English in Australia Terms of Use

English in Australia

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English in Australia

2020

Guidelines for Contributors

English in Australia is the peer-reviewed national journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE).

The journal is committed to publishing material that is of importance to English educators. We welcome high quality teacher-oriented and scholarly submissions in any relevant field of English education, including literature and literacy education.

We are interested in submissions that reflect dilemmas, debates and concerns facing current contemporary English educators in Australia and elsewhere. Submissions may take the form of:

• A report on empirical research conducted with or by English teachers or students in classrooms

• A theorised discussion of English curriculum, or of the effects of policy on English teaching, or

• Practitioner inquiries, including reflective writing that takes a scholarly and methodical approach, that elaborates or illuminates aspects of the practices of English teachers.

Submissions should be explicitly linked to issues of English teaching, pedagogy or curriculum and demonstrate familiarity with current and pertinent scholarly literature.

Articles will be considered from any context where the learning and teaching of English is framed in ways that would engage and interest a secondary English teacher. Writers should take care to relate, early in their submission, the research context for the benefit of both Australian and international readers. The journal welcomes contributions that challenge traditional ways of thinking about English and that prompt readers to entertain new ways of conceptualising English curriculum and pedagogy

Contributors are encouraged to read previous issues of *English in Australia* to get a sense of the existing and ongoing scholarly conversations in our journal. Articles that share Higher Degree Research conducted by English teachers (e.g. Ph.D. and Ed.D. research findings) are welcome.

All articles are subject to double blind peer review by at least two reviewers. This means that the identity of the author is not divulged to the reviewers, nor are the reviewers' names revealed to the author.

Please refer to the following guidelines:

1. All articles should be submitted via Scholastica: https://english-in-australia.scholasticahq.com/
2. Recommended length of articles for publication is between 5000 and 7000 words (including references).
3. Ensure your name is removed from the article, including from the document properties.
4. All submissions should be typed with double spacing in an easy to read font (e.g. Times New Roman or Calibri, 11–12 point) with a 2.5 cm margin on all sides.
5. Your submission should begin with an abstract of 100–150 words that succinctly summarises the research: context; design or methodology; and findings.
6. All references should conform to the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Please consult the *APA Publication Manual*, 7th edition, or any guide to APA referencing available through university library websites.
7. Submissions are expected to have a high standard of written English. Please ensure that you have carefully edited and proofread your submission. Articles submitted with a poor standard of written English, style problems or inaccurate/missing references will be returned to the author for revision before being considered for blind review.
8. Where possible, avoid footnotes. Usually it is possible to incorporate them into the text. Where they cannot be avoided, they should be numbered with a superscript and listed at the end of the article (endnotes).
9. It is the responsibility of authors to seek copyright clearance for any materials quoted, as required.
10. It is the responsibility of authors to ensure that all required ethics approvals and relevant permissions have been received prior to the submission of an article for review. Please ensure that a statement about ethical issues appears in articles that include data collected from or about humans, including any pertinent information about approvals or permissions.
11. It is expected that a clear statement about the implications of the research for English education policy and/or practice appears in either the Introduction or Conclusion section of your article.
12. Please include in Scholastica a separate file with your full name and institutional affiliation for publication, and a 50-word biographical description.
13. You retain copyright of materials published in the journal; *English in Australia* holds first publication rights only. Authors retain the right to self-archive the final draft of their articles in their institution's eprint repository.

You can expect feedback from the reviewers and editor to help you shape your work effectively. Please feel free to contact the Editor or members of the Editorial team to discuss any contribution which you may be considering.

Although *English in Australia* is predominantly a curriculum research and practice journal, occasionally poems and short texts of other genres relevant to the themes and readership of the journal are also published. Such pieces should be relevant to the lives and work of English teachers and students and be accompanied by a short (300–800 word) abstract or reflection. Please email the Editor regarding submissions of this type.

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Editorial

Kelli McGraw

It is with great satisfaction that I pen this Editorial, for an issue that has taken some time to bring together, in what have been challenging times for all educators. In this second issue of volume 55, we present scholarly articles on a variety of themes, as well as considering and celebrating the past. On behalf of the editorial team I wish to sincerely thank all of our writers and reviewers for their persistence with scholarly work for *English in Australia* throughout 2020.

This issue features two articles that will be of interest to English educators concerned with the teaching of writing. The opening piece by Lovejoy, Thomas, Mow, Edgar, Alford and Prain shares insights from a case study where teachers sought to improve student attitudes toward writing and increase writing resilience through the use of 'low-stakes' writing. In Frawley's article, teacher-writers come into focus, drawing on theoretical perspectives of James Gee to conceptualise the struggles faced by teachers in acknowledging and sharing their writer identity. A creative work by Bezi Saunders, a poem titled 'Boxes', is featured later in the issue as further provocation to consider the role that school assessment plays in shaping students' relationship with writing.

Perspectives on how to address the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' are offered by Scott Curwood and Gauci in their paper, including recommendations of a variety of texts for study. Readers seeking advice on how such complex areas of the curriculum can be 'thoughtfully and critically' enacted in the English classroom might see a path forward in arguments made by Kuttainen and Hansen about the potential for knowledge sharing across secondary and tertiary English. Kuttainen and Hansen illuminate the difficulties in supporting dialogue across the secondary-tertiary nexus and offer strategies based on their local, regional context for sustaining stronger links in order to access different kinds of expertise.

This issue comes together following the International Federation of Teachers of English (IFTE) conference, which famously pivoted from an on-location event in Sydney to an online conference in July 2020 within months, after the first pandemic-related lockdowns were announced. We have included an article arising from that conference by McKnight, who articulates 'five dangerous words' that could transform English teaching. With IFTE on our mind this year the article that has been chosen for our Perspectives from the Past section is one that responded to the IFTE conference in 1980, when Sydney previously hosted that event. Catherwood's original article that responded to the conference is reproduced along with a contemporary reflective foreword to the piece, enabling us to contemplate the ways that we can learn from international curriculum developments, and the role of national events and publications in supporting the establishment and growth of English teaching associations.

Also contained in this issue is our regular Reading and Viewing column by Deb McPherson, citations from the AATE Life Memberships awarded in 2019 and 2020, and a farewell to Ken Watson, who sadly passed away in March of 2020.

This was a difficult year for educators and publishers on many levels, experienced differently in our various national and global contexts. What has stood out for me in editing this issue of the journal is the perseverance and patience shown by our scholarly community and AATE members while the wheels of academia turned a little slower than usual. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our publication has meant that this second issue will close volume 55, with volume 56 in 2021 returning to our usual three-issue schedule.

Looking ahead to upcoming publications, volume 56 will include a special edition arising from the IFTE conference. Also forthcoming in 2021 is our special issue 'English @ Home', featuring scholarship that captures essential aspects of what it means to learn and teach English in online and home-based contexts. I look forward to sharing these publications with you.
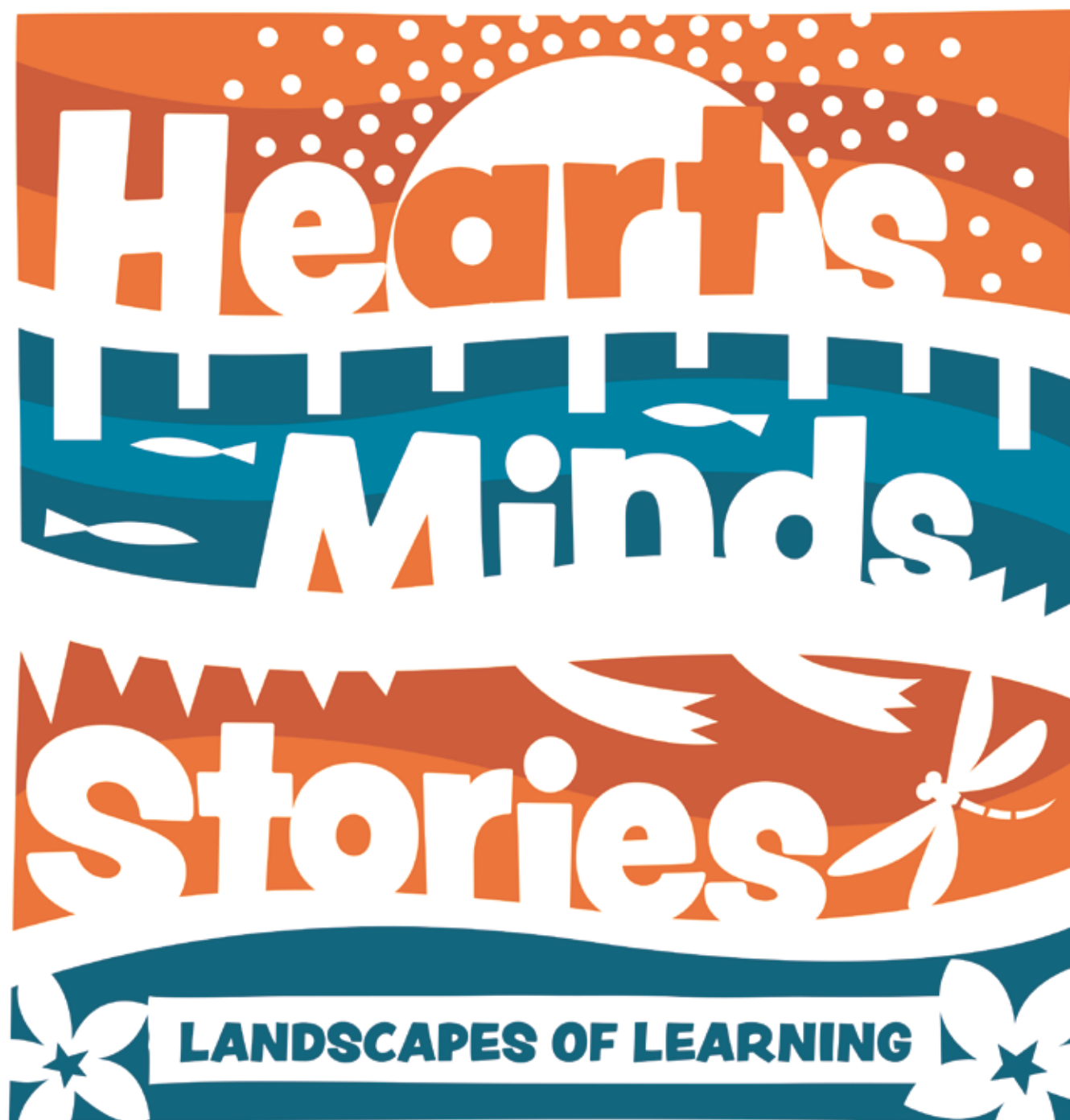
Writing Futures in English

Writing Futures

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Abstract: Despite an intense focus on improving Australian students' writing performance in recent years, and comprehensive instructional advice to English teachers, researchers have noted a lack of gains in standardised writing tests and negative effects on student engagement and learning. In this paper we claim that these outcomes are partly attributable to current orthodoxies around how writing is conceptualised, taught and tested. In reviewing relevant literature and drawing on a case study with low SES students, we propose the need for more diversity in the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of students' writing experiences. In putting this case, we are not arguing that the current intense focus on technical and rhetorical competence (the 'how' of writing) should be abandoned, but rather that students can benefit from more focus on and say in the 'what' and 'why' of this activity.

Developing writers

> *'I've been doing quite a bit of writing and I am finding it easier than at the start.'*
> *'Once I get an idea they keep coming and they just don't stop coming.'*
> *'It's training you to get more ideas.'*

Students made these positive reflections about a writing program their teachers had introduced in Year 8 at 'Grevillea' College, a Year 7–10 low socioeconomic status (SES) regional school, to improve attitudes towards writing (motivation, enjoyment and confidence) and writing resilience (perseverance).

Despite pockets of excellence, concerns remain about the effectiveness of how writing is taught in Australian schools. In this paper we briefly review this complex landscape before making a proposal for program diversity based on analysis of relevant literature and the case study above. As part of an Australian Research Council project on improving regional low SES students' learning and wellbeing (2017–2019), we aimed to identify what affects their learning.

In analysing how individuals develop as writers, Bazerman et al. (2018), in their extensive review of relevant research, identified key reciprocal internal and external influences. Cognitive and motivational dimensions interact with perceived and actual readerships. By implication, effective writing instruction should integrate students' meaningful sense-making within a supportive social context. In this way, students should see how the 'what', 'how', 'why' and 'for whom' of their writing connect. The 'what' refers to the particular subject matter or focus of writing, while the 'how' refers to skills in constructing effective texts at both the macro level (e.g., theme and structure) and the micro level (e.g., grammar, word choice and spelling). The 'why' refers to both educational claims about the long-term instrumental value of writing, and claims about how students can be motivated to write extended texts. Instrumental claims include the value of writing as a key resource for personal sense-making, learning, wellbeing and effective professional and democratic participation in society (MacArthur et al., 2016), where writing is seen as our 'best facilitator for thinking, reading, learning, understanding and

generating ideas' (Ahrens, 2017, p. 22). Motivational claims focus on conditions where writing is seen as personally meaningful for self and others in a supportive environment (Hayes et al., 2017; Prain et al., 2018). Such writing can serve multiple purposes, including amusing oneself and others, making sense of one's own and others' experiences, advocacy and creative speculation. In a good writing program, instrumental and more intrinsic purposes overlap. In this way, students should experience writing in school as a multifunctional resource for living rather than as a narrow academic performance. However, creating conditions for this integration of 'what', 'how' and 'why' poses ongoing challenges for English teachers. We claim that this disconnect can be understood partly in terms of current orthodoxies around how writing is conceptualised and partly in terms of how it is currently tested, which influences the way it is taught.

The current writing instruction landscape

Multiple factors have contributed to narrow prescriptions on writing instruction in Australian schools, with negative effects on engagement and learning. These include: the conceptualisation of student writing as a decontextualised academic performance to be judged mainly on technical competence and rhetorical skills (Perelman, 2018); a comparative lack of gains in standardised writing tests, coupled with the public availability of test results (ACARA, 2017; Byrd-Blake et al., 2010); the increased use of big data and evidence-based approaches to analyse ongoing learning outcomes (Hayes et al., 2017; Prain & Tytler, 2017); an emphasis on teacher accountability for student outcomes (Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2006); and a consequential growing orthodoxy around how writing should be taught (Love et al., 2015).

These prescriptions are increasingly critiqued. In their study of literacy learning in low SES schools, Hayes et al. (2017) observed that writing instruction often involved tightly scripted lessons with a narrow focus on sequential skill acquisition. Much of the pressure on teachers to follow these prescriptions has been driven by the annual National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing, with a strong influence on teacher pedagogy (Ward, 2012). While the writing component of the NAPLAN suite allows for efficient comparison of student writing achievement across every Australian school (Goss et al., 2018), its implementation, design and use of data have faced mounting criticism (Lingard et al.,

2016; Perelman, 2018). Perelman (2018) described its design as reductive and anachronistic when compared to writing assessments implemented overseas, stating that 'its focus on low-level skills causes it to de-emphasise the key components of effective written communication' (p. 28). Pedagogical criticism of the NAPLAN writing task has included: copious test preparation activities; reduced student voice and choice around learning tasks; more teacher-centred instruction; and superficial content coverage resulting in a narrower curricular experience for learners (Carter et al., 2018). As pondered by Anson (2008), 'it is hard to imagine such a situation creating the conditions to inspire students to think of themselves as writers and readers and to engage in writing with any sense of ownership or passion' (p. 155).

In their recent review of the NAPLAN writing test, McGaw, Louden and Wyatt-Smith (2020) highlighted stakeholder concerns about assessment validity and belief that testing negatively affects student creativity and enjoyment of writing. Their report concluded that an unintended effect has been the adoption of a 'formulaic' approach to writing (McGaw, Louden & Wyatt-Smith, 2020), with some students unable to perform under pressure to write at length on an unseen topic within a strict timeline. Wanting their students to succeed, teachers commonly approach this challenge by 'training' students in generic ways to respond to NAPLAN prompts. Failure to reach even the minimum expected Year 9 standard was found to be significantly more in regional and remote areas and more common among boys than girls. Regional, rural and remote students are more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, have access to fewer resources and attain lower NAPLAN results than their metropolitan counterparts (Goss et al., 2018).

While noting the failure of restrictive approaches in their study of schools with students from low SES backgrounds, Hayes et al. (2017) also observed teachers who challenged through their practice a deficit view of student capability. Teachers in these schools recognised the potentially rich cultural, linguistic or cognitive resources of their students and adopted less ritualised but more successful ways of promoting learning, such as basing learning on student interests and experiences, and offering more open-ended learning challenges. These findings concur with an extensive research literature on how to motivate and enable student learning of writing. Such research has found that writing instruction is effective when: students learn

skills and knowledge in multiple lesson types; teachers integrate test preparation into instruction; teachers make connections across instruction, curriculum, and life; students are expected to be generative thinkers; classrooms foster cognitive collaboration; students see learning as purposeful, and can partially or fully construct learning tasks; students have time and opportunities to write on self-selected topics and can write outside writing instructional time; and students have opportunities to write collaboratively (Gadd & Parr, 2017; Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015). These findings also point to key conditions that make writing personally meaningful for students. These include an overriding sense of purposeful intention (the 'why' of writing), authorial ownership of topic focus (the 'what' of writing) and real/interested readerships (the 'for whom' of writing) (Prain et al., 2013, 2018).

In strongly concurring with Hayes and colleagues' (2017) findings, we report on a case study in a low SES school where teachers trialled what they described as 'low stakes' writing. Variously labelled 'expressive writing' (Lepore & Smyth, 2002), or 'free writing' (Jones & East, 2010), this writing task invites students to respond to teacher- and/or student-generated prompts, where there is no formal teacher assessment or feedback on the writing's content or form. In the past two decades, researchers have described several advantages of this kind of writing, with positive effects on learning, engagement and wellbeing. When undertaken in classrooms as a regular part of rich writing programs, such tasks have been found to: contribute to overall improvements in the quality of student writing (Rosário et al., 2017); develop students' writing stamina (Scullin & Baron, 2013); improve their confidence and control over written language (Jones & East, 2010); and increase the length of written responses, particularly for struggling writers (Regan, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2005). Low-stakes tasks have the potential to empower students to overcome writing apprehension, because they can write on personally meaningful and engaging topics without fear of teacher critique (Scullin & Baron, 2013). Such tasks are intrinsically motivating for students because they focus less on mechanics and more on content (Gersten & Baker, 2001).

Students from low SES backgrounds are likely to respond more creatively in an environment where they are not framed as less able (Hayes et al., 2017), and instead, the home and peer culture and language they bring to school is valued when they have the freedom

Table 1. NAPLAN Writing Results, Year 7 2017

Levels	Grevillea College	Similar Schools	All Schools
Below Standard (level 5 and below)	41%	51%	28%
At Standard (level 6)	35%	25%	30%
Above standard (level 7 or above)	22%	21%	40%

Source: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2018 https://www.myschool.edu.au/

Table 2. NAPLAN Writing Results, Year 9 2017

Levels	Grevillea College	Similar Schools	All Schools
Below Standard (level 7 and below)	80%	75%	61%
At Standard (level 8)	13%	16%	21%
Above standard (level 9 or above)	4%	6%	16%

Source: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2018 https://www.myschool.edu.au/

to develop their responses in a way that reflects their interests. In relation to student wellbeing, and when used as self-expression, low-stakes writing has also been found to develop student self-awareness, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hunter & Chandler, 1999) and allow at-risk students to face and overcome significant life challenges (Everall, Altrows & Paulson, 2006). Self-efficacy is perceived as central to a social cognitive theory of writing development (Hodges, 2017). According to this theory, students' beliefs about the value and competence of their writing is instrumental to their ultimate success as writers.

Background to case study at Grevillea College
The principal and English coordinator at Grevillea College saw writing improvement across the curriculum as a school priority. In 2017, the Year 7 NAPLAN writing results were disappointing. The Australian government expects students to attain Level 7 by the end of Year 7, meaning that students undertaking the NAPLAN test during Year 7 should be at Level 6 standard. Although students in Year 7 at Grevillea College were doing slightly better than similar schools in NAPLAN writing tasks, compared with the whole cohort of Australian Year 7 students, they were considerably behind (see Table 1). By Year 9, where they should have reached

Level 8 standard and be working towards Level 9, they had slipped behind similar schools, and even further behind all schools (see Table 2). The school profile shows that this college is low on the index of socio-educational advantage+ with 52% of students coming from the lowest Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) quartile and only 6% coming from the top ICSEA quartile.

The English teachers at Grevillea College had prepared their students for NAPLAN by providing models of good writing, instruction in how to address assessment criteria, and ample opportunity to practise their writing with teacher feedback and opportunities to revise and improve, which included test practice with time limits. Yet the NAPLAN results continued to decline. A novel approach was needed, and the English coordinator and teachers were charged with finding a solution. The participant teachers had observed that few of their students enjoyed writing. In both classes, two or three students refused to write at all, while others wrote very little. Many students did not persevere and struggled to write more than a few lines. The teachers believed that allowing students to express themselves more freely would be motivating, and would encourage them to see themselves as writers, with consequent improvement to the NAPLAN results. The proposed program was intended to remove the usual curricular requirements on writing tasks, such as planning, structure, accepted order, style and grammar. By setting a strict time limit and instructing students to write continuously within that time, they hoped to improve the students' ability to persevere when 'stuck'. While the initial impetus for the program was to improve the school's NAPLAN writing scores, the participant teachers were also focussed more broadly on their students' futures as writers. The school had previously implemented a 'silent reading' time at the start of each school day and teachers had noticed a decided improvement in concentration, motivation and settled behaviour from this program. The implementation of a 'silent writing' time complemented this approach and found easy acceptance among the students.

Aims and methods of our study

In this study we aimed to identify:
1. teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the program
2. the effects of the program on: (a) student attitudes to writing; and (b) writing resilience.

Research methods

Using a case study approach (Yin, 2009), the 'program' was planned with two participant teachers, 'Teacher One' and 'Teacher Two', and the English coordinator. The data in the study included interviews, surveys and observations conducted once a week over a nine-week term with two Year 8 English classes, comprising 44 students in total. The two teachers and the coordinator were interviewed at the start of the study, met with the researchers to discuss progress in Week 6 of the study, and met again for a review session at the end of the nine weeks. Students were surveyed about their attitudes to writing at the beginning (Week 1) and end (Week 9) of the term. Nine students were interviewed during the study regarding their attitudes to writing and the task set that particular day. The teachers selected these students as representative of different levels of writing achievement, although the students who brought back consent forms were the ones interviewed. These were mostly higher-achieving students. Data were analysed independently by the researchers to identify themes based on the literature, with these themes informed and confirmed in consultation with the participant teachers.

Writing program

A period of fifteen minutes was set aside once a week in each class, apart from the normal program, for students to write freely in response to teacher or student stimulus prompts. This writing was recorded in a writing journal provided for this task. Each class began with fifteen minutes of silent reading followed by fifteen minutes of continuous writing. Students were instructed to write as much as they could, and not worry about editing for spelling, grammar or punctuation. The teacher characterised this writing as a private activity, but subsequent voluntary sharing was encouraged, and time was allowed for this. Teachers did not look at the writing unless invited to, and did not mark or collect the writing.

Differences in teacher approaches

The teachers and the English coordinator planned the low-stakes writing activity together and shared resources. However, in practice the prompts varied based on what each teacher thought would motivate her class. Teacher One had received professional development training in 'Seven Steps to Writing Success', a writing program developed to engage students in writing and to simplify the teaching of

writing (McVeity, 2016). While prompts were mainly teacher-generated, Teacher One gave more guidance about how the students should write by drawing on elements of the Seven Steps program, to which she gave the credit for a turnaround in her students' attitudes to writing (interview). Her students were familiar with the language of the program before the intervention began and easily adapted to her instruction to use the stimulus prompt to write 'a sizzling start' and to incorporate 'dynamic dialogue' or an element of 'tightening tension'. The teacher viewed the low-stakes writing as an opportunity for students to practise developmental writing skills.

Examples of Teacher One's prompts:

- Look at the cartoon of Road Runner and Coyote approaching a cliff edge. Use 'tightening tension' to write about what happens next.
- Look at the photograph of a tranquil lake with vortex in foreground. Respond in any way you like to the photograph.
- Write a 'sizzling start' introduction to this story: 'A man dies wearing purple – but he hates purple.'
- Look at this photograph of a uniformed female soldier in an airport on her knees greeting or farewelling a small child. Respond in any way you like.
- Respond in any way you like to this quotation: 'It's been fifteen years but I still regret what happened at the lake that night. It wasn't meant to play out that way'.

Teacher Two had access to the Seven Steps resources but drew less on the program and gave her students less direction about how they should write. However, she did draw on the program for the 'Chatterbox Challenge'. She emphasised increasing the student output within a restricted time, because she believed that students needed to switch off their internal editing impulses to increase writing resilience.

Examples of Teacher Two's prompts
- Write about a time you were scared.
- What does it mean to grow up?
- Watch the video of a short conversation in a park between a lost woman and a man. There is no sound track. Write the dialogue for the video.
- Choose any 2 words or phrases and place them in the bucket. I (teacher) will draw them out randomly. Write about the 2 words.

- Choose any 2 words or phrases and place them in the bucket. Draw 2 words from the bucket. Write for 5 minutes then swap words with your partner and write for another five minutes. Read each other's responses.
- Undertake the Seven Steps origami 'Chatterbox Challenge'. Add heroes, villains and problems to the blank template. Then cut it out and fold it to get story ideas. Every story has a character, a villain and problem – link the three in any way you like.

Findings and discussion

Claim One: Participant teachers viewed the writing program as a positive influence on students' attitudes to, and resilience in, writing
Support for this claim is based on analysis of interviews and classroom observations. Both teachers enthused about perceived positive outcomes, especially for more reluctant writers. Teacher One considered that the low-stakes writing demonstrated to students that the quality of their writing would improve when they focussed on expressing their ideas without concern for mechanics. She observed changed thinking about writing, as students now gave thought to how they would begin, build to a climax and incorporate meaningful dialogue. Teacher Two thought the writing program worked well because the task was the students' own personal work, it was not assessed and they wrote whatever they liked. She observed that students now shared their writing freely and were 'having a go'. She also wrote beside the students and often shared her texts, and she noticed that students were respectfully interested in her writing and believed her modelling encouraged students to share their work. She also thought that her students would write more words in the set time if they practised more.

The teachers differed in how they generated and responded to prompts, and how they interpreted the effect of the low-stakes writing on their students. Teacher One viewed her role as that of a writing mentor. She saw low-stakes writing as a guided learning opportunity for students. She spent time after the conclusion of the task in whole-class discussion about the degree of difficulty in completing the task, student enjoyment or otherwise, and details about how they had interpreted and responded to the prompts. She emphasised that different approaches were valid and encouraged students to take an interest in each other's writing, and to relate their low-stakes writing

to other English writing tasks. Teacher One favoured visual images – cartoons, drawings or photographs – and gave the students no choice of prompts. Instead, she emphasised the variety of student responses and suggested that no two people regard an image in the same way. In this way she aimed to affirm and validate the personal responses of all her students. Though receiving teacher feedback was voluntary, researchers observed the students lining up to share their responses with the teacher. As their chosen audience, Teacher One responded to what the students were communicating in their writing rather than the mechanics of their writing. The students' pride in their work and their interest in the teacher's feedback was obvious to the researchers.

Teacher Two favoured written prompts and personalised the writing by giving students several options. She encouraged students to write on one or more prompts that brought ideas to mind. In one session, towards the end of the project, she let students create the prompts, an approach that the researchers observed lead to enthusiastic writing and sharing. Teacher Two wrote alongside her students and shared her own writing. The researchers observed the students' rapt attention as the teacher shared what she had written. As the weeks passed more students responded to the invitation to share their writing with their peers. Teacher Two interpreted this willingness to share their work with friends and with the whole class, and their growing sense of writing as enjoyable communication, as a reaction to her modelling and to the freedom she allowed in responding to the prompts. She encouraged students to persevere, challenging themselves to write constantly and to aim to increase the amount they wrote within the time limit, but was not observed giving any feedback to her students.

The teachers' differing approaches reflected the varied experience they brought to their teaching, their own learning and teaching preferences and their views of their students. Teacher One was the more experienced English teacher who had undertaken professional development activities, while Teacher Two had experience of a world beyond teaching, as she had previously worked in another career. Teacher One favoured visual cues while Teacher Two preferred written prompts. Teacher One thought her students were already on the path to improvement, while Teacher Two observed that her students lacked enjoyment and writing resilience. The two teachers, together with the English coordinator, met after each session to share their ideas and observations about the students' progress. In our view this collaboration, which led to trying new methods for both teachers, was a valuable aspect of the low-stakes writing project.

Our case study suggests there are multiple ways to conduct effective writing learning in a low-stakes environment Teacher and student roles can vary productively depending on context and culture. Teachers may write themselves or act as mentors, foreground communicative playfulness or authorial strategies, initiate prompts or invite their students to suggest prompts, treat each writing task as an independent exercise or produce a growing body of drafts in a designated writing journal (as in this study). Students may write by hand or on a screen, share their writing or keep it private. These are all viable choices, depending on teacher preference and student readiness. What matters is that well-recognised enabling conditions for students to find writing engaging and meaningful are met.

Claim Two: In the short-term, low-stakes writing enhanced students' attitudes to writing and writing resilience

Survey analysis, student and teacher commentary and our class observations support this claim. Noting that one more student completed the final survey in Teacher Two's class than at the start (18 to 19, see Table 4), some modest attitudinal gains were apparent in students' responses to statements 1, 6, 7, 11, 13 and 14. More students now indicated they liked writing, thought that their writing had improved and were more able to judge its quality. More liked to share their writing and more believed their friends thought they were good writers. More were confident their writing could improve and more were writing at home, and those who liked a challenge initially shifted to stronger agreement. Conversely, fewer were confident as writers or saw themselves as good writers.

In Teacher One's class, 22 students undertook the preliminary survey, while 18 undertook the final survey (see Table 3), making 'before and after' comparisons difficult. However, like Teacher Two's students, in the final survey more of Teacher One's students thought their writing had improved, more thought their friends judged them to be good writers and more were writing at home for fun. These results suggest that some students were enjoying their writing more, and that perhaps sharing contributed to this. In contrast to Teacher Two's class, more of Teacher One's

Table 3. Comparison of Teacher One's Class final and preliminary survey results

(Preliminary results appear in parentheses)

	Statements about Writing	Strongly Agree	Agree	Sometimes	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
1	I like writing	3(4)	3(5)	11(10)	1(2)	(1)	0
2	I am a confident writer	4(1)	4(8)	3(7)	5(4)	2(2)	0
3	I think of myself as a good writer	1(1)	5(4)	3(7)	6(5)	3(5)	0
4	I like doing persuasive writing	1(1)	2(6)	6(9)	2(1)	7	0
5	I like doing creative writing	7(5)	5(7)	4(9)	2(1)	0	0
6	My writing is better than last year	7(2)	6(10)	2(9)	2(1)	1	0
7	My friends think I'm a good writer	3	7(6)	2(6)	4(5)	2(5)	0
8	I like to share my writing	2(1)	1(2)	5(5)	4(9)	6(5)	0
9	I can tell when my writing is good	3(4)	6(8)	6(7)	1(3)	1	1
10	I want my writing to improve	11(9)	4(6)	2(4)	1(1)	0(1)	0
11	I think my writing can improve	6(5)	6(10)	3(4)	2	1(3)	0
12	I give up when I'm stuck with writing	2(1)	1	6(12)	8(6)	1(3)	0
13	I write at home for fun	1(2)	3(1)	4(7)	3(5)	7(7)	0
14	I enjoy new challenges when I write	3(2)	5(6)	4(8)	2(4)	4(2)	0

Table 4. Comparison of Teacher Two's Class final and preliminary survey results

(Preliminary results appear in parentheses)

	Statements about Writing	Strongly Agree	Agree	Sometimes	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
1	I like writing	3	7(6)	6(11)	3	0(1)	0
2	I am a confident writer	1	4(7)	10(5)	3(5)	1(1)	0
3	I think of myself as a good writer	1	4(6)	6(6)	6(4)	2(2)	0
4	I like doing persuasive writing	1	3(3)	2(6)	11(5)	2(3)	0 (1)
5	I like doing creative writing	7(6)	3(7)	6(4)	3(1)	0	0
6	My writing is better than last year	3(3)	10(8)	4(6)	2(1)	0	0
7	My friends think I'm a good writer	1(1)	5(2)	8(12)	4	1(1)	0
8	I like to share my writing	1	2(1)	4(3)	7(9)	5(5)	0
9	I can tell when my writing is good	6(2)	5(6)	5(8)	2	1(2)	0
10	I want my writing to improve	11(11)	7(6)	0(1)	1	0	0
11	I think my writing can improve	11(9)	7(4)	0(2)	1(2)	0	0
12	I give up when I'm stuck with writing	1	1(2)	6(5)	6(6)	3(4)	2
13	I write at home for fun	2(1)	2	4(5)	3(5)	8(7)	0
14	I enjoy new challenges when I write	4(1)	0(3)	8(7)	3(6)	4(1)	0

students expressed confidence in their writing ability, thinking of themselves as good writers. Teacher One made explicit links between the low-stakes writing and other curriculum writing, which may have caused the students to believe that the low-stakes writing tasks were honing their writing skills.

In Teacher Two's class, four students were interviewed. All agreed that they were doing more writing in class and all thought they had improved. 'Katie' thought herself 'an average writer: I don't excel'.

She thought the way to improve was 'lots of practice and listening in class' and was sure she was improving. She enjoyed writing challenges: 'I like to think outside the box and being given more grown-up topics'. 'James' also thought he'd 'improved quite a bit' but wasn't sure why, though he argued that 'I've been doing quite a bit of writing and I am finding it easier than at the start'. 'Cathy' found writing easy and enjoyed writing, but felt she could write more and believed the fifteen minutes was helping: 'It's longer to write and you can

do more in the time'. 'Alice' wrote a lot at home, but would like to 'get better words for my vocabulary'. She found the fifteen minutes of writing difficult because 'I struggle with my creativity sometimes' but 'I can write more when I know it isn't being marked'. James also struggled to come up with ideas sometimes, but 'once I get an idea they keep coming and they just don't stop coming'. Most liked sharing their writing with friends but found whole-class sharing too daunting. James found it 'hard' to share with the whole class: 'I shake a lot'.

Five of Teacher One's students were interviewed. Two liked writing, two liked writing sometimes and one disliked writing. However, all enjoyed the freedom of the low-stakes writing. For 'Maya' it felt like there were 'no borders'. She likes her writing journal because 'I can do whatever I like in there … we are not getting graded, we can just write by ourselves at our own pace'. 'Harry' also enjoyed the low-stakes writing because 'you can put your own twist on things'. 'Maggie' enjoyed it because 'I can use my imagination'. 'Celia' did not think herself a very good writer but found this writing easy because 'we can do whatever we want'. While all five wanted to improve their writing, 'Jack' was not sure how to get more variety into his writing, to improve his vocabulary and make his language more interesting. Harry found getting ideas hard and liked this writing because 'it is training you to get more ideas'. He also found that not having to worry about spelling or punctuation 'takes the stress off'. Harry was writing much more than at the start of the year. Celia needed individual teacher support to improve her writing but said 'she is too busy a lot of the time'. All students had strategies for persevering when they got stuck. Some used friends to 'bounce ideas off each other', while others 'just think through the problem' or 'branch out a bit, then come back to the topic'. All five students were enthusiastic about sharing their writing with friends but not with the whole class. In this class, the students sat in a large open space at round tables in an arrangement conducive to sharing, while students in the other class sat in long rows in a closed classroom. Maggie showed audience awareness in her comment that 'they would be the ones who'd be reading it. If they like it that's good but if there's something they think should be changed that's good to know'. She also liked sharing because she got ideas for other writing: 'We look at things differently'. Both Jack and Harry also wrote with a peer audience in mind. They liked writing 'funny stuff' to make their friends laugh. Maya also gained 'inspiration about new ways to write' by sharing with her friends. Celia liked the lack of compulsory sharing because she 'gets embarrassed' and 'feels weird'.

Student comments clearly show some positive and encouraging signs. Researcher classroom observation confirmed that students were engaged and able to sustain interest for the fifteen-minute period. Banning talk during this time seemed conducive to concentration. Although some students took a little time to start, all wrote continuously, even if outputs varied from 100 to 500 words. This study suggests one way to diversify students' experience of writing, by shifting the focus from writing as an academic performance to a writing as a more relaxed imaginative challenge. By doing so, students discovered a new interest in focussing on 'what' they were writing about, 'who' they were writing for and 'why' it mattered to them, instead of worrying about 'how' they should undertake it.

Perceiving the potential of low-stakes writing, the college has continued with this approach. When interviewed at the end of the following term, the English coordinator reported that the two teachers involved in our study 'continued to see results in terms of the amount of writing the students were able to do and their [the students'] attitudes to writing had improved significantly'. Low-stakes writing was written into the English curriculum for Terms 2 and 3 at Year 8 and 9 levels in 2018, and in 2019 the practice was rolled out across all year levels at Grevillea College. This continuation reinforces the teacher perception of its value in building writing confidence and resilience.

In this paper, following Bazerman et al. (2018), Hayes et al. (2017), Hodges (2017) and others, we have claimed that interlocking psychological, cognitive and social conditions are necessary for effective writing engagement and development. Viewing writing as meaningful sense-making and communication are important conditions (and for some student cohorts, critical pre-conditions) for developing a sense of writer self-efficacy and the need to practise and improve as a writer. We have further claimed that the 'why', or rationale, for writing is a critical component in this writing development, but that this dimension is downplayed in NAPLAN testing, with a consequential narrowing of how writing is taught in Australian schools.

Our study points to one way to re-couple the 'what' and 'why' of student writing in a genuinely engaging way. Despite the limited trial of this attempt to diversify

students' writing experiences, our study reconfirms conditions noted in past research on low-stakes writing that are likely to lead to beneficial outcomes. When participant students had some autonomy in task focus, were not constrained by external or self-imposed inhibitors and pressures on the drafting process and had opportunities to share their writing with a responsive peer audience, they were more motivated to write and found their writing more meaningful. Freedom from external judgement enabled a more relaxed approach, reducing students' self-editing and self-critical instincts and building writing confidence and resilience. Teachers in this case were recast as communicators, audience and learners rather than as judges of technical accuracy and structural coherence. We consider that this approach does not equate with low expectations, but rather raises expectations, when teachers do not view their low SES students from a deficit perspective and instead begin to value their life experiences (Hayes et al., 2017).

This case study raises but does not resolve a range of questions around future productive practices in effective writing instruction. There is the issue of how much time should be spent on creative invention and confidence-building activities of the kind outlined here for disengaged low SES students. The Grevillea College English teachers believed, on the basis of the trial, that there was potential for their students' increased self-efficacy and writing resilience to transfer to high-stakes success. Given that students felt some satisfaction with their writing and a new sense of productive purpose in this activity, the teacher beliefs seem well-founded. However, ongoing ways to integrate the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of writing remain a challenge for English teachers in the context of NAPLAN testing.

Concluding remarks

Given the current Australian writing instruction landscape, we propose that there is a place for low-stakes writing as a worthwhile variation and addition to enriching student learning experiences. To be clear, we are not arguing for abandoning a focus on technical and rhetorical competence, but rather for recognition of the need for diversity of approach, topic foci and purposes to prepare students for their future writing needs and interests (Bazerman, 2018). We consider that in the current context, based on this study and others, there is a strong need to vary practices along these lines, particularly with student cohorts from low SES backgrounds. A richer diet of learning opportunities in

and from writing allows these students to legitimately incorporate their own life experiences. This not only enables them to discover the value and pleasure of creating texts, but also, through the increased self-efficacy that results from discovering satisfaction in writing, may have the potential to improve their performance in formal assessment.

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Asia & the Curriculum

Asia Literacy, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and the Australian Curriculum

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Abstract: This article explores how Australian English teachers can thoughtfully and critically address the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' in secondary classrooms. It builds on our prior research, which highlighted factors that shape teacher attitudes towards addressing this cross-curriculum priority, the perceived evidence of political and economic motivations behind the inclusion of the priority, and the ways English teachers define and conceptualise Asia. We offer case studies of two New South Wales English teachers as they strive to reconcile curriculum requirements with classroom practices and to address the cross-curriculum priority in a way that promotes deep learning and critical engagement for students. This article draws on culturally sustaining pedagogy, highlights the importance of text selection and offers recommendations for high-quality and award-winning films, plays, memoirs, poems and novels that can be readily integrated into the secondary English curriculum.

'Simply to endure is to triumph.'
– Patricia McCormick, *Sold*

Introduction

On my first professional experience placement, I (first author) was given a Year 9 English class at a girls' high school in western Sydney, Australia. The students had just finished their end-of-year exams, and I was told that I could choose what to teach them for the four weeks of the placement, as long as it was aligned with the New South Wales Stage 5 English Syllabus outcomes. As this was an opportunity seldom afforded to pre-service teachers, I considered myself incredibly lucky to be given autonomy over the content and curriculum design. I had just created a unit of work based on the novel *Sold* by Patricia McCormick for a university assignment for my lecturer (second author), and I thought that teaching this class would be the perfect opportunity to put my theory into practice.

A National Book Award finalist, *Sold* is written in free verse and tells the story of a thirteen-year-old Nepali girl named Lakshmi who is sold into sexual slavery in India. My school-based supervisor said that there was a class set of the novel available, although it was not regularly taught. She emphasised that, given the nature of the novel's subject matter, I would need to address this with sensitivity and be aware of any potential triggers. It seemed as though all signs were pointing towards teaching *Sold*.

As someone who is trained in teaching both English and history curriculum, my pedagogy is driven by exploring the sociocultural, historical and geographical frameworks of a text. In light of this, I had planned for the first several lessons for the unit to cover the geographical locations of the countries where the novel is set, the relationship the two countries share and a historical and sociopolitical overview of sex trafficking. My students brought a wealth of languages, literacies and ways of being to the classroom, and I was eager for us to delve into *Sold* together.

I projected a world map onto the interactive whiteboard, and asked for a student volunteer

to point to Nepal. No hands went up; at first, I figured it was due to the fact that I was a new teacher, or perhaps that the students were shy. My next strategy was to ask for a verbal indication of Nepal's location: perhaps 'it's between China and India' or simply 'it's in Asia'. Again, there was silence. As the class stared blankly at me, I hesitated and asked, 'Has anyone heard of Nepal before?' My question was met with murmurs and the shaking of heads. I changed tactics. 'What about India?' Again, murmurs and headshakes.

It was at this point that the link between the introduction of the national cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' and student understanding of this concept became apparent to me. Asia is incredibly culturally, linguistically and geographically diverse, and although the majority of the students in the room had Asian heritage, the novel *Sold* dealt with a specific context that was unfamiliar to most of them. As a teacher striving to address this cross-curriculum priority, I would need to critically consider how my text selection and my pedagogy could fully support my students' learning and engagement.

In this article, we highlight key findings of our study on the attitudes that New South Wales (NSW) teachers hold in regard to addressing the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within English 7–10 classrooms (Gauci & Curwood, 2017), and offer case studies showing how two English teachers conceptualised and implemented this priority within their classrooms. As a high school English as an Additional Language/Dialect teacher and a university teacher educator, we explore the issues that teachers encounter with defining Asia, both geographically and culturally, and we share the ways in which their practices can be understood through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy. We argue that culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) can provide a rich framework to support teachers' work in integrating Asian texts and themes into the English curriculum, and we offer examples of high-quality books, films and short stories that can be used to meet this priority.

Defining Asia: Challenges and opportunities

In Australia, three national cross-curriculum priorities were nominated by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and adopted as part of the Australian Curriculum, which was fully implemented

by 2014. The inclusion of a cross-curriculum priority that emphasises Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is significant. Not only does this reflect changes within Australia, brought on by migration trends and geopolitical forces, it also shows a shift in the conceptualisation of Australian culture. As Ladson-Billings (2014) observes, 'Researchers and practitioners are moving and evolving in new ways that require us to embrace a more dynamic view of culture' (p. 75). In turn, this demands an evolution in English pedagogy in Australia.

It is an arduous and complicated task to define Asia, one made even more so by the multitude of definitions – which are often conflicting – put forward by various scholars and institutions. Salter (2009) provides a variety of criteria by which Asia can be defined, which includes geographic, cultural, religious, historic and linguistic criteria. Similarly, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) states that the region can be defined 'in terms of cultural, religious, historical, and language boundaries or commonalities' (ACARA, 2016, para 7) in addition to geographically.

Whilst ACARA (2016) indicates that there is not one single way in which to define Asia, it does provide an explicit list of countries that 'studies of Asia will pay particular attention to':

- North-East Asia including China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan
- South-East Asia including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam
- South Asia including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (para 8)

Our prior work (Gauci & Curwood, 2017) highlighted several key issues pertaining to how definitions of Asia have influenced teachers' choice of texts utilised to address 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia'. One recurring issue was that teachers themselves had varying definitions of what constitutes Asia, with many believing that there was a clear 'right' and 'wrong' answer. This was further complicated when teachers expressed their belief that ACARA provided no clear definition of Asia, reflecting an issue with teacher access to information published by ACARA, and potentially by other governing educational bodies.

This brings to light an important point: a

significant number of English teachers are selecting and implementing texts that they believe address the cross-curriculum priority, but that originate from, or are based in, a country or region outside of those listed by ACARA. The core purpose of the priority is outlined by ACARA (2016):

> Students will develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia and the rest of the world. Asia literacy provides students with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region. (para 7)

However, because teachers may be drawing on their own definitions of Asia rather than the countries listed above, they are not meeting the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. It is therefore imperative that teachers understand the requirements of the cross-curriculum priority and exercise their agency in selecting high-quality, engaging texts.

Our study

Methodology

We are interested in the 'culture, activity, identity, power, and the sociocultural contexts in which literacy occurs' (Perry, 2012, p. 52). Our study was situated in the Australian state of NSW, and we focused on the teaching and learning of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' in Year 7–10 English classes. Our methodology considered curriculum development and implementation, and took into account how the school context, teacher knowledge of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and accessibility to texts might shape teachers' attitudes and practices towards understanding and implementing this particular cross-curriculum priority as reflected in the *Melbourne Declaration*, *New South Wales K–10 Syllabus* and the *Australian F–10 Curriculum*.

Participants in this study included eighty-two NSW English teachers with full-time teaching experience in government, independent and Catholic schools, who took part in a survey with Likert scale and open-ended questions. We sought to have a representative sample of teachers from diverse geographic areas and schooling systems participate in the study. At the conclusion of the survey, seven teachers expressed interest in taking part in an in-depth interview. Sociocultural perspectives on learning and literacy guided our data analysis. Thematic analysis (Gerber, Abrams, Curwood,

& Magnifico, 2017) provided an open-ended approach to exploring how English teachers conceptualised, enacted and reflected upon the cross-curriculum priority. The first cycle of coding used *in vivo coding* that used the teachers' own words as codes, thereby valuing their lived experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Following this, the second cycle of coding involved *patterned coding* in order to organise, refine and consolidate codes into emergent themes and concepts (Saldaña, 2009).

In Gauci and Curwood (2017), we reported on key findings from the study. Notably, we found that a majority of teachers saw the value in addressing Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia within the English curriculum in their classes. However, many English teachers seemed to require clarity as to how to define Asia within the context of the cross-curriculum priority, which led to challenges related to text selection and implementation. Despite their desire to explore Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia in ways that enriched student literacy and cultural competency, including in relation to political and economic motivations, they struggled with articulating a pedagogical framework.

In this article, we turn our focus to how culturally sustaining pedagogy and evidence-based text selection can promote the meaningful implementation of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within English classrooms. We offer case studies of NSW English teachers and consider: At present, how are teachers engaging with the cross-curriculum priority in the English 7–10 curriculum? How can culturally sustaining pedagogy support teachers' text selection and instruction to ensure that the priority of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' is enacted with sensitivity, integrity and authenticity?

Case studies

In this article, we have chosen to focus on two teachers who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Australian English teachers and who have significant differences in their experience with programming and classroom teaching. Elaine is a white teacher who teaches English across Years 7 to 12 at an independent girls' school in Sydney's eastern suburbs. With over ten years of English teaching experience across different school contexts, she was closely involved in the programming of the K–10 English syllabus at the school when it was first introduced in 2012. From the outset of the interview, Elaine reflected on what she

perceived to be the bureaucratic nature of the new syllabus, and in particular the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities. She highlighted that while there may be some degree of consultation between education policymakers and educators, there was a significant disconnect between the current NSW English syllabus and what is able to be practically implemented and addressed in the classroom. She noted, 'What is fed out to schools to implement clearly shows … not disengagement, but just a total unawareness'.

Mei is an early career teacher with Chinese heritage who has taught Year 7–10 English for two years at a Catholic girls' high school in Greater Western Sydney. She indicated that she was aware of the significant political and economic motivations driving the inclusion of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia as a cross-curriculum priority. She emphasised that 'Students need to understand the world around them, and Australia is – and has been now for decades – very closely tied to countries in Asia through migration and trade. I see this priority as a way for teachers to directly address these topics'. While Mei was able to reflect on the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of countries within the Asia region to construct her own definition of Asia, she did not know of the geographical definition put forth by ACARA in relation to the cross-curriculum priority, and therefore did not consider it when reflecting on her process of selecting texts to address Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Asia literacy, text selection, and the Australian Curriculum: English

The following discussion includes key findings from our study that highlight how the case study teachers addressed the cross-curriculum priority in their English classrooms through the teaching of Asia, how they approached making it relevant to all students within their classes and how critical text selection was in this process. Additionally, we reflect on how culturally sustaining pedagogy can be utilised to ensure that the cross-curriculum priority is meaningfully addressed in Australian English classrooms.

Teaching about Asia within the English curriculum

How teachers define Asia, and how they conceptualise the intricate relationship between Asia and Australia, significantly influences the implementation of the cross-curriculum priority in English classrooms. Elaine indicated that she did not have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of 'Asia and Australia's

engagement with Asia', but that the autonomy English teachers were given to choose their own texts at her school meant that they were able to interpret this outcome based on their own definitions and conceptions of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. Interestingly, the texts that she mentioned that were utilised to address this outcome in her school – *English For English*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Little Frog in the Well* and Bollywood films – all originate from the Asian countries listed by ACARA, but they do not examine Australia's engagement with Asia. Consequently, teachers' text selection process often determines both how and whether the second component of the priority is addressed.

Although Mei was also unsure as to how ACARA defined Asia, she felt that she was still addressing the priority by drawing on her own definition of Asia, and she used that as a starting point for selecting appropriate texts. She stated, 'I also think it's simplistic to define Asia, or to limit it to geographical means, because there are communities in Australia, and there are Asian communities in Western cultures that are distinctly Asian, but not geographically part of Asia'. Interestingly, Mei emphasised the relationship between Australian and Asian communities, thereby highlighting Australia's cultural, linguistic and economic connections with Asia.

As a Chinese Australian teacher, Mei shared her belief that the personal contexts of teachers directly impact and influence not only their definitions of Asia, but also their choice of texts when addressing the cross-curriculum priority. When asked how she felt about selecting and teaching Asia-centric texts, she noted that she drew on what she considered to be her own authority as a teacher with Chinese heritage to select and teach texts that focused on the histories and cultures of China. She said, 'I have a slight leaning towards Chinese culture in my choice of text, simply because that's the sort of text available to me and I come from a Chinese background'. This reveals that, in addition to access, the lived experiences of teachers can have an influence over their choices of texts. Mei stated that this was because she 'feels a bit more of a sense of connection. I feel like I have some sort of authority when I speak about the novel or the film or whatever text it is I'm talking about'. This brings to light the question of whether teachers feel qualified – in terms of either learnt or experienced knowledge – to teach texts of Asian origin, and also whether they feel as though they are 'authorised' to do so, should the text

be of a different origin than their ethnicity.

Like Elaine, Mei indicated that she had a high degree of autonomy over the texts she selected to teach, stating that 'If we're doing a unit on film or biography, for example, I have the opportunity to choose a text that can cover the cross-curriculum priority, as long as whatever I choose is at a suitable level for the class'. These case studies indicate that while teachers may be given a high degree of autonomy in their process of text selection, they may not necessarily know how to access and interpret curriculum support documents published by ACARA to inform this process. Importantly, whilst teachers may choose texts of Asian origin, they may not always link them back to Australia or emphasise the cultural, linguistic and economic links between Asia and Australia. As a result, the cross-curriculum priority may not be implemented with fidelity and authenticity across Australia.

Making Asia relevant to students

It is important for teachers to understand the intent driving the inclusion of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' as a cross-curriculum priority, so that it can be addressed in ways that are not only consistent with the aims of the cross-curriculum priority outlined by ACARA, but also inclusive of the ever-changing diversity of experiences and perspectives of students within Australian classrooms. This raises an interesting point when examining the extent to which the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum are inherently economically and politically motivated. While ACARA explicitly states that the inclusion of the priority 'reflects Australia's extensive engagement with Asia in social, cultural, political and economic spheres'(ACARA, 2016, para 4), it is left to English teachers to translate this into their school curriculum. Elaine understood this to mean that these specific spheres must be explicitly addressed through the texts she selected to address the cross-curriculum priority in her classroom. She shared that it would be 'unethical in an English classroom to push a political and economic agenda of the government'.

Whilst 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' is specified as a cross-curriculum priority, much like 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures', not all students or teachers are from these backgrounds. This then raises the question as to how teachers can address these cross-curriculum priorities to ensure that all students can see how they are relevant to the lives of all Australian school students,

and whether teachers feel confident in selecting and implementing high-quality texts to achieve this aim. While Mei felt the most confident in teaching texts focusing on China, she also wanted to make sure diverse Asian experiences and perspectives were represented through the texts she taught in English. She noted, 'We have quite a few students who have Asian heritage, so for me, it's important that they have the opportunities to see their heritage represented in what they're learning in English. I didn't really have that much when I was in school'. This highlights the importance placed on ensuring that the diverse cultural perspectives and experiences that students bring to their English classrooms are represented through the films, stories and novels they study.

Teachers' commitment to cultural inclusivity and diversity aligns with the curriculum goal that students will 'deepen their intercultural understanding, enrich their own lives and increase the likelihood of successful participation in the "Asian century", for themselves and Australia as a whole' (ACARA, 2017, para 3). This then reflects the idea that, regardless of the cultural and linguistic background of Australian school students, the core aim of learning about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is to expand student knowledge of the histories and cultures of Asian countries and regions. This highlights not only the need for teachers to have the authority and autonomy to select texts to address the cross-curriculum priority, but also the importance of their underlying pedagogy.

Applying culturally sustaining pedagogy to Asia literacy

We argue that this cross-curriculum priority is part of an effort to both promote and sustain Asian culture and understand and reflect upon its relationship to Australia. However, our case studies of Elaine and Mei suggest that they struggled to articulate a pedagogical framework that could underpin their conceptualisation of Asia and Australia's increasingly complex relationship with Asia, and how cultural diversity and personal identity are relevant to the English curriculum. Mei reflected, 'I don't approach teaching these texts any differently to texts that focus on other Asian cultures or perspectives. The main difference is that I feel like I have a better understanding of Chinese history and culture, so I'm more confident in teaching what I know'. Although Elaine was able to select a diverse range of texts that she felt addressed the cross-curriculum priority

in regard to Asia, she was unable to expand on her specific approach to teaching them: 'I tend to focus on the historical or cultural context of the text, and then move onto looking at themes and language or film techniques'. While both teachers had the best intentions in terms of their programming and planning, their pedagogy was unable to account for the cultural pluralism of modern Australia. To that end, we believe that culturally sustaining pedagogy can be instrumental for teachers as they seek to understand both why and how this cross-curriculum priority has a place within secondary English classrooms.

As Paris and Alim (2014) explain, 'Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster – to *sustain* – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change' (p. 88). The national cross-curriculum priorities came about as a direct result of such change, and the successful implementation of the 'Asia and Australia's relationship with Asia' priority depends on teachers' ability to navigate cultural pluralism in local classrooms. At the same time, teachers need to be cautious in how they are defining Asia – geographically, culturally, and socio-politically – and be mindful not to inadvertently reduce or minimise an incredibly diverse part of the world. Paris (2012) elaborates, 'It is important that we do not essentialise and are not overdeterministic in our linkages of language and other cultural practices to certain racial and ethnic groups in approaching what it is we are seeking to sustain' (p. 95). Because culturally sustaining pedagogy has the explicit goal of supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in schools, it is critical that teachers are mindful of how they make meaning of educational policy, how they conceptualise Asia, and how they select relevant, thought-provoking texts.

Our research suggests that Australian teachers would benefit tremendously from professional learning that explores how culturally sustaining pedagogy can inform their interpretation of ACARA curriculum documents, their process of text selection and their approach to drawing upon the linguistic and cultural pluralisms within their classrooms as a way to make meaning of Asia and Australia's relationship with Asia. In the following section, we build on our case studies to offer recommended texts for Australian English teachers as they strive to draw on culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks to implement the cross-curriculum priority.

Recommended texts

It is important to find a wide range of texts that are suitable to differing student contexts and accessible to both staff and students. The Asia Education Foundation website provides a database that teachers can use to find resources based on keywords, key learning areas, year levels and countries of origin. Australian schools can subscribe to the AustLit database, which contains a range of different Australian-based texts, to give teachers access. Suitable texts can also be found in the winners and short lists of each year's New South Wales and Victorian Premiers' Literary Awards, the Miles Franklin Award, the Stella Prize and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

Our study indicated that NSW English teachers are still grappling with selecting texts that can be utilised to authentically address Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. In light of this, we offer a number of diverse text recommendations below for English teachers, thereby allowing teachers to enact culturally sustainable pedagogy to further develop students' Asia literacy.

Missing her by Michael Weisler – Tropfest short film (2011)

The short film focuses on Henry, a young Thai boy who is adopted by an Australian couple from Melbourne after the implied death of his mother. It follows Henry from Thailand to Melbourne, where his adoptive parents attempt to help him settle into his new life in Australia and their family. Henry's resistance to his new life and longing for his mother highlight child experiences of international adoption, and the ways in which it affects children in terms of their cultural identity, customs and sense of belonging. The film provides the opportunity to examine Australia's engagement with Asia through focusing on what it means to be Australian or Asian Australian, and the ways in which children and adults attempt to navigate this concept.

Lion – film (2016)

Based on Saroo Brierley's autobiography *A Long Way Home*, *Lion* depicts the story of Saroo, an Indian Australian man from the Khandwa district in Central India, who was adopted by Australian parents and, twenty-five years later, began the search for his birth relatives using Google Earth, subsequently reuniting with his mother and sister. The film explores Australia's engagement with Asia through the paradigm of how one's identity is shaped through one's ethnicity,

particularly in the case of international adoption. As *Lion* explores Saroo's ongoing effort to develop a sense of identity based on his family, heritage and geographical home, the film sheds light on the ways in which ethnicity, relationships, adoption and geography motivate one's sense of belonging, and the nuanced way that sense evolves over time.

Single Asian female by Michelle Law – play (2018)

The play centres on Pearl, a recently divorced Chinese migrant mother who runs The Golden Phoenix – a dated Chinese restaurant on the Sunshine Coast – and her two daughters Zoe and Mei. The text deftly weaves together themes of culture, gender norms, family tradition, parental expectations, rebellion and belonging to explore the impact of generational differences on one's identity. Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia are depicted in nuanced ways through the characters' different ages and stages in life, and how this influences their identity as Asian Australians. It also highlights how generational shifts for Asian Australians affect their identity, whether that be by holding onto the cultural customs and traditions of their countries of birth, by attempting to assimilate into 'Australian culture' or by striving to achieve a balance between the two.

We are here by Cat Thao Nguyen – memoir (2015)

Cat Thao Nguyen offers a poignant and unflinching memoir of her experiences as a Vietnamese refugee seeking asylum and a new life in Australia, and the complex ways in which her family built lives from themselves in Sydney's western suburbs. Australia's engagement with Asia is explored in an innovative way, through Cat Thao Nguyen's candid recollections of her efforts to overcome the trauma associated with her refugee experiences, adapt to a life in Australia that was often punctuated by racism, and strike a balance between her Vietnamese cultural practices and identity and her new identity as an Australian. The memoir offers the opportunity to examine Australia's engagement with Asia through the lens of Southeast Asian refugees seeking asylum in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s, their struggles to overcome various hardships and the ways in which their identities were thus shaped as Vietnamese Australians.

Walking free by Munjed Al Muderis – memoir (2015)

The memoir *Walking free,* based on the experiences of renowned orthopedic surgeon Munjed Al Muderis,

details his harrowing experiences as a refugee fleeing Iraq after refusing to amputate the ears of army deserters at the order of Saddam Hussein. After crossing the border into Jordan, flying to Malaysia and paying a people smuggler $2,000 to board a boat to Australia, Munjed Al Muderis spent nine months in Curtin Detention Centre in Western Australia's Kimberley region. The memoir highlights Australia's engagement with Asia through the perspective of refugee experiences and its treatment of refugees, both while in detention centres and during their attempts to adjust to life in a new country. It also offers the opportunity to closely examine the treatment of and attitudes towards refugees seeking asylum through any means necessary, and the way in which this frames Australia's engagement with Asia.

Laurinda by Alice Pung – novel (2014)

Set in the 1990s, *Laurinda* tells the story of Lucy Lam, a fifteen-year-old girl from a hard-working Vietnamese refugee family who attains a scholarship to Laurinda, an exclusive school for girls. The novel offers a poignant insight into Lucy's experiences as she deftly attempts to not only navigate the typical struggles of adolescence, but also construct her changing identity in a place in which she struggles to find a sense of belonging. It focuses on the experiences of young refugees simultaneously coming to terms with their identities as newly arrived Australians and trying to reconcile this with their cultural and ethnic identities. Australia's engagement with Asia can be examined in this novel through the themes of coming of age, socio-economic status, familial obligations and expectations, gender and peer pressure.

Ken's quest by Cher Chidzey – novel (2016)

Cher Chidzey's novel centres on a Chinese man, Wei Da – who goes by the name Ken – and his quest to achieve wealth and a happy life in Australia. A qualified engineer whose degree is not recognised in Australia, Ken's experiences of xenophobia and prejudice are explored against the backdrop of themes including assimilation, underemployment, relationships and belonging. The novel poignantly examines the nuances of racial tension between Asian migrants and Australian-born citizens, and the ways in which this has manifested in Australia over decades. It also highlights the ways in which prejudiced attitudes can be overturned through education, empathy and understanding.

Australia Day by Melanie Cheng – novel (2017)

Melanie Cheng's novel *Australia Day* is a collection of fourteen short stories on the theme of what it means to be Australian. The stories are set in different regions within Australia, and the characters differ in gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity. The collection explores Australia's engagement with Asia by examining the ways in which the different characters come to terms with what it means to be Australian based on their individual experiences. Given the nature of the text, the collection supports the notion that Australia's engagement with Asia is a multifaceted and ever-changing concept, and provides the opportunity to explore the ways in which it manifests itself through the perspectives of different characters.

Contemporary Asian Australian poets edited by Adam Aitken, Kim Cheng-Boey, and Michelle Cahill – anthology (2013)

This anthology comprises a range of poetry that intersects the themes of racial, cultural and national identity within the paradigm of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. It has a focus on dissecting what it means to be Asian Australian, and the ways in which this concept is becoming more prevalent in contemporary Australian society. The diverse Asian heritages and perspectives represented in the poetry examine the varied ways in which Australia's engagement with Asia is shaped through migration, assimilation, racial prejudice, opportunities, cultural differences and a desire to develop some sense of belonging. The anthology offers the opportunity to explore the ways in which the concept of identity continually adapts and is shaped by ethnicity, gender, cultural customs, socio-economic status and religion, through the lens of the experiences and perspectives of Asian Australians.

Philippines: Cordite poetry review, 85. edited by Mookie Katigbak Lacuesta and Shirley O. Lua – poetry (2018)

Cordite is an Australian-based international journal of poetry reviews, artworks, essays and criticism that publishes a range of themed issues. Issue 85, *Philippines*, contains a curated selection of international poetry framed in the context of the Philippines and its people. The nature of this text offers an insight into the layered, provocative nature of cultural identity and the multitude of ways in which it manifests in perspectives and experiences. Included with each poem is an introduction to the poet, which may provide contextual information helpful in understanding and analysing the poem. While this text does not explicitly explore Australia's engagement with Asia, it does highlight the perspectives of those from the Philippines, which can be placed in the context of Asia, and with which a significant number of migrants to Australia share their heritage.

Conclusion

Through case studies, this article offers insight into how two Australian teachers have striven to thoughtfully and critically address the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within the English curriculum. Drawing from their own cultural experiences, they have sought to understand curriculum requirements and implement texts that encourage students to deeply engage with the cultural and linguistic diversity of Asia. However, they have struggled to select texts that reflect Australia's engagement with Asia and to adopt a pedagogical approach that both embraces cultural pluralism and aligns with the Australian Curriculum's definition of Asia. By arguing for the relevance of culturally relevant pedagogy and highlighting a number of high-quality films, plays, memoirs, poems and novels, this article offers new directions for Australian English teachers. As Elaine shared, 'The way I see it, we teach texts that focus on Asia so that young Australians have a deep respect for the differences of our neighbours, and they are able to earnestly appreciate and celebrate that diversity in the world'.

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What if? Transforming English Teaching via Five Dangerous Words

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Abstract: This article is a call to action for English teachers and an invitation to think both critically and creatively about language that has infiltrated the English teaching profession in recent years. Specifically, the article explores the use of the words 'bottom', 'clinical', 'evidence', 'rigour' and 'rubric', and the ways in which their attendant discourses attempt to position teachers within the contemporary field of evidence-based education. The article builds on an individual paper given at the 2020 International Federation for the Teaching of English Conference.

Introduction: From conference paper to article

The International Federation for the Teaching of English's (IFTE) call for papers for its 2020 conference centred on the idea of 'If', conceptualised as 'Inventing Futures', 'Ideas in Flight' and 'Interpreting Frameworks'. The blurb suggested that the conference would be about 'going beyond public perception', so that wonderings might become realities. In an abstract for a proposed paper, I asked, 'What if teachers were not "the bottom"?' This question was specifically inspired by concern about the Australian Productivity Commission's (2016) construction of teachers as 'the bottom' in their call for the establishment of a national evidence base for education.

In Australia, teacher input into policy and curriculum is labelled as 'bottom-up'. In the UK, teachers have been described as 'the blob' ('Why does Michael Gove', 2013). In the United States, Donald Trump Jr incited denigration with his use of the term 'loser teachers' (Mazza, 2019). In challenging these discursive positionings, my presentation drew on recent research that equips teachers with ways to speak back to the language of 'low'. It problematised outcomes and evidence-based education, Visible Learning, clinical teaching and other dictates from on 'high', and shared the triumphs of related articles that have gone viral in education circles … and the backlash accompanying this success.

Incorporating my controversial critique of the government's idealised 'phallic teacher', I sought to imagine what might come next. If we, as a community of teachers, acknowledge the ways in which teacher professionalism has been narrowed in neoliberal contexts, this can be the beginning of change. I also reflected on my work in teacher education for subject English, and the particular challenges facing those new to the profession in relation to performing as professional teachers.

The full conference presentation is written up in *mETAphor* (McKnight, 2020), the journal of the English Teachers' Association of New South Wales, with an emphasis on questions about status for practising teachers. In this *English in Australia* article, I take one aspect of the presentation – the role of language in positioning teachers at 'the bottom' – and expand on it, using the playful approach of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St Pierre, 2007) to interrogate and transform five significant words that have become widely used in English teaching. My specific method of inquiry here is to activate perspectives of Foucauldian discourse analysis through attention to patterns of language that systematically strive to

form that of which they speak. This work draws on a number of small empirical, textual and conceptual research projects in which I have been involved. I combine this with a narrative element, mapping my own history of participation in English teaching discourse as a classroom teacher and academic onto these words. This serves to complicate the presentism that has been shown to be so dominant in English education (Diamond, 2020). These narratives, as memories, situate me in relation to these words and in relation to this work of inquiry. My own investments, predicaments, hopes and fears are woven into these linguistic accounts; this is an approach to discourse analysis developed in my own PhD exploring English teacher practices of curriculum design (2015). I also use what I will call 'ekphrastic analysis', in which instead of using art to inspire poetry, I use art to perform analysis in an interdisciplinary feint that intensifies insight.

The winged logo of the conference is suggestive of fantasy, magic and myth, and reminiscent of fairy hoaxes, wishing chairs and Hermes' flying sandals. A plump white-feathered wing forms the background to the word 'If' on the conference program. This article imagines five further words carried on their own wings and taking transformative flight, even as I try to pin them down for my emancipatory purposes: 'bottom', 'clinical', 'evidence', 'rigour' and 'rubric'. When I became a teacher in the 1980s, none of these was an everyday word in education. The phenomenon of their proliferation provides the context for this project. Each word aligns with a research project I have conducted and provides an avenue for research findings to be shared. Discussion of each word is followed by a suggestion for a transformative possibility. Already, perhaps, inside this paragraph, the reader can sense the weight of these five words, like the stones in our pockets, dragging us deep, the opposite of ideas in flight. There is no coincidence in the authoritative stress on the first syllables of these words. They assert themselves masterfully. They purport to carry the certainties of class distinction, medicine, science, iron and grids. This article seeks to highlight the performativity of their claims, and the attendant potential for challenging them.

These five words have been used against teachers in the ways in which neoliberalism is expert: this is why I define them as 'dangerous'. They have seemed to emerge from within the profession, as if naturally, in response to needs, inevitable and right. I seek to take these words and turn them inside out, hold them up to the light, feel them thoughtfully in the perceptive dark, listen to their resonances and test their materiality. I am interested in their metaphorical power, truly an alchemical power, to sustain the claim that one thing is another, that various professions form a hierarchy, that education is medicine, that science is god, that rigidity is quality and that everything is measurable. I will begin with the word that inspired my 2020 IFTE conference presentation: 'bottom'.

Bottom

To English teachers, Bottom is a fool, a crude character with the head of a donkey magicked on, an ass, a lout, preposterous, hilarious and deluded. Yet the laugh is on teachers, as they currently wear the donkey's head. The Australian government's Productivity Commission (2016) labels teachers as 'the bottom' of an education hierarchy that has the Minister for Education at the top. While the commission generously imagines that an evidence-based teaching profession might contribute some 'bottom-up' evidence – presumably drawn from teacher action research (one can imagine them holding their noses at this) – randomised controlled trials and meta-analyses, the province of John Hattie (2008), are the gold standard of evidence. It is unclear what colour they imagine the evidence emerging from 'the bottom' might be.

When I began teaching in 1989, teachers were experts. This is borne out by my doctoral study, which analysed the ways teachers were addressed in curriculum documents. In the 1980s, they were treated as equals, not servants. As a PhD student I sat in the Australian Council for Educational Research library reading old documents, astonished at the guild-like camaraderie in addresses to teachers (along with some casual and now archaic cruelty in discussing students). English teachers were considered a kind of elite as widely read, well respected advocates for their discipline.

This shift in teacher status cannot be divorced from a political economy of teaching and the decline of teacher salaries concurrent with increased pay rewards in other professions. This, it is claimed, has resulted in teacher academic aptitude substantially declining since the 1980s (Leigh & Ryan, 2006). It is not clear, however, that the teacher-proofing of Hattie's (2008) scientific, evidence-based approach is the answer to supporting a cohort of English teachers many of whom may themselves struggle with functional literacy or high-level concepts in texts. Yet a decline in academic

aptitude and confidence could foreshadow capitulation to being characterised as 'the bottom'. Such teachers may be vulnerable to the rhetorics of standardised, 'scientifically proven' programs linked to gurus.

With my colleague Ben Whitburn, I conducted an interdisciplinary analysis (2018), drawing on gender studies and inclusive education, of Hattie's notion of Visible Learning (2008), calling into question the relentlessly explicit nature of the visible and its capacity to undermine teachers while selling their own expertise back to them. According to the Visible Learning mantra, it is necessary to look closely at 'the bottom' through the lens of science to determine what teachers should do; this is highly suggestive of Stuart Hall's (1997) critique of the white man examining the 'exotic' black woman's buttocks through a telescope as an enactment of the concept of fetish. As 'the bottom', teachers are subjectified in a particular way, colonised, raided and rendered compliant.

Feminist and postcolonial theory suggests that 'the bottom' is no coincidental label. Cartesian thinking (predicated on the mind/body binary) posits women, people of colour, those with disabilities and children as subhuman in contrast to the white, able-bodied male (Shahjahan, 2011). Teaching, as a feminised profession, is about women and children, so it is no surprise that it is at the bottom of a hierarchy. Yet 'the bottom', as in Gustave Courbet's famous painting *The origin of the world* (1866), which depicts the view between a naked life model's legs, is the source of everything human: the origin of life, the beginning, essential, fundamental and revered.

While this painting, to contemporary sensibilities, straddles the queasy line between celebration and voyeurism, I propose that the word 'bottom' be consciously and conspicuously replaced by the word 'source'. Teachers can then take off the donkey's head they must wear as capering mechanicals at the mercy of the policy fairies and rightly take their place as the source of knowledge in the profession. They do not need to be subjugated by government ministers, policy officers, curriculum designers or academics. As the source, teachers take in diverse ideas as nourishment, consider and evaluate them, and give birth to designs for learning. Teachers, along with their students, are at the beginning, not the bottom.

Clinical

When I qualified as a teacher in 1989, Carl Rogers was still in fashion and we were taught that the single most important factor in learning was the students' relationship with the teacher. Yet despite the dominance of psychology in our courses, teaching was not constituted as a clinical practice profession. It was a caring profession, a creative profession and an academic profession.

With a colleague at Monash University, Andy Morgan, a medical doctor, I undertook an analysis of the metaphor of the clinical and its role in the education of teachers in 2020. Why is education so open to being colonised by medicine, we asked, when an examination of the medical education literature demonstrates that medicine itself is in dire need of help from education (for example in such novel concepts as planning for learning)? Yet the power differential does not work this way, and instead 'a medical approach to education' has been idealised and required. It is difficult to understand this as anything other than the adoption of the 'medical gaze' (Foucault, 1963) and the objectification of the student, enacted in contemporary English education, for example through the reduction of students to decontextualised grammar skills 'data', the teaching of writing as formula and the adoption of rigid critical theory 'lenses'. Through these exacting means, grids of intelligibility are established through which students can be measured and assessed *for compliance.* Similarly, teachers of the future may be assessed for compliance with evidence-based 'guidelines'. At a policy level, the change in discourse is demonstrated in the abandonment of negotiated curriculum (Boomer, 1992) for national curriculum.

Turning to art again to explore this shift in authority from relationships to tools, Ken Currie's *Krankenhaus* (2016) represents illness as an industrial complex of busy doctors and their interventions. These masked and ritualised practices in medicine suggest contemporary educational testing through means such as NAPLAN, with their attendant harms (Mayes & Howell, 2017). This painting suggests the pervasive and powerful nature of medical discourse. There is no struggle against it. The doctors do not seem other than well-meaning. Patients trust in their unquestioned expertise.

Studying this painting, I propose that the word 'clinical' be replaced by 'compassionate' in all instances related to teaching, in both education and medicine. Through this switch, efficiency makes way for emotion, abjectified with the feminine and the childish in neoliberal education.

Evidence

A cult of evidence is transforming teaching in the service of the clinical. When teaching veers towards being understood as a science, the decisions teachers make become understood to be like the decisions doctors make – epidemiological, and based on statistics about populations rather than individuals. When I became an English teacher, I drew on my own school experiences, the attitudes and practices of my own English teachers, my wide reading of literature, my disciplinary background in English and Literary Studies, my lecturers and tutors in my Bachelor of Arts, my method lecturers in Education, my school practicum supervisors and my readings of theory and professional English teaching literature, along with the publications of professional associations. As a highly trained professional, I was understood to have the expertise on which to draw on to make decisions about how to teach in relation to my own school and students, with whom I shared a constant exchange of information and ideas. Today this may be considered inadequate and unscientific.

Again with Andy Morgan, I wrote a theoretical paper in 2019 assessing the risks of evidence-based practice for teachers, and identifying that in medicine, evidence-based practice was a much-contested and challenged paradigm. This is rarely communicated to teachers, though. In medicine, evidence-based practice: has limitations as well as benefits, especially for individuals; changes the nature of practice and relationships; attracts critique; and invites conflicts of interest. This last point is particularly significant considering the extent of the English education market for teaching materials.

Without the scientific heft of large-scale randomised controlled trials (RCTs), the extent and complexity of which makes them unlikely to be conducted by teachers, my practice looks thinly validated. Yet RCTs may well not relate to my students, or to a particular individual I am trying to support. Analysing the results of these trials is also difficult, even though COVID has turned us all into armchair epidemiologists. Medical doctors often struggle to evaluate RCTs and their vagaries such as publication bias (when only positive results are reported) and surrogate markers (when being able to write a TEEL paragraph is proof of an intervention producing a 'good writer'). Hattie's statistics have been robustly queried (Bergeron & Rivard, 2017); however, teachers continue to present at English conferences with every activity suggested

spuriously linked to one of his effect sizes. Recourse to science becomes naturalised, despite teaching's long history as an art.

Art can again illuminate how discourse functions here. Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin's *The airconditioning show* (1966–67), included as part of the Hayward Gallery's exhibition of Invisible Art, demonstrates how what is invisible or purely conceptual can have meaning. These artists exhibited an empty air-conditioned room containing some screeds about conditions for displaying art. The nature of the visitor experience was dictated by the discursive context … for an absent piece of art. What we understand as 'evidence' is 'noticed and attended to not by virtue of some "naturally" obvious assertiveness but in respect of culturally, instrumentally and materially conditioned discursive activity' (Rugoff, 2012, p. 39). Discourse is essential to how teachers experience their work. 'Evidence' is part of a carefully conditioned scientific discourse in education that positions teachers as inexpert in their own discipline.

I propose that the word 'evidence' be replaced by 'reasons'. Teachers might be expected to give rationales for their actions – to share justifications, plans, projections, understandings, stories, hopes, influences and reasons – but not necessarily evidence.

Rigour

'Rigour' has got me into a lot of trouble; it's a dangerous word both personally and professionally. My concept of the phallic teacher, an IMAGINARY discursive figure addressed in curriculum documents assuming compliance, was linked to the conceptualising of rigour as quality in education. This work was based on British feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie's (2009) depiction of the phallic girl as having to be ever more feminine to be ever more powerful, in long nails, high heels and short skirts as a trade-off for wider participation in the workplace. I argue that teachers are needing to be ever more compliant with demands for rigour to be considered ever more professional. Stiffness, hardness, ruthlessness and their enactment through the educational turn to data, numbers, measurement, benchmarks, 'back to basics', testing and so on are quite obviously, to me and to a strong tradition of feminist education theorists, masculinist tools. Yet some, particularly right-wing, educational commentators refuse to recognise any gendered discourse at the basis of society's binary constructions of soft vs hard. In English, the more

creative aspects of the subject are dismissed as 'airy fairy' (as reported in Frawley, 2014), again in what seems a gendered bias within our discipline.

Louise Bourgeois, the sculptor, as depicted in Robert Mapplethorpe's (1982) photograph of her, demonstrates how to deal with the threat of phallic power by tucking her phallic sculpture neatly under her arm like a handbag. I propose, in a similar motion, that the word 'rigour' in education be replaced by 'integrity', a word that is not so blatantly gendered and destructive to all in our profession that does not fall into the category of 'hard'. This would neatly tuck away into perspective those national aptitude tests, data walls and intrusive probes in which certain forms of power and toolishness get bound up together.

Rubric
One of these tools of power, perhaps the most ubiquitous, is the 'rubric'. I had never heard rubrics even mentioned in English teaching until I returned to Australia in 2009 after six years in London and joined a Victorian Association for the Teaching of English working party developing exemplary units aligned with the new national curriculum. 'Where's the rubric?' asked someone, straight up. Rubrics had morphed into naturalised tools of power, literal grids of intelligibility that systematically form that which they seek to describe. Often compulsory, they are shadowed by a chorus of uneasy acknowledgement of their limitations for student imagination, their attendant frustrations through conflation of items and the time they consume in construction.

New teachers need to know that only 20 years ago, English teachers might not have used a single rubric in their practice. It is also important for them to know how ardently rubrics are contested, especially in the teaching of writing (Kohn, 2006; Wilson & Kohn, 2006). Terry Locke, who wrote the textbook we use in English Method at Deakin, advocates them for formative assessment only (2015). Rubrics promise transparency, visibility, authority, accuracy and objectivity, and yet are merely further atomised subjective judgements that could be drilled down into endlessly.

Rubrics are just as common in higher education. With my colleagues Sue Bennett and Scott Webster, I completed an analysis of competing discourses around the use of rubrics for assessment (2020), finding that the use of a compulsory rubric form for assessment clashed with discourses of twentieth-century learning, authentic assessment, respect for Indigenous

perspectives, support for diversity, creativity and praxis, and academic freedom. These findings have parallels for school education and for English teaching, where assessment might be negotiated, based on workplace practices such as editing, involve 8-ways pedagogy that honours dialogic assessment, or be creatively differentiated.

I do not wish to be graphically deterministic here, and Piet Mondrian is a useful reminder of the possibilities of the rubric. His early work with the Cartesian grid was 'characterised by its sheerly quantitative features of regularity, uniformity, anonymity, homogeneity, repetition, lack of hierarchy, unlimited expansion and most of all, its own kind of predetermination' (Schufreider, 1997, n.p.). These early grids were signs of 'a prefabricated order', an observation that applies to many assessment rubrics, in which teachers have imagined a narrow version of what is possible as an assessment response. Mondrian became famous, though, for works such as *Composition with red, blue and yellow* (1930), which subverted geometry through complex, dynamic and experimental composition.

I propose that the word 'rubric' be replaced by the phrase 'assessment design' to foreground choice and rhetorical intent, emphasising how rubrics are open to disruption, change and invention.

Conclusion: Flight, futures and frameworks
In this article, I have woven together memory, ekphrastic analysis, post-structural theory, and empirical, textual and conceptual research findings to explore 'what if' in relation to changing these dangerous words. Through this endeavour, I hope to suggest how language might be redeployed to reconceptualise 'the bottom', to foreground the attempts at teacher suppression made by scientific, medical and masculinist discourse in education and to playfully incorporate ways in which artists have explored similar preoccupations. I provide here an introduction to a body of work in discourse analysis that, although it relates to English teaching, has tended to be published in other literature, in the hope that English teachers may take it up and use it to argue for enhanced professionalism and status.

I recognise that I perform my own contingent attempts to pin down language and to conscript teachers to use my preferred words and discursive positionings, even as that language inevitably slips even further out of my control. All I can offer is five notional sites for linguistic activism, five sites out of countless sites, and wish that this will inspire discussion of

further dangerous words and their individual 'what ifs', should they be redefined, transformed or replaced. This critical and creative exploration of discourse is vital work for English teachers.

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Gee as a Theoretical Lens for Examining Teacher-Writer Identity

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Abstract: This paper considers the work of James Gee as a methodological lens for conceiving of the teacher-writer identity. Gee's (2000) Four Ways to View Identity are employed to examine the way that teachers discuss their writing identity. The paper reports on findings from a broader qualitative study that examined the writer identity in subject English as it pertains to the English teacher identity. Two key findings arising from the methodology of this study were the ways that teachers can either hold an Ascribed Discourse Writer identity or an Achieved Discourse Writer identity. The paper demonstrates how Gee's original framework can be extended to conceive of a framework for Writer Identity. The implications for the classroom are discussed in terms of how teachers' conceptions of themselves as writers incline them to either empower or limit the writing identities they offer for their students.

Introduction

What does it mean to be a teacher-writer? This compound identity rests within the fields of both Education and the Arts, but in order to properly interrogate such an inherently philosophical question, a broader understanding of the field of identity studies is warranted. According to Hall (1991), the notion of 'identity' as a field of study was prompted by various developments within the twentieth-century, including Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, and 'the linguistic turn,' which Lawler (2014) characterises as 'a turn to attention given to language as something that does not simply *carry* meaning, but *makes* meanings' (p. 3). In other words, language does not merely denote an identity, but forms it through various ways of discussing, debating and defining how we see ourselves.

Central to the debate surrounding teacher identity is the work of James Gee, who conceptualises of identity as being shaped by, and expressed through language (2000). Teachers' social reality is therefore constructed in and through the language that they use, and the language (or discourses) that are available to them in their professional lives. For Gee (2000), in fact, a 'Discourse' (which Gee uses with a capital D in order to distinguish it from Foucault's (1977) use of the term) constitutes being a 'certain kind of person' (p. 110) at a certain time and place, and goes beyond spoken and written language to also include various ways of acting and interacting, using one's body, holding certain views and values, and using certain objects or tools in a certain way.

In this paper, I draw on this understanding of identity to posit that the language used to describe teacher-writers is central to constructing this identity. English teachers may therefore identify (or be identified) as writers through the ways they discuss and practise their writing. Rather than being fixed, this identity is malleable, and dependent on contextual factors that provide a willingness and even sense of empowerment to claim this identity. This line of thinking is constructivist in its epistemology, conceiving of identity as an 'unstable truth in context' (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 150). As such, rather than seeking an objective truth as to what it means to be a teacher-writer, this paper is more concerned with exploring what factors contribute to the thoughts and actions of individuals – how they express what it

means to them to be a teacher-writer. The importance of investigating teachers' literate identities, and their writing identities, in particular, was justified on the grounds that the way in which English teachers see themselves will influence the ways that they view their students' identities and practices, and the subject of English itself.

The discussion that I present below is taken from data collected as part of my doctoral thesis (Frawley, 2018a) that investigated what it means to be a teacher-writer. The methodological approach to this research comprised a case study investigation of fifteen Australian secondary English teachers who are also writers and involved a series of fifty interviews and interactions with each participant over the course of a year (pseudonyms have been used throughout). The participants constituted a varied group in terms of age, gender, teaching experience and teaching context, which allowed for a range of voices and perspectives to come through in the data. Elsewhere (2015, 2018b, 2020) I have relayed the methodology in further detail. In this paper I feature five of the participants who best exemplify the findings pertaining to Gee's methodological lens. In line with the qualitative nature of this study, I expand on the narratives of these five teachers in order to highlight the mechanisms of Discourses in developing, authorising, recognising and sharing identities.

Writing identities and Gee

'Emily, why do you want to write? Give me your reason.'
'I want to be famous and rich,' said Emily coolly.
'Everybody does. Is that all?'
'No. I just love to write.'
"A better reason – but not enough – not enough. Tell me this – if you knew you would be poor as a church mouse all your life – if you knew you'd never have a line published – would you still go on writing – would you?'
'Of course I would,' said Emily disdainfully. 'Why, I have to write – I can't help it at times – I've just got to."
'Oh – then I'd waste my breath giving advice at all. If it's in you to climb you must.'
L.M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*

L.M. Montgomery, better known for her 'Anne of Green Gables' series, wrote the 'Emily of New Moon' novels that follow the story of an orphaned girl who dreams of becoming a writer. In the above quote, the fictional Emily's dreams of one day becoming a writer are navigated by her school teacher, Mr Carpenter. In this section, I draw on this passage to illustrate how Gee's (2000) framework for identity as an analytical lens for research offers an insightful micro framework in terms of understanding identity as 'being recognised as a certain 'kind of person' in a given context' (Gee, 2000, p. 99). I draw on the above passage as a way of illustrating this framework firstly in terms of the writer identity. Gee conceives of four ways of viewing identity, as outlined in the below table:

Table 1. Four Ways to View Identity (Gee, 2000)

Process		Power	Source of Power
1. Nature-identity: a state	developed from	forces	in nature
2. Institution-identity: a position	authorised by	authorities	within institutions
3. Discourse-identity: an individual trait	recognised in	the discourse/dialogue	of/with 'rational' individuals
4. Affinity-identity: experiences	shared in	the practice	of 'affinity groups'

A Nature-identity is conceived of as an identity deriving from birth or nature, such as being a female, or a redhead or a twin. The fictitious Emily's avowal that she 'has to write' is a bid for a Nature-identity: something that is inherent to her being. A Natural-Writer identity, then, is a perspective on writers that aligns with such familiar idioms as 'you've either got it or you don't', 'born to do it', or even 'God-given'.

Gee's second perspective, the Institution-identity, may appear similarly straight-forward: an Institutional-Writer identity is formed when the individual experiences recognition from an institution, such as when the fictional Emily's poetry is accepted for publication. But was Emily's writing that she submitted for her teacher in the above exchange, and her teacher's tacit acceptance of her as a writer, an example of the institution (in this case, the teacher) recognising this identity? Questions such as whether English teachers may authorise their students as writers in school institutions, are explored further in this paper.

Gee's third view of identity as Discourse is experienced as an identity that is recognised through dialogue by or with others – if Mr Carpenter recognises Emily as a writer, he is ascribing her with a Discourse-Writer identity. This Discourse-Writer identity may be

a cause for affirmation or encouragement (and here I think of any writing student whom teachers may call, and try to position as a writer), but this Discourse-Writer identity may also be a cause for conflict. Being spoken of, or speaking about being a writer, may therefore either be something an individual strives for or something they are labelled as by others.

Finally, the Affinity-identity is a shared, even 'grass-roots', identity established through practices with an affinity group. Gee offers the example of Star Trek fans ('Trekkies'), whose identity is shared through practices such as knowledge of the show and attendance at conventions. Individuals in an Affinity-identity share a common Discourse (with a capital D), which Gee defines as

> distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies (2008, p. 155)

Gee's definition of Discourse is useful as a starting point for considering what markers may identify someone as a teacher-writer, and indeed whether there may be a common Discourse or an Affinity-identity observable in teacher-writers. In the remainder of this paper, I group the participants' views of the writer identity into three distinct groups: those who were comfortable with their writer identity, those who engaged in struggles for legitimacy as writers, and those who rejected or problematised their writer identity. Throughout the analysis, I draw on Gee's four ways of viewing identity to highlight which views of the writer identity were at the forefront of the teacher-writers' discussions.

The 'achieved' discourse-writer identity

This section considers the views of teacher-writers who, by talking about themselves (and often their students) as writers, they engage in a bid to view themselves through a Discourse-writer identity. As these teachers' identities were narrated in opposition to the consecrated view of institutionally-recognised authors, these participants all have an *achieved* Discourse-writer identity; their interactions demonstrate their efforts to have themselves and others recognised as writers through the discourses in which they engage, despite – or perhaps because of – their awareness of the institutional writer position within the field.

For two participants in the study, Teresa and Walter,

the experience of becoming a writer (in the sense of becoming confident in their identity as a writer) was described as a process of struggle. For both these teacher-writers, the course of our interview conversations contributed to a quite recent and deliberate identification as a writer. One participant, Teresa, was approached to participate in this research through the recommendation of a mutual acquaintance, she initially expressed the concern that she might not qualify for the research. For Teresa, her Discourse-writer identity has been an achievement in the face of more consecrated understandings of the writer. Although she believed that her recent identification as a writer was due in part to some recent publication success in local writing competitions, she also believed it was due to her relatively newfound willingness to engage in dialogues that challenge her previously held notions of the writer identity. Teresa referred to her schooling and gender as inhibiting factors for previously considering herself a writer. In regards to her schooling, Teresa points to the 'traditional' study of canonical literature in English, and the divide between the quality of what others could write, and what she herself wrote:

> I thought, well I can't compete with Shakespeare, so can I give myself permission to – it feels, from the schooling I had, it sort of felt presumptuous for a long time, to call myself a writer.

Although she has always written poetry, stories, academic essays, and kept a diary, Teresa stated that in the past she would have 'categorically' said that she was *not* a writer and indeed that it would have been 'presumptuous' to claim otherwise. In this excerpt, Teresa clearly foregrounds her schooling experience as one that privileged the Cultural Heritage model of English (see Locke, 2005). Given her lack of cultural capital, especially as a student, Teresa did not feel empowered to engage in what could be recognised as an achieved Discourse-writer identity. Furthermore, Teresa speculated that this unwillingness to call herself a writer might have something to do with her gender; she drew a comparison between herself and her husband, a man who writes academically and has always much more readily 'claimed that space' as a writer. Teresa reflected that

> He's very much an academic writer. In religious philosophy, and this very almost sort of abstruse, obscure field that only a small number of people even understand. And I'm not, I'm not at all that sort of writer. I write fiction, I write imaginative, emotional – I don't

see myself entering his space. And so I suppose, I don't know, there's probably some feminist theory around this. Why is it that men have their voice validated much more quickly than women do? … My experience of writing has been much more about the story telling and the making sense of a life journey, and the experiences of life through writing about it. And sort of coming to terms with the fact that that is <u>also</u> a valid way to be a writer, even without a readership.

Teresa perceived a division between two fields of writing, positioning academic writing as a masculine space (her husband's domain), and her own 'experiential' or 'personal' writing as not only a feminine space, but a space that seems to be accorded with far less validity. It is from her perception of the relative validity of these two fields of writing then, that Teresa saw her writing as having less cultural capital.

In later interviews, Teresa observed that her female students tend to define themselves negatively (i.e. the reasons why they are *not* a writer), while her male student writers are more likely to define themselves assertively. This makes for a striking point of comparison with her own writing. Teresa downplayed her writing as introspective, however she later made the contradictory remark that her male students tend to use their 'personal' writing as a way of internalising their success as writers. This assertion not only reflects the highly complex and at times ambiguous nature of the writer identity, but in this instance also suggests that gender is more dominant than genre as a factor for the achieved Discourse-writer identity. Teresa's bid to call herself a writer is therefore political; it is not only a matter of personal identification, but also has ramifications for how she wants to position her students. As Teresa speculated on this question of her identity and how it might be perceived through feminist theory, it is fitting to draw a parallel with the work of McCabe (2005), who notes both similar issues of empowerment in the push for women's self-identification as 'feminists'. For Teresa, this Discourse-writer identity is very much a discourse, or even counter-discourse, that she seeks to establish within her classrooms.

Like Teresa, Walter also expressed doubt as to whether he 'qualified' to take part in the research given that he has not published extensively as a writer. For Walter, the bid to see himself as a writer has been a journey of challenging the notion of literary cultural capital. Walter stated that his poetic pursuits were an 'enormously significant' part of his life as a teenager through to his early forties and his hope was to be financially successful enough to be a full-time writer. However, his frustration with a lack of publication caused him to 'deliberately discontinue' his writing for a time:

I was sick and tired of being Australia's most unpublished author and could no longer bear the burden of all those unpublished manuscripts. I turned my back on the Muse and she withdrew from my life. About five years ago I realised that everything in my life was travelling well but there was something missing. It didn't take much of an effort to realise what that 'something' was. I was doing nothing creative or artistic and I needed to resume writing.

Up until this point, Walter had defined himself negatively against the Institutional-writer identity; his writing was not institutionally recognised, and therefore his self-categorisation as an 'unpublished author' seems to signify an ironic use of the word 'author', rather than an effort to engage in a heterodoxical bid to challenge the consecrated understanding of the author identity. To some extent, Walter engages with the view of the Natural-writer identity through his description of realising that something was 'missing' from his life when he discontinued his writing; it was unnatural for him to remove a creative output in his life, and his return to writing (this time non-fiction writing) signalled a return to a balanced natural order. However, throughout the course of the interviews, it was Walter's Discourse-writer identity that predominated in the way in which he saw himself as a writer. Given that he was highly conscious of the consecrated writer identity, Walter engaged in discourses with others, as well as forms of self-talk in an attempt to positively assert the legitimacy of his writer identity:

[My writer friend] has a view about artists which I find particularly helpful in my situation as a secondary teacher who has no time to do anything he really wants to do: once a poet, always a poet.

And then in the final interview:

What has become clear to me through the interview and through responding to these questions is that what counts is the fact that I proudly self-identify as a literary writer.

For Walter, identifying as a writer is bound up in the artistic, aesthetic, literary writing he does (see Lerner, 2016). Walter's references to the artist, the literary, and the Muse (in the previous passage) clearly situate his writer habitus within the Arts field. Walter's lack of cultural capital through publication means that he

foregrounds his view of himself through a Discourse-identity, specifically an 'achieved' Discourse-identity. Walter engages with the affirmation of his friend to assert a conception of the writer identity that anyone who practises their art form is an artist (Dewey, 1934). As such, Walter moves from the capital-rich Institutional-writer identity, which he felt he could not lay claim to, to the more inclusive conception of the Discourse-writer identity. Having said that, the creative nature of his writing, and the literary aspirations he continues to have (regardless of publication) still cause him to differentiate between the *literary* writer and a position of lesser legitimacy (i.e. his students' writing).

Walter's writer identity encountered several challenges as it entered the field of education. One instance of the challenges Walter navigated in moving between the two fields is the reference to his identity as a teacher, and the way in which this limits his available time to pursue writing (he has 'no time to do anything he really wants to do'). This teacher identity is positioned as a 'situation' – an issue requiring a remedy. It is therefore through his Discourse-identity, his way of speaking about his writer identity, that Walter is able to assert his Natural-identity as 'once a poet, always a poet'. The other instance of this complexity arises in the divide Walter felt between wanting to empower and ascribe his students with a writer identity, whilst still struggling with his own. Walter's hesitation to identity himself as a writer to his students is in stark contrast to how he seeks to position himself as a reader. In a separate interview, he commented that, 'I often refer to myself in class as a fellow reader. Often. And will defer to the kids, will admit my own mistakes'. Walter felt no hesitation in celebrating this Affinity-reader identity as a shared practice within his classroom of students, and one which is marked by enthusiasm and positive self-imaging. The writer identity, by contrast, is far more complex. As Walter demonstrates, even when making a bid for an achieved Discourse-identity as a writer, the intersection of the fields of Arts and Education make for significant complexities as this identity manifests in practice.

The views of the participants in this section affirm that the achieved Discourse-writer identity remains a 'never fully formed or always potentially changing' (Gee, 2000, p. 111) identity. As the teacher-writers in this section have shown, part of the unfinalisability of the writer identity (or identities) is due to the fact that this writer identity must be negotiated across the two intertwined but distinct fields of Arts and Education.

The discourses that surround writers in the Arts and Literary fields are more likely to be mediated by notions of institutional recognition, whereas writing and writers in the field of Education may also be located within the inclusive discourse of 'anyone can be a writer.' The place of literature within the field of English Education has also been shown to be a complicating factor, as it creates a potential divide between the often canonical (or at the very least institutionally-recognised) writers who are studied, and the teachers and students. This section has shown that there is an inherent tension in the achieved Discourse-writer identity, as it must always be asserted in opposition to the dominant discourse of the consecrated writer. Nonetheless, the participants in this section found it not only possible, but also important and rewarding to identify as writers.

The 'ascribed' discourse-writer identity

This section examines the views expressed by participants (Phil, Christie and Steph) who either rejected the writer identity, or downplayed the relevance of being a writer to their identity. In effect, it was only through my invitation for them to take part in this research (all were recommended for this project by third parties) that these participants were *ascribed* with Discourse-writer identities. Through the act of participating in this research, these participants were required to engage in discourses surrounding notions of 'the writer'. This necessitated that they engage with Gee's conception of the Discourse-writer identity, which could either be framed by participants as an *achieved* identity (as per the previous section) or this Discourse-writer identity could be *ascribed* to them. According to Gee, an ascribed Discourse-identity can often involve 'elites' ascribing 'inferior properties' (2000, p. 113) to those whom they wish to define themselves against. This has already been discussed to some extent in this paper, as per the way in which some teacher-writers who perceive themselves to occupy consecrated positions in the field must fashion their identities in opposition to those who are *not* writers. Yet as this section will show, whilst there were instances of some of these participants appearing to feel that their writing is 'inferior' to more 'elite' writers, there were also instances where some felt that identifying as a writer was more inconsequential or unnecessary to their identity.

Phil, who has had a long career teaching literacy in a a government school serving students from predominately low socio-economic backgrounds, has

also had a successful career as a writer. His writing achievements include a number of YA novels, as well as opinion articles for broadsheet newspapers and some academic writing. Despite this, when he was interviewed, Phil said that he tends to identify as a teacher rather than a writer, given that he is no longer writing for publication very often. Any reference to himself as a writer was usually framed in the past tense. For example, he explained that

> I really was a school holiday writer. When a novel started coming out, I kind of battled a bit between time for school and time for the novel. But I always put school first. Cos I thought, I couldn't look myself in the face if I replaced school with writing and kept teaching, you know?... I just think it was a kind of ethical position. I couldn't draw a salary [for teaching] if I didn't do the job properly. And I – writing was always a hobby, always pleasure. I don't – I kind of half dreamt that I might be very successful but then I realised it just wasn't going to be and so I didn't withdraw from teaching in any way.

Phil's writing life and school life have always been interconnected. Despite the fact that he wrote his first novel as a way of trying to come up with something his students might like to read (a story inspired by S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*), it has also been his teaching life that has obstructed Phil's sense of himself as a writer. The assertion that he needed to 'put school first' speaks to Alsup's (2005) research into the teacher's need to be both selfless and selfish. In Phil's case he was able to balance this 'selfish' need (in the sense of his own writing interests) by withholding his writing urges until school holiday time. Although the ethical intent of this is understandable, the implications for Phil's identity seem to indicate a dichotomised view of 'teacher' and 'writer,' with only one identity able to dominate at the one time. Phil's ascribed Discourse-writer identity is evident through his use of the past tense and therefore his rejection of an ongoing, current identification as a writer. Nonetheless, the reasons why he positions himself in this way are multi-faceted.

The publishing success that Phil has experienced would easily allow him to foreground his identity as an Institutional-writer in much the same way that Aisha (another YA writer in a similar school context) did. However, Phil rejected this identity, particularly because he didn't feel he produced a 'masterpiece' or a 'bestseller' (and here he drew a comparison with Australian bestseller YA author, Andy Griffiths). As he nears his retirement, Phil is 'writing very little' because he doesn't 'want to spend, say, two years of [his] life

writing something that's not good', where 'good' here equates with being deemed worthy of publication. This suggests that where Phil is not able to continue to position his identity through an Institutional-writer lens, he is disinclined to continue the practice of writing. Having said that, even when he *was* being published, Phil downplayed his writing, labelling it as a 'hobby', thereby framing it as something that would have been self-indulgent to pursue too heavily – especially at the expense of his teaching. In this instance, Phil frames the writer identity as a career and his own writing as 'pleasure'. It is therefore possible to infer that Phil distances himself from this identity in order to be able to enjoy his writing (Aristotle, 2013), rather than equating it with a salary and responsibility. His writing, then, is positioned as an activity rather than an identity, and Phil seemed largely comfortable with this. Consequently, Phil professes to not usually refer to himself as a writer, describing it as something that he feels 'has come to a quiet conclusion'.

Steph, an English teacher in a Catholic rural school, stated that she enjoyed what she termed 'creative writing' but at the time of the interviews was mostly engaging in the academic writing required of her Master of Education degree. Although Steph showed an awareness of different discourses of the writing identity, she did not view this as problematic or indeed particularly noteworthy. Steph was largely unconcerned with the notion of identification, even though she initially questioned if she was the sort of writer who would be applicable to this research project. Steph stated that she doesn't write for publication, doesn't earn a living from writing and doesn't feel 'driven to create' the way that her mother (who *does* identify as a writer) does. She summarised her position as such:

> I feel like it's something I *could* do [later in life] and I think I can write quite well. But it's – my passion is education and teaching kids to write. And I would love if I could have an hour a day to write. That would be really great but it's just not something I prioritise. So I do write regularly, I do think about writing all the time, and I read <u>all</u> the time, but I wouldn't consider myself a writer; I'd consider myself a teacher who can write.

Steph viewed herself as a confident and competent writer, equating the practice with deep and creative thinking – both for herself and her students. Steph's ascribed Discourse-writer identity is therefore not so much a product of her uncertainty of her writer identity, or a perceived lack of capital, but instead

a dismissal of the necessity of overt identification. Another participant, Christie, who was also primarily engaged with academic writing at the time of the interviews, described her identity in a similar way to Steph:

> I think that writing is a key part of my teaching identity. And I would describe it in that way, rather than describing myself as a writer first.

When Christie and Steph's writing identities are considered within the field of Education as opposed to the Arts field, they make for significant points of comparison: both enjoy writing, they are good at writing, and they are both passionate about the teaching of writing – but they don't necessarily see themselves as writers (see Locke, 2015).

All of the participants in this section can be classified as having ascribed-Discourse writer identities due to their rejection of, or discomfort with the writer identity, especially within the context of their teaching identities. Interestingly, this was not because they had any less capital than those teacher-writers in the previous section. All participants could have engaged in bids for distinction as writers. Given that they didn't, however, this phenomenon might be labelled as a form of symbolic violence – one that functions as a 'gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1). Yet it would be remiss to strip these participants of all agency in dismissing the writer identity, as they did show an awareness of the counter discourse of the achieved-writer identity. Locke (2015) contends that there can be 'transformative effects' (p. ix) for English teachers when they identify as writers, however the four participants in this section appeared to be more focused on their teaching identities, and did not see any great relevance or necessity between being a teacher and identifying

as a writer.

Implications

The theoretical framework of Gee was central to the way in which this research was conceived and analysed. Gee's analytical lens allowed for a rich analysis of the data that demonstrates the usefulness of this approach for any future research investigating the identities and practices of agents in a given field. Gee's work offers a micro analysis of the data to analyse how participants' language choices reflected and indeed constructed their identities and practices. Four ways to view writer identity, adapted from Gee's work, are outlined in the table below. As this paper has discussed, of particular concern for future research into teachers' writing identities is the Discourse-writer identity as it reveals broader implications about how teachers view themselves, their subject and their students.

The terminology that was developed to describe the teacher-writers throughout this paper (Natural-writer, Institutional-writer, Discourse-writer and Achieved-writer identities), while influenced by Gee's (2000) theory of foregrounding identity, is a new contribution to the field of writing identity. When considering the power sources from which these identities are drawn, it is vital to consider the English teacher's role in being cognisant of how these ways of viewing writer identity shape their practices in the classroom, as well as how English teachers recognise their own power as an 'authority' in claiming this identity for themselves and for others. If the English teaching identity does not encapsulate the writing identity, there are implications for how the subject is thought of, how entry to the profession is mandated and how English teachers relate their creative lives to their teaching lives. This research has shown that teacher-writers are the identity mediators between student and encountered writers in

Table 2. Four ways to view writer identity

Process		Power	Source of Power	Associations
1. Nature-writer identity: a state	developed from	forces	in nature	Writer as Genius, Unteachable
2. Institution-writer identity: a position	authorised by	authorities	within institutions	Published writers, Prize winners…
3. Discourse-writer identity: an individual trait	recognised in	the discourse/ dialogue	of/with "rational" individuals	Being talked about as writers/ Talking about oneself as a writer
4. Affinity-writer identity: experiences	shared in	the practice	of "affinity groups"	Communities of practice, writer groups/ clubs…

the classroom. Teachers' understandings of themselves as writers therefore have clear but complex connections to the ways in which they view their students as writers.

This research revealed that the writer identity, as a creative identity, often constitutes a site of struggle as teacher-writers mediate their concerns with what might be beneficial for their students, and the identity that they might wish to keep for themselves and other 'legitimate' writers. Given that the cultural capital that some teacher-writers felt was required to call themselves writers is, 'by definition, a scarce commodity' (Grenfell and Hardy, 2007, p. 30), under this discourse it is only possible to value their writing insofar as it is able to endow them with a form of distinction. Consequently, writers operating under this discourse have an identity that can only been known negatively – one is only a writer because others are *not*. Conversely, the participants who did *not* view their creative identities as being a point of distinction were much more inclined to extend this identity to their students. Future research would be well-placed to further probe the hierarchy that can sometimes exist between those who may be considered (or consider themselves) to be the capital-rich teacher-writer and the capital-poor student writer, and the extent to which such teachers view making their writer identity visible in the classroom as a self-indulgent or conceited activity. This research raised this phenomenon as an occasional position for teacher-writers (which goes some way towards explaining why some participants downplayed or dismissed the notion of being a 'teacher-writer'), further research is required to examine how exposure to alternative discourses or practices can challenge or change these views.

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Secondary-tertiary nexus

Making connections: Exploring the complexity of the secondary-tertiary nexus in English from the perspective of regional Australia

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Abstract: Mutual support and dialogue across secondary and tertiary English is vital work in urgent times. In this article, the authors examine Australia's secondary-tertiary English education nexus, building on previous scholarship to explore points of connection and disconnection with a view to identifying sustainable ways of supporting points of interchange. Using the framework of complexity theory, they identify nested and overlapping sets of educational systems. Acknowledging complexity in the endeavour to build dialogue across sectors is one of five principles the authors outline in terms of proactive ways for building further dialogue. In English education, complexity exists at both the macro-level and the micro-level. Macro-level complexity involves but is not limited to the national curriculum, peak bodies for English, and the academic discipline, broadly conceived; micro-level complexity involves local community interactions, particular university environments, and the enacted secondary curriculum at any given school or site. The authors point to regional Australia as a place where interaction across the secondary-tertiary divide sometimes spontaneously occurs; ultimately, they make recommendations that larger structures and supports are needed to ensure this kind of interaction is both sustainable and more widespread.

Introduction: The urgency of revisiting the nexus in regional Australia

This article explores existing relationships and nurtures further points of connection between high school and university English. Following on from work undertaken by others before us, such as the Community of Practice at the University of Tasmania (Fletcher et al., 2016) and the Shakespeare Reloaded/Better Strangers Project, our goal is to develop ways to address what has been identified as 'the striking lack of coordinated links between the sectors in our discipline' (Fletcher et al., 2016, p. 26). We share a strong sense of the urgency of promoting a coordinated community-based and peak body-informed cross-sector professional response to the common perception of 'a discipline in crisis' (English, 2012, location 267 qtd. in Fletcher et al., 2016, p. 31). Rather than working from a deficit model, however, we wish to proactively identify affirmative methods of shoring up the study of English for the future. We seek to acknowledge the challenges faced in teaching literature in the 21st century across the sector, and to identify opportunities to support and enrich the profession at all levels.

Like Fletcher et al., our inquiry is based in a regional university and community, and focuses in particular on the unique needs and opportunities for supporting the study of English in regional Australia. Our region of North Queensland has been hit hard in recent years by an economic recession, compounding the already existing vocational focus of often first-in-family to university (FIF) students who are pressured to make pragmatic, career-focused decisions about their study pathways, and who are now facing increasing social, economic, and political pressures that are also being felt across the nation and the world. Declining student enrolments in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) majoring in English, however,

do not align directly with the student experience of English and humanities education in both university and secondary schools, which tends to be positive. That said, these declines are sources for concern.

In the 2017 'State of the Discipline' report (Moore, 2017) by the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE), enrolments in university English programs appeared to be holding steady. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, early indicators across the tertiary sector in Australia suggest this may no longer be the case. Moreover, a number of other indicators worldwide signal a need for what the global peak body for English scholarship, the US-based Modern Language Association (MLA) calls a 'proactive' approach (2017). In light of recent pressures in the Australian university sector (including austerity measures in the aftermath of the tertiary funding crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic, rationalisation of many university departments, and the introduction of the STEM-centred Jobs-Ready Graduate legislation restructuring student fees in ways that further dis-incentivise students from studying the humanities), the goal of proactive relationship-building to enrich and sustain the study of English at all levels has taken on new urgency.

In their report titled 'A Changing Major' the MLA documented a 'precipitous decline in undergraduate English majors across North America that began around 2009' (2017, p. 1). The MLA pointed to a range of factors: the poor economic outlook, the rising cost of higher education and student debt loads, declining public support for higher education, a general devaluation of the humanities, the rising profile of STEM and applied programs designed to prepare graduates for specific careers, and the national decline in reading as well as the ongoing effects of the digital revolution (2017, p. 1). These are apprehensions shared by the national body for the humanities in Australia, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, which has observed long-term sector volatility, connected to 'short-term strategic policy settings, relatively autonomous institutional and sector-level funding decisions, and fluctuations in student study preferences' (Turner and Brass, 2014, p. 1).

The 2014 Report of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 'Mapping the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences in Australia', expresses 'concern for the future' (Turner and Brass, 2014, p. 1) prompted by 'downward trends in demand, significant shrinkage in the provision of programmes in certain subject areas

and in regional locations, and the more complex issue of the long-term effects of a demand-driven system' (2014, p. 2). Of immediate concern to us where we are based in regional North Queensland is Turner and Brass's observation that 'regional universities are particularly vulnerable to these influences' (2014, p. 2). Although the notion of a crisis in English studies is a narrative as old as the discipline itself, in a 'climate of declining numbers of students majoring in English' worldwide, and in addition to these other changes, the data shows that 'it's time,' executive director of the MLA, Paula M. Krebs compellingly argued, 'to make real changes in our outreach' (2018, para 2).

Downturns in university English enrolments may not be regarded as a crisis by high school teachers who understand well the pressures on students to choose other pathways in university. But the sense of impending crisis that is palpable in some university English departments is being felt in other ways in high school classrooms: In secondary school English departments across Australia, increasing pressures on English educators from what O'Sullivan and Goodwyn (2020) identify as 'a global reform agenda of increased accountability and narrow testing and curriculum control, debates about teacher quality, changing policy directives, and legislative standardisation' (p. 224) are reducing teacher autonomy and fomenting professional disenfranchisement. Heavy workloads centred around compliance and regulation are compounding the sense of 'change fatigue' English teachers have already expressed in relation to the 2010 introduction of the Foundation to Year 10 national curriculum (Dilkes, Cunningham, and Gray, 2014).

These changes include but are not limited to the over 22 iterations the *Australian Curriculum: English* (*AC: E*) has undergone since its introduction (McLean Davies and Sawyer, 2018), notwithstanding the various permutations of the senior English syllabus in each state. When, in 1997, Doecke predicted the 'impending demoralisation of the English teaching profession' (p. 3) due to increasing ministerial interference and media scrutiny affecting the autonomy of subject English, the level of compliance and constraint facing teachers in 2021 was hardly imaginable. As O'Sullivan (2016) has incisively observed, the rich complexity of English education in high schools is threatened by technocratic regulation focused on narrow outcomes and measurement, as the extra burden falls on teachers and practitioners to creatively engage students in a subject with diminishing scope for experimentation.

All of these phenomena are encapsulated in Liam Semler's concept of SysEd, a term he uses 'to indicate the state, processes and truths of modern, professionalised education which positions educators and students in an interlocking network of systems that deliver standardisation, measurement and compliance' (2016, p. 3). It would appear that this network of systems seems increasingly directed by external and inward-facing pressures that stymie ways of reaching outward across sectors to each other, to focus on the shared, higher goals of engagement and excitement with English literariness and literacy. In the face of these challenges, it is crucial to find ways to fight for an area of study we are all so passionate about, beyond the barriers imposed on both students and teachers by systematised education.

Because these pressures on English educators (and by extension – on English students) are being felt everywhere, we regard endeavours to build mutual support and dialogue between those of us engaged in the teaching and learning of English at all levels as vital work in urgent times. In what follows, we examine ways to encourage dialogue across the secondary-tertiary nexus. As with Tally and Brass (2014, p. 2), we are particularly worried about the regional experience of English teaching and study, which is indeed under intensified stress; ultimately, however, we also offer up the regional experience as a microcosm of hope. In doing so, we attempt to stimulate an appreciation for and tolerance of the complex systems and challenges that English teachers face as a profession spanning secondary and tertiary education sectors.

Part One: Background, context and approach
In any forward-looking attempt to build cross-sector dialogue, it is essential, firstly, to revisit previous attempts to establish connections between secondary and tertiary English, and to put our current work in the context of its own complex institutional history. At their inaugural meeting in 2012, the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE) organised a 'Secondary-Tertiary Nexus Working Group' (Dale et al., 2014). This working group sought to undertake a bold attempt at the 'mapping of secondary English on a national scale' (2014, p. 15) in order to begin to understand the intended curricula of Australia's eight states and territories. Among this working group was a shared goal of improving transition for commencing university students, with a more general aim of fostering mutually beneficial cross-sector dialogue (2014, p. 3).

The AUHE Nexus Working Group also organised a symposium that brought together key stakeholders in AATE (The Australian Association for the Teaching of English) and the AUHE. Anecdotally, secondary and tertiary English educators were organised in this symposium into two separate streams in ways that may not have enhanced collaboration and sharing. Separately and at the regional level, the University of Tasmania's Community of Practice attempted to bring together English educators and English academics. Although both projects are to be lauded for important developments in supporting the nexus, efforts to sustain dialogue appear to prove challenging. This speaks to the complexity of the undertaking. A unique example of successful long-term collaboration and cross-sector dialogue is the Better Strangers Project (Shakespeare Reloaded), which works directly at the secondary-tertiary interface and since 2008 has fostered collaboration between the University of Sydney and partner school Barker College. This partnership has supported further links across the nexus through regular hosting of free professional development seminars and other events supporting collaboration and communication between secondary and tertiary English educators.

It is in part because of the difficulty in sustaining dialogue across secondary and tertiary English and the patent complexity of these 'networks of systems' (Semler, 2016, p. 3) that we have taken a somewhat different approach from earlier projects, while also learning from and in some cases building on their important foundational work. We have identified five starting principles which we encourage others to embrace in further attempts to build cross-sector links:

1. Instead of undertaking the 'significant challenge' of mapping secondary curriculum onto academic English or vice versa (Dale et al., 2014, p. 15), we borrow concepts from social mapping (Krzywicka-Blum, 2006) to roughly outline the often invisible social factors at play in the development and enactment of curriculum and teaching, and in the building of cross-sector links and relations.

2. We acknowledge from the outset that these cross-sector relations do lack coordination, and aim to explore, and to a certain extent embrace, the messiness of the nexus as an interface with multiple points of entry and interactions, blurry boundaries, gaps, and gulfs of disconnection in addition to points of connection.

3. Rather than being stymied by the complexity of these two different systems and their differences (as Robert Dixon [2012] has admitted he was, in his role in the development of the *AC: E* between 2008 and 2012), we suggest that acknowledging complexity is an important step in moving forward. Building on the work of the Better Strangers project (Semler, 2013), we draw on the field of complexity theory to provide a vocabulary to articulate this messiness and the potential dynamism of interactions between secondary and tertiary English.

4. Relatedly, despite retaining the word 'nexus,' we are wary of its potential to invoke a sense of impersonal architecture. Instead, we emphasise the importance – but also the ephemerality – of human relationships and 'literary sociability' (Mead, Doecke, and McLean Davies, 2020), in working together to overcome structural limits that often inhibit connection across a number of sector boundaries.

5. As much as we view the national context as important, in ways we document, our ultimate focus is the local scene, which we see as a site of both increased vulnerability and possibly increased interconnectivity. We identify the need for structural supports at the national level to underpin and support the positive cross-sector dialogue that can emerge in regional settings.

Part Two: Framework – complex systems theory
The interface between secondary and tertiary English, which we call 'the nexus', is not a closed, controlled system with simple inputs and outputs. Instead, it behaves in far more sophisticated ways and is driven by interaction among various agents in the system. Because of this, complex systems theory and social mapping can be beneficial in identifying nodes of interaction as well as structural impediments to dialogue. Complexity theory recognises the productive messiness of the nexus in ways that provide an affirmative vocabulary for identifying challenges and locating opportunities for strengthening points of connection across the secondary-tertiary divide.

The 'complexity turn' (Urry, 2005, p. 1) in the social sciences, education and elsewhere is no longer new: in 2010 complexivist Cilliers identified that the study of complexity had been around for two or three decades (Cilliers, 2010, p. vii). It is now well-established, as the study of complex systems and the application of complexity theory has rippled beyond the fields of physics, mathematics, biology, and ecology to make waves in disciplines including education and English education (see Biesta and Osberg, 2010; Davis and Sumara, 2006; Doll, 2005; Mason, 2008; Morin, 2009; Morrison, 2002). The argument that education is complex is also well-established. Govers states the case clearly: 'Education is complex. Many educators would agree that it is influenced by many, often contradictory, voices and power structures' (Govers, 2016, p. 2). The framework of complexity theory is of value, therefore, to understanding educational processes and systems. As Osberg and Biesta tell us, 'Many educationalists have found complexity theory helpful for describing, characterising and understanding the dynamics of education differently' (2010, p. 2). The lens of complexity reframes the unpredictable, generative character of educational processes and practice, and enables us to articulate the behaviour of the English education nexus.

Complexity is also interpreted as 'an approach to knowledge and knowledge systems' (Peters, 2008, p. 3) which has been used to understand better the philosophy of education, classroom dynamics, curriculum, epistemology, language and linguistics, school leadership and educational policy (Jacobson et al., 2019). Recently, complexity theory has been invoked to conceptualise the linkages between teacher education and classroom practice, serving 'as a productive vantage from which to make sense of the complex dynamics of teacher development as it interfaced with classroom teaching and learning' (Martin and Dismuke, 2017, p. 23).

The secondary-tertiary nexus of English education is a suitably 'wicked problem' for complexity theory: comprising multiple formal and informal systems, influenced by its engagement with specific local environments and national levels of management, and generated by individual and organisational agents. Wicked problems 'are socially complex, multicausal, and highly resistant to resolution' (Hopson and Cram, 2018, p. 5). A term coined by Rittel and Webner in 1973, a wicked problem is

> a complex issue that defies complete definition, for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time. Such problems are not morally wicked, but diabolical in that they resist all the usual attempts to resolve them. (Ritter and Webber, 1973)

The 'diabolical' nature of wicked problems suggests their inherent complexity; that is, such systems or issues are beyond our complete control and are too sophisticated and dynamic to be managed to a point where they are predictable (Brown et al., 2010, p. 4). We aver that the framework of complexity theory offers ways to review the nexus, to recognise and, hopefully, better understand certain features of its behavioural patterns, even and especially ones which frustrate and stymie dialogue.

Part Three: Beginning to map the nexus
Although a wicked problem defies any complete definition, the 'nexus' can be tentatively identified by two critical but contradictory characteristics. Firstly, a nexus refers to the 'bond, link or junction' ('nexus', OED) between the secondary and tertiary educational institutions in which English is taught. This implies 'a central point or point of convergence; a focus; a meeting place' ('nexus' OED). But secondly and conversely, this nexus is characterised by what we conceive of as a space or gap which features weak or unclear connections.

Despite shared goals and languages, macrocosmic differences widen this conceptual space and detract from opportunities for convergence. These differences include system discourse and rhetoric, system rules and behaviours, institutional infrastructure and requirements, variations in curriculum, and divergent (implicit and explicit) purposes, objectives, and ideologies, as well as different understandings of the role of 'teacher' versus 'academic' across various domains that have come over time to comprise 'increasingly diverse' societies (Govers, 2016, p. 2). In the field of English education, many of these differences can be conceived in terms of institutional structures, such as the development of the national curriculum (*AC: E*), regulatory bodies, and views of the discipline of university English in contrast to the subject English (as discussed by Dixon [2012]), macro-scale and national-level issues which we examine further below.

On a microcosmic level, this nexus may behave differently than at the macro-scale. At the micro-scale, any perceived gap will be wider, smaller, or non-existent – depending on local agents, individual histories, and various relationships. Micro-level manifestations of the nexus could be understood as smaller systems of their own, which will behave differently in their own local contexts. Variations between these different micro-systems of the nexus could be influenced by long-term local patterns of

interactions (of connection or disconnection) between school and university, the impact of individuals working in communities, as well as economic and social changes in the community or region that reduce staff numbers and availability of diverse offerings in English disciplines. These nuances and variabilities across the nexus illustrate that complex systems cannot be exhaustively mapped, or easily 'broken down' into parts (Govers, 2016, p. 2). The characteristics generated through the interaction of those parts are essential aspects of complex networks.

As Martin and Dismuke articulate: 'Teaching–learning activity is nested in several other complex systems ranging from classroom norms to district settings, to community contexts and national policies' (2017, 23). We have chosen two vastly different scales or levels of the nexus to map in this article: the context of the history of the national curriculum, including its social actors, as well as the history of local interactions in regional North Queensland between school and university. An examination of these two macrocosmic and microcosmic aspects of the nexus allows us in what follows to analyse forms of interaction across different levels of the system. Our aim is that this analysis will in turn proffer ways forward to strengthen and support complex secondary-tertiary interactions going forward.

Macrocosmic Complexity: The National Curriculum in secondary English and sector changes in university English
As Yates and Doecke (2018) have noted, the two systems (high school and university) generally do not talk to each other. Without any formal instrument for communication across the sectors, any informal points of connection are chaotic and unstable, working against the dominant behavioural patterns of the system.

The development of the national curriculum was a touchpoint of the history of the nexus that potentially provided an opportunity for dialogue across the nexus, but in effect may have ended up driving a further wedge between the sectors (Dixon, 2012). This can be understood as a bifurcation point; a fork in the road where the opportunity arose for the system to move in a direction that fostered stronger interaction across the nexus. This occurs when a system develops into a state of heightened disorder where change is more likely (Hansen, 2017, p. 44). The revision of the curriculum encapsulates such a moment.

The attempt to create a national curriculum in

Australia emerged out of a decades-long conversation between State, Territory, and Commonwealth Education Ministers (dating back to the 1989 Hobart Declaration and the 1999 Adelaide Declaration) in which stakeholders resolved to work together to 'avoid duplication' and capitalise on 'economies of scale' to 'ensure high-quality schooling for all Australians' (ACARA, 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum,' 2009). These underlying principles gesture toward a mixture of motivations for designing a National Curriculum in Australia. The subsequent Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians that laid the groundwork for the Australian curriculum (MCEETYA, 2008) set two fundamental goals: 1. That Australian schooling would promote 'equity and excellence' (2008, p. 3); and 2. That all young Australians might, through schooling, become successful individuals, confident and creative learners, and active and informed citizens (2008, p. 3). While no doubt appearing to set out laudable goals – even as these were sometimes locked in a muted or unacknowledged agonism – the lofty ministerial rhetoric of the Melbourne Declaration appeared to mask abiding disputes between different social actors and agents (Keddie, 2012; Smyth et al., 2009).

These inherent contradictions set the stage for a manifestation of what Luke, Woods, and Weir identified as a 'compromise curriculum' (2013, p. 1). At the level of English education, this structural compromise unleashed a series of debates between English educators advocating competing visions of English (Green, 2008, 2012; Keddie, 2012): the skills-based and cultural capital model of English which can be loosely described as a 'market' model of education (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 19), and an 'emancipatory vision' of education 'for diversity and social justice' and its role in 'transforming the "ugly," "cruel", and "inhumane" aspects of the world' whilst addressing 'enduring and rising inequity, discrimination, and social disharmony' (Keddie, 2012, p. 1). In subject English in the *Australian Curriculum*, these two models, as in other subjects, have produced a curriculum that is marked by struggle and compromise (Thomson, 2008; Thomson, 2009). Moreover, as McLean Davies has observed (2008), the development of the *AC: E* was marked by anxiety and concern, that led to a heavily freighted curriculum of high school English education that bore responsibility for a variety of functions (language, literature, and literacy). This is a wide diversity of functions that, as Dixon has noted, are not usually required of an often more narrowly conceived literary education in university, which (at the time of writing in 2012), Dixon saw as less constrained by various curricular requirements.

In his role in the development of *AC: E* Dixon raised alarm about not only the number of different activities and mandates that subject English had been charged with in the national curriculum, but also with his perception of an institutional breakdown between the university discipline of English (as varied and inclusive as it has become), and the school subject of English. Furthermore, Dixon diagnosed a number of tensions between the 'diversity of stakeholders who,' he predicted, 'would be challenged to get across the full scope of the subject and negotiate their differences' (2008, p. 19). In such a climate, Dixon worried that while 'divisions indicate the increasing diversity of English in the positive sense,' they 'more negatively indicate real divisions within the sector that I think we need to recognise and work to overcome' (Dixon 2008, 24). Certainly the recognition of the 'broad-based' nature of English in secondary schools was one of the key characteristics of subject English that the AUHE observed in their 2014 attempt to map the national curriculum. Even so, the complex number of social and institutional forces that have gone into shaping history, development, and enactment of the high school *AC: E* account for this. Yet, one key difference between now (2021) and 2014 when the AUHE attempted to establish dialogue with secondary English is the downturn in public and political support for tertiary humanities study.

The austerity measures and policy pressures that are now impinging on university English mean that tertiary English departments may themselves be less insulated from similar pressures and changes. At regional institutions in particular, these austerity measures (as enacted by reductions in staff and offerings), may be more palpably felt by regional academics. In smaller, less well-resourced regional universities like James Cook University (JCU) where we are based, English, cultural studies, cinema, and creative writing have been brought together under one disciplinary umbrella for over a decade. In complexivist terms, this offers a unique parallel of the nexus at different scales.

It is perhaps on account of these institutional factors that regional universities such as JCU in North Queensland may have also been able to engage with a more sustained history of interactions across the secondary-tertiary divide than in metropolitan settings. In the final section of our article, we use key questions

raised by a complex systems framework to interrogate the history, interactions, and behavioural patterns of these interactions from a local perspective through a semi-structured interview with a key system agent in the local Townsville secondary-tertiary English education nexus.

Microcosmic Complexity: Connections across secondary and tertiary English in North Queensland – history, present, future

Every complex system has a history which informs present system behavioural patterns (Hansen, 2017, p. 9). This article has addressed some of this historical complexity through examining the macrocosmic structure of the secondary curriculum and (to a lesser degree) university English. In this section, we turn our focus to the microcosmic history of the nexus, in regional North Queensland.

In 2020, a semi-structured synchronous interview (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 110) was conducted over Zoom with Heather Fraser, with the interview method guided by Merriam and Tisdell's approach to this qualitative data collection technique (2016). This flexible format was chosen in order to focus on 'insights into the attitudes of the interviewee' (Walliman, 2010, p. 99) and to complement our complexivist framework; the flexibility and openness of this interview methodology aligns with complexity theory's prioritisation of unexpected emergence through interaction, and honours the spirit of dialogue we seek both to capture and model.

Interviewing a key member of this local manifestation of the secondary-tertiary nexus is, we believe, a critical (and as Merriam and Tisdell argue, 'sometimes the only') way to obtain data on the topic (2016, p. 109). As Fraser in an expert in her field, who offered written consent to participate in this interview as well as to authorise its publication, this interview complies with R17 of the Australian Code of the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018).

The nature of this interview models and captures the kind of three-way dialogue and intergenerational conversation between an established scholar of English (Kuttainen), an early career researcher of English (Hansen), and a secondary English teacher and secondary teaching peak-body leader (Fraser). This single unique case of the local nexus is a useful example on which future research can build, further expanding our lens to investigate more connections and interactions within the system.

What follows is the transcription of a recorded three-way conversation between Heather Fraser, a multi-award winning teacher of English in Townsville and head of the North Queensland branch of the English Teachers' Association of Queensland (ETAQ), and the article's authors.

Fraser graduated from JCU in 1980, moving to Brisbane to teach before returning to teach in Townsville. She is also a sessional employee in Education at JCU. Her knowledge and experiences of the history of this regional incarnation of the nexus make her an ideal case study for deepening our understanding of its nuances, characteristics and notable developments. Further, as tertiary educators investigating the nexus, it was vital to incorporate voices from secondary educators; not to do so would be to inhibit interactions of the very system we seek to nurture.[1]

In the following interview-discussion, we reflect on the ways in which English teaching in regional universities like JCU and high school English teaching in regional cities like Townsville may offer unique opportunities for connections, in an environment of simplified complexity.

Claire Hansen: Can you tell us about the composition of the local secondary-tertiary English education nexus in north Queensland? What did the nexus look like to you?

Heather Fraser: In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were some legends of educational leadership running the school [where I worked in Townsville] and the environment was nurturing of good practice, so, I quickly started interacting with my JCU lecturers and tutors.

I felt that what they were doing at the university could help instruct my practice. I was young and I wanted to make sure that what went on in my classroom was the best–cutting edge. To ensure that occurred, I asked [academics] to come into classrooms and then to attend English teacher gatherings, so that they could workshop ideas, build a relationship with teachers and see first-hand what was going on in schools. It worked wonders. The latent need for both parties to interact was palpable at those early gatherings. People wanted to listen and learn but more importantly share ideas with each other: sounding out the lecturers and other teachers about what they were doing.

It wasn't long before it became natural for the university academics to be a part of what the English teachers were doing. They all knew each other and there was a manifestly clear agenda to move along the path of incremental improvement where the platform was well articulated and to be more radical in developing a new set of resources and approaches where the gaps and silences existed.

Claire Hansen: It sounds to me like the establishment of a relationship between teachers and university educators generated a kind of regular behavioural pattern which encouraged engagement between secondary and tertiary educators. What kind of outcomes did these interactions produce?

Heather Fraser: As a result of all this activity, in 1981, Pam Gilbert and I formed the North Queensland chapter of English Teachers Association of Queensland and the forum provided a means of formal interaction with academics and teachers: the nexus was formed right here at the local level. Drama, poetry and media workshops helped lift the teachers' consciousness and awareness of evolving trends in education. For a period of ten years this interaction built a foundation that started to pay off for both the university and the teaching community. The North Queensland teachers were being equipped with the knowledge and skills required to shift the paradigm in literacy teaching and learning.

Not long after that critical literacies approaches started to come in, inflected by theory. At that time the curriculum was the focus, and new approaches to English teaching were being nurtured by the university. In 1993, Pam Gilbert enrolled twenty of us in a Master of Education focusing on English Curriculum at JCU. Pam gathered representatives from all the Townsville schools so that she could train them in critical literacies.[2]

North Queensland produced excellence. Regional samples started to appear as State Exemplars. People started asking; 'What is going on up there?' James Cook University developed a reputation for high quality literacy research and teaching. Academics from across the country and around the world were attracted to this little hotspot in literacy teaching and learning. At the height of all this activity in 1995, Townsville attracted The Fourth International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference on Learning.

Victoria Kuttainen: Heather, what would you say to national leaders and scholars who argue that the national curriculum in subject English in high school and the discipline of English in university have grown so far apart that what you experienced then is no longer possible – to have this kind of dialogue between tertiary English, tertiary English Education, and secondary English?

Heather Fraser: I totally disagree. I don't think there's a disconnect. Certainly teachers value the uni more than anything. [With state and national syllabus,] QCAA will always be a revolving door of bureaucracy.

But what matters is people and time. The fact that we are a small city makes a big difference. I think the fact that the uni was quite small [in the 70s and 80s when this all started up here] and relationships were crucial. Even though this was a small university, in the 70s, there were 800 people on the arts side. Mabo could've only happened in Townsville because you had Eddie Mabo and Gracie Smallwood and Margaret Reynolds, and

Bobbi Sykes, all sitting round the kitchen table.

It was always about relationships. Most of us went off to different unis and didn't find this. I studied for a while at Flinders. Friends went to unis down south. We certainly didn't have that level of relationship . ..There were so many connections throughout Townsville, I think being a small uni where people studied together and worked together, it was quite unique. But I'm sure places like Armidale, Toowoomba, etc. would have similar stories. I think it's the nature of smallness.

Claire Hansen: We know that complex systems thrive on a certain level of turbulence and disorder, which can be 'productive and beneficial for the system' (Hansen, 2017, p. 9). Some instability can actually generate innovation and adaptation. What changes have you noted, in particular in relation to this tension between turbulence and innovation, system constraint and creativity?

Heather Fraser: [Certainly] it's a [false] presumption that [local teachers] have come through JCU and stay in Townsville. JCU Education grads go everywhere, and some of them never teach. Looking around my staffroom [in a Townsville State High School], a lot of them have come from overseas, or from NSW or out of state… They've come from a whole range of backgrounds…They come and they go. Also there is a high level of teacher turn-over in the secondary sector.

I remember at ETAQ [when we collaborated with a JCU English event a few years ago], we were in that lovely big uni lecture theatre, and people were gobsmacked. They'd never seen it, never been in it, couldn't believe the facilities…They went back and said 'wow.' It was extraordinary. The university gets good PR out of that.

It's good to see that connections continue, even as things change. You guys at the university put up fantastic speakers, and people come in droves. You've had incredible women: Kath Bode, Leigh Dale, Clementine Ford, Sarah Holland-Batt, Bri Lee etc. You look around, there were probably 300 people in that lecture theatre. Just this year you collaborated with a local bookseller and brought up Trent Dalton. That was extraordinary. He has genuine interest in English teachers. The constant stream of stimuli helps teachers innovate in the classroom. Being able to interrogate writers at close quarters and then workshop with university staff, sometime later, all helps teachers to innovate. That innovation is important when syllabuses and curriculum are changing, resources are changing and there is a heightened sense of uncertainty.

Claire Hansen: Having arrived here relatively recently myself, it feels like the 'smallness' of the system you described earlier has changed, with a widening range of interactions and increasing numbers of educators drawn from interstate or overseas. Added to this are changes to the senior curriculum. With all of this in mind, how do you think we can keep supporting the nexus and making relationships sustainable?

Heather Fraser: Keep doing what you are doing. Keep bringing in clever speakers. Simple is best. This builds connections and points of contact. Informality always works…Just keep doing what you are doing. The interaction, stimulation, just helps. If teachers don't get to our professional development sessions, it's just because they're flat out. We need lots of opportunities to interact and get new ideas. Having ETAQ (Townsville) provides a mechanism for the continual professional development of the teachers in the region. JCU has always supported that professional development process. They have always supported ETAQ and our members. If we didn't have ETAQ, it would be more difficult to maintain the connection.

Victoria Kuttainen: From our perspective at university, we can sometimes feel or be siloed in different disciplines and buildings, rarely interacting and experiencing different kinds of pressures. Heather, when you think about engaging with the university, do you think primarily about engaging with the school of Education, or with the discipline of English?

Heather Fraser: No I don't see any disconnect. [From outside the university] people see JCU as JCU, whether it's Education or English. People just see it as a university. What is important is that the university has an array of staff, in education and English, who want to engage. For instance, I have really appreciated when you (Claire) have taken the time to come into my school and engaged in a Shakespearean class. The ETAQ sessions have attracted large numbers of teachers throughout the state.

Claire Hansen: We've seen that history affects system behaviours. Locally, then, what has been your experience of the nexus, Victoria, particularly since you, like many academics today, did not grow up or study in Townsville but were appointed here from elsewhere?

Victoria Kuttainen: To be honest, I was completely oblivious to connections across sectors when I arrived in 2009 to take up a lectureship in postcolonial literature at JCU in the English department. I had a sense that Townsville was hard to penetrate, and I was an outsider.

I also rarely reflected on high school English, and had little to do with English educators or the Education faculty at JCU. It was only when my oldest child was a senior that I began to realise we were here for the long haul. It was then I realised there was such a profound difference between high school English and university English, and it was because of that that I enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) in 2017, long after my Masters and PhD in English. For me this became a kind of research question: 'What is going on in the Australian senior English curriculum? And isn't this a problem that I don't know this, when my students come from this education into my university classroom?'

Heather Fraser was one of my site-based teacher educators when I was on practicum. Because of the smallness of this place, six degrees of separation are often reduced to two or three in Townsville: I already knew her husband who sits on the board of the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies with me. I began to see how that Foundation had been so crucial over the years in resourcing public events that continued to build connections between the university and the school sector. After doing my Graduate Diploma, I became much more conscious and purposeful about building and maintaining those connections.

Claire Hansen: What do you see as some of the challenges to keeping the nexus going?

Victoria Kuttainen: Firstly, people do come and go and continuities in relationships will get interrupted, and this happens more and more with each restructure of the university. It's hard to see how to avoid those disruptions, except perhaps if we start to make active space for each other on each other's boards etc. The Foundation has always had a teacher on its board. ETAQ and other teaching peak bodies might do well to always have an academic on their boards, and vice versa with academic bodies needing to have a teacher or English teacher educator on their board.

Without these structural mechanisms of collaboration, much relies on serendipity. Even still, this requires a sense of prioritising of a big picture for English that is not encouraged by current structures, systems, pressures and rewards. It takes people doing things out of their good will, and realising that the 'things' that we are doing are building valuable relationships, and that these need to be mutually respectful. We need to recognise that the relationships we build are slow developing, and don't translate immediately into bums on seats as the university marketing programs might like them to do. When I go out into schools I know there are talented English students. They often do not find their way into our English classrooms in university because they are earmarked for medicine or engineering, or something perceived as more lucrative. If we want to find them in our classrooms, we need to be having broader conversations about these structural problems. In Canada, where I did my undergrad and Masters, it's compulsory for everyone to take an English class at university, and same for science or math class. It would be nice to see more of this cross-pollination required.

Regional universities like JCU are vulnerable to shocks, and the vocational push is a real and understandable one in communities like Townsville at all levels of the socio-economic spectrum.

Silos are another problem. These are reflected and compounded by the differences between university calendars and school calendars as well as the differences between the conferences we tend to go to, and the dates of these. The silos exist within universities too between Education and English. We need to actively build relationships there. I have purposely put myself forward for the QCAA text list panel, for example, as a

way to structurally solidify relationships there, not just in my uni but beyond. One of the benefits of my doing the Graduate Diploma in Education was that my English department at JCU also became more conscious of the need to hire English academics who can work into and with Education in high schools and in our university, like yourself.

Victoria Kuttainen: Claire, you work actively with high school teachers and as a scholar of Shakespeare. A lot of your engagement has focused on professional development for teachers, an important manifestation of the nexus in action. ell us about your experiences and insights into working across the nexus and about how secondary and tertiary educators embrace similar challenges from different perspectives.

Claire Hansen: I came to JCU from Sydney where I was working as part of the Shakespeare Reloaded project, which works regularly and sustainably across the nexus. This project is an important example of a successful collaboration situated in the heart of the nexus. Shakespeare is another kind of localised nexus: an identifiable subject area within English where teachers are keen to look to academics for teaching ideas and resources.

One of the challenges of supporting the nexus and sharing our knowledge of Shakespeare across secondary and tertiary sectors is that there are different kinds of expertise in place. When asked to speak about *Macbeth* (on Queensland's external exam), for example, my knowledge about teaching the play is quite different to the expertise teachers themselves have developed on learning for the exams and prioritising student learning and success in the secondary schooling environment.

There is much I can learn from teachers about their teaching and learning needs in this specific context. Secondary educators are the experts when it comes to learning for the exams and regulations of the system in which they are embedded. My own scholarly knowledge about the play doesn't always directly apply or feel relevant in this space, and so there's work to be done here in building dialogue and becoming more conscious of what each party can offer. Teachers have pedagogical expertise that academics stand to benefit from. Equally, academics may be able to stimulate genuine learning both for and *beyond* assessment needs. So I think it's vital that we recognise that there needs to be regular two-way sharing of expertise and experience between secondary and tertiary English teachers.

This has begun on a small-scale with English teachers enrolling in the JCU English Honours program. Having teachers doing honours in English is a vital as well as personalised way to grow the nexus, just as when you and other English academics pursue higher studies in Education.

Claire Hansen: Victoria, I guess I see these things bubbling up spontaneously and sometimes haphazardly, but the key question is: how do we solidify these connections, which can often be random rather than structurally supported?

Victoria Kuttainen: Going forward, we need to value both the human elements of this complexity and try to build more structural continuity across the nexus. Philip Mead, Brenton Doecke, and Larissa McLean Davies (2020) just published a fascinating and relevant article in *ALS* [*Australian Literary Studies*], about the importance of 'literary sociability' in the building of teacher's understanding of literature. I think that interactions between high school teachers of subject English, English teacher educators, and English academics are part of that sociability. We need to value it and find ways to foster it going forward, and to be okay with its messiness. There are structural things we can do at peak body levels and national conference levels to support this sociability, so it's not so random and subject to shocks or serendipity.

Conclusion: Supporting the nexus through change

There is no formal structure in place to connect secondary and tertiary educators of English in North Queensland or elsewhere. Nor is there any formal mechanism to connect the experience of students transitioning from secondary English to tertiary English studies, or to support avenues for communication between academics of English and academics of English education. As yet, these links are created through the idiosyncratic networks generated by chance or design of individual local agents, and they are maintained through the reinforcement of those links over time in ways that build the system's history and establish dominant patterns of behaviour or 'attractors'. Equally, however, such links can be vulnerable and subject to shocks, especially if they are not buttressed by formal, structural supports.

This article has reflected on the behavioural patterns, history and characteristics of the secondary-tertiary English nexus as it manifests from a specific perspective in a specific region of Australia. One of the learnings emerging from this work is that an academic perspective on the university may be very different from an external perspective; for those outside the 'ivory tower' the university may appear as a coherent and unified body, while for those working within it, there may be a sense of differentiation or even silo-ism. Yet the regionalism of our context makes for a particular experience of the nexus. Tension points are clearer because of the sheer smallness of numbers, and the need to straddle more aspects of our discipline or disciplines with fewer faculty numbers can randomly

or inadvertently produce more unintended alignments with subject English in high school classrooms. Moreover, the smallness of the social network in a regional setting can mean (despite the difficulty of penetrating this network for teachers and academics from outside the region) that we are more likely as lecturers to know the Bachelor of Secondary Education students in our English classrooms or to meet former students teaching high school classrooms when we visit, just as they are more likely to keep in touch with us when they enter high school classrooms. Yet the lack of formalised interaction across the nexus means, as we have discussed, that it is reliant upon the action of individual agents over time. These localised interactions may, in our regional incarnation of the nexus, have disproportionately significant ramifications; the links between only a few individuals may change the attractor. While this can be empowering, there is also risk carried here in that minor change (such as one teacher moving away from a certain school or an academic going on leave) may generate disruption. When Heather describes a certain 'level of relationship' with 'so many connections', she describes a complex system in which agents are in close proximity and interacting frequently, generating richer forms of engagement that produce a stronger, more robust system.

The 'smallness' of the nexus in this regional Australian context thus enables more densely packed interactions. Thus, a key finding emerging here is the value of smallness: even in metropolitan universities, we suggest that a nexus can be sustained and strengthened through generating and maintaining specific local interactions. One example of this is the Better Strangers/Shakespeare Reloaded project, which links the University of Sydney and partner secondary school Barker College (2008–present). This is an important finding, as it enables us to re-evaluate concepts like 'smallness', regionalism and localism which unfortunately sometimes acquire a pejorative meaning in the context of education.

Complexity theory provides a useful lens through which to engage with the nexus as it offers a framework for conceptualising the interactions which generate the secondary-tertiary nexus. Gough (2010) argues that '[t]heorising education in terms of complexity offers an alternative to the residual effects of simplistic attempts to model education on industrial systems' (p. 49). He adds that this approach enables us to reframe the unpredictable aspects of the systems we inhabit, welcoming the unexpected instead of seeing it as a problem to be solved (p. 52). The volatility of the nexus can thus be framed as productive instability, offering potential for unexpected developments. This complexivist perspective encourages us to consider how to utilise instabilities in the secondary-tertiary nexus to our advantage.

This article's discussion with teacher Heather Fraser made clear the behavioural patterns needed to sustain stronger links and support the nexus: regularity of interaction ('Keep doing what you are doing'), diversity ('keep bringing in clever speakers'), and fostering a certain type of interaction ('informality always works'). Sociability, frequent and repeated contact, and the opportunity for teachers to be inspired by diverse speakers and events, are key to the maintenance of a robust nexus. In the broader, national and even global context of SysEd, teachers value opportunities to connect at a local level. To ensure repeated contact at this level, it is important to engage in informal opportunities for collaboration, even when this work seems undervalued. That said, lobbying university leadership and working with peak bodies to have this labour recognised in more formal ways is integral to moving forward. Likewise, concerted efforts to implement structural community or organisational interactions are essential. One such way this might be achieved, for example, might be to ensure cross-appointments to peak boards such as AATE, ASAL (the Association for the Study of Australian Literature), and the AUHE. In such a way, secondary teachers and teacher educators might have space made for them in organisations that have heretofore restricted themselves to the academic voice, and vice versa. The pandemic has demonstrated that 'how' we teach, and not just 'what' we teach is as important now as ever. Respectful two-way communication across the secondary-tertiary divide recognises not only the complexity and messiness of these interactions, but makes space for them, in ways that acknowledge different kinds of expertise, and the potential to learn in formal and informal ways across differences.

As Michel Foucault has pointed out, regions and peripheries can sometimes be heterotopias: mirrors which can reflect through a glass, darkly, the patterns that are less discernible in more complex metropolitan centres. The vulnerabilities and potentials afforded by regional interaction across secondary and tertiary English suggest ways of revitalising English across sectors, if this can be formalised and drive broader structural changes.

Notes

1   With Heather's permission, we have included her name instead of anonymising the interview subject, as this enables us to reinforce the singularity and idiosyncrasy of experiences of the nexus, and to emphasise that our local nexus is generated and sustained by specific individual interactions. This data is by no means an attempt at an empirical investigation of the nexus, but rather captures the unique nature of the sociability between actors. It is not possible to exhaustively map or comprehend a complex system; no one agent has a holistic knowledge of a system in which they are embedded. This is not the aim of our complexivist approach; rather, our priority is glimpsing a messy, subjective, dynamic aspect of the system through an in-depth look at one individual's experience.

2   This article is neither an endorsement nor a dis-endorsement of the critical literacies (CL) approach to English. We are simply relating the interview with Heather Fraser, in which she identified the introduction of theory (specifically CL) in the 1990s, as her impetus for enrolling in a Masters of Education at JCU. Further, the authors would like to clarify that we are not advocating this kind of enrolment as a necessary way of building the nexus.

Acknowledgement

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Victoria Kuttainen is an Associate Professor in English and Writing at James Cook University (JCU). She holds a BA Hons and Masters in English Literature from the University of British Columbia (Canada), a PhD in Postcolonial Literature from UQ, and a Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) from JCU. With Claire Hansen she has been working in the Secondary-Tertiary Nexus since 2017, and working on a project called 'Engaging English'. Her literary research focuses on place-based literary studies and on colonial modernity. She is the author of two books and multiple articles. From 2022 to 2025 she will be the next General Editor of *JASAL*, the Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, with Robert Clarke.

Claire Hansen is a Senior Lecturer in English and Writing at James Cook University (JCU). She is a member of the education project, Shakespeare Reloaded, and co-chair of the JCU Blue Humanities Lab. Her research interests include Shakespeare studies, pedagogy, the health humanities, eco-criticism and place. Her second book, *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning*, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

AATE Life Membership

Life membership is the highest honour that AATE can bestow and this award recognises a sustained and outstanding contribution of service to the association and the wider English teaching profession. Recipients join a distinguished group of educators who have had a significant impact on English education in Australia.

RECIPIENTS FOR 2020

AATE is pleased to recognise Catherine Beavis and Bill Green as the recipients of life membership for 2020. The award was conferred at the AATE/IFTE Conference, delivered online in July 2020.

CATHERINE BEAVIS CITATION

Catherine Beavis has had a long and distinguished professional career spanning over 40 years, beginning with her teaching at Maribyrnong High School through to her role as program leader for the Curriculum, Assessment, Pedagogy and Digital Learning program in REDI – Research for Educational Impact, Deakin University. Throughout her career she has contributed immensely to the intellectual life of the English and literacy teaching profession, both nationally and internationally, through her teaching, conference presentations, publications and research. A key and abiding feature of her modus operandi has been her recognition of the importance of professional teaching associations' cultures and contexts for her work as a teacher educator and researcher. She has given unsparingly and generously to AATE in those roles, in part because she thinks of AATE as an important learning community where teachers and teacher educators come together as equals – both practitioners, both researchers – in the development and dissemination of exemplary pedagogical practices.

Catherine has contributed consistently to the intellectual life of the national body. She has published, as contributing editor, two texts: *P(ICT)ures of English* (with Cal Durrant) and *Digital Games: Literacy in action* (with Jo O'Mara and Lisa McNeice), both reflecting her increasing interest in digital literacies, new media and students' out of school literacies/cultures. She contributed to the programs for the two AATE/IFTE conferences that have been conducted in Australia as well as AATE conferences in Sydney 1980 and Melbourne 200.

As well as writing for *English in Australia*, she has been a long term member of the journal's Review Board and, more recently, an Associate Editor. That work has been mirrored in her membership of other editorial boards in Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

In 2007–8, as academic coordinator for the Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English – a project involved with developing and implementing the National Curriculum – she ensured that AATE was well represented in the delivery of the program. This was complemented by her membership of the ACARA Advisory Panel for English, and the National Curriculum Board Advisory panel for both English and Literacy

Catherine has a deep commitment to egalitarian principles both in the construction of an English curriculum and in her sense of the teacher educator-teacher relationship, her sense of collegiality and collaboration, and her intellectual curiosity and adventurousness

These principles are reflected in the 'vision' of subject English she has always advocated for, one which caters for all of students with different interest and needs, always evolving in response to new knowledge. For Catherine, there are no high cultures and low cultures, but simply a diversity of cultures, and all appropriate sources for engagement and critical exploration in a school curriculum. That interest has been grounded in a deep awareness of the history of 'subject English' as evidenced in *Teaching the English Subjects: Essays on English Curriculum History and Australian Schooling*

(co – edited with Bill Green), which was launched at the 1996 AATE Conference in Melbourne.

Catherine's work on digital literacies and young people's cultures attests to her intellectual curiosity and adventurousness. It could be considered pioneering work in Australia, and over the years she has built up extensive networks of likeminded educators and researchers both in Australia and overseas. (www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/people/catherine-beavis)

She is a stalwart who has spent her career advocating for the betterment of English as a subject, through advocacy, through work on its content and its pedagogies, through researching better ways of connecting the subject to young people, and through increasing our understanding of the changing nature of young people's encounters with text, both inside and outside of school. She has been, in these efforts, simultaneously 'light' in touch, in enlightenment and in her graciousness and generosity of spirit. She is also 'steely' – in resolve, in determination, and in standing up for her beliefs.

It is in recognition of these services to the Association and to the profession that AATE proudly awards life membership to Catherine Beavis.

BILL GREEN CITATION

Bill Green has been a passionate advocate, theorist and researcher for English as a subject and English curriculum and pedagogy for 40 years. He is an international expert in literacy and English teaching. Much of the complexity with which international scholars consider literacy (including information literacy, cultural literacy and media literacy) is derived from Bill's research. Throughout his career he has attempted to critique the 'deficit' model of literacy, the notion that students and citizens have a 'lack' of literacy that must be 'corrected' by formal educational structures.

Highly influential in the development of curriculum in Australia and internationally, he saw and advocated that English is not as fixed or static, but a curriculum area in its own right within the context of related, broader perspectives, understandings and concerns.

Bill has been an international leader in creating more complex strategies to not only 'manage' rural education but to also ensure that social justice and equality are part of public discussion. This commitment includes an engagement with indigenous and environmental education, and also a careful understanding of cultural geography and its transformative impact on the often taken-for-granted applications of professionalism, professional practice, regional development and educational change. He has produced outstanding monographs, book chapters and refereed articles with high citations and influence for generations of teachers. Most importantly, he is one of the few academics in the world who has built new, fresh and innovative interdisciplinary knowledge.

With an outstanding record in research and publishing through AATE, state English teaching associations and IFTE – the International Federation for the Teaching of English – Bill's work has stimulated discussion and positioned English as a dynamic curriculum area with related, broader perspectives, understandings and concerns. His research and publications are strongly anchored in and begin with the English of the London Institute – Britton, Barnes, Martin et al. His work demonstrates the importance of English as a subject in its own right, including the perspectives on English such as Literacy and Learning, the Literacy wars, Histories of English, Curriculum Studies, Media, Technology and the Digital; attention to place/situation e.g. rural and regional experience for students and teachers, connecting with the local eg the River Literacies project; and questions of equity and power viewing English curriculum through the lens of contemporary theorists. Bill was also part of the first national project on literacy and technology, 'Digital Rhetorics', which reviewed the initial links between literacy and ICT.

Bill is a strong advocate for research and study of English curriculum histories, differing paradigms and differing iterations of English in each state, co-authoring Teaching the English Subjects: Essays on English Curriculum History and Australian Schooling in 1996. He is also a strong advocate for conceptualising English as a curriculum area and the importance of Curriculum Studies as a field of knowledge.

His diversity of interests in the field of the teaching of English can be seen here: https://csu-au.academia. edu/BillGreen.

Bill has been a regular IFTE and AATE conference attendee and contributor, presenting the Melbourne IFTE keynote in 2003, later published in *Changing English*, (2004); Vol. 11, No. 2: 'Curriculum, "English" and Cultural Studies; or, changing the scene of English teaching?' The article opens with a quote from Burgess and Hardcastle (2000), which sums up Bill's approach to the teaching of English:

> *No-one can understand the arguments and ideals in English teaching who does not also appreciate the passions at its heart.*

It is in recognition of these services to the Association and to the profession that AATE proudly awards life membership to Bill Green.

RECIPIENT FOR 2019

AATE is pleased to recognise Paul Sommer as the recipient of life membership for 2019. The award was conferred at the AATE National Conference in Melbourne in December 2019.

PAUL SOMMER CITATION

'ME, OR SOMEONE LIKE ME …'

Paul Sommer has the unique distinction of being the only AATE President invited to deliver the national conference's major keynote, the Garth Boomer Address. This fact signifies the contribution he has made to both the organisational and intellectual life of the English teaching profession in Australia.

Equally significant, he has done this while remaining a classroom teacher, only recently retiring after over

a decade teaching English in Japan. Throughout those years he has been a regular attendee at AATE conferences, presenting workshops and seminars on the teaching of film. It demonstrates Paul's abiding sense of the importance of professional teaching associations such as AATE, and its affiliated ETAs, in providing the kinds of intellectual communities teachers need to nourish their professional lives: Communities beyond their immediate school ones at state, national and international levels. He says of AATE in his reflections on his time as president published on the AATE website, '… it is not just that AATE exists to represent English teachers but that it exists to help teachers to find their voice and to speak to others.'

The complement to this belief is what Paul has demonstrated in his own professional life. A quality one might characterise as an altruistic volunteerism, the need for practicing teachers to step up and take on governance roles in such organisations to ensure that they remain viable, purposeful and relevant in a contemporary educational landscape. And, most importantly, to ensure they are firmly anchored in what happens in the classroom in the negotiated curriculum, in the lived relationships between teachers and students.

Paul served on AATE Council from 1998–2006. He came to it as the SAETA delegate and SAETA President with a reputation as both a thinker and a doer. He began his professional life as a journalist and when he changed to teaching – it was Garth Boomer who gave him his first teaching post – he brought that expertise and his passion for film and media studies to SAETA.

This was evident in his regularly writing a separate section of the SAETA Newsletter focused on teaching media and film, which was eagerly read by those keen to improve their understanding of these newly introduced text types into the mainstream English curriculum. In the culture wars where some were horrified that film was gaining equal status to Shakespeare, Donne and Hardy in Year 12 English, Paul was able to demonstrate the sophistication of the medium and how to teach it.

His service on AATE Council as first delegate, then Vice President, then President, was during a time when AATE was in a period of great transition. The 'era of the educational guru', as David Homer, a former AATE and IFTE president, characterised it, was passing and transforming into the age of the teacher as researcher. In AATE this was evident, not only in the increasing presence of teacher voices in *English in Australia* and

the *Interface* series, but in Council's commitment to developing the *MyRead* resource, its partnership with universities, education standards bodies and ALEA, and in STELLA. This professional standards research project shaped the early development of standards of professional practice in so many of the standards institutes that now exist around Australia, well before, however, those standards ossified into the rigid regulatory requirements they have become today.

It was also a time when teacher ETA delegates on Council were putting their hands up to be office bearers, including president, after a long period of that office being occupied by a distinguished tertiary educator like Garth Boomer himself, or an English academic such as the poet A.D. Hope, AATE's first president. One thinks of teacher presidents such as Sue Gazis, Garry Collins, Mark Howie, Monika Wagner, Erika Boas, Wendy Cody, Terry Hayes – some of whom are 'still here'.

This period was also characterised by the need for the association to become involved in the politics of English teaching at the national level. It was the time of the so called 'literacy crisis' culminating in the Rowe report on reading and its severely reductive version of what constitutes 'literacy' in the 21st century.

It was also the time of the 'cultural wars' when AATE went into to battle against the likes of Kevin Donnelly and other conservative cultural commentators. Paul recalls a time when he was the only teacher voice – a tactful, measured, principled, and thoughtful voice, one might add – representing the profession at a 'literacy crisis' seminar, with the rest of the panel composed of directors of state education bureaucracies and academic experts on 'literacy'.

As President, Paul also ensured that Council fully supported Wayne Sawyer when he was savaged by conservative politicians and their media allies in his role as editor of *English in Australia*. Wayne's 'crime'? To have had the temerity to question how effective the English teaching profession had been in teaching critical literacy, given the repeated election victories of John Howard.

Paul's Garth Boomer Address, delivered in Adelaide in 2016, was entitled 'The Delirious Spectator: Opening spaces in film studies'. Anyone who heard it, or has read it in *English in Australia*, would recognise it as a tour de force of deep and sustained conceptual thinking. It draws on Paul's prodigious reading in post-modernist and post-structuralist critical, literary and film theory as it argues a case for seeing film as something more

than visual text. As, in fact, a new form of literature with all the attendant framing questions, but ones open to a film's potential for visceral immediacy in its impact on the viewer. The address was a tough intellectual challenge for its audience, but it was also suffused with practical examples of Paul's own wide ranging knowledge and teaching of popular culture texts such as *Skyfall, Run Lola Run, Carol, Hitchcock's The Birds*, and *Apocalypse Now*, as he demonstrated ways of making difficult abstractions and concepts accessible to his students.

More than that, the address is no token gesture to the legacy of Garth Boomer. In preparing it Paul went back to the work of Boomer himself, and especially his interests in the relationship between language, literacy and learning, the implications of a negotiated curriculum, and the importance of being responsive to transformative moments in the classroom – moments Boomer called 'fissures'– to find a language to frame his own study and teaching of film. This involved conceptualising a film, itself, as a relational construct between many active components – scriptwriting, directing, editing, sound and music, acting, etc – and the role of the 'delirious spectator' – always engaged by a film's capacity for immediacy and multidimensionality – as one who exercises a discerning critical eye in integrating those components in the act of viewing. Ideas, Paul suggests, Boomer himself might have recognised as having a continuity with his own thinking about literature over thirty years ago.

More so, the address's genesis reflects the ways in which Paul has incorporated an 'AATE presence' as a central component for his thinking. As indicated earlier, he has used the professional space provided by AATE conferences to think and speculate, to share his insights as they are developing, and to test his propositions in collegial conversations. He will be conducting workshops at the Melbourne conference. This is probably the fifth or sixth consecutive AATE conference at which he has done so, and one suspects it won't be the last. What he says of AATE, in general, is true of his own continuing conversations in the professional space that AATE has provided: 'You engage with AATE as a long conversation; one that started before you and goes on after you.'

Paul implies in his address that the quality he most admires in Garth Boomer is his 'intellectual restlessness'. It is a quality he shares with him.

It is not, however, Paul's most distinctive quality. In reading his reflections about his time on AATE

Council, and as AATE President, one is struck by a self-effacing modesty, and the underlying motif that what he has done for the association has been for the good of the profession. Referring to his decision to step up to take up an executive position on Council he said, '… it was appropriate for the time for me, or SOMEONE LIKE ME …' to do so.

Of his time as President he says, 'I don't fool myself. A lot of what was happening in my presidency and through the association happened around me. I was not a mover and shaker, but others were, and the organisation was a platform for them. My job was to keep it ticking over.'

All of those who worked with Paul on Council think the 'job' was more than that. Keeping an organisation such as AATE on task, across a variety of fronts, while working collegially with a Council of strong-willed individuals, representing equally independent minded ETAs, was no mean achievement. It required tact, decency, integrity, a capacity for strategic thinking, media savviness, and a commitment to collegial discussion, and consensual decision making in which all voices had an equal say. It required 'someone like' Paul.

It is in recognition of these services to the Association and to the profession that AATE proudly awards life membership to Paul Sommer.

Life Membership Citation for Paul Sommer written by Terry Hayes with input from Alison Robertson

AATE LIFE MEMBERS

2020: Catherine Beavis, Bill Green

2019: Paul Sommer

2017: Phil Page

2016: Rita van Haren

2015: Karen Moni

2014: Mark Howie

2013: Guy Bayly-Jones

2012: Susan Gazis AM

2011: Susan Dennett

2009: Terry Hayes, Wayne Sawyer

2008: Robyn Cations

2005: Wendy Morgan

2004: David Homer

2002: Brenton Doecke, Ken Watson, Claire Woods

1998: Bill Corcoran, Elizabeth Hutchins

1997: John Hutchins, Ernie Tucker

1988: Margaret Gill

1978: Peter McDonald

1977: Garth Boomer

1977: Warwick Goodenough

1977: A.D. Hope

1977: Leonie Kramer

1977: James McAuley

Boxes

Bezi Saunders
Northern Beaches Secondary College,
Manly Campus

Author statement

I wrote my poem 'Boxes' at a time when I was really frustrated by the lack of creativity in the English curriculum – especially in high school. I felt (and still feel) like the English curriculum was forcing my peers and I to think in the same way, and to write with such a strict structure and rules that everyone was creating something that was very similar. I didn't feel like this is what English should be about – being a creative subject, I felt that English students should be taught to question and be independent, not to follow and conform.

When I was assigned to write a poem and was given strict instructions and rules on how I had to write it I was angry because I saw my peers and even myself restricting our thoughts and the full extent of our creativity to try and fit into the marking criteria and tick boxes (especially the word count – being marked down if not within a five-word range).

So, I wrote 'Boxes'. And when I was writing it, I decided to not think about the marking criteria or trying to get a good mark, I just wrote truly for the joy of writing, because writing is something I love, and I didn't want a poorly written curriculum to take that away from me.

I hope that in reading my poem that my audience, English teachers, realise and appreciate the value of a message in a poem or in essay writing, and are reminded that the purpose of writing and reading is to share, enjoy and celebrate rather than follow a certain structure. The problem with the current English curriculum is that it aims at giving students a set mark and rank, rather than celebrating, sharing and appreciating work for what it is.

My name is **Bezi Saunders**, and I am from Northern Beaches Secondary College Manly Campus. I love writing and reading, and poems are something I especially enjoy. I wrote my poem 'Boxes' in Year 8 for an English assignment, and I am currently in Year 11.

boxes

Life is about ticking boxes
they say
All you need to know is the curriculum
they say

Well i'd like to challenge that

Are you reading this because you want to or you have to
        Am I writing this because I want to or because I have to

It's not all about your marks
That's just the tip of the iceberg

Below in the murky water
You are able to be different   not conform

See life is all about moment,s,
Swift flowing as the water that they came from
The rest of the iceberg

growinggrowing

What they don't tell you
            Is that it's all about memories
The crackle of a fire
The touch of a hand
The blanket sky
The cool bubbles
The white teeth
The stifled laugh
as you hide from expectation.

                And stay in that murky water where you belong

No one wants to go to the surface
I say

No one wants to tick boxes
I say
No one wants to use the curriculum
I say

all that we want to do is find our own path
Through the murky water

Apparently i'm meant to
composeawell-structuredandsustainedpoemusingthegivenmotiftoexploresophisticatedideas.

Well all I want to do is dive below the surface and explore the murky water

Because that's where I belong .

Bezi Saunders

Reading & Viewing

with Deb McPherson

Many students in our schools have been required, at one time or another, to learn at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Text distribution in these times can be difficult but if some texts being studied are online and accessible then that can make the home learning easier to manage for students, teachers and parents. My first reviews are for texts that are easily available online. Other reviews reflect the importance of all students being able to see themselves in some of the texts they read and view online and in their classrooms. In Tara June Winch's Miles Franklin award-winning novel, *The yield*, (2020) August, her Indigenous protagonist could never find herself or her sister Jedda in the yellowed, dog-eared paperbacks, and kids' books of the mobile library, 'Never a girl like August and Jedda Gondiwindi, not ever.' (p. 62) Let's make sure all our students can find themselves in the texts they encounter in our classrooms and our libraries.

Texts that are available online

The rime of the ancient mariner big read curated by Sarah Chapman, Phillip Hoare and Angela Cockayne; Commissioned by the Arts Institute the University of Plymouth 2020 https://www.ancientmarinerbigread.com

This audio and visual immersive interpretation of Coleridge's epic 1798 poem features forty online broadcasts, by renowned and new voices, escorted by artworks from international artists. The sounds of the sea and the creaks and groans of the sailing ship can be heard throughout the poem. I watched the Big Read over those forty days, eagerly anticipating the next stanzas to be read and the art that would accompany them. Jeremy Irons' Mariner startles us at the wedding reception and then we take sail on the voyage with him. Willem Dafoe takes up the role and admits to the killing of the albatross and we, along with the crew, become complicit. We are drought stricken on a wide, wide sea with Tilda Swinton while Marine zoologist, Professor John Spicer, the scientific advisor for the *Ancient Mariner Big Read*, takes us home with the Mariner as he nears the end of the voyage. While there are many famous actors' voices to be heard on this production, it's interesting that some of the best interpretations of the poem's lines, come from the scientists.

The horror of the betrayal and death of the albatross seems to parallel the abusive relationship 21st century humanity has with the natural world. Classes from 7–11 could explore this relationship as well as the overwhelming sense of isolation, the dreams, terror and loneliness of the voyage and the power of redemption. They could create their own multimodal interpretation of other classic poems such as 'The Lady of Shallot' or modern epics such as Kate (now Kae) Tempest's 'Brand New Ancients' or 'Let Them Eat Chaos'. Each student could be responsible for a stanza and together enact an online version. *The Big Read* will supply inspiration and ideas.

Anatomy of a mega-blaze **Kevin Nguyen, Philippa McDonald, Maryanne Taouk Published 27 July 2020 5.05am, undated 13.13pm. ABC**

Anatomy of a mega-blaze can be viewed as a digital essay https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-27/gospers-mountain-mega-blaze-investigation/12472044?nw=0 or video https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-28/gospers-mountain-mega-blaze-investigation-video/12494510

This investigation of the Gospers Mountain mega blaze, Australia's biggest bushfire, would be a compelling introduction to digital essays for students in Years 7–10. The fire raged for 79 days, burned over a million hectares of land and destroyed 100 homes. Data, images, animation and interviews all combine to tell the story of this monster fire.

We begin with Day 1: Ignition on October 26, 2019. The animations show the number of lightning strikes that start the fire and the story moves swiftly through the acceleration of the fire to Day 17: State Emergency. The fire creates its own weather system and at the end of the day has doubled in size. Subsequent days reveal how little fire authorities can do to contain this massive blaze. As days pass and back-burns fail, the Gospers Mountain fire joins up with other fires and on Day 38 the mega-blaze is born. On Day 56 the fight for Sydney begins with a second emergency declaration. It will take until January 12, 2020 for the fire to be contained and not until February 10 for flooding rain to finally extinguish the blaze.

This Australian dissection of an unprecedented mega-blaze provides students with clear examples of the many elements that go into making a digital essay. The credits include Riley Stuart as editor with photography by Mridula Amin and video by Andrew George, Billy Cooper and Jack Fisher and graphics by Ryan Boyle and Mark Doman. Several institutions supplied meteorological data and special thanks is recorded to the RFS (Rural Fire Service) and the NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Service). It's important to consider the credit list as it emphasises how much this sort of reporting is a team effort.

Two other exceptional digital essays, previously reviewed in *English in Australia*, are the SBS *Missing* (2019) and the *New York Times* journalism project, *Snowfall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek* (2012).

In *Missing* students will encounter the mesmerising story of the abduction and attempted murder of eight-year-old Wendy Jane Pfeiffer. This true story is told in six chapters on the interactive website and in a long read digital essay, by Kylie Bolton. The essay provides images, maps, historical photographs, newspaper clippings, court reports, ABC film footage and a detailed account of what happened following interviews with the now 61-year-old Wendy and her family. Wendy owed her life to the intervention of Jimmy James, an Indigenous tracker who was able to make sense of the muddled tracks and find the badly wounded child. The full review of *Missing* as both an interactive website and the digital essay can be found in *English in Australia* Volume 54 Number 2, 2019.

Snowfall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek would provide a fascinating contrast to the *Anatomy of a Mega-blaze* with their different focuses on fire and ice. This feature story of the 2012 Tunnel Creek Avalanche in the Cascade Mountains, to the east of Seattle in Washington State, is about sixteen people who set out for a day's skiing and encountered an avalanche that resulted in three fatalities. What is different about this story is the way it is told and the use it makes of digital and interactive elements. The reader/viewer encounters more than prose and some photographic illustrations: there are video and audio accounts, time-lapse maps and animations. These added multimedia elements are assimilated into the narrative and enhance the understanding of the reader/viewer. They do not distract us from the narrative, rather they enrich and embellish it. The full review can be found in *English in Australia* Volume 51, Number 2, 2016.

Fiction for Years 9, 10 and 11 that reflects diversity

The surprising power of a good dumpling
Wai Chim (2019) Allen & Unwin 392 pp.

Anna Chui is a Year 11 student who has more than school on her mind. Her mother spends most of her time in bed, suffering from a debilitating and undiagnosed mental illness. It is up to Anna to organise her younger siblings and look after her mother while her father runs his restaurant several hours away on the NSW Central Coast. This Chinese-Australian teenager is also worried about her own academic future and the inflexibility of her school's advice. She wants to help her father run the restaurant while still continuing her studies and it is while she is working weekends that she meets Rory, a young man her father has hired as a delivery boy. A friendship begins that soon develops into a romance and Anna starts to understand more about her mother's condition when she learns that Rory too has had his own struggles with mental health. When her mother requires hospitalisation the family comes together to help with her language barriers, and deal with the difficulties of medication and treatment. The hard road to recovery is realistically portrayed.

Wai Chin has cleverly scattered Jyutping words and phrases (the romanised version of Cantonese) throughout the text which reflects the multicultural and linguistic diversity of the family.

This sensitive and timely novel deals with many issues including cultural assumptions, racism and mental health yet also manages to be a warm and engaging story of teenage love and great food. Anna's dumplings are delicious and highly restorative to both characters and readers. *The Surprising Power of a Good Dumpling* could be used in a wide reading diversity unit or as a close study in Year 9.

Burn Patrick Ness (2020) Walker Books 383 pp.

Burn is set in the homophobic and racist America of the 50s with a remarkable addition – here be dragons, and they have been on earth for hundreds of years. Ness makes intelligent, verbal dragons a believable and even prosaic part of normal life. An uneasy truce exists between dragons and humans following wars in the past. You can even hire a dragon to work for you. But trouble awaits.

Sixteen-year-old Sarah Dewhurst is the pivotal character in this complex novel and the centre of a prophecy about the end of the world. Sarah is bi-racial, and she faces prejudice in her small town with courage and truth. She is drawn to her best friend, Jason Inagawa, a Japanese American, whose family returned home after internment as possible enemies during the Second World War. When trouble arises after Sarah's father hires Kazimir, a Russian blue dragon, to clear land on their farm the breadth of this novel begins to be revealed. Malcolm is a young, gay man escaping his bigoted parents. He is also a member of a dragon worshiping cult. He has been sent on a mission to destroy Sarah. There are FBI agents pursuing Malcolm and internal politicking in the human and dragon communities. The Cold War is ramping up, and a dramatic plot twist is to come that will turns readers' expectations upside down. There are also portals to another world, battles, a goddess, fanaticism, and above all, love in its many manifestations. Ness writes so vividly that his images remain in the mind long after the book is finished. I can still picture Kazimir lifting the Dewhurst's car in his talons and the vaporised remains of a human left after a dragon's blast.

Burn is exuberant, thrilling and inclusive. It could be part in an author study for students in Years 9 and 10 alongside other Ness books such as *The rest of us just live here, Release, More than this* and the illustrated novel, *The ocean was our sky.*

The Poet X Elizabeth Acevedo (2018) Harper Collins 357 pp.

Here is a verse novel/slam novel, that will surely inspire students to write and perform their own poetry. Fifteen-year-old Xiomara is a young Dominican American and her name means ready for war. She is tall and strong with 'a mouth silent/ until it's sharp as an island machete'. (p. 8) This is a girl is built for battle. Xiomara wearily tells the reader how to pronounce her name (See-oh-MAH-ruh) as she has done for her teachers every year of school. The first words she can remember from her father are 'Pero, tu eres facil': 'You sure ain't an easy one' (p. 10) and that proves to be the case. Xiomara defends Twin, her brother, and herself with her fists and her mouth and she doesn't back down easily. But her biggest fight is with her equally fierce and deeply religious mother. Xiomara pushes back against the restrictions of both mother and church and against the taunts and eyes of the boys that follow her at school. It is her teacher, Ms Galiano, who encourages her to join the poetry group and the poems she has always written down in her notebooks can start a new life being proclaimed as slam poetry. In Science class she meets Aman and finds in him a soul mate and first love. Through her poems and her determination, we see Xiomara start to find solutions to the challenges in her life.

This novel will be inspiring in the classroom and a powerful exemplar for students in their own writing and their lives. *The Poet X* will provide so much discussion in the Year 9 or 10 the classroom with its examination of families and religion, growing up and rebellion, courage and sexuality, immigration, music, racism and sexism.

The Poet X was the winner of the National Book Award (2018) and the Carnegie Medal (2019)

How it feels to float Helena Fox (2019) Pan Macmillan 384 pp.

This powerful and moving story about loss, grief, isolation and love is beautifully voiced by Biz, aka

Elizabeth Martin Grey. Her mental health is shaky and she often speaks to her dead father's image. When she drops out of school her mother, and friends, like elderly Sylvia and her grandson, Jasper, give support. But Biz needs to understand her late father's life. It takes a road trip with Jasper to discover something of his past and the links to her own mental illness.

The author, Helena Fox, has lived with mental illness her whole life. As she says 'Every day, I do my best to see the colours. I take note. I breathe them in.' (p 377) After reading *How it feels to float*, readers will have a better understanding of mental illness; of what it means to those who experience it and their families and friends, and of what it gives and what it takes away. This book is a triumph of breathing in, taking note and seeing the colours. Students could explore the website HeadSpace as a background exercise to expand their understanding of the support available for those with mental health difficulties.

The coconut children Vivian Pham (2020) Vintage 282 pp.

Sonny Vuong and Vince Tran were childhood friends in Cabramatta but at fourteen Vince got taken away to juvenile detention. When he swaggers back at sixteen, Sonny watches him through her semi-closed eyes. Sonny's romantic naivety meets Vince's unexpected tenderness and after hilarious false starts, and the aid of a tipsy grandmother, they reconnect. In their relationship Pham captures all that intoxicating delight, awkwardness and ambiguity of first love.

Pham writes metaphors as easily as a shopping list; she sees the world in fresh shapes and patterns and uncovers the poetic in her prose. The families, schools, shops and homes of Cabramatta are vividly exposed in her descriptions.

Some of the family relationships in *The coconut children* are complicated by trauma and dislocation. Poverty, violence and assault are so often the fate of being a refugee, or the children of refugees, all over the world. While Pham writes of crime and drugs she

also writes with humour and joy. The conversations between Sonny and her good friend, Najma, are comical and manic. The reader hears and sees the desire of both Sonny and Vince to shield those younger than themselves from the harshness of life.

The coconut children is a funny, wise and powerful story about growing up, community and second chances. Students in Years 10 and 11 would enjoy this novel in a Rites of Passage wide reading collection and as a close study. I expect to read a great deal more from Vivian Pham.

The yield Tara June Winch (2019) Hamish Hamilton 352 pp.

There is a dictionary submerged in this book and its definitions are crucial to the unfolding of the story. In the past Wiradjuri was a banned language and as such plays a part in the cultural and physical dispossession detailed by Tara June Winch in *The yield*. Winch uses three narratives to tell her story of life on Wiradjuri land. Poppy Albert Gondiwindi leads the way. It is his memories, intermingled with the Wiradjuri dictionary he is compiling, that anchors the book. These are the words that shape his life and his people's history. Words like Ngurambang for 'Country' and ngiyawaygunhanha for 'always be' and yindyamarra for 'respect'.

August Gondiwindi has a matching narrative. She is the girl who left as a teenager only to come back as an adult for her grandfather's funeral. Her memories are of absent parents, abuse and her sister Jedda's disappearance. Her welcome from her widowed grandmother and extended family is bittersweet; amid the grief, pain and love there is more dispossession to confront. Her grandmother faces eviction from the family home and land at Prosperous House. Rinepalm Mining wants it and the family have little evidence for a native title claim. In a scene filled with the blackest of humour August and her Aunt Missy seek out Wiradjuri cultural artefacts in a museum, only to be angered anew by bureaucratic condescension. But other forces combine to support the reclamation and August finds herself at the centre of the fight to establish her family's custodianship with the land.

The third narrative is that of Rev Ferdinand Greenleaf, a nineteenth century missionary. His long

letters and reports detail the violence and oppression of the First Nations people by the settlers, the government and the law while reflecting his own paternalistic outlook.

The yield has strong links to Bruce Pascoe's *Dark emu* where the cultural achievements and ancient farming practices of First Nations peoples are recorded. It resonates as well with the themes of *Too much lip* by Melissa Lucashenko. Students in Year 11 and 12 will benefit from reading and studying this richly complex text which explores the profound loss and dispossession of Indigenous Australians with truth, hope and lyricism. *The yield* was the winner of the 2020 Miles Franklin Literary Award.

The Wall John Lanchester (2019)
Faber and Faber 288 pp.

In *The Wall*, John Lanchester has created a believable and powerful dystopia, set only a few years into the future. After a cataclystic climate disaster, a diminished UK is ringed by a Wall, guarded by a younger generation against the Others (anyone trying to get in). Kavanaugh is one of the Defenders on the Wall. None of his peers (people born after the Change) can talk to their parents. The problem is generational guilt.

> The olds feel they irretrievably fucked up the world and then allowed us to be born into it. You know what? It's true. That's exactly what they did. They know it. We know it. p. 55

The novel is divided into three parts: The Wall, The Others and The Sea. Each section has its own tempo and mood. Lanchester writes with clarity and precision. The novel opens on the freezing Wall and the cold permeates not just the guardians' bones and also those of the reader. Lanchester captures the tedium, the fear, the hunger, and the spike of terror as well, when the Others attack. Members of Kavanaugh's group try and fail to repel the attack and the wall is breached. The rules under which they serve as guardians are remorseless. For every Other who gets over the Wall, a Defender must pay. Kavanaugh and other survivors, including Hifa, a woman he is close to, are arrested, tried and then banished. They are put out to sea in a boat, a fate that condemns them to almost certain death. Whatever hope there is, is qualified, but importantly there is hope, born of Kavanaugh and Hifa's doggedness to find refuge.

This is a novel for the Greta Thunberg generation. It could be used as a close study or form part of a dystopian collection in a wide reading unit. It's a thriller and a parable that will swiftly pull the reader into a nightmarish world; one that few readers will be able to forget.

First Nations Poetry

Fire front: First Nations poetry and power today edited by Alison Whittaker (2020)
University of Queensland Press 177 pp.

This powerful and compelling anthology of First Nations poems, and the commentary that accompanies it, represents a watershed in Indigenous publications. Aptly named, Fire front burns through difficult territory and brings pain, promise and change.

The Gomeroi poet, academic and essayist Alison Whittaker has taken on a challenging editorial task to select and curate from a huge body of work and she has delivered a passionate and vital collection of fifty-three poems that come from the heart of Indigenous Australia.

The poems speak for themselves. The insights in the introduction to the collection and to each thematic section are a valuable guide to the poems that await. Alison Whittaker, Evelyn Araluen and Steven Oliver, Professors Bruce Pascoe and Ali Coby Ekermann and Associate Professor Chelsea Bond provide diverse perspectives and commentary using scholarship, courage and generosity to explore the themes of First Nations writing.

Alison Whittaker gives the reader signposts to the different bolded sections, by taking their titles from a line in one of the selected poems. Chelsea Bond provides commentary for the section 'Ancestor, you are exploding the wheelie bin' where poets explore their connections to kin, Country and ancestors, often in a context of dispossession and alienation. Alexis Wright's savage and sharp epic 'Hey Ancestor', starts with Old Whitefella Day (26 January) and takes the

reader through the core of Country, its permanence, roots and responsibilities and its despoilment. In the same section you will find Archie Roach's 'Took the Children Away' and Briggs's (ft Gurrumul Yunupingu) magnificent roll call, 'The Children Came Back'. Alice Eather's heartbreakingly beautiful 'Yúya Karrabúrra' ('Fire is Burning') takes the reader into the perils and complexity of walking between two worlds. It can also be found in Anita Heiss's anthology, *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia* (reviewed in *English in Australia* Volume 54, No. 1 2019).

The section 'Despite what Dorothea has said about the sun scorched land' is introduced by Evelyn Araluen and chronicles protest and resistance to colonisation and the need for remembrance. Samuel Wagan Watson's 'The Grounding Sentence' begins with an 'eternity of dispersal' and charts the grief and despair of living where the 'skin of the country is branded deep with crosshairs and warning signs'. Kevin Gilbert's 'The New True Anthem 'calls out injustice, hate, tyranny and desecration of the country.

Bruce Pascoe's essay, 'Bleat beneath a blanket', introduces the next section, 'I say rage and dreaming'. These poems are concerned with power and resistance. Pascoe writes of:

> The pain, the indignity, the sorrow, the humiliation, the frustration that white people were deaf and blind to the beautiful planning of a culture over 120,000 years old. (p. 72)

Declan Furber Gillick calls 'Nanna Emily's Poem' (Mount Isa Cemetery 2014), a yarn, a piece of oral history and asks the reader to consider reading it aloud, in a moment of relative stillness. This devastating poem, about a member of the stolen generation returning to the grave of his mother, would move a stone to weep.

Pain, loss and renewal are found in full measure in the section introduced by Steven Oliver, 'Because we want it back, need it back, because they can'. The line comes from the poem 'I am the Road' by Claire G. Coleman. Born off Country, and travelling far from Boodja, the narrator suffers the agony of homelessness, of being pulled away from, and denied, the land of the ancestors. The poem is an individual and collective lament, hoping, dreaming to buy back 'some of my/ grandfather's Country …'.

In the last section, 'This I would tell you', the reader is led to a group of new poets, through Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem for her son, Denis Walker, 'Son

of Mine'. Her great granddaughter, Elizabeth Walker, complements that poem with her own, 'Grandfather of Mine' for Papa Denis. Dylan Voller, who as a youth, suffered infamous brutality in the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre, makes his contribution in 'Justice for Youth'. These, and other poems, as Ali Cobby Eckermann says in her remarkable essay, form part of the cycle of storytelling, of reiteration, of weaving in and out of the First Nations stories as well as writing to and for their future. She calls these young poets the 'beautiful warriors of resistance and truth.' (p. 147)

Teachers and students in Years 10, 11 and 12 will find much to inspire and to explore in this invaluable and essential collection of First Nations poetry. The poems reward rereading and reading aloud. And, as Ali Cody Eckermann asks, 'When you have read these poems, also act' (p. 147). These poems connect so powerfully to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (2017) and remind us all of the justice and importance of its call for 'constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country.'

Dramatic diversity

***A ghost in my suitcase* adapted by Vanessa Bates from the novel by Gabrielle Wang (2019) Currency Press 56 pp.(Stage 4)**

This short play about twelve-year-old Celeste and her Asian family will delight many students in Years 6 and 7. There are not many plays for students in the middle years and even fewer that reflect Australian connections with Asian culture. Celeste is a half French, half Chinese Australian and she is carrying her mother's ashes back to China where she will meet her grandmother. Por Por is a ghost hunter and there are many people who require her unique skills. She is delighted to see Celeste and takes her along when she sets out on her unusual occupation. Often unhappy ghosts haunt homes and cause trouble and it takes a ghost hunter to shift them on. It turns out Celeste may have the same innate abilities and with one difficult ghost, her support, and that of her grandmother's helper, Ting Ting, is vital.
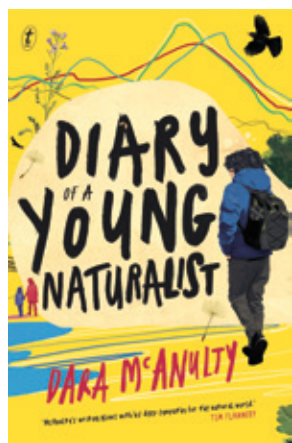
Both Por Por and Celeste must come to terms with

the death of a beloved family member and while grief is explored in this play, there are also moments of joy and laughter as well as exciting plot twists and mysteries to solve.

A ghost in my suitcase won the 2019 AWGIE Award for Theatre for Young Audiences.

Non-fiction Years 5 and 6

Diary of a young naturalist
Dara McAnulty (2020)
240 pp.

Dara McAnulty is an autistic teenager, in a family where his mother and two younger siblings are also autistic, and his dad is not. The family is connected through their love for each other and nature … 'We're as close as otters, and huddled together, we make our way in the world.' (p. 9)

McAnulty lives in Northern Ireland and his diary takes the reader through the four seasons of his fifteenth year. He is a naturalist and as such, a close observer of nature, with a particular passion for birds. His writing seems to explode from the intensity of his observation and readers can finds themselves effortlessly transported to the places and fauna he recalls and describes with such precision, poetry and delight. 'Writing it all down, spilling it out, helps me make sense of the world' (p. 193) he says. McAnulty is also a BBC television and radio presenter, an ambassador for RSPCA and the Jane Goodall Institute and the youngest recipient of the RSPB medal for conservation.

What's even more impressive is McAnulty's ability to share his experience of autism with the reader. He explains how nature gives him protection against the crippling anxiety and panic that flood in when sometimes new places, feelings, sounds, smells and people overwhelm him. On a family trip to remote Rathlin Island he explains:

> This is the kind of place I can be happy in. I wrap my coast tightly around my chest, inhaling it all in, not wanting to go to bed, storing that moment up with all the other memories I keep cached. When I'm ambushed by the anxiety army, when it comes storming back, I'll be ready to fight, armed with the wild cries of Rathlin Island. (p. 25)

Sprinkled through his diary are Irish myths and legends, the Children of Lir, his love of Heaney poetry, his dreams and nightmares. It is an extraordinary book that students and teachers everywhere can learn from. McAnulty describes his ideal classroom (p. 142) with no bright colours and plenty of natural light. His summary of what would stimulate and protect him is instructive and just another example in a book teeming with the positives and negatives of being an autistic learner. *Diary of a young naturalist* is a joyous and wonderful book that should find its way into many classrooms and the hearts of students.

No one is too small to make a difference
Greta Thunberg (2019) Penguin 68 pp.
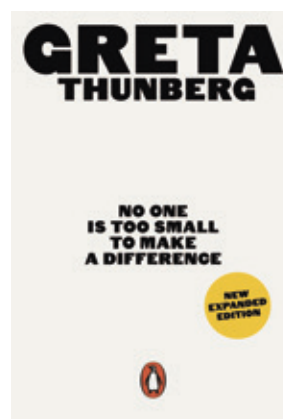
Greta began her call to action on climate change in August 2018. She was a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, on a lonely school strike outside the Swedish Parliament. Her individual action has since grown into a global movement and her message has resonated with people of all ages and ethnicities, but particularly with the young. Students from twelve to eighteen can read her words in this small, 68-page volume of speeches, and their bluntness, bravery and honesty is inspiring. Greta says in her speeches 'I have Asperger's syndrome and to me almost everything is black and white.' (p. 7) She respects scientific facts and evidence-based decision making and wants a better future for her generation. She points out to people, who advise her to go on and be a scientist and find solutions to the problems of climate change, that the climate crisis has already been solved. We know what to do but governments are slow to act.

Greta's speeches on behalf of young people at the United Nations, at World Economic forums, at the British and European Houses of Parliament reflect her committed and determined advocacy for action. She refutes the hate and the misinformation about her on

Facebook and speaks truth to power and authority. 'It's up to us' she says, 'I want you to panic … I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.' (p. 25) Greta's speeches, in print and on video, represent youth and advocacy in a compelling way and have a place in many classrooms.

Diversity in a television series

Years and years directed by Simon Cellar Jones (2019) DVD M rating

This six-part television series follows the British-based Lyons family from 2019 until 2034. We watch along with the family as Great Britain is shaken by political instability. Populist Viv Rook catches our attention early and we see her finally take power with terrible consequences. We see technological changes and economic implosions rip through Britain and the world. We see social changes as Daniel gets married to Ralph and leaves him for refugee, Viktor. We share their fight against injustice as prejudice and discrimination resurface and Viktor is removed from Britain. We visit Grandmother Muriel at her family home and watch the family members ebb and flow around her. Much of the commentary, on the state of the country and the world, takes place at the dinner table or at family celebrations. We see Stephen and Celeste's marriage dissolve and their kids grow up. We are mesmerised when Bethany wants cybernetic surgery. We watch as wheelchair bound Rosie looks for a new partner and a new job and Edith travels the world fighting against tyranny and oppression.

Towards the end of the series we see Muriel, at a family dinner, blame her family (and all of us) for the dystopian mess that the country is in. And in subsequent scenes we watch as various members of the family respond.

This is a series full of insight and turmoil, of love and the contradictions of family and society and the power and downfall of a demagogue. It could inspire much discussion and creativity in Year 10 and 11 classrooms.

Teacher reference

Some kids I taught and what they taught me Kate Clanchy (2019) Picador 269 pp.

After the heady delight of reading Kate Clanchy's collection of student poems in *England: Poems from a school* edited by Kate Clanchy (2017) (reviewed in *English in Australia* Volume 55, Number 3, 2019) I was elated to see that she had written a memoir about her teaching times. This is one of those books you devour in a single sitting. It's passionate and clearsighted in its defence of teachers and of United Kingdom government schools, their students and their ethos. It's honest about the author's own experiences and those of her students. From Callum's dog, Pete's boots and Simon's child to Shakila's experience of bombings these are stories and vignettes that will raise you up and pull you down. Some are painful and distressing, others are hilarious and inspiring. They illustrate so powerfully what education can deliver and the vital need for it to be accompanied by empathy and compassion. Many teachers, (including this reviewer), wish they had kept a diary about the diverse, difficult and amazing students and teachers they have encountered over their careers. Well, Kate Chancy has done it for all of us with these dispatches from the chalk front. Here is a book to inspire every English teacher.

Kate Clanchy 's *Some kids I taught and what they taught me* won the 2020 Orwell Prize for Political Writing.

There's never been a better time for reading and viewing than now. The bookshelves are overflowing with texts for my next column. May you stay safe and well and reading until then.
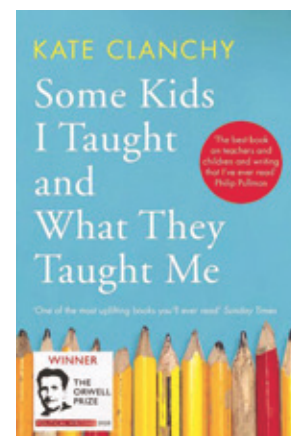
VALE   KEN WATSON

Renowned English educator and former Vice-President of AATE, Dr Ken Watson, died on 13 of March this year, aged 90. Since 2005 the NSW English Teachers Association has honoured Ken through naming its state conference keynote address the 'Ken Watson Address', instituted as a tribute to his contribution to that Association.

Ken was an English teacher from 1952 to 1963 in high schools in NSW, the ACT and the UK, and then Subject Head from 1964 to 1970 in NSW schools. From 1971 until his retirement in 1990, Ken taught in the Diploma of Education program at Sydney University, as co-ordinator of English Curriculum from 1972 and Senior Lecturer from 1980. It was here that he gained an outstanding reputation as a teacher educator and as a teacher himself in university classrooms.

Under Ken, English Curriculum students were introduced to what for many, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, was a whole new world of Young Adult Literature. This was just part of a larger project of inspiring in school students a passion for reading. Alongside this was another new world opening up for his teacher education students, from the 1970s in particular, around how young people learned language. Language was the central theme in English Curriculum and the focus was on how to extend those young people as communicators both in talking and writing. Talking was deemed to be important and one could learn through talking and writing as much as through reading and listening. Ken sent his students out into their own classrooms fired up about what was called for much of his time at Sydney 'the new English', and about the difference English teachers could make to their own students' lives. And his influence was pervasive, as can be gleaned from the many comments on the NSWETA website shortly following the announcement of his death. There teachers have written about him as:
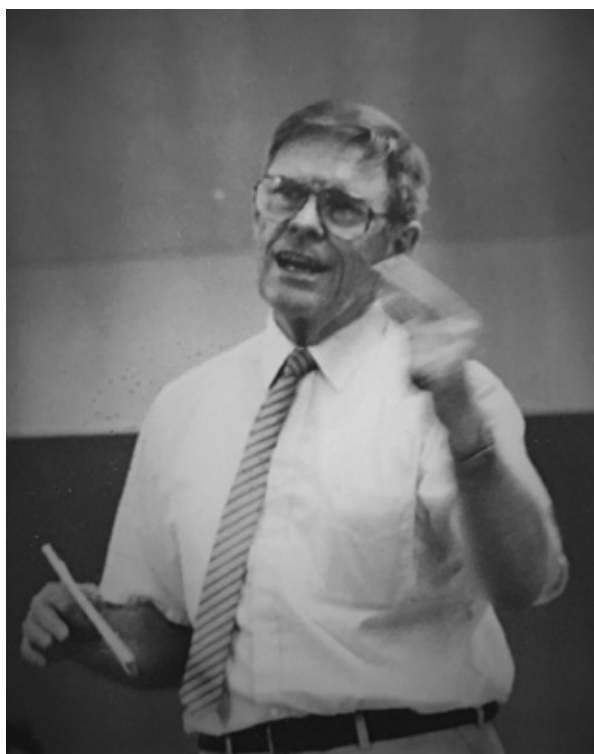
- 'a wonder to listen to' and how 'we hung on every word'
- 'inspiring the way I teach'
- 'impacting (so much) on my practice'
- 'shap(ing) the way we teach and engage young people'
- 'so knowledgeable, so pragmatic, and yet self-effacing … sharing his vision about how English teaching could actually change kids' lives. Everyone respected him'.

In his time at Sydney, those he did send out into classrooms numbered in the many thousands – what one contributor to that collection of comments called 'so many time capsules of knowledge going into the future'. Another refers to his work 'living on in book rooms and classrooms across the state' and another that 'Ken has inspired generations of English teachers. Thankfully his ideas, wisdom and all kinds of publications remain and through them he will continue to teach and inspire future generations of English teachers'. Here is evidence of the truth of teachers never knowing how far their ripples spread.

As an academic and scholar, Ken was a strong, clear model. It was there in the obvious things. He insisted on sticking to what research was showing about any area of language development or classroom pedagogy and would always return to the research in the face of what the media or politicians had decided was the panacea for a current educational ill. His writing was prolific. This ranged from very many resources for teachers, including:

- numerous poetry and short story anthologies – the titles of many of these suggesting his driving interest in this work as a multi-cultural project: titles like *Postcards from Planet Earth; Snapshots*

of Planet Earth; At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners (which was set for the NSW Higher School Certificate); *Cousins across the Seas*

- coursebooks such as the *Explore and Express* series (one ETA comment asked, 'What would I have done without *Explore and Express* when I began English teaching?')
- other series such as *Reading is Response.*

Titles such as *Explore and Express* and *Reading is Response* captured the essence of what was central to the 'new English' with its emphasis on student experience, student development in writing and speaking and active engagement with literature. But he also wrote or edited those books that became the staple of English Curriculum courses across the country for many years. For my generation of DipEd students, these were his co-productions with the NSW ETA, such as *New Directions; Towards a New English* and *English in Secondary Schools: Today and Tomorrow.* This arm of his writing led to his highly influential *English Teaching in Perspective* (which was later published in the UK by the Open University Press) as the first of another evolving series.

As well as the obvious things like research, though, Ken lived his professional life with a sense that an academic was called to certain roles, had certain public responsibilities. This meant writing on particular contemporary issues and responding to particular policy initiatives, but, importantly, it also meant the academic's participation on bodies like Syllabus Committees and professional associations. Ken served from 1975 to 1989 on the NSW Syllabus committees that developed the Syllabuses that are regarded as implementing and underpinning the 'new English' in NSW, viz. the 1971 and 1987 Syllabuses for Years 7–10. He wrote his Masters Honours thesis on the actual implementation of that 1971 Syllabus in NSW.

I earlier referred to those early books *New Directions; Towards a New English* and *English in Secondary Schools* as NSWETA publications. Ken was a very strong advocate of the importance of professional associations, both in their role in professional development, and also in their public advocacy roles. Ken was Vice-President of AATE from 1973 to 1974 and edited the *AATE Guide to Books* – then a specific annual edition of *English in Australia* – from 1970 to 1976. This coincided with his time also on ETA Council in NSW (1967–1977, including the editorship of the *ETA Newsletter* from 1969 to 1975). For his work in contributing to the

mission of both the AATE and NSWETA, Ken was awarded Life Membership of both associations.

AATE's annual conference in 2020 was a joint conference with the International Federation for the Teaching of English. IFTE ultimately grew out of the 1966 Dartmouth conference, and a network of international conferences that followed Dartmouth – IFTE eventually being formally constituted in 1983. IFTE currently has a publication program with Routledge and the first book of that series, which canvasses international issues in the teaching of English, contains a dedication to the founders of IFTE, and among names like James Britton and Jim Squire are a number of important Australian English educators, one of whom is Ken Watson, whose role in the constitution of IFTE was a significant one. John Dixon has said of Ken that 'he kept IFTE ideas going in a thoroughly international spirit'.

In fact, this dedication to the international project of education was extended to L1 education in general. With Gert Rijlaarsdam of the University of Amsterdam in the early 1990s, he founded the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education (IAIMTE), which focused on L1 education in any language. Its aims were to 'care for' (a telling phrase) 'the quality of teaching and learning of mother-tongue languages and to invest in international exchange and cooperation as contributions to the improvement of the work developed at a local or regional level'. Ken co-chaired IAIMTE with Gert Rijlaarsdam from 1994 until 2001. Almost 30 years on from that initial idea the organisation now known as the International Association for Research in L1 Education (ARLE) is a particularly vibrant one. It has had a bi-annual conference since 1997, has a successful journal – *L1: Educational Studies in Language and Literature* – seven Special Interest Groups, and a strong membership from dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, as well as the UK and Australia.

Ken always had a cosmopolitan outlook. He taught for extended periods of time at Cambridge University, New York University, Michigan State and at the University of British Columbia. And the friends he made internationally meant that Australian colleagues and students benefitted from visits to the country from key names in the field. In the 70s this meant people like John Dixon or Leslie Stratta, but almost any international figure in the field in subsequent years who was visiting the country – or was specifically invited – would be someone who might have a

conference organised around them for local teachers and academics, or who might visit local teachers in their classrooms, or who might turn up in one of Ken's Masters or DipEd classes. Ken was one important Australian link, especially in the early days of IFTE, to that larger international body of English educators.

Ken also founded St Clair Press. This, too, was part of his sense of the public obligations of the scholar and with that mindset of 'if there's a gap, you should fill it' that characterised so much of his work. St Clair of course, very soon became a major publisher of English Education work in Australia and contributed not only to the development of the kinds of resources I've already mentioned, but to two particular niche areas:

- one was opening up to generations of secondary teachers the work of major picture book authors. His own co-edited book *From Picture Book to Literary Theory* at one time was probably the central text on the use of picture books in the secondary

classroom, and probably the only text at the time that took on the linking of the two areas of picture books and literary theory for senior school students. It was followed by *Word and Image.*

- the second niche was his pet project of publishing in Australia a complete monograph of workshop activities for the classroom on every Shakespearean play – a project achieved by St. Clair and then by Phoenix Education. Ken particularly focused on the teaching of the plays as scripts for performance. He completed his doctoral work with a particular focus on the teaching of Shakespeare in secondary schools.

Ken was also a founding member of the Australian Education Network – set up to create a public profile for ideas emanating out of educational research, and to carry out its own research – and he edited its *Newsletter* for a number of years.

As evidenced on the ETA site I mentioned above, a word that comes up often in discussions of Ken is 'generous'. Ken's generosity of spirit was remarkable. He would always invite people into projects and offer them opportunities, just as he would always take the time to respond to queries from former students for resources and ideas. No query was too small. That, too, was part of the job – part of the role that should be taken on.

Ken Watson was an inspiring and influential teacher, a model academic and scholar, always generous friend and colleague, and a man who always looked to the moral imperative that drove the teaching of English. He leaves a huge legacy to the educational community in his own state, nationally and internationally.

Wayne Sawyer

Foreword

Vince Catherwood

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

From *Ulysses*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

My original piece was written forty years and half a lifetime ago. And then last week across the Tasman comes an email from Kelli asking to reprint in *English in Australia* as part of a 'perspective from the past' the article which I wrote for the same journal in 1981, perhaps with a Foreword. Of course I agree. But then I started to think about the 1980 International Conference in Sydney, about what we got right, about what has changed since, and about whether I could add any value beyond self-indulgent nostalgia with a few additional words by way of a Foreword. To that last question, I conclude that one person's perspective might still be interesting, although certainly not the last word, so why not? As Ulysses says in Tennyson's poem:

Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a better world.

My philosophy professor at university was intrigued by the notion of memory, since he argued that it is a person's memories that make each individual unique. Memory though is notoriously unreliable, and in my case certainly unverified. I decided a couple of years ago to 'declutter' my basement and deposit my papers relating to the establishment of the New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English with the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington (part of our National Library). These papers included my notes on the 1980 Sydney International Conference, so I no longer have easy access to personal records written at the time. This Foreword will therefore draw mainly on memory, and as a result will be both idiosyncratic and reflective, with a dash of context thrown in by way of explanation.

From a personal perspective, the thing I particularly remember about the 1980 Sydney Conference was that it led to the establishment of the New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English. I had met several times beforehand with Rob Eagleson and Ros Arnold over the planning of the Third International Conference on the Teaching of English, and they were keen to see a good representation from teachers across the ditch.

In my position as Curriculum Officer for English in the Department of Education I was in regular contact nationally with a number of colleagues, and managed to persuade over 80 New Zealand teachers of English to cross the Tasman to attend. Rob and Ros encouraged me to get all the New Zealanders together while we were there in Sydney. During the Conference I put a notice on a chalk board asking interested New Zealanders who were available to come to a meeting I was convening about a proposal to establish a national English Teachers' Association. We duly passed a resolution to do so, and NZATE (the New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English) came into being (and it's still going strong!). A national association gives teachers of English a forum where, among other functions, they can independently promote professional development and undertake research by teachers for teachers. We have much to thank Australia for!

It's clear to me that an important function of International Conferences on the Teaching of English lies in the cross-fertilisation of ideas. I've been to three in my time: Sydney in 1980, Ottawa in 1986, and Auckland in 1990. All were different, and I found all were instructive, controversial and fascinating in equal measure. There are real benefits when scholars from Australia, New Zealand, and other English-speaking countries come together and share ideas about the teaching and learning of English. International developments have been very influential in the teaching of English here in New Zealand. Let me illustrate by a few examples. Through NZATE we invited Donald Graves back to New Zealand after the Sydney Conference, and the teaching of writing here received a huge boost. I know Don subsequently also went back to Australia. I met John Dixon (author of *Growth Through English*, the document that emerged from the First International Conference held in Dartmouth, USA) at the Sydney conference. He subsequently came and spoke movingly to an English teachers' conference in New Zealand. Andrew Wilkinson's work on the concept of

oracy was influential here. The marae-based organisation of the Fifth International Conference on the Teaching of English held in Auckland in 1990 was influenced by Maori protocols, and challenged established conference structures and ways of thinking about English. Women's voices and gender issues were prominent throughout this conference. The publication in 1990 of *Teaching and Learning English Worldwide*, edited by James Britton (UK), Robert Shafer (USA) and Ken Watson (Australia), and sponsored by the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE), provided interesting comparative historical studies of the teaching of English in thirteen different countries. Are similar international fora still continuing, especially given travel restrictions in the current worldwide pandemic of 2020 and 2021? I hope so, given the attendant benefits of exchanging experience and good teaching practice, but I do not have a definitive answer. I leave that question to other people to follow up.

Because of my own background, I did mention the New Zealand secondary English curriculum in my original article. Its key innovation was the idea of broadening the scope of subject 'English' by including production (the modes of speaking, writing, moving and shaping) and reception (the modes of reading, listening, viewing and watching). The pervasive influence on young people of film, television, video and social media in the intervening period since 1981 serves to reinforce the wisdom of that broader approach.

Curricula, like time, do not stand still. The secondary English curriculum in New Zealand has been no exception. By way of background, the draft *Statement of Aims* that was referenced in the footnote to my original article was formally approved as a national curriculum document in 1983. I was the one who helped write and shepherd it through the New Zealand education bureaucracy in its final phase of development. That subject-specific syllabus document (*English: Forms 3–5: Statement of Aims, 1983*) was then caught up in a subsequent larger overall curriculum review (*The Curriculum Review*, 1987) which morphed into the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, 1993. The 1983 secondary English document was then superseded by *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* 1994 (which emerged from the national curriculum framework). This latter document was heavily influenced by international movements in curriculum development which focused on articulating objectives at different levels and how they would be assessed. The revised 1994 English curriculum was also comprehensive in that one document covered all levels of teaching and learning English in the primary and secondary school systems. Eventually the overall national curriculum emerged as *The New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007 (for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1–13), published in both Maori and English. All this work in New Zealand occurred during and after a time of fundamental reform of the education sector (from 1989 on) when the former Department of Education was restructured and became the Ministry of Education, and the former Curriculum Development Division was disestablished in favour of curriculum development through contractual arrangements. I mention this part of the history of curriculum development and education reform over the last forty years in New Zealand because there may be parallels in Australia. Ultimately all curriculum work is political, and the English curriculum (in this country and elsewhere) is particularly so because it epitomises identity and values.

However, I haven't really been involved in curriculum development in New Zealand since the mid 1990s, so I am not the best person to give an up-to-date accurate analysis of what has happened to the English curriculum in this country since then. At age 78, it is time for me to pass the baton on. Let me conclude then by posing some key questions which are of perennial international concern and which current researchers may wish to consider.

- What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are essential today in subject 'English'?
- What are key themes in current curriculum development in language and/or subject 'English'?
- Have curriculum developments in other English-speaking countries (United Kingdom, USA, Canada …) influenced curricula in Australia? In New Zealand? How?
- What influence have international conferences and international scholars had on the teaching and learning of English?
- To what extent has new technology had an impact on the teaching and learning of English today (including communication technology such as computers and other digital devices, multi-media communication, mobile phones, the internet, social media …)?
- How have curricula in English responded to current issues such as increasing social and linguistic diversity, the student's right to read, concerns about gender and racial equity, the perspectives of indigenous people, and the rights of disadvantaged groups?
- How have different approaches to the teaching of literature influenced the curriculum in English?

Wellington, New Zealand

A New Zealand Perspective Sydney Revisited

VINCE CATHERWOOD

For he on honey dew hath fed And drunk the milk of Paradise.

During the Third International Conference on the Teaching of English I was conscious of a bewildering variety of ideas and impressions on almost every conceivable subject that had some relevance to the teaching of English. After eight months, the many disparate ideas which were debated and argued over now seem to have a unity and consistency.

I think of the International Conference at Sydney as a romantic one. The weather, the site, the company and the collection of seers, artists, visionaries and teachers whom Roslyn Arnold had assembled all offered a promise of heady fulfilment as the week began. Conference-goers look to the seers for inspiration, and on the Tuesday afternoon and evening we were not disappointed.

Donald Graves' account of his research into patterns of control in children's writing was the initial stimulus. He and his fellow researchers had made meticulous records on videotape, sound tape and reams of paper, not of how they believed children ought to learn, but of what they actually did in the process of learning to write. His address, liberally spiced with humour, conveyed his own infectious enthusiasm for children as personalities and their idiosyncratic ways of learning to make meaning in print. He talked, for instance, of how children needed to revise their writing, but of how one girl, Amy, seemed not to need to revise her writing at all. She invariably produced a first·draft of impeccable quality. By talking to her he discovered that her revision was done mentally while she lay in bed at night, and he illustrated how her experience of seeing a shaft of light shine on a cat's eye had been transmuted into fiction in her story of a fox with a squint.

James Moffet became a talking point of the conference by polarising participants with his views on the relationship between writing, inner speech and meditation. His challenge to established ways of teaching English proved controversial, but the links with Donald Graves' student, Amy, were there. Amy's revision of her story went on in her head, and her mental sorting out and the reordering of her experience prior to the actual activity of writing were what Moffett would call inner speech.

Harold Rosen warned that we must avoid paternalism in our approach to the needs of the culturally different. He noted that linguistic diversity existed and that the starting point for growth must be a respect for the language the student brings to the classroom. The students' experiences are the basis on which classroom programmes must be built, for unless students learn to trust their own responses they will be unlikely to become confident users of language. The thread of individual control of one's own linguistic destiny had begun to emerge.

Later in the week Ian Pringle's account of his research in Canada into mechanical and conventional errors as symptoms developed this thread further. Pringle had analysed the writing of a sample of adolescents in Ottawa and had discovered that syntactic control in adolescents' writing broke down when the task set was too difficult. Certain types of writing (such as narrative) the writers could handle well, but, as the difficulty of the task increased, their control over written expression began to falter. There were clear links here with the work Graves had been undertaking with young children. Graves found apparent regression in young children's writing was a sign they were about to move on to something new. Pringle discovered a similar phenomenon in the writing of adolescents as the tasks expected of them became more difficult. The remedy suggested by Pringle was a more flexible approach whereby students could be encouraged to explore the ideas first in talk or discussion, and once they were able to understand what was required of them, they would

be able to clarify their ideas in writing. In a sense, the wheel had come full circle, and we were back again with the ideas James Britton has been promulgating for a lifetime, that the language students use must be made their own through a gradual process of assimilation.

While in one sense we were back at the beginning, in another sense the conference did break new ground. Although the folk-lore of Sydney's ideas and debate will only come into focus with subsequent publication and discussion, I have a feeling that 'response' is a word and an idea whose time has come. It is the emphasis upon response which suggests to me that there are stirrings of romanticism evident in the 1980s in the teaching of English. Geoffrey Summerfield, for instance, reinterpreted how teachers can encourage student response to literature. As teachers of English we must consider how we can encourage response, and how each student who makes a response must be given the autonomy and confidence to generate more and deeper responses.

Let me illustrate how 'response' became a major focus by referring to the Commission on Assessment and the Implications of Failure, which was the group I worked with for the week. The Conference was, after all, essentially a working conference, and the main business of learning and discovery was expected to occur in the working groups. A view of the teaching of English which sees the important part of learning language as consisting of processes and interactions, of ideas being developed and refined in response to the flux of argument and debate, led inescapably to a conference organised along such lines. In retrospect I feel that organisation must have worked, for I feel confident that I learnt more about assessment than about any other topic during that week in August.

Our commission was one of the smaller ones (about 40 in total) but perhaps its smaller size helped contribute to its success. At least everyone was able to make some contribution and the fact that ordinary classroom teachers formed a majority served to remind any impossible romantics of the realities of the classroom. Much of the discussion could be regarded as a rediscovery of the assessment wheel, but the process of doing this in an international context made us reinterpret our own beliefs and prejudices. Surprisingly, there was still a large measure of agreement in a gathering which represented most states of Australia and a good portion of the commonwealth.

The first comment from Leslie Stratta, that perhaps we should be talking, not about assessment, but about response, gave us an initial focus and a point of departure. By the week's end we agreed on a short statement which asserted our concerns: 'A finding of this Commission is that English is most appropriately assessed by teachers. We recommend that the Conference urge the various associations of teachers of English to press for school-based assessment procedures, to develop assessment procedures which appropriately reflect the range of skills and abilities developed in an English course; to note that terminal external examinations do not adequately assess the range of activities, experiences and skills of the student; and in view of the demands this will place upon individual teachers, we call upon the associations to press for adequate financial and human resources to achieve these ends.'

From the first comment to the final consensus, the discussion ranged over several issues: the university domination of the curriculum in the senior secondary school; the ways of assessing writing which would encourage teachers to support more imaginative work; the tension that exists between the assessment functions of certification and accountability, and the functions of motivation and diagnosis; the impact of examinations and how these convey messages to teachers and thus affect the curriculum; how teachers can respond to students' work in such a way as to help them improve, without labelling them failures; the relative merits of norm-referenced assessment measures against various forms of individual measures; the tension which exists between promoting student language growth and using marks or grades in an English classroom; the effects on student motivation of judgmental assessment compared with a responsive approach.

I must mention particularly the work of two people, whose work on assessment in relation to writing I found very helpful. Leslie Stratta made us realise that, as teachers of English, we need criteria which do not constrain, and assessment which does not condemn. Even if systems of assessment which create failure are not going to be abolished overnight, we can, by adopting sensible procedures in our teaching, liberate and humanise students in the classroom. Brian Johnston suggested that judgemental assessment schemes do not motivate students to improve their writing as well as responsive schemes, and explored ways by which a responsive

approach to assessment can help a student write better. If judging and categorising students' work serves to hinder their progress by making them afraid to experiment or to try out new ideas in case they fail and are exposed to ridicule, then as teachers we would do much better to respond by suggesting specific ways the writing could be improved, rather than to try to measure it all the time.

I believe there are two further aspects of assessment in English which could well become the focus of attention over the next decade. First of all, a responsive approach to assessment implies that there is a need to look closely at how as teachers we fulfil the requirements of accountability and certification. When a final assessment is quantified in marks or grades (as is usually the case in school reports or on school certificates) then the assessment procedures during the year will usually follow that pattern. The assessment tail will wag the curricular dog. If we are concerned to build more response and less measurement into the school curriculum, we must find other ways of giving students, parents and the community information about a student's performance in English. The answer seems to me to lie in the development of systems of assessment which describe students' performance in language against specified criteria. I described to the Assessment Commission one such system of descriptive assessment which would lead to the writing of a student language profile. This idea of a student language profile which describes a student's language strengths and weaknesses has been tried out in New Zealand and has been well received by schools.

The other aspect of assessment which I should like to mention is the scope of assessment in English. Much of the work in the Commission was devoted to the assessment of writing. This work was useful and suggested new directions for development which will be helpful for teachers.

Nevertheless, it is true that teachers of English are generally comfortable with assessment in this field, since there is a range of well-established procedures available to assess writing. The same comment is true of assessment of reading, and to a lesser extent of oral assessment.

I believe the distinctive contribution of the New Zealanders in the Assessment Commission at Sydney (about one third of this group were kiwis) was to suggest that the scope of what we assess in the English classroom needs to be broadened. The impact of the electronic media has had a profound effect over the last twenty years on the lives of our students, and has led teachers of English in this country to discuss the implications for the English classroom of these technological changes. The boundaries of literature are being extended by what is happening in film and television, and the electronic media are now accepted internationally as a significant means of communication.

The curriculum in English in the 1980s can no longer be restricted to print, drama and the spoken voice, in the conventional sense. The visual and non verbal aspects of communication (primarily, but not exclusively, seen in television and film) deserve attention in the English classroom. The work of the National English Syllabus Committee in New Zealand[1] has suggested that language involves production (the modes of speaking, writing, moving and shaping) and reception (the modes of reading, listening, viewing and watching). The modes of moving, watching, shaping and viewing are those which concern themselves with visual and non-verbal communication, and teachers of English have begun to develop assessment procedures which sensitise and develop student awareness of a facility in these aspects of communication.

Finally, I believe that in spite of the apparently disparate nature of the different commissions at the conference, there were common threads through all of them. James Britton suggested that the 1980s will be the decade of action-research by teachers in classrooms. I am certain that insights and discoveries from the research we heard about in Sydney will indeed serve to inspire teachers to investigate how students learn. If the result is the promotion of practices in the English classroom which will assist learning, then the experiences of Sydney will have been worthwhile.

Attendance at this conference has been for me the most professionally rewarding experience of my teaching career, and I believe this view would be shared by many of my New Zealand colleagues who attended.

Note

1. Statement of Aims, National English Syllabus Committee, 1978 draft, Department of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

Vince Catherwood [was] an Education Officer (English) with the Curriculum Development Division of the Department of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

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