

70 seconds to be heard

Workshop presentation

Theme: Empowering Voices

Aim

This presentation aims to inspire educators to use less traditional formats for students to have their voices heard.

Relevance to theme

Young people have a lot to say. Traditional modes of teaching and learning have often limited the tools with which young people are equipped to have their voice heard. Performance poetry is an accessible and powerful way for students to have their say about issues that are of interest or concern to them.

Overview of content

The Burke Hall campus of Xavier College in Melbourne is an independent boys school consisting of a dedicated kindergarten and classes from Foundation to Year 6.

With a 100 year old tradition of providing quality education the school provides opportunities for students to take part in a range of academic competitions, including an annual sponsored public speaking competition for Year 6. This competition is coordinated by both the English and Drama teachers at the school, providing opportunities for students to learn the craft of speech writing as well as the performance elements for an effective delivery.

In 2025, after many years of students being given specific prompts and scaffolds, the decision was made to try something new. Inspired by the work of young performance poets such as Solli Raphael, the teaching team decided to pursue a more current and less scripted project.

Partnering with performance poet Joel McKerrow, the students wrote free form poems about topics of their choice. They were supported to think deeply about issues of concern and used a variety of language techniques for impact. Once written, they worked with their Drama teacher, and a second visit from Joel McKerrow, to hone the performance elements of their poem.

The presentation will include the sharing videos of the winning presentations.

Intended outcomes

It is hoped that attendees will be inspired to see the many modes through which students can have their voices heard. By using words, features of voice as well as spatial and gestural techniques, students felt empowered and emboldened.