SPECIAL EDITION

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AATE

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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

Ceridwen Owen and Kelli McGraw

English @ Home

English @ Home is a special issue that we hope contributes to and encourages an ongoing discussion and research imperative in Australia to understand the experience and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, universities and all that work and learn within these institutions.

There have been many voices that have claimed to know what is right for those in education, from government to school leadership. This special issue comes from a desire to capture and foreground other voices; the voices of pre-service teachers, teachers, and teacher educators and the everyday experience of teaching and learning in schools and universities. The focus of the articles in this issue are the voices of those learning and teaching in the everyday.

We started planning this issue when the pandemic first hit and it became clear that it would have an ongoing and deep impact on the education landscape. Both working in lockdown (Ceridwen in Melbourne, Victoria and Kelli in Brisbane, Queensland), we felt a need to capture the experience of education in Australia during the pandemic as it was personal to us but also an important moment in the national education journey. Closing schools for a pandemic is not unprecedented in Australia, one example is schools closing in 1937/38 for a polio outbreak, and it will not be the last. In this context, in mid-2020 when we began planning this issue, we aimed to provide a moment's pause as the nation rushed to *return to normal* to appreciate what had occurred and the impact on those in education.

'At the point of publishing this special issue, Australia is coming out of some of the longest lockdowns in the world and has moved to the political perspective of living with the virus. In this moment, there is a heightened imperative to hear the stories and understand the experiences as teachers, teacher educators, students, families and communities are exhausted, traumatised, but also hopeful. As the classroom experience in affected areas attempts to find new normals, with greater ventilation, spread out students and masked up teachers, the lessons we can learn from our experience and the healing that can occur as we share stories is worth acknowledging.

This issue is a record, but we also hope that it can become part of a conversation, where we learn to talk about the experience and the impacts it has had in a different way; with a conscious focus on reflection and care. In a time when most teachers and teacher educators have experienced the isolation of remote learning, we hope that this issue can go some way in helping them understand their experience in a broader context, as a shared experience. We also hope that it enables them to see the achievement of getting through; of the multiple skills that they hold, their resilience and their adaptability. For research, the COVID-19 pandemic will have far reaching consequences for what education is in Australia and globally, the work that teachers and teacher educators undertake and the experience of students. The resulting professional and industrial changes will be long felt and need to be considered as more than something that will pass.

This issue of the journal opens with three papers that include the voices of school teachers, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers. The writers are those who responded to our invitation to record a narrative based on their experiences during the pandemic. In the first paper Owen assembles narratives to 'recall, record and understand the everyday experiences of five individual teachers' from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. By capturing their range of individual everyday experiences, a collective story is formed as a counter to the 'prospect of a potential shared amnesia to the experiences of 2020'. Parr's paper shares similar goals, also reflecting on ways that narratives shared by academics working in teacher education draw attention to the 'new normal' of teaching in online spaces. The industrial implications of rapidly remediating teaching

and learning materials are clear in this paper, as is the labour of rapidly acclimatising to the demands of digital, and sometimes unfamiliar, spaces. The third and final paper of invited narratives records the experiences of pre-service teachers and is the only paper in this group of three that appears without academic framing. As noted in the introduction to the article, this enables the record of their experience to be read without imposing a teacherly view of their experience, also privileging their position as authors.

The next two papers in the issue share further insights on learning English during the troubled times of the pandemic from a variety of contexts in Australia. Gannon, Jacobs, D'warte and Naidoo theorise the experience of a Year 9–10 English class in western Sydney, where 'connectedness and creativity' were emphasised during school closures in Term 2 of 2020. They present five samples of student work that are characterised by their individuality, imagination and openness, and argue for the benefits of creative assignments in providing an avenue for processing stressful situations. In Jones' paper we are also invited to consider how studies in English can assist with processing stress, with a focus on the use of 'trauma literature'. Jones theorises their experience as an English teacher through professional reflection and analysis of two literary texts that afford a space for students to reflect on their own trauma, and for the development of insight and empathy for the trauma of others. Although this paper does not respond directly to COVID-19, the link is clear as pandemic-related traumas will inevitably be increasingly faced in contexts of learning and teaching.

We are grateful to Sydney-based poet Eileen Chong for permission to share the poem 'Witness' in this issue. Commissioned for the Poetry on the Move festival in 2020, Chong's poem poignantly captures these times when many of us 'missed the summer'; where we were all left asking 'how far should we stand / from people we love'. The intimacies of home life captured in the poem will resonate with teachers and families who precariously balanced home and school identities in the blurred space of teaching-from-home.

We are also grateful to Melbourne-based urban artist Ben Barek, for permission to reproduce the artwork 'Village Goat' on the cover of this issue. The painting was completed and a picture of it posted on Instagram by Barek (@barek_art) during May 2020, when the editors were in lockdown. It further represents the strangeness and surreality of sudden, constant situatedness in one's own neighbourhood. Barek's annotation in comments below the post returns us to the role of place in directing our attention in the world: 'inspired by a lady that lives in my suburb who takes her goat out for walks around the area 😂I used to think I was crazy because nobody else had seen her but finally I have confirmation she exists.'

In the final article of the issue, perspectives from the UK are shared by Brindley, Alexander, Amis, Lownds, Shaw and White. Mini-narratives from the teacher authors are assembled to give a sense of how their reflections foregrounded different themes at different points in time. Beginning with reflections on the role of technology at the start of home-based learning during the pandemic, moving to the theme of motivation that emerged in the middle of the period, the experiences of these teachers echoes some of the narratives shared by teachers in Australia. And like us, their reflection finds difficulty with locating a finalising theme, as it has become starkly apparent that the pandemic period is far from over. Instead, these authors find themselves wondering 'what really matters in English teaching', and advocating for teachers to continue writing, researching and working with each other to forge new understandings.

Selecting a paper for 'perspectives from the past' was not straight-forward for this special issue, as our current focus on learning English in online and home-based environments is in the context of unprecedented times. The selected paper 'Insiders and outsiders: Teaching standards, national certification assessment, and professional development' by Anthony Petrosky was originally published in *English in Australia* in 1998. In this paper Petrosky examines the introduction of a national board certification in America for early adolescence/English language arts teachers. On the surface this paper does not appear to relate to the COVID context or online and home-based learning, however, Petrosky's paper's relevance is not in the context but rather the examination of teachers' work. In this special issue the papers address the everyday experience of teachers and many of the papers interrogate explicitly or implicitly the role of government in teachers' work during the pandemic. The frame that Petrosky uses in his paper of the insider and outsider is useful to interrogate the role of government in teachers' work and society's understanding of teachers' work during the pandemic.

Petrosky examines the process of teacher standards design and implementation in America and considers

the failings of standards to address the everyday work and professional development needs of teachers when they are designed by 'outsiders'. The central concept in the article is the 'insider' and 'outsider'. Insiders are those within the teaching profession including teachers, while outsiders are those beyond the teaching profession, such as professional administrators and test developers that have previously or currently work in 'state departments of education, banks, corporations and testing organisations' but not schools. Although insiders – teachers – are consulted, they have no executive positions. As such, it is outsiders that have the 'important day-to-day decision making' power. Petrosky discusses that due to the control of the outsider, part of the problem is that teachers' work is then designed to focus on rating and ranking of themselves and students, rather than the 'contextual situation of teaching'.

This concept of the insider/outsider and inquiry into who is making decisions about teachers' everyday work and how they understand that work, is comparable to the experience of teachers during the pandemic, where outsiders are government and departments of education at both state/territory and national level, and insiders as teachers, pre-service teachers, teacher educators, students, and those working in schools. The articles in this special issue focus on the insider voice and experience, which is quite different to the messages that were being delivered and the stories that were being told from outsiders. This special issue gives an opportunity for a variety of narratives to be told that have, through the pandemic, often been drowned out by official statements. Teachers have spent the pandemic being told what to do and what their experience is, and this has often been quite different to the everyday work and feelings of teachers.

Petrosky's article, we hope, can be used by teachers as a way to recognise their work and validate their experiences, which may be quite different to the narratives they were hearing in the media. We also hope that including this perspective from the past assists to frame the articles in the special issue and adds to our call for researchers to continue to examine and consider the work of teachers, students, and schools during the pandemic and beyond from an insider's perspective. We have additionally, at the end of this editorial, provided a briefly annotated bibliography of articles previously appearing in *English in Australia* that could also inform our thinking and future research on English education during the pandemic.

As we push for further research relating to English teaching in the time of the pandemic, we must also acknowledge that not all states and territories in Australia were disrupted to the same extent in 2020-2021 by school closures and home-based learning. Although in this special issue we have strived to bring together voices from multiple jurisdictions, a silence remains around the national picture. What research questions will best elucidate the impact of local school closures on the national professional ecosystem? And what national practices and structures might continue to be questioned in the wake of pandemic-related disruption? As Gannon et al. point out in their paper, creativity was afforded space to thrive in a school term where the usual NAPLAN tests had been cancelled. It is hard to imagine that the review of the Australian Curriculum that took place during 2020-2021 attracted the attention it deserved while teachers and teacher educators in so many areas had their world turned upside down; what missed opportunities might come to be seen in policy and curriculum change during this time?

We know the publishing industry and authors releasing works during 2020-2021 certainly did not get the attention they deserved – some excellent titles from this period are found in our regular 'Reading & Viewing' column, with text reviews by Deb McPherson. We call on all English teachers to consider that a destabilised literary landscape may have negative consequences for English education, and to consider ways of better connecting and supporting authors, publishers and bookshops in times to come.

To finish, we extend an invitation to researchers and teachers to keep examining and seeking to understand the experience of the pandemic on individuals and institutions. Ceridwen's interest in the special issue began when she was working at Monash University. During the pandemic she returned to teaching English in a secondary school in Melbourne. This shift in perspective was dramatic as it enabled her to live the experience of teachers but also to observe the experience of her colleagues. Returning to onsite classes at the end of October 2021 after the sixth Melbourne lockdown lasting 77 days, which brought the total of days in lockdown to 262 days, there was a general sense of fatigue but also relief, uncertainty and anger amongst her colleagues. Kelli's interest in the issue has been shaped largely by her experiences teaching university students in online and hybrid modes, and both of us also experienced these times as

parents of children who undertook remote learning. Although this special issue focuses on the experience of educators during remote teaching and learning, the story does not end with the end of lockdown; the story is still being told.

The virus will eventually pass but further research into the experience and accounts of the trauma arising from this period are yet to come. The end of lockdown is not the end of the impacts as individuals and institutions face a transitional period that could take months and years. We hope this issue serves as a prompt to continue the work that the articles in this issue are starting.

Annotated bibliography of related *English in Australia* articles

Curwood, J.S. (2011). Teachers as learners: What makes technology-focused professional development effective? *English in Australia*, 46(3), 68–75.

Jen Scott Curwood investigates how learning communities influence secondary English teachers' use of digital tools. During periods of home-based schooling during COVID-19, teachers who had not already gained knowledge and skills in the use of digital tools for teaching found themselves in a period of extremely rapid professional learning. There was not likely much time for this to include some features recommended by Curwood, such as sustained dialogue around teachers' curricular goals and students' learning outcomes. However other features such as hands-on learning with digital tools would have been common to all teachers. This article provides a frame for considering the adequacy of professional learning about digital tools during the pandemic.

Faulkner, J. (2012). 'It's a sort of ad hoc roadshow': Disruptive pedagogies and digital introductions. *English in Australia*, 47(1), 53–60.

Julie Faulkner explores the possibility of students thinking differently when faced with disruptive pedagogies, in particular the inclusion of digital pedagogies. In reflecting on the disruptions to learning of the COVID 19 pandemic and the shift to the digital space for teaching and learning this article acts as a provocation for the possibilities of the digital space to further expand education into the digital medium, where digital pedagogies change how we teach.

Gardner, P. (2013). Writing in context: Reluctant writers and their writing at home and at school. *English in Australia*, 48(1), 71–81.

Paul Gardner investigates the engagement with writing of reluctant writers in the contexts of home and school. The study reports findings from primary-aged students in the UK, including a finding that students deemed reluctant writers by teachers could been found writing in a range of genres in the home context with more adult help and willing audiences available. During the COVID 19 period of remote learning, the blurring of boundaries between home and school as learning sites challenges us to build on the wealth of existing research about the gap between school and home reading/writing. New questions may now come to light, for example about achievement versus disadvantage during home-based learning.

Parr, G., Bellis, N. & Bulfin, S. (2013). Teaching English teachers for the future: Speaking back to TPACK. English in Australia, 48(1), 9–22.

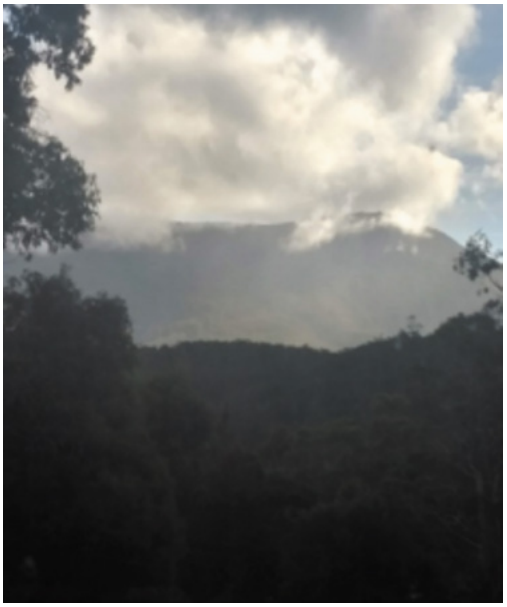
Graham Parr, Natalie Bellis and Scott Bulfin propose a different approach to professional development for teachers that is more collaborative and complex than what is offered in the TPACK structure. The COVID 19 pandemic offered an educational situation that does not easily fit in the structure of TPACK or other institutional structures. This article offers a situated approach to supporting teachers that focuses on the everyday experience of teachers working with and alongside others.

Lockdown Teaching

Teaching During Lockdown: English Teachers' Experiences in the Time of COVID-19

Ceridwen Owen, Monash University
Emma Enticott, Forest Hill College
Joe Harlowe, Brighton Grammar School
Steven Kolber, Brunswick Secondary College
Ellen Rees, Hobart College
Anne Wood, A.B Patterson College

Abstract: In an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19 in Australia in 2020 state and territory governments mandated the closing of schools for all but vulnerable children and the children of frontline workers in various parts of Australia for various lengths of time. In what follows, five English teachers from across Australia reflect on the everyday experience of teaching during lockdown. Using the framework of 'who' and 'what' stories (Cavarero, 2000), these narratives explore the individual and contextual experience of the everyday work of teaching remotely, while also contributing to the collective story of English teaching during a global pandemic. The narratives raise questions about teachers' identity and development as well as broader questions about subject English.



Kunanyi/Mount Wellington, Hobart. Taken by Ellen Rees during remote learning in 2020
In attempting to write this I have been confronted by how little I remember – my memories of the days are cloudy and only a few distinct events cut through the fog.
Ellen Rees, 2021

The image of cloudy memories brought an understanding to my memory of 2020 that I hadn't encountered before. I, Ceridwen, experienced the pandemic in Victoria, Australia. I was teaching pre-service teachers remotely at Monash University, finishing my PhD and

homeschooling my two daughters in Grades 1 and 3 across the 14 weeks of school closures. When I attempt to recall memories from those days, I find myself struggling to grasp concrete moments. I have an emotional response – I feel sadness, anxiety and a sense of heaviness, as well as scattered memories of joy and laughter – but when I try to connect these emotions to events, I begin to struggle. My memories are foggy. They lack clarity. I can remember the schedule for the days and I know that it was difficult, but, perhaps due to the 'Groundhog Day' nature of the experience, I cannot distinguish individual days, or even moments. Yet I feel an imperative to remember, to ensure that I do not move on with life as if the pandemic did not occur, and transition unquestioningly back to pre-pandemic life.

In this article, with the prospect of a potential shared amnesia around the experiences of 2020 and a shared trauma, where both experiences and trauma are individual and distinct in nature but have commonalities that connect, we present the narratives of five English teachers from across Australia. The purpose is to recall, record and understand the everyday experiences of individual teachers. We argue that through narratives we are able to explore the complexity and subjectivity of individual experience and the shared experience of a group as they work within institutional structures (Owen, 2020; Parr & Bulfin, 2015). This shared experience includes the inevitable blurring of identities as teachers during remote learning brought their students into their living rooms and their families into their classrooms. It also includes the strain teachers experienced in managing their own mental wellbeing along with that of their families, students, the school community and colleagues. There are also the practicalities of transitioning from on-site to online learning, and the subsequent changes that occurred to subject English. Each of these shared experiences is also individual, as each teacher, student, classroom and school is unique. The experience of individuals, therefore, is both unique and shared.

The collective and individual experience is also deeply connected to place and institutional structures such as classrooms, schools and policy environments (Cavarero, 2000; de Certeau, 1984). Understanding the everyday experience of remote teaching and learning in 2020 involves understanding the individual and the collective, institutional structures and society. For, as Mills (2000) writes, 'neither the life of an individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both' (p. 3).

In focusing on the individual experience within institutional structures, and the individual and the collective, our aim in this article is to consider school-as-its-people, rather than solely school-as-institution (Owen, 2020). This focus considers the social space of schools: the interactions between people and the physical (or virtual) spaces of schools and policies that inform those spaces. From this position, the narratives of the five English teachers enable a reflection on the complexity of English teaching during the pandemic, and perhaps also shed light on the nature of English teaching moving beyond the pandemic.

The COVID-19 context and the importance of stories

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across Australia closed to the majority of on-site students for varying lengths of time, the longest being 14 weeks in Melbourne and other parts of Victoria. The potential impacts of lockdowns on workers have already been extensively recorded globally, and will certainly continue to be examined. With regard to the impact on education and schooling, there is also a growing body of work. Much of this research considers online teaching practices and methods, the transition of pedagogy and practices from face-to-face to online, and student experiences in the time of COVID-19 (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; König, Jäger-Biela & Glutsch, 2020; Marstaller, 2020; Okebukola et al., 2020; Pelosi & Vicars, 2020; Yandell, 2020). In terms of English and L1 research, there is an emerging focus on the experiences of teachers, elicited from their voices (Chamberlain et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2020). Extending this research to include an Australian perspective, in this article we explore the narratives of five English teachers as they reflect on their experiences of working from home. Working in metropolitan Melbourne, where the longest lockdown period occurred, Joe, Steven and Emma undertook 14 weeks of remote teaching across two lockdown periods; Ellen in Tasmania taught from home for 7 weeks; and Anne taught remotely in Queensland for 5 weeks.

To understand the experiences of these teachers, we draw on the work of Cavarero (2000) and her concept of 'who' and 'what' stories. The distinction Cavarero makes is between 'qualities (what I am)' and 'uniqueness (who I am)' (p. 61). The 'what' stories are

qualities/roles shared with others, such as the teacher and the student, while the 'who' stories are 'unique and unrepeatable' (p. 61).

The 'what' stories often rely on simplification. In regards to teachers, Parr and Bulfin (2015) write that 'what' stories

> are premised on the belief that it is possible to 'capture' and articulate a definitive and unarguable truth, such as 'what a teacher needs to know and be able to do', as professional standards discourses typically claim to do. This kind of 'what' story often relies on simplifying *what has been* as well as *what will be* in order to prescribe *what should be* for the present. (p. 165)

The 'what' stories are often institutional narratives that are neither inviting of, nor receptive to, alternative stories. 'Who' stories, on the other hand, actively invite response, reflection and dialogue, as they do not make a claim about truth, but rather implicitly recognise the uniqueness of human experience: they do not claim that an individual's experience is necessarily everyone's. 'Who' stories encourage questions about self, society and others. They represent the subjective unalloyed array of individuals' experiences.

In relation to the stories of teachers in Australia during lockdown, the 'who' stories of individual teachers focus on the relational experience of remote teaching – the 'life-story' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 59) of the pandemic. These 'who' stories take the readers into classrooms, living rooms and the identities of the storytellers. They are stories 'open to the prospect of exploring further the [experience] of individuals and particular contexts, settings or social groups' (Parr & Bulfin, 2015, p. 166). Alongside the nuanced, subjective and contextual experience of individual English teachers that are represented in these stories is a shared experience, as they are all members of the same profession and during remote teaching were all working under similar institutional conditions resulting from government imposed COVID-19 restrictions and school closures. 'Who' stories enable the unique experiences of individuals to be appreciated alongside the 'what' stories that connect teachers to the collective (Owen, 2020; Parr & Bulfin, 2015; Parr, Doecke & Bulfin, 2015).

Methodology

The five 'who' stories presented below are from five Australian English teachers who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As well as being discrete narratives of their individual experiences, they collectively contribute to a larger narrative encompassing the experiences of English teachers in Australia. The individual stories are followed by an analysis of the shared and individual experiences of the teachers.

The five Australian teachers responded to an *English in Australia* 'call for narratives' for this special issue of the journal. In the call, the teachers were asked to tell a story about their experiences of teaching and learning during remote learning. The narratives were collected before the analysis was undertaken.

In analysing the narratives, Ceridwen focused on the themes that arose from the data as well as considering narrative writing as a way for the teachers to reflect on and understand their individual experiences. The overall purpose was to develop an understanding of both the individual stories and the collective story (Barkhuizen, 2015; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Woods, 1986). The approach to analysis included recognising that all of the narratives were essentially experiences of the same phenomenon: that is, the teaching of English remotely during the 2020 global pandemic. This understanding enabled an approach to analysis that considered the social and time-space context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). From this analysis, a predominant theme was developed – 'gains and losses' (Parr et al., 2020) – where all narratives discussed what was lost during remote teaching but there was also an appreciation of what was found, remembered or gained.

The approach to teacher development used to analyse the narratives considers that teacher development can be broader than teachers aligning with government education policy based on standardised measures (Diamond, Parr & Bulfin, 2017; Doecke, 2004; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Parr & Bulfin, 2015; Owen, 2020; Parr et al., 2020). Development involves struggle and hardship as well as change and growth. This approach to development, labelled 'becoming', draws on the work of Bakhtin (1981), where teachers become as a result of the difficulties they encounter as they dialogically confront, consider and reflect on their views and values of teaching and learning. In this article, this process of dialogically engaging with their experience occurs through the processes of narrative writing and reflecting, and of engaging in discussion about their work with others.

In the next section of the article, the five autobiographical narratives (Joe, Emma, Ellen, Steven and Anne) are included before the theme of 'gains and

losses' is considered in more depth. Joe, an experienced English teacher from Melbourne, contrasts his experience of teaching with his daughter's experience of learning, and the negotiation required for him to balance his identities as father, husband and teacher. Emma, a graduate English teacher from rural Victoria, considers her experience in relation to her expectations and anticipations before the year began. Ellen, a secondary school teacher from Hobart, Tasmania, struggles to engage in the process of remembering and reflecting as she tackles the 'fog' of memory, and in doing so, considers what she has learned and what she hopes for the future of education. Through his questioning of what education is for and what the experience of remote learning has taught us, Steven, a senior-years secondary school teacher from Melbourne, considers what is possible for subject English and English teaching post-pandemic. Anne, a Head of English from Queensland, considers the role of creativity in the English classroom and contrasts the approach to the teaching of creativity by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) with that of other institutions, including professional associations.

Five autobiographical narratives about teaching English during remote learning

Joe Harlowe – Melbourne, Victoria

Jess is long gone when I'm woken at 8 am by Ms 8, who comes in to tell me the cat has vomited in the hallway. Don't touch it, I say. I won't, says Ms 8. I didn't even hear Jess go. Long days at the hospital, for her, and I worked late last night, till after 1, writing and annotating sample paragraphs for students.

8:30ish Breakfast. Ms 8 and I cut up the cereal box to make a superhero mask. The kitchen table is an absolute disaster, but space to work has been cleared successfully. Ms 8 is checking in with her school, and I am off to class. I log onto Teams and open the PPT I prepared and set the roll-call question in a forum thread on the Learning Management System.

9 am. Hello; how are you all this morning? Some cameras are on, some are not; I ask for them to be turned on, but not all comply. I'm supposed to get them all to turn on their cameras for every class, but I don't, not always. I need to make a point of doing so. For every class. Should I? I have mixed feelings; I understand why students don't necessarily want them on. And some students have asked not to be called on for answers to questions, but without calling on specific students, it tends to be the same few students answering questions all the time. God bless them, they do help when the silences yawn in response to questions, but everyone should be having a go.

I check on Ms 8 during our break; she is trying to write haiku in Japanese. We discuss what a syllable is and consider how it is different to *on*. I make tea and go back to work, to Year 12 English, to *Ransom* and *The Queen* – the ordinary nature of leaders. Discussion, then writing, so I can talk to students one-on-one while others work. I talk to one; we go through a piece of writing together. Your topic sentence is a bit broad; narrow it down. You're rushing a bit; what's the evidence for that idea? Slow it down. Give me a quote. 'Clogging grey web' – yes. 'Heaviness' – yes, that's a good one. Is it 'earth-heaviness'? We should check. This is how you use a semi-colon. This feels like proper teaching, but it's slow slow slow. Class is over. 10:45. Have a good afternoon, and a good day tomorrow; remember, I won't see you then. It's a day scheduled for no new content, for students to catch up. I'll be available, but I won't be teaching. I already have four meetings set and a stack of paperwork to get through.

10:50 I check on Ms 8; she's doing well, writing a short story.

11:15 am. I don't have class, but I need to send some emails and respond to others. Here are the new SAC (School Assessed Coursework) dates. Here is some feedback on an essay. This is how you use a semi-colon. Don't forget to talk about the picture. You're making things more complicated than they need to be; can you simplify it a bit? That word doesn't mean what you think it means.

I check on Ms8. Maths; she's doing worded problems. Division and multiplication. Tricky. We talk about it a bit. I am not so good with maths; I know the answers to some of the problems, but I find it hard to explain how she is supposed to know what to do to find those answers. We end up cutting up bits of paper to make physical objects to represent the numbers and put them in groups. I have no idea if this is how a teacher of maths would do this.

1pm. A meeting with C and M (English-teacher colleagues). Talking about next year. I don't want to be full-time. I already know I'll have 3 VCE subjects to teach, and I don't really want to do anything else on top of them. I feel like I'm stretched already. Maybe it's the pandemic. Maybe it's not always this bad.

I check on Ms 8 again, who is still stuck on the

worded problems in maths. I try to help a bit, but how to explain whether a problem requires multiplying or dividing? I am not sure.

3:30 pm. An extra class, not on the regular timetable, for EAL (English as an Additional Language) students who want extra practice with argument analysis, in preparation for the exam. Issue, author's position, main contention, supporting ideas, target audiences, emotions elicited, and what about the picture? Yes, the legs pulled up and the arms crossed; what does that suggest? And what about the facial expression? How does the child feel? The straight mouth, yes, unsmiling – what does that convey? And how about the twist in the body?

I check on Ms 8. Tears; maths is too hard without help. Still not finished, answers wrong. Can't work it out. I hug her and dry her eyes and feel guilty about how little time I've spent with her today. I don't want her to abandon it altogether, so I walk her through how to get to the answer and tell her to call it a day. Suddenly we remember jiu-jitsu – 2 minutes to get ready. It's a good class, v-locks and armbars and kimuras.

We make dinner, Ms 8 cracking the eggs for fried rice. We treat ourselves and open a bottle of sarsaparilla; it was a tough day. Holy cheese and crackers, says Ms 8. That maths was *hard*. Jess gets home before 7 pm and exclaims over how early that is for her these days. I finish eating and take the dog out for a walk before the curfew kicks in.

8:30 pm. I'm drifting off to sleep as I read Ms 8 a bedtime story; I shouldn't have lain down to read to her. Goodnight goodnight goodnight sweet dreams.

I make tea, and walk around till my mind clears and then I go back to work; I need to answer a couple more emails I never got to today. I add a couple of slides to a PPT and finish a paragraph I was writing. I look at work waiting to be assessed and decide I can't face it right now. I start reading around Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* and Kate Tempest's *Let Them Eat Chaos*. I love this pairing, but I'm wondering: what questions can I ask them, in what order, that might develop their understanding?

10 pm. 11 pm. I'm not sure. I'll keep at it.

Emma Enticott – rural Victoria

November, 2019. I have just landed my graduate job as a teacher. Having made my way through four years of university, I am beyond excited and itching to start! I have chosen to start out my teaching career in a little school in rural Victoria. I wanted to teach in a rural school mostly for a change of lifestyle, but also to push myself out of my comfort zone.

I am handed the text list by the Head of English that I will be teaching next year. The usual offenders are there: *The Crucible*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet*. And also, *Station Eleven*, a book I have on my 'desperate to read' list. Now I have a legitimate reason to lock myself in my room and read it. Everything is right in my world in November.

Station Eleven – the imagery of the novel is eerie, otherworldly. I read this novel in many locations – on the beach, in my room, on the city loop train. Within the first few pages, St John Mandel comments on the hysteria of people panic buying toilet paper and supplies. I couldn't believe it. Imagine if that was to happen! …

And then it did. Week Eight of Term One. The week my graduate year of teaching was moved online.

All those graduate teacher rites of passage were overnight removed, and replaced with the stressors of 'Remote' and 'Flexible' learning. At the end of my graduate year, I have not experienced the chaos of hosting a school excursion. I have not been on a school camp. I have not met other graduate teachers beyond my own school. I have not even been to an in-person professional development. I am yet to meet a parent, or be recognised in the street. Instead, graduation year feels a little mundane.

Not all is terrible, I am lucky as a graduate. I am young. I don't remember a time in my life without the internet. I know what engages students online, because I was a student at university that had to be engaged online. I have anecdotal evidence of classes that had me hooked on every word that was said, and some that made me fall asleep.

But back in November last year I unknowingly put myself into an even bigger challenge. Moving to a rural area, my final day before remote learning was a flurry of students telling me of their internet woes and poor phone lines. Whilst crafting curriculum for the first time ever, I was making explicit choices on how to be equitable in a low data environment. My dreams of grandeur were replaced with lessons that can be performed online and offline. A balancing act of engaging education and accessible education became my biggest challenge.

With eight weeks of teaching under my belt, I had to redefine my pedagogy and practice. I have found that in remote learning, round one and then round two, it has been vital to put wellbeing at the forefront of

everything I do. Instead of getting frustrated with my students and with overdue tasks, my learners are freely given extra time to do their work.

Which makes me think, what is really important in my practice? Is it being able to mark essays on time, or having happy learners in my classroom? When we go back into the classroom for a second time, I know that all I want is happy learners. Not only learners that are mentally happy, but learners that are engaged, curious and glad to be within my classroom.

This has been a tremendously difficult year for all graduates. But I think that after this, we might be some of the most resilient graduates of all time. With a pandemic under our belts, anything that comes after this must be easier … I hope!

And we have a graduate year story that trumps many others.

Ellen Rees – Hobart, Tasmania

Working at a public Senior Secondary college in Hobart, my experience of online teaching was limited to seven weeks, from late March to early May 2020. There was a messy and confusing time when students stopped attending, a week which began with the instructions that we were to teach the students in the room and ended with the realisation that we would need to move to teaching online. This time was fraught with change and concern, punctuated by new restrictions and new knowledge of how the virus could be transmitted. The first five weeks of Term Two were delivered online and then, in early May, students were back on campus. I know that compared to many, my experiences of online teaching was limited to an incredibly brief period, however, it was still the most challenging period in my seventeen-year career. It challenged my confidence and I spent long hours sitting in my office wondering 'Am I a teacher for these times?' In attempting to write this I have been confronted by how little I remember – my memories of the days are cloudy and only a few distinct events cut through the fog.

I sit in an empty classroom for my Monday morning double writing class. The room seems yellow and hollow and the silence spirals around me like an empty warraner shell.

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Grey cloud shadows on The Mountain's purple foothills – framed by glowing blue-gum leaves; the view from the narrow rectangular window in my office changes rapidly but the mute over the campus is constant. There is something tiring about the heavy quiet.

***

Still at the desk in my office, I marvel at the iridescent interior of the small smooth abalone shells I keep on a bookshelf while I phone my students. When we would have double lessons, I spend the time contacting or attempting to contact each student. I joke about using a landline telephone and tried to describe the curly black cord. These conversations are easier, less stilted than trying to talk on our whole class video conferences, which often break up or, as one student told me, make me sound like 'a bebop robot.'

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Two students log in early for an online lesson and we banter and joke. These moments shine as I think 'This is just like when students arrive early for a class in a classroom.'

***

I stand in the street outside my house and talk with a parent on my phone, on my 'day off.' The road is wet and radiates cold. My attempts to remain encouraging seem to slip downhill.

***

For me, the experiences of teaching in 2020 were defined by the impact that disrupted routines had on students' mental health. The early uncertainties meant that many young people wrote off a year when it was less than three months old. Some were able to regain their footing and complete their final years of high school. Others continued to struggle with anxiety, depression and motivation. They struggled to find meaning in what they were being asked to do. As with so many other aspects of life, the pandemic highlighted or amplified challenges, in students' lives outside school. I discovered that there were many students for whom school was a safe place, when home was not always.

There were aspects of a regular teacher workload which dropped away, such as writing reports. I had time to read and to prepare resources to be uploaded, to focus specifically on delivering content. Particularly in the early weeks I was again made aware of the ways in which schools are sites for politics to play out. At the time I hoped that the role that schools play in communities, as safe places as much as places of learning might be acknowledged.

I am still hopeful.

Steven Kolber – Melbourne, Victoria

As a metropolitan Melbourne, VCE English teacher, who has taught during two 'states of disaster' this year (the Black Summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic), it is safe to say, everything is not fine.

Teaching during this period can be divided into three phases:

Remote Learning 1.0 (April 15 – June 9)
Enjoying the novelty of remote learning, learning new methods and tools with students.

Remote Learning 2.0 (July 20-August 1)
Prep to Year 10 students return to remote learning, with 11s and 12s at school, masked senior students, limited spaces and concerning times.

Remote learning 3.0 (August 2 – Current)
Back to working from home, much less novelty, much more concerning, students disconnect, enthusiasm wanes.

Putting aside the dangers, loss of life, livelihood, mental and broader health issues (a significant task), whilst also noting the comparative economic safety of teachers, it's timely to consider the changed nature of teaching during these phases. Teaching 'rona style' (as one of my students would say) has probably been widely different for teachers across different sectors, locations and schools but what follows are my reflections.

Teaching remotely is an interesting experience. My personal practice did not need to change dramatically, as I've utilised instructional video for the last four years and used collaborative online tools for much longer. What did change, and dramatically so, was the experience for my students and my delivery to them. In my teaching practice, I was less formal, more collaborative, less dictatorial and more flexible around the moods and preferences of my students and classes. A focus on collaboration, engagement and connection was used to foreground student voices. Wellbeing and students' positive mental health was my primary concern rather than delivery of an overstuffed curriculum. As my work routines changed dramatically, less time was spent working with colleagues and the work I did supporting low-literacy students became more difficult. Each of these changes meant more time for me to read, write and reflect. In this reflection, I note that for those students for whom school is a difficult and challenging place, remote learning seemed to mean that they could by and large opt-out of the process. Schools, and I, as ever, did everything in our power to address this fact, with some successes. The rare quieter or less sociable student, found the independent allocation of time and greater control over work completion a positive. Still even less common was, the student who missed the stimulation of schooling and returned to online learning after extended absences. Beyond the bricks-and-mortar safety of schools, its rigid supervision and time management, it proved impossible to monitor those students who chose not to engage actively.

Thinking more broadly, across many aspects of schooling, it feels as though everything is again up for reconsideration; whether this happens at the system level or not, for English teachers, things have been changed and potentially irreversibly so. During remote teaching, the constant downward pressure of overstuffed curriculum documents had to be reconsidered and there was a focus on student wellbeing and visions of students as whole people, living within a community, with pets, siblings and parents all around. This vision is one that cannot be easily erased and should be valued. This shift in focus in the virtual classroom has brought joy, more time spent interacting and discussing everyday minutiae with students and building more human relationships. Relationships that revolve less around obtuse assessments or obscure curriculum outcomes and more around a shared knowledge and experience between humans.

My practice upon returning to school has seen more authentic and live assessment, less busywork, more skills building and a dramatic increase in group and collaborative work. These changes in approach will not leave my practice quickly, nor will the change in focus and thinking around assessment and taking a more holistic view of my students and their development. Discussions, play readings, 'read-alouds' and debate all continued online, albeit with much of the shine knocked off. Less granular steps were progressed through on the way to final writing activities, but more of the emotional and relational elements were focused upon. This was partly a school-wide approach to reduce pressure on students as well as an innate sense that what my students needed was not content but connection, collaboration and most of all engagement. Assessing students online proved manageable, albeit with a 'leap of faith' element around plagiarism and the originality and insurance of own work, requiring trust and knowledge of our students. This discovery casts some doubt over the copious note-taking, assessment score collation and data crunching that we teachers do, and raises questions around standardised assessments and their simplifying and reductionist impact on teacher knowledge.

The overall learnings from this time outlined above

shall not be forgotten by me and hopefully all English teachers. The question now is – will the system allow the flexibility necessary and mandates to empower our profession to refocus our work around our students as whole people?

Anne Wood – Queensland

As Head of English at my school, I acutely felt the burden of designing innovative units that would support not only students but more importantly our teachers. My faculty reflects the English teaching profession across Australia; there is a diversity of ages, technology skills and experience teaching English. Many of my colleagues were nervous when we first started teaching online and were frightened to turn on their cameras and present live lessons. But as the days progressed, online learning provided an extraordinary opportunity for teachers to see the possibilities of technology and creativity in the English curriculum.

The practical organisation of a school shutdown was at first overwhelming. I was worried about how we were going to design units that could be taught effectively in an online environment, while balancing the content requirements, assessment demands and keeping students engaged. Creative writing seemed to be the logical choice, as it accommodated for a wide range of scenarios. I tried to plan for every contingency I could think of; '*What happens if the student is unable to access the internet*?', '*What happens if we are out of school for the entire term*?' and '*What happens if the student has learning difficulties and cannot access the curriculum by themselves*?' In response to these questions, I designed a range of highly engaging genre-based units for students from Years 7–10, including crime and gothic genres. Our school utilised the online platform Microsoft Teams for students to create, collaborate and celebrate their writing. For the purposes of equity, work booklets were sent out to students, so they could access the curriculum without being online.

School shutdown in Queensland has inadvertently led to questions regarding the legitimacy of creativity in a high-stakes assessment environment. When the QCAA removed one internal assessment, which defaulted to the IA3 (Internal Assessment 3) Examination (imaginative written), their justification was it 'is likely to be difficult to administer in the event of prolonged or distance learning'. This decision eliminated the creative unit and assessment item from the 2020 Year 12 English curriculum. QCAA claimed it was to 'support Queensland schools, teachers and students to manage learning and assessment during the evolving COVID -19 pandemic'. However, the implicit message that could be interpreted from this decision was that creativity is not essential in calculating a tertiary entrance score and reflects a broader conversation about the role of creativity in the curriculum.

Literary competitions have attempted to fulfil the creative void for Queensland Year 12 students in 2020. The University of Queensland and the Independent Education Union in conjunction with ETAQ (English Teachers Association of Queensland), amongst others, have offered literary competitions for students to express their creativity. Students may well prefer to submit their creative writing for a prize rather than a grade. However, this does not mean an intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity whereas extrinsic motivation, for example, writing for an exam, is detrimental to creativity.

This leads me back to our experience of creativity in online units. We discovered an online environment provided a space where students could write free from judgement in private channels within the platform. Many teachers in my faculty described experiences where students who did not participate in class and felt self-conscious were more than willing to express their creativity in this environment. One particular Year 10 Learning Support student who had not completed one English assignment since enrolling in the school in Year 7 was able to produce a Gothic short story which met the Year 10 achievement standard.

My colleagues triumphed under impossible circumstances and our students adapted quickly to a new normal. Our experiences challenged the QCAA position that creative assessment would 'be difficult' during 'distance learning'.

Discussion

In considering what can be learned from examining these narratives, it is important to reflect on their distinct nature, where each is individual and contextual. Each teacher was writing from a different location in Australia and therefore different lockdown conditions, except for the two Melbourne teachers who were subject to the same lockdown conditions. Writing from Melbourne, Joe and Steven were remote teaching but they were also having their movements heavily restricted, as they were not allowed to move more than 5 km from their homes and were experiencing a nightly curfew. While Emma, working in rural Victoria, was also teaching remotely, not all other

restrictions applied. Each of the teachers was also at a different stage of their career, including Emma as a graduate teacher and Anne as the Head of English at her school. These variations suggest that there is no singular narrative that can capture the experiences of English teachers during remote teaching and learning. Each narrative, as with each experience, is complex and nuanced. Yet despite this complexity, when these narratives are read together there is a continuity across them; there are commonalities that connect them. They assist in forming a collective narrative of the experiences of English teachers during remote teaching in Australia.

In considering the individual and the collective, this discussion is divided into two sections. The first section is based on the theme 'gains and losses,' and considers teachers' becoming in relation to these gains and losses. The second section discusses the process of writing in relation to the process of becoming. It argues for the meaning-making process that occurs during writing and how this is an important part of learning and developing.

Gains and losses

The notion of becoming that is used to frame the analysis of the narratives of Joe, Emma, Ellen, Steven and Anne for the purpose of understanding their everyday experience of remote teaching moves away from the idea of teacher development as a linear process of gaining skills and knowledge (Diamond, Parr, & Bulfin, 2017; Doecke, 2004; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Owen, 2020; Parr & Bulfin, 2015; Parr et al., 2020). Rather, becoming considers the difficult struggle as individuals consider and confront a variety of perspectives and tensions (Bakhtin, 1981). These tensions often relate to one's changing views, values and beliefs as external circumstances and perspectives challenge the status quo and cause one to reconsider, re-examine and possibly change one's practice and positions on teaching, learning and education.

The process of becoming, due to this tension, may be uncomfortable and difficult and can include distinct losses but often occurs in conjunction with something positive: gains. This process of loss and gain, Parr et al. (2020) write, is less about 'balancing the books' in terms of losses equalling gains and more about 'generative disquiet' (p. 249). Parr et al. (2020) consider that generative disquiet is an important condition for inquiry and becoming. From this perspective, struggle, even when it may seem debilitating, is repositioned as generative, where one is becoming something else, something different, rather than something less. In this section two broad examples of this process of becoming are considered: the becoming of the individual and the potential changes to subject English as a result of individual teachers reconsidering and re-evaluating the teaching and learning of English. Drawing on Joe's and Emma's narratives, we discuss the individual experience of becoming, while Steven's, Ellen's and Anne's narratives are utilised to discuss the potential changes to subject English. This division is somewhat superficial, as each narrative is both a narrative of individual becoming and relates to potential changes to subject English.

First, the individual experience of becoming. For Joe, his experience of remote teaching is that his job swelled to take up all potential space. Without the physical location of school and the movement from home to school, teaching English seeped into his interactions with his daughter and his evening activities. His identities as father, teacher and husband no longer had the distinctive spaces that they may have had prior to remote teaching; rather, he had to hold these identities simultaneously. In relation to his role as father, there is a blurring of his identities of father and teacher as he assists Ms8 through the difficulties of home learning. And there is a constant tension between the time he gives his daughter and his students. This leaves him considering his future career, where he is forming the view that he does not 'really want to be full-time' as he feels 'stretched'. The experience of remote teaching provides Joe with an opportunity to consider his identities and where his time is being spent, and results in a potential shift as he considers how his identity as an English teacher relates to his life and the potential need for change, for the wellbeing of himself and his family.

For Emma, much of her loss is connected to her anticipation and expectations of her graduate year. She found her graduate year to be anything but what she had expected. She reflects on missing out on 'the chaos of hosting a school excursion', 'school camp' and meeting other graduate teachers and parents. These are examples of various rites of passage Emma felt should be part of her process of becoming an English teacher. But rather than musing on the loss, she is able to reflect on what she has gained through the realisation that while her expectations have been left unfulfilled, she has gained a resilience and an ability to adapt that she may not have developed had her graduate year gone

as planned. She was able to bring the knowledge of online learning that her youth and her experience at university provided to her work. And she was able to reflect on her practice: she now knows that being an English teacher is more than marking essays or having 'happy learners'; it is about having 'mentally happy' learners and learners that are 'engaged, curious, and glad to be within [her] classroom'. On reflection, for Emma, rather than pessimism there is strength and determination.

Both Joe and Emma found that through reflecting on, not just telling, their experience they were able to gain perspective and insight into their experience and their identities as English teachers. For Ellen, Steven and Anne, their experiences during remote teaching and the reflections that arose led to them questioning subject English: where the focus of English curriculum is and should be; what the potentials for subject English post-pandemic are; and what change is already occurring.

Ellen, due to the stress of remote teaching and the subsequent removal by her school of many 'time-sucking' activities such as report writing, was able to consider the role of the school for the community, as a safe place as much as a place of learning. Reflecting on the quiet of the school yard and the mental health struggles of students and their families, Ellen recognises the work that she does with individuals to support them and is 'hopeful' that due to the pandemic, institutions such as schools can become more aware of their roles as places of care for communities.

Steven considers the role of busywork and assessment pre-pandemic, and how he felt this focus was increasingly taking away from schools and governments trusting students' and teachers' knowledge of learning. Perhaps, he muses, the pandemic can be a shifting-point for schools and governments to trust teachers and students, particularly in terms of student knowledge, development and assessment. Rather than systematic standardised assessment, he reflects, more time should be given for teachers to teach and students to learn, trusting teachers to understand the needs of students and their progress. He questions whether the institution of schooling is able to consider students as 'whole people' rather than measurable entities.

Anne finds that the pandemic highlights a potential threat to subject English, as the QCAA removes creativity from the internally assessed dimension of student assessment for Year 12. While Anne reports this was positioned by the QCAA as being due to the difficulty in administering the creative unit for assessment during distance learning, she considers the implicit message to be 'that creativity is not essential in calculating a tertiary entrance score' and states that she believes this 'reflects a broader conversation about the role of creativity in the curriculum'. Yet amongst this criticism of the QCAA and concern for the loss of creativity, Anne also uncovers a gain. Moving into the creative space left by the curriculum, Anne comments that 'The University of Queensland and the Independent Education Union in conjunction with ETAQ, amongst others, … offered literary competitions for students to express their creativity'. The response of these institutions to QCAA's decision suggests that there is a potential shift in the control of the government-endorsed curriculum, where rather than it holding a monopoly on determining what is valued in subject English, other organisations are forcibly voicing their positions and providing teachers and students with other opportunities and perspectives. In regards to the continued focus on creativity in her school despite QCAA's decision, Anne feels that she, her colleagues and others 'triumphed' in continuing to value creativity in the English classroom and 'challenged' the position and authority of the QCAA as well.

The 'triumph' over the QCAA's decision and the response of institutions also brings into question the space of schools. While the lockdown was difficult for many teachers and students, Steven and Anne also suggest that the space of schools may be hindering for teachers and students in some dimensions. For Steven, being in the physical school was aligned with busywork and accountability measures that took away from valuable learning opportunities and trust in students and teachers. Anne's account also suggests that the physical space of school may limit valuable learning opportunities. Extrapolating from the 'triumph' of teachers and institutions in continuing to provide space for students to be creative, there are questions to be asked about what forms of space encourage creativity. As Anne comments, many of her colleagues found that 'students who did not participate in class and felt self-conscious were more than willing to express their creativity' in the online environment. The assessment of the online space as more appropriate for some students to be creative raises questions about the need for a physical classroom for writing. There is an opportunity to consider how space is used and what spaces are used in the teaching of writing.

These narratives express not only loss but also

hope for the English teaching profession as each of these teachers demonstrates grit and determination in relation to teaching English their way. Each found cracks within the difficulties of remote teaching to continue to teach and even to expand the ways of teaching that they considered valuable. In reflecting on their time, they also raised questions about their identities as English teachers and important questions about the roles of schools and subject English in students' lives. As the experiences of Joe, Emma, Steven, Ellen and Anne illustrate, loss and gain are important conditions for becoming, as it is in the resulting generative disquiet that inquiry, difference and change occurs.

Meaning-making through storying

In the final section of this discussion, we reflect on the process of writing: where writing informs and contributes to teacher development. We argue that storying is essential to English teachers' work, particularly during struggle, as a way to reflect on difficulties and make meaning of these difficulties (Doecke, 2015; Owen, 2020; Parr et al., 2020; Smith & Wrigley, 2012).

Cavarero (2020) wrote, 'life cannot be lived like a story, because the story always comes afterwards, it results; it is unforeseeable and uncontrollable, just like life' (p. 3). The point raised here is that the story is not a recollection of events but rather a process that 'reveals … meaning' (p. 3) that is unknown before the storying process. Joe, Emma, Ellen, Steven and Anne developed a meaning that was not completely known before they began to write. It was in the process of writing, in reflecting on their experience, that they engaged in meaning-making. Both Ellen and Joe explicitly discussed the process of writing about their experience with Ceridwen. Before submitting, Ellen sent the following message:

> Hi Ceridwen – so sorry that I haven't got to this. To be honest – it has been a difficult time to think-write about and I have been meaning to write and say this to you.

She was able to put words to this difficulty in her narrative, for example through the image of 'fog'. Joe's reluctance was different from Ellen's; he felt 'stretched thin' by the end of the year, but also, he was 'reticent, and not for the usual reason – ridiculous busyness – but also because [he] fe[lt] like [he] did a shit job of teaching online'. He, however, felt that perhaps his experience 'would be worthwhile including'. In a situation where he felt confined, he was hesitant in sharing his story because of how revealing it might be – that it would not capture how he views himself as an English teacher because he was not able to teach his way during remote teaching. However, he also felt that his narrative was important to write and tell. Joe's comments and Ellen's observations of the difficulties are suggestive of an awareness of the potential importance of writing about difficult experiences: that in the process of writing and reflecting, a different meaning is able to develop. This process is important for wellbeing and for developing as an English teacher (Doecke, 2015).

The experience of the English teachers sharing their narratives in this article reflects a broader field of research that examines the power of writing for development (Doecke, 2015; Owen, 2020; Parr et al., 2020; Smith & Wrigley, 2012; Whitney, 2008). Adding to this research, the narratives from Joe, Emma, Ellen, Steven and Anne show how writing may be an important part of self-care, in which reflection can lead to a new perspective on struggle and provide space for the struggle to be considered.

Conclusion

This article has included the narratives of five Australian English teachers reflecting on their experiences of teaching during remote schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the framework of Cavarero's (2000) 'who' and 'what' stories, the narratives form a collective story of English teaching as well as presenting the nuance of individual everyday experiences.

Joe's, Emma's, Steven's, Ellen's and Anne's narratives suggest that the process of becoming is multidimensional, a struggle and layered. As Parr et al. (2020) identify, teachers' narratives illustrate that 'becoming can be uncomfortable, uncertain and isolating, as well as, and often simultaneously, challenging, engaging and rewarding' (p. 249). While there is not a certificate of completion at the end of the writing process as there would be from a formal professional development session, this approach to engaging with one's practice and learning from this engagement is equally, if not more, valuable for one's development (Doecke & Parr, 2005).

Underlying the approach to teachers' experience taken in this article is the understanding that English teachers may work as individuals but they are also part of a collective; they are members of a profession. As such, their individual stories and the collective story are important in understanding English teachers' everyday

experience. The individual narratives presented here contribute to the collective narrative of the English teaching profession. This collective narrative is formed by the voices of individual English teachers and potentially moves across state and country boundaries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers of English around the world have taught remotely; the voices of these Australian English teachers add to the collective story of this, a global profession (Chamberlain, 2020; Evans et al. 2020).

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In the time of COVID

English Teacher Education in the Time of COVID: Australian Teacher Educators Share Their Experiences

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Abstract: Many studies have reported the disruption and anxiety associated with initial teacher education programs across the world lurching in and out of online and remote teaching because of COVID-19 related lockdowns. Few studies, however, have homed in on the day-to-day experiences of teacher educators in particular disciplinary specialisms or 'methods', or explored how these disciplinary contexts shaped the experience of teaching in the time of COVID-19. This essay presents extended autobiographical accounts of four English teacher educators from different universities on the east coast of Australia, who taught English methods during lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. The study affirms the uniqueness of their experiences, but also recognises four key dimensions of the English teacher educators' work: relational work; curriculum and pedagogical work; identity work; and professional learning. The study has implications for how English teacher education responds to the challenges of teaching during and beyond the pandemic.

Introduction

> There is no return to normal, the new 'normal' will have to be constructed on the ruins of our old lives, or we will find ourselves in a new barbarism whose signs are already clearly discernible. It will not be enough to treat the epidemic as an unfortunate accident, to get rid of its consequences and return to the smooth functioning of the old way of doing things …
>
> (Slajov Žižek, 2020, *Pandemic! COVID-19 shakes the world*, p. 3)

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the rapidly proliferating COVID-19 virus to be a pandemic. Since that time, according to UNESCO, more than 1.5 billion school-aged children – that's more than 90% of enrolled students across the world – have been affected by partial or full school closures, forcing them to learn in remote or online modes (UNESCO, 2020). Institutions and systems were equally unprepared. Established practices and structures were radically disrupted. The words 'crisis', 'shock', 'traumatic' and 'unprecedented' have described the consequences for students, teachers, school leaders and institutions alike.

The disruption was experienced unevenly both within countries and across the world because of the existing inequities in social and educational systems (Sahlberg, 2021). While better-resourced settings supported creative problem-solving and innovation to ameliorate the disruptions, more vulnerable systems, schools and people felt their disadvantage

more acutely (United Nations, 2020). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, First Nations peoples, students living in remote areas, students with disabilities and those whose home language was not the dominant one in their national setting were amongst the most deeply affected. The literature widely acknowledges that although COVID-19 exacerbated existing social and educational inequities, it did not create them. Žižek (2020) argues that COVID-19 showed us the 'barbarism' of educational and political systems, which knew about this inequity and did little to address it.

And what of teacher education? Like schools, teacher education institutions across the world were radically disrupted by lockdowns and COVID-19 closures. Teacher education leaders and teams had no choice than to transform, sometimes overnight, all of their educational spaces, pedagogies and curriculum so that pre-service teachers could continue their learning online. The enormity of the disruption is clear when we appreciate that every decision and adaptation required consideration of not only the needs of diverse pre-service students and their teacher educator colleagues, but also the requirements of school partners and systems, tertiary institutions, professional associations and accreditation authorities (Flores & Gago, 2020).

From early in 2020, studies emerged in which teacher educators from different countries and institutions shared their stories of pivoting to online teacher education in different national settings: e.g., Australia (Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020; Ziebell, Acquaro, Pearn & Seah, 2020); England (la Velle, Newman, Montgomery, & Hyatt, 2020); Hong Kong (Moorhouse, 2020); Portugal (Flores & Gago, 2020); and the U.S. (Quezada, Talbot, & Quezada-Parker, 2020). Some studies analysed experiences across the diverse geopolitical world – Carrillo and Flores (2020), Ellis, Steadman and Mao (2020) – and special issues of international journals have focused exclusively on teacher education in the time of COVID-19: e.g., the UK-based *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4) and the *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4).

These teacher education studies typically detail the complex ways in which technology and unfamiliar spaces mediated new relations between lecturer and pre-service student, between student and student, and between school and student. They point out that the relational dimensions of teacher educators' work have become ever more crucial under changed and strained conditions, and that some teacher educators have responded by learning new skills and developing their identities in unanticipated ways. Ellis et al. (2020) emphasise 'the responsibilities all [teacher] educators [felt] for their students', and how these responsibilities were heightened by an 'almost existential anxiety' (p. 560). They speculate about whether some enduring change for the better might come from all this anxiety. Only briefly, though, do these studies home in on the day-to-day experiences of teacher educators in particular disciplinary specialisations or 'methods', or explore how these disciplinary contexts shaped their particular COVID-19 experience, for good or ill.

This essay picks up from where the general teacher education literature leaves off by focusing on a particular discipline: *English* teacher education. It inquires into the experiences of four English teacher educators who taught English methods to pre-service teachers at four universities on the east coast of Australia during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and beyond.

Methodology

The inquiry is enacted through the presentation of four autobiographical narratives (Rosen, 1998; see also Parr & Doecke, 2012) written by teacher educators in response to an invitation from the Australian Association of the Teaching of English. The invitation read: 'Tell us a story about your experience as an English teacher educator during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Four teacher educators – Alex from Victoria, Kelli from Queensland, Janet from New South Wales, and Fleur from Victoria – wrote contrasting narratives in which they reflected on their practices, emotions and professional identities during and after periods of lockdown.

In bringing together these four narratives in a single essay, our intention is not didactic. This is not a collection of 'best practices' of how English teacher educators *should* have responded to the disruptions to their programs caused by the pandemic. Rather, the essay provides contrasting windows into how four English teacher educators teaching pre-service teachers across the east coast of Australia responded to COVID-19 lockdowns and institutional closures, and what they have learned from the experience. Along the way, there are some examples of creative problem-solving and innovations embedded in the narratives, which readers might find helpful, but this was not the main purpose of the essay.

Alex, Kelli, Janet, and Fleur all hold leadership

positions in specialist initial teacher education subjects/units that are focused on preparing the next generation of English teachers. Their narratives are juxtaposed, one after the other, with the intention that readers will engage with each narrative both on its own terms and in dialogic relationship with the others (Parr & Doecke, 2012). First, Alex shares some of his frustrations at teaching with the celebrated 'affordances' of online English teacher education and promises of 'digital forms of sociality'. He wonders if they could ever make up for the lost opportunities to develop trusting relationships in face-to-face education. Then Kelli, a well-known specialist in online teaching and learning, recalls 'an online teaching fail' after returning from long service leave, where almost everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Third, in a narrative enriched with literary allusions, Janet muses about her transformation into a 'prickly porcupine' along with the shift to remote learning, but emerges from the experience a nimbler teacher educator, more comfortable with uncertainty in 2021. Finally, Fleur narrates her intense and sometimes stressful professional learning journey over the same period, critically ruminating over gains and losses for herself, her students and the English education program in which she teaches.

The essay concludes with a brief discussion of some of the key issues about teacher education in the time of COVID-19 that emerge through the narratives. It considers whether English teacher education in Australia can avoid returning to what Žižek ironically refers to as 'the smooth functioning of the old way of doing things' before the pandemic. We begin with Alex's narrative.

The narratives

'They still didn't really know me and I didn't know them' (Alex)

'Hi Alex. My name is Sarah and I am in your Tuesday workshop.'

Email beginnings like this became common throughout 2020 as students in my English Method class reached out. On first glance, there is nothing remarkable here: just another student making contact with their method tutor. However, the frequency of emails starting in this way, including from students who had been in my classes for almost a year, was surprising. They still didn't really know me and I didn't know them. Despite all of the time spent learning together, a connection was missing.

A 'normal' year of relational work with my pre-service English teachers involves two semesters of at least 36 direct contact hours. These hours would usually include lectures (delivered face-to-face with interaction and participation encouraged), and workshops (with students spending much of their time working in small groups as I 'rove' around the room). There would be opportunities to observe students as they completed teaching placements, meeting with them in schools before and after their teaching, to engage in Freirean notions of praxis – reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1972). Add to this the corridor conversations, standing in line together waiting for coffee, and occasions for connecting in other course subjects, and we can see an abundance of the types of socially and physically close contact that I've always believed are necessary for developing trusting relationships that can survive well beyond students' time at university.

The shift to online learning which began in early 2020 challenged all of this. As COVID took hold in Melbourne, and lockdowns began, face-to-face teaching ceased and we introduced a plethora of digital technologies and learning tools to continue our programs. We turned to Zoom for lectures and workshops. We met in breakout rooms to discuss ideas. We completed readings asynchronously, sometimes sharing annotations through software like Perusall. Lecturers became small faces in the corner of PowerPoint slides. Online quizzes became commonplace. Face-to-face discussion moved to digital discussion boards. Our relational worlds were transformed.

In some ways, we had become closer than ever, with students literally looking into the inner workings of my home. But the reality was that a gulf had opened up, one that would become wider as the year unfolded. The opportunities for genuine connection, already greatly hindered by decades of encroaching discourses of neoliberal managerialism in teacher education, were limited even further.

For many pre-service English teachers, their time of study is a period of great anxiety. Stressors become magnified as they juggle the expectations of several 'masters': subject coordinators, course requirements, university regulations, teacher mentors, year level coordinators, school principals, parents and students, all vie for their attention. These pre-service teachers often reach out to their method leaders. 'Can we have

a chat after class?' 'Have you got a minute to talk?' 'Can you help me with this unit plan?' These are the calls for help that are more easily made, and answered, when a trusting relationship is in place.

The move to online learning has meant that the personal has been sidelined for the possible. And amongst all this disruption, I was assured by digital learning leaders that the affordances of these new technologies meant that we wouldn't skip a beat. Twelve months since our first total shift to embrace these digital forms of sociality and I wonder whether this term 'affordance' has become just another example of doublespeak, a term repeated so many times, and in such vague ways, that it obscures any meaning.

When the Collins English dictionary announced the 2020 Word of the Year to be 'Lockdown', they must have under-represented educators in the voters they sampled. Teachers would surely have voted for 'affordances' as their Word of the Year, since they are apparently blessed with infinite affordances associated with websites, apps, and platforms. The term 'affordance' has its origins in the verb 'to afford' and was coined by American psychologist James J. Gibson just fifty years ago. Using the relationship between animals and their environment to explain the term, Gibson (1979) stated: 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill' (p. 127). More recently, sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001) has applied this thinking around affordances to examine how technology provides possibilities for action, which are shaping sociality. His main argument is that all artefacts, including technologies, 'set limits on what it is possible to do with, around, or via the artefact' (p. 453). The digital technologies that have become so ubiquitous in educational contexts are both shaped by and shaping of the practices of humans, and the interactions with, around and through them. And, as Hutchby reminds us, all technologies have limits. Well, yes.

We spend so much of our time with our students helping them understand the role that language plays in mediating human relationships. We draw on the thinking of Vygotsky, Halliday, Barnes and others to emphasise the part that language will play in supporting their teaching and professional learning. Yet, the shift to training teachers online has raised many questions about the scope for teacher educators to communicate this message. I often wondered whether the experience of teaching English Method in the time of COVID trespassed into 'do as I say, not as I do' rhetoric.

There is an abundance of literature that explores the fundamental role teacher education has in shaping processes of 'being' and 'becoming' associated with English teacher identities. I am reminded here of the reflections of Parr, Bulfin, Diamond, Wood and Owen (2020), who in their investigation of the impact of standards-based reforms on teacher education argue that writing, reflection and dialogue are key enablers through which processes of ideological becoming are activated and sustained. I certainly agree that the act of writing about the past twelve months for this narrative has led me to reflect on my identity as an English teacher educator. I've even been prompted to question the very activities that I have planned for next week's online English Method workshops. But what of dialogue? How is it impacted by the digital interface that has dominated teacher education of late? And what will be the long-term impact on those relational literacies that enable the sharing of knowledge and meaning-making beyond the pre-service years?

I think I'll pose this question to my English Method students in their next Kahoot.

Figure 1. Alex's home 'office' and online classroom

* * * * *

'The webcam was the least of my problems' (Kelli)

I looked on from the distance of my long service leave while my English curriculum colleagues endured the confronting ordeal of transitioning, overnight, all of their on-campus class materials into digital format because of the coronavirus pandemic. I had dodged that mother of a bullet, having begun five months of long service leave in semester one, 2020. While on leave, I continued to read my colleagues' tweets. I felt their struggles and their wins. But I had my own challenges to contend with at home. I was experiencing

home-based learning as a parent. I even vlogged and blogged about it.

Toward the end of my long service leave, I guess part of me was mentally preparing for teaching online in semester two. I figured I'd do OK. Online teaching was my jam, and if I could just source a decent webcam for my home PC, I thought, the jump into the virtual space should come naturally.

In the weeks leading up to Semester 2, my university in Queensland announced that students were to return to campus, but lecturers were also required to provide online options for any students wishing or needing to stay home. I mentally calculated the invisible workload increase. Everything would need to be prepared twice, and with only a few weeks' notice. Still, the prospect of having half of the teaching online was appealing to me despite the increased workload. I had gotten used to my own fence line, my 'home pants', the rhythm of the day in my own back yard. Friends and family nearby had gotten used to having me around the suburb more, not losing me for most of the week to on-campus work near the city. Half-at-home was better than none-at-home. As long as I could find a quality webcam.

But on that day, on the first day of Semester 2 classes, the webcam quality was the least of my problems. It began with a comedy of errors leading up to that online workshop. First, my university informed me that they had no webcams to spare. Then I found that local stores were all sold out of affordable equipment. I decided to purchase a very expensive webcam anyway, only to find that the expensive webcam would not work with my older computer without disabling the microphone. The comedy crescendoed one hour before the workshop when our home internet went down. And when that happened … I had to think quickly.

I realised in that moment I was rusty – I hadn't practised tethering my phone to my tablet as an internet hotspot. I was hamstrung. Having planned to share my desktop screen, I suddenly couldn't see a way to share it without the wifi connected. In that moment, I was confused. I noticed my phone battery was low, but hopefully charged enough to make it through an hour and a half. I decided to run the virtual class via the Zoom app on my phone, using my phone data for connectivity, with fingers crossed that the recording would work.

In the panic of changing all the technology at the last minute, I'd missed my window to check my hair and put on some make-up. I wasn't going for the 'I just woke up like this' kind of look, just the 'help your eyes and mouth stand out to increase expression on camera' kind. I knew that like an actor on a stage, a teacher on a screen needs to be framed well to draw the right focus. But as I balanced my phone precariously on a stack of books, I knew I'd lost my chance this time to get the angles right …

After the online workshop I walked up the backyard stairs of my house, still giddy with adrenaline. I paused to take a selfie. It was cute and totally Instagram worthy, with an authentic adrenaline-fuelled glow that maybe made the pain of the online teaching fail worthwhile. The planned technology for the class might have been a bust, but now I had epic social media content, which I could talk about next week with my English curriculum students (amongst others). So how could I complain? I was finally sharing the real COVID teaching experience and, as a silver lining, had been brought entirely back down to ground.

Figure 2. Kelli's adrenaline-fuelled selfie

* * * * *

'And King Hamlet's Ghost zoomed in …' (Janet)

I have photos of my English teacher education students from Week 1 2020. Seated close together in table clusters, they are smiling, relaxed and anticipating the year ahead. Who could have known then what the year ahead would involve? One week later they were scrambling to set up home offices in busy family spaces, closed-in verandahs and cupboards under the

stairs à la Harry Potter … and I was certainly uncertain.

Romantic poet John Keats gives us many wonderful things on which to reflect as English teacher educators: a Grecian urn; a melodist for 'ever piping songs for ever new'; a nightingale that '[s]ingest of summer in full-throated ease'… He also offers the beautifully evocative concept of 'negative capabilities', which he describes as 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats, 1817). It is this concept of 'negative capabilities' that I turned to in order to re-frame my teaching during the shift to remote learning … and it is a concept that continues to resonate, reminding me that it is perfectly OK to harbour mysteries and doubts about my English teaching in these uncertain times.

Teaching for me has always meant creative pedagogy, student engagement, and the cycle of influence (Manuel, 2003), whereby I share my love of English with my students. How then to achieve this in the year of Zoom? How to know what to retain, what to adapt, and what to cast off? English has been described as a 'pedagogical porcupine' (Newton Scott as cited in Woods, 1990, p. 50), but in so many ways COVID highlighted not the prickliness of our teaching area but rather its capacity to be dynamic, adaptable, and, like the porcupine's multiple quills, its capacity to reach into new territories and ways of doing with confidence borne from uncertainty. It's this story I share.

So, how to model creative pedagogy within the limits of the square, often frozen, digital meeting space? To my surprise the students eschewed independent learning in favour of the connections that a Zoom tutorial could facilitate. They happily inhabited breakout rooms for tutorials and lingered at the end to share cute dogs, babies and the books they were reading. I confess that several weeks into the online pivot a prickly porcupine might have been an apt description for me, as I struggled to deal with the vagaries of online teaching and learning. It wasn't that I craved the certainty of fact and reason, but I did long for some kind of familiar rhythm to my teaching that would allow me to recognise myself as an English teacher educator.

Over time, this rhythm and this recognition began to emerge. I created optional exit points in tutorials, so students who were also parents/carers could hand over computers to school-aged children or yield the dining table/bandwidth/computer to a partner or housemate. I looked to crazy hat days to define key moments in our textual studies, or just to lighten the mood. Even drama texts could be brought to life in Zoom. Table readings replaced blocked readings, Shakespearean shared lines could be shared across the digital divide and, with careful planning, the 'conscience alley' drama strategy still worked albeit without the eponymous alley.

Creativity remained central to the teaching and learning. It enlivened the virtual Zoom backgrounds we created as visual representations of Tomas Transtromer's poem 'Blue House'. It underpinned the choice of symbolic objects we held aloft in our adaptation of the 'mystery box' characterisation strategy, and the multimodal texts we created by s/mashing together famous poems, memes, and prose first lines in outrageously short time frames. As anxiety about the new eased, I loosened the reins and let my students be leaders of learning in breakout rooms. I learned again that learning can be messy and that, as a reflexive teacher, the best thing I could offer my

Figure 3. An assembled image of Janet's tutorial screen view

students was to be humble and acknowledge that I will always be learning to be a better English teacher.

Reflecting on the year that was, I am keenly aware of what a big decision it is to become a teacher, and of the passion for English that sustained my students through that challenging period. In some ways online teaching made it that much harder to prepare my students for their work as classroom teachers. Proxemics, gaze, and non-verbal communication strategies couldn't be modelled. The dance of 'think, pair, share' looked different on a screen. And the physicality of performance and texts was absent. I grieved the loss of nuanced individual interactions that usually shape my work as a teacher educator, and I never found a way to transfer fully my capacity to 'read' the classroom.

But in other ways the shift was deeply reassuring. I am thrilled that over 30 years after I started teaching (and class of 1984 Brad Mitchell, Stephen King, Dot Panaretos and Annette Lamont, I wonder if you're reading this!) I was able to bring new territory and new ways of doing English to the mysteries and doubts of 2020. Like so many English teachers, I sought to bring what I call a 'nimbleness of gaze' to my pedagogy and resource selection (Dutton, 2017). English teacher education was sufficiently dynamic and flexible to re-shape itself to suit my new context. By year's end there was nothing prickly, just familiar things re-worked and the marvellous anticipation of the unexpected.

At the start of 2021, I took photos of my classes again, to help me learn students' names and to record for them their first day of being an English teacher. I am now teaching in blended mode. For every class the students are clustered in a socially distanced way around a computer screen, as they seek to make Zoom students feel included. It requires nimbleness on everyone's part to navigate different time zones, settings and technologies. There are familiar rhythms, yet still some uncertainty. There's also an ever-present creative spark that could ignite anywhere. When I recently witnessed my students' tableaux in which an overseas-based King Hamlet's Ghost rose from the centrally positioned computer, I knew we had left behind any danger of 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'.

* * * * *

'I wonder about English teacher education post-COVID' (Fleur)

The sequence of units titled *English Education in the Secondary Years* (EESY) at my university have traditionally been a face-to-face on-campus experience. Before 2020, I had taught EESY with a variety of English teachers and teacher educators, enacting a pedagogy that emphasised small-group work, dialogic inquiry, exploratory talk, collaborative writing and building community among the pre-service English teachers.

In 2020 I was scheduled to teach EESY with my colleague Dr Scott Bulfin. As warnings of the approaching coronavirus increased in intensity, and the prospect of online learning loomed, Scott and I questioned how we were going to translate this dialogic experience into the medium of Zoom. The sensation at the time was of walking a quickly shifting landscape as university administrators adapted to almost daily changes in health and policy advice. Following a delayed start to classes, some educators had one day of face-to-face teaching before the university announced by the end of that first day that all educational offerings were going online. Faculty were granted a four-day reprieve to adapt their units for online learning. We never met our students face-to-face. We would get to know them through the media of their writing and a Zoom screen.

Scott and I re-planned and re-fitted teaching that had been carefully designed for classroom learning. Transposing what we had traditionally done in classrooms into the medium of Zoom meetings became an intense journey of professional learning. We threw ourselves into this work. Each week demanded long planning sessions, also on Zoom, as Scott and I combed through our teaching repertoire and re-imagined our workshops for an online experience. The students were on the whole philosophical about the necessity of remote learning. Everyone seemed to understand that the social isolation we were all obliged to experience was to protect the vulnerable and keep the community safe. The students 'rolled with it' and this proved to be a huge advantage as I learnt on the job about breakout rooms, screen sharing, recording online lectures, and the affordances of the chat function for plenary discussion.

In those first weeks both Zoom and my home internet connection proved temperamental. Early workshops saw me logged out of my own classes on several occasions. I well recall these stressful weeks, as I struggled to wrangle the technology while holding fast to our ideals of exploratory talk and dialogic teaching. We were determined not to succumb to a model of education that sees the teacher's role as

simply transmitting information. Instead, we planned around opportunities for students to work in small groups, with the Zoom breakout room functioning like a round-table group in class.

Autumn deepened into winter, and COVID case numbers in Melbourne were climbing. Both my partner and I were working from home, while my son was doing Grade 6 from the kitchen table and a laptop. Like so many families in the Melbourne lockdown, we were having to negotiate living in each other's pockets, with the kitchen table functioning as classroom, office, and lunchroom. As the person running lessons for in excess of 30 students at a time on Zoom, I had commandeered a small desk in the bedroom as out of the way of foot traffic. For months, I spent almost every hour out of the 24 in that space, working, reading, or sleeping. I developed an acute case of office envy for colleagues whose bookshelves formed the backdrop to their Zoom calls.

Fortunately, there were positives that emerged from the wholesale disruption. For example, the re-scheduling of our students' professional placement experiences stimulated valuable re-thinking of our EESY program. One of the most positive outcomes to emerge from the challenges of our year of online teaching came in response to these rescheduled placements. We needed to come up with a new program for the weeks some students were still with us while others were teaching online in schools. Our English education teaching team have a love of Young Adult Literature (YAL) and in the past we had tried several times to integrate the topic of teaching YAL into EESY units, with mixed success. The main barrier had consistently been students feeling unable to read a YAL novel in the week we usually allotted to this task. They needed more time and more scaffolding for thinking pedagogically about YAL. Having three weeks to fill with material that could not be assessed (because only some students would be present), we devised a teaching sequence about using YAL in the secondary classroom. This involved a roadmap for teaching a YAL text, pacing the reading of the novel against different phases of a novel study. The students got three weeks instead of one to read a YA novel in small groups and the uptake of this was much stronger than in years past. The feedback on this 'mini unit' on teaching YAL was positive. We could thank COVID for allowing us to develop valuable resources that we could carry forward in our teaching beyond 2020.

Taking the teaching of EESY home has necessitated some hard thinking about what we prioritise in English teacher education. My colleagues and I are determined to build in support and flexibility to enable students to succeed, even in the confines of Zoom and learning management systems. And yet we eschewed quizzes and other popular tools of online learning that are often promoted as 'interactive'. We were more concerned in any online learning to retain the special place of interpretation in subject English and the importance of interpretive communities than to ensure students remember a discrete set of facts. In 2021, we are required to teach EESY as a 'hybrid' model of education, with lectures and some workshops online, while other workshops are face-to-face. The advice now is to plan for online teaching first, and then adapt from that to face-to-face classes. What comes through strongly from the 2020 experience, whether we're teaching online or face-to-face or both, is the enduring importance of exploratory talk and a sense of connection with our students, even when mediated by screens. Perhaps especially when mediated by screens.

Figure 4. Fleur's work-from-home set up during the second lockdown in Melbourne, featuring a teetering pile of books.

The return to face-to-face classes on campus this year has been a relief on one level, while on another, I find myself faced with new dilemmas. I wonder about English teacher education post-COVID, and how teachers and students will understand their roles. We have had, for example, increased numbers of students asking for a recording of online workshops

in lieu of attending them. Does this suggest that coursework is now akin to media 'content', and something that should be available 'on demand'? Where does this leave the learning process in English as a dialogic encounter with other voices, other minds, a conversation which *demands* something of us and in which we are each involved? The 'call of stories' (Coles, 1989) is something that migrates across media and can be usefully employed in online learning. However, it is worth remembering that call is also the call of the other, and our ethical relation to others, something that we have been asked to live by as we try to control the spread of a deadly virus.

Conclusions

The narratives of Alex, Kelli, Janet and Fleur are just four of the 'numberless' educational stories being told and retold, framed and reframed, as teacher education across the world continues to struggle with the ongoing disruption and trauma of the pandemic. These four English teacher educator authors are by turns cautious and assertive, impatient and respectful, sombre and upbeat, critical and creative, funny and serious. Using a range of narrative strategies they show, up close, the uncertainty in teacher education but also the resilience of teacher educators that recent research has highlighted. There is a particularity to their stories, a situated uniqueness to their voices (Cavarero, 2000). Their stories invite readers into a professional and personal dialogue with them.

As part of that dialogue, English teacher educator readers cannot help but recognise familiar details – we see ourselves, our struggles, our frustrations, our small wins. We can relate to aspects of their experiences. There are four dimensions of English teacher educators' work woven through the different narratives – relational work, curriculum and pedagogy work, identity work, and professional learning – which we briefly summarise below.

Relational work

Each narrative, in its own way, reinforces the importance and nuances of professional relationships in English pre-service teacher education. Despite the emergence of some valuable pedagogical innovations, the narratives share a concern that the pandemic is contributing to a 'new normal' where the relational work of English teacher education is felt to be curtailed. There is also a wondering about what this curtailment means for graduate English teachers entering the workforce.

Curriculum and pedagogical work

Sprinkled throughout the narratives are some delightfully engaging, creative, sometimes idiosyncratic resources or technology-mediated teaching practices spawned through the authors' encounters with unfamiliar or unexpected challenges. It is worth observing at this point that these four teacher educators were privileged to be working in contexts where they and their students had access to technology and resources, which could facilitate these creative practices.

Identity work

Prompted by the intense and stressful experience of negotiating a range of educational tensions and compromises in the time of COVID-19, the narrative writers inquire into, affirm or modify both their educational philosophies and their senses of themselves as English teacher educators. There is a sense in their narratives that this intensity and stress can potentially enrich teacher educators' crucial identity work and becoming (Parr et al., 2020), although it seems there were times when the stress became almost overwhelming for them.

Professional learning

For some authors, the experience of teaching during the pandemic can be framed as a destabilising but rich professional learning journey. The authors' encounters with challenge and anxiety are not just problems to solve, but opportunities for professional learning and dialogue – about technology and pedagogy, about English and language teaching, and about teacher education. With that learning came opportunities for growth, development and new knowledge.

One of these four dimensions that deserves more space to tease out here is the authors' identity work. Ellis et al. (2020) observed in their transnational study in the early months of COVID-19 that teacher educators across the world were feeling an abiding sense of 'responsibility' toward their students, along with heightened anxiety about that responsibility. Stress, struggle and/or discomfort are never far from the surface of the four narratives in our essay. We see this in responses to sustained confinement (within the four sides of a screen or the four walls of a house or room), in grappling with intensified workloads and rapid policy changes, and in the negotiation of meaningful English teacher education when the circumstances often seemed to militate against this.

For most authors, though, there is a satisfying

sense of achievement evident by the end of their narrative. Or perhaps it is just relief. Having endured a precarious and challenging 2020, there is some optimism – optimism that at least as far as these four English teacher educators in Australia are concerned, the pandemic is in no danger of being forgotten as 'an unfortunate accident'. Through essays such as this, the teacher educators' resilience and forbearance under acutely challenging circumstances will not be forgotten.

The knowledge that the teacher educators have drawn from their teaching experiences, and from writing about those experiences, is valuable and worth celebrating. Occasionally, that knowledge affirms some important 'old ways of doing things' that were/are beyond the scope of remote or online learning. For example, most narratives express concerns about the curtailment, during periods of lockdown, of opportunities to build rich professional relationships through regular in-person and informal social interaction. Reflecting on the experience of teaching during the pandemic generated rich insights into the experience of curtailed agency. This too is knowledge that should not be forgotten. Similarly, the new possibilities, knowledge, and discourses that the experience of COVID-19 has helped to generate for English teacher educators will surely not be forgotten.

In the context of this essay, the Žižek epigraph can be read as a call to English teacher educators across the world to engage in a professional dialogue about the experience of teaching through the pandemic. It is a call to resist the seductive lure of a 'return to normal' rhetoric. One important dimension of teacher education that the narratives do not mention is the deep social and educational inequities, exacerbated by the pandemic, which this essay began by observing. It is important to acknowledge that the authors of the narratives (and their students) appeared to be operating within contexts that were better resourced to deal with the pandemic than many of the schools or social institutions that their pre-service teachers will work in when they graduate as teachers. How will the experiences of English teachers who are graduating in resource-rich institutions during the pandemic prepare them for the challenges of teaching in low-SES schools and communities? This is one of many questions that English teacher educators, like the authors of these narratives, are no doubt reflecting on as part of the professional dialogue and learning prompted by the pandemic.

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Sharing pre-service

Pre-service Teacher Voices: Sharing Experiences in Victoria and Queensland

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Abstract: In this paper four pre-service teachers share narrative responses to the phenomenon of studying Education degrees at Australian universities during periods of lockdown following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The narratives serve to capture a variety of experiences and emotions of pre-service teachers, with two narratives reflecting the context of studying during lockdown in Victoria and another two reflecting the context of studying during lockdown in Queensland.

Introduction to the narratives

This paper collects narrative responses from four pre-service teachers who were studying various Education degrees in Australian universities in 2020. All of these pre-service teachers had enrolled in their degrees prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, expecting to complete their degrees under the conditions of either attending university on campus, or attending in blended online/on-campus mode with physical access to their usual outside worlds, including campus facilities. All of the narratives are responses to a common prompt: 'Tell us a story about your experience as a pre-service English teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic'.

The narratives in this paper are written by students in Masters-level Education degrees. This means that they either had already completed a Bachelor-level degree and opted to return to university for further study to gain qualifications to work as a professional teacher, or were completing their Education degrees alongside a Bachelor degree. The two pre-service teachers from Victoria (Sophie Ioannidis and Danny Sydor) undertook practicum under lockdown conditions, teaching their students and liaising with colleagues online, whereas the two pre-service teachers from Queensland (Patrick Lockyer and Bianca Snodgrass) only undertook their coursework studies under lockdown, with their university postponing practicum to a later semester in their degree. While the pre-service teachers in Queensland were able to return to on-campus learning in Brisbane where they were located in their second semester of 2020, the pre-service students in Victoria would remain in lockdown until after the end of second semester 2020, due to more extensive restrictions where they were located in Melbourne.

The stance taken on authorship of the paper is that the students who have contributed the narratives are acknowledged as the authors. As teachers of these students we offer only this brief introduction to their voices, to provide some cultural and institutional context for the record.

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Ceridwen Owen, Monash University

Narrative 1: Patrick Lockyer

I made the decision to commence pre-service teacher studies after sustaining a significant knee injury in my workplace. My full-time job since I was eighteen had been working as a soldier and as an officer in the Australian Army, so minor injuries were not a foreign experience to me. However, I knew from the moment I felt the unusual pop and crack behind my kneecap that this time was going to be different. While sitting in the regimental aid post thinking about what my future military career was going to look like with a 'dicky' knee, I was revisited by the memory of a long-forgotten goal I thought I had shelved many years ago. What had originally inspired me to enlist in the Army was the desire to save enough money to afford to go to university and become a teacher. 'Well,' I told myself, 'why not now?'.

In 2020 I commenced my first semester of a Master of Teaching (Secondary) through Queensland University of Technology. I was (and still am) in the Army, so a course with a part-time, distance mode of study was the most practical choice; this proved fortuitous when COVID struck, as I wasn't thrown for a loop by the move to online learning. Even more fortuitous was that my very first subject was titled *Supporting Innovative Pedagogy with Digital Technologies*. Looking back, I don't think I could have been better set-up to commence my studies considering the circumstances. As a pre-service teacher, COVID restrictions provided me perhaps the most authentic environment to start thinking about online teaching and digital pedagogies.

Fast forward to semester 2, and I found myself required to design an inquiry project for year 9 or 10 English students using project based learning (PBL) as the pedagogical framework. While searching for inspiration for an engaging project idea, I received a phone call from an ex-Army colleague who I had studied literature with at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). He was going through a hard time since returning from an overseas deployment and was struggling with the COVID restrictions, which had impacted his ability to access face-to-face mental health support. In my efforts to keep the conversation going, and to empathise with my friend, I reminded him of a time when I had been brought low during our first year of undergraduate studies, which I humorously observed had coincided with a unit of study on existentialism. Eventually, we found ourselves reminiscing more fondly on our studies of Romantic poetry under one of our favourite lecturers. I don't know whether it was the memories of the texts, or of our simpler days as undergrads, I think it was probably both, but I noticed a considerable improvement in my friend's attitude. Suddenly, I had found my inspiration for the inquiry project.

My final PBL inquiry project centred on the driving question: *How can we use literature to help military veterans remain socially connected during the COVID-19 restrictions*? This project would involve year-9 students researching and analysing shorts texts about WWI by Australian writers, such as John Le Gay Brereton, Vincent Buckley and Roderic Quinn. The students would also communicate online with war veterans to share what they had read and to hear stories from the veterans about their recent experiences. The students would then work with the veterans to create an original multimodal text that was based on the wartime or post-war experiences of the veterans. Although I was confident that I had designed an engaging and original project that would meet the standard I had set for myself, there was one question remaining that caused me to pause. Without any practical classroom experience, how could I assess the feasibility of my project? Not knowing who to ask, I sent my project to the friend who had inadvertently been my inspiration. My friend told me 'as always you are very ambitious, but if you pull it off, you'll be showing a lot of people that COVID doesn't have to be the road block that it is considered to be'.

I am now in my second-year of my Master of Teaching and have not lost sight of my goal to one day become a Secondary School teacher. Despite the challenges that COVID presented to many students and teachers, I am highly optimistic about the future of school-based learning. I have learned that, like being in the Army, teaching can be a challenging and unpredictable venture that requires resilience and flexibility; I hope that I will be able to model these qualities for my students. I have observed that, in the face of highly stressful and emotive situations, teachers are required to remain steady and focussed on achieving learning goals for the benefit of students, parents and their colleagues.

Narrative 2: Bianca Snodgrass

My reflection blankly stares back at me, interrupted only by smeared fingerprints which have tried to remove flecks of dinner from the night before in vain. I am in a t-shirt which has operated for three consecutive days now as a both pyjamas and 'Zoom-wear', and my hair has been pulled up into a high, greasy bun in a desperate attempt to convey that I am ready to concentrate on the next few hours of class time

ahead. Hastily purchased blue-light blocker glasses are the only accessory to this ensemble. Waiting for the teacher to arrive, I briefly return to doom-scrolling, congratulating myself on getting out of bed today.

The door opens into our virtual classroom and we all rush in to stare vacantly into each other's pixelated eyes. Surrounded by tiny squares, I search anxiously for a familiar face to smile at and am instead rewarded with muted mics and a vast majority whose webcams have chosen exactly this moment to 'not work, sorry'. The teacher repeats his question, an octave higher this time in a desperate plea for someone, anyone to please participate. I glance again into the black dot, a poor substitute for eye contact these days and sigh deeper into my dining room table. Time appears to no longer exist in this pandemic.

I had such extraordinarily high expectations for 2020 and all that it represented. I would be able to study the degree I had been so passionate about for years and have the opportunity to mingle and mesh with minds who shared the same aspiration: to become teachers. To be able to make lasting connections with my peers based on the idea that we each want to be our own versions of Miss Honey or recreate our own 'Dead Poets Society' classroom. The collaborative element of teaching is a cornerstone of the profession, and to suddenly have it reduced to a breakout room where silence echoes and majority of us have mastered the art of using your phone to scroll through TikTok subtly, was a deflating experience. To not be able to make eye contact or be able to have spirited discussions about curriculum content in real time without hindered NBN connections, added to the isolation. This was not what I was promised the experience of a pre-service teacher would be like.

My laptop chimes gleefully, interrupting the lecturer's stream of consciousness. Diving for the mute button, my cheeks flush at being caught out and not giving my undivided attention to what could have been surmised in a single hour, as opposed to the designated three. A message request. The name recognisable but not immediately familiar, maybe someone I got a coffee with during a class break in one of the few weeks we had on campus.

'This lecture is honestly going forever and the only thing that is getting me through is the ability to change my background on Zoom' it reads. I stifle a laugh and begin to type my reply.

Narrative 3: Sophie Ioannidis

Being a student and preservice teacher during remote learning required the ability to understand and accept the important lessons of education without physical interactions.

While I was studying online I did miss the on campus community and opportunities to engage with students at a café for an impromptu meeting or raising my hand in class to ask a question. To compensate for this missed opportunity, I found myself initiating conversations and exchanging phone numbers to stay connected with my classmates during the online tutorials. One advantage of the online classes was that I could establish more substantial relationships with my colleagues and students. Catching a glimpse of student's personal life through their screen and seeing how they connected their working station, or seeing someone's pet helped start various conversations. In turn, contacting colleagues after hours felt less invasive, and more personal connections were made. These casual interactions reminded me that I should continue to make connections with students on and off the screen to establish a learning community by personalising situations. As a pre-service teacher, interpersonal skills are essential and establishing context of the students you are teaching. Studying and teaching online helped establish various contexts which were not experienced face to face. These various experiences helped me gain more confidence to develop my interpersonal skills while working online.

I was looking forward to interacting with my allocated school on a professional level and continue the established relationship with the Grade 2 class I was teaching. The online placement consisted of a forty-five minute Webex meeting which I instinctively believed was too short for teaching and learning. Having taught in the class previously I understood that some students would need more time to discuss or explore the new content with their peers. I was not prepared for the precise and ruthless instruction of the four subjects while students were required to sit and listen. There was some diagnostic assessment and recapping of learning, which kept students engaged, however, I did find the Webex meeting was used more as an instructional tool rather than for learning. The students' microphones were muted for most of the session and there was limited opportunity to raise hands to ask questions. However, one thing I did find surprising was seeing how most students were reacting to the new online learning process. Some students were able to engage throughout the whole Webex while others needed reminding to keep their cameras on and be visible on screen.

Due to their age group (7- or 8-year-olds) I wanted to ensure there was a lot of engagement and time to

experience the new content as much as possible. I used home-made resources such as cans of tomato and Christmas ornaments while asking as many thought-provoking questions to create a more interactive experience. Developing resources and using what you have is an experience I will take away with me into the classroom and a reminder that my teaching practice can be practical to everyday environments and contexts. I also learnt that when working with such a short amount of time the preparation for these meetings was crucial, however, through the course of the Webex I felt I was giving instructions rather than teaching. I was skipping some key teaching strategies such as observation and class interaction which I used to understand the classes current mood. Another important factor which was missing from the online class was the students' ability to practise and explore the new subject content with their classmates. I believe this experimentation and social learning is key to motivate and build students confidence.

It was disappointing to see some students isolated in their bedroom and not having the opportunity to interact with their peers and teachers or have access to alternative resources. I believe it is essential for students to interact with each other to comprehend new ideas otherwise there is a risk that they will not grasp or understand the learning. Furthermore, it is a possibility that without communities for learning, students who rely on various exposures to understand new concepts, may not have the time or interaction from their families to practise new learning. This could lead to students falling behind in their work or losing confidence in themselves as a learner or as a member of the learning community. The inability to give direct feedback or assess work through the day also affected student's confidence, which is a key building block to scaffold any learning. Unfortunately, during online teaching we could not have this direct experience and instead the independent learning meant that student work was being submitted without me knowing how much assistance was required, which limited my ability to understand the students thought process.

Slowly the magnitude of having to correct four pieces of work for each student at the end of the day became more apparent and the requirement of students to submit work meant that the Webex was increasingly used to remind students of outstanding work. This took away from the time I could spend to attend to students' questions and turned the online learning community to an administrative process. Students soon understood the new reality of listening to the teacher because 'there was a lot to get through'. The Webex became a balancing act of teaching and learning while questions were answered or asked only when students were prompted within the 45-minute time period.

Student reading lessons and the ability to take books home became a digital process and learning how to read became a pre-recorded snippet of the student's voice. Using the Sunshine Classics program, I was able to listen to the students recording many times, which was a benefit as I was able to clarify what areas needed to be focused on. I was able to adjust the assessment data and comments section multiple times as I listened to all the students reading and became familiar with the text. Although the ability to capture the students reading was reliable and convenient, I was not able to see the students reading. I did not have the students next to me to observe their reading behaviours, sitting position or use of aides, such as a finger or ruler. I could only listen for clues of their confidence or frustration while listening to their reading through the voice recording, which limited my ability to provide accurate feedback. I was also unable to encourage or give immediate feedback. This disconnection to the students made me feel that the assessment I conducted was not a true representation of the students' reading abilities.

All these factors reminded me that assessment should be fair, reliable, and valid. However, the online experience altered the control I had over the assessment, limiting how much I felt I could assure these factors. Because the assessment was not conducted in the controlled class environment that I was used to and instead in a variable home environment, reliability and fairness were more difficult to ascertain. It could have been possible that a student may have practised reading the section beforehand or used aides to complete the reading, to give a better impression of their reading abilities. Without the in-classroom time with them to observe their ability in the same time and place I was limited in assessing them and providing adequate feedback. I was uncertain if my comments and assessments were appropriate for students or the teaching language required to establish data for moderation or to distribute to parents. This made me question how assessment can vary between teachers and how important it is to have accurate assessment data.

During the online placement I felt a greater need to reach out to my mentor when I needed to contact her for specific information or gain feedback. During previous onsite placement on the other hand, my mentor and I were able to build on ideas and expand on passing

comments which increased interaction and built a professional relationship. Other missed opportunities while on online placement was organising classroom resources, interacting with students and speaking to colleagues. This made the online placement feel like a task driven experience and disconnection to common teaching practices or holistic approach to teaching.

Narrative 4: Danny Sydor

There I was, on screen, trying to not seem like I was looking at myself, my hair, the lighting, what sections of my room were on display. I was in class after all; I was a student who should be a face in the crowd, at a desk or in the audience of a lecture hall.

They should not see more than an attentive face and I should not see a teacher holding up a mirror.

Discovering how to wrangle the strains of remote teaching and online learning as both a student and a student teacher, gave us all a uniquely structured journey to take this year. And I wanted to write about why this is and how it affected my teaching and understanding of secondary students in 2020.

We were both the captains and the passengers on this strange ship, many have endured the obstacles brought on by COVID-19, but none experienced the unique position of those studying education. Acting as the students to long-term teachers now learning how to adapt to something new, but also acting as teachers aiding young minds through this year's struggles.

As we were studying how to engage with in-class technologies and a range of teaching techniques, so we couldn't help but assess and critique our instructors engaging in these new waters themselves, trialing new procedures that failed or succeeded before our eyes. They had taught us what not to do and then did it, we suffered through what didn't work and took note of what did.

As a pre-teacher on placement, now the big face on screen, we knew what it was like on the other side. Our discomfort with seeing our faces on screen was now their discomfort; our strained eyes and sore spines were now their aches and pains. We knew what it was like to self-manage our own learning, to be dealt more than we could handle. To be asked to contribute to discussion in a sea of icons and names without faces. To be thrown into a breakout room with no clue why we were there and too many minutes to figure it out.

On the surface, many ideas for remote learning can seem achievable, but become daunting in practice. In an effort to replicate in-class discussion by requiring all students to respond to a prompt via a discussion board, some university instructors overlooked the fundamental discrepancies between a live classroom and a remote one. In a live classroom, students respond with short, on-the-fly ideas. In remote, the first two or three responses become short essay answers that set the tone for the rest of the class. These first responders prescribe the word limit, include references and aim to answer every aspect of the question leaving nothing but scraps for the rest of the herd. A wrong answer or quickly thought out response is printed in digital ink and can be read and re-read by all, with our names listed alongside our response.

This is not how in-class discussion worked; we had instead become a comment section. Our responses were too a mirror of ourselves.

We felt what all Victorian secondary students were going through in remote learning. What overwhelmed them and what wasn't a practical method to continue education from home. As a pre-service teacher, I never once asked for my students to turn on their cameras nor did I require the students to complete any task that anyone beside myself would see.

I think we need to understand the students we are teaching, but more importantly, understand the differences between teaching in a classroom and teaching remotely.

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Creativity Online

'But w'rry not we shall banquet again someday': Creativity and Socially Distanced English

Susanne Gannon, Rachael Jacobs, Jacqueline D'warte and Loshini Naidoo, Western Sydney University

Abstract: Disruptions to learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been one of the most concerning consequences of school closures in Australia during 2020. Carefully planned curriculum sequences and learning progressions were flipped into online formats, with teachers having very little time to prepare and students being unused to learning away from each other and from their teachers. In this paper, we turn to the early moments in the Australian educational response to the pandemic when schools pivoted to online learning. We address the potential that emerged for localised, creative ways of thinking and educating under these conditions. We examine how an English class in a western Sydney school quickly adapted a writing task in a unit on *Macbeth* for COVID-19 conditions, and the varied ways that the students responded to their teacher's invitation to write their own soliloquies. We consider how writing creatively in English created opportunities for students to begin to process the barrage of conflicting emotions precipitated by the COVID-19 crisis. We examine how textual form and convention, paradoxically, opened spaces for creativity in their writing. Students found distinct routes and modes of expression for conveying what they were feeling, thinking and experiencing about coronavirus during the initial school lockdown. We consider how theories of creativity within constraints help us to think through what students were learning about language, about themselves and about their text in the context of socially distanced English.

Introduction

In early 2020, when cases of COVID-19 spread worldwide, it became very clear that the virus had implications reaching far beyond its direct impact on people's physical health, causing fundamental shifts to every aspect of social life. As with all other sectors, education faced large-scale upheaval and continuing uncertainty. Young people's lives and their social worlds have fundamentally changed as a result of the crisis. At the height of the isolation and during the initial phase of COVID-19, schools around Australia switched to online learning for most of Term 2 (from late March to May/June) 2020. Intermittent broad and localised outbreaks continue to close schools in most states in Australia as the Delta variant rampages through 2021. The research that we discuss in this paper was undertaken in the first wave, when young people were not yet seen to be vulnerable to its medical impacts. While acknowledging the serious educational, social and health impacts of the pandemic, in this paper we also want to draw attention to glimpses of productive disruptions and creative localised educational responses.

Australian COVID-19 prevention measures, including local lockdowns, border closures, social distancing, meeting in 'bubbles' and wearing facemasks, helped Australia achieve relative success in stemming the spread of the virus during 2020, with vaccination added to the arsenal in 2021. Social, educational, economic, psychological and health impacts continue to be felt. Schools have accommodated profound shifts, both pedagogically and operationally. The move to online learning has challenged educators, families and

students in myriad ways. Vulnerabilities and inequities have been exposed and exacerbated both in Australia and globally (Brown et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). The consequences of the pandemic have disrupted pedagogies, technologies, relationships and the spaces within which education operates. In the absence of the high-stakes NAPLAN tests that would normally have taken place in Term 2, 2020, schools emphasised connectedness and creativity. Schools were recast as hubs for communities, while some responsibilities shifted to families. The impact of the disruption to formal education will continue to have substantial effects, and a return to the normal world, or pre-COVID-19 ways of operating, cannot yet be contemplated. The shift in thinking about educational practice has changed our world irrevocably, demanding our 'intelligent collective action' (UNESCO, 2020, p. 3). Conversations have opened up about where and how learning takes place. Digital technologies are now unequivocally at the centre of teaching and learning. Schools have paid renewed attention to independence, mental health and wellbeing, connectedness and creativity.

Our research examines pandemic effects in Australian education through the voices and creative responses of young people. We are particularly interested in how creative ways of thinking and educating were mobilised under pandemic conditions. Inspired by Danish research into the impacts of the initial school lockdowns (Hansen, Knage, Rasmussen & Søndergaard, 2020), we firstly asked Australian secondary school students to reflect on their feelings about and experiences of lockdowns, and secondly asked students in NSW secondary schools to share any artefacts they had created in school subjects in response to the pandemic. It is this latter phase of the research that we explore in this paper. Following NSW SERAP approval, in July 2020 we distributed an invitation to principals of NSW Department of Education secondary schools to ask students to share artefacts they had created during the earlier period of school lockdowns. One school in western Sydney provided seventeen different responses to the same task from Year 9/10 students: a pandemic-inspired soliloquy embedded within an English unit on *Macbeth*. The students who wrote these artefacts were not connected to other parts of the study, nor had they been interviewed by the research team on their experience of lockdown. The artefacts provided indicate young people's capacities to process their feelings and thoughts, and their English teachers' resourcefulness in pivoting to the conditions of the present. Five of these texts are examined in detail in the latter sections of this paper. These texts demonstrate the value of creativity during times of crisis and attest to English being able to offer a particular scope for students to creatively respond to that crisis.

The Shakespearean textual inspiration outlined below that prompted student writing seems particularly apt. Shakespeare's life was shaped by the pandemic of his time (Greenblatt, 2020). It is well known that he lost his son Hamnet to the plague, but recurring outbreaks shadowed his entire life. Social, cultural and economic life was profoundly disturbed. In London, as he worked as an actor, playwright and impresario, civic officials implemented public health responses based on tracking of data of weekly fatalities. When conditions warranted, authorities imposed social distancing and quarantine, and triggered extended closures of public sites of mass gathering including theatres (but excluding churches). Soon after *Macbeth* was first performed, a summer surge closed theatres, and it is likely that between 1606 and 1610, London theatres were open for no more than nine months in total, prompting an economic as well as social and public health collapse (Greenblatt, 2020). We return to Shakespeare after a brief consideration of how we might think creatively about curriculum in the contemporary pandemic.

Creativity is a capacious and contested notion. As a keyword in cultural studies, Williams (1976) defined it as bringing a sense of originality and innovation together with making or producing some thing, object or artefact in the world, usually in the arts. In English education, creativity emerged with progressivism. At the pivotal Dartmouth seminar, creativity was understood to be 'a state of mind' characterised by curiosity, inquisitiveness and experimentation and requiring classroom atmospheres that could facilitate the personal growth of the child (Sawyer, Davies, Gannon & Dowsett, 2016, p. 47). Examining creativity in contemporary secondary schools, Harris (2016) similarly described creativity as a 'way of thinking' rather than a doing or making. In their study, Australian teachers identified assessment practices as impediments to creativity, and lower SES and rural schools tended to see it as 'extraneous' to core business (Harris, 2016, 29). Within English, MacCallum encourages teachers and students to step outside narrow institutional framings of learning that value the replication of form and knowledge,

and to push against a system that is oriented towards 'control, conformity, standardisation and compliance' (2012, p. 150). Our position is that creativity arises in conditions that both constrain and enable, that provide language resources and also permission and space for individual and collaborative play. In turning to the *Macbeth* soliloquy, tensions between process and product, exploration and replication, freedom and constraint are evident. However, one task in one class is not indicative of the broad approach to creativity called for by scholars. We therefore turn to the specifics of the task design and the responses elicited from the students in our study, after consideration of broader issues around creativity in these times.

Creative COVID-19 curriculum

Amidst the chaos of the pandemic, digital lives and online worlds offered potential spaces for cultivating wellbeing and creativity. Creativity was evident in many online spaces during the initial COVID-19 lockdown. Ordinary people took to online spaces and social media platforms to create images, films, metaphors, symbols and satire that aided our survival. A 'rewilding' of creative endeavour was apparent, with many artistic pursuits flourishing in unlikely spaces (Jacobs, Finneran & Quintanilla D'Acosta, 2020). Professional arts companies and institutions made works accessible online for free, allowing people to experience the arts from the confines of lockdown. UK's National Theatre's NT at Home opened its catalogue of recorded performances, including Shakespearean works, to online viewers around the world. In Australia, #ShaxRedrawn (from the *Shakespeare Reloaded* team) brought image and text together by inviting people to create and share an image in response to a selected Shakespeare quote over 22 weeks from April to August (Semler, Hansen, & Abbott Bennett, 2021). Creativity, collaboration, online sharing and simple open-ended prompts underpinned all of these initiatives.

Online learning also opened spaces for creativity inside the curriculum. In a typical school day, classroom distractions are constant. The relentless pace of the world has a cost in terms of imagination and control of our own creations. The COVID-19 lockdown provided spaces to relearn, rediscover and reinvigorate. While the potential for demotivation was high among some students, there also opened a new space for ideation among students and teachers, which is a key factor in creativity. Initial school lockdowns in Australia offered glimpses of education that was less about content and rankings and more about relationality and wellbeing. Writing offered potentially potent space during school lockdowns for students to explore their feelings, thoughts and experiences about COVID-19.

State English Teachers Association journals have also featured writing about COVID-19. In NSW, the 'Lessons from Lockdown' special issue of *mETAphor* (2020, Issue 2) included teachers' reflections on their experiences through Term 2. It outlined a 'pandemic pedagogy' of collaboration, flexibility, personal reflection and professional collegiality (Hicks, 2020), and advocated for a reimagining and transformation of teaching in order to value student voice and build confidence, independence, deep learning and understanding (Yager, 2020). Short reflections on online learning by students were also included. In Victoria, an *Idiom* (2020, Issue 2) special section, 'Groundhog Day', presented English teachers' reflections on online teaching during Lockdown #2. These reinforced the importance of connection, care and relationships with both students and colleagues. A special section on teaching Shakespeare online described how English and English Literature teachers incorporated digital tools into their pedagogy. Teachers produced enhanced PowerPoint lectures, interactive quizzes, animations, Screencasts, podcasts and vodcasts, and curated digital resources for students including interviews, modern and classic adaptations (Bird, 2020; Scott, 2020; Sheedy, 2020). They demonstrated how they maintained quality teaching of Shakespeare despite remote learning conditions. One of these classes undertook a creative text response, creating Instagram and Tumblr profiles for characters in *Twelfth Night* (Scott, 2020). However, elsewhere in *Idiom*, in a response to VATE's annual text survey, a teacher noted that their school had become more flexible with texts, deciding against *Macbeth* for Year 10 as being too difficult for online learning because engaging with complex language and plot was contingent on face-to-face interaction. While these examples provide glimpses of teachers' ingenuity in responding to pandemic times, the soliloquies that we present in this paper provide an unusual corpus of writing from one English classroom. In this class, a difficult text from the past became a vehicle for difficult thinking in the pandemic present.

Shakespeare in English often raises issues around relevance, timeliness and pedagogical approaches. Literary analysis often crowds out other possible approaches. Claims of universality of theme and emotion have underpinned the retention of Shakespeare's plays

in the English canon and classroom, and may have reinforced a disposition to venerate the text. Yet interpretation and deep understanding of language do not sit in opposition to creative and even playful approaches to texts. Experiences of Shakespearean text can encompass performance, language and imaginative recreations through workshop approaches to texts (Gibson, 2016). Shakespearean texts in English need not (only) be approached as 'literary artefacts' (Watson, 2003). Johnston and Maurer (2002) argue that they are provocations for teachers and students to take risks, to multiply meanings and seek incoherence, as they 'undo' Shakespeare while 'doing' it. Inspired by the fantastic Forest of Arden in *As You like It*, Semler proposes a kind of 'Ardenspace' that is a 'type of dreaming' or 'creative interactivity' with the capacity to 'ultimately [pour] poetry back into pedagogy' (2014, n.p.). Ardenspace allows collaboration, affect and emotion, vitality, independent thought and serious textual play, which serve to bring students to closer, more personalised and more credible engagements with Shakespearean drama (2014). In pedagogical spaces, Semler argues, structure and freedom must somehow coexist when we work within educational systems.

Textual form and convention can, paradoxically, open spaces for students to find their own distinct routes and modes of expression for conveying what they are feeling, thinking and experiencing. In this study, the 'pandemically adjusted' writing task in English enabled students to produce diverse creative responses to the invitation offered by their English teacher; it offered them permission and the resources and space to engage in individual and collaborative play.

Qualities of creative writing tasks

Creative writing tasks provide enabling constraints that allow students opportunities to engage their imagination and process human experience in new and exciting ways. Creativity can be found in the demonstration of skills and craftsmanship that require students to create original work that will 'energise us with some previously unseen thing' (Kleiman, 2005, p. 1). Beyond the commodification and homogenisation of much assessment, English teachers can create pedagogical events and creative opportunities that open lines of flight towards something new (Gannon, 2014). The creativity in the task featured in this paper is evident as students synthesise their textual understanding with their original thoughts and formulate soliloquies that can successfully respond to the task requirements. Creative work is grounded within content knowledge, in this case that of early modern theatre, the narrative of *Macbeth* and the stylistics of Shakespearean language. This knowledge would have had to be pre-established, as creativity involves original creation combined with deep content knowledge (Sawyer, 2008). In English, that creativity is present when students are required to move beyond the replication of pre-existing or formulaic texts. Instead, the student applies their content knowledge and deploys creative skills, creating new work and combining forms in inventive ways. Divergent responses are permissible, and in some cases encouraged (Jacobs, 2018).

Creative writing tasks offer a jumping-off point, a platform or a blueprint of ideas through which the student can hone their experiences and understandings. In English, creative writing is entwined with reading and experiences of other texts, which offer students new possibilities of form, tone and purpose that they might not otherwise be familiar with (Gannon, 2014; Gannon & Dove, 2021). Writing from personal experience involves creative processes which are multi-faceted, with many interlocking variables, emphasising originality, creativity and innovation. In order to create a piece of writing, students must have processed an experience, pre-text or stimulus, then be given space to create work anew within a creative frame. When engaged in creative tasks, students make decisions each second as they engage simultaneously in creation and reflection (Baptiste 2008). Model or mentor texts are often used in English (Gallagher, 2014) as templates and inspiration for student writing; however, these approaches tend to be much more prescriptive than the creative task that was shared for this research. This writing task uses the space provided by the disruption of COVID-19 to engage students creatively in writing about and through the moment they are living in.

Creative writing has deeply reflective and personal aims for the learner. The aim is to deepen the connection between the writer and the human experience, to facilitate imaginative, aesthetic and creative growth and to allow processing of potentially sensitive experiences (such as living through a pandemic). If assessed, attributes such as flair, imagination and originality feature strongly in assessment criteria alongside craft elements (Jacobs, 2018). Creative tasks alone cannot lead students to be creative, imaginative or artistically engaged. For creativity to occur, a learning environment

must also be imbued with creative philosophies and practices that allow for the pursuit of 'meaningful, new forms' (Gibson, 2010, p. 608) and that cultivate the confidence to take risks and experiment.

No task is inherently creative. Creative learning is a dialogic and collaborative process and in English, as we have noted, it is influenced by the texts that students encounter in the curriculum. These provide some of the conditions that make creativity possible. In English, we can create spaces for imagination and reflection, and at the same time develop craft knowledge and technical and aesthetic writing skills such as descriptive and evocative language and syntax. The invitation to creativity needs to be open-ended enough that diversity of response is valued, rather than locking students into repetitious or formulaic responses. The task featured in this study fulfilled these criteria for creative tasks, allowing students scope to engage their imaginations in experimental ways; however, the enabling constraints of the task allowed them to engage meaningfully with their set text, *Macbeth*.

Creative writing in response to *Macbeth*

The class had been studying *Macbeth* and students were provided with resources that they could draw upon in preparation for this creative writing task. As our data set is limited to the scanned copies of the writing that the students chose to share with us, we do not know how or whether the work was graded, or how it fitted within the sequence of assessment or learning design more broadly within the unit on *Macbeth*. We know that students completed it during the period of online learning in Term 2, 2020. The two pages of instructions on the worksheet and students' responses are artefacts that shed light on the ways creativity was harnessed through this task.

A parody of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy ('Out, damned spot …') written by the students' teachers was provided at the top of the worksheet, and the students were instructed to follow these five steps:

1: Pick a character (from *Macbeth*, yourself or imaginary);
2: Pick a challenge, conflict or problem they are facing due to coronavirus;
3: Think of some ideas to be explored;
4: Draft a soliloquy in the style of the example provided and revise several times;
5: (Optional) Perform and record.

The impact of the task on the students was significant. More than three months later, after we had completed university and Department of Education ethics processes, seventeen of the students and their parents were enthusiastic about sharing their work. We anticipated that student writers would be proud authors of their creative contributions, so students had the opportunity to assert on their consent form whether they wanted their real names to be attached to their artefacts. We have respected this wish where it has been explicitly expressed. The five samples we have selected in the following section show the breadth of variety of the students' responses.

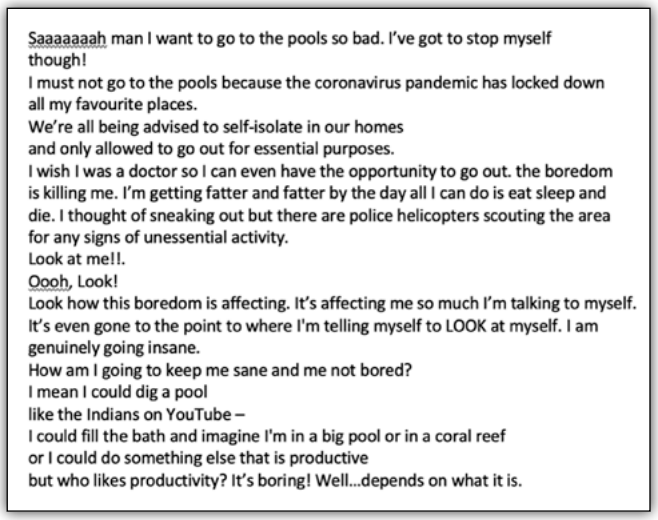
Coronavirus soliloquies

In each of the samples we have selected, we have retained the original spelling, punctuation, and layout. We are not interested in the sporadic moments of incomplete control of language such as punctuation, but rather in the creative decisions each student made through their response in the context of the pandemic-induced lockdown.

Example 1: Shohid wants to go to the pool

In our first example, Shohid chooses to write himself (or a version of himself) as the character. He has focused on the conditions of lockdown and surveillance, including the self-surveillance that has been required from all citizens as we have been asked to think beyond ourselves as individuals to the community, since we are 'all in this together'. The frustration and difficulty of this for young people is evident in this text, as well as good-natured hyperbole about the potential consequences of the lockdown (getting fatter, going insane) and how it might be safely subverted by acts of imagination inspired by online resources. His wry comment about 'productivity' resonates with our own experiences of trying to keep focused and effective at work while we were locked down at home.

The form of Shohid's soliloquy is very effective. We have a sense of a person verbalising their interior thoughts aloud to an unseen audience, and the twists and turns of thought are cleverly captured in the text. The tone of equivocation that characterises some of the soliloquies in *Macbeth* is here. His self-talk suggests that this dilemma is irresolvable. The sense of madness and loss of control mirrors that of Lady Macbeth. He has made artful use of rhetorical questions and exclamations; he makes suggestions to himself and then abandons them. His language is colloquial,



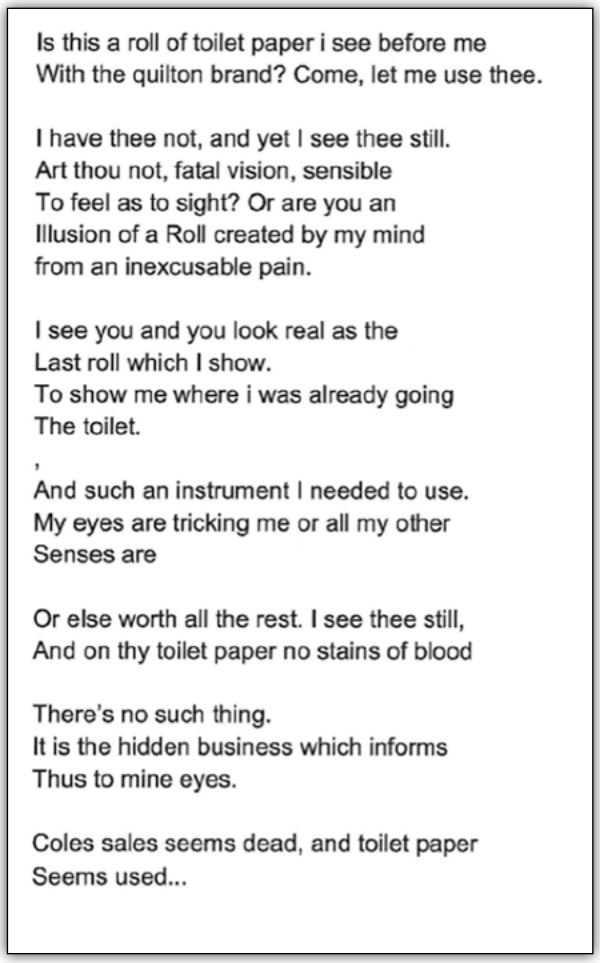
Saaaaaaah man I want to go to the pools so bad. I've got to stop myself though!
I must not go to the pools because the coronavirus pandemic has locked down all my favourite places.
We're all being advised to self-isolate in our homes
and only allowed to go out for essential purposes.
I wish I was a doctor so I can even have the opportunity to go out. the boredom is killing me. I'm getting fatter and fatter by the day all I can do is eat sleep and die. I thought of sneaking out but there are police helicopters scouting the area for any signs of unessential activity.
Look at me!!.
Oooh, Look!
Look how this boredom is affecting. It's affecting me so much I'm talking to myself. It's even gone to the point to where I'm telling myself to LOOK at myself. I am genuinely going insane.
How am I going to keep me sane and me not bored?
I mean I could dig a pool
like the Indians on YouTube –
I could fill the bath and imagine I'm in a big pool or in a coral reef
or I could do something else that is productive
but who likes productivity? It's boring! Well...depends on what it is.

conversational and contemporary, and written in the rhythms of prose. The student has also been clearly motivated by the combination of their dilemma, the task and having the space to be creative. Kaufman and Baer's 'Amusement Park' theory of creativity states that one needs to be motivated for creativity to thrive, regardless of the conditions of that motivation. Semler's (2014) suggested approach, in which structure and freedom coexist, is also evident in this artefact, as the student is able to creatively allow the interaction of their current world with the traditional Shakespearian soliloquy form.

Example 2: Are you an illusion of a roll created by my mind?

Our second student writer adopted a playful and amusing stance to take up the much-discussed toilet paper wars within a more overt experiment with Shakespearian language. Images that we had all become familiar with from media coverage were repurposed in this parody of Macbeth's fatal trajectory towards regicide and murder.

The dilemma of the elusive toilet paper is captured well through Student 2's writing. They borrow from Macbeth's soliloquy directed to the dagger in Act 2, Scene 1. Line-by-line emulation of the diction and rhythm is evident. Many of the lines and phrases appear just as they do in the original speech, with witty substitutions and consequential twists of meaning. The writing mirrors the form of Macbeth's soliloquy in a familiar and humorous way, demonstrating that the work is rooted in deep content knowledge, which is one of the conditions for creative work (Sawyer, 2008). The student has an ear for poetic rhythm and has carefully retained some echoes of iambic pentameter



Is this a roll of toilet paper i see before me
With the quilton brand? Come, let me use thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feel as to sight? Or are you an
Illusion of a Roll created by my mind
from an inexcusable pain.

I see you and you look real as the
Last roll which I show.
To show me where i was already going
The toilet.
,
And such an instrument I needed to use.
My eyes are tricking me or all my other
Senses are

Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still,
And on thy toilet paper no stains of blood

There's no such thing.
It is the hidden business which informs
Thus to mine eyes.

Coles sales seems dead, and toilet paper
Seems used...

by selecting words with particular syllable and stress patterns. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the role of the soliloquy in suggesting madness, desire, fixation and inner turmoil. The student likening toilet paper to Macbeth's infamous murder weapon adds to the humour, as though one might have lived and died for the roll at a time of need. The motif of blood that is so important in *Macbeth* is also here, with a gesture towards the 'stains' of bloody guilt that haunt Lady Macbeth later in the play. Shakespearean language is skilfully interwoven with vernacular language and the names of familiar brands such as *Quilton* and *Coles*. The student understands that the task is designed to entertain and even incite laughter as a way of coping with absurd times. The ending 'seems used' is a punchline thrown to the reader to further emphasise the exasperation of such times. In the surreal world of the COVID-19 crisis, Semler's (2014) Ardenspace is in play, allowing the creativity interactivity which 'pours poetry back into pedagogy (n.p.). The student has moved closer to more personalised engagement with Shakespeare, in which originality results in humorous innovation.

Example 3: The virus will end everything

The character chosen as the persona in our third example is somewhat mysterious. We wondered in our first reading of the text whether the 'I' might be the virus itself, personified as the ultimate villain intent on wiping out humanity. Or could it be Macbeth, so crazed with his lust for power and his paranoia that his enemies are potentially everywhere and everyone? Though presumably, he too is human and would fall victim to any fatal virus, and power is futile if there are no people over which it can be exercised. Perhaps this is a sort of zombie apocalypse?

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"
The virus creeps slowly towards the end of humanity
It has taken fools much closer to their deaths
The virus shall end all humanity

I shall use this virus to my advantage
Spread it as much as possible
Kill all my enemies with this virus
And end everything

The virus shall kill everyone
One by one everyone shall fall dead
Nobody shall survive
For those who do,
They shall be slaughtered

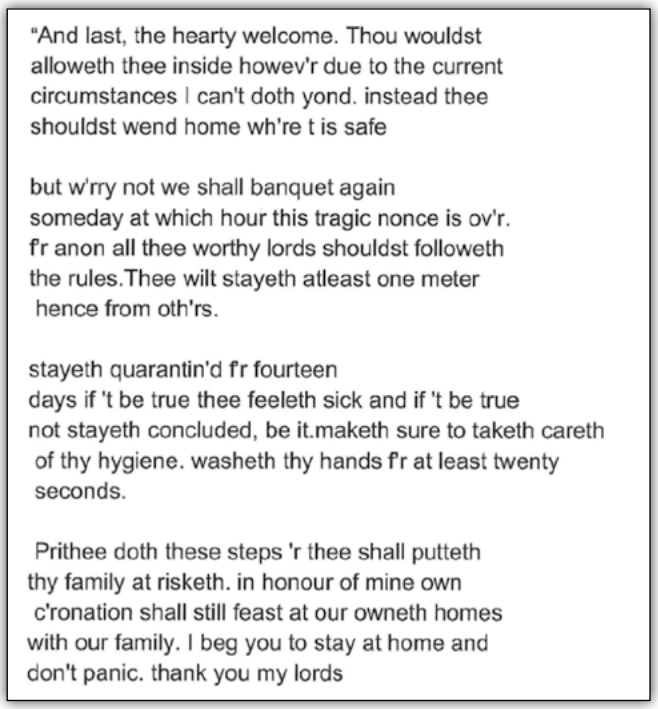
This shall be worse than the plague
It shall spread quickly
And end lives

Prepare for the end of humanity
The death of all beings
This virus will kill everyone
Nobody shall survive

There is a darkness in this third example that offers a more disconcerting view of pandemic life. The original soliloquy in Act 5, Scene 5 is spoken by Macbeth as a reflection on the futility of life and a reminder that death awaits us all, and an intimation that the end is near for him. In the context of a global pandemic the message is cold and concerning. The student has insightfully maintained Shakespeare's chilling language, keeping words such as 'creeps' and 'death', and used 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' as a launch pad. However, the form has changed significantly from the original soliloquy. Now we have 'the virus' creeping instead of time, but time figures everywhere throughout the soliloquy, and speeds up as it proceeds to the fatal end. In subject position in the Macbeth soliloquy, it is 'time' itself that creeps, and it is 'life' itself that is a 'shadow' and a 'player'. There are no human subjects, no pronouns, in the original text. Macbeth's imminent erasure is perhaps implied in this feature of the syntax. Yet here, there is clearly an 'I', elusive yet savage and vindictive. For Macbeth, 'our yesterdays' implies his inclusion in the category of the human, whereas this speaker looks with glee to the 'end of humanity' and we assume does not see themself in 'everyone'. Once again, the student has understood the themes of the play, the evilness of Macbeth's character and the prominence of death and slaughter, and has taken these as far as possible in their text. Here the virus is something to be controlled as an instrument of mass killing. No moral dilemma is contained in this piece. The finality of the short sentences in the final stanza give a sense that the pandemic has invoked thoughts of the end of times. We would love to talk with this student (and all the others) about their intention and their vision for the text, and we recognise that again there is a unity of vision and effect. This text again is artfully achieved, in a completely different way than the other students. Creativity, as conceptualised by McCallum (2012), is evident in this artefact as the student has used the task to move away from replication of form or content. The task is open-ended, allowing for divergent responses or unimagined outcomes to arise. While the student is still demonstrating their craftsmanship with regard to writing skills, they are also fulfilling Kleinman's (2005) criteria for creativity in that they are creating original work that energises the reader, in this case with thought-provoking, even disconcerting imagery.

Example 4: Ece reassures the guests

In our fourth example, Ece has installed a banquet host as the persona of their text. Under pandemic conditions, it seems that the banquet to celebrate the coronation has been cancelled. The intended guests are invited instead to celebrate the coronation in their homes, and reminded of correct pandemic protocols regarding hygiene, social distancing and quarantine. It isn't clear whether the new king or his wife is the speaker, or perhaps someone in authority equivalent to our Premier or Chief Health Officer. Certainly the reminders of protocols and the clarity of messaging quickly became familiar through the pandemic, though in *Macbeth*'s cast of characters and in those differently unruly times, there do not seem to be any such factotums.



"And last, the hearty welcome. Thou wouldst alloweth thee inside howev'r due to the current circumstances I can't doth yond. instead thee shouldst wend home wh're t is safe

but w'rry not we shall banquet again someday at which hour this tragic nonce is ov'r. f'r anon all thee worthy lords shouldst followeth the rules.Thee wilt stayeth atleast one meter hence from oth'rs.

stayeth quarantin'd f'r fourteen days if 't be true thee feeleth sick and if 't be true not stayeth concluded, be it.maketh sure to taketh careth of thy hygiene. washeth thy hands f'r at least twenty seconds.

Prithee doth these steps 'r thee shall putteth thy family at risketh. in honour of mine own c'ronation shall still feast at our owneth homes with our family. I beg you to stay at home and don't panic. thank you my lords

The equivalent scene in the play is of course the banquet in Act 3, Scene 4. That section of the play alternates the voices of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, directed variously at the actual invited banquet guests, at the ghost of Banquo who appears amongst the throng and at the murderers who slip in to report on their evil deeds, with interjections from Lennox, Ross, and the murderers themselves. By writing in prose, Ece, like Shakespeare, breaks with the conventions of verse to create stronger effects.

The tone is hopeful and forward-looking, but also reflects much of the firmness conveyed by authority figures during the lockdown. The directive to not panic, the imploring that guests stay at home 'quarantin'd', and the handwashing instructions reflect the pervasive instructions of the lockdown period, expressed though Macbeth's authority. The welcome is there at the start, and also the reassuring tone that Lady Macbeth adopts when Macbeth has become unhinged in front of the guests.

Ece has made a close study of the conventions of Shakespearian English as represented in Shakespeare. We can imagine how useful the glossary of language has been, with 'nonce', 'anon', 'doth' and 'prithee' used convincingly, and careful use of the arcane addresses 'thee' and 'thou'. Phonetic qualities are also attended to. The profligate contractions of Shakespeare are emulated (ov'r, f'r), and suffixes for verb tenses ('maketh sure to taketh careth') again demonstrating the deep content knowledge (Sawyer, 2008) with which creativity can thrive. These were used by Shakespeare to achieve the rhythmic vocal effects that he wanted. Here the present is flavoured by the past. Ece writes in the spirit of Shakespeare's wild inventiveness with language. This student has converted a dialogue scene from *Macbeth* into a text able to be performed as a soliloquy, seamlessly weaving ideas together to create Shakespearean prose for our times.

Example 5: Angela starts to cough

Our final selection from the corpus of student work takes an entirely different approach. In her text, Angela has fully entered into a contemporary imagined scenario – the persona that speaks is a young person who seems to be in lockdown in the company of her mother, who has tested positive for COVID-19. This scenario has become frighteningly familiar since hotel quarantine has become the main way for Australian governments to deal with international arrivals, including families, and sometimes with interstate travellers. Back in Term 2, 2020, however, this was not yet so visible.

The character converses with the audience, expressing internal thoughts and feelings. This is very much like an interior monologue in the classic Shakespearian soliloquy. Interior thoughts are voiced aloud, making the thought patterns and mood of the subject accessible to an audience. Rhetorical questions feature. Anxieties and reassurances compete for space in the text. It is imaginable as a performance piece in a space where we might see the speaker glance over their shoulder in fear at a hospital bed, or crumple or reach for a tissue at the final line. The first section is almost entirely focused on the mother; then there is a movement triggered at the line 'How would I ever be able …'. From here, through the second section, the character begins to consider their own mortality rather than their mother's. The third section, littered with imperatives, with a rising staccato tone of panic, resolves with the realisation that the narrator has now caught the virus too. Perhaps this realisation parallels the realisation of some young people that they are not immune. Scanning one's body for potential conditions of vulnerability was a feature of the early period of the pandemic. The last line ('Oh no, is that my own cough I just felt and heard?') might hint at the diction of the dagger soliloquy in *Macbeth*. This is another subtle and strong contribution to the pool of COVID-19 soliloquies.

Day one after the diagnosis of my mother, positive for COVID-19. She sure is coping. Coughing and coughing, and fever and fever. To think that she will recover soon is foolish at this rate, considering her age and knowing the fact that it's just going to keep getting worse and worse. But, would she even recover? She's a healthy individual I say. Majority survived. Some didn't. However, it is possible that she could die. How would I ever be able to go on with life without her.

Now hang on a second, the virus is known to be contagious. Meaning that I could also have a high chance of getting it. Does that mean I could die? Sure, everyone says that only people with medical conditions and diseases have a higher risk of fatality. But, unluckily for me I have asthma. Goodbye. Pretty weird as to how my mother doesn't have it while I do.

For sure, I am going to get it soon. I would be a complete maniac if I wasn't aware. Drink water. Wash those filthy hands. Wear masks. Don't go out. Stay away from mother. I would be fine they say and that is what I shall think. I will be fine. COUGH COUGH! Oh no, is that my own cough I just felt and heard?

There is not much here that speaks of Shakespeare as an inspiration on a surface level, but the intent and the form work well together in this very particular contemporary context of the pandemic. It is originality and innovation, rather than replication of form, that opens lines of flight towards something new (Gannon, 2014). This is an example of a divergent response which is encouraged through creative tasks.

Conclusion: Promoting independence and imagination

The research team was impressed by the work produced by these students and most of all by their individuality. Writing samples not featured in this paper were also interesting and varied. The openness of these responses sits in stark contrast to the traditional curriculum, in which students may be forced to adhere to strict schedules and specific learning processes and textual outcomes, or to overly constrained use of mentor texts. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed inequalities and vulnerabilities, but it has also surfaced extraordinary human resourcefulness and potential, much of which has been demonstrated by the world's young people. Children and youth are highly vulnerable to the impact of sustained stressors developed during a crisis, and their mental health during and after these times warrants special attention. At an individual level, young people suddenly lost many of the activities that provide structure, meaning and a daily rhythm to their lives, including school, extracurricular activities, social interactions and physical activities (Courtney et al., 2020). However, our study demonstrates that other forms of creative activity and avenues of entertainment were possible. In this instance, this was aided by skilful and imaginative planning by English teachers looking to bring a historical text into the modern world and engage students in Shakespeare using a high level of reflection on the current predicament. The students were indeed thinking deeply about Shakespeare. They melded their knowledge of story and character with their current situation to recontextualise the text, often with humour and introspection. Creative tasks require students to go beyond mere retellings of Shakespearian stories or regurgitation of well-worn arguments about themes and issues. Connecting their present context to the text demonstrates that they internalised their knowledge of the play and could reimagine it in new and innovative ways.

The task also contained several critical components of creative tasks (Baptiste, 2008; Jacobs, 2018; Kleiman 2005), and demonstrated some of the conditions under which creativity can thrive (Gibson, 2010; MacCallum, 2012; Sawyer, 2008; Sawyer, Davies, Gannon & Dowsett, 2016). Although it did not specifically require students to respond to the plot or themes of *Macbeth* by asking them to reflect on the context of an ambitiously flawed and murderous king, it promoted processing of stressful situations and invited students to reflect on their shared experiences of the pandemic, despite being away from school and each other. Various resources from the text itself became part of the repertoires for response that they were able to draw upon. The Shakespearian pedagogy at play allowed Semler's (2014) Ardenspace to emerge, encouraging dreaming – creative interaction with both the text and the present context – within a structure that has freedom for individuality and divergence to flourish.

On a simpler level, the task allowed students to create work they were proud of while in lockdown, as well as promoting independence and imagination

during this rewilding of creativity. It is possible that these divergent, highly creative responses might not have been possible in normal school time within the confines of the conventional pre-planned curriculum and accompanying assessment regime. Similarly, the absence of the chaos of the school day may have given student participants more space for creative endeavours and divergent thinking.

These matters require further consideration, and have implications for pedagogical design even outside of the pandemic. In the context of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, to *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, we must examine the most effective ways to provide quality learning experiences in a range of contexts. This study allows us to reflect on the ways that the English curriculum can become a positive force during other crises, whether those be another global pandemic, population displacements, crises triggered by climate change, or more localised conflicts and natural disasters (Chabbott & Sinclair, 2020). Documenting and reflecting on one's experience and reworking that experience and related emotions through language offers a subtle form of agency to young people. We hope that in their sharing of their work when they returned to school, the students had opportunities to share and to talk through their intent, the decisions they made as authors, and the myriad of feelings that were conveyed in their textual experiments. All of the students throughout our study talked about the conviviality of school life, events they had looked forward to, and daily pleasures and habits that been cancelled and how disappointed (though remarkably stoic) they were about these. They expressed hope that the world they knew and loved would return one day in some form after the pandemic. We have borrowed the title of this paper from Ece's soliloquy – '… But w'rry not we shall banquet again someday', which seems to encapsulate the future-focused hopes of the young people in our study (and our own).

The power of opening spaces for young people to find their own distinct routes and modes of expression and convey what they are feeling, thinking and experiencing has been powerfully illustrated by the youngest inaugural poet in US history, Amanda Gorman, in her spoken-word poem 'The Hill We Climb' at the recent US presidential inauguration (January 2021). Her words captured global attention, and educators responded quickly, displaying flexibility and ingenuity in using the poem to design learning that promotes creativity and critical social engagement. We hope that the example in this paper suggests how the affordances created by the pandemic may be of use in reclaiming some of what English teaching has been forced to lose in the age of assessment and standardisation. Educators' abilities to creatively respond may be the key to keeping learners engaged and keeping learning relevant to the challenges of these times.

Note

1 These were two distinct research phases and cohorts, with different student cohorts and research processes. In Phase 1, after securing university ethics approvals, we distributed an online survey via social media and conducted online interviews with a small number of volunteers. In Phase 2, we added in a further ethics process with NSW Department of Education so we could approach secondary schools in our existing research networks. The 'Youth in the Time of Corona' research was unfunded.

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Trauma Literature

Trauma Literature in the Classroom: Pitfalls and Potential

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Abstract: Psychological trauma is swiftly becoming one of the most significant public health concerns and obstacles to effective education in the current teaching climate. This paper responds to my experiences as both a secondary English teacher and registered psychologist, examining the potential utility of trauma literature in the English classroom for destigmatising trauma as a subject, as well as offering representation and hope for students who have experienced trauma. Reasonable concerns about addressing the subject of trauma, even through fiction, are also discussed. The concept of trauma is first framed, before the genre of 'trauma fiction' is briefly outlined. Following this, two case studies are presented, examining the use of trauma fiction in the classroom. Final thoughts are presented regarding the potential benefits of utilising trauma fiction in the English classroom, as well as possible pitfalls. This reflective response aims to instil greater confidence in teachers of English in responding to trauma; in their classrooms and in the texts that they teach.

Introduction

This paper utilises a pastiche of autoethnography and teacher as reflective practitioner approaches to examine the use of trauma literature in the English classroom, and its possible utility in destigmatising trauma as a subject, as well as offering representation and hope for students who have experienced trauma. Reasonable concerns about addressing the subject of trauma, even through fiction, are also discussed. Childhood trauma is becoming increasingly recognised as a significant issue amongst children and adolescents, and as such is the subject of considerable educational discourse in both the areas of pedagogy and wellbeing (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; Cavanaugh, 2016; Dods, 2013). Dutro (2011) asserts that through a focus of critical literacy, and the processes of both composition and analysis, students in English classes are provided a space in which trauma can be addressed. Balaev (2008) argues that the protagonists in trauma stories perform an important function in simultaneously representing a unique experience and a collective event. Through critical engagement with trauma texts, students are able to vicariously explore not only the traumatic experiences of fictional characters, but also what Dutro refers to as 'the hard stuff of life' (Dutro, 2011, p. 193); subjectively important experiences of pain and loss within their own lives.

Whilst the focus of a class may be the critical analysis of a fictional text, students extrapolate from their exploration of fictional events, and reflect upon their own lives as they find representation in characters. Dutro (2011, 2017) asserts that the difficult stories that enter the English classroom and interact with the fictional texts presented for study, are not always introduced by students. At times they may be shared by parent, siblings or social workers. Often they may not be shared at all and students may connect a fictional text to their lived experiences without disclosing to the teacher.

In my classes, students have shared with me their parent's diagnosis with a terminal illness as we studied Margaret Edson's *W;t* (1999), and their removal from their parents' care as we discussed the journey of Ender in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985). Working with young offenders I have discussed Lady Macbeth pressuring Macbeth into murder by questioning his manhood, and students' own experiences of toxic masculinity leading to their conviction. These conversations have emerged organically in relation to texts studied through a critical literacy approach, and largely discussed outside of regular classes, rather than in the public forum of class discussion. However, there have equally been times that I have not been aware of the ways in which students have connected with the work studied until long afterwards, where they have contacted me after leaving school to explain the impact of a class that, at the time, felt unremarkable to me.

Dutro (2011) shares similar experiences; difficult stories of students' traumas entering her classroom through connection to the fictional texts studied. Such texts, Bean and Moni (2003) argue, function as a form of 'roadmap' for adolescents, helping them to navigate their own experience through engagement with the experiences of fictional characters. In this way, English teaching creates a space where trauma can be addressed without disclosure, with empathy and within the textual space of narrative (Balaev, 2008; Dutro, 2011, 2017; Schönfelder, 2013a). Where a traumatic experience 'divides or destroys identity'(Balaev, 2008, p. 149), fiction creates a space for identity to be explored, a space for 'seeing who we are and might be, for feeling our way through the world' (Dutro, 2017, p. 332).

Despite the enormous scope for positive discussion and exploration, however, the area of trauma is fraught. Teachers always hold a position of power and trust in the classroom. This is especially true with the increased vulnerability of students who have experienced trauma. The capacity to do further damage, it must be considered, is equally as great as the capacity to heal. Further, many teachers (not just those of English) feel poorly equipped to respond to issues of trauma, even indirectly (Alisic, 2012). This reflective response, utilising autoethnographic and teacher as reflective practitioner methodologies (Del Carlo et al., 2010), aims to instil greater confidence in teachers of English in responding to, addressing and analysing trauma, in their classrooms and in the texts that they teach.

Framing trauma

The concept of trauma has evolved considerably over time and continues to be redefined and re-examined in a variety of disciplines. From a psychological perspective, trauma is a response to 'major events that are overwhelming for an individual' (Briere & Scott 2006, p. 3). The fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association 2013) presents trauma through the contemporary lens of PTSD, where an individual may suffer emotional distress, experience intrusive or impaired memories or exhibit risky or destructive behaviour (among other symptoms) following exposure to an extreme 'stressor'. Historically, conceptions of trauma were highly focused on the impact of a single event or experience, with various 'syndromes' conceptualised to categorise the symptoms seen in war veterans. 'Railway Spine', 'Shellshock', 'Vietnam War Syndrome' and 'Gulf War Syndrome' were all terms variously used as the mental sciences developed their understanding of the effects that traumatic experiences can have upon the individual. In recent years, both psychology and public understanding have moved beyond the extreme/not extreme dichotomy to appreciate that people process experiences through a lens of perceived severity, rather than from an objective categorisation (Atkinson et al. 2010). As this understanding has grown, trauma as a term has come to encompass more than reactions to extreme single events. Domestic violence, neglect and chronic physical and sexual abuse have come to be understood as traumatic stressors (Schönfelder 2013).

This research uses the trauma framework set forth by Figley (1985) and reinforced by Scaer (2001) and Van der Kolk (2007). Figley (1985, p. 28–29) defines trauma as an 'emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm' and also behaviourally as 'a set of conscious and unconscious actions and behaviours associated with dealing with the stresses of catastrophe and the period immediately afterwards'. This conceptualisation paints trauma as a crisis of meaning, wherein previous views of the self and the world are damaged by an experience (or set of experiences), and behaviours change as a result.

Trauma fiction

Trauma fiction has evolved as a genre over centuries, mirroring developments in the psychological and social

understandings of the effects of traumatic experiences upon individuals. The genre not only thematically addresses the issue of trauma but also textually 'performs' its psychological impact through devices such as fragmentation, memory impairment, unreliable narration, isolation and violence (Schönfelder 2013). In these texts, trauma is used as a lens through which to develop a greater understanding of phenomena such as human emotion, memory, identity and sexual expression (McGuffey 2005). Texts have evolved in their expression—from depicting trauma as a physical abnormality reflecting psychological pain, as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2012), to examining trauma within families and as a social and cultural phenomenon, as in Melina Marchetta's *On the Jellico Road* (2006).

As a genre, trauma fiction explores the capacity of words to 'address wounds' (Schönfelder 2013, p. 319). The characters, events, behaviours and thoughts that form the substance of trauma fiction intersect in complex ways with psychological and psychiatric discourse, and the evolution of the genre over time has reflected developments in the understanding and conceptualisation of trauma as a concept (Schönfelder 2013). Romantic trauma texts, such as Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, first published in 1798, or Shelley's *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818, highlight the effects of the family home on characters. They also regularly represent scars on the psyche of characters as permanent physical abnormalities. As the psychological understanding of trauma evolved through conceptualisations of 'hysteria', 'shell shock', 'battle fatigue' and 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (Jones & Wessely 2006), reflections in literature similarly developed. Postmodern trauma novels of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, such as Lisa Graff's *Lost in the Sun* (2015), Tamara Ellis Smith's *Another Kind of Hurricane* (2015), and Karen Harrington's *Mayday* (2016) emphasise the possibility of new, albeit complex, beginnings that offer hope of a future beyond trauma (Enriquez et al., 2017; Schönfelder, 2013).

Trauma fiction depicts a wide range of reactions to traumatic events and relationships, including 'crises of identity and memory, guilt and shame, fear and anger, depression, a sense of haunting, and a general loss of orientation' (Schönfelder 2013, p. 318). Belliveau (2018) suggests that audiences engaging with these texts are able to achieve a measure of catharsis by witnessing a character overcoming trauma. McGuffey (2005) further asserts that, in trauma texts, traumatic experiences are used as a lens for both writer and reader to develop a greater understanding of phenomena such as human emotion, collective memory and sexual expression. This assertion fits with psychiatrist Judith Herman's (in Schick 2011, p. 1849) conceptualisation of the role of storytelling in trauma as a 'work of reconstruction' that allows traumatic memories to be reintegrated into the life story of an individual.

Trauma is strongly linked, in both psychological research and literary discourse, with memory. Anne Whitehead (2009) attributes the popularity of trauma fiction to a cultural obsession with the concept of memory as an aspect of identity, including the ways that it can be disrupted or disruptive in the mind of an individual. The task of the trauma writer is to engage with these complexities of memory and experience and to anchor meaning in personhood, storytelling and place. However, engaging with the subject of trauma is ethically complicated, and it requires a considered approach to issues of representation, voice, objectivity and truth (Murphy 2015).

Trauma novels do not simply address psychological wounds and how they affect personhood, identity and memory; they textually perform these effects within the narrative (Caruth 1995). Such performances may entail gaps in memory, unreliable narration and the fragmentation or breakdown of language (Schönfelder 2013). Contemporary novels such as Sonya Hartnett's *Surrender* (2005), Melina Marchetta's *On the Jellico Road* (2006) and Clare Mackintosh's *I Let You Go* (2014) use memory gaps, fragmented narration and character obsessions to perform the effects of trauma and to work through issues of psychological damage. They variously depict healing and the integration of experiences into individual identities to illustrate the hope of a life beyond trauma.

Moore and Begoray (2017) assert that trauma fiction can play a valuable role in the classroom in providing a textual framework for difficult discussions. They suggest that teachers should first gain confidence in addressing these issues through professional development, should seek the support of school administration, and should establish a healthy and supportive class culture. As they note '[d]ifficult stories exist for our students whether they are explored or not' (Moore & Begoray, 2017, p. 179). I remember a discussion between myself and a previous school principal as I advocated for the inclusion in my classes of some controversial material that my students had selected for discussion.

I argued then, as I believe to this day, that students are grappling with complex issues, theirs or those of characters, whether we choose to teach them or not. However, without us, they explore such stories alone.

Case Study 1 – *Macbeth* in Juvenile Justice

In 2018 I conducted a residency with Bell Shakespeare Theatre Company, working with young men in juvenile justice to unpack and explore Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The project was such a success that I repeated it again six months later in the same facility with three new groups of young offenders. The realities of the setting made for inconsistent teaching conditions. On several occasions myself and the other educator I partnered with were confined to a room for up to several hours as the facility went into lockdown and staff responded to a critical incident. Our sessions were voluntary, and at times individual students chose not to attend. At other times, they were not permitted to attend due to their behaviour earlier in the day. These interruptions made for a challenging environment in which to engage these youth in a complex text.

We began by assessing background knowledge. As we had expected, most of the boys had never heard of Shakespeare. Those that had heard of him responded negatively to his mention, expressing that his work was 'confusing' and 'boring'. Many of the boys had impaired literacy skills, so we did not present them with a script. We worked through *Macbeth* practically, giving the students roles, re-enacting key moments, analysing small fragments of dialogue. The boys engaged with the description of Macbeth's sword as '[smoking] with bloody execution,' cutting into enemies from 'the nave to the chops'. We expected the violence of the play to be an easy way to engage our cohort. We were surprised, however, when the boys equally engaged in discussion about Lady Macbeth undermining her husband's masculinity with the line 'Are you a man?'. Whilst combat and bloodshed engaged the boys in the text, significant conversations occurred around the concepts of toxic masculinity and guilt ('Out, damned spot!').

We were not permitted, in agreement with the facility, to discuss the boys' offences. Nor did we need to. Instead, one boy proposed that Macbeth regretted what he had done in murdering King Duncan but couldn't back down in front of his friends. It was not a question; the boy was certain that this was how Macbeth felt. He identified with the character's experiences, and through this was able to reflect upon his own. Of course, this was not a therapy session. As the teacher I offered no specific advice, nor did I inquire about the boy's experiences. We discussed why Macbeth may have felt unable to turn from a course that took him further and further into crime. We also asked our students to improvise moments in which Macbeth could have made alternate choices – confessing to Banquo, divorcing his wife, surrendering his title to Malcolm. As a group, we enacted Macbeth's fate as he stood in hubris until the end, certain that he was invincible until he was beheaded.

When asked who was to blame for the events of the play, the boys had a variety of theories. Some claimed that it was the witches, who had fed Macbeth information designed to tempt and trick him. Others blamed Lady Macbeth for making her husband feel like he had to kill and rise to power to be viewed as a man. A few assigned blame to Macbeth, and said that ultimately, he made his own choices, regardless of whatever pressures he was under. As educators, we did not draw inferences for the boys' own offences. Certainly, the text was chosen due to its relevant themes. However, as an English Teacher, I do not consider it my role to heal the psychological trauma that my students may have suffered. I do, however, consider that my role is to engage students in texts that provoke questions and reflections about culture, ideology, philosophy, spirituality and values. Dharamshi (2018) conceptualises this role as an aspect of literacy education, positing that critical literacy interrogates multiple viewpoints, and incorporates a focus on socio-political issues in an effort to teach students to better 'read' the world around them. Dharamshi goes on to assert that, through this approach, students' own lives are used as curricular resources, and they are encouraged to examine their own beliefs and assumptions about the world around them. In doing so, there exists the capacity to restore power to the disempowered, equipping students with the skills to begin to work through their experiences (Dutro, 2011, 2017; Moore & Begoray, 2017).

Case Study 2 – *Infinity*: Class Creative Writing Project

Also in 2018, in an entirely different setting, I worked with a class of Year Seven and Eight students to collaboratively produce a novella we entitled *Infinity*. This was a standard, non-streamed class of nineteen students with a wide variety of literacy abilities from 'I've never read a whole book before' (direct quote)

and a student with profound dyslexia who was unable to access written texts, to a student who regularly borrowed extension reading material. The 'horror' genre was selected for the project for its accessible tropes and conventions, and a proposed cast of some three dozen characters was eventually narrowed down to a more manageable number. Collaboratively, the class constructed an overarching plot framework and timeline. Individual students then wrote chapters from a character's perspective that contributed to the development of the narrative. Refining these was complicated, with students reading each other's work and negotiating to ensure continuity. Arguments over the condition of the peeling paint on the walls of the abandoned mental facility were common as creative visions clashed and a common understanding was forged.

The work itself was a trauma narrative – the story of a damaged girl searching for her lost brother and a tortured scientist's experiments in pursuit of power and immortality. Archetypal stuff. Of course, it was entirely fictional – psychic powers were involved. However, the themes of the text held real meaning for many of the students who wrote it. In class, and after when students were invited to leave for lunch break, we discussed how many of them related to the feeling of being an outsider or feeling disconnected from their families. This was channelled into the work, through sometimes clumsy sentences and derivative characters. The quality of the work was not always the point. Individual students felt an ownership of their aspect of the story, and when they felt unable to discuss their own social isolation or family dysfunction, they discussed that of their character.

One boy, who was unable to write due to significant reading and writing difficulties, elected to communicate his chapter through a series of paintings. He discussed with the class how these still frames were from one character's point of view, and showed a shadowy figure emerging from an elevator with a cryptic message. Later, as we packed up his paints and rinsed brushes, he continued to tell me how his character has been in a cell for a decade and hadn't been able to communicate with anyone. The character, he explained, saw people walk past and go about their jobs but was confined and unable to escape. As he screwed the lid onto a bottle of black paint we had borrowed from the Art room, he said to me 'he used to be really frustrated… he doesn't try to get out anymore'. This conceptualisation of the character was unnecessary for the project – it never made it into the book. Still, this was the most engaged I had seen this student in a text since I began teaching the class. I never asked him why he knew that the character felt that way, and of course it is possible that he never shared those feelings himself. Regardless, something about the creation of that narrative in his mind, and the expression of a piece of it in his artwork had engaged him in a discussion of a speculative emotional journey. It remained a significant experience for this student who discussed it again with me two years later, stating that he'd never felt he understood a text in the same way since.

Throughout this class project, one student excelled in the creation of the work. In the end she contributed a full three chapters to the finished work. The character she created through this project became the central protagonist of the novel. This character was a young girl, desperately trying to track down her older brother who had gone six months before the events of the narrative. Throughout the novel the character's narration reveals how she 'couldn't let anyone know how upset [she] really was', and how she 'couldn't bear to live another second in this nightmare.' Of course, this character also had an infinity-shaped birthmark that matched her brothers and later, psychic powers. The content was undeniably fictitious. Months later, however, the student and I discussed the experiences from her own life that had informed her writing, and how the process of representing these in fiction had helped her to understand her own thoughts and feelings. Interestingly, I had a similar conversation with three other class members who felt, as readers, that they identified significantly with this character. The trauma narrative that, for one student, was a very personal representation of her own challenges, was for others a significant exploration of thoughts and feelings they connected with.

This was a complicated project to manage. In the end we self-published the work, releasing a limited print run for students, friends and families to purchase. We held a small book launch and threw a class party afterwards. The visibility of the work within the community created some content concerns from school administration. I remember justifying the class's choice of the horror genre in a meeting with the principal as I was asked 'never to do something like this again'. I made arguments about how, if students are interested in exploring complex themes, it's better that they do this in an open discussion with the group rather than alone. The reality is that, as Colin Davis

(2011) argues, discussing issues of trauma is an 'ethical minefield', a statement that Christa Schönfelder (2013, p. 319) suggests is true 'even if the traumatized 'other' is a character in a literary text'. Not representing a given issue, however, is equally problematic, as it raises significant questions about the politics of visibility and whose trauma deserves discussion (Murphy 2015).

Reflections –Pitfalls and Potential

Trauma, as discussed above, is in many ways a crisis of meaning. English, as a subject area, is devoted to the analysis, discussion and representation of meanings. The NSW K-10 English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (2019) lists amongst its outcomes for Stage 5, that students should question, challenge and evaluate cultural assumptions, and understand the way texts can represent personal and public worlds (EN5-7D, EN5-8D). These outcomes place the exploration of trauma firmly within the domain of English, creating a space where students can reflect upon the experiences that impact others and themselves, and examine personal worlds that may be different to their own. These texts give students opportunities to compare their experiences, as well as the meanings they derive from them, with others.

The old adage of teaching students 'how to think' not 'what to think' still holds true. English teachers need not have training in psychology to suggest that Macbeth might have felt lonely, or that Brian in Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet* (1986) may have had difficulty adjusting to normal life after his experience surviving in the wild. English teachers are trained in dissecting fictitious experience and prompting their students to reflect and apply what they have learned to their own worlds. West and Williams (2015, p. 20) suggest that English classes can 'engage students in reflection related to their social and cultural position and identity in the world'. In the analysis of trauma in the classroom, these skills provide an avenue for teachers to provoke, with sensitivity, thought about trauma–its causes, effects and the possibility of hope in recovery (Dutro, 2011, 2017).

Of course, concerns about addressing trauma in the mainstream classroom are common. As childhood trauma has received greater recognition as a significant issue in school-aged children (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; KidsMatter: Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative, n.d.), the education space has responded with 'trauma-informed' strategies to protect the wellbeing of students (Cavanaugh, 2016, Berger, 2019). Carter (2015) has highlighted the fear of 'triggers' that may 're-traumatise' students, and the resultant move towards a pedagogy of 'trigger warnings'. However, such practices are inherently political, and Carter warns against 'the difference between pedagogically productive discomfort and trigger-induced re-traumatization' (2015, para. 9). If those who have experienced trauma are viewed as neurologically diverse, rather than from a deficit stance, we understand that whilst they experience the world differently their experiences are not incorrect. In teaching students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, whilst we understand that they may have difficult in interpreting social cues, we do not shrink from discussing relationships between textual characters. We also do not intentionally place students in situations that may be upsetting for them.

There is, I think, a balance to be struck here. Just as teachers make informed decisions about content that is culturally and age-appropriate for their students, so too must decisions be made about the utilisation of trauma literature in the classroom. There is the possibility that the content could be upsetting to some students who may have had similar experiences. On the other hand, these very same students may draw the most value from studying such content, finding inspiration in representation and hope in stories of 'working through' trauma (Schick, 2011). For students who have not experienced trauma, such narratives provide an opportunity to engage with and attempt to understand how experiences impact an individual's mental state – to develop insight into the social and emotional landscape around them (Dutro, 2011, 2017; Moore & Begoray, 2017). Despite these potential benefits, reasonable concerns remain about the negative impact of teaching such content poorly, or causing further psychological injury to students who have experienced trauma. Brown et al. (2020) note the challenge for teachers in feeling competent to address trauma in the classroom, and the need for teacher preparation training to address this.

It is my belief that the analysis and discussion of what Dutro (2011) terms 'the hard stuff of life' already occurs in many English classrooms. Some teachers certainly already engage their students in the study of texts that depict experiences of trauma and offer significant

questions for discussion regarding the impact such experiences may have on characters. Further research is required, however, to identify the specific supports teachers need to feel confident in connecting texts to the concept of 'trauma'. Frameworks should also be developed to assist teachers in engaging students in a trauma-informed discussion utilising fictional texts as metaphors for students' own experiences.

A multi-tiered model of intervention, such as regularly used by school learning support departments, has been proposed for trauma-informed care in schools (Berger, 2019). This model suggests that all teachers have a role in supporting students who have experienced trauma as a 'first tier' of intervention. In the second and third tiers, Berger suggests school mental health staff and external professionals are able to offer more specialised care. This multi-tiered model suggests that the level of intervention offered by teachers should be universal, rather than individual. Teachers need not know the individual circumstances of students, nor tailor their teaching to specific cases. Instead, what is proposed is that teachers be equipped with some basic level of trauma awareness and help all students to understand the ways in which traumatic experiences impact upon individuals, their perceptions of the world, and their ability to participate in relationships.

Childhood trauma is an increasingly significant issue, and Australian English teachers are well-placed to be at the front line of trauma intervention, delivering universal education regarding trauma through texts that explore this terrain. In doing so, students can be engaged in reflecting upon their own experiences and the ways that these have impacted their views of themselves and the world around them. This approach destigmatises the experience of trauma without requiring any disclosure in the classroom or specialist mental health knowledge. As all students are engaged in the analysis and discussion of a work of trauma fiction, the issue of trauma is depersonalised, and the experiences of a fictional character can be discussed without the need for students to make themselves vulnerable. Following Berger's (2019) model, students who express a desire for more specialist intervention can be referred on to school mental health staff, who can then liaise with external professionals as required.

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Witness

I began to find the boredom almost beautiful

'The Music Next Door', The Lucksmiths

The paintings we bought of the interior
of someone else's home now come across

as somewhat ironic Black and white
it seems do we know when to unmask
ourselves how far should we stand

from people we love gloved flesh
makes for poor intimacy I caught sight

of a man at his desk by a window previously
always shuttered he saw me sweating

on my exercise machine dressed in only a chemise
I felt ashamed

I heard the music next door and thought
of our ex-neighbour who loved spanking

we would listen down the corridor and wonder
when to call the police there are people

sitting on park benches they follow me
I worry they can tell I am Asian underneath

Ticker tongues send out numbers in the thousands
sites crash and burn your colleague

has curious taste in wall art but then she gets up and
goes to speak in the closet I feel lucky

I am childless I dream about jars and wake
to measure rise not descend write down the lifts and turns

The sun is watery we have missed the summer
Do leaves even fall if you are no longer a witness

Eileen Chong is a Sydney poet and the author of nine books. Her work has shortlisted for many awards and prizes, including the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, and twice for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Her most recent poetry collection is *A Thousand Crimson Blooms* from the University of Queensland Press. She lives and works on unceded Gadigal land of the Eora Nation.

'Witness' was commissioned for the Poetry on the Move festival in 2020 and has previously appeared in an interview published online (www.correspondences.work, June 14 2020). You can listen to the poet reading the poem at https://youtu.be/chP0mO8akGw.

& READing VIEWing *with* Deb McPherson

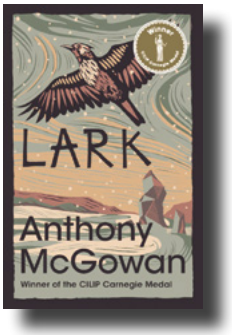
Many wonderful texts have appeared on my desk and screen over the past year, and I have opted for a series of shorter, sharper reviews to enable more texts to have time in front of teachers' and students' eyes. With the likelihood of lockdowns still with us, and a theme of English@Home, I thought some ideas about 'Reading Challenges' for students might be a way to encourage reading and viewing for pleasure, both inside the classroom and at home. Give students a list and set them on a text hunt. Lists of texts, could include banned texts, texts with an historical context, graphic novels, verse novels, inclusive texts, texts that explore different identities, 'appeal of the real' texts, such as memoirs and biographies, and texts that changed lives. When teachers encourage book borrowing in non-lockdown times and have emergency text borrowing for time at home it helps normalise reading and viewing for pleasure. Look through some of the reviews of texts below and set students the task of finding some of them in the school or public library, online, in eBook or audio format and in the bookrooms. How many in each stage can they track down and enjoy?

The AATE annual conference, *Challenge and Change*, was presented online in July 2021 and had many engaging and exciting speakers, including Ellen van Neerven, Kay Kerr and Anna Whateley. Reviews of Ellen's poetry collection, *Throat*, and two neurodiverse YA books, Kay's *Please Don't Hug Me* and Anna's *Peta Lyre's Rating Normal* appear among the reviews below.

Years 7 & 8 fiction

Lark Anthony McGowan (2020) Barrington Stoke 110 pp.

Two brothers and a dog start out late for a walk on the moors. Their dad suggested they go as things are tense at home with their mum about to reappear in the lives. Nick is younger but looks after Kenny, who is learning disabled. Tina is their dog. When they get caught in a snowstorm, the brothers need each other more than ever to avoid disaster.



This is a story about the power of telling stories. The 110 page novella of beautifully written prose is pacey, engaging and authentic. It details poverty and tough times yet McGowan also conveys the inner life of the boys and the love between them. The landscape of the Yorkshire moor is so vividly described it almost shines as a supplementary character. It's almost certain that you and your students will be in tears at some stage in the reading. *Lark* is a book that is equally heartbreaking and heartwarming and it will wind its way into the hearts of teachers and students alike. It is destined to be read in many classrooms and become a classic tale for students to enjoy. *Lark* was the winner of the Carnegie Medal for 2020.

Future Girl Asphyxia (2020) Allen & Unwin 384 pp.

Future Girl is a graphic novel by Australian DEAF writer, artist and activist, Asphyxia. It is set in the near future in Melbourne. In an environmental crisis, Piper, who is a Deaf daughter to a hearing adult, meets Marley who is a CODA (Child of a Deaf adult). Piper's mum, who has just lost her job as leading scientist on the Recon project, has focused on getting Piper to speak and lipread while Marley is a fluent Auslan signer. He introduces Piper to his mother, Robbie, and her garden. Piper is full of wonder at what Robbie has created and how delicious wild food can be, despite the government labelling it as poison. The crisis increases as the Recon food problems grow and people try to turn to wild food. Piper starts her own garden on council land, learns to sign and her journal records all her experiences, including her up and down relationship with Marley. As political pressure increases her art and her protest become central to the cause.

Future Girl will encourage students to explore

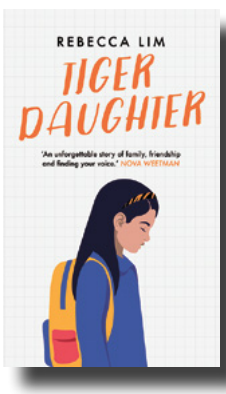
the environment and the DEAF community with its emphasis on ways for hearing readers to demonstrate inclusion and empathy. *Future Girl* has a tactile cover and art work and images throughout the text. This is an authentic page turner as each page brings fresh delights.

***Snow* Gina Inverarity (2020) Wakefield Press 199 pp.**

Snow is a retelling of the Snow White story in a future, climate-changed world. It is a fascinating exercise in intertextuality. It starts with Snow's memories of life before her father died, as she is locked in her cell by her stepmother and held captive by her malice. Snow is small but fierce and it is in her voice that the story is narrated. In her world, magic has been replaced by science, but it is fading because the industrial economy has collapsed, and people are no longer global citizens but returning to an agrarian society. When the hunter takes her into the forest, with orders to cut out her heart, she makes a deal with him and escapes into the wilderness. New Zealand writer Gina Inverarity brings the mountains, passes and rivers vividly to life. There is menace, power, and danger in this novel as well as spirit and light. Snow is not all that white either, but ethnically ambiguous. The version of 'Snow White' in Carol Ann Duff's *Faery Tales* (2014) published by Faber & Faber (pp. 293–309) could be part of an introduction to the novel and support the exploration of the intertextuality at play.

***Tiger Daughter* Rebecca Lim (2021) Allen & Unwin 224 pp.**

Wen Zhou, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Chinese immigrants, helps her friend Henry Xiao with his English while he helps her with Maths. Both are trying to cope with unhappy home situations and see a selective school entrance exam as a pathway to new opportunities. But when Henry's mother tragically takes her own life, Wen must do everything she can to support her friend. Wen's father tightly controls his wife and daughter and lets his own despair and anger damage their lives. It will take courage on the part of both mother and daughter to stand up to his bullying and help Henry and his father. As a migrant child of the 70s and 80s Rebecca Lim never saw herself, or others like her, in any childrens' books. *Tiger Daughter* arose out of determination to write a story that asks readers to think about what it must be like to be marginalised and try to walk in two worlds. This story vividly builds empathy and understanding in the face of racism and sexism.



***The Dam* David Almond and Levi Pinfold (2018) Walker Books Australia 32 pp.**

The writer and illustrator have collaborated in this poignant picture book record of a true story of the Northumberland landscape and the power of music. Mike and Kathryn tell the story of the building of a new dam and what is lost from the environment. Their words and pictures and the music they play capture and celebrate that loss.

Years 7 & 8 film and television

***Enola Holmes* (2020) directed by Harry Bradbeer PG Netflix (Film)**

Millie Bobby Brown stars as Enola, Sherlock's sister, in this high energy mystery thriller about Enola and her escape from a repressive school and her quest to find her missing mother. The film is based on the YA fiction series by American Nancy Springer with screenplay by Jack Thorne. Fast action, clever special effects, humour and a wonderfully fiesty protagonist will delight students as they watch Enola use her sleuthing skills, while the film explores independence and equality.

***His Dark Materials* Season 1 directed by Jamie Childs (television series 2019) Running time 7 hours 38 minutes DVD**

This fantasy series is based on the Philip Pullman novels in which characters can move between different yet parallel worlds. Young Lyra lives at Jordan College

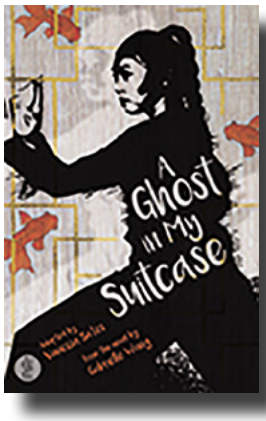
in Oxford and in her world, people have daemons, animal companions to which they are closely attached. When her friend, Roger, goes missing, along with many children, Lyra is disturbed. She runs away from a sinister benefactor called Mrs Coulter, a senior member of the Magisterium, who is later revealed to be her mother. Lyra joins the Gyptians who think the Gobblers are responsible for the children's disappearance. They plan to go north with the help of Lyra's alethiometer, a truth telling device that she seems to know instinctively how to use. Armoured bears, dust and a terrible secret laboratory of the Magisterium await in the north. This is exciting, challenging fantasy, and students could read Pullman's books in tandem with selected episodes and launch into an exploration of the genre and its conventions.

Years 7 & 8 drama

Sunshine Super Girl **Andrea James (2021)**
Currency Press 57 pp.

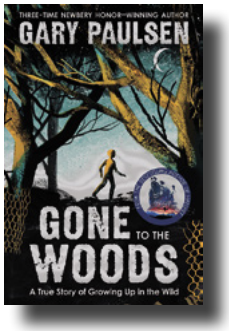
Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai writer, Andrea James, dramatises the story of Australian tennis champion, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, who came from a farmimg town in NSW. At nineteen she became a world champion. Poverty and racism are part of the tale, both countered by a strong connection to country and community. A tennis net is fittingly part of the set and students will find Evonne's story is told with humour and warmth. Amid the prejudice and adversity she faces, her spirit and extraordinary talent shine out.

A Ghost in my Suitcase **adapted by Vanessa Bates from the novel by Gabrielle Wang (2019)**
Currency Press 41 pp.



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

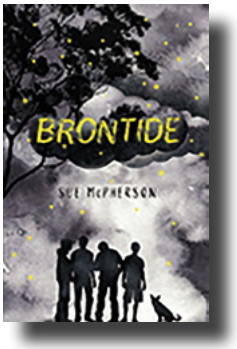


Gone to the Woods: A True Story of Growing Up in the Wild **Gary Paulsen (2021)**
Pan Macmillian 224 pp.

In this memoir of the first two decades of his life Paulsen gives insight into the experiences that he used to write survival stories. When he is five years old his alcoholic mother sends him, by train, from Chicago to his aunt's farm in Minnesota. He travels there alone and finds love and security, but then his mother reclaims him and takes him to the Philippines where his father is serving. Both parents ignore him as they sink deeper into their drinking. Returning to the US Paulsen takes the reader into his attempts to escape and the profound influence a kind librarian had on him. The third person narration captures the trauma and the tragedy, but with revealing humour and insight into the practical skills that helped him survive such a lost childhood.

Years 9–12 fiction

Brontide **Sue McPherson (2019)**
Magabala Books 132 pp.



This short novel will make a big impact in the classroom. It's the story of four boys, their school and their sometimes dangerous games. Rob is in Year 12, fifteen-year-old Pen is his brother, twelve-year-old Indigenous Benny Boy is friends with Pen but doesn't trust Rob, and Jack is white, new to the area, and adopted into

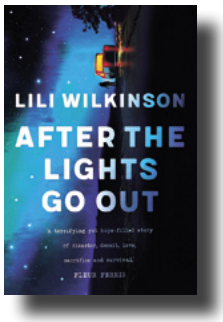
a First Nations family. Their lives intertwine and are told during a series of interviews that take place over five days. The boys are authentic and engaging, with rude, humorous and challenging dialogue that reveals the family fractures and the love and trouble in their lives. This is an accessible and gripping novel that will engage disengaged readers and its ending will shock them. Sue McPherson's Author's Note reinforces the story's gut-wrenching plausibility, so much so that I had to reassure myself that Taralune High did not exist. It doesn't. This is a compelling work of fiction.

The Boy from the Mish **Gary Lonesborough (2021) Allen & Unwin 271 pp.**

Benjamin Law wishes this book had been written when he was a teenager as it would have changed his life. Jackson is seventeen, a young Yuin man living in rural NSW and confused about his own sexuality. When Tomas, another First Nations teenager, fresh out of detention, comes to stay at Jackson's home in the Mish, Jackson starts to fall in love with him. All the awkwardness of love and the misunderstandings are captured so authentically, with much humour among the angst. The importance of family and friendship is affirmed and there will be much to discuss in the classroom. Gary Lonesborough is a Yuin man who grew up on the NSW far South Coast. He is part of a large First Nations' family, and this is his first YA novel. His acknowledgements are a delight to read. He thanks his Year 6 teacher at St Patrick's Primary School in Bega 'who asked twelve-year-old me to send her a copy of my first book', and his Year 12 English teacher at Bega High for 'always cheering on my writing'.

After the Lights Go Out **Lili Wilkinson (2019) 352 pp.**

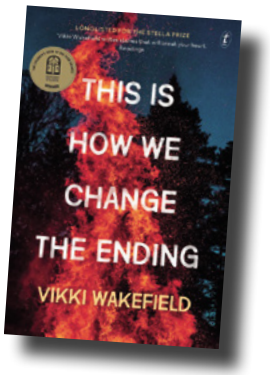
The Palmer family are Australian doomsday preppers who live on the outskirts of town. Rick the authoritarian father, has created a bunker stocked with water and food and trained his daughters, seventeen-year-old Pru and her twin sisters, in survival. When Rick is far away at his mine work, a solar flare takes out the power and communication in the nearby town and cars won't start. The girls, whose motto 'family comes first' has been drilled into them, don't disclose their secret bunker. They don't share the goods it contains with the other people, despite a growing desperation among the townsfolk and a budding relationship between Mateo, a Puerto Rican newcomer, and Pru.



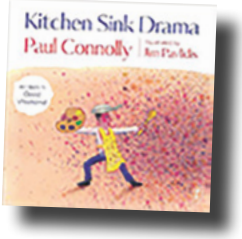
This dystopian thriller explores the best and worst aspects of a diverse humanity, and the way different people respond to disaster; some with kindness and cooperation, others with menace.

This is How We Change the Ending **Vikki Wakefield (2019) Text Publishing 272 pp.**

Nate's aggressive dad, Dec, makes life very tough for him and the rest of the family. Nate is sixteen and trying to be invisible. He goes to school and the youth centre, but he worries; he worries a lot. He worries about the climate, about his reckless mate Merrick, about how his dad treats his small stepbrothers and their mother, Nance, and most of all he worries that he might grow up to be like his father. His worries fill his notebooks and when some pages go missing and are used in a revolt against the proposed closure of the youth centre, Nate's closed world begins to open. This novel has a gritty realism and does what Wakefield does so well, gives insight and appreciation to the lives of kids, who, with few advantages and limited opportunities, push back against the world to make it a better place. *This is How We Change the Ending* won the 2020 CBC Book of the Year for older readers.



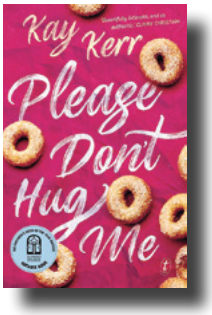
Kitchen Sink Drama **Paul Connelly illustrated Jim Pavlidis (2020) 201 pp.**



These small, sharp vignettes are wonderful starters to inspire writing and excellent examples of a multimodal text. They are also featured in the *SMH Good Weekend* and can be found online at Connelly's website https://www.paulconnolly.net.au

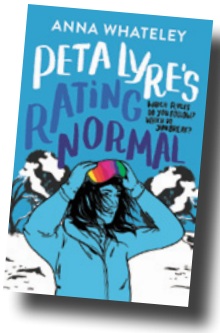
These observations of the human condition are tart and pithy and often infused with humour and delight. From tattoos after a fling to burying a loved dog they capture the truth so economically, and students can explore the connections between the images and the words as they create their own small-scale dramas.

Please Don't Hug Me **Kay Kerr (2020) Text Publishing 281 pp.**



When Kay Kerr received her own autism spectrum diagnosis, she was composing the first draft of this novel. Her protagonist, Erin, an autistic seventeen-year-old is writing a series of letters to her brother Rudy. Sometimes the letters are angry that Rudy hasn't come home, sometimes they are full of the efforts she is making to fit in and deal with the difficulty of being different at home and at school. She is focused on Schoolies with her best friend Dee, (despite hating parties, and isn't Schoolies one giant party?) and trying to find her place in the world. *Please Don't Hug Me* is a wise and often funny novel with some serious plot twists while providing readers with insights and affirmations into the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

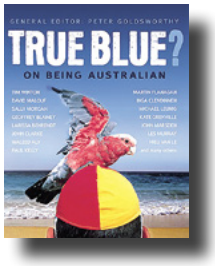
Peta Lyre's Rating Normal **Anna Whateley (2020) Allen & Unwin 237 pp.**



This 'own voice' YA novel also provides insights into the daily experiences of the neurodivergent. It references a collection of strategies and techniques that protagonist, sixteen-year-old Peta Lyre, an 'alphabet kid', uses to navigate her way through a world that isn't designed for the way her mind works. These social skills are scattered through the text in italics as her inner advice (e.g. *'a question shows you are interested in what someone is saying', 'when you find irritation building either use one of your coping techniques or remove yourself from the situation', 'feed your other senses to block the one that hurts',)* and they provide her with the ability to fit in with the expectations of others. Peta ends many chapters with her 'Normal rating' and her mantra 'Inhale. Exhale. Survive.' Rarely does Peta give herself a 10/10. But as the story continues, Peta and the reader start to question what is normal? Peta's blunt character seems refreshingly honest compared to the false and fake people that surround her. After the much-anticipated ski trip she must respond to the feelings she has for the new girl, Sam, and plot a path that allows her to be her own normal, and to relax some of the endless rules she has tried to live by. Peta is an endearing and authentic character and her story about finding people to love by representing neurodivergent readers and widening the understanding of neurotypical readers.

Anna Whateley herself is proudly autistic and has ADHD, SPD, and Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. She says that writing this novel has changed her life, it's likely that *Peta Lyre's Rating Normal* could change many lives too.

True Blue? On Being Australian **edited by Peter Goldsworthy (2008) Allen & Unwin 224 pp.**



What makes us Australian? *True Blue?* This anthology uses novel extracts, newspaper articles, poems, cultural icons, historical commentary, photographs, paintings, and voices old and new to reflect on the stories Australians tell about ourselves and the myths we cultivate. An excellent task for students would be to consider the gaps and silences in this text and to create an updated collection of texts that reflect the 2021 nature of being Australian and its increasing diversity and inclusiveness.

Years 9–12 film

The Personal History of David Copperfield **directed by Armando Iannucci (2020) FilmNation DVD 144 minutes**

This modernist and absurdist interpretation of Dickens' classic is enegetic, intellegent and very entertaining. The colour-blind casting has a splendid Dev Patel as David and a huge array of other characters, including Ben Whishaw as Uriah Heep and Rosalind Eleazar as Agnes, while Tilda Swinton excels at Betsey Trotwood and Peter Capaldi as a beguiling Mr Micawber. This inventive and creative film reinvents a classic narrative with skill and visual excitement that reinforce the timeless qualities of Dickens' story. A wonderful companion to the classic novel and a quality film in its own right for discussion in the classroom.

Your Name **directed by Matoto Shinkai (2016) Film PG**

Taki is a 17-year-old boy living in Tokyo. Mitsuha is a 17-year-old girl living in a rural Japanese village. A cosmic incident somehow impacts them and unexpectedly they begin swapping bodies. This

exchange is confusing and often humorous as they struggle to cope with different gender and life experiences. They begin leaving notes for each other and finally, when the swapping stops, Taki sets out to find Mitsuha as they try to understand what has happened to them. This time travel/body swap romance is stunningly animated, and the different landscapes and lives are beautifully conveyed.

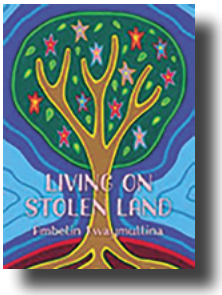
***Backtrack Boys* directed by Catherine Scott (2018) Documentary film MA**

Bernie Shakeshaft started *Backtrack Boys* from a shed on the outskirts of Armidale. His aim was to help troubled and traumatised youth through counselling, friendship, and the influence of dogs. The dogs are wonderful, and so are the boys they work with. Shakeshaft reveals the debt he owes to First Nations Elders for showing him how nature and time can support the lives of youth at risk. Catherine Scott followed and filmed several boys and staff and their dog jumping team over two years. The documentary gives voice to those boys and the tough times as well as the successes. This film is about relationships and masculinity. It is both a joyful tale and one steeped in difficulty, but inspired by hope and care. Be aware that its honesty involves strong and frank language, though why this language would rate MA classification is ludicrous. This rating may prevent it being viewed and explored in Year 9 or 10 classrooms where it would be most valued.

Poetry

***Living on Stolen Land* Ambelin Kwaymullina (2020) Magabala Books 64 pp.**

This brilliant collection of poems challenges the non-Indigenous people of Australia about the founding myths of our nation and asks us what we will do to creatre better relationships with First Nation peoples. Do not be mislead by the slim 67 pages of the text or the vivid colours of the cover – this is complex, challenging and confronting poetry. The four sections (You are on Indigenous Land, Perspectives, The Long Con and Pathways) consider stolen lands, First Nations perspectives, systemic bias such as job denial, skin privileges – 'I'm not a racist but …' – and the need for decolonisation.



Kwaymullina explains

> You are on Indigenous lands
> swimming in Indigenous waters
> looking up at Indigenous skies …
>
> You are living on stolen land
> What can you do about it?

Kwaymullina describes Australia as a land where settler colonialism lives on. Many First Nations people around the world suffered from extraction colonialism. They were robbed and enslaved but the colonisers, who, after extracting all they could from the land, were finally pushed out by the majority Indigenous people. But in Australia the settlers stayed. They were settler colonists and they became the majority and never left. In the *Pathways* section Kwaymullina calls on settlers to walk humbly, ask and listen, take responsibility for our own learning and be partners in respectful relationships.

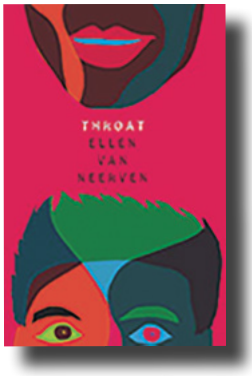
This important poem sequence should find its way into many classrooms from Years 7–12. Its grace and truth should be considered by all Australians because:

> There is no part of this place
> that was not
> is not
> cared for
> loved
> by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation
> There are no trees
> rivers
> hills
> stars
> that were not
> are not
> someone's kin

Ambelin Kwaymullina belongs to the Palyku people of the eastern Pilbara region of Western Australia. She is a writer, illustrator and law academic who works across a range of genres, including YA, science fiction, poetry, and non-fiction.

***Throat* Ellen van Neerven (2020) UQP 138 pp.**

Ellen Van Neerven's subtle and persuasive collection, suffused with humour and nuance but also telling truth to power and exploring phases of love, is just plain



wonderful. Family, love, land, politics, language, and beauty are scattered through these poems and addressed with wit and heart and forensic interrogation.

'Chermy' is a tribute/ recollection to First Nations life in Chermside, the Brisbane suburb Ellen grew up in; a poem full of family, community, and the joys and losses of ordinary living. The poem 'The Only Blak Queer in the World' (who didn't know 'how to tell my family') charts what the poet didn't know, hadn't read or met, and how to survive lonely nights by 'creating Cathy Freeman/ as a lesbian and prince as an Aboriginal.' But the 'dance joined a big dance' and joy and community were found, but also the heavy loss of 'those killed, murdered, missing'.

'The Last Apology', written on Sorry Day in 2017, takes aim at apologies without action. 'Let this be the last apology/ that moves from your lips' while 'Women are still not being heard' was written for Ms Dhu, a 22-year-old Yamatji woman who died in police custody in 2014.

> Our bodies ignored
> Crimes against us approved
> Sister spoke up
> It took her life
> In custody …
> It must end.

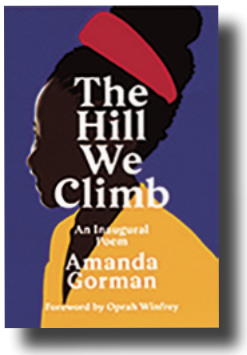
So many poems like 'Bold & Beautiful' ('This stitching of care between generations pulls us all in'), deliver phrases that linger in the mind long after you have put the collection down. *Throat* is a collection well worth reading, rereading, and discussing in your senior classroom.

Throat was the Winner of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards Book of the Year, Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry and NSW Multicultural Award in 2021. It was also the recipient of the 2020 Quentin Bryce Award. Ellen van Neerven is an award-winning writer of Mununjali Yugambeh (South East Queensland) and Dutch heritage.

A poet for all stages

The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem **Amanda Gorman (2021) Vintage 27 pp.**

Amanda Gorman is the youngest poet ever to recite at an American Presidential Inauguration. When she stood up to perform her poem, 'The Hill We Climb', to mark the swearing in of Joe Biden as the 46th president, her performance was seen around the world. Her voice, her rap, her yellow coat, red headband, and graceful movements brought instant attention. The poem's powerful message of hope and change and her electric performance was a worldwide internet sensation and led to poetry becoming number one on some bestseller lists.



Students could perform the poem as Reader's Theatre in the classroom, and view it as a video clip at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lI1c-Lbd4Bw

Earthrise **Amanda Gorman (2018)**

In 2018 Amanda Gorman performed 'Earthrise' (dedicated to Al Gore and The Climate Reality Project) to explore a moment in history and to support action on climate change. This powerful performance poem begins with the magical sight of earthrise from Apollo 8.

> On Christmas Eve, 1968, astronaut Bill Anders
> Snapped a photo of the earth
> As Apollo 8 orbited the moon.
> Those three guys

> Were surprised
> To see from their eyes
> Our planet looked like an earthrise
> A blue orb hovering over the moon's grey horizon,
> with deep oceans and silver skies …

This central image forms the basis for Gorman's exploration of the earth as our home and the need for its protection by (and from) its inhabitants.

The *Earthrise* video clip can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92XFwAoJn6w

So many more texts are sitting beside me, waiting to be reviewed, but they will have to wait until next time.
Happy reading and viewing until then.

Perspectives from the UK

Teaching and Learning in UK English Classrooms: Tales from the Pandemic

Sue Brindley, University of Cambridge

Piers Alexander, West Suffolk College, Bury St Edmunds

Daniel Amis, Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge

Sophie Lownds, Oasis Academy, Leesbrook, Manchester

Christopher Shaw, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe, Swansea, Wales

Simone Stephney White, Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge

Abstract: The unexpected advent of a global pandemic and, in the UK, as part of the government response to control the spread of the virus, the closure of schools with just 48 hours' notice, meant many English teachers were faced with entirely new pedagogical, curricular and technological demands. This article reflects on the experiences of five English teachers in widely differing contexts, from both state (government funded) and independent (fee paying) schools, with diverse resource and demand, and explores how their classroom practices and understanding of teaching and learning were impacted by the imperative to move to online teaching. It also represents a snapshot of how these teachers' beliefs about English teaching were surfaced, and the commonalities of purpose and values that underpin their work make evident.

The context

The complex interplay between teaching and learning has never been so starkly revealed as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers' frequently unarticulated beliefs about effective pedagogy and the English curriculum (for where is there time and opportunity in a busy school to discuss such concepts?) were, almost literally overnight, revealed as they became suddenly dependent on technology as a largely untried proxy for the classroom, and familiar classroom pedagogies were suddenly abandoned in the often less familiar context of the digital environment.

This article describes the experiences of COVID-19 and English teaching and learning in a UK context, through the lens of the experiences of five teachers and their students. The teachers are all recent graduates of the Masters in English and Education at the University of Cambridge, UK. Part of the purpose of the course was to develop teachers into researchers with a concomitant formal, research- and evidence-based discourse to discuss English teaching – a discourse which has been eroded, it could be argued (Brindley, 2013), by the incursion of the agenda of compliance that dominates UK education. Reclaiming professionalism through informed critical engagement required teachers to be active in creating the conditions for such an act, and research and writing were the means for achieving that:

> … teachers must create the ideological and structural conditions necessary for them to write, research, and work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power. (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxiv)

The impact of 'writ[ing], research[ing] and work[ing] with each other' is powerful and ongoing: 'I feel like I've learnt so much even since completing my master's: like that mindset has just stuck with me and kept rolling on' (Josh). In investigating the experiences of five different schools and colleges, we found that the teachers developed mini-narratives about learning and teaching in English based on their experiences. Using these mini-narratives as evidence, we met online and explored some of the key themes to emerge across our experiences. For ethical reasons, all participants have been given pseudonyms and no student has been identified by name.

Our experiences were not homogenous: geographical areas, socio-economic backgrounds, status of schools and age ranges were all different, so the mini-narrative examples we offer here illustrate in part the differences that we have as contexts, and the concomitant differences in priorities and coping mechanisms; the mini-narratives also illustrate how the principles of English teaching are surfaced through the act of examination of practice, and how praxis reflects the differences that exist there. This article therefore seeks, through teacher research, to contribute to the wider enterprise of developing understanding of teaching and learning in English.

The beginning

> *At 5pm on Wednesday 18 March, 2020, the UK government announced that schools would close indefinitely two days later. Exams were cancelled and around 8 million pupils in England were told not to return to school the following Monday unless they were the children of key workers. This was the first national closure of schools in modern British history.*

Inevitably, the first theme to emerge was that of technology. Although the English classroom had used ICT for many years, in reality the pedagogical changes this brought about were enhancements rather than transformations. Few institutions had actually engaged with interactive technology in teaching in any radical way. Consequently, and exacerbated by the often conflicting expectations about ICT from policy makers, teachers, schools and students, there seemed to be limited understanding of the place or possibilities of digital technology in schools and colleges, and classrooms were, in digital terms, under-resourced. In what came to be known in the UK as remote learning, therefore, competing information surfaced rapidly. Policymakers sought to reassure parents that students would not be disadvantaged by this 'temporary' closure, and pressure was put on school Heads to bring about a sense of continuity in learning for both students and parents. But little was actually offered by policy-makers to support teachers in this, and schools were thrown back onto their own resources. What became clear in our mini-narratives was just how significantly the difference in resources played out at a time of crisis.

Inner city English classrooms: Hannah's story

Hannah, teaching in an inner city school in an area of low socio-economic status, was aware that an online environment was going to highlight issues of deprivation:

> As the English curriculum leader of a school in an area of high socio-economic disadvantage, the initial forecast for engagement in online learning was low. Prior to completing even one digital lesson, newspapers, politicians and education theorists reported on the potential widening of the disadvantage gap, cautioning that learners in a school like mine could be left at a further disadvantage. The day prior to the launch of remote learning was a time of introspection; how could we ensure that both students and subject would flourish under these new learning conditions? In short, this was an opportunity to dig deep into our practice as an English department and understand what was absolutely necessary and what could be left behind.

One of the key issues Hannah faced was access, including access to computers. Not every family had a computer at home, and of those that did, most households did not have one for each child, so computers had to be shared. Hannah had to plan for learning that did not rely on 'real time' access:

> During the first lockdown period, all faculty teams provided prerecorded lessons for students in the form of a video that could be watched at any time, therefore ensuring that students could access their learning at any time and removing the obstacle of sharing a device or assisting with the home learning of their siblings.

But more important for the English classroom was the language profile of Hannah's school, which has a population where the number of home languages spoken (78) is one of the largest in the UK, and therefore English as a second, third or indeed fourth language is a learning event which teachers' usual classroom pedagogical choices addressed as a matter of course. Online, however, it was a different matter to ensure that English as an Additional Language (EAL) students could access English-language medium

materials. Furthermore, the English teachers in Hannah's department were aware that many EAL students would not speak English or hear it being used at home, so their own language proficiency in English was in danger of deteriorating. Strategic decisions had to be made on how EAL students might be supported in both these areas. Hannah's solution was to provide spoken materials:

> … we displayed the text on the screen and read each section aloud in our recording. While tiring and time consuming for us as teachers in the preparation of this material, this at least ensured that students could hear high-quality English being spoken aloud.

Hannah's school population also has a significant number of special educational needs and disability (SEND) students, particularly students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A number of students were identified as both EAL and ASD. This raised a further issue for her to deal with:

> In the physical classroom students are able to take social cues from the teacher and the students around them, lessons follow a similar pattern and so expectations are much clearer than the digital classroom. We found that students with SEND, particularly ASD, were struggling to access remote learning due to the anxiety surrounding the differing expectations for submission and participation in each lesson.

Access here then began to refer to students' emotional needs in the classroom – again, something that most English teachers' classroom practice had factored in and responded to without necessarily articulating how in any detail. Hannah's response was to build in a sense of predictability and familiarity:

> When preparing lessons for remote learning, the ultimate goal was to ensure that the experience would be as close to that of the physical English classroom as possible. With this in mind, simplicity and consistency of approach was key to success when developing the structure for live lessons.

In part this referred to how learning was to be introduced:

> I developed a timetable for learning at the start of each English lesson detailing exactly what each task would be, how students would complete this task, when it would be completed and how I would monitor the submission. This was done through a simple table, a series of symbols used to represent whether the work would be completed on paper, digitally or through question and answer during the lesson, and a schedule for how long each task would take. Time was built into lessons to allow students to collect materials or books needed for the class, meaning that the anxiety surrounding the unknown of online learning was removed for SEND students. In working on the clarity of instruction and expectations for lessons, we found that as a school, submissions from all students increased. Students were more aware of their learning and participation increased. The reassurance of set routines was not something I had initially considered, but this strategy proved instrumental in creating an inclusive, calm and purposeful learning space for all students.

Hannah clearly coped with the situation of being thrown back onto her own initiative with no additional funds or resources available.

What is interesting is to compare Hannah's situation in her school with that of James, who teaches in an independent (fee paying) school that is well resourced, with both time and funds available in ways that were not for Hannah.

An independent school: James's story

The reality of an English classroom with multiple access issues, and their concomitant impact on teaching and learning, is clear when we compare Hannah's mini-narrative with that of James, an English teacher in an independent school. James outlines a quite different response from his school to Hannah's:

> As we watched the rest of the world lock down, it seemed inevitable that the 25,000 state and independent schools in England, would have to close and make alternative provisions for pupils … so despite the short notice, we were prepared. My school, an academic and selective independent school for boys, had in place a comprehensive ICT infrastructure for delivering face-to-face online learning. An intense two weeks was spent upskilling teachers and students to cope with remote teaching. It was the educational equivalent of a war footing with those skilled in ICT offering training sessions, constant online support, and group chats to cope with all the changes. It was fraught but it brought out a strong community spirit amongst staff as we reached out to one another for both professional and personal support …

For James's school, access to computers was not an issue:

> … students were required to have access to a device with a microphone and camera. Accessing lessons on a mobile phone was considered a barrier to full engagement with learning and a last resort. The onus was on parents to provide this although support was available on request for those who needed it and the school facilitated the purchase and set-up of the majority of the devices now in use.

There is no mention in James's mini-narrative of issues with EAL students, nor with SEND students. Certainly students with both learning needs are present, but it is clear that the school resources can accommodate the demands such students present.

It is important here to note that as English teachers, Hannah and James were personally and professionally equally committed to ensuring their students were as successful as possible in the digital teaching and learning context. Hannah's determination to focus on support, and James's belief that 'there remains, as in any school, a moral responsibility … [for students' success]' demonstrate their similarities. But for Hannah, progress hinged on enabling students to access and understand materials. James' school expectations were focused on ensuring that students' progress online continued as it would have in a face-to-face classroom.

As James observes, when it comes to effective use of digital learning, the context is quite clearly pivotal:

> Certainly, this is a privileged context and as Rice, Lowenthal and Woodley (2020) state, 'while it might be tempting to think that online environments are inherently more accommodating to diversity … the factors that make a student successful using learning technologies are often connected to socioeconomic privilege' (p. 319).

The middle: Motivation

English teachers routinely use dialogic and group work as pedagogic choices in the classroom. Part of the art of the English classroom, however, is also to use these approaches as a motivational tool to ensure all students are involved and active in their own learning. Online learning presented additional challenges for not only the pedagogic but also, notably, the motivational aspects of teaching.

Further education students: Josh's story

Josh teaches in a College of Further Education with students aged 16+ whose experience of education to that point has not been one of success. Specifically, Josh's students are re-sitting English GCSE:

> I am the programme leader for GCSE English Language, the 'qualification of choice' (Department for Education, 2021) for all 16-to-18 students finishing school with a near though not passing grade. One may encounter here a wide degree of receptiveness to English resit study. Allowing access and achievement in the subject is the perennial – and perennially rewarding – challenge.

Josh's learning model was dominated by issues of motivation for students whose experiences with education were often negative and participation was a key teaching issue. Much of his classroom focus was therefore on engaging the students through individual attention. Online, this immediacy of interaction was less easy to achieve:

> *In this remote-learning, students lacked the nudging encouragement of the classroom and the keep-you-on-track motivational stimulus …engagement in this environment raised new complexities – as indeed did the question of whether this environment would be possible at all for some.*

In seeking to understand student motivation, Josh developed a taxonomy of participation:

> Three weeks into lockdown learning, differing sets of engagement are discernible. We may observe particular sets of students who engage and achieve in various ways in the classroom, at home during self-study and now in online delivery. Indeed, crossover exists, but this crossover presents challenges in categorisation. The broadest possible groups might be constructed as follows:
> - engaged in class; engaged online
> - engaged in class; not engaged online
> - not engaged in class; engaged online
> - not engaged in class; not engaged online.
>
> These groups are not fixed, and each will contain numerous subsets such as the following:
> - engaged in work following the live lesson but not during
> - engaged online but producing little or no written work
> - occasionally engaged with written work but not online
> - occasionally engaged online but producing no written work.

Josh observes:

> The question of how to ensure access and engagement from all presents itself partially: at once clearly, with logistical problem solving (assisting with computer access, planning flexibility for those unable to attend at live-delivery time, etc.) but also with the more opaque and ever-present aspect of engaging the disengaged, though this time with the parameters and assumptions of what constitutes a 'disengaged' student changed further still.

Although Josh does not record the numbers of students in each category, his own anxiety about 'whether this environment would be possible at all for some' reflects the degree to which the learning model underpinning Josh's teaching is based on the professional working relationship of teacher and

student, and that in his context, for some, online learning is detrimental to that.

English teaching and learning: Will's and James's story

At the heart of this is, of course, teaching and learning in English. We began by saying that remote learning had the unexpected outcome of generating new discussions about teaching and learning in English. Each of the teachers contributing to this article made discoveries about their classrooms which were revealing and thought-provoking. In this section we want to look at two in particular: planning for remote learning in English, and the place of discourse and dialogue. The transfer of these activities to a remote learning platform raised some interesting issues, not least in the differences in assumed models of knowledge present in each approach.

Planning and sequencing: Will's story

For Will, planning, and in particular the issue of sequencing, became a focus:

> As I navigated this new landscape of English teaching, the shift from teaching in my classroom to teaching from my dining-room table has made me reconsider what really matters in teaching. Heartened by the statement that 'the pedagogical quality of remote learning is more important than how lessons are delivered' (EEF, 2020, p. 20) and that the sequential nature of learning remains a priority, drawing attention to the idea that 'what matters most is whether the explanation builds clearly on pupils' prior learning. The concept of sequencing and structuring learning as a hugely important pedagogical consideration has developed as a priority within my own experiences of teaching remotely.

For Will, the directive issued by the Education Department in Wales to 'teach any new learning in small manageable steps; and refrain from introducing too much content at once' (p. 7) became key. He comments:

> One might consider such recommendations relatively straightforward, yet the concept of 'manageable steps' and a reluctance to overburden learners with 'content' do indeed echo the significance of sequencing learning within an online context.

Interestingly, this contrasts sharply with the initial rection of teachers to get into, in Hannah's words, 'a blind race to provide students with something, anything, that would enable them to continue learning in some way at home' by focusing instead on managing learning 'steps' through a focus on sequencing. And here we see a *confirmation* of Hannah's discovery that familiarity and predictability in classroom procedures were critical for effective remote learning. In fact, for Will, this was as much as anything a surfacing of existing pedagogical strategies:

> As a classroom teacher, I am a self-confessed creature of habit, and most lessons, although varied in their approach and strategies, tend to be structured within a very familiar framework. This sense of routine has become even more paramount in the online classroom.

Will was planning to teach Victorian literature and in particular Arthur Conan Doyle to his class when lockdown struck, so his adaptation of his usual approach took on new significance in revealing just how important sequencing was for online teaching and learning.

Will's mini-narrative was based around his choice of genre and text:

> For illustrative purposes, the sequence will be contextualised within a series of lessons focusing on introducing Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* to a mixed-ability Year 8 (12–13-year-olds) group. To contextualise, the group had never previously studied Victorian literature, therefore the topic and genre was relatively unfamiliar within a school setting, although most learners were familiar with Sherlock Holmes as a literary figure..

Will devised a sequence which would inform his planning in English, which was based on five stages. His account below shows both stages of sequencing and how he used this approach to teach the text:

> *Materials slide*
>
> On a practical level, commencing all lessons (either synchronous or asynchronous) with a 'materials slide' offers learners a frequent aide-memoire in terms of the equipment required for the lesson. This also helps support the enforcement of more practical considerations in relation to safeguarding protocols, and the shared expectations of conduct in the online classroom.
>
> *Exploratory quizzing*
>
> It is important for a teacher to consider what prior knowledge learners might have of a particular topic and to establish any potential gaps or misconceptions. Such exploratory quizzing should be low-threat and only assessed in terms of influencing how the findings can shape any future learning from the teacher's perspective.
>
> For example, when introducing *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, this approach enabled the introduction of key conventions within the detective genre such as 'archetype' and 'denouement'. The use of multiple-choice questions has made the creation of such resources straightforward, and it is a frequent staple of the online lessons. For this purpose, learners were given

a knowledge organiser, offering definitions for such terms, and this could be used as a reference when tackling such quizzes.

Exposition

This section is perhaps the most difficult to navigate in the online classroom as teachers have to ensure that explanations are concise, and precise, whilst ensuring there are frequent opportunities for learner engagement. Two pedagogical principles central to effective exposition are the use of modelling and explanation. Such principles can be refined more within an asynchronous approach, as teachers can enhance and edit their explanations until they are suitably satisfied, though those preferring a synchronous style might cite the potential lack of student input here as a drawback of such a method. A concept which certainly developed my own practice is the inclusion of 'pause points' within the exposition phase. 'Pause points' offer opportunities for learners to reflect on the content that has been delivered, but also to establish and reinforce expectations in terms of participation. Another clear benefit from the use of 'pause points' is the opportunity to immediately address any learner misconceptions or to plug any gaps within their understanding. For example, when returning to Sherlock Holmes, it proved useful in clarifying that learners were able to deduce how Holmes had solved the case of the Speckled Band and identified the snake as the agent of Dr Grimesby Roylott's demise.

Checking for understanding

This stage of the lesson sequence is entirely dependent on learners' ongoing participation within the online classroom. Questioning and dialogue are at the heart of effective classroom teaching, and this remains the case in its digital equivalent. As Lewis and Hargrove (2020) argue, it is the teacher's responsibility to 'force them to engage actively, over and over. You will make the thread of instruction more compelling-and make it harder to go window hopping' (p. 85). The 'thread of instruction' and the sequencing of learning is again emphasised here as a critical consideration. Effective questioning techniques in the online classroom are strikingly similar to those employed in the more traditional model. Within the context of encountering a short story, and having to read this independently, it was important to support students attempts to engage with the narrative and its meaning as it unfolded. As an additional means of support, we provided a recorded audiobook version of the story for learners during this lesson sequence.

Confirmatory quizzing

Unlike its exploratory equivalent, confirmatory quizzing is able to offer the teacher an indicator of the success of the learning sequence. Such quizzing can also deepen the level of challenge offered to learners, and here the use of distractors within MCQs or more open-ended questions can further probe learners' appreciation of a text or concept. This type of quizzing can offer the teacher an immediate indicator of learners' understanding of a topic, and ensure that the following lesson(s) can build on the progress established. Within my series of lessons on Conan Doyle's text, learners were challenged to synthesise their understanding of the text and apply their knowledge to a new context in producing a written account of the narrative's key events. It is a critical final step in the stage of the lesson sequence in enabling learning and teaching to move forwards. Ultimately, as Lewis and Hargrove (2020) conclude, the lesson's sequence needs to consolidate 'a culture of cognitive engagement and accountability' (p. 86).

Will's (re)discovery and consequent articulation and enhancement of the significance of sequencing in the context of remote learning has brought about a clear schema for teaching text, with stages which can be adapted and applied across a wide range of teaching texts. Will quotes Williams and Cotton (2020) in summing up the power of sequencing in their observation that 'the power of consistent, familiar procedures is doubled when we teach online' (p. 123). For Will, his students' learning is made secure through sequencing and his own teaching, now rooted in newly articulated but familiar pedagogical approaches, has found a new confidence in remote learning.

Dialogue and discourse: James's story

In stark contrast to the focus on sequencing for teaching text, James instead became more aware of the processes of dialogue and discourse as key learning and teaching strategies in the English classroom. He observes:

> Teaching both English language and literature requires a discursive practice of careful questioning and responding to check knowledge and understanding, and to develop critical thinking and multiple possibilities in response to a text.

As Millard (2018) states, 'Speech and communication lies at the heart of classroom practice', and James's classroom approach clearly echoes this belief:

> [Good English teaching] is best achieved with a blend of teacher talk and student peer-to-peer discussion. In a review of evidence focused on pedagogical best practice, the Education Endowment Foundation finds 'consistently positive impacts of collaborative learning – that is, students working in small groups to complete a collective task, with particularly strong gains from approaches that promote talk and interaction between learners.'

So this most central of processes in the English classroom, evident in James's claims for effective

learning in the English classroom, was felt to be placed at risk by the sudden shift to digital technology and the associated physical isolation of the remote learner. Opportunity to discuss seemed to be under threat. However, in seeking to ensure the best experiences for his students, James took advantage of the features available in order to ensure oracy remained at the heart of his teaching:

> The technology now provides such opportunities, with breakout rooms a standard feature … With access to the technological resource that enables best pedagogical practice and time for teachers to adapt, is there room for th[e] optimistic view that students in this context will not be disadvantaged? In some ways, teaching English via a digital device may present opportunities for enhanced learning experiences as they are more intimate than the physical classroom. With headsets, a fixed focal point for the learning and control of the mute button, there is a sense of holding twenty-five one-to-one lessons simultaneously. There are more ways to engage with content, for example messaging a teacher directly rather than in a public chat, the breakout rooms, live polls, research at the fingertips of students and so on which may provide wider opportunities for engagement. So, there is an argument that the subject of English can successfully adapt to online teaching models.

The issue for James, however, is adaptability – not just for teachers, but for students too:

> Yet for all of the pedagogical opportunities, there is a reciprocal part to this idea of adaptability. Students too need to adapt … it is becoming increasingly clear for all the adapting, and it has been impressive, that fatigue is setting into the student body … engagement in classroom activities is waning somewhat.

So whilst the technological opportunity may still be evident, for James at least, talk is caught up with more than technological affordance: it is also rooted in a classroom dynamic which James has not seen sustained online. Dialogue remains quite possible in remote learning, but in James's view, there still exists a gap in student experience:

> … in an independent all-boys secondary school, whilst the resources for success are abundant – success defined in relation to their own context – there remains the problem of the students and subjects effectively adapting to online education … You feel for this generation of young people who are generally told to spend less time on devices now being forced to spend hours of every day on one.

For James, the case for effective online dialogue is yet to be proved, and in Will's words:

> … divisive debates continue on the benefits and drawbacks of synchronous or asynchronous approaches. Mark Enser (2020) in his critique of both synchronous and asynchronous methods … quite poetically states that when we 'take away the classroom, the magic is lost'.

Exploring that 'magic', and if and how it is replicable online, is the teaching and learning issue that has been so clearly revealed in James's experiences.

What we also see through these two mini-narratives is an illustration of how two earlier claims in this article are realised. The first, that the discourse relating to English teaching is developed through research, is evident in the teachers' use of scholarly research to argue their positions, and the stance of questioning and critical engagement as a given in their reflections on their own narratives. The second, that 'the principles of English teaching are surfaced through the act of examination of practice, and … praxis reflects the differences that exist there', is similarly shown. The two case studies here are both given by highly successful English teachers, yet clearly embody differing pedagogical approaches and use different models of knowledge. That diversity of approach, revealed so clearly by the online environment, nevertheless demonstrates that English teaching remains alive when teachers are given choice and autonomy over pedagogy.

An end point? Learning about teaching and learning

It would be reassuring to be able, at this point in 2021, to conclude with a neat 'looking back, what we have learned' section. But COVID-19 continues to disrupt daily life and schooling too, and what we have learned is a work in progress. We are still, ourselves, learning about what it means to teach English online, and the situation is complex. Teachers are dealing, in the same lesson, with a mixture of students in physical attendance and at home, including those who fall into Josh's categories of 'occasionally engaged' or even 'not engaged'. Examination arrangements remain in a state of flux, with no certainty as to when or if exams will ever return in their pre-COVID form. Talk continues about removing the unpopular GCSE (16+) exam and replacing it with another form of assessment, but no decisions have yet emerged.

So, some summing up: 'what really matters in English teaching' is a theme that recurs for almost everyone.

Will says:

> From my perspective as Head of English in a state comprehensive school in Swansea, this period of upheaval has coincided with the development of the Curriculum for Wales, a 'national mission' to transform education in Wales, and a curriculum driven by 'what matters' statements. Such a labelling is particularly helpful in charting how I have navigated this new landscape of English teaching, the shift from teaching in my classroom to teaching from my dining-room table has made me reconsider what really matters in teaching.

Similarly, Hannah discovered the importance of giving specific instructions rather than relying on additional teacher explanation – something that she says makes her teaching feel 'lighter' – and that further, the new learning environment gave some students the confidence to take part in lessons in ways they had not before in an 'open' classroom:

> Every lesson has taught me to see my students and my own planning in a different light. I prioritise what is essential learning, I pay close attention to the clarity of my instruction and I have learned to leave behind some of the superfluous techniques I used in the classroom. My teaching feels lighter and many of my students have benefited in ways that I could not have anticipated. I will always lament those beloved paper resources that I was unable to use over the last year, but rather than view this as a period of mourning, I have come to celebrate the myriad successes of my online classroom.

There was also the discovery of the ways in which assessment became more than the relentless outcomes measure that it had been pre-COVID:

> I drew from my multifaceted professional role to reconsider the human face of assessment – how my students had been impacted personally and academically in coping with the effects of the pandemic as significant experiences in their secondary education and how I would play my part in striving to support them in reconstructing their learning landscape.

But not everything was a gain. Some authors found losses in remote learning. James, for example, acknowledges the effort that has gone into trying to make remote learning work:

> Teachers in my own school have gone above and beyond to provide the same level of education provided in physical school … I believe every teacher in my own school has the students' wellbeing and development as their priority, without exception.

But for him, 'Whilst there is room for optimism, it seems clear that online learning for secondary schools can only ever be a bandage and not a permanent fix'.

Hannah acknowledges that not all remote learning has been a success but nevertheless believes potential exists:

> Nationally the variable success of remote learning leads to more questions than answers, but the positive outcomes of some schools are surely worth investigating to discover what exactly has flourished and what has been lost in the classroom.

Josh, however, offered a different perspective – not of loss and gain, but rather of the newly emerging remote learning as simply a further arena for purposeful teaching and learning in English:

> It would be naïve or absurd to suggest that there are not things of value that become changed when the classroom moves online. To conceive though of the working landscape in terms of an 'outside and inside' creates a 'dialectic of division' (Bachelard, 1964/2014, p. 227) which may constrain instead of differentiate. We find multiple sets of students engaging and achieving in various ways in class and online: our aim … must be to continually uncover that which is fundamental for meaningful learning and to make that accessible for all, no matter what the environment.

Looking forward

The extraordinary circumstances that have shaped our professional lives over the past 24 months have been profound in the changes they have wrought to almost every aspect of teaching and learning. The maelstrom created by the pressures to transfer teaching and learning from classroom to computer has created, as we have seen here, storms of different hues and intensity, but none has escaped untouched. What writing the mini-narratives allowed us to do, though, was to clarify the issues we had been faced with in the newly constructed remote terrain of teaching and learning.

But more than this. We began with a claim relating to teachers as researchers, and Giroux's insistence that teachers must 'write, research, and work with each other'. In writing this article, the experience of doing precisely that has made real the powerful experience of creating shared understanding. It is only through researching and writing about English teaching in a pandemic that moving towards an understanding of our experiences becomes possible. As one of the authors said:

> … it's been a pleasure to actually have time to shape my thinking on this – I have been too busy doing to stop and make sense of it …

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Perspectives from the Past

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articles

Insiders and Outsiders:

Teaching Standards, National Certification Assessment, and Professional Development

Anthony Petrosky
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'I dream of a day when we will examine our practice with critical friends who care about our work as much as we do and whose insight will inform and support us. I dream of being intellectually challenged and held accountable for similarly challenging the children in my care; I dream of being valued for what my colleagues and I learn from and give to children. I dream of a day when teachers' literacy is seen as crucial to our work, a day when time and funds are enthusiastically offered so that we might become better and better at what we do.'

'What struck me most forcefully during my five days reviewing the field test material at ETS was the total lack of respect for my knowledge and experience as a teacher. We were all teachers, gathered in Princeton "to be trained." When any of us dared to raise criticisms or even questions about the rubrics or the benchmark performances, we were silenced with the words: "Leave your biases at the door," or "Allow yourselves to be convinced." These comments were repeated again and again, mantras that left us no room for discussion. Most insulting of all was the soothing refrain, "Don't feel inadequate; you will learn how to do this," as many of us struggled to come to terms with the rationale behind the procedure of evaluating exercises.'

Maureen Barbieri, 'Messages from the Editors',
Voices from the Middle ,

The space between these two epigraphs marks the difference between an insider and an outsider. Ms Barbieri made the first comments as an expression of what reflective practice - observing and critiquing video tapes of hers and others' teaching - could mean to her as an experienced teacher who had logged four years of work with the development of national board certification for early adolescence/English language arts (EA/ELA) teachers. She made the second set of comments after the

Educational Testing Service (ETS) had taken over the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification assessment, and after she had participated in their 'scoring' of teachers' performances on three exercises in the assessment's teaching portfolio. Until ETS took over the EA/ELA project, Ray Pecheone, from the Connecticut State Department of Education, and I co-directed it. Our focus had been on the development of a performance assessment to be used to board certify English teachers, but in our first formal report to NBPTS, we recognised, and called for, the embedding of the assessment, especially of the process for evaluating candidates' performances on the assessment, in on-going professional development hinged to the national teaching organisations. The longer we worked on the project, the more field test results we reviewed, the more we critiqued our own work, the more it became clear to us that the assessment would best serve the profession if it were embedded in a large-scale professional development effort. When the Educational Testing Service took over the work in 1994, the focus was completely shifted to the development of evaluative procedures for the assessment that would only sort and rank candidates with little, if any, substantive feedback to them on their performances.

Our assessment team worked for four and one-half years from 1989 to 1994 on this project. We learned a great deal about performance assessment of teaching. Some of what we have had to say has been published elsewhere (Delandshere & Petrosky, 1998; Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994; Petrosky, 1994; Petrosky & Bishop, 1995). Now I would like to take this opportunity to write on a few issues that seem central to this national assessment project and to any such project which proposes to affect teaching through the establishment of national teaching standards and certification assessments. My theme might be called the difference between insiders and outsiders. The metaphor gives me a way to think about teaching standards, assessment and professional development from multiple perspectives. Ms Barbieri's comments in the epigraph point to one angle, to a space opened-up by a disjunction, an incongruity. As a teacher, as an insider to her own self-reflective thinking, she imagines a vision of reflective practice that would involve her and her colleagues in a critical exchange over their practice. As a scorer for the ETS board certification assessment, she's an outsider to the assessment and its evaluation procedures. As an outsider, she's asked to perform mechanically, to adopt a set of criteria and a procedure for evaluation about which she has questions. She is not, in other words, being invited to participate in an educative process; she is being invited to leave her thoughts at the door.

But the metaphor offers more than this distinction, as telling as it is about the way teachers have been traditionally positioned in testing efforts in the states, and I would like to use it to think about the way performance assessments of practice - often called 'authentic assessments' - position teachers as takers of the assessment and as those who are, or who might be, responsible for its development, or its redevelopment, and its administration. I should say, too, that I know this metaphor - insiders/outsiders - isn't iron-clad; people are seldom if ever completely one or the other. I hope it's clear that it's usefulness resides in the way it works as a thinking-machine, a way, that is, to generate comparisons that entail teachers' involvement in the various aspects of standards setting and performance assessments. I am particularly interested in the usefulness of such assessments in promoting change and growth, so I also would like to carry this metaphor into my thinking about professional development, the role of assessments of teaching in professional development, and the differences in reform that takes assessment as its main focus and reform that takes professional development as its focus. To do this, I first would like to present some information on NBPTS and the EA/ELA assessment. Next, I'd like to make a few comments on insiders and outsiders as my

guiding metaphor and follow those with a few paragraphs on standards development and the NBPTS Standards Committee's work in English language arts. Then I' d like to comment on the differences in the positioning of teachers as insiders to assessment development, administration, and evaluation and the positioning of them as outsiders. I'll close with a brief comparison of reform that is driven by assessment and reform that is driven by professional development.

Before I begin, as I promised, here is some background on NBPTS and the exercises that we developed for the board certification in EA/ELA. I thought it would be best to present it as a list rather than as reportorial prose. It seems easier to read and imagine this way.

- The mission of NBPTS is 'to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools.'

- NBPTS is governed by a board of sixty-four directors. The majority of them are classroom teachers. From 1993 to 1997 NBPTS awarded National Board certification to 911 teachers.

- When originally implemented to develop a voluntary national certification for teachers of all subject areas at all age levels, NBPTS solicited bids for the assessment work, awarded contracts to various universities and organisations to complete the work, and established standards committees to develop the standards independent from the assessment development. During the period of our contract, several other diverse groups around the country worked on assessments for certification for NBPTS in other areas such as art education, middle school generalist, and science. When NBPTS cancelled its contracts with these other developers and awarded ETS the sole assessment development and scoring contract, it began a process that would, in my view, erase the healthy range of diversity and perspectives embodied by these groups. ETS is now the sole contractor for NBPTS assessment development and scoring.

- The assessment that our EA/ELA team developed for NBPTS consisted of three components: a knowledge test, a teaching portfolio, and assessment center exercises. The knowledge test was a paper-and-pencil essay test in which teachers were asked to write about issues and problems in the field, some of which were presented and framed in journal articles that the candidates were asked to read and in vignettes or cases of teaching. The teaching portfolio asked teachers to complete three exercises over the course of a year of teaching. The assessment center exercises, conducted at an assessment site, asked teachers to view and critique video tapes of teaching, to read and assess students' written work, and to participate in a group discussion to select novels for a middle school curriculum.

- The teaching portfolio's three exercises were designed as sets of directions that might help candidates provide windows onto their teaching by showing them how to package moments of their teaching so that they could be visible and understandable to others. Those exercises were the Post-Reading Interpretive Discussion (PRIDE) in which candidates submitted twenty minutes of videotape of their work with a group of students engaged in a discussion of a selection of literature, a written critique of their discussion, and other relevant artifacts. The Student Learning Exercise (SLE) asked candidates to package and submit three portfolios of students' written work and their written commentaries on that work. The Planning and Teaching Exercise (PTE) asked candidates to submit sets of their plans for teaching an integrated language arts curriculum along with descriptions of and commentaries on students' work from that curriculum.

- All of the exercises were developed to reflect the EA/ELA standards (see addendum pages 54-55) and reviews of research on teaching to capture critical moments of EA/ELA teaching. The NBPTS board accepted our exercises. We were in the process of developing a method to evaluate teachers' performances on the exercises, when that contract was given to ETS.

As sketchy as this information is, it will at least give you a rough idea of the national certification project and the assessment we developed for it. Although as contractors we worked closely with the professional teacher organisations whose members would be affected by the project (the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association), it was at the time

NBPTS policy to not involve professional organisations for fear that they would unduly influence the work. (If you are interested in a more complete presentation of this work and a full range of the issues surrounding it - including a chorus of voices from advocates to skeptics - see the *Voices from the Middle* special issue on National Certification.)

Insiders and Outsiders

From the beginning of this project my colleagues and I closely aligned with a position that imagined benefit and value in national subject area teaching standards and national certification for teachers based on an assessment that reflected those standards. I feel this way today, and it seems to me that there are good arguments for board certifying teachers and to include such certification as a part of an on-going national professional development process. Unfortunately, it seems to me that NBPTS has chosen to emphasise assessment as testing to sort teachers - both as a matter of policy and in the focus of its on-going assessment development with ETS - with a weak professional development effort to back up the testing. This may change in the future, but it seems to me that the most effective change would mean a radical reorientation of the board towards assessment as a part of professional development rather than to the continuation of the current policy which positions assessment as a sorting test first with some professional development to support those taking the test. The NBPTS work that we did serves as a spring board for my narratives and as an example, a little story, that is, in a larger one that I began to tell myself in 1989 and am still rehearsing and revising. It begins with a question about who gets to sit at the table. Who gets to do the work. Who gets to make the decisions.

Our EA/ELA team, which we called the Assessment Development Lab (ADL) met our first issue concerning professionalisation when we put ourselves together as a team. We imagined that a teacher assessment should be developed by teachers, so we composed our group of three middle school teachers, three university teacher educators, two assessment professionals, and a number of consultants. This may not seem unusual, but it was, since the actual development work was being done by teachers in consultation with assessment professionals rather than by assessment professionals in consultation with teachers. Assessment developers, such as the people who work at ETS, have a long tradition of test creation in the USA, and they have traditionally used committees of teachers to review their work, but that is quite a different thing from teachers doing the actual assessment development. It is a difference of being on the inside as opposed to being on the outside. When teachers are insiders to assessment development they create an assessment from their knowledge and experience as teachers as they work in consultation with others, including test developers. When test developers create an assessment, they do so from their knowledge and experience as test makers in consultation with teacher-reviewers. Insiders understand the assessment development work qualitatively differently from outsiders. Outsiders see the products of others' work, for instance, but insiders see the possibilities of those products when they are under development, and they make the decisions that lead to the narrowing of possibilities in favor of this or that. Outsiders never know what might have been possible, so their reviews do not situate an assessment in an ideology or a particular framework or set of assessment methods. That is the work of insiders. Outsiders never confront the development problems either; they simply make judgments about whether particular exercises seem to do what the assessment developers desire them to do. Insiders confront the problems, contradictions, inconsistencies, and paradoxes of assessment development.

Insiders who developed the PRIDE (the Post-Reading Interpretive Discussion Exercise in the teaching portfolio which asked candidates to video tape and comment on an interpretive discussion with students of a literary selection),

for instance, made decisions about what would be useful for candidates to include by watching hundreds of video tapes of teachers conducting discussions of literary selections, reading thousands of pages of teachers' comments on their discussions, interviewing candidates who completed the sample exercises, listening to the comments of reviewers from a wide range of constituents, and, finally, by holding all of this information up against their own experience as teachers who regularly conduct literary discussions with students. Outsiders get to see the final or semi-final product - exercises with a handful of example performances - and their decisions are all framed by that product rather than by this multiplicity of factors that go into the decisions bearing on its creation and the process of its creation.

Paradoxes of Teaching Standards

The EA/ELA Standards Committee was composed of teachers with a few representative teacher educators, but the majority of that committee, one charged with developing the standards for what middle school English language arts teachers should know and be able to do, were teachers who became insiders to the standards development. We attended all of their meetings, mostly as observers, so we saw them struggle with the conceptual work of imagining and then writing standards. And while they presented drafts of their work to other teachers to review, they could always situate it in their experiences. Working from their experience, they understood immediately that any standards they might design and write would be subject to multiple interpretations and that it's the spirit of the standards - their philosophical approach to teaching (or, in other words, their ideology) - that matters the most, so to frame their philosophy, they wrote vignettes of teaching from their experiences as illustrations for each standard. This work, then, stood for them as quite intense long-term professional development. They conceptualised (or theorised) teaching into broad critical activities (see standards VI - XI for examples); they wrote them out; they categorised them and sequenced them; and they illustrated them with rich examples (although these vignettes have been completed for years, they have not yet to my knowledge been published by NBPTS). And they officially sanctioned the revision of their work by others in years to come on a regular schedule as an ongoing part of that professional development by insiders.

But there is a paradox in their work and in the work of any standards development effort. The significant, enriching experience for the standards committee members evolved around their long-term three year project to develop the standards. They learned from their discussions, their experiences, and from the texts they read and the consultants they invited to speak with them. From all of this, they produced a set of standards (see addendum). Now, here's the paradox. Other teachers and administrators who could benefit from thinking about teaching in the same ways that these committee members did, by engaging themselves in the study and theorising of teaching, will not because they can now simply adapt the already developed standards. Even if others take the standards as spring boards to modify and rewrite (say, for their own districts or schools), they engage in a process that is qualitatively different because the frame for their work and the outline of its parts are already set. They would work, in other words, more like reviewers than developers. Learning occurs when standards are developed within a culture of professional development at local sites and levels by teachers voicing and debating their ideologies, their experiences, and in doing so, using the works of others as references and sources. Standards are like behaviour objectives. As discourse about teaching, they want to solidify, to be understood as 'true' and comprehensive. And this is precisely the danger of standards. They can quickly, invisibly establish themselves as adopted goals, therefore undercutting the work that would make us insiders to standard setting and, instead, they would position us as outsiders who use someone else's goals rather than doing the work ourselves. It is, in other words, the work of setting standards that matters, that allows those doing it to have the intimate understandings of the broad-based standards so that they can implement them in specific ways in the spirit of the ideology that frames them.

So, it seems to me that the heart of the matter concerning standards setting has to do with how it might be possible for teachers at local levels to work through a process of establishing standards in much the same way that the EA/ELA Standards Committee did. This isn't, though, a call for teachers at the local level to adopt or revise someone else's standards, although that material might certainly be entered into their discussions. The danger, always present, is that it's simply easier to adopt or revise other standards, but the loss, then, is the loss of doing the work, and it's doing that work that matters. It also seems important to imagine all these various standards documents in a kind of national conversation with each other as the discourse of standards. If it would play-out as

other national venues have for similar kinds of discourse in other professions, it might be possible, then, for those involved to resee familiar issues from the multiple perspectives represented by the different standards documents and to look, then, for continuing debates on the issues. It would most likely be possible to establish some consensus around a core set of standards, and it would be more compelling, I think, than a consensus established by a single committee charged with establishing one. It would be more telling, too, as an epistemological exercise to see how different views of teaching emerge from these local documents. And if we keep in sight that it is the process of the debates, the discussions, that keeps us thinking and rethinking, then we won't be driven to design the final, most 'truthful' set of standards. The standards would be principally a vehicle for the thinking and rethinking from which we benefit most, so they could be regularly reimagined and revised as a part of professional development.

Who Makes the Decisions?

Our assessment development work - designing the teaching portfolio's three exercises along with a written knowledge exam and assessment center exercises, then field-testing these and various evaluation procedures - was messy. Members of our team often held quite different views on the work and on our products, so we argued with each other for four and one-half years; we argued with reviewers; we argued with professional assessment developers; and we argued with NBPTS administrators. One of the issues that we argued with them over had to do with the way teachers were situated within their organisation. At the time, teachers we brought on as interns or consultants, often on paid leave from their schools. They attended standards committee meetings; they offered their interpretations of issues; they attended many of our assessment development meetings and critiqued our work; but they did not make the day-to-day decisions that determined, for instance, which evaluation system would be field tested or how much money would be allocated to professional development activities in support of the candidates who were to take the assessment. Those decisions were made by professional administrators, often in consultation with professional test developers, and most of the administrators had worked previously in such positions in state departments of education, banks, corporations, and testing organisations. No teachers held executive positions.

If we overlay the insider/outsider story on the administration of the organisation, it is obvious that teachers were outsiders to the important day-to-day decision making, the decision making that affected everything from where money would be spent to what organisations would receive contracts for specific work. But, more importantly, when teachers don't hold executive positions, all the day-to-day decisions, the ones that always reflect an ideology or a set of beliefs and values spread out over time, are made by professional administrators whose ideological orientations, whatever they may be, are not situated in the local experiences of teaching. When, for example, we developed the Student Learning Exercise (SLE), we originally asked candidates to supply three portfolios of students' writing and their comments on them. We thought that teachers could best pick the students' work they seemed to have influenced. Since the exercise was designed to allow us to study the influence of teachers' work on their students' writing, we thought it would be best to leave the decision on which students' work to include up to the teachers and to ask them to explain their reasons for their choices in their written commentaries. After we field tested the exercise, one of the executive administrators told us that he wanted the wording changed so that teachers would be asked to submit portfolios from students who were good, regular, and poor writers. We never did learn how this decision was made, and a number of teachers on the project found the request offensive, as a subtle sanction of tracking, and none of the teachers thought it was a useful way to frame

the request for students' written work. It didn't seem to us to be a teacherly decision, but, regardless of that, it stands as an example of the kinds of day-to-day decisions that position the power in an institution within an ideology that also has the authority to enact it. In my story, I would like to see teachers on leave from schools to administer assessment projects.

One-Shot Judgments or Guidelines for Professional Development?

Let me begin this next section on assessment and professional development by quoting from a piece that Ellen Bishop and I co-authored for the *Voices from the Middle* special issue on National Certification.

> If an assessment of teaching is only a test, only a one-shot measure to separate the 'accomplished' from the 'unaccomplished', then it is not a vehicle for reform or change or professional development. It is just another externally imposed attempt at teacher accountability. Tests are only tests, no matter how innovative they might appear, and unless they exist as part of a carefully designed and implemented long-term professional development effort, they are only occasions for one-shot judgments. (30)

It's difficult for me to imagine, sitting here in my office in 1998, that this could have been, or still is, a radical position on teacher assessment, but that seems to be the case. It was so significant that the language of professional development, the language, that is, of 'the reflective practitioner', of 'self-reflective critiques of teaching', was placed by NBPTS at the center of the assessment outcomes. Official policy, that is, took the establishment of reflective practitioners as an overriding goal of all of the board's work. In this way, it sounds like the assessment can be professional development because the rhetoric of reflective practitioners surrounds it and because the exercises look as though they promote reflective practice. The three portfolio exercises asked candidates to present windows onto their actual teaching, either through video tapes of discussions with written commentaries (PRIDE), or through examples of students' written work accompanied by the teachers' commentaries (SLE), or through the teachers' plans for integrated language arts curricula (PTE). The written commentaries by the candidates on these materials were designed to be self-reflective critiques, and, at another level, judges, who would be teachers too, would review the materials and evaluate them, so this too could be seen as another level of professional development. But to an insider, to a teacher who developed the assessment, who watched hundreds of video tapes of literature discussions, and read thousands of pages of teachers' critiques of those, the assessment held the potential for professional development, but as a single assessment, the most it could accomplish would be to call teachers' attention to the kinds of things being requested of them and to mark those as professionally significant. The potential for professional development in this work is in the way it focuses us on self-reflective critique of our own teaching and our teaching materials, and the ways in which it asks us to situate our practice in relation to an ideology represented by standards and assessment exercises. If the assessment remains isolated as a test whose purpose is to rate and rank teachers against a set of standards, even if it is innovate enough to call teachers' attention to their practices through their self-reflective critiques on the test, it is still only a test, a one-shot deal, and it will have little if any possibility for bringing about significant change or growth.

Let me use myself as an example to make this point. Until six years ago, I had not been in a position to critique my teaching or my teaching materials. Three years ago my department instituted peer reviews of teaching, so that all members of the department must now prepare teaching portfolios on a regular schedule. An option in the plan is for teachers to prepare video tapes, written self-critiques, and to make those available to others to critique in regular on-going discussions of teaching. As a result of this peer review procedure, a number of teachers in my program have begun to ask students to prepare video tapes and written critiques of their teaching in their methods classes, so that we now have an evolving culture of self- and peer-critique of teaching. It has taken us three years to put the program in place, and it still regularly cries for attention and revision. But, and as a result of this, we have institutionalised a way to promote growth through a form of professional development that is used as a part of our overall performance assessment every year. Its success will depend in part on its regularity and its own success in fostering a culture of peer- and self-critique. Until we made these programmatic changes, few of us, me included, had ever seen tapes of our teaching, or even fewer yet had ever critiqued their teaching with colleagues against some theoretically interesting criteria.

Is this absence of critiques of our teaching unusual? No. Most teachers in the states, no matter where or what they teach, have not participated in this kind of critical work on

their teaching. It is not a part of our professional culture. The teaching of writing, as opposed to the teaching of written forms and grammar, was not a part of our teaching culture until twenty years ago either when the Bay Area Writing Project, which became the National Writing Project, became a presence in the lives of thousands of teachers. The success of this project, which stands for me as one of the best professional development projects in the world, is directly linked to its long-term growth of a culture of writing and writing instruction. It did this by asking teachers to write, to critique their writing, and to revise their teaching based on what they learned as writers. The national board assessment desires to bring about the same kinds of professional change by encouraging a culture of critique and reflection, yet its major investment is in its assessment rather than in professional development. It's plausible, I think, that assessments can be incentives to institute professional development, but it also seems clear to me that assessments do not bring about change and growth the way professional development projects, such as the National Writing Project, have and can.

A part of the problem is that we are always outsiders to an assessment. We take it, and we are rated and ranked. The rating and ranking alone tell us little other than if we made the cut. And if we do, unless the feedback is specific to our specific performances, we don't ever know quite why we made the cut - except, of course, in the most general of terms. And if we don't make the cut, we don't ever know why, except, again, in the most general of terms. Unless a performance assessment of teaching can offer us detailed feedback about particular aspects of our teaching, about the patterns of our practices and materials, in a situated way, so that we can see the links between our practices and the idealised vision they are held accountable to, then it has little chance of changing us or motivating us to change ourselves. Numerical ratings and rankings are useful only to bureaucrats who desire them for quick and easy accountability measures. They surely atomise and reduce teaching, and they surely fall far short of providing the kinds of critique and commentary we associate with good professional development.

We know that tests iron-out playing fields. It's both a strength and weakness. It's also what marks them as essentialist tools. They attempt to rate and rank everyone equally without consideration for contextual factors; in fact, when it can be said that contextual factors influence a test, the test suffers from measurement error. Yet if we consider teaching, how is it possible to say that it is anything but contextually situated? The PRIDE literature discussion changes, for example, when the students change, when the text under discussion changes, and when the questions that prompt the discussion change. The substance of the discussion, what really matters if one is thinking in terms of the discussion's interpretive quality, is contextually dependent. What remains constant when all other things change is methodologically superficial - the way a teacher keeps notes, for example - compared to what is contextually dependent.

One of the most striking examples of the contextual situation of teaching came from an observational study I was fortunate to be a part of with teachers in the state of Mississippi in a district that was dirt poor (sixty-seven dollars a year was allocated per teacher for professional development) and all black. One of the buildings I visited was an unpainted cinder block with a roof that leaked into buckets placed all around because there was no money for repairs. There was no money for books and supplies either, so the teachers I observed spent from their own money to buy paper for their students and to have stories copied for them to read. All of this is salient, but it's not quite as important as the fact that these teachers imagined their job was to prepare their students to pass the state and national standardised tests that would get them out of that place and into a college, so their curriculum reflected the tests. Their students memorised information.

They studied critiques of literature, so that they could give them back when asked, and their literature discussions, well, they were lectures punctuated by call-and-response questions to the students for correct answers. These teachers would have done poorly on our assessment. The poverty would have played a role by limiting the teachers' access to teaching resources, but not the overriding role that their own ideology would have played. They simply wouldn't have valued the PRIDE task because they would not have seen it as important, given their philosophical tack on teaching to the students' standardised tests. They probably would not have done well on the PTE - the Planning and Teaching Exercise which asked for plans and lessons that demonstrate an integrated language arts curriculum - for their curriculum was anything but integrated, and their students spent most of their time doing grammar drills rather than writing to fill portfolios, so they most likely would not have done well either on the Student Learning Exercises which focused on candidates' writing instruction.

This example raises questions about the assessment as a test and its ability to help these teachers. Its ideology doesn't fit theirs. That's a more complicated problem than the one having to do with tests being one-shot deals no matter how innovative they appear, but it relates to that one. While it's difficult to imagine a situation where a test of teaching would move these teachers to conduct interpretive discussions of literature, for example, it is possible to imagine a test of students that would do so; they hold themselves accountable to their students' success on tests, and they're good at what they do. An on-going professional development project, something like the National Writing Project, might have a chance to involve them in other ways to prepare their students for those examinations, and thereby grow them out of their rote learning curricula by putting them in positions to engage in learning to write differently from their usual rote approach; but if we want to be reformists in this situation (and I do), an assessment of their teaching seems like the last thing that we might ask them to do. They might benefit, in other words, from practical engagement, for instance, with other ways of thinking about writing instruction by doing other kinds of writing for themselves before (or while) they would ask it of their students. A test would only tell them what they already know - that they don't teach in a student-centered way. They would tell you that they have good reason not to, so a test's results could be easily dismissed, since it most likely would not offer concrete, specific feedback or suggestions.

So what do insiders get from professional development that they don't get from an assessment? The culture of the professional work. Ongoing participation. Opportunities to work closely with other teachers. And feedback. Feedback is a necessary link in any self-reflective practice. Assessment evaluation, the rubrics that are used to rate performances, and are, therefore, the grounds for any feedback that comes from an assessment, are often overlooked when we think about tests. They seem self-evident, necessary, and obviously reflective of testing criteria. They replace talk or written comments. And they are ideologically situated. Evaluation rubrics that describe rating points seem to me to be more ideologically determinate than the test's exercises or the standards that are reflected in the test's exercises. And standards cannot be used as rubrics because they are developed at the wrong grain level. Standards reflect broad consensus agreements, in very general terms, about what teachers should know and be able to do. In this way, they are ideological maps of a field designed through a particular lense rather than yardsticks designed to measure specific teaching. Evaluation rubrics, on the other hand, take on lives of their own, and they resituate standards and exercises in a cloaked manner. They are, first, the final lense through which performances are evaluated, so they are always already positioned to frame, or reframe, every performance in their terms. And second, people who take the assessment seldom know what the rubrics are. They are kept secret. They should be public, and if an assessment is actually assessing a learned, patterned activity, such as conducting an interpretive discussion, then knowing the rubrics ahead of time should be a positive thing, but rubrics are hardly ever made public to test takers.

I would like to stop here to pull together my thoughts by drawing your attention back to my earlier remarks about standards and standard setting. Professional development, when it's long-term (as opposed to a one- or two-shot dog-and-pony-show) such as the National Project in the states, when it involves us in projects as insiders, changes us. It helps us keep our thinking about teaching alive, in motion, and open to critique. Assessments, especially when they are one-shot deals, are like standards. Even if they uniquely engage us in self-reflection on our teaching, they want to solidify, to be 'true' and complete. But unlike standards, they resist revision and reimagination even when they are locally developed. The best case, it seems to me, occurs when teachers work as insiders to develop, administer, and evaluate teaching assessments, but even in such a case, the prospects for involving more and more teachers in such work is limited because assessments are costly, time

consuming things whose discourse is one of finality and truth. They propose, in other words, that they make the final, truthful determination; unlike professional development, they can't offer generative work among colleagues as an avenue to growth and change.

I hope this paper has offered you the opportunity to think about standards setting, certification assessments, and professional development. About who benefits. And about who is invited to the table. But most of all, I hope it has convinced you that you have to be active in these things. If you are not, if teachers are not, then they will be positioned once again as outsiders because that is the tradition within which these things - standards and certification assessments - are situated.

THE EARLY ADOLESCENT/ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Overview

The following standards are presented as facets of the art and science of teaching English language arts to young adolescents. They are analytical constructs, created to provide a closer accounting of the critical aspects of accomplished practice. However, in real time these segments of teaching occur concurrently because teaching is a seamless activity with many disparate purposes being served in the classroom at any one given moment.

Preparing the Way for Productive Student Learning

I. KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers systematically acquire a sense of their students as individual language learners.

II. CURRICULAR CHOICES
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers set attainable and worthwhile learning goals for students and develop meaningful learning opportunities while extending to students an increasing measure of control over how these goals are pursued.

III. ENGAGEMENT
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers elicit a concerted effort in language learning from each of their students.

IV. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers create a caring, inclusive and challenging environment in which students actively learn.

V. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers select, adapt and create curricular resources that support active student exploration of literature and language processes.

Advancing Student Learning in the Classroom

VI. READING
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers engage their students in reading and responding to literature, and in interpreting and thinking deeply about literature and other texts.

VII. WRITING
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers immerse their students in the art of writing.

VIII. DISCOURSE
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers foster thoughtful classroom discourse that provides opportunities for students to listen and speak in many ways for many purposes.

IX. LANGUAGE STUDY
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers strengthen student sensitivity to and proficiency in the appropriate uses of language.

X. INTEGRATED INSTRUCTION
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening opportunities in the creation and interpretation of meaningful texts.

XI. ASSESSMENT
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers use a range of formal and informal assessment methods to monitor student progress, encourage student self-assessment, plan instruction and report to various audiences.

Supporting Student Learning through Long-range Initiatives

XII. SELF-REFLECTION
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers constantly analyse and strengthen the effectiveness and quality of their teaching.

XIII. PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers contribute to the improvement of instructional programs, advancement of knowledge, and practice of colleagues.

XIV. FAMILY OUTREACH
Accomplished EA/ELA teachers work with families to serve the best interests of their children.

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(a) and post-structuralist epistemology
(b) from a post-structuralist epistemology
(c) and post-structuralism
(d) none of the above'
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