

A Sense of Place in Maitland

This Resource Kit has been developed through *Our Sense of Place: Improving environmental attitudes and behaviours*, a project of Maitland Region Landcare with assistance from the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust.

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Our Sense of Place Project Background

Background

A Sense of Place in Maitland: Resource Kit for Schools has been developed through *Our Sense of Place: Improving environmental attitudes and behaviours*, a pilot project of Maitland Region Landcare with assistance from the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust.

The *Our Sense of Place* project extended from February 2002 to May 2003. In part, it was motivated by the results of a local school survey in October 2001 that highlighted the kind of support and resourcing schools needed to improve environmental education.

During the implementation phase, the project involved participation of six local schools:

- ♦ Metford Public School
- ♦ Bolwarra Public School
- ♦ Hunter Valley Grammar School
- ♦ Maitland Grossmann High School
- ♦ Maitland High School
- ♦ All Saints College, St Peters Campus.

Teachers and students from these schools worked with Kylie Yeend (Project Manager), Lana Collison (Maitland Landcare Coordinator) and Kate Adkins (Environmental Science student) to trial a range of approaches and resources. The aim was to develop a 'sense of place' in relation to Maitland's natural and cultural heritage.

Development of the Resource Kit

The Resource Kit has been the most important material output of the pilot project. It has been developed to assist schools' and communities' knowledge and understanding of local (Maitland area) natural and cultural heritage, environmental issues and their management, and excursion opportunities. Providing access to and encouraging the use of local information, people and places reflects an important aspect in the development of a local sense of place.



John Cameron explores a 'sense of place' with local teachers during an in-service training day.

The Resource Kit is a culmination of the experiences, information collected, and feedback gathered from those involved in the *Our Sense of Place* pilot project. Its development was made possible only through the generous sponsorship and contribution by a range of organisations and individuals.



Guest speakers to the classroom added an extra dimension to exploring local issues and places.

The Resource Kit has been designed to be 'living' and flexible. The idea is that new information may be inserted in the future and that teachers can mix and match various elements of the Kit. The Resource Kit does not need to be used strictly from beginning to end, instead, each case study, program and worksheet may stand alone.

It is likely that future materials for the Kit will be coordinated through Maitland City Council's Schools Environment Program. It is also hoped that each school will add to the Resource Kit based on their own collection of local information, programs and worksheets.



Excursions that combined hands-on experiences with information on local issues and places were an important part of the project.

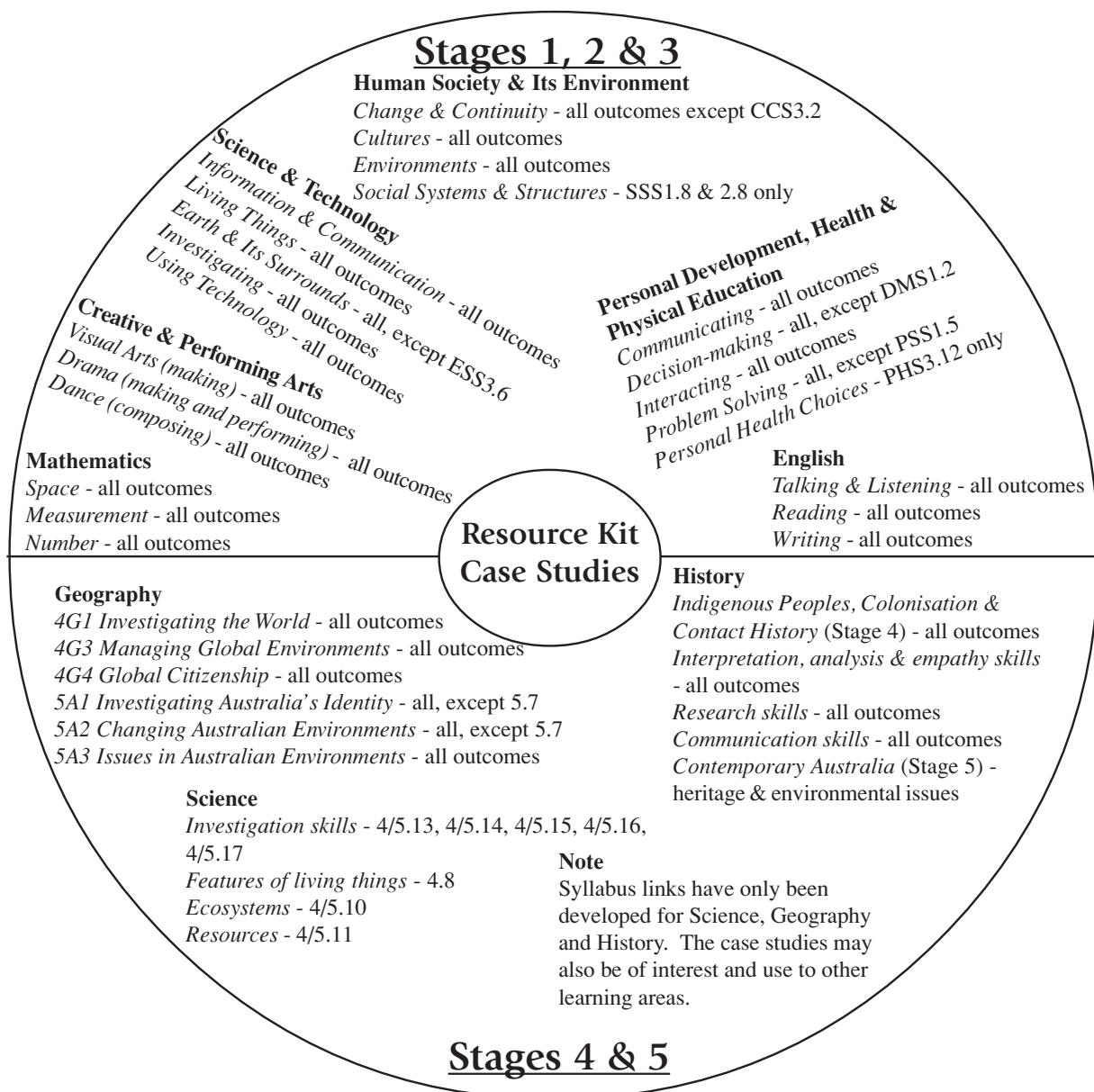
This excursion to Tenambit Wetland involved revegetation, nature journaling, water quality monitoring, and environmental games.



Overview of syllabus links

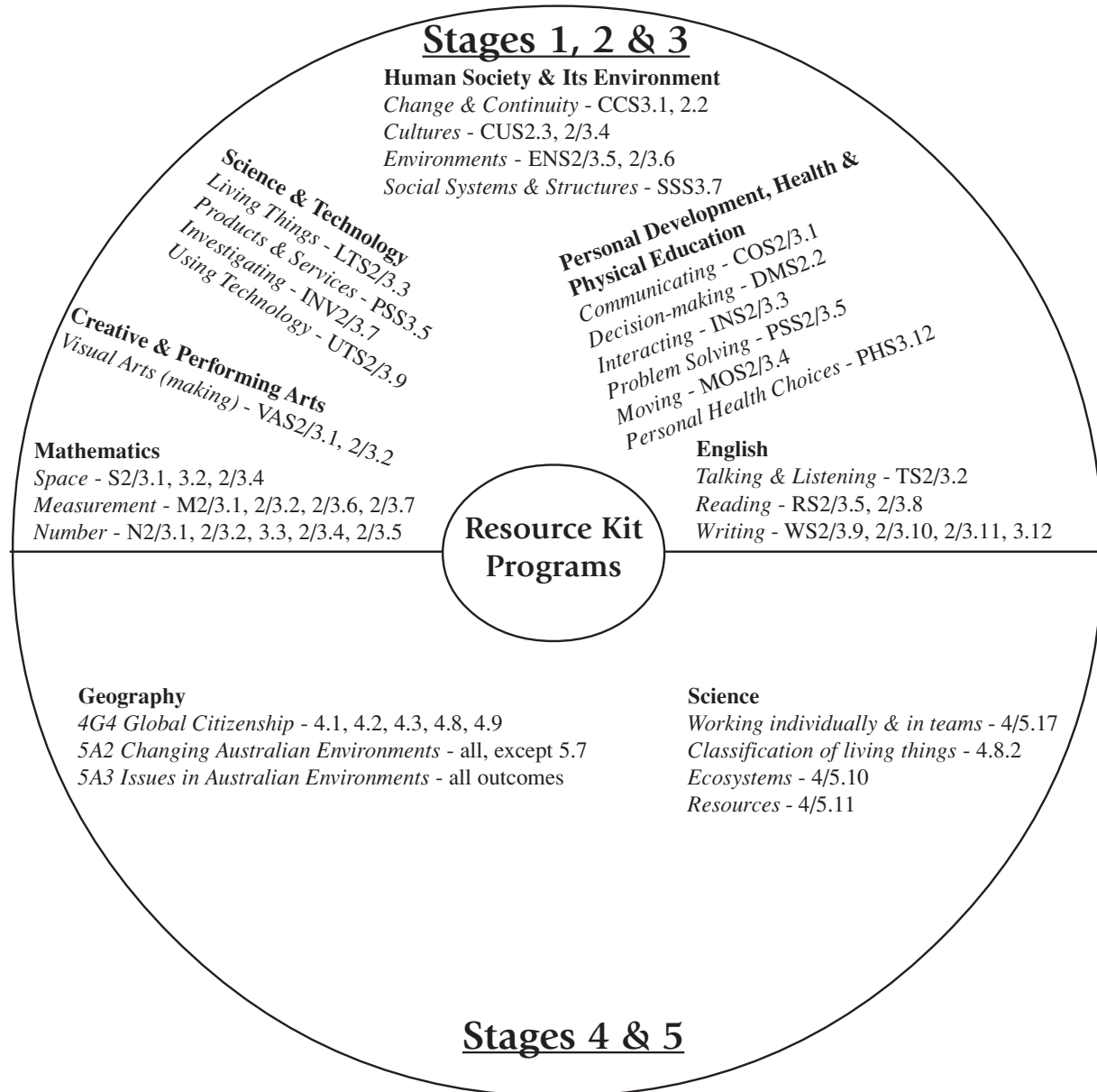
The case studies, programs and worksheets in *A Sense of Place in Maitland: Resource Kit for Schools* address a range of syllabus outcomes. The programs and worksheets have a stronger emphasis on Stages 3 and 5. This is because the pilot project focused on trialing information and approaches with Years 6 and 10.

Depending upon which **case studies** are used and how they are applied in the classroom or field, they have the potential to address the following syllabus outcomes:



Overview of syllabus links

An overview of syllabus links is provided at the beginning of each program, including excursions. The diagram below offers a summary of all connections of **programs** and **worksheets** with syllabuses.



Overview of syllabus links

Use of Resource Kit materials will also assist schools meet the mandatory curriculum objectives of the **Environmental Education Policy for Schools** (NSW Dept. Education & Training, 2001):

Students will develop:

knowledge and understandings about:

- ♦ the nature and function of ecosystems and how they are interrelated (K1)
- ♦ the impact of people on environments (K2)
- ♦ the role of the community, politics and market forces in environmental decision-making (K3)
- ♦ the principles of ecologically sustainable development (K4)
- ♦ career opportunities associated with the environment (K5)

skills in:

- ♦ applying technical expertise within an environmental context (S1)
- ♦ identifying and assessing environmental problems (S2)
- ♦ communicating environmental problems to others (S3)
- ♦ resolving environmental problems (S4)
- ♦ adopting behaviours and practices that protect the environment (S5)
- ♦ evaluating the success of their actions (S6)

values and attitudes relating to:

- ♦ a respect for life on Earth (V1)
- ♦ an appreciation of their cultural heritage (V2)
- ♦ a commitment to act for the environment by supporting long-term solutions to environmental problems (V3).

Understanding & Developing A SENSE OF PLACE

Defining 'sense of place'

The term 'sense of place' is often used to refer to the feelings people have for particular places and the meaning they gain from a relationship with these places. A sense of place is one of the fundamental felt senses a person develops along with a sense of self and a sense of community. The main emphasis of a sense of place is on *personal feelings* for places.

There are other definitions of sense of place, however, that describe the interplay of emotion, knowledge and action or the intertwining of meanings, activities and specific landscapes. These definitions suggest that it isn't just a feeling. Our sense of place is also recognised and developed through our actions in a place and the significance of those actions to us.

A sense of place is commonly associated with local areas, the places in which people live and work. It can also be applied to regions, nations or even the whole planet.

A sense of place can come from a feeling of belonging to a place, of being at home there. It is often contrasted with a sense of displacement or placelessness, of not belonging anywhere, which has been linked to the modern condition of alienation. Sense of place is sometimes used in the debate over the effects of modernisation and globalisation, referring to what has been lost or what needs to be more highly valued.

Some writers emphasise that different groups of people have different senses of the same place that may be based on age, class, gender and race. These variations in sense of place should be recognised and handled with respect. In the Australian context, exploring the interactions between Aboriginal and settler senses of place provide an opportunity to understand cultural influences and how these have contributed to Australian identity.



Students can be encouraged to observe, reflect and record the layered stories of a local environment.

The importance of sense of place for environmental attitudes and behaviours

Sense of place is not something a person either has or hasn't, it can develop with care. Fostering a sense of place in a school-age child or adolescent has obvious benefits from a personal and social perspective. At a personal level, a sense of place can contribute to the development of self-esteem, belonging and identity. Socially, a sense of place can strengthen connections with community, and also have environmental benefits.

Love of a place can be a very strong motivator for environmental behaviours. It stands alongside other motivations of an environmental ethic such as fear (of environmental collapse, for example), hope (for a more environmentally friendly society, for example) or moral obligation (to give other animals moral consideration, for example). While all these approaches have their value, love of a local place can provide a more grounded, practical and positive basis to environmental concern.

By drawing out students' understanding of local places and their response to them a teacher can help students make clear links between their actions and their effect on local places. Attention to the felt response to place can help to foster an ethic of care for the local environment that may be extended to the environment as a whole. Encouraging students to explore local places gives them direct experience of the environment in which they live and a means of expression for environmental attitudes.

Sense of place is also developed by increasing knowledge about local places, especially by considering places as the sites of multiple stories. Some of the stories are scientific - how the local landforms were created, and how the plants and animals evolved can be imaginatively told by knowledgeable people in the field to develop much greater ecological literacy. Some of the stories are human - local Aboriginal myths and knowledge, settler histories and oral histories can be collected. These stories develop a richer, more intercultural attitude towards the local environment.

Research on sense of place

Refer to www.augustana.ca/~janzb/place/education.htm for direct links and information on sense of place and education.

Understanding & Developing A SENSE OF PLACE

Indicators of sense of place

How does a teacher assess the development of students' sense of place? There are many indicators:

Knowledge about local places

How much information about local places can the students provide? Is it of different types - scientific, historical, personal, intercultural?

Integrative capacity

Can the students relate the different types of knowledge of place in order to present a rich and multi-layered sense of place?

Expressive capacity

Can the students express their response to local places in an articulate way? Do they use a variety of modes of expression - written presentation through factual, poetic or imaginative expression, presentation of images such as drawings, sketches, videos and photographs, and oral presentation?

Depth of experience

What experiences of local places are the students reporting upon? What range of experience types are being drawn upon (e.g. active, reflective, data collecting, imaginative and so on)?

Practical engagement

What level of physical engagement with the place have the students shown? What activities have they initiated? How involved have they been in local place-related activities and demonstrating active citizenship?

Appreciating different senses of place

To what extent have the students understood that there are different senses of the same place depending upon factors such as class, gender, age and race? Have they articulated some of these differences, especially Aboriginal stories and understandings of local place? Do they understand the need to respect difference and engage in dialogue across the differences?

Exploring sense of place through school education

School education provides important grounds for developing a child and adolescent's sense of place. Conversely, including local place-based approaches in teaching can make the educational experience more enriching and meaningful for students. They develop a clearer understanding of the relevance and relationship between their day-to-day learnings and what they see, feel and interact with in their surrounding environment

and community. It can also build recognition that local places are special and significant - that you don't have to travel great distances to find places of beauty and value.

There are a range of activities that contribute to a sense of place and that may be integrated with school curriculum:

Work in the school grounds

This could involve compiling a school history; understanding the plants and rocks; working to revegetate and regenerate school grounds; and building nature trails.

Oral history projects

Identify older people who are holders of local oral history and interview them. These stories could be compiled and published in a simple format that also includes students' drawings to give an extra dimension to the oral histories.

Mapping local areas

Identify places of local historical, scientific and geographical interest and discover the stories behind them. Students may map their own homes, neighbourhoods, suburbs, towns, regions in concentric circles with flows across the boundaries, showing connections between themselves, their community and places.

Creative writing and drawing

Students select a special place that they visit each week where they write poetry, do drawings, and develop their capacity to respond to place in different ways.

Nature Journaling

Start a regular program of nature journaling within the school grounds or another suitable environment close to the school. This might involve weekly observations and recordings of weather conditions, feeding and breeding patterns for birds, insects and other animals, and the flowering of plants. Taken over the course of seasons and years, these observations encourage students' close attention to their surrounds and offer a wonderful opportunity to explore patterns of nature and weather.

Excursions

Arrange field trips to explore local places and include guest presentations or workshops that give students hands-on and informative experiences. Build an awareness that special places exist in the students' own 'backyard' and uncover the 'layers of stories' (historic, scientific, geographic, artistic) that exist in these places.

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