

<u>Brisbane</u> Today 🍎 17 °/ 26 ° 🗲

Read Today's Paper Tributes & Notices

# Courier Mail

⊖ Hi, Elise 🗸

BREAM:

🛑 Rewards | We'reforyou

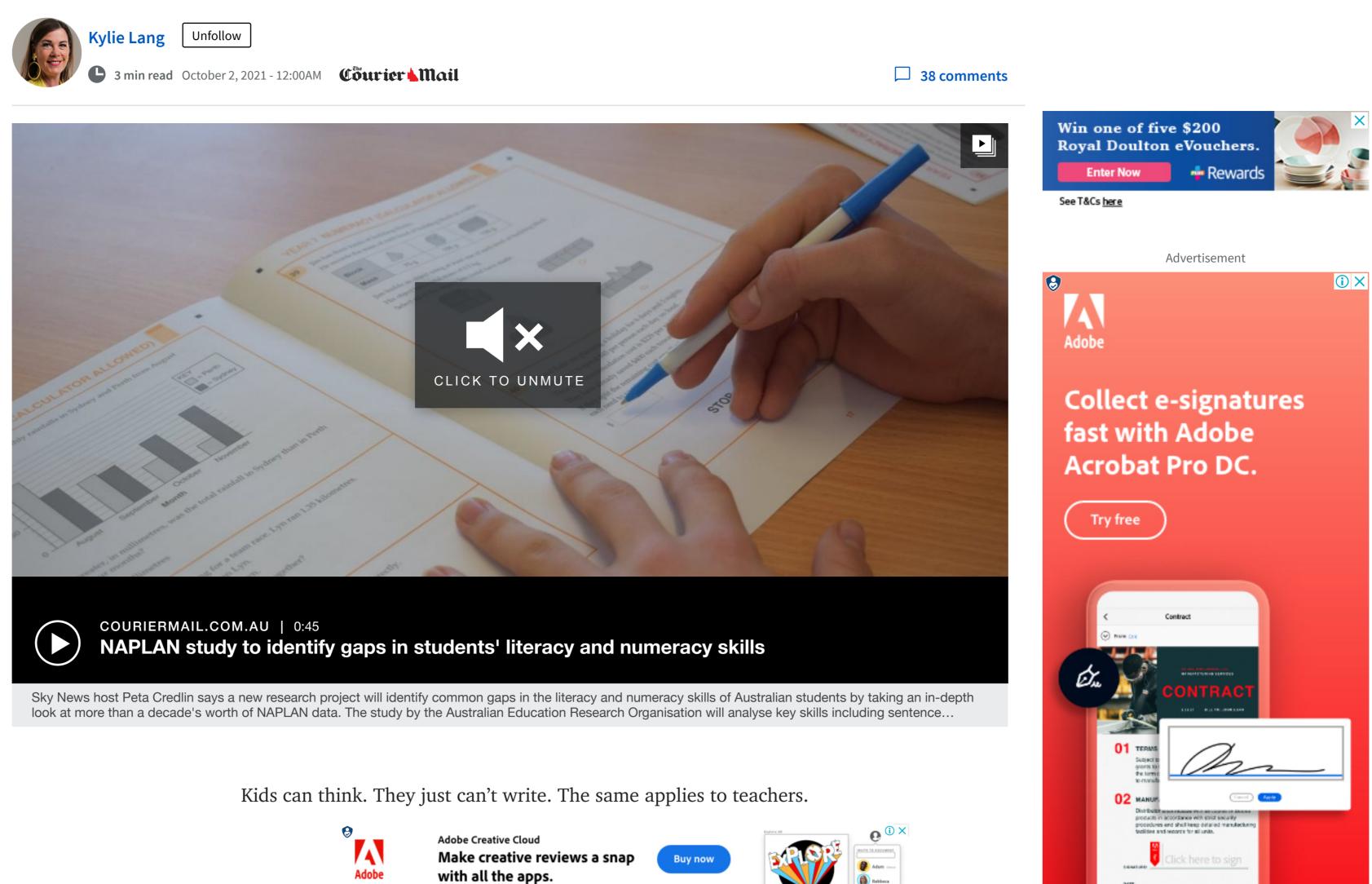
Q

My News Local QLD National World Opinion Business Entertainment Lifestyle Sport

### **News** > Opinion > Kylie Lang

# Kylie Lang: Urgent action required as Qld kids get left behind on writing

NAPLAN reveals student writing standards have plummeted and urgent remedial action is required to prevent children falling further and further behind, writes Kylie Lang.



No wonder we're in a mess.

When you look at educational benchmarks – including NAPLAN results, back when the Queensland Government bothered to publicly release them – it's clear that writing is not students' strong suit.

Children are slipping further and further behind as they struggle to string a sentence together, and now schools are forking out big bucks on rescue packages.

Writing coaches are being brought in to show teachers how to do their jobs.

Schools, both private and state, are spending up to \$100,000 a year on the Writer's Toolbox program, which includes in-house workshops for teachers on the basics of writing and how to integrate them across the curriculum, not just in English lessons.

The program's founder Dr Ian Hunter, a New Zealand historian, author and former university lecturer has pretty much struck gold.

The real question is: how was it allowed to come to this?



Dr Ian Hunter from The Writers Toolbox, New Zealand. Picture: Brad Fleet

Sometime in the "free loving" 1960s, Education Queensland took its eye off the ball.

It let the teaching of explicit writing skills slip in favour of encouraging individual expression.

According to Dr Hunter, "the rules of grammar went out the window", and writing became about the process, one's personal creative journey.

"The mantra in Education Queensland at that time was 'language is caught not taught'," he tells Qweekend today.

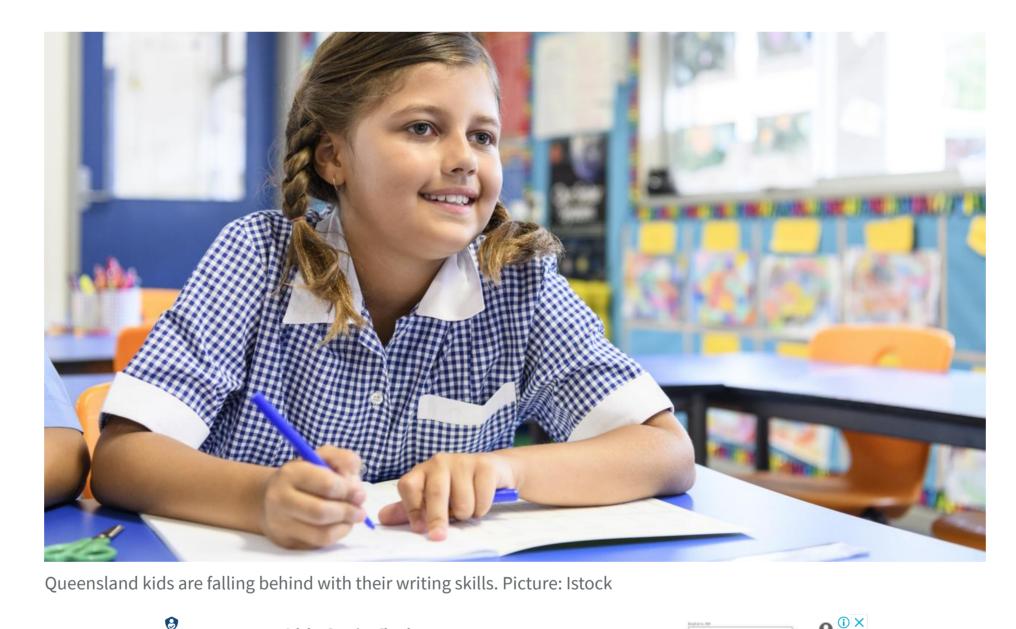
"So we now have these generations of young teachers who have never been taught the

#### rules of writing."

I can't count the number of times my son, then in primary school, would show me a teacher's "corrections" on his homework, scribbles in red pen that were actually wrong.

Then there were the official letters home from school that were riddled with errors, using "less" when it should have been "fewer", "me" when it should have been "I", and my personal pet hate, the sign-off where they say, "please don't hesitate to contact myself". It should be "me", and teachers should know this, but a good many don't.

How, then, can we expect our kids to understand?





Writing is not some outmoded skill – even in this age of emojis, abbreviations and short, sharp text messages.

It is essential to expressing our thoughts and consolidating ideas.

As prolific American writer Joan Didion, now 86, once said, "I don't know what I think until I write it down."

The very act of writing, including choosing the right words and structuring sentences, pushes us to think more, to analyse, to discover.

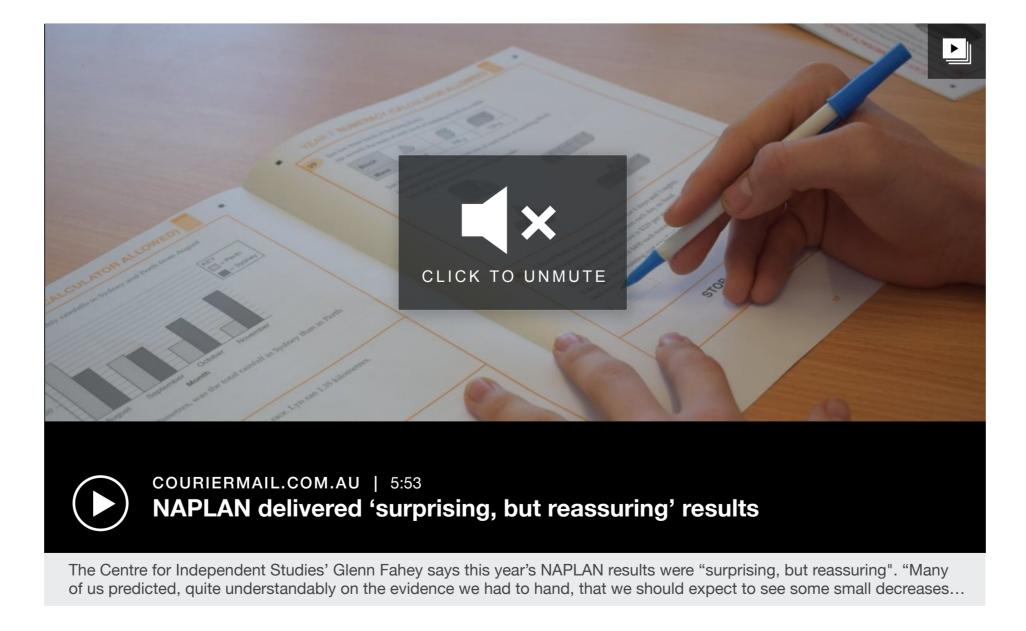
And unlike other things we learn at school but never use afterwards, writing remains relevant.

Written communication is high on the list of 21st century skills that employers seek and understandably so.

Some of the most influential people in the world sparked change through their writing.

Consider Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution informed modern science studies, or Simone de Beauvoir, who gave voice to global feminism.

Alarmingly, Dr Hunter says proper writing instruction – once the hallmark of good schooling - stops around Year 7.



From then on, kids are left free-wheeling and largely clueless about how to express the thoughts in their head.

When more sophisticated thinking is required as they move into the higher grades, they flounder, and by the time they get to university – if they make it that far – they really struggle.

It was while teaching business history to tertiary students in New Zealand that Dr Hunter realised just how compromised young people were, and it inspired him to write a book on essay writing.

Schools then asked him to write a version for younger audiences, and his Writer's Toolbox took off from there.

What his experience shows is that two things need to drastically change.

Universities must sharpen teacher-training programs to include the essentials of good writing, and the government must strip back the curriculum to allow schools to once again put a laser focus on core skills.

We can't expect kids to pick up writing by osmosis.

LOVE

■ That dress. The Duchess of Cambridge outshone any Bond girl in a glittering gold Jenny Packham gown at the premiere of the latest 007 film, No Time To Die.



Kylie Lang Don't miss out on the headlines from Kylie Lang. Followed categories will be added to My News.

Follow



Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge attends the No Time To Die World Premiere at Royal Albert Hall. Picture: Getty

Daniel Craig turning heads of his own, and tossing out the traditional idea of masculinity, in a dreamy pink tuxedo jacket, by Savile Row tailors Anderson & Sheppard.

#### LOATHE

■ Queenslanders being told to wait until the Premier's morning press conference for confirmation of any community spread of Covid. We deserve to know as soon as new cases are detected, along with new contact tracing locations.

## More Coverage

**Revealed:** The elite schools splashing \$100k to lift Naplan results

Gov secrecy gone mad: ATAR, Naplan, attendance kept hidden from parents NAPLAN is staying, but a big change may be coming



Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Picture: NCA NewsWire/POOL/Bianca De Marchi

■ Former PM Tony Abbott getting it so wrong. The anti-vax protestors that stormed Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance last week were in fact "violent" and "destructive", not to mention disrespectful to a sacred site.

Kylie Lang is the associate editor of The Courier-Mail



Kylie Lang is an award-winning writer who covers a range of issues as the Courier Mail's associate editor. Her beautifully-written stories are powerful and thought-provoking while her topical columns go right to the heart of sentiment in society.

Email Kylie Lang



Join the conversation (38 comments)

More related stories

Kylie Lang Opinion Sick joke: Does the Premier even have a pandemic plan? Rather than keeping Queenslanders safe, Annastacia Palaszczuk's new mantra seems to be to keep them guessing, writes Kylie Lang. VOTE IN OUR POLL

Paltry fines another case of 'money talks' during pandemic The case of two rich trucking magnates – one of whom who owns a \$38m mansion – being fined only \$1378 each for crossing the border to attend a funeral stinks and it's yet another example of the unfairness that has defined this pandemic, writes Kylie Lang.

My News Feed Read More > Kylie Lang QLD News QLD News 'Dangerous defects': Sick joke: Does the 'Like tissue paper in there': Mum to sue after Thousands of 'disgruntled' Premier even have a botched C-section owners take on QBCC pandemic plan? 0 0

#### More from My News Feed 🗲

Good Morning Elise Recommended based on what you've read

SuperRacing	Fraser Coast	Gympie
Queensland to make an	\$7.1bn train factory to	Gympie bypass progress
'Impact' in The Phoenix	revive country town on Fraser Coast	threatened amid fresh cultural claims

### Trending now

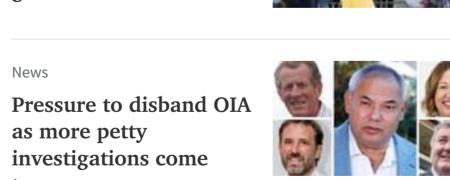
Coronavirus Full list: 100 Qld schools where you can get vaccinated this...

News

to...

Sport

as more petty



jabs in regions □ <sup>377</sup>

Premier's Covid update as politicians push



different road map

□ <sup>129</sup>

boys

 $\Box^{101}$ 

Most commented

Nats and net zero: Why it's so complicated □ <sup>159</sup>

State's great divide: Unvaccinated to get a

Game on: The big questions for NRL's new

**Dolphins v Moreton** Bay: NRL naming scandal explodes as counc...



News Former Test opener Michael Slater is facing



**NEW TO BINGE?** GET A 14 DAY FREE TRIAL GET BINGE



Contact Us

Help & support

Photo Sales

Letter to the Editor

Advertise with us

FAQs

# Courier Mail

Membership Subscription packages Group/Corporate subscriptions The Courier Mail app Today's Paper Newsletters Rewards

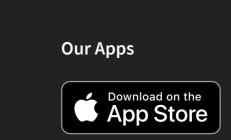
About Us
About us
Meet the team
Job opportunities
Code of conduct
Subscription FAQs
Subscription terms
App only subscription terms
Financial Hardship Policy

Nationwide News Pty Ltd © 2021. All times AEST (GMT +10). Powered by WordPress.com VIP

### Our News Network Herald Sun The Daily Telegraph The Advertiser news.com.au The Australian The Mercury Geelong Advertiser The Cairns Post Gold Coast Bulletin Townsville Bulletin The Chronicle

NT News

#### **Our Partners** Buy Search Sell Classifieds Find Your Local Foxsports Foxtel Hipages Kayo My Tributes odds.com.au Punters racenet.com.au realestate.com.au Sky News



**()** 

Privacy policy Relevant ads opt-out Cookie policy Terms of use

GET IT ON Google Play

The Weekly Times Coupons

A NOTE ABOUT RELEVANT ADVERTISING: We collect information about the content (including ads) you use across this site and use it to make both advertising and content more relevant to you on our network and other sites. Find out more about our policy and your choices, including how to opt-out.