five online magazine submissions. Text 3 is typical of those produced by Bonofan to mobilize his fellow TIG affiliates to take action to address global poverty.

### **Text 3: Blog: Just Stand**

*In Australia, there continues to be a rising number of young people that are willing to take up the challenge set forth for our generation. In Nelson Mandela's words, "Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation."*

*Today, 24th October 2005, hundreds of young people chose to take a stand against poverty. Today, the Oaktree Foundation's "STAND" advocacy campaign took place. In Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Canberra and Brisbane, young people all took a stand against poverty, took a stand to have their voice heard, and took a stand to see the MDGs put into action.....*

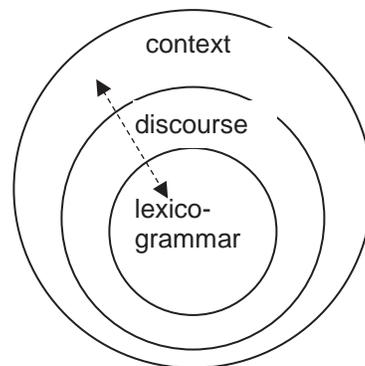
*The night concluded with a challenge to us all: to accept that poverty is the problem that our generation has to address. In the 60's there was the civil rights movement. In the 70's there were the peace demonstrations all around the world opposing the Vietnam war. This decade, we mustn't ignore the opportunity to be known as the generation that eradicated extreme poverty. It is within our grasp. We only need to reach out and grab it.*

Both Text 2 and Text 3 are taken from a corpus of adolescent activist texts and have been extensively analyzed to establish discourse patterns of persuasion (Humphrey, 2008). While they are illustrative rather than representative of the activist literacies of adolescents, they do allow for analysis of the ways in which young people exploit the potential of semiotic systems to participate in, and indeed construct, affiliations oriented to social change. For educators, descriptions of the resources used by adolescents within affiliations such as these present great potential and challenges for supporting diverse learners to develop powerful literacies at school and in their wider communities.

In the discussion that follows, I describe how the teachers at Metro and their students analysed the persuasive resources of these texts and I discuss the activist responses of their students. However, before doing so, I will provide an overview of the rhetorical and social semiotic theories that informed the teachers and students, illustrating with examples from the texts of the adolescent activists introduced above.

### Informing Theories

In analyzing the exemplar texts deployed by the young activists, participatory researchers involved in the ELK project looked to models that could explain both the how and why of language use. Systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2005; Macken-Horarik, 1996; Martin & Rose, 2007, 2008; Martin & White 2005; McCormack, 2003) provided a valuable framework for this work, augmented with understandings from rhetorical, social semiotic, and broader socio-cultural perspectives on language and context (Gee 2000, 2003 2005; Habermas, 1979; Kennedy, 2007). Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) provides analytical resources for exploring meanings at three different levels: the level of social activity, the level of discourse semantics, and the level of lexico-grammar (Martin & Rose 2007:3). The relation among these levels is represented in Figure 1.

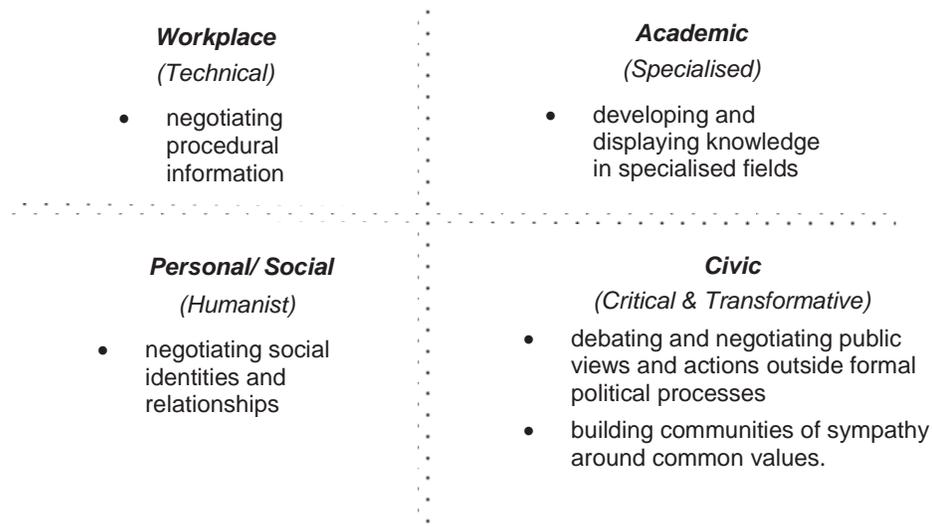


**Figure 1:** Points of view on discourse (adapted from Martin & Rose 2007, p. 5).

According to Martin and Rose (2007),

discourse analysis employs the tools of grammarians to identify the roles of wordings in passages of text, and employs the tools of social theorists to explain why they make the meanings they do. (p. 3)

While the focus of the ELK project has been to date the workings of verbal language, SFL has shown itself to be a flexible model, informing understandings of meanings across a range of modalities (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Unsworth, 2008). From an SFL perspective, contextual influences on texts occur at two levels: the context of culture and context of situation. Context of culture is glossed by Halliday (1985) as “the broader background against that the text has to be interpreted” (p. 46) and in educational contexts, has been interpreted discursively in terms of genre (staged, goal-oriented social purposes) to model the predictable patterns of language for learning (Martin & Rose, 2008). The model that informed ELK practitioners (see Figure 2) brings together discursive and social perspectives on culture to account for the multi-layered literacies of adolescents within and beyond schooling.



**Figure 2:** Cultural domains of adolescent literacies (Humphrey, 2010, following Macken-Horarik, 1996; McCormack, 2003).

Of particular relevance to adolescent activist literacies is the civic domain, which, in common with Habermas’s public sphere, refers to the spaces “where citizens assemble, debate their self-interests, and then pressure their societies’ political institutions for redress or legislative-executive action” (Gronbeck, 2000, p. 141). Adolescents, such as the composers of Texts 2 and 3, with limited access to formal political activity such as voting, tend to form loosely bounded civic affiliations with multiple rhetorical aims.

From this perspective, the lobby group within that the young refugee activist was working, called Chilout, can also be seen as one such civic affiliation. The diverse participants of this group are united around the common goal of persuading the federal government to change its policy in relation to the mandatory detention of children and their families within IDCs. An important

strategy in achieving the goal has been to deploy the conventions of personal narrative to show the human faces of refugees and to break down the negative media perceptions of asylum seekers as disruptive and ungrateful queue-jumpers (Ozdowski, 2004). As Chiloit Ambassadors, the young refugee activists have produced texts across a range of forums, and have addressed divergent audiences to achieve their political goals.

The online textual practices of the young activist, Bonofan, can be seen as situated within two overlapping civic affiliations. As a committed, long-term, and celebrated member of the TIG affinity space (Gee, 2003), Bonofan addresses an audience of fellow affiliates, primarily to mobilize social action on the issue of poverty. The shifting networks and diverse discourse forms that shape the TIG affinity space provide opportunities for Bonofan to interact with new roles, relationships and meanings (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006), and through this affiliation, to expand the repertoire of meanings available to him. Also influential is Bonofan's affiliation and allegiance to the goals of the MakePovertyHistory campaign, which has been largely enacted through a range of celebratory events with prominent international citizens and celebrities acting as spokespeople. Texts such as Text 3, which can be described as promotional genres, are very rarely found in the academic domain and are learned in the context of civic work.

The more immediate layer of context within SFL, context of situation, includes variables such as the nature of the topic or social activity (the field), the relationship between the text creator and the audience (tenor), and the channel of communication (mode). When considering the immediate context of texts in the civic domain, it is the dimension of tenor, and in particular, solidarity, that is seen as most influential in determining language choices. In this domain texts are typically composed to persuade audiences to do something or change existing views. With little institutional power, activist speakers and writers need to align audiences around shared values and feelings.

### **Persuading Through Rhetorical Appeals**

In rhetorical theories, the persuasive work of writers and speakers is described in terms of the three appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos (Kennedy, 2007). Although these appeals are described as being relevant in any speech situation, the demands of audiences in different domains privilege particular appeals and ways of enacting those appeals. Predicting the possible positions and responses of audiences and deploying the appropriate persuasive appeal is essential to successful persuasion in the civic domain. New Rhetoric theorists have found that, in contrast with academic discourse, activists frequently deploy pathos to create a unity of feeling that builds allegiances (Schwarze, 2006: 251) and ethos, essential to mobilize audiences to action through building trust and a sense of collective or rapport (Clark, Drew & Pinch 2003; Halmari & Virtanen, 2005).

The young activist composer of Text 2 has drawn on all three persuasive appeals to carefully stage her persuasive speech. A strong and complex appeal to ethos opens her text (*I am an 18-year-old female refugee from Bamiyan, Afghanistan. I am in year 12 at Holroyd High School and I am studying for my HSC*) and not only establishes her authority to speak as an insider victim but also establishes rapport with the broader Australian audience, which values educated young citizens who fit in with society by attending school. An appeal to logos is achieved

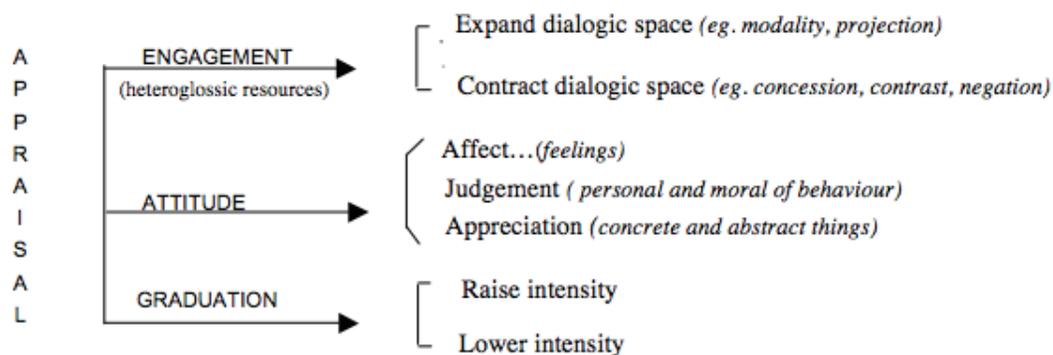
through re-contextualizing the families' experiences in Afghanistan as causes and conditions (e.g., *We left Afghanistan because of civil war, persecution, ethnic cleansing of my people, the Hazara*). However, pathos, achieved through skillfully appropriating the conventions of narrative, is the dominant appeal of this text and others composed by the young refugees. Through the unfolding problems and solutions, which are recounted before revealing the resolution of their permanent visa status, and the revelation of the feelings and concerns of the participants throughout, the audience is taken on a roller coaster of emotions toward empathy and ideally social action.

Understandings of contextual features such as domains, genres, and audiences, as well as rhetorical concepts of persuasive appeals, have been very helpful in building students' understandings of the activist's role and the need to vary one's language and image. However, what is also needed to support emerging activists is a repertoire of resources for enacting these appeals in appropriate ways across texts. In the following section I will provide an overview of key systems of resources from SFL that have allowed teachers to be explicit about the work of language in achieving persuasion.

### Discourse Semantic Resources: Appraisal

Within SFL, emerging descriptions of discourse semantic systems of Appraisal have allowed analysts and educators to understand how the values and positions of audiences are acknowledged and responded to, even in monologic texts (Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal theorists assume that "any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" (Bakhtin, 1953/1986, p. 69). Appraisal theory provides tools for systematically mapping dialogic resources to their contexts for making visible the way adolescents negotiate the complex relationships of power and solidarity with their audiences across stretches of text (Martin & Rose, 2007; Martin & White, 2005).

Figure 3 provides an overview of Appraisal values relevant to the analysis of civic domain discourse.



**Figure 3:** Appraisal, adapted from Martin and White (2005).

While choices from all of these systems interact in various ways to create different rhetorical appeals and discourse styles, of particular interest here are systems of ENGAGEMENT, which one enters as soon as the text allows any recognition of voices—i.e. beyond the bare assertion. At the most general level, ENGAGEMENT offers options of resources that expand space for dialogue and of those that contract space. Both choices are heteroglossic in that they show awareness of the possible positions audiences may hold. However, expansion “actively makes allowances for dialogically alternative positions and voices’ while contraction functions to ‘challenge, fend off or restrict’ the scope of” dialogue (Martin & White, 2005, p. 102). Appraisal researchers have found that expanding resources are highly valued in academic discourse (Coffin, 2006). However, in order to build consensus in political discourse, speakers and writers need ultimately to contract or close down alternative voices (Miller, 2004).

Expansion and contraction can be effectively achieved through the resources of concession. Concession involves summarizing or referring to an argument that is counter to the position of the writer and then rebutting that argument. The following example (Text 4), also an extract from Bonofan’s blog, is an example of the use of concession. In this excerpt, Bonofan initially expands space for those who may challenge his authority to speak by making a lengthy concession to his lack of status. However, in the final sentence he contracts that space to voice his concerns (*But then*). This strategic device appears to open space for other positions and suggests open-mindedness or objectivity. However, it is in fact ultimately contracting because the audience is left with the writer’s own argument, rebutted on his own terms.

#### **Text 4: Contracting Dialogic Space in BonoFan’s TIGblog: The Politics of a New Generation**

*As a 17 year old, I never know if I should be commenting on social issues that I see around me. Sure, I know that many encourage the participation of youth in various levels of decision-making, policy formulation and such, but sometimes I still feel as if I need to know more, or experience more, before I can comment on society and politics. But then again, who makes anyone else more 'qualified,' to use a better term, than another person?*

The lexico-grammatical resources for achieving concession include grammatical resources of conjunction (e.g., although, while, however, but) as well as adverbial adjuncts (e.g., still, only, Sure). However, the choice of resource will vary according to factors such as the degree of familiarity (tenor) and the mode (e.g., spoken-conversation, monologue, or written).

The excerpt from the more formal speech from Text 2 below shows a complex interplay of concession (However, only) with parallelism (We knew... We knew... We knew...), to more emphatically contract any potential argument that may be raised by those in the audience who question the refugees’ motivations for leaving Afghanistan

#### **Text 2a: Interplay of Concession with Parallelism to Contract Dialogic Space**

*We knew our escape route would involve a lot of danger. We knew we might die of starvation and thirst, or be killed by pirates or storms at sea. We knew our mother might die,*

*because she was pregnant. However we decided to go because we were desperate. Escaping was the only thing we could do to ensure our futures. We were hopeful that we would find safety.*

In this example, the listing of dangers involved in the journey functions as a resource of GRADUATION, amplifying the concession, while at the same time the repetition and foregrounding of the projecting clause, “We knew,” adds great emphasis to the contraction.

Resources of GRADUATION are used frequently to add emphasis in Bonofan’s celebratory blog post (Text 3). Unlike the texts of the refugees, the audience of promotional texts such as this do not need to be as carefully positioned through expanding and contracting. In this text however the resources of parallelism and other forms of GRADUATION are used to great effect to amplify the excitement and commitment to his cause and thus to rally the troops. These evaluative resources of Appraisal, along with references to high status icons such as Nelson Mandela, have been found to be typical of the enactment of activist literacies in contemporary social movements such as MakePovertyHistory (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006).

While many teachers draw on knowledge of rhetorical appeals and isolated realizations such as parallelism and amplification to encourage students to strengthen their arguments, the function of these devices in expanding or contracting dialogic space and the effect of dynamic interactions between resources across texts is not well understood in educational contexts. Consequently, teachers are often not resourced with a meta-language to make explicit to their students how the resources function to meet or confound the expectations of the audience. In Section 4 I will demonstrate the way in which teachers and students developed a powerful meta-language to describe and indeed perform the interactions of the discourse semantic resources described above.

### **Lexico-Grammatical Resources: Expanding the Noun Group**

While successful persuasion in the civic domain depends upon a wide range of lexico-grammatical resources, one structure that is essential for building rhetorical appeals is the noun group. Teachers in Australia are typically well versed in the work of noun groups in packaging information within clauses. Genre-based publications have also informed teachers and students as to the patterns of modification within noun groups that are required to achieve the purposes of different text types. For example, in scientific reports, noun groups typically include classifiers (e. g., a *chromosomal* disorder), while in narratives, factual and evaluative adjectives, often themselves modified with adverbial graders, build descriptions (e. g., a *heavily decorated* carriage). To prepare students for the rhetorical work needed to persuade diverse (and potentially hostile) audiences, knowledge of the function of noun groups needs to be extended to include, for example, their work in building ethos. In the following excerpt from Text 2, the speaker develops an extended noun group to build her authority as an insider source. This noun group, built around the main noun, *refugee*, is highlighted in the following excerpt, with pre-modifying classifiers italicized and the post-modifying phrase underlined.

#### **Text 2b Elements of Noun Groups to Build Ethos**

I am an *18-year-old female* **refugee** from Bamiyan, Afghanistan.

In the next section I will describe a lesson sequence developed by teachers to model this and other resources of persuasion. This pedagogy involved setting the texts in their cultural and immediate context and then working to build understandings of the rhetorical and linguistic patterns. Throughout this Deconstruction stage, students were supported in appropriating those resources to use in their own activist literacy practices.

### **Engaging Students in Exploring and Generating Activist Literacies**

As discussed in Section 2, the genre-based pedagogy that informed the ELK project prepares students for generating texts through scaffolded deconstruction and reconstruction of exemplar texts. Teachers at Metro understand and are committed to apprenticing their students into activist literacies. The knowledge of key rhetorical and lexico-grammatical resources has provided teachers with a meta-language for both modeling transformative practice and deconstructing literacies that oppress (Martin, 2000). Armed with this metalinguistic toolkit, teachers worked through the stages of the Teaching Learning Cycle to expand the students' repertoires for participating in activist literacies. Several exemplar texts were used in the class, focusing on issues of community, national, and global significance, and produced by both adolescent and adult activists. In the following description, however, I focus only on the use of the texts produced by the young refugee activists, and particularly on the speech provided as Text 2 above.

Working on the principal of modeling from a top down perspective, teachers began with setting the context of the unit of work in terms of the importance of including the opinions and concerns of young people in public debate. A short overview of the development of classical rhetoric and its contribution to democracy in Athens, Greece was provided, and students discussed the different ways they persuade people to do things or think things in different domains of their lives. Performing persuasive scenarios (e.g., persuading the teacher not to give homework; persuading a family member to switch off a light; persuading a potential customer to buy a product) was an effective strategy for raising students' awareness of the different language resources needed for different persuasive purposes. The four domains of persuasion were explicitly modeled and distinguished in terms of purposes and audiences. Teachers distinguished the academic domain as involving primarily purposes of persuading the fairly static audience (a teacher/marker) that an opinion was valid, using evidence built through curriculum learning. The literacies of the academic domain were compared with those of the civic domain, which involves persuading audiences to take part in social action (Martin, 1985). These concepts provided a powerful meta-language to share throughout the unit and have also helped students and teachers discuss disciplinary differences that affect the choices of persuasive text types in other disciplines.

Having established the broad context within the civic domain, students were invited to discuss issues of concern to them and to choose an issue that they would develop as a speech for an appropriate civic audience. Teachers were initially surprised that the issues chosen by students were limited to those involving their school experiences (e.g., canteen food, school uniforms), rather than to issues of broader concern in their communities, such as racism and tolerance. On reflection, however, participant researchers agreed that the selection of issues of local relevance

would enable the students to focus on building their repertoire of challenging rhetorical and linguistic resources in the context of a familiar field of knowledge. Furthermore, teachers felt confident that they could provide the appropriate civic audience for the students' speeches within the school community and thus allow the concerns to be heard by, for example, members of the school executive who had power to make changes or at least lobby on their behalf.

Interestingly, however, two students raised issues that the teachers found initially confronting. One issue was the lack of commitment of teachers to school sporting events and the second was a more general concern with the commitment of teachers at the school (see Text 5 below). It speaks volumes for the leadership at Metro that, when she heard of these concerns, the principal came to the class and not only applauded the students for their active engagement in their school community, but assured them that if they were able to communicate their concerns convincingly in their speeches, they would be added to the agenda of future staff meetings and inform an action plan oriented to transforming practice.

Building a shared knowledge of the field of exemplar texts is an essential activity within the Teaching and Learning Cycle. The issue of mandatory detention of asylum seekers was explored first because of the relative accessibility of the language of the testimony text type and potential of the local context (the young refugees lived and went to school in neighboring suburbs) to engage students' interest. Teachers guided students in reading and comprehending a range of print and multimodal texts representing views of the young Muslim activists, as well as those of the conservative politicians and commentators who supported measures such as mandatory detention, offshore processing, and turning back refugees' boats. From a literacy perspective, the multiple viewpoints provided an opportunity for teachers to reiterate the notion of audience and to discuss the difficulties that might be encountered in speaking to audiences with such diverse views. At this point the rhetorical appeals of pathos, logos, and ethos were introduced explicitly as three ways of persuading depending on the audience; in very simple terms: appealing from the heart, appealing from the head, and appealing from the projected image.

Establishing this initial rhetorical meta-language provided the context for deconstructing the semiotic functions and structures of the texts. Beginning with the concept of ethos (e.g., "*Who is going to bother to listen to you if you don't look and sound like you know what you are talking about and can relate to the experiences of the audience?*"), the class looked first at visual representations of the young activists' identities on YouTube clips and webpages, including the prominent Muslim scarf or hijab worn by the female speakers. The notion of an insider activist identity was established to describe those who are speaking from their own experience as a victim or witness to the injustice they seek to redress. In relation to ethos, this positioning enabled discussion of the credibility established through insider experiences, compared to the credibility of generalized external sources to support academic arguments. Students then explored the introduction to the speech presented as Text 2, discussing not only the different images presented to build authority and rapport, but also the lexico-grammatical resources for expressing them.

Moving from modeling the context and rhetorical effect of the texts to the analysis of the language structures of the text required a great commitment on the part of teachers. However, with the help of educational linguistic research partners, they worked to build their knowledge of

relevant resources so that they could lead students in the analysis of how the rhetorical appeals were realized in the lexico-grammar. For example, teachers modeled for students the young refugee's use of the extended noun group discussed in Section 3 above to package information about the identity of the speaker and introduced students to functional terms, such as classifying adjectives (e.g., 18 year old, female) and qualifiers (from Bamiyan, Afghanistan).

With the guidance of their teacher, the students then discussed whether introducing themselves in terms of their identity as an insider (e.g., as victim or witness) would be effective for the issue and imagined audience of their own speeches. They practiced creating extended noun groups to build ethos and discussed the contribution of non-verbal representations, such as stance, eye contact, and clothing choices.

Working from this knowledge base, teachers then proceeded to model the ways in which other rhetorical appeals were used in the refugee's speech and the lexico-grammatical resources deployed to realize these appeals. In modeling the linguistic resources used to achieve the appeal to pathos, teachers introduced the appraisal resources of ATTITUDE, particularly the explicit and implicit resources used to express feelings. Students were supported to identify explicit evaluative wordings related particularly to positive and negative meanings of security (e.g., safety, scary) and also to the implicit but powerful ways in that these values can be expressed (e.g., we were in a compound with single men who had been there a long time and had gone crazy). Teachers were particularly concerned to model the achievement of pathos through the selection of seemingly bland facts with cultural relevance for the audience. For example, in the excerpt from Text 2 shown below, a powerful relationship of contrasting emotions is achieved for an Australian sports loving audience through juxtaposing the reference to the Olympic games in 2000, when people from Sydney welcomed visitors from all countries with great joy, with the negative image of being "sent to a detention center in the desert with fences around it."

### **Text 2c: Implicit Contraction through Shared Cultural Values**

*We arrived the day before the Olympic games started. We were sent to a detention centre in the desert with fences around it.*

The use of such cultural references within apparently neutral statements of fact shows a highly developed sensitivity to audience. It is a rhetorically powerful way of binding the audience emotionally to the experiences and ultimately persuading them of the cause.

While pathos and ethos are certainly foregrounded in the text, teachers also made explicit the use of appeals to logos in the text, introducing students to the rhetorical effect of abstract nouns (e.g., civil war, persecution, ethnic cleansing), many of which are formed through the process of nominalization (expressing actions as nouns) to remove the agents of the actions and the personal effect on the victims. Teachers and students discussed the effect of this abstraction in encouraging the audience to focus not on the treatment of the refugees in Afghanistan but on their experiences on their journey to and experiences within Australia.

While the scope of this paper does not allow for a full discussion of all aspects of the literacy instruction that occurred in developing the activist literacies of the students in year 8, one further

set of interpersonal resources that proved an effective addition to the repertoire being built in the classroom included those for expanding and contracting space for dialogue. As discussed in Section 3 above, these resources of ENGAGEMENT, expressed in the grammar through concessive and contrastive clauses, are rhetorically powerful in positioning unconvinced audiences.

Expansion and Contraction were modeled performatively, using the physical classroom door as a prop and meta-language of opening and closing doors. The students were guided in imagining a scenario whereby people in the classroom were the audience and a group of people outside the classroom represented the external voices in the text: the sources of facts, opinions, and experiences that would be introduced to support the speaker/writer's position and/or be challenged. One student was chosen to be the controlling voice and therefore doorkeeper, and instructed to keep his hand firmly on the door at all times. Such an instruction represents the need for rhetoricians to be in control and not allow external voices to take over the text.

The scene that was enacted in this performance involved the doorkeeper inviting selected people (voices) in from outside (opening space for other voices), allowing them to speak, thereby creating the potential for dialogue with multiple voices. However, the external voice was carefully controlled by the doorkeeper who could, by opening the door more or less, allow a number of voices to speak, limit the space made according to how they supported the position, or close off the voice altogether (closing or even banging the door). Students also experimented with other ways of controlling the audience reaction to these external voices; for example, turning up or down the volume of the voices (GRADUATION), or by introducing them in a way that added positive evaluation (ATTITUDE) or increased their status (e.g., "the *great* Nelson Mandela said . . ."). Students were invited to reflect on the performance from the perspective of how the audience was positioned and to consider persuasive texts (both academic and civic) as a process of opening and closing the door to dialogue and controlling who comes in, what they are allowed to say, and, importantly, how their contribution will be evaluated by the writer and audience once the door is closed! The meta-language of *opening and closing the door to voices* was immediately taken up by students in their analysis of the model texts, and they were keen to learn some of the ways these dialogic resources could be realized grammatically (e.g., through reporting and concessive clauses modeled in Section 3).

Following the preparation provided by the engaging modeling and deconstruction activities explored above, students of Year 8 worked cooperatively and independently to prepare speeches giving voice to their concerns. As most concerns related to issues within their school community, the teachers, with the encouragement of their students, arranged for the principal and other members of the school executive to be included in the audience for the presentations.

The following excerpt from one student's response provided as Text 5 below illustrates the extent to which a number of students were able to use extended noun groups to build ethos and ENGAGEMENT resources to expand and contract dialogic space in persuading their audience. Annotations and marginal notes are provided to show these resources.

**Text 5: Example of speech from Year 8 student**

Staging and Rhetorical resources		Discourse Semantic and grammatical resources
Orientation <i>ethos</i>  preview to <i>logos</i>	<i>Good morning teachers and students ... Today I am raising an important issue as a community and as a student at Metro school. This issue is teachers that don't try at school are <u>the cause of students failing in class</u>. I will provide <b>compelling</b> arguments to persuade you today. These arguments concern parents, teachers and students alike.</i>	<u>extended noun</u> <u>group</u> <i>nominalization of logical resources (the cause)</i> <b>GRADUATION</b>
Arguments <i>pathos</i>	<i>But before I begin to discuss these arguments, let me begin to tell you a story that illustrates this issue. <u>A class named 8z, a unique intelligent class that did really well in school, that was evident in their NAPLAN results. During the year the teacher of 8z left the school and she was replaced by a teacher, who wasn't very enthusiastic about teaching and only cared if she got her cheque at the end of the day. As a result, 8z failed their exams and lost all interest in learning...</u></i>	'Paragraph' opens to signal rhetorical structure  <u>extended noun</u> <u>group</u>
<i>From pathos to logos (generalized reasoning)</i>	<i>8z is just one story. .. There are many other stories like this one where teachers don't try at school and it is <u>the cause of students failing in class</u>.</i>	<u>extended noun</u> <u>group with</u> <u>nominalization of logical relationship (the cause)</u>
	<i>Some of you might be still be saying that it's the students' faults that they are failing in class. But I'm here to tell you that students all over New South Wales aren't accessing the proper education they need and it's the teachers who are to blame. <i>As a student I have seen the teachers playing the blame game when their student fail in class. THIS NEEDS TO STOP! ...</i></i>	Concession (expanding and contracting dialogic space)  <b>GRADUATION</b>

Text 5, like the other texts produced by the Year 8 students, gives evidence of many of the resources modeled within the adolescent and adult activist texts. The rhetorical patterns in both verbal and non-verbal representations also impressed teachers, the school principal, and others who were invited to be the audience with their rhetorical power.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of texts and contexts construed by adolescents within these three civic domain affiliations gives evidence that they have developed a repertoire of powerful semiotic resources which, though not always valued by subject teachers, are effective in aligning their particular audiences into communities of sympathy to achieve their social goals. These resources can be viewed from the perspective of rhetoric as interactions of rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos that allow for the goals of particular activist affiliations to be addressed. Importantly, enacting these appeals depends on knowledge of discourse semantic and lexico-grammatical in terms of both their function and structure. While it is likely that the literacies of social affiliations in the 21st Century will be expanded and enabled by the affordances of emerging technologies, developing an activist identity is not dependent on such access.

The analysis of resources deployed by these adolescents has significant implications for teachers and mentors who are concerned to support young people to develop activist literacies. As I have demonstrated above, modeling the resources deployed from a range of speaking positions to engage critically and actively with discourses of power can open spaces to students for ways of meaning making beyond the often narrowly defined curriculum areas of secondary schooling. The positive and celebratory perspective offered here is designed to complement the critical deconstruction of texts which oppress (Martin, 2004). This pedagogic strategy deliberately allows teachers and their students to challenge dominant images of adolescents as problematic and disengaged, and their literacies as superficial. However, modeling of these adolescent discursive politics needs to be firmly grounded in a model of context such as that offered by systemic functional linguistic theory. This model accounts for the relation between contextually constrained semiotic choices in the civic domain and those in agnate domains of adolescents' lives. For adolescents to be fully resourced for the 21st Century, attention must be given to making visible the semiotic resources and contextual constraints of all domains of their literacy lives.

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