Agency

Transform

Community

Advocate

TURN THE VOLUME UP

Leading English Conference
Friday 31 July 2026
ACMI, Fed Square

VATE
Victorian Association for
the Teaching of English

2026 VATE Leading English Conference
Turn The Volume Up

Seldom do we hold... an opportunity to transform and reinvent. Rarer still is it the people themselves whose hands are the ones upon the levers of change. And yet we know that too often in our past, moments of great possibility have been promptly surrendered to small imagination and smaller ambition. What was promised was never pursued, what could have changed remained the same. (Zohran Mamdani, 2026)

Turn The Volume Up and listen. Our profession is calling for a new approach to leadership. It's time to tell a new story.

A story where English teachers are acknowledged as instruments of change, not objects of governance. Where the English teacher is respected as the expert in their field. A vision of leadership that understands the impact of collective power and participation of every English teacher. Leadership that extends beyond the (figure)head of department and into the classroom. Leadership that empowers each teacher to be a moral agent of change – using their expertise, agency and professional autonomy to disrupt the course, to change the narrative, to nurture togetherness. Leadership that stretches across age, experience, sector, region and year level.

All English teachers are leaders, with or without the appointed title. All classrooms are places of change, growth, joy and unity.

The 2026 VATE Leading English Conference celebrates the collective work of leaders in English across our membership. It is an opportunity to **Turn The Volume Up** on leadership that is synonymous with both reality and results. A chance to highlight courageous and responsive ways to engage students. To celebrate your advocacy – for yourself, for your students, for each other and for our profession. **Turn The Volume Up** in solidarity and celebrate the positive, communal and human nature of our subject.

Keynote address
Affective Intention: Moving beyond the prompts

The hype surrounding the potential of AI to supercharge productivity and human capabilities is matched by fears that it will transform life and society in unimaginable ways. While some believe AI will revolutionise industries and everyday life, the fears that AI will replace jobs, ruin the environment and change the way we think and learn have left many cautious and pessimistic. In this presentation, Pangrazio will examine the moral, ethical, philosophical and pedagogical challenges that are emerging from the increasing ubiquity of AI. While there are no easy answers to these complex challenges, evaluating the range of responses to AI moves educators beyond its use for authenticating student work and skilful prompting. Schools and teachers can play a crucial role in shaping how society thinks about, engages with and understands AI.

Luci Pangrazio, Deakin University

Luci Pangrazio is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University. She is a recent DECRA fellow and a Chief Investigator on the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. She researches data and digital literacies and the politics of digital platforms. Luci is the lead editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Critical Data Literacies* (2027) and author of *Critical Data Literacies: Rethinking Data and Everyday Life* (2023, MIT Press) and *Learning to Live with Datafication: Educational Case Studies and Initiatives from Across the Word* (2022, Routledge).

Research Dialogue
Leading English in times of change

Listen to Kate Blandford, Dr Susan Bradbeer and Dr Katrina MacDonald in conversation with Associate Professor Amanda McGraw as they explore what it means to be a leader in subject English in the current educational landscape. Sharing insights from their research and experience, the panellists will explore:

- What are the key challenges experienced by leaders in/for English at this time?
- What capacities are required to lead faculties in times of change?
- How can leaders balance compliance and managerialism with innovation and adaptability?
- What are the challenges associated with the people-centredness of our work and how can be build collegiality?
- How can leaders of English support colleagues with workload issues?
- What are the challenges associated with curriculum and lesson design at a time when curriculum is increasingly outsourced?
- How can leaders of English work toward social justice ensuring that all students, regardless of background and ability, have access to opportunities?
- Are there particular challenges for leaders in regional and rural areas? What are these challenges and what can be done to resolve them?

Kate Blandford, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

Kate Blandford is an experienced educator and leader with a strong foundation in subject English, instructional leadership, and curriculum development. She has served on the VATE Council since 2023, bringing insights from her work in the Government education sector and her roles as Director of English, Senior Curriculum Leader and currently, Assistant Principal – Curriculum. Kate's professional interests include equity, educational leadership, and curriculum innovation.

Susan Bradbeer, The University of Melbourne

Dr Susan Bradbeer is an educator, writer, and researcher interested in the intersection of identity, leadership, gender and race. She is currently working in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne and coaching leaders in education.

Katrina MacDonald, Deakin University

Dr Katrina MacDonald is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, Deakin University. Her research and teaching interests are in social justice, public education, educational leadership, the teacher workforce, school reform, intersectionality, spatiality, and the sociology of education through a practice lens (feminist, Bourdieu, practice architectures). Katrina is a former anthropologist, archaeologist and primary and secondary teacher in Victoria.

Amanda McGraw, Federation University

Associate Professor Amanda McGraw is a VATE Life member and VATE Council's Research Officer. Her research interests include a focus on teaching reading and writing in English, dispositions in teaching, school/university partnerships, and teacher professional learning. She has expertise in developing communities of practice involving practising teachers who use practitioner inquiry to learn deeply about teaching and learning processes.

Program overview

LS Livestream

Time	Session
9.15 – 9.30am	**Welcome** Emma Jenkins, VATE and Ernest Price, Leadership Network Convener
9.30 – 10.15am	**Keynote** **LS** Associate Professor Luci Pangrazio, Deakin University
10.15 – 10.20am	**Transition to next workshop**

10.20 – 11.15am	1A	**English faculty leadership in practice** **LS** Amy Rashid, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals	1B	**Building a culture of moderation and benchmarking in Years 7–12** Kate Blandford, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College	1C	**Data literacy: How to translate the numbers into intentional action** Christine Lambrianidis, Westbourne Grammar School

11.15 – 11.45am	**Morning tea**

11.45am – 12.40pm	2A	**English in the AI era** **LS** Ernest Price, Kilvington Grammar School	2B	**Formative assessment as a means to reduce marking load** Kim Konisberry, Ararat College	2C	**What trust makes possible** Steve Lowe, Brentwood Secondary College

12.40 – 12.45pm	**Transition to next workshop**

12.45 – 1.45pm	**Research Dialogue** **LS** Kate Blandford, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College Dr Susan Bradbeer, The University of Melbourne Dr Katrina MacDonald, Deakin University Associate Professor Amanda McGraw, Federation University
1.45 – 2.30pm	**Lunch**

2.30 – 3.25pm	3A	**I'm the English leader now!** **LS** Tegan O'Dea, Warragul Regional College	3B	**Turning the page on literacy: Reigniting skills and engagement in Years 7–9** Louise Piva, Casey Grammar School	3C	**Curriculum design as a collective commitment** Melanie Aquilina, MacKillop College

Registration cost

Individual $235 | Organisational $255 – Prices are per staff member and inclusive of GST.

If financial barriers impact your attendance, email Kate Gillespie to discuss options.

Affective Intention: Moving beyond the prompts

The hype surrounding the potential of AI to supercharge productivity and human capabilities is matched by fears that it will transform life and society in unimaginable ways. While some believe AI will revolutionise industries and everyday life, the fears that AI will replace jobs, ruin the environment and change the way we think and learn have left many cautious and pessimistic. In this presentation, Pangrazio will examine the moral, ethical, philosophical and pedagogical challenges that are emerging from the increasing ubiquity of AI. While there are no easy answers to these complex challenges, evaluating the range of responses to AI moves educators beyond its use for authenticating student work and skilful prompting. Schools and teachers can play a crucial role in shaping how society thinks about, engages with and understands AI.

Associate Professor Luci Pangrazio, Deakin University

RESEARCH DIALOGUE **LS**

Leading English in times of change

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Kate Blandford, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

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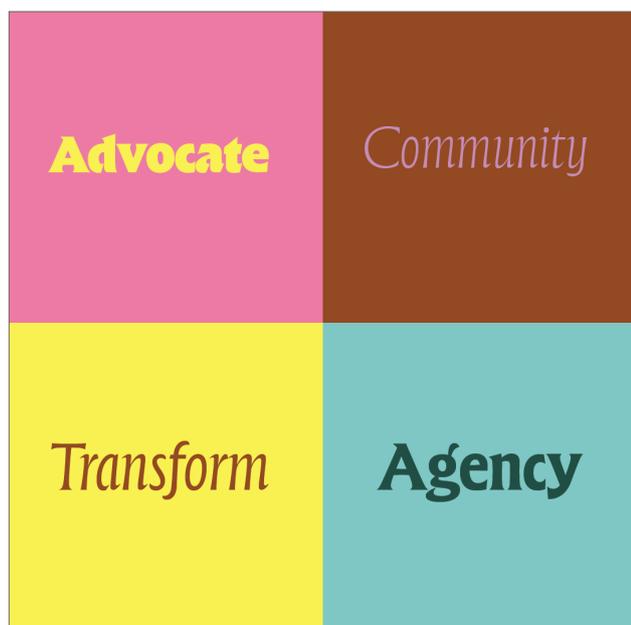
1A **English faculty leadership in practice**

LS English faculties are complex professional communities. Beyond curriculum and classroom practice, they hold responsibility for whole-school literacy, senior secondary outcomes and assessment integrity. Middle leaders are not simply coordinators. They are culture-shapers and instructional leaders. This practical workshop invites English faculty leaders to step back and examine their context, their team and their leadership impact. Through structured reflection and collaborative discussion, we will explore how school context shapes faculty leadership; the difference between leading and managing; knowing your team's strengths and leveraging them effectively; designing coherent curriculum and assessment pathways; establishing consistent teaching language and expectations; creating efficient moderation systems; and protecting sustainability during high-pressure periods. Participants will leave with sharper priorities and practical approaches they can apply within their own faculty context.

LEADERSHIP

Amy Rashid, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

1B **Building a culture of moderation and benchmarking in Years 7–12**

This workshop will outline one school's work in building a culture of moderation and benchmarking across Years 7-12. We will explore two elements of this – the strategic (building culture, getting buy in) and the operational (structures and processes) and apply this to an analysis of your context to inform your next steps.

MODERATION

Kate Blandford, Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

1C **Data literacy: How to translate the numbers into intentional action**

In this interactive workshop, we will debunk the myth that English teachers don't understand how to use data by closely interpreting your school's data with your critical and analytical English skills. This includes using Selena Fisk's work on data literacy to plan, write and then action how every English student in your school will improve. From the data, you will be able tell a story with sound and fury but this time it will be told by an English teacher – and that will change everything.

DATA

Christine Lambrianidis, Westbourne Grammar School

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2A English in the AI era

LS This workshop will address the challenges of leading subject English in the AI era. Participants will consider the ethical, curriculum and pedagogical implications of AI creep in the English classroom and discuss strategies for better equipping staff and students to find their place in this shifting terrain.

`AI` `ETHICS`

Ernest Price, Kilvington Grammar School

2B Formative assessment as a means to reduce marking load

For leaders who are frequently finding themselves giving feedback on a Friday night rather than living their lives. This workshop looks at how to use formative assessment, checklists and exemplars to empower students to self-correct and identify their own next steps (with some guidance from us!).

`FEEDBACK`

Kim Konisberry, Ararat College

2C What trust makes possible

In many schools, inquiry is shaped by product, proof and structure in ways that can limit genuine professional learning. This workshop will look at how English leaders can use trust and autonomy to create the conditions for meaningful inquiry, and how that inquiry can help teachers and emerging leaders build the clarity and confidence to back an idea. Using my own experience as a starting point, I'll unpack how inquiry helped me move an idea forward: advocating for it, negotiating support and building enough momentum for it to go somewhere. I'll step through how I developed that idea, built buy-in and moved it forward without formal authority, including what the uncertainty, false starts and small wins taught me about leading from the middle.

`ADVOCACY`

Steve Lowe, Brentwood Secondary College

3A I'm the English leader now!

LS This workshop is designed for teachers who are new to English leadership and are seeking practical guidance in leading their teams. The workshop will introduce key theoretical approaches to leadership, team management, and implementing change that is sustainable and impactful within an English team context. Participants will also have the opportunity to ask questions, both big and small, about the realities of the role. In addition, the workshop will explore what it means to lead English in the current educational landscape, including the influence of the Science of Learning, the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model 2.0, the Positive Classroom Management Strategies (PCMS), and let's not forget Professional Learning Communities.

`NEW LEADERS`

Tegan O'Dea, Warragul Regional College

3B Turning the page on literacy: Reigniting skills and engagement in Years 7–9

Our students' literacy levels are falling – but the solution lies in reconnecting them with reading and purposefully teaching the skills that help them thrive. This workshop shares a practical, evidence-based program for Years 7-9 that builds literacy through two powerful pathways: fostering a genuine love of reading and explicitly teaching literacy in ways that are supportive, relevant, and achievable. This workshop will explore classroom-ready strategies that lift confidence, strengthen comprehension, and restore the joy of reading and learning.

`LITERACY`

Louise Piva, Casey Grammar School

3C Curriculum design as a collective commitment

How do we ensure every student is thinking, speaking and learning in English classrooms? This workshop explores how explicit teaching and low variance lesson design can increase student participation and make student thinking visible. Through practical examples, it demonstrates how carefully sequenced instruction, retrieval and checking for understanding empower teachers to respond in real time to what students know and need. Importantly, it also considers how we support one another to design these lessons well through shared planning, common routines and collective reflection with a particular emphasis on how this work can support early career teachers and teaching who are teaching out of field. When planning is deliberate and collaborative, classrooms become places where every voice matters and professional expertise is strengthened across teams.

`EXPLICIT TEACHING`

Melanie Aquilina, MacKillop College

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