

Background:



Sue has been principal of Hebersham Public School for 14 years. Her teaching experience has mostly been in the Western Sydney group of schools with high equity funding. Sue embraces opportunities for engaging students in innovative and effective literacy and numeracy programs. *Make It Count* has provided an excellent framework for not only improving numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but also increasing parent and carer participation in their children's learning.



Mona, a Kamilaroi/Muruwari woman, was born in Brewarrina. She worked at the Kindergarten Union Childcare Centre at Sydney University for the first 12 years of her working careers whilst studying to obtain her childcare qualifications. Mona moved into a number of Community Worker roles with Carers NSW, The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children NSW and the South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services NSW just to name a few. Currently, Mona is the Aboriginal Education Officer at Hebersham Public School where she has worked since 2006 is an integral member of the *Make It Count* Team.



Danielle has been teaching for the past 8 years at schools in both Australia and the UK. Most of her experience has been in Western Sydney schools including her current position at Hebersham Public School. For the past 3 years, Danielle has been a part of the *Make It Count* project at the school level where she has worked with Mona McFarlane (AEO) to develop an Early Stage One Numeracy program – 'Monday Maths Mob'.

School Background

Hebersham Public School (HPS) in Mt Druitt was established in 1972 on Dharug land. Literacy, numeracy and student welfare are key focus areas. The positive behaviour for learning (PBL) philosophy is embedded into the school culture. The whole community has embraced the pride guide (PBL): be a learner; be respectful; and be safe. These rules are displayed in all school areas and are explicitly taught to students for all settings. The PBL/LST team is well established and through on-going analysis of systems, practices and the collection of data supports learning outcomes for students, teaching and support staff and parents and carers. Accelerated Literacy; QuickSmart literacy and numeracy; Jolly Phonics; Jolly Grammar; Spelling Mastery; and Reading Recovery are key programs. Student enrolment is currently 595 with 49% of students from language backgrounds other than English and 16% of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. The school participates in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen and Garden program focusing on gardening and cooking for stage 2. There are 23 mainstream classes and three support classes - two for students with autism and one for students with emotional disturbance. HPS was funded for the National Partnerships Low SES school communities program in 2010 and will receive PAS & PSFP equity funding in 2013. The school competes successfully in the district sport and public speaking competitions and performs in dance and choral festivals. The P&C Association strongly supports school programs and raises funds for additional resources such as air conditioners and interactive whiteboards.

Hebersham and Make It Count

Hebersham Public School became a part of the Make It Count project in 2009 along with Doonside Public School and St Marys North Public School* to form the Dharug Cluster. As a cluster it was decided that the project focus would be on developing numeracy programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in grades K-2. Each school developed their own program based on their individual schools.

Monday Maths Mob

Hebersham chose to focus on numeracy development in Kindergarten as this is the first formalised mathematical learning students are exposed to in primary school. The kindergarten program that has developed since 2010 is - 'Monday Maths Mob'. The aim is to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kindergarten students, their parents, carers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stage 3 peers in a learning community that would engage in numeracy based activities each Monday afternoon from 2:00pm – 3:00pm. It is now in its third year of running and has evolved from a small group of 7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to include all 80 Kindergarten students both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. This program has highlighted the need to ensure culturally responsive pedagogies in Kindergarten and across all levels of school and has acted as a catalyst to bring Aboriginal Education to the forefront of the school.

What are our personal beliefs impacting upon our teaching, specifically of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

This diagram below shows our evolving personal beliefs impacting upon our teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Each belief is interconnected with none operating in isolation from the others.

We believe that all students are entitled to a quality education. Through our involvement in the Make It Count project we have developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of the term 'culturally responsive pedagogy'. We have listened to educators, researchers and academics about ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn and how this can be embedded into our numeracy teaching programs to truly support student learning. Since 2010 we have planned and modified Mathematics tasks incorporating Aboriginal culture and ways of learning into our programs. Through involvement in a range of conferences we have been challenged by colleagues to consider both 'How?' and 'Why?' Thus we have found ourselves looking for ways to make our program authentic in terms of cultural responsiveness whilst still holding simultaneously high academic expectations.

We believe that all students are entitled to learn in a safe and supportive learning environment. For many of our students Kindergarten is the first real experience of formalised education and it can be a daunting experience for children and parents alike. We believe that developing positive relationships with students and their families helps to build a level of trust and respect which in turn supports the teacher to provide a supportive classroom that encourages students to 'have a go' - to take risks in their learning. The idea of a safe supportive environment also extends itself to relationships with parents. We

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encourage parents and carers to attend our weekly Monday Maths Mob program where they can share in their child's learning as well as share their own knowledge with both the teachers and students.

Building strong connections with students and families is the first step in strengthening student attendance with Aboriginal culture being valued across the whole school. We believe that culture is valued throughout the school in classrooms, at assemblies, visually through signage and artworks, through celebrations, through visits from Elders and through culturally responsive planning across the school.

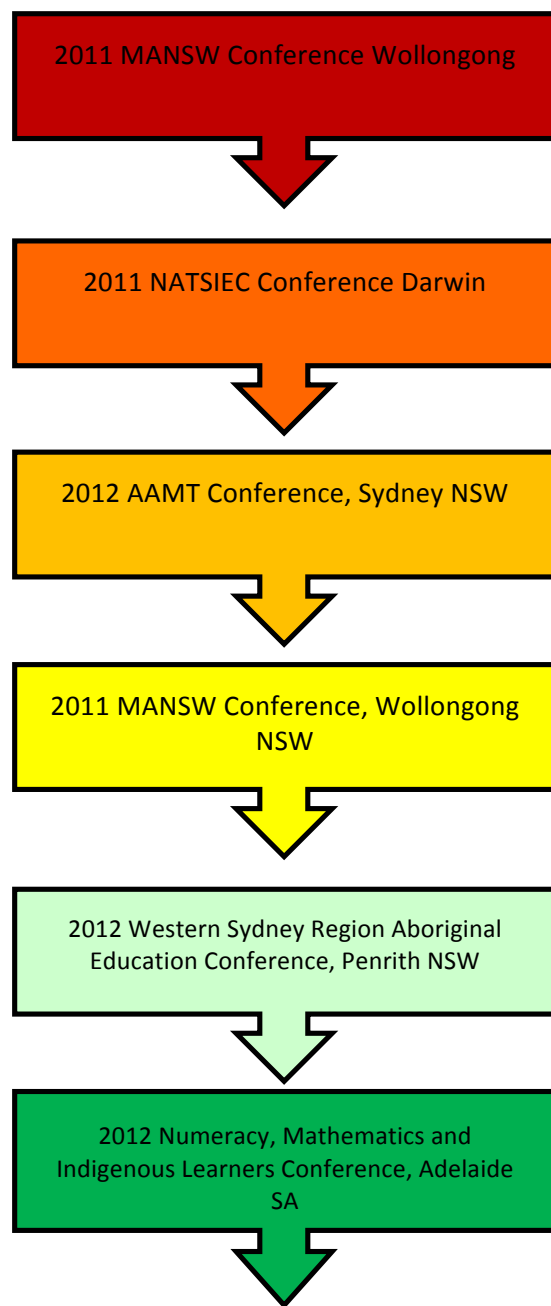


**How we are responsive to the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners
(relational, cultural and social inclusion)**

At Hebersham, we believe that being responsive to the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involves a range of programs, events and committed staff members. In addition to the “Monday Maths Mob” program, Hebersham has a range of programs that cater for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across K-6. Below is a diagram which identifies the different ways we are responding to students’ learning needs.



How do we go about developing our pedagogy?



After being involved in the Make It Count project since 2010 we have certainly changed and developed our teaching pedagogy through an ongoing intent to provide the best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Since the launch of the Make It Count funded program 'Monday Maths Mob' we have been invited to attend and present at a range of local, state and national conferences focusing on Mathematics and Aboriginal Education. Our participation has enabled us to hear from a range of educators and academics across Australia and how they have developed teaching pedagogies in their own learning communities. One of the most significant speakers was Dr Tyson Yunkaporta at the AAMT National Conference held in Sydney 2012. Tyson explained the 8 ways of Learning framework developed with community members and educators in Orange, NSW. Following his presentation we were intrigued to find out more and seek ways to incorporate its philosophies into our own planning based upon ways other Australian schools had used the framework to assist them in developing a more culturally responsive pedagogy. We have used many of Tyson's ideas and suggestions to assist us with our planning for 'Monday Maths Mob' including time for a 'yarn up', trying to make our learning tasks linked to the land and relevant to the child's own experiences.

Although conferences have given us the opportunity to hear from a range of educators, we too have been asked to present on what we have been developing at Hebersham. We were to be honest a little nervous about reporting on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, yet it has definitely pushed us into defining exactly what we do and why we do it. It put us out there to be questioned by others about our pedagogy and how successful it is and why. Furthermore, it gave us a network of people to connect with in other parts of NSW.

Despite the abundance of learning we have undertaken with educators at national and state levels, we have built a strong collegial connection with the two Dharug Cluster schools Doonside PS and Blakett PS. We meet with these schools at least once a term to discuss the progress of our individual Make It Count school programs as well as explore ways we could improve our pedagogies. At each cluster meeting we are privileged to have Ass Prof Peter Howard from the Australian Catholic University as our 'critical friend'. Peter listens closely to our collegial discussions and feeds back to us common themes emerging from our discussions and most importantly poses thought provoking questions which make us question our rationales, teaching styles, use of resources, planning methods and much more. His involvement has been priceless and he is one of the key reasons our pedagogy has continued to grow and evolve over the past 3 years.

Within our own school and community we have learned from each other. Mona McFarlane (AEO), Matt McFarlane (SLSO ATSI), Michele Clarke (SLSO) and I (Dani Upton, teacher) talk regularly about ways we can 'find' Maths in culture' and how we can make the learning relevant and engaging for Kindergarten students. Mona and Matt have worked tirelessly to formulate a range of Power Point slides about different aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture which are used in two of our key programs 'Monday Maths Mob' and 'Koori Club'. As a team Mona and Matt share their cultural knowledge with Michele and I. We discuss the mathematical links that can be made together we formulate series of lessons that teach students about differing aspects of Aboriginal Culture as well as identifying the links to mathematical problem solving tasks. We also engage in collegial discussions with the Kindergarten team involving six teachers to monitor the effectiveness of the lessons as well as decide on the area of mathematics which the children require support. In this way the program is not an 'add on' and teachers take ownership as their ideas are linked with cultural information that they themselves can teach the children.

We are fortunate to have established connections with some of our local Elders who have such a huge amount of knowledge to share with students and teachers alike. In September 2012, Uncle Wes shared Dreamtime stories with Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students in our 'Koori Club' program. It was a privilege both to meet Uncle Wes and to listen to him talk. The way he engaged students (and teachers) through his storytelling was mesmerizing. It really highlighted the importance of oral history in Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander culture. It was clear to see how much the children respected Uncle Wes through their attentive listening and question asking following his stories. Following his presentations at 'Koori Club' Uncle Wes will come to share Dreamtime stories with staff members.

Summary

Over the past 4 years of the Make It Count project we, as educators, have become more conscious of the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students both at an individual and at a whole school level. We have become more informed as a result of our involvement in a range of Aboriginal Education and Mathematics Education conferences, through our own investigation of current research surrounding Aboriginal education and due to our links with staff, students, parents, carers and community members.

Through our lead program, Monday Maths Mob, we have had the opportunity to develop an ever evolving numeracy program for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kindergarten students that enables them to engage in mathematics and cultural learning in a safe and encouraging learning environment.

Our aims are to ensure the 'Monday Maths Mob' program remains embedded in the Kindergarten program and to develop a Stage One focused program 'Boomerang Buddies' which will continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students beyond Kindergarten. As we have already begun whole school discussions around culturally responsive pedagogy we would hope that eventually all K-6 programs reflect what has been learned on our Make It Count journey.

*In 2010 St Marys North PS left the project and Blackett PS became a school partner of the Dharug Cluster.