

**Final Report to the Office of the Board of  
Studies NSW**

**Evaluation of the Years 7–10 English  
Aboriginal Support Pilot Project**

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We also wish to thank the principals and staff from the five schools who participated in the case studies conducted as part of this project. We are grateful for the way they were able to accommodate our inquiries, often at very short notice. We are very conscious of the demands made on schools, and acknowledge the imposition we often make on their time. Similarly, we also thank the senior staff from the NSW Department of Education and Training who made us welcome and shared their expertise with us. We are appreciative of the time afforded us, and the insights they were willing to share.

While the information presented in this report draws on the contributions of a range of stakeholders, the accuracy of the findings and the conclusions drawn are the responsibility of the evaluation team.

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## Executive Summary

The Office of the Board of Studies NSW engaged Erebus International in mid-2005 to evaluate the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project. The overall pilot project has five explicit objectives relating to both processes and outcomes. Each objective is outlined below:

- to increase awareness and expertise among teachers of the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal students in need of culturally and pedagogically appropriate support to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* and provide the basis for equitable student demonstration of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* outcomes
- to develop a range of explicit scaffolding teaching/learning strategies and authentic assessment tasks that meet the learning needs of targeted students, based on the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* literacy program
- to critically engage Aboriginal students about their learning within experiences of the English syllabus and as it integrates with other key learning areas
- to critically engage students through effective pedagogic practice and discourse so that they are able to consider how success in English and English-related school experiences might provide immediate and enduring engagement with school and education
- to develop links between schools, Aboriginal communities and the wider community, that support effective teaching and learning practices; to encourage the development of learning partnerships; to improve the overall school achievement of students; and to facilitate students' becoming engaged and active lifelong learners.

The Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project has three separate yet related phases. During this second phase of the project, an evaluation was planned to be undertaken during the period of the pilot from March to December 2005, focusing on the following issues:

- the impact of the approach on student literacy
- the impact of the approach to professional development on teaching practice
- the overall efficacy of the approach with a view to future implementation.

Members of Erebus International attended briefing sessions, undertook on-site interviews at the beginning and end of the pilot with teachers (and in some cases Principals and Aboriginal Education Assistants) from the schools participating in the project, attended the teacher professional development sessions, sustained ongoing contact with each school during the pilot, and examined and analysed all relevant policy and school-based documentation during that period.

Five schools were chosen to participate in the pilot project:

- o Sydney Secondary College (Leichhardt campus)
- o Alexandria Park Community College
- o Ballina High School
- o Richmond River High School
- o Bonalbo Central School.

The following findings are particularly relevant.

While the initiative was designed initially with the needs of Indigenous students in mind, the program benefit has also extended to students with many different characteristics. More particularly, a selection of comments taken from teachers readily encapsulates the impact of the approach:

- Increased engagement for all students involved in the pilot, including Aboriginal students.
- Many students found the learning experience intensive but rewarding work.
- Students generally appreciated the very structured approach to both teaching and learning and soon locked into the sequence of steps involved, thereby building confidence in their own capability as they repeated particular steps.
- Students were prepared to attack new reading situations with increased confidence and less hesitancy.
- While the approach may have been designed initially for slower students, teachers witnessed a general improvement level in all students irrespective of reading ability and literary experience.
- The approach can be readily adapted to more senior students in terms of appropriate selection of text and designing the critical response required of them, rather than a personal response in order to take them out of their comfortable learning zone.
- Evidence of improved student attendance over the period of the pilot, particularly with those students whose attendance had previously inhibited patterns of learning. In some classes attendance had elevated from seven students attending from fourteen (50%) to twelve from fourteen students (86%) attending on a regular basis
- A work ethic became evident among those students who had never previously been able to engage for anything more than very short periods.

The professional development component was considered by participating teachers to be integral to the pilot project because of the potential for generalisability of the approach under consideration. Teachers attended four separate two-day sessions of professional development. This component was only one aspect of the professional development experience which may be described as input, collaboration, trialling, feedback. The model was seen as superior by practising teachers in relation to other previous professional development experiences. Nevertheless there was some criticism of the repetitive nature of the professional development workshops, indicating that more time could have been spent in action

rather than input and reflection. Despite these limitations, the potential to apply this model, while resource-intensive, is enhanced when the outcomes of the experience for teachers is considered.

In terms of the future of the initiative, the following factors appear to be key success factors to facilitate sound implementation:

1. The active support of the Principal and the school leadership team for the initiative.
2. Individual-teacher and whole-school ownership of students' results.
3. Working in a paired or team-based context.
4. The link between the professional development model and the ongoing accountability for performance.
5. The focus on success within the project and the importance of praising students for their achievements.
6. The importance of identifying personal/professional benefits for teachers as a motivation for participating in the project.
7. The key role to be played by Aboriginal Education Assistants, and by parents.
8. The emphasis on explicit teaching and student engagement.
9. Use of the approach by other teachers in other key learning areas.
10. An identification of the key assumptions underpinning the teaching of literacy.

























relief, funding must be found for expendables that are used during the project, eg materials for professional development and students' books, photocopying and stationery.

Irrespective of the option to be adopted, it is recommended that a pilot project exit strategy be undertaken in the near future to ensure that the gains already achieved in terms of both student achievement and teacher development are sustained for the longer term. This may involve meetings in both the inner city and on the North Coast, with each of the participating teachers seeking suggestions to ensure that their work continues and that the gains made by the students are not lost if funding is withdrawn. Meanwhile it is appropriate to advise regional personnel of the success of the model so far and the benefits that have accrued as a result of the financial investments being made.

## Key Success Factors

In terms of the possible future expansion of the pilot project, a number of key factors may be identified that will contribute to the future success of the project. Each of these is detailed below. They should be carefully examined if the project is to continue in its existing or some adapted form.

### 1. *The active support of the Principal and the school leadership team for the initiative*

It is well understood that, without the Principal's and/or school leadership team's support, any educational initiative will receive limited resources and ultimately will not be seen as part of the school's core business. Under these circumstances, it will remain on the periphery of school priorities and ultimately wither away. In those pilot schools where the Principal has been an active supporter, participating teachers have made presentations at whole-school staff meetings and have sparked the interest of teachers from other KLAs, resulting in professional sharing. In these circumstances, the potential for the initiative to have a whole-school focus is significantly enhanced.

### 2. *Individual teacher and whole-school ownership of students' results*

It is important that each teacher take individual responsibility for the measurement of student outcomes from the initiatives. This includes accountability for the results achieved from the initiative. Again, in those schools where the initiative has had whole-school acceptance, there is a strong sense of whole-school ownership for the students engaged in the program and the resulting progress made as a result of the pilot initiative.

### 3. *Working in a paired or team-based context*

Participating teachers have clearly identified the benefit of having a soul mate with whom they can share aspirations, ideas and frustrations during the period of the pilot. Research on adult learning also supports the model that facilitates teacher dialogue with 'trusted others' during personal learning. In this way teachers can clarify perceptions and regularly learn from each other during the periods of professional development and implementation. The advantage of a committed team rather than a pair is that the members of the team become advocates for the

initiative. Consequently there is a critical mass of internal champions within an organisation that can be employed to facilitate learning and implementation as the initiative is being expanded.

**4. *The link between the professional development model and the ongoing accountability for performance***

The overall learning model employed during the pilot is not the only key attribute of the collaborative professional development model. As importantly, there is a built-in expectation that participating teachers will trial ideas, activities and strategies introduced during the professional development sessions and report back to peers on their return to the next session. This means that all teachers will need at least to trial the initiative under discussion and be prepared to share successes and challenges with peers. Such an approach provides the opportunity for teachers to follow through the ideas introduced and ensures that a safe environment is provided where teachers can talk openly about successes and initial failures and discuss openly why these may have occurred.

**5. *The focus on success within the project and the importance of praising students for achievements***

A particular benefit of this pilot for students has been the emphasis on incremental learning where teachers have the opportunity to offer praise for work completed. For some secondary school teachers this aspect of their pedagogy has been a recent addition to their teaching repertoire. Also, in some cases the opportunity to use praise has been transferred to teaching other students in other classes and in other KLAs. One of the identified strengths of this project has been the focus on student success and its appropriate acknowledgement. This has been a development experience for some teachers irrespective of experience and will continue to be employed by those teachers regardless of the future of the pilot project.

**6. *The importance of identifying personal/professional benefits for teachers as a motivation for participating in the project***

From a school leadership perspective, the L2R:R2L pilot is an example of a change-management initiative within the school setting. Under these circumstances, the history of educational change suggests that some teachers will be more sceptical about the change than others. In the case of these teachers, it is necessary to identify for them the key personal and professional benefits that will be derived from their participation in the project. While advocates of the model suggest that the benefits relate to increased skill development in relation to pedagogy and student engagement, these benefits must be clearly articulated at the beginning of the project to ensure maximum commitment from the teachers.

**7. *The key role to be played by Aboriginal Education Assistants and parents***

The notion of developing key partnerships to facilitate student learning has become very important. Evidence gathered during this pilot project in North Coast schools suggests that there are two key partners who must be involved in the planning and implementation of such initiatives at each step of the process. Initially, this pilot was established for Aboriginal students. In schools

where the Aboriginal Education Assistants have been involved, students are more comfortable in their learning and a link has been established between school and home through the AEA. Such a measure is a necessary and important step if the school is to enhance the potential for student attendance, and the learning is to be supported and sustained at home. In light of the experience in the pilot, it is considered important that the AEA should be involved in the project as early as possible, concomitantly clarifying the scope of the particular roles and responsibilities of the AEA in relation to the initiative. In this way genuine partnerships can be established at the outset and complementary roles can be undertaken for the mutual benefit of students and other key stakeholders. It should be noted that, in some cases, the AEAs may require considerable assistance to undertake their roles. Equally, however, it is considered that such an effort would be worth the investment.

This pilot has also demonstrated the impact of the model on non-Aboriginal students who may have been experiencing learning difficulties. In these situations, any gain in literacy made by such students must be sustained through active parental support and interest. Sustained success appears to be greatest where parents have been advised of the nature of the pilot and the roles that they can take to support students at home. While many parents are willing to assist, this project again demonstrated that they need specific assistance with the activities they can take into the home context to assist their children. In those relatively few situations where this occurred, there appears to have been a range of positive results for students.

#### **8. *The emphasis on explicit teaching and student engagement***

Many teachers engaged in the pilot project have commented on the benefit of their now understanding the nature and implementation of explicit teaching and how it can be applied across a range of learning disciplines. While many teachers and students engage in more inductive and discovery-based activities, the place of explicit teaching as a possible teaching methodology has been re-established and many teachers are already seeing the benefit of such an approach in particular learning contexts and with particular students.

One of the greatest challenges confronting teachers at present relates to their ability to engage difficult students in the learning process. It would appear that this pilot project has offered teachers a range of strategies that can be employed with such students. Indeed, many teachers have commented on the reduced disruptive student behaviour they are experiencing when teaching the L2R:R2L model.

#### **9. *Use of the approach by other teachers in other key learning areas***

It is readily apparent that the L2R:R2L model will only be successful when the key aspects of the pedagogy can be applied across a range of learning disciplines. The pilot has already demonstrated the capacity of the model to satisfy this criterion.

A fundamental step of building wider acceptance of the model is to ensure that teachers from other key learning areas are constantly trialling the methodology successfully. Where this has

already happened, acceptance is accelerated and the potential for sustainable impacts on student learning are decidedly greater.

**10. *An identification of the key assumptions underpinning the teaching of literacy.***

If the literacy teaching model under consideration is to be successful over the longer term, it is apparent that existing assumptions about the teaching of student literacy must be considered, challenged and/or supported where necessary. While there is no single approach most appropriate for all students, it is imperative that teachers have the opportunity to argue the key assumptions underpinning this and other approaches to teaching student literacy so that they clearly understand the elements of the pedagogy being applied. Once this has occurred teachers are in a stronger position to use the methodology with understanding and commitment.

## Concluding Statement

Evidence gathered during the review from teachers and related stakeholders indicates the early success of the pilot project. While the data relating to student achievement is essentially anecdotal at this stage, it is clear that the confidence and motivation levels of students participating in the pilot have increased. It would also appear that these trends relate to students of varying ability levels and backgrounds. Equally, participating teachers have found the experience instructive and challenging. For many teachers, existing pedagogical paradigms have been challenged and new teaching methodologies have been successfully trialled.

At the heart of the pilot project is the collaborative professional development model which has been found to be extremely beneficial yet resource-intensive. It is apparent that there is a growing groundswell of support for strategically expanding the model, perhaps in different contexts within New South Wales and even with different key learning areas. It has also been acknowledged that any expansion of the pilot will require considerable resource allocation for the purposes of teacher professional development and lesson planning. Only time will tell whether schools perceive the benefits of the pilot project to be sufficiently significant to identify this initiative as core business in the future and therefore a targeted school priority for future and ongoing school funding.



## Appendices

**Appendix 1 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – June 2005**

**Appendix 2 — Interview Schedule: Other Project Stakeholders – July/August 2005**

**Appendix 3 — Project Outline**

**Appendix 4 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – Late 2005**

**Appendix 5 — Stakeholder Schedule**

## Appendix 1 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – June 2005

### *The Project*

1. What is your motivation for participating in this project?
2. What do you consider to be the major goals of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project?

### *The Approach*

3. What do you consider to be the greatest strengths of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach?
4. How does this approach differ from the way you have taught student literacy in the past?
5. In what ways do you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Do you anticipate any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What examples of student evidence will you be able to provide that suggests the L2R:R2L approach used in your classroom may be making a difference for students?
7. How could you apply the 'scaffolding' approach across other KLAs?
8. In what ways do you believe your teaching of Indigenous students will change as a result of participating in this pilot project?
9. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist you in the measurement of student achievement?
10. Have you spoken to other teachers in your school about this approach to teaching student literacy? If so, what has been their reaction?

### *Professional Development*

11. What benefits does your participation in this pilot project provide for you in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
12. In what ways has this approach challenged your existing strategies for the teaching of student literacy?
13. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot so far? What worked well? What could have been improved?
14. Do you consider the lesson videotaping to be an integral part of the project?
15. How has lesson videotaping enhanced student learning to this stage?

16. How has lesson videotaping enhanced the quality of your own teaching?
17. The model of professional development being applied in this project is one of input, trialling and feedback in a collaborative context. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of this model of professional development?
18. What role do you see for peer mentoring in a project focusing on teaching and learning strategies like the Years 7–10 English pilot project?

***Overall Project Efficacy***

19. At this relatively early stage of the pilot project what do you see as its greatest strengths and limitations?
20. Given that the pilot project is still in its early stages, what aspects do you consider could be readily applied in similar projects of this kind?

## Appendix 2 — Interview Schedule: Other Project Stakeholders – July/August 2005

### *The Project*

1. What do you consider to be the major goals of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project?
2. How do you believe this pilot project will assist students and teachers?

### *The Approach*

3. What do you consider to be the greatest strengths of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach?
4. What do you see as the major differences between the L2R:R2L approach and more traditional approaches to student literacy?
5. In what ways do you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Do you anticipate any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What particular challenges do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will provide in determining whether the approach makes a difference for students?
7. Do you consider that there is potential for applying the 'scaffolding' notion across other KLAs? Is this particularly the case for Indigenous students? Could you give some examples?
8. In what ways do you anticipate that the teaching of Indigenous students may change as a result of teachers' participation in this pilot project?
9. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist the measurement of student literacy achievement?

### *Professional Development*

10. What benefits do you believe teachers' participation in this pilot project will provide in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
11. In what ways does this approach challenge existing strategies for the teaching of student literacy?
12. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot so far? What worked well? What could have been improved?

13. Do you consider the lesson videotaping to be an integral part of the project?
14. The model of professional development being applied in this project is one of input, trialling and feedback in a collaborative context. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of this model of professional development?
15. What role do you see for peer mentoring in a project focusing on teaching and learning strategies like the Years 7–10 English pilot project?

***Overall Project Efficacy***

16. At this relatively early stage of the pilot project what do you see as its greatest strengths and limitations?
17. Given that the pilot project is still in its early stages, what aspects do you consider could be readily applied in similar projects of this kind?

## Appendix 3 — Project Outline



# Evaluation of the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project

## Project Outline

### Background

The Office of the Board of Studies NSW has engaged Erebus International to evaluate the Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project. The overall project has five explicit objectives relating to both processes and outcomes. Each objective is outlined below:

- to increase awareness and expertise among teachers of the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal students in need of culturally and pedagogically appropriate support to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* and provide the basis for equitable student demonstration of the *English Years 7–10 Syllabus* outcomes
- to develop a range of explicit scaffolding teaching/learning strategies and authentic assessment tasks that meet the learning needs of targeted students, based on the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* literacy program
- to critically engage Aboriginal students about their learning within experiences of the English syllabus and as it integrates with other key learning areas
- to critically engage students through effective pedagogic practice and discourse so that they are able to consider how success in English and English-related school experiences might provide immediate and enduring engagement with school and education
- to develop links between schools, Aboriginal communities and the wider community, that support effective teaching and learning practices; to encourage the development of learning partnerships; to improve the overall school achievement of students; and to facilitate students to become engaged and active lifelong learners.

It is recognised that Indigenous students require greater levels of support in order to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes. This support includes increasing awareness by teachers of culturally and pedagogically

appropriate teaching and learning strategies for Indigenous students. These strategies include the need for provision of explicit scaffolding techniques and authentic assessment tasks. Each of these will be reviewed during the pilot phase of the project.

The Years 7–10 English Aboriginal Support Pilot Project has three separate yet related phases. **The first phase**, commenced in 2004, established a clear definition for the nature and purpose of the project, established the project school sites, learning teams and training peer mentors. **The second phase**, commenced in 2005, represents the pilot project stage. During this phase, four separate English teacher training workshops will be conducted each term. The focus of these will be the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* approach to literacy teaching developed by Dr David Rose from the University of Sydney.

In addition the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* strategies will be implemented in the six confirmed schools with thirteen teachers and two teacher mentors.

The pilot project also involves:

- providing personal support to each teacher through a consultation in which the teacher, consultant and mentor will discuss video footage of them trialling the approach in class
- a second consultation aimed at assisting teachers with future planning/programming
- a professional development day for teachers to be held in Term 3
- the collection of data by teachers (student writing samples – before, during and after the project – one to be a story, the other a response text)
- the publication of annotated samples of student writing on the Board's website.

During this second phase of the project, an evaluation will be undertaken, focusing on the following issues:

- the impact of the approach on student literacy through the analysis of students' pre- and post-writing samples
- the impact of the approach to professional development on teaching practice
- the overall efficacy of the approach.

**The third phase** of the project is designed to focus on the same areas as the pilot, but modified by what is learned from the evaluation of the pilot project.

### Project Objectives

It is anticipated that the pilot project evaluation will:

- identify and critically evaluate existing research, reports and projects in two key areas: effective models of peer mentoring as well as strategies for facilitating significant change in the professional development of teachers
- develop qualitative and/or quantitative data collection tools to capture the extent to which teachers understand the need for explicit teaching strategies to help improve the literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students

- develop qualitative and/or quantitative data collection tools to capture the extent to which teachers have engaged with the approach, taken ownership of it, and implemented it in their classroom practice, in particular, as well as English teaching in general terms.

### Project Methodology

This evaluation requires information to be provided to key stakeholders within the Office of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training (Sydney Region) about the outcomes of the pilot project and the strategies for achieving those outcomes.

The methodology for the evaluation will include:

- documentary analysis
- interviews with participating teachers
- analysis of pre- and post-program assessment data
- videotaping methodology of teachers engaged in the implementation of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* approach in their classrooms
- analysis of data derived from teacher journals developed for the purpose of documenting relevant insights and learning during the project
- development and delivery of a teacher survey/questionnaire to be completed by each of the thirteen teachers and two teacher mentors involved in the pilot project. The parameters of this survey will be in direct accordance with the five key outcomes of the project and the stated objectives of the evaluation.

### Project Timeline

The evaluation is to be completed by the end of December 2005. Data-gathering activities are planned to take place from June to November 2005.

### Contact for Further Information

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## Appendix 4 — Interview Schedule: Participating Teachers – Late 2005

### *The Project*

1. Do you remain positive about your participation in this project? Why?
2. What do you consider to be the greatest strength and limitation of this project?

### *The Approach*

3. What is your current view of the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* (L2R:R2L) approach for your students? Could you provide any reasons?
4. Could you describe how you have adapted the L2R:R2L approach since the beginning of the year?
5. What are your current views of the ways you anticipate this approach will more effectively address the literacy needs of students? Have you noted any particular differences for Indigenous students? Why?
6. What examples of student evidence have you gathered to suggest the L2R:R2L approach used in your classroom may be making a difference for students?
7. How could you apply the 'scaffolding' approach across other KLAs?
8. In what ways do you believe your teaching of Indigenous students has changed as a result of participating in this pilot project?
9. How would you plan to apply this methodology in 2006 and beyond?
10. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach will assist you in the measurement of student achievement?
11. How do you believe the L2R:R2L approach could be most effectively marketed to other teachers and schools?

### *Professional Development*

12. What benefits has your participation in this pilot project provided for you in terms of professional development? Can you give some examples?
13. How could the impact of the professional development component of the project be further enhanced?
14. Could you comment on the usefulness of the professional development days for the pilot? What worked well? What could have been improved?
15. To what extent have you employed lesson videotaping to enhance student learning during the project?

16. How has lesson videotaping enhanced the quality of your own teaching? How would you plan to use it in the future?
17. What do you see as the major strengths/limitations of the model of professional development? Does it require adaptation for use with other schools in the future?
18. Are there any other comments about the professional development process with a view to applying this model more broadly?

***Overall Project Efficacy***

19. What do you see as the greatest strengths and limitations of the pilot project?
20. How do you believe this project could be adapted in order to be employed in other schools throughout the state?

## Appendix 5 — Stakeholder Schedule

Organisation / School	Name
Richmond River High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Karen Yager</li> <li>• Ms Jane Ryan</li> <li>• Mr Mark Ippolito</li> <li>• Ms Gae Masters</li> </ul>
Ballina High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Sue Page</li> <li>• Ms June Burtonwood</li> </ul>
Bonalbo Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Sue Smith</li> <li>• Ms Jan Maslen</li> </ul>
Alexandria Park Community School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Garry Ledwidge</li> <li>• Ms Rachel Varela</li> <li>• Ms Jesse McMaster</li> </ul>
Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Bruce Barclay</li> <li>• Ms Zoe Smith</li> </ul>
NSW Office of the Board of Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Kevin Lowe</li> <li>• Ms Suzanne Ziems</li> <li>• Ms Jennifer Munro</li> <li>• Dr Maree Stenglin</li> <li>• Dr David Rose</li> </ul>
Sydney Education Region, NSW Department of Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Phil Lambert</li> </ul>