

# ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

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# English in Australia

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# Editorial

KELLI MCGRAW, LISA VAN LEENT AND BRENTON DOECKE

English teachers have always encountered moments in the classroom to talk about love. Whether this be courtly love, romantic love, patriotic love, or love of land and the environment, opportunities abound to talk about what we love, about loving, and about being loved, and about how these things are represented using language and other semiotic resources. It is fair to say though, that some kinds of love and ways of talking about love are more dominant than others, and that some genders and sexualities continue to be marginalised in English classrooms and across the school, both in our professional discourse as English teachers and in the conversations we attempt to facilitate amongst students.

Following the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey in 2017, the Marriage Act in Australia has been amended to allow same-sex couples to marry. The campaigning that took place in response to the Survey contained difficult messages for some audiences, and links were made in some public campaign materials between marriage equality and educational issues such as the use of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia anti-bullying materials. In response to this significant historical moment, the 'Love in English' special issue asks what all this means for English teaching.

Why should English teachers take a renewed interest in questions of gender and sexuality in the aftermath of the same-sex marriage legislation? At the most obvious level, the legislation means that same-sex couples might now affirm their love and know that society recognises the legitimacy of their relationships. Lucinda McKnight argues that the concept of inclusive education needs to embrace the concept of inclusion beyond identity politics as part of a social justice agenda in their<sup>1</sup> aptly titled 'Feel the love: Moving beyond representation to a more inclusive English'. They argue that 'inclusive' is more than representation. Complementing McKnight's argument, Kelli McGraw and Lisa van Leent contend that inclusive texts are indeed an important aspect of a social justice agenda in addressing the 'invisibility' of diverse genders and sexualities in schools. Evidence from their investigation of an official English curriculum text list reveals a perpetuating normalisation of heterosexuality.

At this watershed moment in Australian history, it seems impossible for English teachers to avoid the professional responsibility of asking anew how they should handle issues of gender and sexuality in their classrooms. 61.6% of those who participated in the plebiscite voted yes, 38.4% no. English teachers surely need to respond to this endorsement of same-sex marriage on the part of an overwhelming majority of the Australian population. Such a response is part and parcel of teachers' responsibility to address the 'diversity of students and the effects of social inequalities in students' lives and learning' (Connell, 2013, p. 73). At the very least, political policy debates impinge on the work that happens in English classrooms – they provide the content for students to develop the skills to critically engage with media representations of Australian society. The very visible political discussions on the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program are fleshed out in an article by Stephanie Wescott, who explores the ways in which language use of our parliamentarians shape the ways in which topics of equity and equality for LGBTIQ+ Australians are debated within education and society at large. Chris Walsh and Louise Townsin present a model to address the 'how' aspect of teachers' work, asking how English teachers can engage in practices that provide equitable educational experiences for LGBTIQ+ young people that are free from discrimination. The border crossing pedagogy model presented in their article titled 'A border crossing pedagogy to disrupt LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence in schools' illustrates how and why English teachers can teach about diverse genders and sexualities on the basis of anti-discrimination and marriage equality laws. This is a matter of facilitating the kinds of conversations that occur within classroom settings, where the challenge of acceptance of difference and diversity is always present.

Eleanor McRae and Jen Scott Curwood raise the important issues of teacher education programs encouraging visibility of queer inclusive texts to pre-service teachers. They describe this as 'one mechanism' to promoting equity and equality for LGBTIQ+ young people and challenging heterosexism; a challenge in and of itself. Kate Douglas also explores a

higher education context, reflecting on experiences in the university English classroom with teaching E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, and emphasising the central role of questioning in queer pedagogy. Douglas also acknowledges the 'risky' position taken up by educators who choose to teach in ways that 'ask students to embrace feelings of discomfort and confusion in their learning'.

The fact that not everyone voted in favour of same-sex marriage contributes to the potential difficulties or 'riskiness' associated with such acts of inclusion. It has already become apparent in the months since the legislation has been passed that some community groups and institutions continue to feel that same-sex unions are fundamentally at odds with their views and values. This suggests that there is good reason to make visible positive representations of diverse genders and sexualities. The inclusion of such characters in queer literature for young people makes it possible for such identities to be visible inside the school gates, in school libraries and in classrooms. Emily Booth and Bhuvra Narayan reveal some of the barriers for authors who include LGBTQIAP+ identities and themes in their fiction work, not only in the world of fiction, but in the reality of the everyday lives of Australians. The changes in legalisation of same-sex marriage recognise and make visible the love that exists between same-sex couples to the broader community in Australia. How, then, do we discuss love when we are facilitating conversations with young people in our classrooms?

For all the contributors to this special issue of *English in Australia*, marriage equality is something of immense personal significance. The deeply felt personal character of this historical moment can be felt in the stories and other writing that people have contributed to this issue. We have framed the whole issue with two very powerful narratives, beginning with 'Drawing on Love', by Amy Azano and Eve Azano, in which they share their experiences of Eve coming out and reflect on the need for young people to be able to see themselves in the texts chosen for study. Then towards the end of this special issue can be found another narrative by CeCe Edwards, 'The Job Interview', in which powerful questions are raised about her identity as an English teacher and how open she can be about her sexual identity when students inevitably try to tease out details of her personal life.

The word 'story' perhaps does not do justice to

the quality of this writing, which has a hybrid character, combining moving accounts of personal experiences with more general reflections in which the authors endeavour to understand the significance of those experiences within the context of this historical moment. The same can be said about Timothy Mannix's 'Here I am' and Aubrey Jean Hansen's 'On Queering Indigenous Literatures', both of which in their different ways provide personal testimonies in response to the call that we originally distributed for contributions to this special issue to affirm the role that love ought to play in our lives. Rory Harris has also responded to this call with a poem entitled 'Tears'.

Over the years *English in Australia* has featured many articles on gender and sexuality. The archives reveal at least two special issues, one entitled 'Gender' (No. 107, March, 1994) and another entitled 'Gender and Sexuality' (No. 112, July, 1995). In this edition's 'Perspectives from the Past' section, we reproduce Ray Misson's 1995 paper which focused on ways in which questions relating to homosexuality and discrimination might be addressed, not only in the English classroom but also at a school-wide level. Misson offers short 'reintroduction' to this paper for this edition, which considers ways that the field and related issues have changed since the paper was first published.

Issues relating to equity and equality intertwine as we are challenged as educators and scholars to give voice to a wider range of perspectives on love. Thank you to the impassioned academics and educators who have contributed their words and their creativity to this special issue.

## Note

- 1 'Their, they, them' are used as alternatives to gendered pronouns (Washington Post, 2017)

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# Drawing on Love (A Dialogue)

Amy Azano, Virginia Tech

Eve Azano, Blacksburg High School

My daughter, Eve (coauthoring this paper), was 12 years old when she came out to me. We were sitting in her room, and she said, 'Mom, you know how you've always said you will love me no matter what?' Concerned a bit, I said, 'Of course.' She responded, 'Well, I need you to draw on that love now.' This is par for the course in our conversations. Eve is eloquent and snarky and knows how to balance wit with serious conversations. She smirked while I laughed nervously and then, seriously and courageously she told me, 'I am gay.'

At the end of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, there is a moment where the music stops. It is just before Aaron Burr's bullet strikes Hamilton, when Hamilton wonders about the worth of his life and the weight of his legacy. He says, 'I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory. Is this where it gets me – on my feet, several feet ahead of me?' The moment your child says she is gay is a bit like that. It is like an out-of-body experience where every promise you make about parenting comes at you in slow motion. Knowing the type of mother I aim to be and hoping it maps to the mother I am in this moment becoming. Terrified for her safety. Admiring her bravery. The orchestra isn't playing, and I know that the next words out of my mouth could shape everything that follows. I wish I could write something beautiful here, share some wisdom that came to me in that moment when truth pointed its pistol at my heart. But in reality there were many moments, lots of hugs and tears, a few missteps. One thing held true, however. I did not have to draw on my love for her when she told me she was gay. And, in the three years that have followed, my love and acceptance have never been in question – and yet, I have had much to learn.

I've learned that having a gay teenager means reexamining my parenting practices. Early on in these conversations, I (and many others in her inner circle) asked, 'How do you know?' Or, we said similarly naïve statements: 'You're so young. Who knows who you will like when you get older.' Not only did these statements undercut the sheer bravery of her coming out in the first place, but they also served to discount the experience of knowing oneself. To her father's question, 'You're only in high school; how do you know you like girls?', she replied, 'How did you know you liked girls in high school?' That helped shore up understanding for us all. It was *not* a decision she made. It was a knowing. The only decision was telling us – and what a risk that is for a young person!

Irrespective of my personal values or political beliefs, having a gay teenager has been a learning experience where I have learned to be the student. Eve is my teacher – and a patient one at that. She has been my guide for understanding my own and others' heteronormative stance in the world. She has allowed me to see the ways we make invisible the difference around us. And, she has thoughtfully made suggestions on what I should read and watch, and how to understand literary texts as she might encounter them. Also, she has challenged me as an English educator to revise syllabi and make new choices regarding the books I select for the future English teachers with whom I work. In fact, in the past two years of 'Teaching Adolescent Readers', a required course for our preservice English teacher candidates, I incorporated a unit, 'LGBTQ+ and Redefining Normal', in which students chose from various texts, including *The Art of Being Normal* by Lisa Williamson, *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters, *From the*

*Notebooks of Melanin Sun* by Jacqueline Woodson, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and the musical *Falsettos* by James Lapine and William Finn, along with *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, a novel by John Green and David Levithan.

Since having the opportunity to learn from my daughter, two lessons have become most salient. The first is that gay teens need role models – real and imagined. They need openly gay teachers. They need time with and access to people in their communities who are gay so that they can see the possibility of a future. Gay teens are at higher risks of anxiety, depression, and suicide, and while slogans of ‘It gets better’ might help, they need real evidence that it will in fact *get better*: that they will be known and seen in their adult lives; that they can have relationships, get married, raise children, or whatever their future goals might be. The second lesson is that their voices must be privileged in conversations about them. Hence, I have asked my daughter for permission not only to share our story as we’ve experienced it but, by coauthoring this piece, ensure that her voice (and art) are integral to it.

Eve and I have always bonded over books. As a former English teacher and now literacy professor, I was thrilled when she gravitated to books as a small child. By third grade, she had finished the Harry Potter series and her trajectory of ‘book nerd’ was set. Since that time, I have seen her devour books, including nearly all of the popular Young Adult (YA) series (i.e., *Percy Jackson*, *Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *I am Number Four*, etc.); however, since coming out, her reading choices have explored YA literature with LGBT characters. Given the call for this special issue, I asked Eve if she would think about the books she has read this past year in her high school English classroom, what English teachers should know, and why this matters. As an artist, she also elected to share some of her drawings related to this topic.

In the style of Freire and Macedo (1987), we offer the next section in thinking through opportunities in and out of the canon as a dialogue. In their chapter, ‘Rethinking Literacy: A Dialogue’, Macedo explained that ‘emancipatory literacy suggests two dimensions of literacy’, that is, one where students learn about their histories and culture but also how to ‘appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments’ (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47). This is the critical space in which I began this dialogue.

- Amy: What do you think should be the focus of an English class?
- Eve: To teach students about the world through literature.
- Amy: So, what kinds of literature have been used so far to do that?
- Eve: Well, *Fahrenheit 451* taught me about control and the government. *Lord of the Flies* taught me about true human nature.
- Amy: What about *Animal Farm*?
- Eve: Oof. I didn’t really like that one much. But, I guess I learned that the ones who rebel will eventually become oppressors. By the way, that’s what should’ve happened in the *Hunger Games*!
- Amy: And in *Romeo & Juliet*, was love the focus there?
- Eve: I’d say it was more about lust than love. I don’t think it was real love. I did learn that straight people annoy me though (*she laughs*).
- Amy: Now you’re reading *The Odyssey* – any takeaways there?
- Eve: I’m only on Book Five so it’s much ado about nothing so far.
- Amy: Thinking back on all the books you’ve read in 9th grade, did any conversations about love come up?
- Eve: Not at all.
- Amy: Do you think there were opportunities to do so?
- Eve: Maybe in *Romeo & Juliet*. We could have discussed how characters treated each other and the ways people love and what love means. Also, we could have talked about parental love. The parents say they love their kids, but they weren’t really hearing them.
- Amy: If you were an English teacher and had to teach themes like government control and oppression, do you think some of the LGBT books you’ve read could achieve those goals?
- Eve: Yes – government and oppression! That’s literally the history of LGBT! Teachers could use nonfiction books, like Cleve Jones’s *When We Rise*, to look at the civil rights movement. Or, even books like *We Are the Ants* for fiction. It’s a book about aliens but really a book about oppression, and the main character is gay.
- Amy: Any other books you’d love to read in English class?
- Eve: *Luna* is a great book about a trans person. *Openly Straight* is a good book about a gay guy who tries to pretend he’s straight. It leaves you broken-hearted and confused.
- Amy: Is that a good thing?
- Eve: Well, any book that can make you feel emotion –
- Amy: So, is it a good choice because the gay relationships are portrayed the same as hetero relationships?
- Eve: Yeah – except for the constant ridicule and stereotypes!
- Amy: What do you want English teachers to know?
- Eve: They should know that they’re not teaching all of





Figure 1. 'Love Can Tell a Million Stories' by Eve.  
Inspired by 2016 revival of Falsettos

their students. They're teaching white books to white kids and male books to male students and straight books to straight kids.

- Amy: But, you've liked the books you've read this year?
- Eve: Yes, but I can't relate to them. So, when a teacher asks, 'How do you relate to the characters?', I can't. I find books easier to read when I can relate to the characters.
- Amy: Do you worry that if you read LGBT books in English class that you might be asked to serve as a spokesperson for gay people?
- Eve: No. I think it would make it easier to talk to my classmates because we'd all have the book in common. I don't have to out myself in class. That's my personal life, but I could answer a question without feeling bad about it because at least it would be an acknowledgment – a positive acknowledgment that gay people exist.
- Amy: Do you think it's important for straight kids to read books about gay people?
- Eve: Well, there's a fine line, but I think it's important for everyone to read books about diversity. A lot of kids might not have any experience or exposure to gay people, and books can help normalise that. They need to learn about homophobia in the ways that we learn about racism and oppression. Hate crimes exist and books about these experiences can help.

- Amy: Do you think teachers are scared to teach these books?
- Eve: I don't think they're scared. Honestly, they seem oblivious. Like it doesn't occur to them that there are kids who are gay.
- Amy: Why is it important for English teachers to provide these books for *all* students?
- Eve: Because kids will feel invisible without them, especially for a kid who isn't out. They still need a book! – and they shouldn't have to ask for it. Especially if they don't feel safe. You shouldn't have to ask to be seen in the first place.



Figure 2. 'Do You Know' by Eve

Eve is an avid reader and a critical thinker who seeks out opportunities to find and read books that reflect her experiences and worldview. We wonder about the students who won't find the ways to access these stories. If a gay teen never sees their world represented in the books they read, then it affirms a sense of invisibility – that their lives aren't worthy of a book cover or a narrative at all. The night before the 2016 presidential election, Eve and I sat together on the couch, tears in our eyes at the thought of having our first female president. We met the following morning with different tears, and in the week that followed, Eve successfully established the first Pride (Gay-Straight Alliance) Club at her then middle school. She said students needed a place where they could feel safe. When we embarked on this project together, I asked her why Harry Potter remains her favourite series. She replied, 'Harry Potter gave me a universe where I could

hide.’ Young people gravitate to books for different reasons and hiding or finding safety is a reason I often hear from the preservice teachers when discussing why they want to be English teachers.

In my university classes, every conversation about books is one about power. The power we have as English teachers and literacy professors is apparent every time we make a choice about the books we assign. In leveraging critical pedagogy, Freire (with Macedo, 1987) said that it is not our job to dispel tensions but to arm students with the skills to recognise tensions and address them. Here, we attempt to recognise the tension that comes from having young people needing to hide or feeling invisible in the classroom.

It is with caution *and love* that I share this story about my daughter with my academic village. I do so with her permission, knowing full well she is still a

child and that much of her life will continue to unfold and reveal itself to her. However, without sharing her voice, we continue to perpetuate a myth that students’ young lives are merely a passing through on their way to something more important. Her life is now, and she shouldn’t have to ask to be seen.

#### Reference

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**Eve Azano** is a sophomore at Blacksburg High School where she is active in the Pride Club and participates in the theatre program. She plans to become a social justice lawyer in the future.

my story flows in  
more than one direction:  
power of story, politics of voice.

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# Feel the Love: Moving Beyond Representation to a More Inclusive English

*Lucinda McKnight, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University*

**Abstract:** A renewed interest in diversity for English following the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey of 2017 aligns with the concerns of inclusive education. Since previous special issues of *English in Australia* on gender in 1994 and 1995, the field of inclusive education has burgeoned and become recognised as a discipline in its own right. There is little in the English teaching literature that links the disciplines of English and inclusive education or contemplates how this articulation might inform English teaching. This article seeks to address this gap and provides critical commentary of key works in inclusive education theory in relation to what they have to offer English. The article argues that the important work of achieving diverse representation in text selection is only a first step and English educators need to move beyond this to tackle barriers in the curriculum, the classroom and in culture that impede social justice for all.

## Introduction: School dance blues

While there are four people in the image below (Figure 1), the focal depth suggests that the two young men in black tie at the rear are the subjects here. They are a couple, seated side by side, grinning, eager, excited and hopefully anticipating that their school formal will be a night for dancing with and romancing each other, as well as having fun with friends. This image, with its white table cloth, roses, smart jacket lapels and bright evening lights, is on the cover of the *Guide to Hosting Inclusive School Formals* (Ward, Radcliffe, Scott, & Richardson, 2013). This is a useful potential poster image for talking about representation with students. Yet in 2018, when I showed this image to pre-service teachers, some were perplexed, and asked why any school dance committee would want to design a poster that 'would not appeal to the majority'.



Figure 1. Cover image from Safe Schools Coalition's *Guide to Hosting Inclusive Formals* LaTrobe University, reproduced with permission

Despite the successful result of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey in 2017 and the subsequent legalising of marriage for diverse couples, there is still a long way to go before we all feel the love: many Australians are still numb to the desires and emotions of the substantial number of citizens who are now free to marry the people they love. So there is cause for both celebration and consternation. For English teachers, this is an opportunity to consider how our subject can contribute to the project of helping everyone feel this love, not only in relation to marriage equality, but to the full participation in society of all diverse peoples. This is to recognise that there is solidarity to be found in 'challenging all forms of prejudice based abuse and discrimination' (Ward, 2017, p. 469) and linking this to the pursuit of basic human rights.

### Foundations in the Australian Curriculum

We have a solid basis for this inclusive project in the Australian Curriculum, the national document setting out what young Australians should be taught to create 'a democratic, equitable and just society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse' (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, ACARA, 2018). The Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities call for engagement with diversity, for the development of respect, reciprocity, empathy and open-mindedness. English in particular is identified for its capacity to foster empathy, use reason and imagination, incorporate diverse texts, analyse the powerful effects of language and develop communication skills across cultures (ACARA, 2018).

Stating this in a curriculum document, however, is not achieving it in the classroom. The national curriculum draws on a particular behaviourist and skills-based conceptualisation of education that uniformly assumes these skills or capacities are achievable outcomes of individual pedagogical inputs. Teachers are elided as mere delivery mechanisms enabling the achievement of descriptors, despite critique of this in the curriculum's drafting stages (see for example English Teachers Association of New South Wales, ETANSW, 2009).

The national curriculum itself has been critiqued (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013) for failing to model and practice inclusivity in its development, especially in relation to Indigenous involvement. The ironic prominence of 'empathy' and 'respect' in the national curriculum's documents may also serve as a substitute for the real thing, based on the assumption that if something is in there, it is taught, and even *able* to be taught and

learnt. Teachers initiating discussions around diversity in their classrooms know that intercultural sensitivity and respect are not inevitably achieved. All Australians are now also aware, post-survey, that many children are growing up in families opposing marriage for people who are not heterosexual.

In the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2018) students are understood to develop intercultural understanding through:

- studying a diverse range of texts, characters and individuals;
- applying reason, empathy and imagination to texts and situations;
- studying the inclusive and exclusive effects of language;
- expressing points of view about empowerment and disempowerment;
- respectful understanding of contexts of texts.

This article argues that this curriculum's predominant interest in representation and language in set texts allows for a limited focus via ticking the boxes of diverse cultures and voices. This is reinforced by the ways teachers themselves describe inclusive text selection; in-depth study of text selection in my own research has found that teachers feel the intrusion of multiple external demands, in relation to mandated curriculum, with one Head of Department saying:

It seems like they're saying that you need to teach this and this and this and this and this, kind of implying you wouldn't be using your time wisely if ... if you weren't given these guidelines and I think, well, one of the things I'm worried about in our race to tick all the boxes, we won't actually teach. We'll touch on ... or perhaps it's not so much that we won't have the time to teach, we won't have the time to learn. (cited in McKnight, 2016, p. 241)

Our English teaching literature also suggests the ways that attention to representation alone offers superficial solutions, with one author writing in the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English journal *IDIOM* about the need to find 'a text [that] ticks off both the Asian and Indigenous work requirements' (Sykes, 2012, p. 24). This may also apply to boxes for other diversities, such as gender and sexuality, if further such requirements are introduced.

### Risks in text selection

Including books or films on a text list, a wide reading list, or in the library may simply pay lip service to



inclusion, or worse, perform exclusion. Such texts have been critiqued as 'empty markers' (Zaslow & Schoenberg, 2012, p. 99), celebrating diversity while not challenging norms or initiating action. Simply setting diverse texts cannot ensure that teachers support their messages, that students may not resist and reject them, or that these texts do not ultimately serve to reinforce negative, anti-inclusion values and attitudes.

This reinforcement of negativity is a real risk, as demonstrated by research into coeducational English classrooms in which studying texts culturally ascribed as 'girls' texts' results in denigration, exclusion and sexism (McKnight, 2015). Such initiatives have led to gender issues being marginalised (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991) and girls' texts in particular being disparaged (Spender, 1989). Judith Butler (1990/2007) has written about the ways categories, such as woman, or in this instance, 'girls' text', are produced and controlled by the very means by which they are critiqued. An example of this would be studying a unit on 'girls' magazines' when we know many young people of all genders read these magazines too, while many girls do not.

It is also sobering to heed the words of educators seeking curricular inclusion of marginalised subjects and knowledges in a Lesbian Studies course:

Despite our explicit interventions, all of our discourses, all of our actions in this course were permeated with the continuous and inescapable backdrop of white heterosexual dominance such as a) any subordinated identity always remained marginal and b) 'lesbian identity' in this institutional context was always fixed and stable. (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 285)

Isolated instances of drawing attention to the 'marginalised' may therefore serve to merely reinforce this as a category.

If LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning and Intersex) related anti-bullying programs can perpetuate and legitimate bullying (Carlson, 2014), if specific measures to brown the curriculum exclude (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2006), and if 'voices' from different cultures can only be understood in the context of cultural information that is well-nigh impossible for teachers to find, especially in relation to Islam (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010), what is to be done? While the desire to expand representation is important and valid, educators need to be careful that a scramble for texts with diverse characters and authors does not preclude a critical engagement with the texts themselves, and the recognition that attention to representation is just one

way to seek inclusion. There is much further to go and much more to be done.

### Turning to inclusive education

In contemplating this, key theorists of inclusive education prove useful, with this field understood as 'teaching and learning that supports teachers to respond to individual differences between learners, but avoids the marginalisation that can occur when some students are treated differently' (Florian, 2014, p. 289). Inherent to inclusive education is a reflexive criticality that considers the potential self-defeating capacities of inclusive endeavours, such as the potentially exclusionary practice of labelling and removing those with 'special needs' (Whitburn, 2014). Inclusive education also recognises the resilience of hate, despite the benign army of responsible global citizens anticipated by curriculum documents.

This article, in a sense, queers the search for a gold standard of representation for diversity, by advocating for it, and simultaneously critiquing it from a place outside compliance. By using the term 'queer' here, I redeploy it, as Judith Butler advises (1993/2011), never forgetting its exclusionary history as hate speech, but putting it to political use as an agentive and critical verb that challenges complacency, common sense and the superficial ticking of boxes. This process of queering a focus on representation as an end in itself also involves asking how attention to diversity might serve the masters in ways that minimally disrupt established hierarchies and hegemonies, leaving unchallenged the sedimented discourses of power.

For example, the question 'which diverse voices should be represented in our literature' distracts from a commitment to returning 'text' rather than 'literature' to the heart of English. There are many more diverse voices represented in textual categories outside the classed, raced and sexed boundaries of 'literature'; these texts allow for broader understandings of 'the interplay between gender, language and cultural practice' (Gilbert, 1995, p. 3). The strictures of heteronormativity, for example, are being both challenged and reinforced through activity in digital social and recreational media, through the kinds of texts students are voluntarily using in their own textual worlds. So how can teachers attempt to move beyond being satisfied with nominal inclusivity via representation in text lists and the like? The literature of inclusive education suggests three key initiatives that may be linked to and adapted for English: a critical approach to inclusive



discourse, recognition of the holistic nature of inclusion, and prioritising changing the self in order to change the world. In the following sections, I discuss these ideas, cite key readings for further study and suggest links to English.

### 1. A Critical approach to inclusive educational discourse

A critical approach to inclusive educational discourse would locate the machinery of exclusion not merely within texts for study, but within the language that structures teachers' work. As an example, the received wisdom of 'special needs' is so taken for granted that in 2016 the Victorian Institute of Teaching mandated 'special needs' professional learning as a registration requirement for all English teachers, indeed for all teachers. This ruling was implemented without any acknowledgement of 'special needs' as a highly contested and loaded term, with the term 'special' in particular singled out as an exclusionary 'stamp' (Whitburn, 2014) isolating students from their peers. 'Special needs' is rejected for its basis in a problematic medical model of understanding difference that locates problems with people ('Khamal has special needs') rather than with their contexts ('There is not enough space around our desks for Khamal's wheelchair'). The field of inclusive education itself evolved from concerns about the category 'special' (Florian, 2014).

#### *Problems with 'voice' and 'lens'*

English teachers, with their skills in critical literacies, are ideally placed to challenge this kind of language, and to consider its workings not only in school-wide contexts, but in English-specific discourse as well. For example, English relies heavily on the essentialising force of 'voice', and the colonising power of the 'lens' as a means of performing a literary perspective (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, VCAA, 2015). The intellectual project of critiquing such terms and their use in education is important work for academics, teachers, faculties and subject associations. 'Voice' has been recognised as a problematic term (St Pierre, 2009; Jackson & Mazzei 2009; Mayes & Riddle, under review), because it

- can reify, essentialise and homogenise particular 'groups';
- pretends to access an authentic voice, as if such a thing exists;

- ignores poststructuralist insights into fractured subjects;
- coalesces as an unproblematic implied/validated/sought author/speaker, after Barthes (1977) has proposed the author is dead;
- frames subjects, such as 'homosexuals', for an audience;
- accesses what is always already a construct set up by a more powerful group, for example, researchers seeking diverse 'voices' who have chosen what constitutes 'diversity', which snippets of diverse voice get recorded, analysed, communicated and how they are analysed;
- tends to compartmentalise perspectives as lip service, or a gambit that allows for elision in other areas, such as confining diverse voices to the data of a project, or a part of a meeting or presentation.

To claim we include Indigenous, Asian, gay, 'disabled' and further 'other' voices in our text lists is to locate those voices outside and beyond our selves, our students and our classrooms, and to assume those voices channel and speak from some fixed place or identity. A preoccupation with voice can also lead to students being called upon thus: 'So, as a lesbian, what do you think about ...?' or 'As a Muslim, what would you say about ...?' Such crude and normative addresses insist on difference defining identity in a way that is rarely demanded of heterosexual people or atheists. When coming out results in being interpellated as a sexual category, is it any wonder some people prefer to stay in the closet? Visibility as a minority group member and having your 'voice' acknowledged are inextricably linked to risks of bullying (Carlson, 2014).

The lens creates distance, again, between a student and what is studied, and is deeply troubling for cultural or postcolonial theorists interested in race (Hall, 1997). A desire to look at a text through a lens narrows perspective so that a queer lens, for example, can be picked up and put down, used in an instrumental way to 'focus' on meaning determined only by the lens, rather than the raced, sexed and classed student holding it. Such lenses ignore intersectionality (the unique ways combinations of race, class, gender and other diversities create individuals) and the complexities of identity; a key tenet of inclusive education is 'diversity within diversity' (for example in Ferreira, Coimbra, & Menezes, 2012, p. 120), so that those identifying as queer cannot be reduced, metaphorically, to a single way of looking. Those identifying as feminist are

understood to associate themselves with generations of contested feminisms, not a single perspective. An Indigenous lens shatters in the context of the multiple language groups of Australia's first peoples. There are many better metaphors for the use of theory, such as the democratic and collegial 'thinking with' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), that regards writers as individuals, not 'homosexuals' or 'people of colour' who represent fictional discrete and bounded groups or movements.

Perhaps ultimately, for English teachers, the use of 'lens' reifies the externality of meaning in a way that denies our own subject's literary traditions, for example, of reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1968), or social theory (Yandell, 2012), which locate meaning with the reader, or with social contexts and interactions. Inclusive education warns of the dangers of labels, whether 'special needs', 'autistic' or 'disabled'. Labelling lenses is just as fraught. There is an arrogance in white students saying 'if I use a black lens, I see ...' Imagining yourself in the shoes, or with the eyes, of others needs to be accompanied by the questioning of assumptions and stereotypes made in this process. The assertion of the lens as providing the best 'insight' is in itself an ableist claim, excluding those with visual impairments (McKnight & Whitburn, 2017).

### *English teachers as leaders for inclusion*

If teachers, as public intellectuals and theorist-practitioners in an ever-evolving profession, can critically engage with the language that institutionalises exclusion, they can also be at the vanguard of modelling inclusive language in all workplace interactions. Gender inclusive language in education, for example, is often abandoned at the stage of the supposedly correct 'his/her'. Yet every time these slashed pronouns are used, they perform and reinforce the gender binary, the ordering and division that subjugates girls and women, and also deliberately excludes those who are non-binary.

English teachers, as language experts, can lead the way for other learning areas and welcome person-first language (the 'person with a visual impairment', rather than the 'blind person'). They can use pronouns such as 'xi' and 'hir' to participate in an ever-changing and adapting language. They can challenge normative and loaded use of words such as 'mainstreaming' and 'tolerance' and call out perennial curricular insults such as the study of 'man-made' materials in Science. English teachers are ideally positioned to lead analysis of the cultural politics that makes and is made by language,

sharing their expertise outside disciplinary siloes. This is to acknowledge that inclusion is more than a check box text list, and that exclusion is woven into the fabric of schools *and* society.

This is what inclusive literacy across the curriculum could be: intimate, multilayered critique of the work of language in educational and social discourse undertaken collaboratively with students, instead of directives such as the use of TEEL paragraph structure in all subjects. Disciplinary and curricular language can potentially be changed through activism more readily than the ink and celluloid of novels and films. This kind of work recognises that 'curriculum', like 'heterosexuality' or 'disability', is 'a construct that finds its meaning in a social and cultural context' (Opini, 2016, p. 67).

### **2. It takes a village to raise inclusive curriculum**

The literature of inclusive education argues that inclusion must be embedded in policy (Ballard, 2013). Individual teacher efforts, year level choices of books on a text list and classroom invitations to diverse guest speakers can only have limited effects, unless they are part of a broader rationale for inclusion leading to agreed strategies. If inclusion had been embedded in the policy of the national curriculum from its inception, then Indigenous knowledges might have informed its development, rather than being add-ons. An entire national education system could have been predicated on Indigenous ways of knowing, as a dramatic step towards reconciliation, rather than an opportunity missed (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). Policy-based engagement with such possibilities, including queer pedagogies (Britzman, 1995; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016) posits pedagogy as ever-evolving, not as a list of known strategies.

### *Working 'with' rather than 'on' people and texts*

Trevor Gale (2010, p. 11) offers three principles for inclusive pedagogies:

- a belief that all students bring things of value to the learning environment;
- a design that values difference while also providing access to and enabling engagement with dominance; and
- a practice that 'works with', rather than 'acts on' students and their communities.

If English teachers work in a policy environment that combines these principles with subject English

theory, we may have the beginnings of a powerful manifesto for change. Key synergistic concepts include Ian Reid's workshop approach for the study of English, rather than a hands-off gallery approach. Reid asks, 'What does this mean in a teaching situation? For a start, less complicity with appreciative rituals and more analysis of these rituals' (1984, p. 30). This is not the distanced examination of texts through glass, whether that of the gallery or the lens, but a hands-on tugging apart of language, text lists, tokenism and curriculum, with the knowledges students make together, a process that values their differences and posits them as collaborators and artists rather than ciphers of essentialised theory.

Reid (1984) suggests that in the workshop, a senior student might conduct original research into the classifying of an author: how his writings have been institutionalised, published, reviewed, promoted, set and read. Or, riffing on this, a student could research how the various erotic tensions of *The Great Gatsby* have played out since its publication, in the language of the text, in academic articles, book jackets, film posters, directors' versions and actor's interpretations ... and the populist rhetoric of rottentomatoes.com. Student responses could take the form of new versions of any of these. This would invite creative engagement with the productive and materially-realised workings of culture, leading students into authentic workplaces, diverse contexts and digital media.

Instead, in Victoria, Year 12 Literature students must use two items of literary criticism as prisms through which to view a text and formulate a reading. For example, they might write a response synthesising a 'postcolonialist' and a 'feminist' perspective on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as if such 'perspectives' in literary criticism always exist discretely for initial consumption and can be readily labelled. Simultaneously, examiners note the ways the requirement to 'put forth' (VCAA, 2017, p. 2) a single literary perspective (in the exam version of the task) gets in the way of students sharing their own interpretations. Such posturing creates distance between student and text.

This is also ironic in that the use of the lens is exactly the kind of ritual Reid would like us to be deconstructing, in a critical process that R.W. Connell (1993) recommends as counter-hegemonic. Reid asks us whose interests are served by having literature 'hanging on the wall or encased in boxes' (1984, p. 29) – surely not the interests of students. How can they, along with teachers, parents, families, faculties, schools, subject

associations, curriculum bodies, publishers and the culture and media industries, work together to create a workshop-based English that values student knowledges, lives and interests, however diverse?

This English must also ask and challenge what would best serve Reid's 'authorities', that is, Gale's 'dominance', and enable resistance to institutionalisation. A return to the broader 'text' would also recognise the world as 'pedagogised', as Gale advises (2010, p. 4), and invite critique of broader cultural pedagogies of exclusion. How would we assess this, readers may be asking? Whose interests does straightforward assessment serve?

### *Creativity and negotiation as ways forward*

Another way to enact Gale's 'working with' students would be to reinstate personal and creative writing as central to English. These forms of writing, especially those inviting reflection, whether created by teachers as teacher-writers, or by students, are powerful ways to share knowledges and learn about each other in an evolving atmosphere of trust and respect. It may be difficult to teach creative writing in high stakes scenarios (Frawley, 2014), yet this also means teachers must ask what high stakes scenarios do to principles of inclusive education. Again, as Reid would ask, whose interests have been served by the demise of creative writing as a core component of English? Whose knowledge and ideas have been privileged? When texts are read in English, are they by authors, about authors' lives, or by students, about students' lives?

English teachers reading this may also be thinking of Garth Boomer's (1992) negotiated curriculum. This concept chimes with Gale's belief in students' assets, rather than their deficits. Instead of prescribing literature, or literary theory, to educate students, to work on them and fix up their deficiencies in knowledge, negotiated curriculum asks what students want to know, and what they have to offer as co-designers of pedagogies. Would students of diverse genders and sexualities (i.e. all students) all choose to study texts that are about only heterosexual and cisgendered people? It seems unlikely. Negotiated curriculum is a key tenet of inclusive education espoused by a highly esteemed English educator. A need for equity may enable us to connect with and reinvigorate negotiated curriculum for a new generation and to challenge top-down models of education.

### *Stages in curriculum change to advance inclusion*

A community approach would also mean thinking together through Paul Gorski's (2018) five-stage process of curriculum transformation towards multicultural inclusion. Gorski structures these stages with attention to representation as an early step to initiating change and elaborates on each stage as follows:

Stage 1: There is a Eurocentric and masculinist curriculum that ignores non-dominant people.

Stage 2: Teachers adopt the 'heroes and holidays' or 'tips and tricks' approaches, with 'special' integration of occasional non-dominant texts that may ultimately reinforce them as 'other', or the implementation of strategies for 'dealing with' difference that again reify recipients as 'other'. This may mean, for example, holding a queer film festival, in isolation.

Stage 3: There is substantial integration of material related to non-dominant groups. This may still discriminate, perhaps relying on descriptions of these groups by middle class older white men.

Stage 4: With seamless integration, teachers and students are immersed in different perspectives and constantly seeking new knowledge.

Stage 5: This involves action and awareness; social issues are central to a classroom in which students themselves are key cultural resources for the curriculum (adapted from Gorski, 2018).

This demonstrates that inclusion is a process not instantly and readily achieved through 'fixing' representation in text lists. Getting to Stage 5 in this messy and recursive project requires doing the hard work of exploring homophobia, transphobia, sexism, racism, ableism and other forms of discrimination in curriculum, literature and society *and* creating change based on these discussions. It also means supporting teachers appropriately in undertaking this challenging work.

### *The global village context*

Schools developing inclusive policies such as those outlined above are not acting alone. By incorporating critical reflexivity regarding educational discourse, a workshop approach, the renewal of creative writing and negotiated curriculum, and moving beyond tips and tricks, they can align their work with relevant national and global policy beyond the national curriculum. UNESCO, for example, describes principles for a comprehensive education sector response to homophobic and transphobic violence as

- rights-based
- learner-centred and inclusive
- participatory
- gender responsive and transformative
- evidence-based
- age-appropriate
- context specific and culturally sensitive. (2016, p. 64)

This provides useful ways teachers and students can begin to audit curriculum and school policy. How does the English faculty's text selection policy refer to human rights frameworks, ensure inclusion, involve learners, respond to gender and instigate ongoing change and renewal, draw on research and teacher evidence, attend to age and allow for contextual adaptation and cultural sensitivity? This goes way beyond having Indigenous, Asian and queer representation in texts or amongst authors.

### **3. Recognition that inclusion is largely about changing the self, not just the curriculum**

If only inclusion was as easy as setting *Two Boys Kissing*<sup>2</sup> (Levithan, 2013) for Year 10 English, or *The Natural Way of Things*<sup>3</sup> (Wood, 2017) at Year 11. Yet culturally relevant pedagogy is said to be less about 'what we do' and more about 'what we think' (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 34); it is also about what we feel. Much of what happens in the classroom is not on the official curriculum or even the result of planned actions, hence the term 'hidden curriculum'. Yet, as teachers, we are likely to be unaware ourselves of what we impart via any hidden curriculum or able to change our teaching simply through reflecting on representational practice alone. Inclusive education teaches that it is the development of critical cultural competence that matters; this has been defined as a 'beyond knowledge' understanding (Cooper, He, & Levin, 2011, p. 15). This means, for example, being alert to the embodied awareness that aspects of our practice are excluding students.

It means that if you happen to be a heterosexual English teacher, when you play 'Honey I Love You But I Just Can't Smile', unthinkingly arranging the kids in a circle and ruling that boys can only say it to girls (to try and make the observer/listener laugh) and vice versa, you become attuned to a gut feeling that something is wrong. Or perhaps you become aware of the ambivalent expressions on the faces of some students, or of your friends when you describe what fun that game was in class. It also means, following on from



the call for greater criticality of inclusive pedagogies, that if you rule that kids can say 'Honey I Love You but I Just Can't Smile' to anyone, and when boys say it to each other, most of the class collapses in laughter, you wonder if this may not just be further cementing heteronormativity. Perhaps there is a better game?

Critical cultural competence is about being in ongoing dialogue, both internal and with others, about inclusion. This is not about being perfect. It means noticing what you have said, and saying 'Did I just call you all 'guys'? Is that ok?' (Note: use of 'guys' is banned at some coeducational and girls' schools.) It means noticing the binary on the author biography worksheet, requiring description of a key incident in 'his/her' life and saying 'That's no good; what's a more inclusive way to write that?' It's about stopping in the corridor and intervening when you hear 'That's so gay'. It means being prepared to question your own assumptions, especially those that create barriers, such as that learning about diverse genders and sexualities is all about sexual activities (described by Witthaus in Duffy, 2012), or that you need to be a cultural expert to mention Indigenous issues in the classroom (critiqued by Shipp, 2013). It means opening yourself up to opportunities for cultural and professional learning that will expose you to new ideas and new people with different experiences of life in all its diversities, as a means to developing cultural sensitivity. A useful place to start is with seeking literature exploring queer-influenced pedagogies in the English and literacy classrooms (for example Helmer, 2015; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016).

This is to acknowledge that curriculum and pedagogy always begin with the self, and the teacher's narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), and confronting what experiences of being in dominant groups and majorities might mean for practice. It is this emergent self that manages discussion in the classroom and structures the opportunities that hate speech offers to speak back (Butler, 1997) when children ventriloquise it. It is this self that has the capacity to ardently defend attacks on 'political correctness' and position inclusion within global imperatives for human rights.

The development of critical cultural competence may, however, be particularly difficult in current circumstances. The teacher who can harden the heart to the casual violences of NAPLAN, league tables, setting and streaming, withdrawal for assistance and other features of contemporary neoliberal education, may find it difficult to feel the love. The neoliberal

requirements of the dominant regime are perceived to create challenges for teacher reflection and development (Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011), with English teachers interpellated (addressed) as recipients and deliverers of mandated curriculum, rather than creative, autonomous professionals (McKnight, 2016). One of the three key requirements in a widely used framework for inclusive education is that 'teachers continually develop creative new ways of working with others' (Florian, 2014, p. 291), while critical cultural competence relies on 'thoughtful, innovative practices' (Cooper, et al., 2011, p. 16).

### Conclusion: Can you feel the love yet?

Instead of imagining that teachers are producing knowledge workers for future economies, schools could aim to create people who would look at a poster of two young men at a school dance and perceive them as being just as representative of the wonderful human experience of falling in love as any other people. This will come through more than celebrating diverse voices in English text lists, but through 'the democratic reconstruction of the school' (Carlson, 2014, p. 338) and the acknowledgement that 'the roots of the problem are institutional, political and cultural' (Carlson, 2014, p. 339).

Programs like those of the Safe Schools Coalition that seek to support this, in a comprehensive way, are deeply threatening to entrenched orthodoxies and need urgent and vocal support from both teachers and communities. English requires more than the kind of 'rent-a-minority' (Mahdawi, 2016) tokenism that is satisfied with putting an Indigenous, a trans and an Asian author on a text list. It would benefit from a wholehearted embracing of the philosophies of inclusion, such as critical engagement with pedagogical discourse, community commitment to inclusive policy and the development of cultural competence as a personally sensitive and empathetic orientation, not a catalogue of tips and tricks for 'dealing with' difference. Then perhaps we could all really feel the love.

### Notes

- 1 Judith Butler comes to mind here, resisting interpellation as belonging to 'feminism' (1990/2007, p. vii).
- 2 Read a review of David Levithan's novel *Two Boys Kissing* at <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/may/16/review-david-levithan-two-boys-kissing>.



- 3 An excellent study guide for Charlotte Wood's novel *The Natural Way of Things* is available at <https://readingaustralia.com.au/lesson/natural-way-things/>.

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# A Border-crossing Pedagogy to Disrupt LGBTIQ+ Bullying and Violence in Schools

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**Abstract:** Many primary, secondary and tertiary educators need support to engage in inclusive pedagogical practices that challenge homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity. We present a border-crossing pedagogy (BCP) designed to assist English language arts educators in translating knowledge into action to demolish deeply engrained anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex (LGBTIQ+) bigotry, discrimination and violence. This model is timely given the rise in anti-LGBTIQ+ bigotry as governments pass LGBT-inclusive hate crime laws, executive orders prohibiting LGBT discrimination and marriage equality. We illustrate how the BCP can be used to explore affordances and barriers located in the English curriculum, and beyond, to teach about diverse genders and sexualities, positively recognising and affirming LGBTIQ+ identities.

## Introduction

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, n.d.) highlights, 'it is through the study of English that individuals learn to analyse, understand, communicate and build relationships with others and with the world around them'. English provides opportunities for learners to develop ethical, thoughtful and informed opinions and beliefs that support active participation in civic dialogue, and responsible contribution to Australia's, and the world's, future. Yet, we know that our current world does not always reflect the values of dignity, respect and inclusion, even though these principles are fundamental to the study of English and the Australian Curriculum. In Australia and elsewhere, over 80% of homophobic bullying happens in schools (Jones & Hillier, 2012; FRA, 2013; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas & Danschewski, 2016). LGBTIQ+ students and teachers still lack basic protections from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Where protections exist, they are largely inadequate or unenforced (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Post-plebiscite, the situation is certainly no better, and Australia still does not have LGBTIQ+ inclusive sexuality education in schools (Kang, 2017). With transgender and gender non-conforming students more visible, many educational institutions at the national, state and local levels have not taken the necessary steps to ensure they can access equal academic and extracurricular experiences. A renewed pedagogical effort by teachers is needed to disrupt existing power imbalances that work to marginalise LGBTIQ+ people and perpetuate anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination and violence. These acts of bullying and violence arise from deeply ingrained prejudices where LGBTIQ+ individuals are viewed as the 'other' (see Figure 1).

All educators, particularly primary and secondary teachers, can be empowered, through pedagogy, to disrupt these manifestations of bullying and violence in their classrooms. As

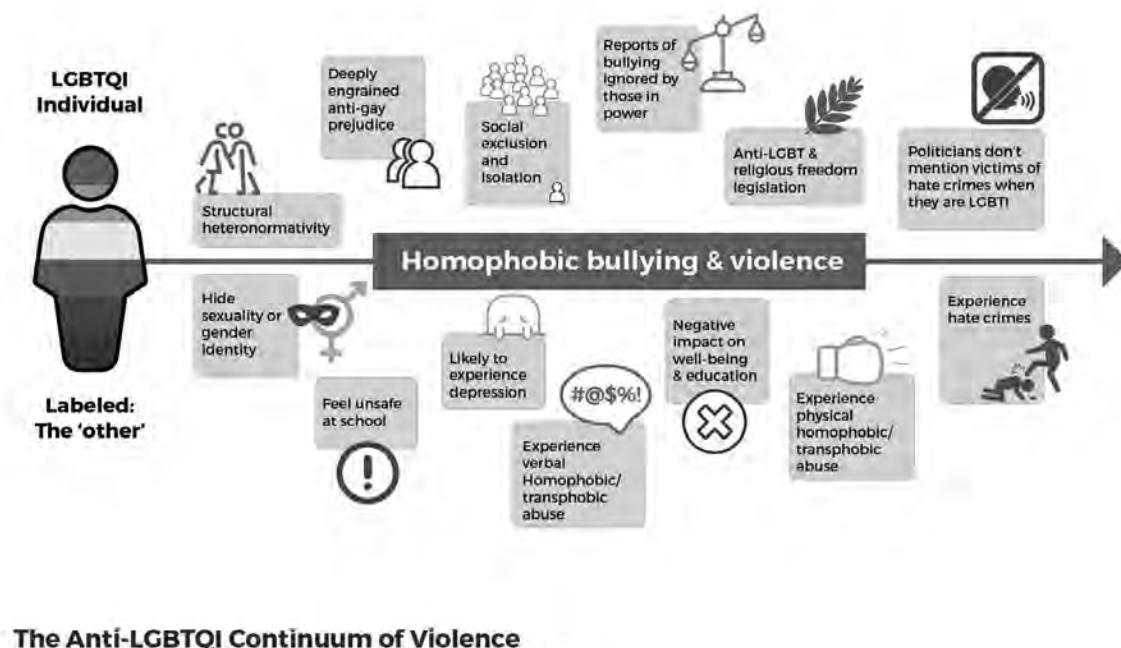


Figure 1: LGBTQI+ bullying and violence

educators, like so many other Australians, we experienced hurt and negativity from the marriage equality plebiscite. This, coupled with recent and pending anti-LGBT legislation and growing violence against LGBTQI+ people globally, particularly youth and families, was the humanising catalyst or conscientização that pushed us to design a border-crossing pedagogy (BCP) with the potential for praxis. In this context, we wish to encourage students and teachers to act together upon local and global instances of LGBTQI+ bigotry, bullying and violence, not only in English education, but beyond, by considering possibilities for non-violent critical reflection and action, even acts of love.

In what follows, we present a pedagogical model that we believe has the potential to empower English language arts educators to be courageous in dismantling the structural heteronormativity that relentlessly promotes homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity in their classrooms, at the school-wide level and in society (Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Skelton, 2016; Van Horn, 2015). This complements similar 'queer' critical media literacy approaches in English classrooms that 'support students to read genders and sexuality through the perspective of queer theory' (van Leent & Mills, 2018, p. 403). The BCP we outline below works to engage children and young people in critiquing structural heteronormativity within and beyond print and media texts, in much the same way they would take on the role of the text analyst in Freebody and Luke's (1990) Four

Resources Model. The BCP also invites educators to view themselves as change agents, recognising that this takes tremendous courage. In this sense, the pedagogy proposes that educators imagine themselves as a subject in the process of becoming, thus being ready themselves for change (Freire, 1998). We acknowledge that some educators may need to be convinced of the goals and risks of a critical dialogic approach (Kincheloe, 2004) to disrupt anti-LGBTQI+ violence in their educational settings and society (e.g. Homosexual Advance Defence Laws or gay panic defence). To address this, we outline how the BCP can be used in English classrooms with the Safe Schools Coalition Australia's (2016) *All of Us* resources, which were designed to create safer and more inclusive environments for LGBTQI+ students, staff and families in Australia.

### A border-crossing pedagogy (BCP) to disrupt LGBTQI+ bullying and violence

When educators invite students to border cross in the English classroom, they can empower them through dialogue, to aspire to come to know and understand LGBTQI+ otherness on its own terms, rather than being complacent that heteronormative and gender binary borders are needed to separate, define and control their lives and world. Individuals are usually aware of the geographical borders that separate people, but are often unaware of the borders in their minds relating to LGBTQI+ and other categories of otherness. The 'borderlands' are transgressive spaces where



students can learn the skills and competencies that are required for sharing the present and the future with others mindfully, and with a desire for justice and equality. Border crossing as an educational pursuit in classrooms invites teachers to create safe contexts for learners to think about themselves in a border context to facilitate crossings and connections between people, while being aware and critically reflective of issues of privilege and power (Romo & Chavez, 2006).

We believe that the BCP is relevant to all matters of difference, not only cultural difference, although that has been a focus in prior applications of the model (Townsin, 2017; Townsin & Walsh, 2016; Walsh & Townsin, 2015). The BCP presented here was created as a response to the question, 'How can teachers 'do' queer pedagogy to disrupt anti-LGBTIQ+ violence?' The BCP has theoretical roots in critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1992, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005, 2010), queer pedagogy (Luhmann, 1998), border crossing (Giroux, 1991a, 1991b, 1992), hybridity (Anzaldúa, 1987), dialogue (Freire, 1970), praxis (Freire, 1970, 1994, 1998) and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). The BCP can be utilised across multiple settings to assist learners to rethink how to effect change within both inner and outer worlds. Wanting to disrupt anti-LGBTIQ+ bullying in violence, as illustrated in Figure 1, prompted us to explicitly articulate how the BCP can be operationalised to respond to the current inner and outer worlds that distort, deny and erase LGBTIQ+ subjectivities across educational settings.

At the centre of the BCP (Figure 2) is the belief that education is about dialogic journeys of becoming (Chappell, Craft, Rolfe, & Jobbins, 2012). These lead to small, incremental changes over time that ultimately culminate in 'quiet revolutions' (Craft, 2013). Our approach to pedagogy is for teachers to promote classroom experiences that assist students in fostering *new* ontologies (ways of being) that are built on courage, hope and mindfulness. This is represented by the arrow with the heart. In terms of knowledge represented by the brain, students and teachers are encouraged to undertake the epistemological task of coming to understand power, social change and the legacies of heterosexual and gender normativities. They can also explore how heteronormative ways of thinking and acting negatively impact their world and promote privileges associated with heteronormativity and historical patriarchal values over solidarity, care and reciprocity (Quiroga, 2015).

These newly formed ontological and epistemological perspectives can then be applied in both cognitive and behavioural ways to dismantle anti-LGBTIQ+ bigotry. Thus, knowledge and attitudes can facilitate an internal frame of reference shift, symbolised by the arrow with the lightbulb, in order to engage in possibility thinking (Craft, 2010; Walsh, Chappell, & Craft, 2017) and embrace hybridity. In this co-creative third space, students and teachers can make use of uncertainty and ambiguity, exploiting the potential they have for opening up new imaginings and spaces for problem-solving and innovation through border crossing. Critically, a goal of the pedagogy is the application of wise, humanising creativity (WHC) to take engaged, ethical action(s) while simultaneously being mindful of the consequences (represented by the arrow with the lightning bolt) (Walsh, Chappell & Craft, 2017). The external outcome, or rather, how students and teachers apply themselves – *who they are becoming* – emerges through the experience of border crossing across individual, collaborative and communal contexts.

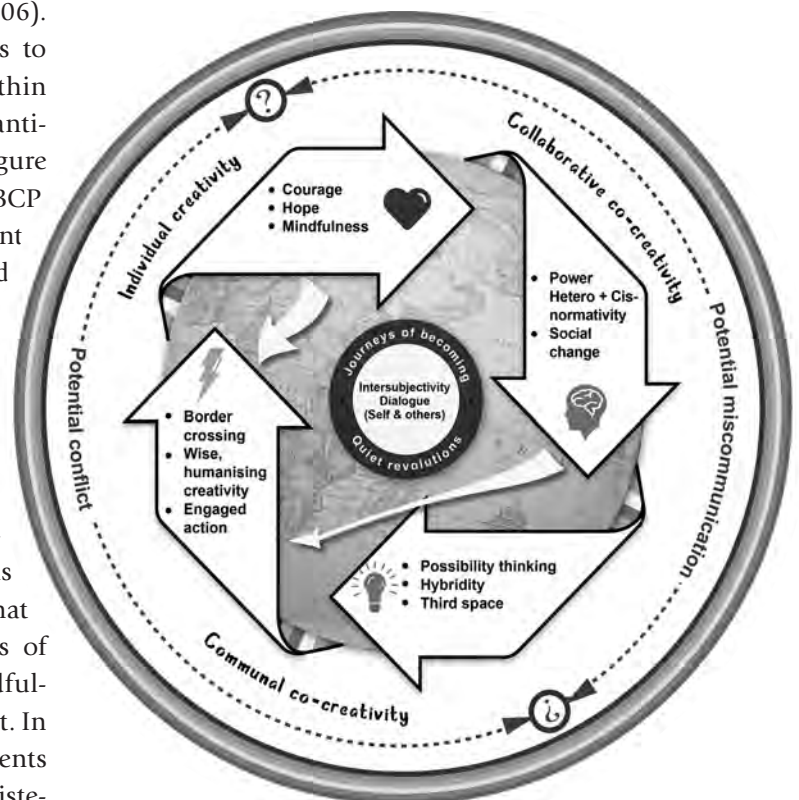


Figure 2: The border-crossing pedagogy (BCP) to disrupt LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence

Given the sharp rise in global anti-LGBTIQ+ violence as governments propose and pass LGBT-inclusive hate crime laws, executive orders prohibiting LGBT discrimination and marriage equality ('Action needed to stop



violations of LGBT people's rights', 2017), the BCP is urgently needed. The 'borderlands', LGBTIQ+ or otherwise, are not viewed as 'utopian site[s] of transgressive intermixture' (Ang, 2001, p. 164), nor is hybridity viewed as a concept that makes it any easier to challenge individuals' ritualised and dominant heteronormative ways of thinking about their own subjectivities. Rather, when teachers enact and experience pedagogy for border crossing, they can challenge realities characterised by miscommunication and conflict associated with gender, sex and sexuality differences, to acknowledge that alternative identities, genders and sexualities exist. The BCP assists teachers in setting up methods to address the experiences of all students, specifically LGBTIQ+ children and young people, to develop what sj Miller (2010) refers to as a 'social-justice minded pedagogy' (p. 62) that helps students become clear about their own belief systems. The BCP is similar to Miller's work in the sense that it is inquiry based, but it differs because it is explicitly linked to WHC. As noted above, WHC emerges from the concept of wise creativity (Craft, 2008), a creativity which involves creative stewardship of new ideas towards the collective good and humanising creativity (Chappell, 2008). WHC is fostered when people have opportunities to engage in dialogue and collaborative action to imagine new ideas which are valuable to them and their communities. WHC strongly emphasises the reciprocal relationship between creativity and identity. This means that in the process of making or designing, children and young people are also being made in individual, collaborative and communal ways.

### *Three steps to using the BCP in English classrooms*

We believe educators can use the BCP to create spaces for border crossing to disrupt anti-LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence in English classrooms (as well as in other subject areas). This is because the BCP invites educators and students to engage in problem-posing education towards praxis – the integration of theory and practice towards emancipatory ends – where, through co-creativity, they engage in transformative action and reflection on action. At times, this will mean that potentially confronting and difficult conversations are required to name instances, both local and global, of LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence. The BCP can then be used to invite teachers and students to take risks to articulate ideas for concrete action that can be initiated in the present to disrupt LGBTIQ+ intolerance and violence, with a goal of eliminating it across contexts. Teachers

and students can do this collectively through dialogue where they name anti-LGBTIQ+ violence and turn it into a problem needing to be transformed. More often than not, it is the teachers, as adults, who often struggle to name anti-LGBTIQ+ violence (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In the classroom or school, stakeholders can co-create 'precisely worded intentions' of what they want the world to be like and what they want to be like (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 290). This itself provides an opportunity to name anti-LGBTIQ+ bullying violence in the context of working for greater equality and peace, something common to most curriculum frameworks.

Critical to using the BCP is taking the first step to understand the different perspectives of teachers and students about anti-LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence locally. We realise this will likely be a challenge for many teachers and students. It requires teachers to design classroom spaces and activities that encourage students to speak with courage and mindfulness and for them to listen to each other even when they may not agree. Given the lack of respect for and understanding of sexual and gender diversities, we understand this initial step is often the most difficult. But, given the plethora of media, news clips, picture books, Young Adult literature and LGBTIQ+ resources available (e.g. Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, The Safe Schools Coalition, Rainbow Network, Stonewall Community Foundation, Safe and Supportive Schools Project), we believe these can be used as a catalyst. In situations when this approach is not possible, it is recommended that community members (e.g. The National LGBTI Health Alliance, Minus18, Australian research centre for sex, health and society (ARCSHS) representatives, politicians) be invited to the classroom to 'break the ice' around issues relating to LGBTIQ+ bullying, violence and prevention. The second step requires teachers to work alongside students to collectively imagine a new vision that challenges anti-LGBTIQ+ bigotry and to visualise a preferable future through possibility thinking. In a third step, teachers and students co-create prototypes for immediate action to resolve challenges at the individual, collaborative and communal level. This could mean, for example, initiating or improving school policies or facilitating the development of student-led activities.

By engaging in ongoing critical, dialogic and co-creative endeavours, over time teachers and students have the potential to recognise and understand that reality is process, rather than an obstinate and stubborn entity we just have to live with. Here praxis is

realised co-creatively through courageous action that we believe can be transformative in scope as teachers and students experience small incremental changes to their beliefs. As noted above, these small incremental changes can actually bring about what Craft (2016, p. 409) calls quiet revolutions, or 'social change valued by the community as a whole in which participants play co-emancipatory roles'.

This three-step suggestion for using the BCP mitigates the risk of only speaking to people about one worldview (e.g. an inclusive-LGBTIQ+ world free of violence or an exclusionary heterosexual world that discriminates against LGBTIQ+ people) and attempting to impose that view on others. As Kumashiro (2000) argues, critical pedagogy is more than learning and teaching about 'this' or 'my' critical perspective, as this simply replaces one hegemonic framework with another. He urges teachers and students to engage in critical work to analyse their own lives, and to use critique as a means to search for what is overlooked, unsaid, impossible and unthinkable.

This critique can be achieved through dialoguing with diverse stakeholders in order to move from a 'purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the *causes* of reality' (Freire, 1970, p. 112). Through dialogue and praxis to resolve challenges, stakeholders uncover how a reality constructed by others has actually divided them, to preserve the status quo, oppression and binary ways of existing. Dialogue in this context is not an easy or 'catch-all' process. It does critical work and is thus open to failures and even further harm and should therefore not be entered into lightly. Part of working with the power of dialogue is to also learn when it is not possible, feasible or likely to occur, when it is wise to instead pursue alternative means of resistance and enunciation. Indeed, one of the criticisms of critical pedagogy has been that the process of challenging oppression can create even more harm to those who are already marginalised in society (Ellsworth, 1992). Similarly, debating marriage equality in the public sphere through the plebiscite forced Australian LGBTIQ+ people to open their lives and identities to public debate, scrutiny, evaluation, and sometimes abuse (Knight, 2017).

However, in a responsible framework in the classroom, dialogue supports teachers and students to view their own, and others' intentions and desires. In this micro context, this then enables change, growth and the possibility for further relationship and collaboration,

whether that be with others who are similarly or differently oppressed or with those who are also interested in co-creating a world free of violence and oppression for LGBTIQ+ people. The kind of border crossing we speak of in this paper is important as a form of pedagogical imagination precisely because it underscores the value of disrupting our own 'selves' as generative and not as an attack on individual rights, rights which inevitably have the potential to oppress others if collective liberty has not been realised.

A strength of the BCP is its potential to disrupt anti-LGBTIQ+ violence through a dialogic act of love (Freire, 1970) that fosters an intersubjective journey of becoming through dialogue with self and others. Freire (1970) reminds us that '[h]uman existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words' (p. 69). The BCP requires educators to be courageous so they can encourage students to use 'true words' to name the world and collaborate to change it by engaging in possibility thinking or the transformation from 'what is' to 'what might be'. (Craft, 2013). By naming anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, or any other dehumanising action or form of communication, it can then be conceived as a problem that requires a co-creative solution. When teachers and students begin to speak about anti-LGBTIQ+ violence and name it, they begin to challenge and dismantle structural heteronormativity and deeply ingrained prejudice. Dialogue, where people name the world, is an act of creation and re-creation that is not possible without love (Freire, 1970). This is because love is as an act of courage, commitment to others and liberation from oppression. In this sense, the BCP no longer permits students and citizens to 'draw the line' between us and them, gay and straight, transgender and cisgender, as well as other binaries that unacceptably fuel anti-LGBTIQ+ violence.

### **Border crossing with *All of Us***

Education offers particular versions and visions of civic life, community, the future and our physical and social environment (Giroux, 2016). What is taught and how teaching occurs 'represents a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities' (Simon, 1987, p. 372). However, the degree that these dreams are implicated in organising the future for others highlights how education always has a moral and political dimension. This is a foundational premise of the BCP and especially relevant in a climate that privileges technical and functional skills in learning

and teaching, as well as heteronormative and gender binary ways of being and knowing. In what follows we provide an example of how the BCP could be applied using the Safe Schools Coalition Australia's (2016) *All of Us* anti-bullying program resources.

There is a growing number of teaching resources available online that educators can access and use in their classroom practice to address anti-LGBTIQ+ violence. Many resources use digital media to explore personal stories of LGBTIQ+ pride and celebration, while also highlighting the challenges associated with being 'othered'. Short TED talks such as 'How I'm Bringing Queer Pride to my Village' (Kolanyane-Kesupile, 2017), 'How to Talk (and Listen) to Transgender People' (Bird, 2017) and 'This is What LGBT Life is Around the World' (Chang & Dazols, 2015) are powerful examples. Resources by Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Anti-Defamation League, and Southern Poverty Law Center's 'Teaching Tolerance' project offer a variety of lesson plans, text and film ideas and teaching strategies. Notwithstanding the many resources available, we have chosen to focus on one particular resource in this paper. A primary reason for this includes the desire to reference an Australian resource. As Giroux (2011) argues, 'pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place' (p. 75). Although the Australian context cannot be easily distilled or defined, we also recognise that our geographies, climates, political and media systems, histories and cultures are very different to the North Americas. We also wish to demonstrate how existing resources can be 'hacked' – that is, how English teachers can think creatively to draw from resources that may not necessarily be developed for specific use in the study of English.

*All of Us* includes a collection of seven short videos with accompanying learning activities. The videos show LGBTIQ+ youth discussing their experiences, thoughts and advice in relation to their identities, sexualities, genders, schooling, relationships, families and futures. The videos are windows into both the idea and representation of 'the other', giving insight into what life is like for the speakers at the time of filming and how others impact on their lives in different ways. The *All of Us* videos offer a timely invitation for border crossing, particularly when it is not always possible to bring diverse LGBTIQ+ stakeholders into a school setting.

All efforts that address homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity are crucial, but these efforts – including incorporating the *All of Us* resources – should not be limited to Health and Physical Education, where educators often view this teaching as most visibly relevant. The *All of Us* videos are well-suited for the English classroom, particularly as these classrooms are often 'envisioned as transformational spaces in which students can learn sensitivity to diversity and work against stereotypes as they consider perspectives and experiences different from their own' (Helmer, 2016, p. 36). The English classroom can accommodate problem-posing and possibility thinking to ascertain the extent to which the *All of Us* videos present significant dimensions of individuals' contextual realities. There are some important questions to ask: 'Are the videos familiar for students?' 'Can they easily recognise the situations and thus their relationship to them?' The BCP assists teachers and students in naming themes or problems they wish to explore in further detail, as well as strategies for how and where this would be possible. We view teachers as the initial catalyst for these kinds of inquiries. We have approached the *All of Us* videos in this manner ourselves, envisioning how we would use them as tools to introduce a diversity of perspectives that can expand and alter dialogue through transformational multiplicity as learners are encouraged to seek plurality through the negotiation of multiple ideas and knowledges (Anzaldúa, 2002). Specifically, we focus on three areas of learning: language; identities; and histories. Although different themes will no doubt arise in future and other circumstances, we offer these in the first instance to demonstrate how transformative thinking, teaching and learning with the BCP can be applied in the English classroom.

### Language

*All of Us* provides a springboard to critically explore how words and language can cause harm to others, thus supporting learning on the inclusive and exclusive social effects of language which serve to empower or disempower people. As Kedley (2015) notes, 'all teachers – regardless of gender and sexual identity – are complicit in and contribute to mainstream narratives in their classrooms' (p. 371). The theme of language is certainly not limited to LGBTIQ+ experiences. It is also part of a broader conversation on free speech and, in today's climate, the origin and current use of the concept of 'political correctness'. In particular, the videos provide many examples of how young people

would like others to respond to differences with mindfulness, encouraging teachers and students to examine the way language is often used to 'other' LGBTIQ+ people, and the value of mindfulness in all communicative activities.

The first lesson in the *All of Us* program focuses on creating a safe space for discussing sensitive topics and offers the following question: 'How do we use appropriate language when talking about topics related to LGBTIQ+ people?' This kind of question provides a catalyst for dialogue that goes beyond coming to agreement in a short period of time, but rather stimulates further questions, such as, 'Who decides what language is appropriate and why?' or 'How have I/ those I know/ the media/ politicians used language as a means to separate us and them when referring to LGBTIQ+ people?'. Opening up for complexity in this way encourages learners to become more accustomed to the third space where, in order to learn, they need to experience humility to acknowledge what they don't currently know. This in turn can lead them to exercise the courage to problematise the taken-for-granted as they visualise alternative futures and communicate them to other members to co-create prototypes for action. Language is an obvious yet useful theme; through it we can name LGBTIQ+ injustice and violence, and then move to new visions of the future involving specific plans which can be implemented in the classroom, school, and beyond.

### *Identities*

The theme of identities within the *All of Us* videos provides many possibilities for border crossing. A focus on the complexities of identities, as clusters of stories that individuals tell about themselves and that others tell about them (Anzaldúa, 1999), is an opportunity for students and teachers to engage in possibility thinking. By engaging in possibility thinking, students can author precisely worded intentions of what they want their world to be like and how they envision themselves acting in that world. By considering the different perspectives of stakeholders around identities, they can consider and re-consider gender, sex and sexuality, as well as other multiple social identities, some of which the *All of Us* videos touch upon, such as ethnicity, religion and age. The focus is on transforming from 'what is' or a focus on binary gender or sexual identity, to 'what might be', a more fluid understanding of gender and sexual identity and other identity categories of difference.

Key to explorations of identities in the *All of Us* videos are matters of power, violence and love, and how these manifest and are produced through everyday actions which either confirm or deny the existence of LGBTIQ+ identities. Jaimee's *All of Us* video, for example, discusses experiences of disconnection and isolation. Vivian's, Michael's and Margot's videos, in contrast, highlight love in familial relationships. Dialogue could explore how and to what extent love in personal, family and societal contexts can effectively challenge and ultimately change the structural conditions that privilege heteronormative and frozen gender identities.

The youth in the videos encourage teachers and students to border cross to understand LGBTIQ+ identities on their own terms. As they speak openly about their experiences, they invite viewers to try to understand who they are and what life is like for them at this time, dispelling the mystery of their otherness and without glossing over differences related to gender, sex and sexuality. The videos also bring attention to the rarity of identities being presented in rich, complex and honest ways. Margot's video specifically discusses the depiction of transgender people through warped and exaggerated caricatures in cartoons and movies, urging stakeholders to name the violence of essentialism, which demonises LGBTIQ+ identities and destroys any possibility for border crossing. Hence, learning how to border cross is also about identifying what obstructs attempts to border cross, how these issues are related to power and/or violence and whether or not courage, hope and love can counteract this.

### *Histories*

The youth in the *All of Us* videos importantly share their mostly positive experiences of coming out. Certainly, the youth demonstrate huge capacities for courage and hope, evident in their stories and also in their willingness to be involved in the filming. Extending on one of the interactive exercises in *All of Us* which asks students to imagine difficult scenarios for LGBTIQ+ youth, we would also have learners consider courage by asking questions such as 'How and why might it be easier today for LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities? Yet, why is it still sometimes difficult to speak up against others who are afraid of difference? What can we do now when we see instances of discrimination/bullying/harassment which would have not been possible in the past?'. Courage therefore is something that everyone truly needs every single day, as it confirms



the interconnectedness that underpins generative co-existence.

The BCP requires teachers to work alongside students to therefore highlight the groundbreaking and courageous work that has facilitated the availability of the *All of Us* material, as well as how much further work still needs to occur in this area. The BCP assists stakeholders in critically examining the past and present. In the Australian context, exploring the past would mean bringing to light some of the dark 'secrets' of our recent history, such as the violent birth of the Sydney Mardi Gras. Now one of Australia's most famous and loved events, its beginning involved police brutality situated in a deeply hostile environment that permitted explicit institutional violence against LGBTIQ+ people. Collective action against anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, in turn, incited social change. Exploring the present might include 'gay panic' defence where a killer can claim the victim allegedly made homosexual advances towards them. The final lesson in *All of Us* looks at strategies to make school safer. However, through the examination and analysis of the past and present, learners would be better placed to understand the deeply ingrained prejudices that still require challenging, and thus how the need for social change continues to be relevant.

Colonial settlers brought the values of heteropatriarchy and gender binaries from Europe to many countries, resulting in centuries of regulation of Indigenous bodies, genders and sexualities in a historical continuum of anti-LGBTIQ+ and racial violence (Wilson, 2015). By acknowledging this violence, we acknowledge the need for healing in our society that enables the proclamation of Indigenous sovereignty over bodies, gender expressions, sexualities, land and lives. Through border crossing, we will likely see pain. Committing to listening and then to acting in ways that support connection to each other, as well as to land, water and skies which sustain life, can promote healing.

## Conclusion

While the idea of a border-crossing pedagogy is not new when it comes to cultural differences (see Stewart & Gachago (2016) and Wilson, Ek, & Douglas (2014)), it is new when it is used to dialogically disrupt LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence in schools. Given the success of recent LGBT-inclusive legislation and protections, there will certainly be an ongoing anti-LGBTIQ+ legislation backlash to maintain the status

quo. This will continue to perpetuate bigotry based on sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. We believe the BCP provides primary and secondary teachers a useful tool to create and transform English classrooms, and schools, by engaging in inclusive pedagogical practices that challenge homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity. Working to disrupt anti-LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence in any classroom is unavoidably confronting. The reason that many might find it daunting to do so is the very reason it must be done. Given that many educators already feel ill-equipped to respond to situations of homophobic remarks, harassment and assault of LGBTIQ+ students (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013), it is time for educators to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable when it comes to anti-LGBTIQ+ bigotry and violence. Part of this entails considering ignorance as a form of psychic resistance that is both implicated in and constitutive of knowledge (Luhmann, 1998). We may need to accept that others may not be able to bear what we want them to know and to trust, not blindly, but proactively, in the power of dialogue to create and transform. If we are serious about a future where anti-LGBTIQ+ violence no longer has power or legitimacy, then remaining silent is not an option. Teachers can encourage students to reject those dichotomies of otherness that maintain the status quo and fuel discrimination, harassment and hostility in many areas of everyday life for LGBTIQ+ people. These dehumanising forces are oppressive and continue to deny LGBTIQ+ people individual human rights and the dignity of their individual freedom and bodily autonomy. In the words of Nelson Mandela, 'to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others'.

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# Textual Constraints: Queering the Senior English Text List in the Australian Curriculum

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**Abstract:** In this paper we report the results of an analysis underpinned by a critical orientation seeking non-heteronormative representations of sexualities in an official English curriculum text list. Content and thematic analyses were conducted to establish the extent to which diverse sexualities are represented in the 'sample text list' for the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary English. Only two of the fiction texts on the list were found to substantially contain non-heterosexual protagonists, named characters, experiences, or relationships. We contend that creators of authorised text lists should seek to more overtly address the persistence of heteronormativity in Australian schools by listing texts that represent diverse sexual identities and issues of sexual difference and diversity, and texts that are equitably accessible to a wider range of students in English.

## Introduction

The question of which texts ought to be studied by school students in English subjects is a source of perennial debate. Nowhere in the school curriculum are decisions about text choice so contested as in senior secondary English subjects. Conversations about appropriate content, perceptions of literary quality, and concerns about balancing print, live, and digital-electronic media are typical topics to come across in this field (McGraw, 2005). In Australia, decisions about whether teachers must choose texts from a prescribed list for study are made by curriculum agencies at the state and territory level, and New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania are currently the only states requiring Year 12 teachers to choose from mandated lists. With Queensland adopting this practice from 2019, half of the Australian states and territories will require Year 12 students to focus their study in English on written, spoken and multimodal texts that are chosen from a state-authored prescribed text list. Texts for study are typically selected from the official list by the teacher or at the English Department level, with varying approaches to consultation with students or parents/caregivers, and within the limits of other curriculum constraints such as number of texts to be studied in total, required balance of genres, and assessment advice.

In 2012 the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) released the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary school, for subjects in the learning areas of English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. The English learning area includes four subjects: 'English', 'Literature', 'English as an Additional Language or Dialect' (EALD), and 'Essential English'. For each of these four subjects there is a sample text list that proposes texts as examples of what is suitable for study in the categories of fiction, poetry, or non-fiction (Appendix A). In this paper, we analyse the extent to which texts featuring non-heterosexual sexualities are included in the senior secondary Australian Curriculum for English and report on the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, and plus<sup>1</sup> (LGBTIQ+) identities, experiences, and relationships in these listed sample texts. We argue that lists of texts that are endorsed, promoted, or prescribed by curriculum authorities must represent a diversity of sexualities.

We will first describe the context in which text selection for school-related reading in Australia takes place, establishing contemporary issues in the contexts of language use, social context, policy and curriculum. We then outline relevant findings from the existing literature to show the positive impact of inclusive curriculum design on LGBTIQ+ students' academic achievement and wellbeing, and detail how texts representing LGBTIQ+ have been used in other teenage reading projects. Our finding that the sample text list for senior secondary English in the Australian Curriculum contains very little representation of diverse sexualities leads us to conclude that non-heterosexual representations are still considered significantly taboo in the English curriculum. Given the progress in the Australian Curriculum in recognising other significant 'cross-curriculum priority' areas of Indigenous experience and Australia's relationship to Asia (Appendix B) for the benefit of social improvement and social justice, we suggest that recognition and representation of diverse sexualities in senior English continues as a neglected area in student experiences of the world through texts.

### Background and context

Conversations in school settings about sexuality and sexual identity cover complex territory. As issues of sexuality can be framed in physical as well as cultural discourses, conversations about sexual identity can potentially occur across the curriculum areas. However, upon review of the curriculum, explicit reference to 'sexuality' is typically confined to the Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum. In other curriculum areas such as English, 'sexuality' is silenced in the official curriculum, despite the subject's vital study of human relationships in literary texts. In English, 'heterosexuality' is normalised, made invisible. Understandings of sexuality are influenced by cultural values, drawn from multiple discourses, including the conversations occurring in family, friend and community groups. Institutional discourses also impact the approach to sexuality taken in educational settings, as political bodies and religious organisations in particular take public stances on the acceptable limits of these conversations, especially in relation to young people. The debates are framed by an ongoing tension between wanting to promote student safety and wellbeing by *giving* access to knowledge and wanting to protect students from threats to their safety and wellbeing by *limiting* access to knowledge.

Ultimately, judgements about whether accessing material and discussion relating to sexual identity is helpful or harmful to young people are grounded in personal values and belief systems, making this an emotive topic.

### Terminology

The language used to talk about sexuality is itself continuously evolving, and we wish to recognise at this point in the paper the overlapping concepts of sexuality and gender, as well as the increasing recognition of both sexualities and genders. Representations of sexuality include, for the purposes of this paper, not only sexual acts, but sexual identities (Renold, 2005) and orientations (Janssen, 2008), or sexual behaviour, sexual desire/attraction (Riley, 2010). Whilst we acknowledge the interplay between a plurality of genders and sexualities, the focus of analysis in this study is on *sexualities*.

In the field of sexualities, collective identifiers such as GLB (gay, lesbian, bisexual) have developed over time and the contemporary orthodoxy for referring to the various identities outside of heterosexual experience is LGBTIQ+. The expansion of this collective acronym reflects a tension in the field of gender and sexuality studies, namely the extent to which sexualities ought to be constructed along traditional binaries that support the privileging of heterosexual and cisgender identities as the norms against which to define the 'other'. In this paper we seek to explore the representations of any non-heterosexual sexual identities (extending beyond same-sex attracted identities) in the Australian senior English curriculum.

### Social context

The topic of sexualities has been heightened in Australia by two recent socio-political controversies. The surrounding contexts include the 2017 postal survey that was conducted by the Australian Federal Government to find whether the marriage of same-sex couples had majority public support, and the extensive public debate of the Safe Schools Program.

The same-sex marriage survey was pitched to the public by the government as an opportunity for 'respectful debate'. However, what ensued was an onslaught of harmful and damaging propaganda that entered the letterboxes and television screens of Australians. Although the outcome was positive for all Australians with a successful 'yes' to marriage equality, the debate prior to and following the postal



survey continues to position non-heterosexuality as debatable and problematic. For example, following the decision, the government has conducted a religious freedoms review,<sup>2</sup> implying that the legalisation of same-sex marriage may lead to religious freedoms being impinged upon.

The Safe Schools Program was initially introduced as a federally funded program in 2014 and was subsequently rolled out to states and territories. The program had been successfully developed and implemented in Victoria for years upon which the national program was developed. The national program of funding was completed in 2017. In February 2016, the Australian Government announced that there would be an independent review of the current resources provided to schools under the Safe Schools Coalition Australia Program (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2018). The findings revealed that the materials suited the aims of the program to address homophobic, transphobic and interphobic bullying and to support teachers regarding same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming themes and issues. Also, it was suggested that some of the material was more suited to secondary schooling contexts. A national evaluation of the program was conducted, but the results were never released to the public. Concerns about legitimising 'identity politics' and promoting concepts such as 'gender fluidity' through the use of education materials echo social debates about whether it is acceptable to legalise same-sex marriage. What these two areas of concern have in common is a fear of moral disorder and a desire to reassert heteronormative values.

By describing issues such as marriage equality and gender fluidity as controversial, we are aware that we become complicit in a discourse that positions queer identity work as marginal and even optional. Educators like to avoid controversy, and with good reason. *Gayby Baby*, a film about the lives of young people living in same-sex families, received significant media and political attention when a school attempted to have some students view it (see Jeffries, 2018). The results of this study show that 'conservative, liberal, and critical discourses were regularly employed in this digital debate, with very few postmodern comments evident' (Jeffries, 2018, pp. 10–11). A study undertaken in the United Kingdom reveals how one principal's attempt to include a trans-inclusive initiative was unsupported by education authorities, despite the application of policy. The principal received significant negative press and the initiative was described as 'risky business' (Taylor,

2017). Teachers are making pedagogical choices about responding to diverse sexualities based on the question, 'Will this end up on the front page of the newspaper?' (van Leent, 2014).

### Policy

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians specifically details the provision of equitable education outcomes regardless of 'sexuality' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Yet, education inclusive of diverse sexualities continues to be a controversial and 'risky' endeavour some ten years following this publication. Each state and territory in Australia develops localised education policy on 'LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusions', and there is great variation. For example, the Queensland policy is a two-page document titled 'definitions and reference' (Queensland Government, 2016), and yet, South Australia has a comprehensive policy built on the World Health Organisation's *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (2009). The policy has recommendations for all departmental and school staff and includes comprehensive legislation links, definitions, roles and responsibilities, references and resources (Government of SA: Department for Education, 2016).

### Curriculum

The move in the last decade to a national curriculum also saw progressive state curriculum elements disappear as local frameworks fed into a larger 'Australian Curriculum' that needed to be feasibly rolled out to all states and territories. For example, the New South Wales (NSW) syllabuses for Years 7–10 contained seven areas of 'cross-curriculum content' that were intended to be embedded in all Key Learning Areas:

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Work, Employment and Enterprise
- Key Competencies
- Literacy
- Aboriginal and Indigenous
- Civics and Citizenship
- Difference and Diversity
- Gender
- Multicultural. (Board of Studies NSW, 2003)

The focus of the *gender* cross-curriculum content was described in the NSW Years 7–10 English syllabus in this way:

*Gender* is a term that refers to the social construction of identity that follows historically from the biological differences between females and males. In English students explore the impact of different gender perspectives, stereotyping, and the social construction of gender in texts including the media. (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 11)

As we have already noted, the concepts of gender and sexuality are interrelated, but are not interchangeable. However, as can be seen in the quoted description of the content above, the cross-curriculum content for gender frames the concept as a 'social construction' and recognises a plurality of 'different gender perspectives', which is in keeping with the theoretical perspectives we have put forward in this paper 15 years later. It is not a stretch to imagine that the same theoretical framing would apply in the NSW syllabus context of 2003 to the concept of sexuality, particularly given that explicit reference to sexuality does appear in the cross-curriculum content in the English syllabus in the area of *difference and diversity*:

*Difference and Diversity* content acknowledges that students experience difference and diversity in their everyday life. This experience occurs in their personal life, in the local community and in the wider society. English provides opportunities to assist students to deal with personal, social and cultural difference and diversity in a positive and informed manner, showing awareness, understanding and acceptance. It assists them to develop and express their sense of self, to connect with other people and communities and to understand the features of a fair and just society that values diversity. *In particular, the representation of disability and sexuality in texts is a point of focus in the English content.* (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 11, emphasis added)

The Australian Curriculum, in contrast, fails to mention either gender or sexuality explicitly in any of the seven General Capabilities, or in any of the three Cross-Curriculum Priorities (listed in Appendix A). The General Capability 'intercultural understanding' does include 'interacting and empathising with others' as one of three key ideas, though this is related more strongly to 'cultural identity' (implying issues of nationality or ethnicity) rather than other kinds of identities (e.g. sexual identities). Gender identity and sexual orientation do appear in Australian Curriculum content at the subject level – overwhelmingly, these instances occur in the HPE learning area, and notably, no content of this nature is apparent in the English learning area. The imperative to engage specifically with diverse representations of sexuality, once the

status quo across all subjects in NSW junior schooling, was erased during the writing of the Australian Curriculum and therefore erased from subject English nationally.

### Scholarly perspectives

There has been a long-standing argument for queering the curriculum and reading the curriculum in non-heteronormative ways (Letts & Sears, 1999; Sumara & Davis, 1999). Mayo puts forward the agenda of queering education:

Queer theory works the verb 'to queer' to centralise the constant need for critical attention to the processes of subjectification, whereby particular meanings of identity come to form potentially limiting understandings of identities, practices, and communities. But queer theory, similar to LGBT studies, is concerned with examining places in dominant discourses that are particularly open to the play of meanings that make change, however momentary, possible. Queer theory, then, is as concerned with the press of normative power in dominant culture as it is in queer subcultures themselves, concerned not only with the limits of discourse around queerness but the limits of discourse in general. (2007, p. 80)

To clarify our theoretical position and to summarise the words of Mayo, a queer undertaking signals that we are interested in broader understandings about how normative power is represented, and in this paper specifically, how normative power manifests through the limits of representation of LGBTIQ+ identities. Sumara (2001) hone in on the 'literacy education' space to theorise about how the work of teachers can engage in critical literacy practices that examine not only heteronormativity, but how any label or categorisation of human experience creates and/or limits possibilities for understanding identities.

Blackburn, Clark and Martino (2016) identify the groundbreaking work of English language arts scholars such as Athanses, Epstein, Hamilton, Reese, Schall and Dauffmann, who have advocated for queer-inclusive curriculum. Blackburn and colleagues (2003, 2005, 2011) significantly contribute to the development of the concept of queer-inclusive literature. Queer-inclusive literature provides an opportunity for LGBTIQ+ students to see representations of themselves in stories (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). More recently, Page (2016), and Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) have continued to advocate for queer literature which is inclusive of the themes and experiences of gender and sexually diverse young people. A

more recent development extends the advocacy to the digital text arena in which van Leent and Mills (2017) have developed a Queer Digital Literacies Framework, that suggests ways of working with young people to both consider queer-inclusive texts *and* to read digital texts queerly. A clear trajectory of advocacy for queer-inclusive literature and the benefits toward inclusive curricula and positive school climate form the argument for our analysis of the inclusiveness of the secondary English recommended text lists regarding diverse sexualities in particular.

Queer lives are increasingly visible in contemporary literature and popular culture. However, certain queer representations are more visible and acceptable than others (Greteman, 2018). Acknowledging that queer lives are more visible in texts pays homage to those that have endured years of developing and advocating queer theories to the point that these theories have permeated popular culture; for example, notions of Butler's 'gender performance' have influenced cultural shifts in representations and understandings about gender (Greteman, 2018). Literature which includes queer representations provides an avenue for students to see themselves reflected in the literature (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). However, queer representations, queer lives, LGBTIQ+ lives, are still 'missing' from mainstream concepts of inclusive literature; the sample text list grossly represents the underrepresented queer life.

There are myriad barriers to inclusive curriculum and pedagogy in terms of gender and sexual diversity. These barriers include concepts such as heteronormativity (Britzman, 1995; Warner, 1991), which is a belief that heterosexuality is natural and normal, and ideologies such as childhood innocence (Robinson, 2013), which is the notion that young people are too innocent to know about diverse sexualities. Robinson (2013) describes the discourse of childhood as being invested in concepts such as innocence, 'purity, naivety, selflessness, irrationality, and a state of unknowingness ... vulnerab[ility]' (p. 42). As a result of such concepts, the visibility of gender and sexual diversity continues to be narrow and pedagogical practices such as critical literacies possibly rendered heteronormative.

Schools with an inclusive curriculum have students who report a more supportive environment. Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, Gabrion and Russell (2015) report that school climate is perceived as safer, and bullying is reduced when inclusive curricula is broad across multiple learning areas. Furthermore, Helmer (2015)

suggests that a 'Gay and Lesbian literature class' (p. 418) contributed to a queer-inclusive curriculum which proved to be meaningful for all students, and that the queer English curriculum would contribute to a whole school-inclusive curricula agenda and in turn increase student wellbeing and overall school climate.

### Research design

In seeking to establish the extent to which LGBTIQ+ perspectives and representations are evident in the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English, this paper reports findings of an analysis of the fiction and non-fiction texts appearing in the 'sample text list' of the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English (ACARA, 2012). The text list was selected as key content for analysis to establish the presence of LGBTIQ+ themes and perspectives in the English curriculum, as it indicates the type and nature of texts that are intended for students to experience.

The analysis of the text list used an initial content analysis to quantify the number of texts in which representations of LGBTIQ+ identities, experiences or relationships were foregrounded. The second stage of the research design used a thematic analysis to investigate the nature of the representations in the texts identified as containing LGBTIQ+ themes and perspectives to establish the extent to which they could be used to engage students in non-heteronormative discourses.

### Content analysis

The Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English contains four 'courses' for English:

- English
- English as an Additional Language or Dialect
- Essential English
- Literature.

Data for analysis in this research was limited to the sample text list for the English course, as it is the course that would typically be undertaken by the majority of students in senior school. All of the courses feature a 'sample text list', which is not mandated for study, but which provides insight into the types of text that are institutionally recommended and endorsed by ACARA as a national curriculum authority.

The lists organise texts under three subheadings: fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. This research analysed texts appearing in the English course list for fiction and non-fiction only, as these longer pieces of prose work contain relatively discernible characters and

relationships, whereas the meanings expressed in poetry are further open to interpretation. The inclusion of poetry analysis was also ruled out from this study due to the tendency of the sample list to identify poets rather than specific poems for study (see Appendix B), making the corpus of poetry texts too large and ill-defined for inclusion in this data set.

The total number of texts yielded by this sampling process was 21: thirteen fiction texts and eight non-fiction texts (see Appendix B). The content of these texts was analysed to quantify the number of representations of LGBTIQ+

- protagonists (identity)
- named characters (identity)
- experiences (acts and desires)
- relationships (overtly non-heterosexual).

Protagonists and other 'named' characters were counted separately, in order to distinguish between stories that are *about* an LGBTIQ+ character and stories that *include* them.

### Thematic analysis

After applying our categories for the content analysis of the list, any texts identified as containing representations of LGBTIQ+ identities, experiences or relationships were considered in light of three themes informed by scholarship in this field. As described in our review of research literature, a queer-inclusive curriculum should include access to and study of queer-inclusive literature, and this is characterised by

- inclusivity of the experiences of gender and sexually diverse young people;
- inclusivity of relatable themes for gender and sexually diverse young people;
- overt representation of gender and sexually diverse characters.

A deductive analysis was undertaken to establish how closely the identified texts could be described as 'queer-inclusive', followed by an inductive analysis to ascertain text-based themes arising from the identified fiction and non-fiction works.

### Findings

A content analysis of the sample text list for English revealed that only two out of the 21 texts listed in the fiction and non-fiction categories contained any representations of gender or sexual identity that can be categorised as non-gender normative or non-heteronormative. The two texts identified as containing

queer-inclusive representations – *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare – are both in the 'fiction' category.

### *The Great Gatsby*

In order to count *The Great Gatsby* (*Gatsby*) as a queer-inclusive text in this analysis, we accepted suggested queer readings of the text, which provide multiple instances of textual evidence to support the 'homosexual leanings' of Nick, who can be read as in love with Gatsby (Wasiolek, 1992). An analysis of the text in this light reveals two relevant themes: that gender can be constructed beyond a simple binary of masculine/feminine; and that Nick can be read as a gay character.

Fitzgerald's novel, published in 1925, is recognised for the theme of questioning and challenging constructions of gender, in particular of masculinity. Nick Carraway narrates the story of characters living on Long Island during the prohibition era in the fictional towns of West and East Egg; he is a key example of a male character who is constructed with feminine qualities. Nick's views of Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and George Wilson provide multiple angles on what masculinity looks like, and on what kinds of masculinity are desirable and ultimately lead to gains in social status and power. Earlier critics conflate gender with sexuality, for example, arguing that guest lists for Gatsby's parties contain 'sexual hybrids': "'The women are 'defeminised' – Mrs. Ulysses Swett, Francis Bull, Faustina O'Brien – and men are emasculated – Newton Orchid, Earnes Lilly, and Russell Betty'" (Pacey Thornton, 1979, as cited in Wasiolek, 1992, p. 16). This speaks to the overlap between constructions of gender and sexuality; however, when 'gender and sexuality' is constructed as a topic pair rather than discrete issues in their own right, it provides scope for English teachers to engage with gender norms in texts such as *Gatsby*, without ever tackling notions of sexuality.

A notable theme for engaging frankly with representations of sexuality in *Gatsby* would be to examine arguments that Nick can be read as a gay character, attracted to Jay Gatsby. Just as 'strange gender transgressions [e.g. in chapter 2] suggest Fitzgerald's discomfort with strict divisions between masculine and feminine behavior and personality' (Kerr, 1996, p. 416), the representation of Nick's affections does not present a 'strict division' between heterosexual and homosexual love, and readers (perhaps frustratingly) are not given explicit confirmation of Nick's sexual identity. Rather, the novel contains instances of personal desire that are



not explicitly or singularly about sexuality, sometimes intertwined with desire relating to wealth, class and masculine power.

In contrast to the subtle and covert representation of homosexual desire in *Gatsby*, the novel contains high levels of sexual reference, demonstrating that books containing heterosexual sex are not taboo in senior English:

Tom sleeps with a chambermaid shortly after his marriage; the Buchanans leave Chicago because of one of his flings; he fornicates with Myrtle while Nick goes out to buy a pack of cigarettes; Nick has an affair with a girl from Jersey City; and the parties Gatsby gives are whatever else, sexual orgies. (Wasiolek, 1992, p. 15)

We acknowledge that the appearance of this content in *Gatsby* does not mean that sex is no longer a taboo subject in all schools. However, the inclination of some schools to censor all literature that contains sexual references – even in senior school – suggests a specific need for authorised text lists to contain ‘PG-rated options’, in which LGBTIQ+ characters and themes are explored without also representing sexual acts. In some schools, the adult nature of the subject matter in *Gatsby*, irrespective of any queer reading, would rule this text out for study.

### *Twelfth Night*

Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (*Twelfth Night*), written around 1601/1602, offers opportunities to investigate themes relating to both gender and sexual diversity. In the play, the twins Viola and Sebastian are separated in a shipwreck that turns Viola up on the coast of Illyria. Viola disguises herself as a male, takes the name Cesario, then enters into a love triangle that challenges notions of both gender construction and sexual attraction.

The play can be categorised as a ‘transvestite comedy’ (Wright, 2011) due to Viola’s cross-dressing; in the context of Elizabethan theatre, this has further significance as roles in Shakespeare’s plays would have been performed by male actors. Gender as a socio-cultural construct is directly challenged:

In the doubly androgynous role of male actor playing a woman playing a man, Viola/Cesario must literally perform the role of the male; her success before the aristocratic Orsino and Olivia consequently points to the constructedness and performative character of gender itself. (Charles, 1997, p. 123).

Although the play yields in this way an avenue for discussion of gendered performances, the term ‘transvestite

comedy’ points to the limitations of this theme in this text. Rather than being a text that offers contemporary students in English a story reflecting ‘serious’ issues relating to transgender or transsexual experiences, Viola’s situation is treated as temporary and comedic.

The ‘constructedness of gender’ is a standout theme of the play, as Thomas argues: ‘[T]hat is the whole point of Cesario’s transformation: *Twelfth Night* depicts one’s gender as essentially a performed role, a simple change of costume marking a change in identity’ (2016, para 6). Other scholars note the androgynous nature of Sebastian’s characterisation (cf. Lindheim, 2007). However, the comedy is resolved in Shakespearean style by a series of heterosexual weddings at the end of the play after Olivia is reunited with her twin Sebastian and reveals her identity: Olivia marries Viola’s twin brother Sebastian (believing him to be Viola/Cesario); Viola marries Duke Orsino, who she has been in love with since first sight.

As with *Gatsby*, in our analysis of *Twelfth Night* we accepted readings of the text that posit a homoerotic friendship between Sebastian and his rescuer, Captain Antonio, and the possibility of Antonio’s homosexuality (Pequigney, 1992). Taken alongside Sebastian’s later marriage to Olivia, the play furthermore presents possibilities for reading Sebastian as bisexual. Pequigney argues that Duke Orsino can also be read as bisexual, given his marriage to Viola/Cesario, who he came to love as a male servant.

One of the things that makes *Twelfth Night* problematic as being one of only two texts on the sample text list offering non-heteronormative characters and themes, is the historical context in which the study is situated. Although there is room in a study of the play to contrast the text with more recent adaptations and transformations (such as the 2006 film *She’s the Man*), a study of gender and/or sexuality in *Twelfth Night* can be conducted from a ‘safe’ distance, possibly without relation to contemporary conversations about diverse genders and/or sexualities. Given the difficulty of reading Shakespearean works, we are also concerned that this text would not be seriously considered by teachers of students with low engagement in English, effectively rendering this a text that is only accessible to more motivated or talented students. We will argue in our discussion that authorised text lists ought to include more accessible and/or contemporary texts that provide students with representations of LGBTIQ+ themes and characters that they can more readily and directly relate to their personal socio-cultural contexts.

## Discussion

### *The pressure and persistence of heteronormativity*

Queer theory is interested in challenging normalised constructions of gender and sexuality identities (Meyer, 2010), challenging heteronormativity. Through analysis of the sample text list for senior English, we argue that heterosexuality is normalised through a lack of queer identities or themes. Heteronormativity is an example of institutional reproduction of cultural norms: heterosexual stereotypes, heterosexual privilege; the normalising of heterosexuality. The sample text list does the job of perpetuating heteronormativity.

If we are to challenge the construction of the list, we might propose sj Miller's (2015) work, which introduces a literacy education philosophy of equality: a Queer Critical Literacy Framework. Miller draws on queer theory to develop a set of ten guiding principles for educators, for example, 'advocates for equality' (Miller, 2015, p. 42). Two of Miller's guiding principles are relevant to the analysis and discussion of the identified texts for the purposes of this investigation:

5. Opens up spaces for students to self-define with chosen (a)genders, (a)sexuality, (a)pronouns, or names.
6. Engages in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, etc. (Miller, 2015, p. 42).

If the construction of the list was underpinned by these philosophies, we might see creators who open spaces so that students have the opportunity to 'self-define', and we argue this is relevant in terms of 'reading' representations of themselves in texts introduced into the curriculum and classroom (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). The ways in which young people identify with a range of genders and sexualities includes, Miller (2015) suggests, '(a)genders, (a)sexuality, (a)pronouns'. Point 6 reinforces the critical literacies work to be done in the sample text list for senior English in the Australian Curriculum. Whilst gender and sexuality norms are inextricably intertwined and the focus of the analysis was the representations of sexualities within the texts, we argue that Miller's principles would most likely still be relevant in the event of an analysis of representations of gender diversity. For example, hegemonic masculine representations (Connell, 1996) might consistently represent the protagonist in the literature. To be able to critique sexuality representations, one must have a language to discuss what it is and what it is not. A heteronormative lens provides

an opportunity to label genders, sexualities and their norms. The queer lens critiques these representations; revealing the norms, questioning the norms, critiquing the norms. The sample text list should be underpinned by philosophies of equality and inclusion, and the intersections of identity (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

### *Diversity as a productive resource*

In 2005, Janks draws on hooks and Kostogriz to make a case for diversity being a productive resource:

Awareness is not enough; critical education needs also to produce transformative action ... We need to provide our students with a lived experience of difference, where they experience difference as a resource for ideas, for creativity, for new ways of being in the world. Deconstruction is also not enough. If we use deconstruction to reveal the power of discursive representations and the interests they serve, then we have a responsibility to imagine with our students ethical possibilities for change and reconstruction. (Janks, 2005, pp. 41–42)

Our analysis of the text list does show how curriculum choices can marginalise/silence diverse experiences. In discussing these results, we take on board Janks's (2013) call for critical analysis of texts to attend to the *interdependence* of power, diversity, access, and design/redesign as 'dimensions' of critical literacy. In this research we have focused closely on providing an account of representational diversity in relation to the texts put forward in official curriculum documentation, but in light of Janks's interdependent model for critical literacy, we suggest that future transformation will be limited if seeking greater queer representation in the English curriculum is viewed as an isolated aim. We have shown that there is queer representation in both *Gatsby* and *Twelfth Night*, but is this 'enough', given the limitations of the texts we have also described? Considering how dimensions of power, access, and design/redesign are operating in the learners' contexts will allow conversations about text diversity in the curriculum to move beyond critique and toward transformation. We argue that access remains a neglected consideration in the list, as both texts identified can optionally have their queer readings denied and silenced by a teacher who chooses to do so, and both texts are potentially inaccessible to students due to their adult themes (*Gatsby*) or textual difficulty (*Twelfth Night*). Further research might address the question of how to negotiate a queer-inclusive design/redesign of text use in senior English.

To be clear, we do not suggest that the result of this

research should be a 'tick-a-box approach' to representing marginalised identities in English. We also acknowledge that identities are intersectional, and that the authors of any official list will be hard pressed to choose a range of texts in which every possible student can see their unique intersection of identities represented by a protagonist or key relationship. However, the Rationale for the Australian Curriculum for senior English might be considered here:

[English] encourages students to engage with texts from their contemporary world, with texts from the past and with texts from Australian and other cultures [as] such engagement helps students develop a sense of themselves, their world and their place in it. (ACARA, 2015a)

By only selecting texts including LGBTIQ+ characters and themes from 'the past' and from 'other cultures', the sample text list sends the message that diverse genders and sexualities have no place in 'our' world and are best studied at a safe distance. It is an example of how education 'dismisses or cannot bear to know' (Britzman, 1995, p. 154) how particular forms of knowledge, in this case heteronormativity, are structured and enforced in our contemporary world.

### *Filling the curriculum gap*

We resist the notion that students studying English in secondary school are not mature enough to discuss sexuality, as well as the notion that conversations about diverse sexual identities are inappropriate for English teachers to engage, particularly once students are in Years 11 and 12 and preparing to enter the adult world. The Australian Curriculum for HPE contains content as early as Years 5–6 in the sub-strand 'Communicating and Interacting for Health and Wellbeing' relating to 'how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057)' (ACARA, 2015b). The elaboration for this content descriptor explicitly offers sexual identity as a topic (although it doesn't mandate its inclusion): students could explore 'media representations of people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from diverse cultural backgrounds, same-sex attracted *or* gender diverse', and discuss 'how representations impact on community values' (ACARA, 2015b, emphasis added).

This particular elaboration could just as easily sit within the English curriculum, which is also concerned with media communication and representations. In the context of primary schooling, a cross-curriculum

study with HPE and English content would be easy to construct here. However, in secondary schools, which in Australia largely continue to run class timetables where students study different subjects as content 'silos', in different rooms with different teachers at different times, such cross-curriculum studies become more difficult to organise and design. In senior secondary English, especially in states where prescribed text lists are in place, the content is constrained even further.

Of interest to the audience for this journal is the range of high quality community resources being produced in this space by readers, writers and researchers, including several curated websites and online lists. The *Get YA Words Out* website is 'a platform supporting the writing, reading and publishing of AusQueerYA' (<https://getyawordsout.com/>) containing book lists and resources relating to 'Australian kids' books with LGBQ characters'. *The Rainbow Owl* is a website curated by academics from Flinders University, Clare Bartholomaeus and Damien Riggs, which aims to document 'the growing international body of literature and resources that focus on trans and gender diverse young people, their families, and those who support them' (<http://www.the-rainbow-owl.com/>). Jenny Pausacker's outstanding and comprehensive guide titled 'So Gay: A List of Australian Children's and Young Adult Contemporary Realist Novels with LGBQ Characters 1985–2015 (plus three remixes)'<sup>3</sup> provides not only an alphabetic list of titles from the time reviewed with LGBQ characters, but also a chronological list, a breakdown of the kinds of LGBQ characters represented in Australian children's literature, and annotations on individual titles. Although this paper has found the sample list in the Australian Curriculum for senior English to lack diversity in LGBTIQ+ representation, for English teachers and students, there are these other avenues for gaining information about non-heteronormative texts. Future research in this area might focus on further analysis of other senior English texts lists (e.g. in NSW, Queensland or Victoria), or seek to explore the extent to which Australian English teachers are using alternative, community-generated resources.

### **Conclusion**

Professor Peter Freebody's video introduction to the Australian Curriculum English indicates the intent of the curriculum and suggests some key guiding principles to help teachers to 'clarify and be confident and

sure-footed about how it is that English plays a key part in equity'; he suggests that the curriculum should be adapted to the 'real conditions in which teachers work' (ACARA, 2015a). For example, real conditions equal 10% of the population identifying as LGBTIQ+ (The Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). Whilst Freebody may not have had gender and sexual diversity in mind, he did have 'equity' in mind. Given the statistics and experiences of LGBTIQ+ students in our schools, it would seem the word 'equity' applies to them. In turn, the English curriculum, including text recommendations, should play a key part in equitable learning experiences, at least, of students.

Through our analysis of the current text list, we would like to contribute to the debate about which texts end up on the text list by suggesting that features such as appropriate content, literary quality, and variety of language modes and text production mediums can all be achieved with the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ identities. By queering the senior English sample text list in the Australian Curriculum and exploring the work that literature, identity and sexualities can do, at the very least, LGBTIQ+ youth will see aspects of their lives reflected at school. Young peoples' lives are too often silenced through heteronormative practices both within schools and in the institution of schooling itself. The senior English text list production is one such example. Whilst we acknowledge that myriad factors influence the text list production, such as a narrow (although increasing) scope of queer-inclusive literature to draw on, we would like to highlight the normative assumptions that underpin the processes and decisions made along the way.

The text list ultimately impacts the decisions made to use particular texts at the school level. Whilst the text list is not a mandated list and teachers have autonomy at the classroom level, it is difficult to step outside of the espoused norms reflected in the text list. Without systemic support, selecting a queer-inclusive text might be or feel risky for some teachers. If texts are explicitly recommended, teachers may 'see' professional permission to teach with LGBTIQ+ inclusive texts and engage in queer pedagogies with a range of literature. If no authoritative voice is visible to challenge norms and provide permission for the representation and interrogation of diversity, then heteronormativity endures. English curriculum in Australia has an imperative to include texts representative of LGBTIQ+ identities and themes.

## Notes

- 1 The term 'plus' signifies that these bounded labels are fluid and not exhaustive; they do not capture the complexities of time and place. It also works to include other/future non-conforming identities.
- 2 Information and Report available: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/religious-freedom-review>
- 3 Retrieved from: <http://jennypausacker.com/so-gay-a-list-of-australian-childrens-and-young-adult-contemporary-realist-novels-with-lgbq-characters-1985-2015-plus-three-remixes/>. Pausacker gives this rationale for compiling the list: 'In 2015 I accidentally discovered that it was possible for LGBQ and LGBQ-friendly writers and reviewers to be completely unaware of a 30 year tradition in Australian children's literature of writing about characters who identify or are identified as gay male, lesbian, bisexual or questioning and I decided I wanted to know exactly how many books had been forgotten.'

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## Appendix A

### Australian Curriculum (Senior Secondary) 'Sample Text List' for English (ACARA, 2012)

Retrieved from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/senior-secondary-curriculum/english/english/texts/>  
The sample text list for senior English is introduced with the following statement:

'The following texts are examples of literary texts suitable for the study of *English* and are intended to stimulate thinking about teaching resources in relation to the content of the curriculum. The following examples are not meant to be prescriptive.'

#### Fiction

- *Swallow the Air* by Tara June Winch (novel)
- *The Broken Shore* by Peter Temple (novel)
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (novel)
- *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri (short stories)
- *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* by John Misto (play)
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (play; film directed by Elia Kazan)
- *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare (play)
- *Gattaca* directed by Andrew Niccol (film)
- *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* by Zdenko Basic and Manuel Sumnerac (illustrated version)
- *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (graphic novel)
- *Cloudstreet* by Tim Winton (novel)
- *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville (novel)
- *Citizen Kane* directed by Orson Welles (film)

#### Poetry

- Christina Rossetti
- Wilfred Owen
- Judith Wright
- Romaine Moreton
- Australian Poetry Library <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/>
- *Windchimes: Asia in Australian poetry* edited by Rowe and Smith

#### Non-fiction

- *Unpolished Gem* by Alice Pung (memoir)
- *Dear America – Letters Home from Vietnam* edited by Bernard Edelman (collection of letters)
- *I Have a Dream* by Martin Luther King Jr (speech)
- *Australian War Memorial* website (multimodal)
- *The Legacy: An Elder's Vision of Our Sustainable Future* by David Suzuki (speech)
- *First Australians* directed by Rachel Perkins (documentary)
- *Cry Freedom* directed by Richard Attenborough (film)
- *The Justice Game* by Geoffrey Robertson (essays)

## Appendix B

### Australian Curriculum (Foundation– Year 10) General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities

Retrieved from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/>

#### General Capabilities

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- ICT Capability
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding

#### Cross-curriculum priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Country/Place
- Culture
- People
- Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia
- Sustainability
- Systems
- World views
- Futures.

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# 'Don't Talk about the Gay Character': Barriers to Queer Young Adult Fiction and Authors in Schools and Libraries

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**Abstract:** This article explores findings from an investigation into the publishing experiences of Australian authors of inclusive Young Adult (YA) fiction. A total of seven authors, each publicly identifying as part of a marginalised community in Australia, were interviewed. This paper concentrates on the findings of semi-structured interviews with two authors of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, and Other (LGBTQIAP+) fiction, and their experience of promoting their books in school and library environments. Findings were analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis to understand their interactions with publishers, audiences, and school staff. The research was carried out in 2016 but highlights longstanding issues regarding the inclusion of queer literature for young people in educational spaces, including school libraries and high school English curriculums. More broadly, it contributes to the understanding of how diversity and inclusion within YA Fiction is viewed in Australia, and the role of gatekeepers in providing or denying access.

## Introduction

In recent years, the Australian Young Adult (YA) Fiction publishing industry has increased its output of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, and Other (LGBTQIAP+) literature, with 2017 seeing the release of eight YA books featuring queer leads. These titles broke new ground in representations of gender and sexuality, while simultaneously moving away from the traditional 'coming out' narrative. However, satisfaction with this progress is tempered by the reality that, of 131 Australian YA Fiction novels published in 2017, only eight featured queer leads (AustLit Database, April 26, 2018), showing that queer stories are still under-represented. As Misson wrote in 1995, queer fiction has a particular role in providing 'an acknowledgment and, hopefully, an affirmation of [queer youth's] existence', and an 'opportunity to work through, however silently, some of the overwhelming burden of emotional issues involved in minority sexual identity' (p. 29). This makes the presence of queer youth literature in the Australian publishing industry and in Australian classrooms and libraries an absolute necessity.

This study is an exploration of the experiences of two Australian authors of YA Fiction with queer protagonists, and how their recent books have been received in educational contexts. The findings have implications for high school educators, librarians, the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA), and the Australian publishing industry. While the larger research project involved participants with various marginalisations, this article focuses on the publishing experiences of these two authors of works with queer protagonists. By gaining insight into how these authors' identities have influenced their publishing journey and the reception of their queer-led novels, educators, librarians, readers and future

researchers might achieve a greater understanding of how to support and include LGBTQIAP+ fiction in classrooms and libraries.

Rhodes argued that '[t]he increased quality, quantity and range of YA novels with GLBTQ content can also be seen as reflecting the changing direction of the calls for true equality and legislated human rights for GLBTQ people throughout the world' (2009, p. 49). The continued growth of queer representation in Australian YA mirrors the legalisation of same-sex marriage in December 2017. In 2018, we have so far seen the release of six YA novels with queer protagonists, which builds on the progress of 2017. The announcement of two forthcoming anthologies dedicated to queer voices and stories from Black Inc. Books and Walker Books further demonstrates this growth (Black Inc. Books, 2018; Walker Books, 2018b). Australian publishing of queer fiction is small when compared to the United States and the United Kingdom, and the perception of queer-led stories as 'niche' influences whether publishers consider them worthwhile investments. The 2017 publication of 123 heterosexual-led YA novels by Australian publishers, compared to only eight queer-led YA books, reveals the extent to which heterosexual-led stories are perceived as more 'mainstream' (AustLit Database, April 26, 2018). With the highest average earnings of the top 25% of Children's and YA authors amounting to approximately \$14,000 a year (Zwar, Throsby & Longden, 2015, p. 4), schools and libraries are key sources of exposure for authors. As the public debates surrounding the legalisation of same-sex marriage revealed, there are individuals who oppose the normalisation of queer experiences, and their anxieties increase when representations of queer identities and experiences are presented to young people. As the findings of this study indicate, these anxieties apply as much to literature as to education – and in youth literature, classrooms, and libraries these often overlap.

### Background

YA Fiction houses many genres and forms, reflecting ways the intended teenage readership's 'tastes vary, their abilities vary and their needs vary' (Plozza, 2015, p. 6). In this paper, YA Fiction is defined using a publishing industry-based definition drawing on the following sources to reflect how books are categorised by their creators. This definition requires three criteria to be filled: the book features a protagonist between the ages of 12 and 18 (Allen & Unwin, 2018; Walker

Books, 2018; is written with teenagers as the intended primary readership (Binks, 2014); and features characters who 'live in the moment' (Tingley, as cited in Goldstein, 2011) and experience the emotional intensity common among teenagers (Zorn in Freer, 2016). These criteria are recognised as necessary attributes of fiction for teenagers by booksellers (Armstrong in Freer, 2016), authors (Zorn in Freer, 2016), reviewers (Binks, 2014), and publishers (Allen & Unwin, 2018; Tingley in Goldstein, 2011; Walker Books, 2018).

The call for greater diversity and inclusion in youth literature has been championed by the US-based organisation *We Need Diverse Books* (WNDB), founded in 2015. WNDB has harnessed social media to advocate for increased representation of 'diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color [sic], gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities' in fiction for young people (WNDB, 2018). People with these 'diverse experiences' are often referred to as 'marginalised communities' within contemporary online advocacy spaces to emphasise how the publishing industry has historically relegated stories about and by people from minority groups to the margins.

While WNDB's goals and definitions have been embraced globally, most change is limited to the United States, with the Australian publishing industry lagging behind in the publication of stories by and about people from marginalised communities. Stories by and about queer people written for young readers are just one category where this gap is evident, with only four out of 138 YA novels published in 2016, when this research was conducted, featuring queer protagonists (AustLit Database, July 25, 2018). There have been increased calls in online advocacy spaces that more authors from marginalised communities receive the opportunity to 'tell their own stories' about their experiences, as outsider authors are often privileged by publishers in this area. In some cases, this can lead to harmful or stereotypical depictions of marginalised communities, necessitating the creation of 'OwnVoices'. Created on September 6, 2015 as a hashtag by Dutch YA Fiction author Corinne Duyvis (Duyvis, 2016), OwnVoices has been adopted by book-blogging communities and diversity advocacy spaces to refer to books with primary characters from the same traditionally marginalised communities as the author. The label is descriptive rather than prescriptive, with the sole purpose of identifying when a novel's lead(s) and author share marginalised identities.



### Literature review

The importance of diversity, inclusion, and representation of traditionally marginalised communities has been interlinked with YA Fiction since its emergence as a distinct category of literature in the 1940s and 50s. In the United States, youth librarians guided this focus by promoting titles featuring 'main characters drawn from a variety of classes, conditions, and racial and cultural groups' (Jenkins, 1995, p. 311) to re-engage teenage readers. As these stories gained popularity, authors catered to this market, centring teenage protagonists in stories with similar themes. In 1956, the original booklist 'Adult Fiction for Young People' had its name changed to 'Young Adult Fiction' to reflect this (Cart, 2007, p. 4). YA Fiction soon gained popularity in Australia through the importation of American titles in the 1970s and 80s, highlighting topics 'such as divorce, drugs, death, teen pregnancy, disabilities, sexuality and minority groups' (Ullin in Munro & Sheahan-Bright, 2006, p. 219).

Despite inclusion and representation of traditionally marginalised communities being one of the original goals of YA Fiction, publishers have been slow to embrace this. The metaphor in Bishop's seminal 1990 article 'Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors' demonstrates the value of inclusive fiction, and the ways in which young readers respond to and benefit from the representation of diverse experiences and communities in youth literature: representation can act as a mirror that allows readers to see lives and experiences like their own reflected and validated. These stories can act as 'windows' and 'sliding glass doors' for readers outside these communities to look and step through, to gain insight into other lives and experiences (Bishop, 1990). This reading experience is vital to all young people – by reading fiction that illustrates 'fears and questions inherent in challenging social, familial, institutional prescriptions and ascriptions', they can develop frames of reference to 'locate themselves as having experienced some form of marginality and prejudice' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995, p. 35) and/or better understand prejudices that disadvantage their peers. However, recent U.S. based research has shown their publishing industry does not reflect the realities of young readers, with only 6% of all youth fiction published in 2016 being written and/or illustrated by 'Black, Latinx, and Native authors combined' (Ehrlich, 2017, emphasis in original).

Scholarship on the topic of the inclusion of traditionally marginalised communities in Australia's YA

Fiction publishing industry is lacking compared to the United States, reflecting the local publishing industry's smaller output of fiction. Recent contributions to scholarship have largely been made by freelance writers and authors of inclusive fiction themselves, with an eye to the representation of their own community. One of the most significant contributions to queer representation in Australian youth fiction was made by author Jenny Pausacker, known for writing 'the first Australian young adult novel with a gay main character' (Pausacker, 2016a), *What Are Ya?*, published in 1987 by Angus and Robertson. In 2016, Pausacker published a comprehensive survey of Australian youth fiction with queer characters, spanning three decades. The survey, 'So Gay: A List of Australian Children's and Young Adult Contemporary Realist Novels with LGBTQ Characters 1985–2015 (Plus Three Remixes)' concluded that within this timeframe, there had been 'at least 134 Australian novels for or about kids dealing in some way with LGBTQ experience' (Pausacker, 2016b). Pausacker (2016b) concludes,

134 books is a relatively impressive total, which bears comparison with the 187 American titles listed by Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins in their 35-year survey *The Heart has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay / Lesbian / Queer Content, 1969–2004*, especially given that the American publishing industry is estimated at ten times the size of the Australian publishing industry.

However, the *protagonist* is LGBTQIAP+-identifying in only 35 of the titles listed (including characters 'questioning' their sexuality). Additionally, few of these books are currently accessible to Australian young people. Many titles mentioned in Pausacker's study, including all 11 of her own novels (many of which can be classified as OwnVoices, due to their Lesbian protagonists), are out of print, or were self-published with limited copies and now unavailable.

Pausacker also touched on the lack of queer YA Fiction published by publicly queer authors. Diverse representation among authors is a persistent issue in literary markets globally. Academic and YA Fiction author Ambelin Kwaymullina, who has written extensively about diversity and representation in Australian youth fiction, has highlighted this. Kwaymullina's 2016 *Alphareader* blog post, 'Privilege and Literature: Three Myths Created by Misdiagnosing a Lack of Indigenous Voices (and Other Diverse Voices) as a "Diversity Problem"' examines how 'diversity problems' are often framed as the failure of individual authors to be

traditionally published. Kwaymullina proposes there is instead a 'privilege problem' within the industry: 'a set of structures and attitudes that consistently privilege one set of voices over another' (Kwaymullina, 2016), leading to few Indigenous Australian authors and People of Colour being published (and by extension, other marginalised voices). Kwaymullina's article strongly influenced our research and raised questions about the experiences of traditionally published authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction in Australia. Our research was guided by questions about the level of support authors had received from the publishing industry, how their work had been received by various audiences, and whether they had been challenged for writing about communities they belong to.

### Methodology

Data collection for the primary research took the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews with traditionally published Australian YA Fiction authors who identified publicly as belonging to a marginalised community and had published an OwnVoices novel. To select interviewees for the research, it was necessary to know which authors active in the Australian publishing industry had written an OwnVoices novel. In the United States, there are resources for this research, such as the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), founded by the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1963 (CCBC, 2017), online readers' hubs like BookRiot (<https://bookriot.com/>), or the growing number of websites with 'curated recommendations' for fiction about marginalised communities, like LGBTQReads (<https://lgbtqreads.com/>). Australia does not have equivalent organisations or platforms, although community-generated archives on forums such as Goodreads (<https://www.goodreads.com/>) can provide guidance. It was necessary to create our own annotated list with information about all OwnVoices novels by Australian YA authors, as of October 2016.

Methods to develop the list included searching the AustLit Database and communal archives on *Goodreads* for eligible authors, and investigating publicity materials released by authors and their publishers. For ethical reasons, we only included authors who publicly and freely identified themselves in written material as part of a traditionally marginalised community. (The list continues to be updated. Due to ethical considerations, currently there are no plans to make it publicly accessible.) At the time this research was concluded in October 2016, the list contained approximately 30

authors, of which 20 were currently writing and residing in Australia. This included Indigenous Australian, People of Colour, and LGBTQIAP+ authors, as well as authors with experience of disability (including mental illness). After receiving human ethics clearance, seven authors from the database were contacted (representing the aforementioned communities), and all agreed to be interviewed.

The interview format prioritises the voices of already marginalised representatives of the Australian publishing industry, for 'if we genuinely want to hear, to understand an individual we must provide a way for her or him to speak in a genuine voice' (Cisneros-Puebla, Faux, & Mey, 2004, p. 3). Semi-structured interviews allowed us to speak at length with the authors, with follow-up questions for a deeper understanding of the authors' 'motivations [and] feelings' (Sahu, 2013, p. 6) about their writing. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded to foreground overlapping or contrasting themes in interviewees' responses, allowing us to '[understand] the data in a more meaningful way' (Sahu, 2013, p. 79). These findings were analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a method that has historically examined 'the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result[s] from it' (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). CDA 'draws our attention to issues of power and privilege in public and private discourse' (Huckin, Andrus & Clary-Lemon, 2012, p. 111), making it appropriate to scrutinise how marginalised authors perceive their publishing journey and experiences in an industry with a 'privilege problem' (Kwaymullina, 2016). Bean and Moni (2003) used CDA to examine Australian YA Fiction, with an emphasis on how teenage readers respond to portrayals of adolescent identity in fiction. Our transcripts were coded using CDA, with particular attention to exchanges or usages of power by authors, publishers, their readership, and educators; as well as whether the authors interviewed faced the same expectations as their non-identifying peers.

This article focuses on two authors who have written novels with queer protagonists: one author self-identified as queer (referred to as Author One) and the other heterosexual (Author Two). Both authors are from different cultural backgrounds marginalised by the Australian publishing industry. Although Author Two was not queer, their protagonist is from the same ethnic background, meaning the book fitted OwnVoices criteria. To respect the privacy of the interviewees, interview findings have been anonymised and

de-identified for publication due to the personal nature of quotes. Both authors gave written permission to be quoted directly in publications using this research.

## Findings

One primary discourse established from the research was that the experience of promoting books with queer characters, and accessing audiences to promote to, was negative for both authors. Librarians and other school staff had enforced barriers on multiple occasions, while the Australian high school English curriculum was found to be unsupportive of using LGBTQIAP+ fiction in classrooms. While the only State curriculum identified was NSW, both authors have spoken at schools across Australian States and Territories and reside in different States, meaning it is possible similar curriculum issues occur in other States and Territories. Australian authors are dependent on schools and libraries to connect them to young audiences through author visits, and with a quarter of Australian authors stating in 2015 that they depended on jobs connected to their author status to supplement their income (Zwar, Throsby & Longden, p. 4), these barriers are concerning because they impact authors' livelihoods. The experiences described by these authors indicate a much larger issue of identity-based opposition experienced by marginalised authors – one author found this prejudice extended beyond their book's content to their identity.

### 1. Librarians and school staff as gatekeepers

Author One experienced incidents of prejudice regarding the representation of diverse sexualities in their books, and prejudice in-person because of the public status of their sexuality. They described instances as 'well-meaning opposition'; perpetrators often expressed prejudice directly, with the expectation that Author One would 'understand'. While some staff potentially act on the instructions of school boards or larger governing bodies such as in faith-based schools, this does not neutralise the prejudice inherent in asking an author to 'understand' why an aspect of their identity is considered inappropriate for teenagers. The author described an encounter with a teacher several years prior:

What she said was, 'I've heard people really love [your novel] [and that it] really looks at family ... but I don't have it in my library because I've heard there's a gay character'. And I'm like, 'So I have a book about the importance of family, but you won't stock it in your Catholic

school because there is one character in 250-something that kisses [someone of the same gender]'. And she's like, 'Yes'.

When the author explained that the book is, at its core, about family and faith, the teacher struggled to respond: 'She just looked at me and blanked out.' This was one of many examples of deliberate gatekeeping by high school staff the author gave throughout the interview. Other incidents included teachers 'warning' them before speaking to students on school visits, 'don't talk about the gay character'.

Author One confirmed they knew of 'certain [...] high school libraries' that only stocked the author's book in the 'adult section', 'where only teachers are allowed to borrow it'. The author believed this was because the novel was perceived as inherently more sexual than novels centred on the heterosexual experience: 'That's the thing, if you say "gay", whether you write about gay sex or not, people think "gay sex".' The novel's only sexual interaction between two gay characters is a kiss. The 'implication that a character may be gay makes it adults only', rather than graphic content, resulted in the novel's restricted access. The complicity of school staff in censoring stories about queer protagonists is concerning because teachers and librarians are entrusted by schools to educate and inform students – yet in these examples, they have created and maintained barriers that deny teenagers the ability to access literature depicting sexualities other than heterosexual.

Author One was aware they must tread a fine line to be perceived as acceptable by (presumably heterosexual) informational gatekeepers in schools and libraries:

If I wanted to write an authentic gay experience for teens, there's no way it would get into schools. There is absolutely no way that it would win any awards. So if I can't sell it in the first week, then it's stuffed.

In this way, Author One faces limitations on their creative work because of their dependency on support from schools and libraries. The author stated that publishers' awareness of prejudice in many schools has led to advice to the author to 'walk it back a bit' when writing queer characters' experiences, so novels are more palatable to gatekeepers. Although school and library staff may believe their practice of denying access to LGBTQIAP+ fiction in their institutions to be 'well-meaning', or 'understandable' to the author, their gatekeeping produces creative limitations for the

author, as well as negative psychological or emotional impact.

Author Two felt that it had been 'tricky to get traction' for their YA Fiction in the past, 'probably because I'm [a marginalised] writer and the stories I write reflect the experiences of a minority group'. Despite this, they stated that one of their motivations to write a queer protagonist was 'because of the real conservatism around in Australia ... particularly around, you know, talking about a plebiscite, and all of this stuff'. For this reason, they 'thought this character has to be same-sex attracted'.

In contrast to Author One being hyper-aware of appearing palatable to gatekeepers, Author Two, a self-identified heterosexual, was prompted to write a queer protagonist because of the 'real conservatism' they had observed in Australian society. Author Two's lack of hesitation in writing a queer experience clearly demonstrates how possessing a sexuality perceived as 'acceptable' by gatekeepers – and thus, not being exposed to 'well-meaning opposition' – does not produce anxiety and creative limitations. The lack of direct opposition to Author Two's sexuality can therefore be seen as influencing their creative process, in the form of 'giving them permission', as the author themselves is still seen as 'appropriate'.

## 2. High school curriculums as barriers

Author One expressed that they experienced a lack of support for YA Fiction that featured queer protagonists, stating, 'if it's not the librarians, it's the organisations librarians work for that are very, "we don't want diverse books"' in their approach to managing their materials for young people'. This suggests that the prejudice goes beyond individuals actions and is systemic in nature. The author believed Australian high school English syllabi do not support the teaching of literature exploring queer identities and experiences, and referred to the NESA English syllabus (formerly known as the Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards), which highlights different marginalised voices and communities that students must study:

If you look at the New South Wales syllabus, there [are] dot points for every single kind of human experience you have to look at, Indigenous experience, you have to look at migrant experience ... there's nothing about diverse sexualities. [It is] completely missing from the entire rubric.

With the governing body for education in NSW neglecting to highlight the value of understanding

queer experiences and failing to provide necessary support that would allow teachers to respectfully and organically facilitate the growth of their students' empathy for queer individuals, this responsibility falls to individual teachers. Rhodes's 2009 assessment that '[t]he current absence from the curriculum of any valid information about same-sex attraction in most schools fails all students and staff' (p. 45) is as accurate today as it was nearly 10 years ago, because, as Author One stated, '[a] largely queer experience written by a queer person will not be [put] on a syllabus'. This has consequences for the author: 'because Young Adult [fiction] is so tied to schools, and so tied to syllabuses [sic]', the author must choose between writing books that reflect their community, and books with greater probability of providing financial stability necessary to continue their career.

Author Two stated that 'one of the objectives [is that my] publishers try to get [my books] on the curriculum ... or read in schools', which has at times led to their work being 'toned down a bit' in order to appeal to educators. Their decision to write a novel featuring a queer protagonist had an important motivation: 'I don't [want to] see [people I care about] go through this rubbish [where] they're ostracised.' They sought to create an authentic depiction: writing the novel involved consultation with people who shared the same cultural *and* sexual identity as the protagonist, who also read the novel in its early drafts and provided feedback. This was to capture the nuance of the intersecting identities, because 'part of [the author's] whole process is really ... engaging, [with] the people, that I'm representing'. A sincere and respectful portrayal was paramount to the book's creation; the queer characters' realities were likely not 'toned down' the way some aspects in the previous novels may have been. However, it is possible this was a contributing factor to the reluctance of educators to incorporate the text into classrooms and libraries: despite the publisher's efforts to support the book's use in classrooms through the development of teaching resources, as the author stated, they didn't 'know of too many books [like theirs] that [had] been picked up' by schools. Thus, while Author Two did not face direct opposition to their book from educators, the lack of engagement with their novel indicates a reluctance to engage with its themes.

## Discussion

The experience of support from educational institutions



ranged from neutral to negative for both participants and demonstrated significant prejudice in specific schools and libraries. The findings provide three insights on parameters established by educational institutions (including individual schools and the NESA itself) for authors who write fiction that features queer protagonists.

Author One's public non-heterosexual status foregrounded the non-heterosexual content within their novel, leading to more opposition from librarians and school staff. This practice deprives students from engaging with texts (and authors) who can give an understanding of LGBTQIAP+ identities. For heterosexual students, restricting access to queer fiction reduces exposure to 'window' books (Bishop, 1990) that would allow them to 'experience ... some form of marginality and prejudice' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995, p. 35), with which they may better understand their LGBTQIAP+ peers. Similarly, queer teenagers are denied 'mirror' books (Bishop, 1990) that would give 'an acknowledgment and, hopefully, an affirmation of [their] existence' (Misson, 1995). As Author Two did not experience this same opposition from librarians and school staff, it is possible that the author's known heterosexuality mitigates the queer protagonist, making the story (and author) 'more appropriate' in the eyes of gatekeepers. It is also possible that some contemporary LGBTQIAP+ authors do not publicly identify as queer to retain access to schools. This could explain Pausacker's (2016b) observation that few OwnVoices queer YA books have been published in recent years, though not the comparative lack of queer YA books more broadly.

The limited amount of OwnVoices queer YA Fiction being published in Australia (Pausacker, 2016b) may also be influenced by publisher awareness that some school and library staff are hesitant to embrace it. This awareness leads to pressure on queer authors of queer YA to self-censor the 'authentic gay experience' in their writing. While schools and libraries are not required to support Australian authors, authors are dependent on them to access audiences and promote their books (Zwar, Throsby, & Longden, p. 4). The importance of a book being capable of 'win[ning] any awards' was also mentioned as a contributing factor in relation to schools, suggesting youth literary awards play an important role in the selection of YA Fiction for school libraries and classroom use. This raises questions about the inclusivity of youth literary awards committees in Australia.

The findings of these interviews revealed that the NESA curriculum plays a significant role in the crafting, promotion, and reception of Australian YA Fiction novels, particularly those featuring queer characters. The 'dot points' referred to by Author One are cross-curriculum outcomes teachers address throughout their instruction of English students from grades Kindergarten to Year 10. The 'priorities' are 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures', 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia', and 'Sustainability' (NESA, 2017). Acknowledging the intersectionality of some of these categories with queer identities, there is no emphasis on queer identities and experiences, just as Author One noted. This observation echoes the way in which 'lip-service is usually paid to "politically correct" attitudes on class, race and gender, [but] it is not nearly as evident when dealing with sexuality' (Misson, 1995, p. 30). In this way, NESA's requirements possess the same 'privilege problem' identified in the Australian publishing industry (Kwaymullina, 2016), wherein NESA's own 'set of structures and attitudes' does not highlight queer voices for particular attention in an educational context. In this instance, the 'set of voices' (Kwaymullina, 2016) NESA privileges over queer voices are from the heterosexual demographic.

The schools that invite Author One to visit go beyond syllabus requirements to benefit students – and this freedom can allow them to negatively influence the author presentations. Another possibility is that schools might use the absence of queer experiences on the NESA's outcomes to avoid education. This disadvantages all students, potentially contributing to a more hostile environment for queer teenagers. Heterosexual students are deprived of an opportunity to be educated about queer identities and expand their 'ethical understanding', their 'intercultural understanding', and their 'personal and social capability' – what NESA calls 'general capabilities' that 'encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to assist students to live and work successfully in the 21st century' (NESA, 2017). Author Two, whose cultural community is covered under the 'cross-curriculum priorities', did not experience opposition from school staff or librarians to the same extent as Author One for their representation of queer characters. This indicates that NESA's structure can enable inclusivity in classrooms, further supporting the need for queer experiences to be highlighted in the same way.

## Conclusion

Based on the relevant data in this study about the experience of promoting of queer YA Fiction, many contemporary Australian schools still express prejudice against queer fiction by restricting access to the books and authors who publicly identify as queer. In order to improve this, it is vital that school and library staff actively source and promote queer YA Fiction, make it freely available to students, integrate it into classrooms using teaching resources developed by publishers, and invite authors of queer YA Fiction to speak to students without restricting their speech. However, this only addresses barriers at an individual level.

The research shows that authors of queer YA Fiction are disadvantaged by their exclusion from the NESA 'cross-curriculum priorities'. This can force creators to choose between their livelihood and their art, and negatively impact Australia's arts industry by enabling prejudice against these authors. It is therefore necessary that NESA revise the cross-curriculum priorities to include learning about queer experiences, and no longer enable systemic discrimination. This would also allow students a richer, more holistic learning experience, and alleviate strain on hard-working teachers currently undertaking this extra labour alone. Where Australian authors of queer fiction encounter gatekeeping upheld by individuals and institutions with influential positions in libraries and schools, young queer readers will have limited chances to see their identity validated in the fiction they read, and heterosexual readers will have fewer opportunities to gain insight into lives different from their own, particularly if they lack visible queer friends and role models.

Australian authors of queer youth fiction continue to tell stories reflecting and validating the experiences of queer Australian teenagers and 'contributing to the richness and well-being of a diverse society' (Misson, 1995, p. 29). If educators, librarians, and publishing industry professionals work to challenge barriers and gatekeepers, Australian young people will have greater access to narratives that include queer identities in all their colours.

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# The Politics of Safe Schools: Opportunities for Intervention in the English Classroom

Stephanie Wescott

**Abstract:** The furore has recently dissipated, however the 'Safe Schools' behemoth, generated and perpetuated by Australian parliamentarians, looms still as one of the most significant education debates in past years. The following paper draws on 18,000 words spoken about 'Safe Schools' in the Australian Federal Parliament from November 2015 to August 2016. This dataset was interrogated with discourse analysis strategies to examine the ways in which Australian parliamentarians constructed narratives about 'Safe Schools', its teaching resources and its intentions and capacities. The analysis produced a range of prominent discourse 'themes' which aligned with three of Gee's 'Building Tasks of Language' (2011): Identity, Politics (the distribution of social goods) and Connections. This paper argues that the political rhetoric around Safe Schools serves as an example of the potency of language in building and shaping perceptions around teaching content. It offers possibilities for English teachers to take up some of Safe Schools' intended work by interrogating heteronormativity through text study and framing the work of English teaching as activism.

## Introduction

Safe Schools and its associated imaginings and invocations has emerged as a prevalent feature of political debates about Australian schools, curriculum and marriage equality in recent years. The Safe Schools Coalition Australia's (SSCA) principal aim was to 'create safe and inclusive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families' (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2016). Its teaching resource, *All of Us*, encompassed a unit guide, student handouts, a classroom poster and supporting videos, and mapped to the Year 7/8 Health and Physical Education learning area of the Australian Curriculum. It was launched without opposition or controversy in November 2015. But, by February and March of 2016, furious debate about the SSCA was raging between the four major political parties, minor parties and Independents, and across the Australian media.

What occurred in parliament between the launch of *All of Us* and its official review in February 2016 is the focus of this paper. While debate intensified among politicians at the time of peak interest, opinion pieces, interviews with commentators and politicians and social media dialogue also appeared to saturate media feeds. The *Australian* newspaper alone published almost 200 stories on the topic of Safe Schools, totalling over 90,000 words (Law, 2017). The following paper examines parliamentary discourses around Safe Schools as an example of the potency of language in building reality and perception. It then considers possible ways for English teachers to continue the intended work of the SSCA in their classrooms.

**In context: Curriculum and education policy debates**

*Culture Wars: Ongoing conflicts in Australian curriculum*

The nature of the conflict among voices in the Safe Schools debate invites comparison



to existing conflicts in a range of other educational debates, predominantly focused around the 'quality' and 'content' of curriculum. These debates are forged between opposing sides of the political spectrum and are usually underpinned by ideologically grounded understandings of what 'quality' education looks like. A number of writers have uncovered a prevalent fear that Australian schools have been infiltrated by critical perspectives such as feminism, multiculturalism and postmodernism (e.g. Freesmith, 2006; Snyder, 2008) and the threat these perspectives pose to the preservation of the status quo in Australian schools. This status quo typically relies on the teaching of texts from a narrow literary canon, singing the praises of Western civilisation, and rejects reducing the study of language to 'text-talk', that is, legitimising texts comprised of abbreviated language or contemporary slang as worthy of inclusion on text lists (cf. Donnelly, 2007). These ongoing conflicts in Australian education symbolise the ideological divides that inform perspectives on what should or should not be taught in schools. Safe Schools serves as a recent example of the ongoing conflicts in Australian curriculum fought across the ideological spectrum.

While Snyder's (2008) and Donnelly's (2007) work focuses on culture wars in English and History teaching and this study examines political rhetoric around Safe Schools, both topics are catalysts for debate that is of a similar nature – conflict between preserving traditions in curriculum and 'progressive' voices who agitate for change (Snyder, 2008). Both debates illuminate the contested and precarious nature of educating young people and position teachers in impossible predicaments – preparing critical thinking young people who are inclusive of difference and diversity, while remaining apolitical and ideologically neutral amid debates that compel them to work in environments that are highly politicised.

#### *Privileging of 'mainstream' values in curriculum development*

Just as certain types of knowledge are privileged in educational debates, so too are the 'values' deemed culturally and historically normative. There is an existing body of work that explores the endorsement of particular values through new educational policy and the critique of existing practice. For example, Jones (2009) examined Australia's first values education policy, *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (2005), uncovering the

privileging of traditional values and a homogeneous and masculinised view of Australian identity (Jones, 2009). Similarly, Bessant (2011) identified how concern about the declining quality of education in Australia is attributed to Marxists and post-modernists who threaten the authority of Western civilisation through their influence on the education system. Additionally, Freesmith (2006), in undertaking a critical reading of articles published in the *Australian* that critique critical literacy practices, uncovered conservative, homogeneous and nationalistic ideologies operating within the work of writers such as Kevin Donnelly and Luke Slattery. Likewise, Angus (1992), observed in political discourses around education the promotion of the idea of a 'crisis' in Australian society, identifying the erosion of the sanctity of the nuclear family and a lack of reverence for traditional values as being of paramount concern. Education policies are inevitably a representation of the dominant views and values held by the society in which they are produced. They have potential for shaping, controlling and privileging knowledge (Shannon & Smith, 2015), and what they remove or silence is equally as powerful as what is included within them.

#### *Progressive sex education policy in Australia*

Research recommends that resources supporting inclusive sex education be funded and implemented in schools due to past iterations of the curriculum failing to meet the needs of same-sex attracted students (Hillier & Mitchell, 2008; Jones & Hillier, 2012; Shannon & Smith, 2015). Same-sex attracted students have previously reported that their experience of sex education was unhelpful and irrelevant (Hillier & Mitchell, 2008). Inclusive sex education curriculum results in positive outcomes for LGBTIQ students (Jones & Hillier, 2012) and is essential to support teachers striving to promote inclusivity in curriculum and pedagogy (van Leent & Ryan, 2015). Further, backing from policy and curriculum documents supports teachers encountering discussions and disclosures around sexuality in their classrooms (van Leent, 2017b). However, inclusivity and diversity in education policy is seen as morally problematic within conservative sex education approaches, and queer sexualities are considered controversial (Hillier & Mitchell, 2008; Shannon & Smith, 2015). It is within this historical context that the resources designed by Safe Schools become crucial to respond to the needs of same-sex attracted young people.

### *Assembling the data*

The data for this research is drawn from two sources: the Australian Senate and House of Representatives. A corpus of textual resources was constructed using speeches, comments and questions spoken by Australian Senators and Members of Parliament across all three major political parties. In order to construct a 'corpus' of texts, the Australian Parliamentary Hansard was searched for instances of the phrase 'Safe Schools' between the period of November 2015 and August of 2016.

The corpus was extracted from Hansard and assembled according to date, speaker and political party. Instances of occurrence were then coded by political party and the point of view, which tended to fall within a neat binary of 'oppose' or 'support'. While there are some limitations to an approach that strictly divides individuals by 'for' and 'against', the analysis revealed that sentiments, predictably, were almost unanimously obedient to party lines. A thematic analysis (Willis, 2013) was then conducted on the corpus. This analysis produced a range of prevalent themes that were repeatedly invoked by speakers throughout the selected period. These themes were identified through a process of grouping thematic sentiments together and were named according to their most pertinent overarching ideas. These themes are named and discussed below.

### **Methodology**

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use (Paltridge, 2006) and offers a methodological framework to examine the relationship between discourse and reality. It enables an examination of language within its specific social and political context and to speculate on purpose and outcome. Discourse analysis examines how language enacts perspectives, interrogating the structures of power at play within language. There are many possible approaches to discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1998, 2003; Taylor, 2004), which Gee (2011, 2014) divides into two groups: descriptive and critical. Descriptive analysis tends to focus on the grammatical function of language (Gee, 2011), and its aim is simply to understand how language is being used. Critical approaches, however, tend to examine the expression of themes, ideas and meaning through language – the varied effects, meanings and actions connected to discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1998, 2003; Luke, 1997).

Gee's (2014) approach to discourse analysis combines a broad linguistic/grammatical analysis with

interpretation of language in its social and political context. Specifically, this study employs Gee's (2014) 'Seven Areas of Reality' framework to conduct analysis on the corpus of text. This framework is formed by the assertion that realities are built into existence through language use. There are, argues Gee (2014), things that language users bring into the world through the particular functions of the language being used, which Gee terms the 'Seven Building Tasks' of language. Of Gee's Seven Areas, three were particularly useful to this research: Identities, Politics (the distribution of social goods) and Connections. Each of these areas is described below, along with an explanation of its relevance to this paper.

Area 3. Identities: This building task involves using language in order to be recognised as assuming an identity or role. This is relevant to this study as actors in the Safe Schools debate assumed roles of authority or as protectors in order to speak on behalf of children, families and constituents and the curriculum.

Area 5. Politics (the distribution of social goods): This task examines how language is used to offer a perspective on social goods. For example, what is suggested as being 'normal', 'right' 'appropriate', or 'the way things ought to be' (Gee, 2014, p. 35)? Many politicians participating in the Safe Schools debate drew upon discourses relating to what is normative, 'mainstream' and appropriate.

Area 6. Connections: This building task represents the use of language to build connections or relevance between things. It was identified in Hansard that politicians attempted to make links between the material in the *All of Us* resource and other controversial materials such as pornography and propaganda, or deviant behaviours such as bullying, homophobia and the 'sexualisation' of young people.

### **Prevalent discourse themes**

Analysis performed on the corpus of texts produced a range of discourse themes, three of which aligned with Gee's discourse framework. There are many ways in which these discourses were invoked in the course of the debate, by both sides of parliament, and this section aims to tease these various uses out. Typically, those in favour of the SSCA argued for the need to 'defend' LGBTIQ young people from homophobic bullying and condemned the 'attacks' on the resource by its opponents. Those opposed to the SSCA argued that children needed to be 'protected' from its 'true intentions', and that the SSCA was launching an 'attack' on the values of Australians and the rights of parents.

*Identities: Strict fathers and children*

This theme tended to invoke children as vulnerable subjects in need of protection from harmful forces and saw politicians assuming responsibility for their safety and protection. Discourses also projected ideals about children and young people: their identities as sexual beings, or not, and the appropriateness of the ideas, images and activities they engage with and consume during their formal school education. Within this discourse it was also common for politicians to position themselves as the gatekeepers of young people's access to ideas and information.

Politicians tended to invoke the notion of protection in two distinct ways: first, protection from the bullying perpetrated in schools against young people, and LGBTIQ young people in particular, and, second, protection from the SSCA's teaching resources and ideas and the dangers of its implied social values. The words 'safe' and 'inclusive' were among the most commonly employed by SSCA proponents, but for divergent purposes to its opponents. Examples include Greens Senator Robert Simms, who praised the SSCA for 'improving the safety and inclusivity for LGBTI young people at school' (25/11/2015), and Prime Minister Turnbull, who pledged that '[e]very student, every child has the right to be safe at school and at home' (1/03/2016). In an almost identical pledge of support to Prime Minister Turnbull, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten vowed that '[e]very child in Australia has the right to be safe at school' (17/3/2016). Similarly, Liberal MP Warren Entsch, the sole Coalition member to offer his support, pledged that 'our schools must be encouraged to provide safe and supportive environments for LGBTI students' (25/11/2015).

Senator Simms repeated the SSCA's aspirations, to '[make] our country a more safe and inclusive place', evaluating this as 'a great thing' (25/11/2015). Labor MP Graham Perrett affirmed the SSCA's potential to 'save lives' and 'make kids feel more safe [*sic*]' (10/02/2016). Labor Senator Carol Brown, in a condemnation of the government's position on the SSCA, accused the Coalition of 'perpetrating dangerous views that have the potential to have devastating impacts on the lives of young LGBTI Australians' (23/02/2016). Reframing the SSCA, she explained, '[w]hat we are talking about here is a program that works to ensure schools are safe environments for young people who are same-sex attracted or gender diverse' (23/02/2016). Labor Senator Anne McEwan spruiked the fundamentally earnest aspirations of the SSCA, encouraging schools

to '[work] together to create safe and inclusive school environments' (25/02/2016). Similarly appealing to sentiments of uniting forces for a common good, Labor MP Joanne Ryan promoted the SSCA's virtuous intentions to '[get] students to work collaboratively and cooperatively together in creating a safe environment for all students, including students of LGBTIQ, to make sure that they feel safe in their environment' (16/03/2016).

These discourses around safety and protection make particular assumptions about young people in schools and what is required of policymakers for their protection. First, in order to be 'protected', LGBTIQ young people must first be vulnerable. This deficit point of departure speaks to historical representations of LGBTIQ people as victims, rather than empowered. Rasmussen (2006) has disputed the representation of LGBTIQ identifying young people as 'object[s] of pathos' (p. 2). In particular, objectifying LGBTIQ young people serves as a rhetorical technique to incite emotive responses and enables the appropriation of Safe Schools as the necessary remedy to an obvious problem. In this instance, it is necessary for LGBTIQ young people to be illustrated as in need of saving, in need of politicians' help to create 'safe and inclusive' environments, or to get students to 'work collaboratively and cooperatively' to ensure their safety. Politicians therefore find themselves able to provide assistance here to a problem they are also helping to construct.

Further, politicians could be seen assuming the identity of the 'strict father', often invoked in political debate as a moral authority (Lakoff, 2004). The strict father describes political actors who see themselves as the head of the family and the ultimate authority on moral issues. Lakoff (2004) purports that the strict father model is usually invoked by fear, and issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion agitate a far greater response from the strict father than any other contemporary issue. This, writes Lohrey (2006), is because these issues represent a direct threat to the strict father model, and threaten to undermine the conservative authoritarian system.

In the debate around Safe Schools, politicians draw on an assumed moral authority to speak to what is best for the family. For example, Nationals MP George Christensen projected himself as a protector of young people and families when he stated, 'I rise as a voice for the thousands of parents who have been shocked when they discovered how the ironically named 'Safe

Schools' program is indoctrinating their children' (25/02/2016). Simpkins also adopted the protector role: 'Who stands up for [the young people 'belittled in Australian schools']? The answer, of course, is that we do, and I am proud of it' (24/02/2016). Here, as with the proponents of the SSCA, both young people and their parents become victims – on the one hand, of danger and bullying, and on the other of an agenda of indoctrination and an 'ironically named program'. Both sides of the spectrum offer themselves as protectors and advocates – Simpkins and Christensen of children and families, and Safe Schools supporters of LGBTIQ young people.

In its teachings on gender and sexuality diversity, and therefore the erosion of the normality of the nuclear family structure, the SSCA, according to those who oppose the program, poses a risk to the father's long-established position as both the moral authority and the righteous head of the family. In a family model in which there is no requirement for a strict father, the strict father's role becomes diminished, unnecessary or non-existent. Taylor (2007) observes that the demonisation of non-mainstream families and the 'moral panic' assertion that gay and lesbian lifestyles threaten mainstream society suggest that the presence of the strict father has an active role in influencing people's positioning on particular issues. In progressive education debates such as the one at the centre of this paper, the strict father trope assumes the role of protector against 'folk devils' (Cohen 2002) who threaten the legitimacy and relevance of the strict father in a society where family models are evolving away from the nuclear structure that legitimises a strict head of the family. The strict father, however, is still a prominent and prolific metaphoric presence in the complex territory of progressive sex education debate, where likewise, imaginings of a similarly caricatured 'child' are deployed for similarly emotive effect.

The identity of 'the child' was also powerfully invoked in this debate, as is common in policy and culture war debates (Baird, 2008; Robinson, 2011). Liberal MP Luke Simpkins asked, 'what about those young people that are belittled in Australian schools because of this program and the agenda of those that advance it?' (24/02/2016). Here, Simpkins positions young people as victims of the SSCA and their 'agenda' which poses a threat to their safety in schools. His construction of alternate victims, other than those vulnerable to homophobic bullying, depicts the SSCA and *All of Us* as a threat to young people in schools. In

referring to the 'agenda' of SSCA proponents, Simpkins affirms the discourse also invoked by Nationals MP George Christensen and former Coalition Senator Bernardi. Bernardi, in denouncing the SSCA, asserted that '[s]chools should be places of learning not of propaganda' (22/02/2016). Protectively, Bernardi affirmed that '[c]hildren should be children. They should not be enlisted as political activists' (22/02/2016). Similarly, former Liberal MP Luke Simpkins warned, 'I say that our children and freedom of speech are not safe from this program' (24/02/2016).

Whereas once the most powerful political invocations were 'the people' or 'the nation', a sign of the increasing privatisation of political issues is that 'the family' is now one of the most powerful invocations in political debate (Lohrey, 2006). The image of the nuclear, balanced, values-enriched family is central in the ideological wars between left and right (cf. Apple, 1996). Its associated discourses can be summoned for a range of social and political purposes, but most often when political actors want to make an appeal to that particular motif to sustain a campaign against a perceived threat. Summoning 'the child' into political debate is particularly potent when debating contentious issues such as drug policy, internet safety, and the treatment of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory (Baird, 2008).

In this particular context, 'the child' is imagined by politicians as a subject in need of protection, vulnerable to sexualisation. Simultaneously, it is invoked as a subject susceptible to homophobic bullying, requiring protection through government policy. In bringing the interests of the child into the debate, politicians summon an untouchable symbol onto which their views, values and political agenda are projected. To be speaking for the child, rather than an ideology, immediately seeks to make their position more virtuous than one that speaks only from an ideological position. Moreover, it is a highly emotive tool which also works to manipulate the interests of both parents and teachers, who are compelled to comply with what is considered best for the imagined child. Precariously, schools and parents must balance what is in the child's interests; here, opposing sides argue for vastly divergent ideals.

What becomes potentially problematic for English teachers is observing discourses that construct imaginings of their classrooms that are far from their known reality. These politicians argue for the protection of the vulnerable child, fetishising a deficit imagining



of young people and their sexual autonomy. Further, assuming the role of the strict father, the moral authority and protector enables politicians to speak authoritatively on what is best for young people and parents. The use of the strict father and vulnerable child identity serves to evoke particularly formidable characterisations of Safe Schools and its potential implications. There exists here an opportunity for teachers of English to speak back to this kind of potent political rhetoric, arguing for renewed characterisations of the strength of a diverse and progressive curriculum, and resisting objectifications of students. These possibilities are addressed further in the final section of this paper.

### Politics: The distribution of social goods

Many of the discourses about the SSCA and *All of Us* from both progressive and conservative politicians relied on conceptions of a dichotomous 'mainstream' and 'fringe' among the Australian population. Opponents evoked ideas such as 'mainstream values' to insinuate tension and distance between the content featured in *All of Us* and the views of the 'majority' of the Australian public, while proponents condemned the government for catering to who they believed were an extreme fringe group with a stronghold over the Prime Minister. Typically, these discourses served to assume rights and responsibilities over curriculum decision-making, and ultimately, input in shaping future citizens.

For example, Senator Simms accused the Liberals of 'want[ing] to push their particular ideology, their particular world view, within our schools' (24/02/2016). In pitting their opposition to Safe Schools upon a common set of values shared by all Australians, Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi and Coalition Senator Barry O'Sullivan relied upon a homogenous and normative imagined Australian ideal. Simms similarly homogenised his adversaries, emphasising 'their' worldview and 'their' ideology without stipulating the specific parameters of this worldview, nor the basis of his opposition to its place in schools.

Opponents also argued that to teach children content of this nature without the consent or awareness of their parents obstructed the fundamental rights of parents to make decisions about knowledge shared with their children. Liberal MP Andrew Hastie suggested that the *All of Us* curriculum 'usurps the role of Australian parents, who are best placed to teach their own children about sexuality' (23/02/2016). Family First Senator Bob Day described Safe Schools

as 'antiparent', 'expos[ing] [young people] to ideas contrary to the values of their families', without parent consultation (25/02/2016). Senator Day described *All of Us* as 'smack[ing] of the intolerant seizing state apparatus to drive their view of the world, the latest orthodoxy, down the throats of children without their parents' knowledge' (25/02/2016). Liberal MP Andrew Laming expressed the view that '[p]articularly in these areas of morals, ethics and sexual issues, I think parents are an equal partner in the discussion' (03/03/2016). Senator O'Sullivan argued that 'in the future, any funding should be applied in ways that professional educators, mainstream representatives and, in particular, the parents of the children in schools have a say in' (24/02/2016).

Here, Australian parents were placed as a mainstream interest group being held to ransom by the powerful interests of a small minority. Politicians suggested, through rhetoric such as Safe Schools being 'contrary to the values' of mainstream families, 'isolat[ing] parents', and 'smacking' the latest 'state seizing apparatus' 'down the throats of children without their parents' knowledge', that the mainstream values and interests of parents were being ignored and their children hijacked in the pursuit of an agenda completely out of alignment with their values. In MP Laming invoking 'morals, ethics and sexual issues' into the space up for grabs by fringe groups, abstract territories were introduced over which parents should rule. Laming's argument that 'the state', held captive by an extreme fringe, could now be usurping parents and exposing children to deviant content, enters fraught and potent territory. Detractors were then able to argue not only in the interests of children but also parents who also assume a position as victims, serving to construct a point of contention over the distribution of social goods. The use of this rhetoric invokes tension around who is granted access over the curriculum, and who is denied.

This mainstream and fringe dichotomy worked in other ways too, with Safe Schools' opponents reasoning that a narrow focus on a minority of students victimised and potentially placed other students at risk. MP Luke Simpkins argued that 'legitimately held views of young Australians [are] being intolerantly maligned based upon the influence of the Safe Schools program' (25/02/2016), while MP Laming likened *All of Us* to an 'attack on the values of Australians' (03/03/2016). Coalition Senator Barry O'Sullivan criticised the SSCA's focus on 'such a minor group',

suggesting that instead, Australia needed 'an equitable program that looks after all of those other children in our mainstream education' (24/02/2016). Senator O'Sullivan suggested that '[a] more balanced program that will assist all students was required' (24/02/2016). Senator Day drew upon discourses previously invoked in other culture wars, referring to the SSCA supporters as 'the elites' (25/02/2015). In this way, Safe Schools was also established as anti-mainstream values and outside the scope of official knowledge – not only is the content being taught against the wishes of parents, but it is not preparing students to participate in Australian society in a way that aligns with mainstream values and expectations.

Determining the curriculum and 'official knowledge' (Apple, 1996) for inclusion is inevitably ideological and contested by opposing views. However, the capacity of powerful factions to employ discourses to position certain types of knowledge as 'legitimate' and others as potentially harmful, undesirable or 'illegitimate', distorts the process of determining what might actually be useful or important inclusions in the curriculum. It is important therefore to examine the power plays operating in determining curriculum, and how discourses of legitimacy and illegitimacy sanctify some curriculum offerings over others. Notably absent, though, in the debate around Safe Schools, were the perspectives of educators. Educators continue to work in contexts in which the implications for policy and program changes are manifested, but often these precise policies and programs are appropriated in abstract ways that have very little tangible connection to the practicalities of their work. Here it becomes valuable for teachers who engage in critical professionalism – advocating for policy change and an improvement in social outcomes for students – to be aware of precisely how these debates unfold among policymakers. Understanding the history of patterns of discourses and the commonly invoked tropes in such 'debates' is crucial to empowering educators to critically examine the basis for politicians' views.

### Connections: Safe Schools and possibilities

SSCA detractors pursued the allegation that the SSCA was concealing or withholding Safe Schools' true aims. In doing so, they invited speculation about the SSCA's 'agenda', and made connections between Safe Schools and possible risks posed to children's safety. This strategy has been used in previous debates in education, namely, the 'literacy wars' and the broader

'culture wars', where opposing sides have speculated about the potentially perverse or hazardous intentions of one another. These debates threaten to stifle the development of genuinely responsive policies that meet the needs of young people and equip them with crucial ethical and social skills. As the merits or ills of curriculum are debated among politicians, the needs of young people in schools continue to be marginalised and become secondary concerns to securing ideological wins. Further, the utilisation of deficit notions of LGBTIQ young people, the tenuous claims, deployment of deviant tropes and use of 'sex panic' scripts aimed to obfuscate and make exaggerated connections between *All of Us* and objects of fear and outrage.

Those who opposed Safe Schools conveyed a belief in the deception of its intentions, described its true nature as 'alarming' (Bernardi, 22/02/2016) and 'isolat[ing]' (Simpkins, 24/02/2016), and revealed its alleged capacity to '[push] [students] to conform to a certain world view' (Bernardi, 22/02/2016). Senator Cory Bernardi claimed that the SSCA founders' agenda is to 'make schools a part of an ideological revolution to free us from the horrors of capitalism and the constraints of family life' and 'promote a radical political and social agenda that seeks to indoctrinate students to make them its advocates' (22/02/2016). He critiqued its name, 'sound[ing] so lovely and light, Safe Schools', but in claiming to reveal its true intentions, described it as 'an indoctrination of our youth into a circumstance they are not ready for' (19/04/2016). MP Laming suggested that the SSCA operates 'in the guise of preventing bullying', MP Christensen referred to it as 'the ironically named Safe Schools' (03/03/2016), while MP Hastie sought to imply the victim position of state and territory governments, accusing the federal government of 'impos[ing]' the 'program' upon them, characterising this move as 'ideological big government reaching into the lives of ordinary Australians' (23/02/2016).

Further, Liberal MP Brett Whiteley suggested an 'incongruence' between 'the title and objectives of the Safe Schools Coalition program and what is actually taught and, importantly, how it is taught' (24/02/2016). The reality, alleged MP Whiteley, was that '[r]ather than creating safer schools, the Safe Schools program potentially creates damaging confusion of gender among children' (24/02/2016). Whiteley characterised the SSCA as 'an extraordinarily dangerous program', that 'has little to do with what its name suggests'. He continued, 'It does not create safer schools' (24/02/2016). Similarly,

MP Simpkins accused its supporters of having a Marxist agenda, suggesting that some of the teaching methods seem 'akin to Orwell's *Animal Farm*', and describing it as '[an] enforced doctrine' (24/02/2016). Meanwhile, MP Christensen alleged that the resource indoctrinates children, and likened the SSCA to 'grooming work that a sexual predator might undertake' (25/02/2016). Gee's (2014) Connections building task is relevant here in the ways politicians sought to establish a relationship between the aims of the *All of Us* teaching resource and a more sinister agenda. This connection-building language worked to introduce distrust and suspicion, possibly attempting to cultivate a 'moral panic' (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009), thereby forcing the SSCA and its supporters to offer justifications and corrections to pervasive myths.

Australian education has played host to a range of 'moral panics' about the state and quality of its system (Robinson, 2011). Panics have mainly centred around the quality of student learning and academic achievement, particularly in literacy, and have often been featured heavily in media content and then 'remedied' in subsequent policy (Bessant, 2011). Panics are not simply wars over what should and should not be taught in schools; they are also essentially citizenship politics (Irvine, 2006). Within this citizenship politics, moral panics around children and sexuality – particularly homosexuality – have risen in recent years (Robinson, 2011). These debates are about determining, policing and enforcing which types of citizenship are legitimate or illegitimate.

Education programs, in helping to shape subjects and citizens and the lives they will subsequently lead, inevitably become sites for 'moral panic' and ideological strategies to maintain the primacy of the nuclear family (Robinson, 2011). The moral outrage or pledges of support for curriculum resources such as *All of Us* are inspired not only by an innate sense of their appropriateness or inappropriateness, but also by an imagining of their role in the nation-building process and their aims for shaping future subjects and citizens. Opportunities for redress include demanding the consultancy of teachers and education academics around curriculum development and resisting the inclusion or exclusion of reforms and initiatives that work for or against the social and emotional needs of students. Policy and curriculum have a responsibility to be ethically responsive to what is required in school and classroom communities, and the misappropriation of Safe Schools in parliamentary debate suppresses

the possibilities for truly representative curriculum. The employment of common tropes, metaphors and discourses that derail the focus of school programs and invoke inflammatory and emotive responses of 'chaos' and 'outrage' should be closely observed, examined and, where necessary, challenged.

### **Safe Schools and the English classroom: Possibilities for intervention**

#### *Interrogating heteronormativity through texts*

This paper investigates how language use by parliamentarians deployed Safe Schools as a device to achieve political outcomes which position LGBTQI identities in particular ways. Teaching young people about the power of language in both empowering and silencing identities is the central aim of the Safe Schools curriculum resources. Many of the concerns of the LGBTQI community and the difficulties LGBTQI young people face in schools are about language, whether it be the casual use of 'gay' as a synonym for 'not very good' or other offensive homophobic slurs. Educating people on the use of appropriate gender pronouns is another important example. And, for English teachers, equipping our students to use and understand language adeptly is not only an explicit aim of our curriculum but also a fundamental socio-political responsibility.

The English classroom provides many opportunities to interrogate implications of heteronormative or homophobic language use. Teachers have reported that homophobic language is common in their classrooms (van Leent, 2017a), and schools are inarguably heteronormative sites, where binary notions of gender and culturally enshrined imaginings of heteronormative romance and relationships are enforced by curricula and pedagogy (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). There are opportunities to interrogate the primacy of heteronormativity through text selection (Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2010), whereby texts featuring sexuality and gender diverse characters are selected for the purpose of normalising diversity. This approach must be treated carefully however, as there is a risk that sexuality and gender diverse characters can be reduced only to a caricature of their representation, rather than interpreted as characters embodying multifaceted, complex and contradictory ways of being, as is normal practice in text study. Further, Blackburn and Smith (2010) argue that in teaching LGBTQI texts, teachers must explicitly address heterosexism and homophobia and the systems and mechanisms that enforce their

dominance. This becomes a practice of advocacy rather than symbolic inclusion and takes up some of the work the Safe Schools creators aimed to undertake.

The possibilities for English teachers to continue the language work in their classrooms by enhancing LGBTQI representation in texts and seeking to dismantle the heteronormative status quo that fosters homophobia are endless.

### English teaching as activism

This paper also draws attention to the highly contentious nature of the practice of educating young people. The factional tensions that see an ongoing culture war across the educational curriculum and policy landscape continues to stifle the development of curriculum and policy. With such staunch differences in how best practice approaches to educating young people are perceived, these binary tensions will continue to stagnate policy development until a more nuanced approach can be considered.

Meanwhile, teachers continue to work in contexts where these policy stagnations play out and must negotiate the increasing bureaucratic pressures of their work, with evolving expectations around developing particular types of learners with particular skills. Blackburn, Clark and Schey (2018) advocate the need for teachers to see opportunities for activism in teaching in order to speak back to political discourses operating around what constitutes teaching and curriculum. What this looks like for individual teachers is dependent on many things, but their research indicates that this might involve the following actions: building the capacity of individual students, interrogating structural measures of inequality and marginalisation, working against bigotry, ensuring space for LGBTQI students and valuing difference in classrooms (p. 27). Blackburn et al. (2018) also suggest three possible ways to make classroom sites LGBTQI inclusive: stand-alone topics or texts that generate discussion and exploration, availability of texts featuring LGBTQI characters, and the inclusion of LGBTQI teaching content in curriculum (p. 39). While each approach has its possible shortcomings, these suggestions serve as possibilities to remedy the damage of rhetoric invoked during the Safe Schools debate and to address the primary concerns of its creators.

Further, critical media literacy, a pedagogical practice that trains students to analyse power dynamics in media products and produce interpretations of dominant discourses (Gainer, 2010), provides a

potential opportunity for teachers to teach students to respond to dominant political discourses. Developing critical media literacy skills in students is essential to enable them to accurately interpret media messages and to participate fully in their democracy (Kellner & Share, 2007). Undertaking resistant readings of texts and making space to create radical, subversive representations and consider motive, power and position create opportunities to challenge dominant ideologies (Gainer, 2010).

The Safe Schools debate also affirms how vital it is to empower young people to understand the role of language in forming our shared political reality. It is among the emergent political realities of Trump, Brexit and post-truthism that Safe Schools functions as a possible example of how objective facts drown beneath outrage and personal opinion, and how a single entity can emerge from relative obscurity to hold power as a potent political force. The work of English teachers is crucial in building young people's capacities to critically analyse political debate around policy and speak back to powerful discourses that directly invoke their subjectivities.

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# LGBTIQ+ Representations and Social Justice Principles within English Teacher Education

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**Abstract:** Teacher education programs play a significant role in shaping pre-service English teachers' pedagogy. The incorporation of texts with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, intersex, and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ+) perspectives in the curriculum is one mechanism for promoting inclusion as well as a means to address and combat homophobia and heteronormativity. Situated at an Australian university, this case study examined the beliefs and practices of pre-service teachers and teacher educators related to the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues and texts in secondary English classrooms. Drawing on sociocultural theories, the findings from this study indicated that pre-service teachers generally held positive attitudes towards the incorporation of LGBTIQ+ texts and representations. Notably, preparation to teach through a social justice lens developed pre-service teachers' understanding of the significance of including a diverse range of lived experiences in classrooms. However, the lack of specific inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives in teacher education meant that pre-service teachers often struggled to incorporate related texts in their university assessments and professional experience placements, and they were concerned about their ability to do so in the future.

*Literacy is one way to combat homophobia,  
but it's also a tool for fighting all sorts of oppression.  
(Blackburn, 2012, p. 17).*

## Introduction

The texts chosen for study within schools privilege certain groups, experiences, and belief systems (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). For some young people, the English curriculum does not support the inclusion, let alone the celebration, of their lives and identities. In particular, students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, or other identities (LGBTIQ+) may feel that their lived experiences are entirely invisible within the curriculum. However, 'the classroom space holds contemporaneous plurality and teachers have great agentic possibility to rupture dangerous dichotomies and myths about gender and sexuality while educating' (Miller, 2015, p. 39). Consequently, teachers' inclusion of texts containing LGBTIQ+ perspectives within the secondary English classroom is one way through which homophobic and heteronormative practices can be challenged (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

Drawing on sociocultural theories, this case study focused on pre-service English teachers' beliefs and practices related to the incorporation of LGBTIQ+ texts and representations in the secondary curriculum. The inclusion of these texts is informed by social justice principles as it allows for the recognition of a group that has often been marginalised in school institutions while also providing resources to support their wellbeing (Bell, 2016). If our aim is to promote social justice within schools, we need to begin by considering how

teacher education programs give pre-service teachers the theories, tools, and texts that they need as they step into classrooms. As an English teacher educator and undergraduate Honours student, we believe that social justice principles value equality, justice, and respect. In this study, we examined our own university context and asked the following questions: What are English pre-service teachers' attitudes towards teaching texts that reflect LGBTIQ+ perspectives? What training is provided to pre-service teachers in order to prepare them to embrace LGBTIQ+ inclusive pedagogy?

### **Theoretical framework and literature review**

Sociocultural theories emphasise that the interpretation and significance of literature is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978). Importantly, they recognise the way that particular perspectives and lived experiences are included, or excluded, from classrooms, and this influences the meaning and the value attached to them (Gee, 1991). A sociocultural approach emphasises the ways in which 'culturally and historically situated meanings are constructed, reconstructed, and transformed through social mediation' (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 208). Therefore, the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ texts in English classrooms has the potential to incorporate diverse LGBTIQ+ experiences, and it offers students the opportunity to gain insight into how texts shape meaning making about gender and sexuality. Sociocultural views of literacy highlight the role of texts in developing students' understanding of LGBTIQ+ experiences (McInerney & McInerney, 2010), as well as how texts, including novels, plays, poems, and films, can promote social justice, reflect diverse genders and sexualities, and combat homophobia and heteronormativity.

A growing body of scholarship has examined teachers' approaches to the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives within the secondary curriculum, both in Australia and around the world (e.g., Blackburn, 2012; Blackburn & Schey, 2017; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009; Ferfolja, 2007; Jones & Hillier, 2012; Miller, 2015). Notably, prior research suggests that the training provided to pre-service English teachers significantly informs their beliefs and practices related to incorporating LGBTIQ+ representations in the classroom (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2010). English teacher training involves both broad education about the roles, responsibilities, and identities of teachers as well as a specific focus on English methodology, including programming, planning, and

assessing student learning. To situate our study, we begin by reviewing the literature relating to LGBTIQ+ discourses in schools and social justice principles in teacher education programs, and then we situate both within Australian educational contexts and policies.

### **LGBTIQ+ youth in schools**

Australian LGBTIQ+ youth experience social isolation and marginalisation in secondary schools, which is perpetuated by their classmates and teachers (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014; Ullman, 2015). In many schools, there is a prevalence of anti-bullying and anti-homophobic messages within the curriculum; however, these discourses often serve to reinforce heteronormativity in schools (MacIntosh, 2007). If we consider discourse as 'a form of social interaction and power' (Pope, 2012, p. 226), we can understand it as socially constructed, politically related, and historically embedded. Therefore, discourses within schools affect students' experiences and their understandings of texts and contexts. Liasidou (2008) considers the ways that discourses of inclusion are constructed in the curriculum and the effect this has on concepts of difference and the promotion of inclusion. She suggests that identification of the 'other' through school policies reinforces difference and exclusion. As a result, critical discourse is needed to allow for meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ+ texts.

The ways in which diverse genders and sexualities are represented in, or absent from, the English curriculum shapes whether teachers and students are able to engage in thoughtful, respectful, and inclusive discourse. Quinlivan and Town (2010) investigate the influence that reading practices have on binary constructions of gender and sexuality in schools. They suggest that the 'silence around same-sex expressions of sexuality ... reinforces the normality of heterosexuality while inferring that there was something wrong and abnormal about experiencing same-sex desires' (p. 515). Blackburn (2012) and Blackburn, Clark and Martino (2016) show how this can be addressed in the classroom, while Curwood et al. (2009) consider ways of working towards the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ texts. Such studies highlight LGBTIQ+ inclusive teaching experiences that promote non-discriminatory environments and pedagogies, and emphasise the importance of teacher education in preparing teachers to achieve these objectives. Similarly, Miller (2015) identifies the potential for positive curriculum inclusion of LGBTIQ+

perspectives as a means of promoting acceptance and reducing homophobia and heteronormativity. In order for teachers to incorporate LGBTIQ+ discourses in schools, their teacher education programs must equip them with the knowledge of theory, pedagogy, and policy.

### Teacher education and social justice

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* provides teachers with requirements that need to be achieved in order to teach effectively and to meet the needs of their students. For pre-service teachers to meet the graduate requirements and to later become proficient, they need to 'establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities' (Australian Institute For Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 14). Unless pre-service teachers and in-service teachers are prepared to incorporate inclusive discourses within classrooms, including the integration of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, this cannot be achieved. For teacher education, this means that the training and mentoring needs to support the development of inclusive practices and social justice principles (Miller, 2006; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2010).

Teaching for social justice is not neutral, and teacher education should position pre-service teachers as activists, as agents for social change, and as LGBTIQ+ allies. Burns and Miller (2017) argue that social justice teaching involves a research base that 'provides a robust, adaptive, and evolving conception based on continuous critical reflection on the nature of social justice and the use of knowledge gained from that reflection to design and attain educational goals for the public good' (p. 5). Pre-service English teachers need ongoing support and mentoring as they reflect on their beliefs and identities, enact social justice principles, and consider how they can support LGBTIQ+ students through their pedagogical choices. Because research indicates that inclusive discourses and practices have the ability to break down environments of homophobia, harassment, and heteronormativity within schools (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Ferfolja, 2007; Miller, 2015), English teacher education needs to effectively prepare students for the challenges they will face in diverse school contexts.

### Australian policies and positions

Within the *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English*, there is a direct acknowledgement that texts should be 'of personal, cultural, social, and aesthetic

value' (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 8). *The Quality Teaching Framework* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003) identifies 'significance' as a key aspect of encouraging student learning. Therefore, both of these documents effectively embrace the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals and voices. Broadening the range of represented experiences, identities, and stories is beneficial to all students as it promotes awareness and acceptance of sexuality and gender diversity. The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives in schools is still perceived by some to be controversial; however, the *Controversial Issues in Schools Policy* (New South Wales Department of Education, 2018) validates the choice of material that is 'sensitive to students' needs and relevant to the curriculum'. The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives in the state's schools is appropriate to this policy and is further supported by the *Values in NSW Public Schools Policy*, which recommends teaching materials that reflect values that form 'the basis of law, customs, and care for others in our society' (New South Wales Department of Education, 2016).

In New South Wales, there are policies and curriculum materials that support the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ texts in English classrooms. While independent schools are exempt, government schools operate under the *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act* (1977), which states that discrimination is not allowed on the basis of race, sex, marital status, disability, sexuality, age, transgender status, or carer's responsibility. The *Australian Education Union Policy on Gender Education* (2008) supports the *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act* (1977). *The Safe Schools Coalition* (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015) also provides schools with assistance and resources to promote a safe environment for LGBTIQ+ identifying school community members. In addition, the *NSW Teachers Federation* (2014) explicitly supports LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices, providing materials primarily concerned with combating homophobia and harassment.

Despite the prevalence of materials supporting LGBTIQ+ inclusion, there is a notable lack of texts and specific outcomes that include LGBTIQ+ perspectives within the *NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English K-10* (NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2012), *English Stage 6 Prescriptions* (NESA, 2018a) and the *Stage 6 Syllabus English* (NESA, 2018b). Although students in Stage 6 English are meant to read 'texts with a wide range of cultural, social, and gender perspectives' (NESA, 2018a, p. 5), the prescribed texts



notably lack representations of diverse genders and sexualities. As Mills (1999) found, some parents, teachers, and school leaders are resistant to increasing the incorporation of LGBTIQ+ perspectives. This results in tacit, and at times explicit, censorship of texts and the perspectives included in English classrooms (Noll, 1994). While there is a broad sense that inclusive educational practices are required in Australian classrooms, the absence of specific attention to representations of diverse genders and sexualities is problematic. Therefore, it is not only teachers' personal views that impact the censorship of certain perspectives, but also the wider contexts they are working in, which are shaped by the curriculum, parents, community members, and administrators.

### Methodology

Qualitative research methods emphasise 'inductive, interpretive methods applied to the everyday world which is seen as subjective and socially created' (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). In this study, qualitative methodology supported the investigation of a particular social and cultural context as well as the values and ideas present within it (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). Notably, this research built on previous studies that employed qualitative methods to gain insight into experiences and perspectives related to LGBTIQ+ inclusion and teacher education (e.g., Blackburn, 2012; Elia & Elianson, 2010; Quinlivan & Town, 2010; Szalacha, 2003).

In order to gain insight into pre-service teachers' attitudes, case study methodology allowed for 'an empirical inquiry that investigate[d] a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context [we]re not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003, p. 13). A case study methodology (Stake, 2005) allowed us to explore pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives within the secondary English curriculum.

### Research context and participants

This study is situated at a major Australian university with an education program that emphasises social justice. As a teacher and a learner within this context, we sought to interrogate our own university to understand how the presence (or absence) of social justice teaching shaped pre-service teachers' understandings of LGBTIQ+ inclusive policy and pedagogy. Our study involved two participant groups: teacher educators and

pre-service secondary English teachers. The pre-service teachers were chosen using purposive sampling techniques (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), and they had completed at least one professional experience placement.

### Data collection

Data was collected from three main sources: pre-service teacher surveys, semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers and teacher educators, and artefacts such as unit outlines and curriculum policies. Pre-service English teachers completed an online survey involving Likert scale questions (de Vaus, 1995) and open-ended response questions. Surveys were distributed to 150 pre-service English teachers, and 25 were completed. The surveys asked pre-service teachers to share their beliefs related to including LGBTIQ+ perspectives, their experiences doing so in their teacher education program and professional experience placement, and whether they felt prepared to enact social justice principles and facilitate inclusive discourses within the English curriculum.

From the survey respondents, eight were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected because they indicated previous experience teaching LGBTIQ+ texts, and they expressed representative views concerning the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives. Interview questions were constructed to gain further insight into the reasoning behind pre-service teachers' attitudes to the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, as well as their concerns and their sense of preparedness to teach these perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three university teacher educators who teach within mandatory units required of all students as well as specific units within the English education program. Interviews focused on the support and training provided to pre-service teachers in order to prepare them to teach LGBTIQ+ perspectives within classrooms. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Unit outlines were used to triangulate university teacher educators' accounts of training provided to develop LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices. As products of the teacher education program, 'they reflect the interests and perspectives of their authors' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 231). Data sources were chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes as well as teacher educators' perspectives and practices.

### Data analysis

Thematic analysis identified the key themes and ideas present within the surveys, interviews, and unit outlines (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding was applied to all data sources, with the focus on interpreting and pinpointing the main attitudes identified in the participants' responses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Multiple sources of data were necessary as they allowed key themes to be identified across the different data sources and for these to be triangulated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A second cycle of coding, using axial coding, was conducted in order to highlight overlapping codes and clarify existing codes. The original descriptive codes became more refined, and this process also allowed the main categories to be identified according to the way they related and responded to the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). For example, categories that emerged from the interviews with pre-service teachers included their rationale for inclusion or exclusion, their concerns about specific texts, and their sense of preparedness. Identification of such categories focused the research and led to the identification of key findings which responded to the research questions (Boeije, 2010).

### Findings and discussion

The study identified a strong desire within the majority of the pre-service teachers to incorporate LGBTIQ+ perspectives in their classrooms. At the same time, the findings highlighted pre-service teachers' sense of feeling unprepared by their teacher training to effectively include LGBTIQ+ texts and perspectives. Teacher educators placed a significant focus on the promotion of safe environments and socially just practices in teacher training. As a result of this, pre-service teachers were broadly prepared to support social justice principles; however, LGBTIQ+ perspectives were often not explicitly included within this social justice framework.

### The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives

The majority of pre-service English teachers were supportive of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives in their classrooms. In the surveys and interviews, they acknowledged that this inclusion could promote tolerance and reduce homophobia and heteronormativity in schools. However, even pre-service teachers who held positive attitudes towards the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives acknowledged that they had multiple reservations. These included their sense of

preparedness to teach these perspectives and the potential for repercussions due to negative responses from parents, school leaders, and community members.

Surveys showed that pre-service teachers had a strong knowledge of the perspectives that are mandated by the *Stage 6 English Syllabus* and the *NSW K–10 Syllabus*. From the respondents, 64% acknowledged that gender was included in the *Stage 6 Syllabus*; however, only 25% identified LGBTIQ+ perspectives as an aspect that could be included as part of this according to the curriculum. The low rate at which LGBTIQ+ perspectives were identified as a possible area of study within the curriculum identifies a gap in pre-service teachers' awareness of the potential to include these perspectives. Despite this lack of recognition, 91% of surveyed students indicated that they believed that there was a place for LGBTIQ+ texts within English classrooms. This suggests that pre-service teachers hold positive attitudes towards teaching and including LGBTIQ+ texts, but are unsure how this can occur.

Pre-service teachers highlighted four main reasons why they would incorporate LGBTIQ+ perspectives, including an effort to increase inclusion, reduce bullying, promote safe environments in schools, and adhere to the social justice tenants of education. The justifications that pre-service teachers provided for their desire to teach LGBTIQ+ perspectives aligned with the social justice values that have been central to their teacher training. One pre-service teacher explained, 'Yes, I think it is really important to look at as many perspectives as possible. You can't ignore one side of things and only teach one perspective'. Another participant acknowledged, 'I think more needs to be done in this area', and suggested, 'That will be when we get out there to try and make schools more inclusive for all students regardless of their sexuality'. The views expressed here show an awareness of the increasing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ identities and perspectives, and they highlight the need for schools to be actively involved in promoting tolerance and inclusion through the incorporation of diverse voices in classrooms (North, 2010).

Some pre-service English teachers expressed significant concerns about the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives and shared an unwillingness to incorporate them in classrooms. Notably, this stemmed from their personal beliefs about sexuality and gender diversity and from their concerns about the impact that LGBTIQ+ texts may have on their relationships with colleagues and parents. For instance, one pre-service teacher explained that teaching LGBTIQ+ perspectives

may encourage 'gay students to come out in an unsafe environment, which could be an issue with parents'. Moreover, he believed that it 'could be an ethical issue because if a student comes out to you and it's because you are teaching a particular text, you very much could get reprimanded'. Embedded within this justification is the problematic idea that LGBTIQ+ perspectives, and potentially, LGBTIQ+ identifying individuals, are unwelcome within the school environment.

While these attitudes were in the minority, it is important to acknowledge that they are present, even within a university faculty that values social justice. Moreover, these attitudes will influence the texts and perspectives included in classrooms. We suggest that the lack of emphasis on the significance of including LGBTIQ+ perspectives in teacher training may be a contributing factor to these views. The silence around the need to incorporate these perspectives in teacher training reinforces and justifies attitudes that position these perspectives as unwelcome in classrooms (McInerney & McInerney, 2010). Despite their commitment to social justice, pre-service teachers may then tacitly support heteronormativity and fail to confront homophobia (Miller & Gilligan, 2014)

### Key aims of teacher training

Teacher educators repeatedly identified that one of their central goals was to develop pre-service teachers' understanding of social justice. Sara (all names are pseudonyms), an English teacher educator, suggested that her goal was 'to explore that concept of empathy ... to expand their horizons, their perspectives, and their sense of understanding of the other'. She explained that she sought to develop pre-service teachers' understanding and empathy, which she believed should translate to actively combating discrimination. This ideology drove the need to develop pre-service teachers' critical pedagogy and reflective practice in order to support inclusivity (Ferfolja, 2010). Elisabeth, who oversaw all secondary education courses at the university, expanded on this: 'I work in a faculty that has a vision and a mission that is very concerned with specific ideas about education ... We teach through a particular lens which is anti-neo-liberal and pro-social justice'. This statement reflected a common goal across the education faculty to promote social justice practices.

Elisabeth drew on Paulo Freire's work and emphasised the importance of both reading the word and reading the world: 'My perspectives on teaching texts in English has always been about understanding the

world and the development of a critical consciousness through the critical reading of texts'. This focus on developing social justice practices and critical pedagogy through pre-service teacher training was designed to encourage implementation of these practices in future classrooms for the inclusion of all students (MacIntosh, 2007).

The approach taken to teacher education, and specifically English teacher training, can be seen to support these key ideologies. When Theresa, another English teacher educator, was asked about the preparation provided in order to develop abilities to teach multiple perspectives in teacher training, she said, 'I would consider that to be one of the most significant dimensions of the pedagogy that I recruit when I am teaching English ... within the spectrum of diversity and social justice'. She continued: 'I think that is a critical dimension of teacher training'. Interviews highlighted the primary concerns of these teacher educators and showed that their emphasis on social justice and critical pedagogy informed their approaches to teacher training.

### Preparing pre-service teachers to teach diverse perspectives

Within the social justice-driven aims of the teacher education program, there was an emphasis on the development of inclusive learning environments. It is through this lens that preparation was provided to support pre-service teachers' abilities to teach LGBTIQ+ perspectives. The approach taken during pre-service secondary teacher education was not generally focused on providing explicit instruction regarding aspects of identity such as race, class, gender, or sexuality. Instead, training was concerned with building skills that could be applied across a variety of lived experiences and perspectives. However, curriculum mandates and accreditation requirements demanded that teacher educators must ensure that considerations of Asian and Indigenous perspectives were present in unit outlines and assessment tasks across programs. These perspectives were reinforced through their position as explicit cross-curriculum priorities in the state and national curriculum, and they are required components within Australian teacher education programs.

LGBTIQ+ perspectives are not explicit requirements of the state or national curriculum, and despite the faculty's focus on social justice, LGBTIQ+ issues were not specifically emphasised within the teacher education program. There is only one lecture within

the mandatory units for all pre-service teachers that directly focuses on the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, which is given by the second author and highlights issues of curriculum integration, text selection, and censorship. Although pre-service English teachers can elect to include an LGBTIQ+ focus within their self-selected activities and assessments, the reality is that engagement with LGBTIQ+ perspectives is not required nor is it explicitly emphasised across their course. Due to this, exploration of these perspectives within teacher training are directed by pre-service teachers' own interests; those that have not been exposed to ideas, or that may not be confident discussing LGBTIQ+ perspectives, are not effectively supported in developing the necessary content knowledge and pedagogy (Miller, 2006; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2010).

Teacher educators believed that pre-service teachers recognised the importance and significance of teaching LGBTIQ+ perspectives; however, there was also an awareness of factors that caused hesitancy to do so. As Elisabeth noted, 'I think probably they feel quite confident teaching the text but they don't feel confident either having conversations with faculty, or administration, or parents about the text'. This assumption that the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives will be seen as controversial or even undesirable reinforces the prevalence of heteronormativity within schools (Blackburn, 2012). It aligns with the idea that all students, families, and staff members identify as cisgendered and heterosexual, and due to this, LGBTIQ+ perspectives may be unwelcome within schools (Mills, 1999). Ultimately, pre-service teacher preparation to teach LGBTIQ+ perspectives was seen to arise from the overarching focus on social justice and reflective practice. However, findings from this study suggest that it is not sufficient.

### Conclusion and implications

This study offers new insights into pre-service teachers' desires and concerns related to including LGBTIQ+ perspectives in Australian English classrooms. By building on previous understandings of the mechanisms that support inclusive practices and the incorporation of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, this study demonstrates the need to explicitly address LGBTIQ+ issues within English teacher education. We argue that unless English teacher education programs include a specific focus on LGBTIQ+ perspectives, pre-service teachers themselves cannot know how to talk about – let alone how to teach about – diverse genders and sexualities.

It is the responsibility of teacher educators to give them the words, the tools, and the strategies. Moreover, a social justice foundation is essential because, 'to be successful, pre-service teachers must be prepared for the diversity of students they will encounter and be comfortable modelling and encouraging fairness, equity, and respect in their classrooms' (Alsup & Miller, p. 195, 2014). While this foundation resulted in pre-service teachers having a strong sense of the importance of social justice, the lack of a specific focus on LGBTIQ+ perspectives meant that social justice values were not always translated into practice. As one pre-service teacher shared, 'With the more aware society that we have today, I think we need to teach those perspectives. Our classrooms should reflect the attitudes and issues that are present in greater society'.

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# On Teaching Queer Indigenous Literatures

Aubrey Jean Hanson, University of Calgary

**Abstract:** This short response to the theme of 'Love in English' reflects on the importance of teaching queer and Indigenous literatures within English classes. I share personal perspectives on seeking literature that reflected who I was as a young person developing queer and Indigenous identities. I also share professional experiences from my past English teaching. Further, drawing upon original interviews with Indigenous authors, I share considerations for teachers on why it matters to teach queer Indigenous literatures. Ultimately, this piece contends that young people – particularly queer and Indigenous youth – need to see themselves storied into the world.

I come from a Métis family: that is, on my mother's mother's side, my ancestry traces back to Red River Métis. The Métis are one of Canada's three main Aboriginal groups: the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Within those three categories, vast diversities exist, spanning the enormity of this land. The Métis are a distinct people within Canada, having emerged out of the early relationships between First Nations and European settlers, centuries ago (St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). We have a complex history of displacement and conflict within Canada, with both overlapping and distinct experiences from our First Nations and Inuit cousins. Where, in general, mainstream Canadians have a fair amount to learn about Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives within Canada, I find that it is common for even less to be known about the Métis. To speak from my own experience, I do not remember hearing the word 'Métis' spoken outside my own home until I was well into my twenties. It felt like a private part of my identity. Both Native and not-Native, Métisness was something that gave me a sense of both pride and uncertainty.

Alongside my Métisness and growing desire to learn about my cultural heritage, as I grew into adulthood I began to recognise that I identified as queer. This was something that seemed even more private, even less certain. After all, I could trace several lines of my ancestry with direct evidence, following the branches of the family tree back through Métis communities, and, even further, to where those branches dead-ended with the words 'Cree woman' or 'Native wife'. By comparison, when it came to sexuality, I had to learn to trust my inner knowledge, seeking self-understanding rather than external, objective validation of who I was. Over time, I found my way to empowering and supportive communities in both of these cases, moving beyond personal understanding into shared identity and social responsibility.

Within that process of empowerment, my developing role as a teacher played a large part, as did the opportunities I had to engage in social justice education. I was able to work in several diverse secondary schools as a teacher, engaging with students through English and other subject areas that brought together the beautiful dances of language and culture. This professional experience propelled me further into graduate studies and into a faculty role – my current position. In that capacity, I am able to engage in scholarship on Indigenous education and curriculum studies, alongside teaching pre-service teachers and graduate students. I am able to recognise how my lived experiences resonate with the interplay of power and politics, cultures and contexts. I can rationalise the need to examine my own autobiography and narratives in relation to curriculum and learning (Kanu & Glor, 2006), and I feel deeply that interrogating my own schooling experiences can illuminate the presences and absences that shaped my developing sense of self. When it comes to the stories that depicted the world

for me as a child, amidst the abundant presences, a few important absences stand out.

Looking back on my own schooling, growing up in a little neighbourhood in the city of Calgary, a bustling city in western Canada, I can see that queer and Métis identities were not represented to me in the literature I read. What stories stand out in my memory? One is *Julie of the Wolves* (George, 1972), the story of a young girl from an Inuit community who runs away and has to make peace with a wolf pack to survive in the Arctic. Another is *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Banks, 1980), the story of a boy whose toy Indian comes to life and teaches him about Native culture and lifeways. These books were not written by Indigenous writers, but they awakened something in my young mind at the time. I do not remember any stories told by Indigenous writers during my years in elementary or secondary school: that part of my experience was not reflected in my formal education. I also do not remember any queer stories, any stories that invited me or my classmates to consider the lives and loves of LGBTIQ+ people. It was not until I undertook a degree in English that I encountered more diverse literatures from Canada and around the world and, finally, met a text that spoke more closely to how I understood myself and my communities.

The first Indigenous work I remember reading in university was Gregory Scofield's (1997) *Love Medicine and One Song*. Scofield struck me as particularly significant – I was about 20 years old at the time – because he is both Métis and gay. His poetry treads lovingly through both Indigeneity and queer love, drumming out an erotic tenderness between men. I had not realised, before then, that it was possible for me to identify so strongly with an author's experiences. While I acknowledge that some of his more erotic poems, such as 'My Drum, His Hands', might be considered too mature for school-age students, I wonder what might have been different if I had met writers like Scofield sooner in my own story.

My first reading of Gregory Scofield illuminated the dark space, the null curriculum (Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986), that had failed to identify or nurture my Métisness or my queerness when I was young. During my university years, my encounter with Gregory Scofield's writing was followed precipitously by a self-induced landslide of Indigenous and queer writing. I sought out everything I could, researched authors and compelled swiftly from one to the next. This seeking continues today – I have been reading

Chrystos, Beth Brant, Billy-Ray Belcourt, and Joshua Whitehead, to name a few.<sup>1</sup> I strive to read every LGBTIQ+ Indigenous or Two-Spirit writer I can find.<sup>2</sup> It is important for me to see something of myself storied into the world.

As an educator, I see the significance of such stories for young queer and Indigenous people. When I taught English classes to adolescent children, I was well aware of the push to teach canonical texts. A canon sets out literary works that have withstood the test of time, that hold artistic merit, that convey within them so much of what is beautiful and powerful about creative writing – the expression of humanity through words well aligned. The supposed universality of such works – essentially, conveying social norms from American or British cultures rather than speaking for all of humankind – is already well understood (Episkew, 2002; Smith, 2012). Likewise, I do not need to explain to readers of this journal that factors like race, gender, and class are not always treated with nuance in canonical works. While they are beautiful, teachable, and significant, canonical texts can overshadow texts from more diverse authors, precluding the possibilities that other(ed) texts can offer to diverse readers. As a classroom teacher, I particularly noticed the mismatch between the books I felt pressured to teach and the young adults in my classes. I had a rainbow of young people before me and I was showing them the world using only a palette of two or three colours. I began to question my practice. How might I work to resist the institutional, disciplinary, and material pressures to teach to the mainstream?

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to carry out research on the importance of Indigenous literatures for learning, making connections between perspectives from Indigenous authors and from classroom teachers. During one project (Hanson, 2016), I held conversations with individual authors and teachers about their work. I asked them to talk about why it matters and about the significance Indigenous stories can have for communities. Always in the back of my mind were my lived experiences and those of the young people who are not finding their own stories in the literatures they are reading. How might English teaching be shifted so that future students could experience a literary world that validates who they are?

Among the writers I interviewed are two whose work addresses LGBTIQ+ or Two-Spirit perspectives. The first is Métis writer Sharron Proulx-Turner, and the second is Cherokee writer Daniel Heath Justice.<sup>3</sup> Both



of these writers have taught me a great deal, whether in person or through their writing. Furthermore, as both of these writers have something to offer to teachers, I want to share some of their perspectives here, and to come to what I think is the heart of this short reflective piece.<sup>4</sup> That is, what is at stake if teachers do, or do not, bring diverse texts into their classrooms? What is the potential impact for young people if they never read a story or poem that speaks to who they are as queer and Indigenous youth? Conversely, what is the potential impact if they develop a sense of belonging in the world around them? While I do not speak for others, I know that my own path would have been different if I had begun some of this learning when I was younger. An exploration of LGBTIQ+ love in English would have been empowering for me and healthy for my emerging sense of self. Given how much is at stake in this pedagogical undertaking, it is important to ask why teachers might not embark upon it. Does it seem risky? Are they afraid of parental backlash? Are they uncertain of how to proceed in a respectful way? The two authors I am listening to here have some helpful perspectives on these questions.

First of all, both Proulx-Turner and Justice encourage teachers not to be daunted by the mistakes that they might make (Hanson, 2016). While it is vital to proceed respectfully into territory that might be unfamiliar, it is important for the young people that teachers try. Proulx-Turner argues, 'The important thing for me is to have a child go into a classroom and see themselves represented in something they're reading' (personal communication, September 22, 2015). It is world-changing if young people encounter themselves in what they are learning – or if they never do, that kind of scenario is not positive. Proulx-Turner encourages teachers by saying, 'Try not to be afraid of making mistakes. We all make mistakes. If we didn't make mistakes we would never learn' (personal communication, September 22, 2015). Likewise, Justice reassures, 'Yeah, you're going to screw up. You're totally going to screw up. Just like Indigenous teachers screw up. That's the nature of the beast. We're going to mess it up' (personal communication, October 2, 2015). He points out that getting everything right is an unrealistic expectation: 'No one expects that they're going to get it right on other stuff all the time' (personal communication, October 2, 2015). It is vital to realise that everyone makes mistakes and that it is the big picture of ongoing learning that matters.

When I teach Indigenous education courses for

pre-service teachers, this lesson is one that I emphasise greatly. Alongside an acceptance of mistakes, I ask myself how I might model for my students the process of entering respectfully into a terrain that I do not know well – ready to listen and learn, eyes and mind open to see and understand, willing to ask questions and pursue the knowledge. I cannot teach them everything they want to know about Canada's Indigenous peoples in one course, but I can instil in them a sense of readiness to learn more. I can hope that they have a feeling of intellectual humility that will carry them forward in good ways.

Both Proulx-Turner and Justice acknowledge that there are barriers and challenges for teachers in teaching more Indigenous literatures. From the teachers whom I interviewed (Hanson, 2016), I heard a wide range of factors that discourage them from bringing more Indigenous texts into their classes, and many of these would likely extend to LGBTIQ+ literatures as well. For instance, teachers might be discouraged by a lack of funding for new resources, fear of parental disapproval, lack of support from school colleagues or leadership, lack of background knowledge about the texts, lack of confidence about the key issues such texts might raise, and uncertainty about how to handle the difficult conversations that might arise in the classroom around issues that seem controversial – to name a few. However, Proulx-Turner encourages teachers to launch in despite these barriers: teachers may need to be 'diplomatic and kind, but firm' or to grow 'a thick collective skin' (personal communication, September 22, 2015). In terms of support, she insists that individual teachers should not work alone. Instead, they can look to the 'Aboriginal teams that teachers can bring in and consult with' and to the writers themselves (personal communication, September 22, 2015). 'Almost all Native writers', she suggests, 'will take the time to talk to you. You just have to reach out' (personal communication, September 22, 2015). Support is there for those who are willing to try.

Justice, likewise, insists that it is necessary for teachers to take on the difficult work of learning and pushing for shifts in educational practice: 'The only way things will be better is if we do that' (personal communication, October 2, 2015). I agree with Justice that educational change relies on the efforts of teachers. He acknowledges the work entailed, pointing out that, 'if it were easy, it would have been done by now' (personal communication, October 2, 2015). However, the struggle is a crucial one. It matters for Indigenous

people to see themselves in what they read. Justice says, 'We're looking for a window into a world that includes us. We're looking for stories, and images, and possibilities, and dreams, and visions of reality, wherein we are part of the narrative, we are part of the story' (personal communication, October 2, 2015). How might our schools be different if all children, at some point, had a glimpse through such a window? The texts we teach can open up that option.

In closing here, I want to turn to the words of Two-Spirit and Cherokee writer Qwo-Li Driskill. Driskill (2004, 2016) writes poetry as well as literary criticism and has been a powerful voice in the scholarship on queer Indigenous writing in North America (or Turtle Island). Driskill makes clear that the erotic has a central place in struggles for sovereignty. Like Indigenous lands, Driskill argues, Indigenous sex and gender systems have been targets of colonial processes. Driskill (2004, p. 52) writes, 'I do not see the erotic as a realm of personal consequence only. Our relationships with the erotic impact our larger communities ... A Sovereign Erotic relates our bodies to our nations, traditions, and histories'. Sexuality is a vital site for decolonial work and Indigenous resurgence.

While there may still be some distance in time between the children whom we teach and the future adults whose erotic lives Driskill addresses, it is negligent to believe that education has no responsibility to nurture the growth of children into healthy adults whose identities and experiences have been affirming. This responsibility is a social justice issue, but it is also an issue of teaching English well to all learners. The children we teach need to grow up feeling that they have a place in the world around them. It must be possible for queer and Indigenous children to find a sense of self through the stories they read, fostered within a caring learning environment in which everyone has a place. I have the greatest respect for teachers who are willing to walk alongside children on their journeys, even for just a little while, in places where the terrain feels unfamiliar to their own feet but where those children find their first steps forward.

## Notes

- 1 To begin reading these four authors, I would point toward Chrystos's (1988). *Not Vanishing*, Beth Brant's (1985), Billy-Ray Belcourt's (2017), and Joshua Whitehead's (2017) *full metal indigiqueer*. This list is, of course, just a starting place.
- 2 The term 'Two-Spirit' emerged out of LGBTIQ+ Indigenous communities in North America by the early

1990s (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011); Cree scholar Harlan Pruden (2016) aptly calls the term an organising strategy that enables community-building work and dialogue among Indigenous LGBTIQ+ peoples. A strong body of scholarship on Two-Spirit or queer Indigenous literatures and perspectives exists across Turtle Island (North America). A number of examples are provided in the list of references for this article: see, for instance, Barker (2017); Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonetti (2011); Morgensen (2011); Rifkin (2012); Roscoe (1988); and Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, and Barman (2010).

- 3 Sharron Proulx-Turner was the author of several books of poetry, including *what the auntys say* (2002), *she is reading her blanket with her hands* (2008), and *she walks for days inside a thousand eyes (a two spirit story)* (2008). She also collaborated with Lakota Elder Beverly Little Thunder to publish a book sharing Little Thunder's oral memoir, entitled *One Bead at a Time* (2016).

Daniel Heath Justice is the author of the speculative fiction series *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles* (2011), as well as a number of short stories, including 'Tatterborn' (2017). He also has published widely as a scholar in Indigenous literary studies: his most recent book is *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018).

- 4 Quotations from these interviews are cited as they occur within my doctoral dissertation (Hanson, 2016).

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## tears

Rory Harris

& when the bar girl recalls you  
from a couple of years ago  
on the plaza behind Orchard Road  
you know there is something in the air  
& on the table one sweating *Tiger Beer*  
a bucket of ice & two glasses  
*don't complicate it*

The calm humid morning purr of tricycles  
a cruise of cabs  
smoking just off Pedro Gil Street  
Manila Bay over my shoulder  
& Robinson's Place white against  
the morning's commerce sleeps

The night before we hold hands standing  
a grace at the long table of *Mr Poon's*

A straight edge hot towel shave  
two brandies later  
I can still thread a needle in the half light  
& sew a button at any age

The bitumen sings concrete rusts  
a bus moans through back streets  
I order a thermos of hot water for three in one coffee  
& a three in the morning wakeup call

At the Su-ay Market the smile of Angelique  
& the sky rains candy  
I sit with her sister Rose  
in the burnt out shell of their shop  
the day after the fire they cleaned up  
the next day was trading as usual  
their savings bought new stock  
insurance is a first world luxury

I drink a couple of almost cold beers  
delivered tops off from the shop next door

Love is a crucifix around the neck of the day  
I buy a dozen at the Columbian Mission & get one free

At the afternoon end of the school day calm  
I unblock the toilet  
the students rehearse the Novena  
for tomorrow night's Mass  
it's one of those Mary & Martha moments  
& I'm up to my elbows in someone's shit

A tree grows out of the school kitchen  
chicken curry & rice for ten pesos

that's twenty five cents  
rather than chop it down  
the cooks have learnt to walk around its girth

Mangrove planting & the earth rises  
a big lunch inside stilted houses  
over the estuary fish jump into nets  
& the students delight in their easy labour

In the cotton clad night  
a dream of rain to raise the crops from our lives  
I sip brandy made from sugar cane  
& re-read the label too many times

At the dam we strip down to ourselves  
& wash away the last few days  
it is the Feast of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz  
& lunch is spectacular

John Carl brushes his lips against my face  
a lit candle & flowers are on the table  
his brother dead almost a year & with these new tears  
we sip water in the house of his parents  
his grandmother wants to feed us

*The bus will be here in five minutes*  
we rest in our silences & move through the day  
this is a three beer wait  
& I'm doing the washing up from lunch  
when the driver knocks on the scullery door

A joyful ballet dancing language of the deaf

Here we have unpicked time to let it settle around us  
looking for threads to knit a pattern  
we hug the coast road to Bacolod

After breakfast we stroll through the Barangay  
pick up from where we left off  
multiple breakfasts house warming & flowers

An almost cold beer for morning snack  
afternoon tea is coconut wine & chicken & noodles  
supper is a feast & kids filling the house

& when the water comes it breaks  
the sky open & the street's a flood of litter  
& then through the calm  
we step around our silences  
a prayer to the cooling night  
a string of taxis turn to where land ends

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# Here I Am

Timothy Mannix, Deakin University, Victoria

**Abstract:** The study of English, like the teaching of English, is bound with thematic concerns of love. Notions of love, and the range of experiences that come with them, coalesce in learning spaces when both teachers and students analyse texts, unpack social issues, and construct arguments in daily teaching and learning practice. Within the broader social context, ideas of love are continually politicised and filter into the education space as they are tethered to social conceptions of gender and sexuality. Schools are called upon to protect both young people and parental rights time and time again, fracturing the central unifying idea of love into modes and types of love that are deemed acceptable by government bodies and wider social discourse. The aim of this piece is to give voice to the lived experience within my own classroom and articulate the encounters and affective politics of notions of love, and at times gender, that arise within teaching spaces. This piece also discusses the possible consequences faced by students in the modern classroom, when they participate in these discourses and their own conceptualisation of love is deemed unacceptable, and the implications this then holds for teachers as the arbiters of power within these spaces.

My body is burning, it starts to shout  
Desire is coming, it breaks out loud  
Lust is in cages till storm breaks loose  
Just have to make it with someone I choose  
Here I am, rock you like a hurricane  
*Rock You Like a Hurricane, The Scorpions, 1984*

The lyrics above are from The Scorpions' 1984 studio album, *Love at First Sting*. The lyrics of this popular song are concerned with ideas of sexuality, enacted passion, uncontrollable forces, agency, and seeking the objects of desire. The metaphors present within the lyrics speak to an energised, if not violent, interplay and nexus between these ideas and interestingly the song itself is housed under a title primarily concerned with love. The Scorpions' lyrics also highlight an important aspect to consider when it comes to love, that is, the affirmation of the self, the steps taken to cry 'Here I am' into the vault of reality.

On the other hand, the song lyrics also reveal a dichotomy, a parallel notion of pain that is a part of, and native to love, whilst simultaneously suggesting that love calls you forth and generates action. The results of the 2017 same-sex marriage postal survey mobilised millions, revealing the generative function of love. It was encouraging to see a groundswell of public support for the equal treatment and formalised recognition of love adult couples can share. However, before the survey results were announced, the public debate imposed upon the private lives of same-sex couples, demonstrating in real terms that, at the heart of expressing love, giving love and revealing love, vulnerabilities are exposed. Australians were asked, 'Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?' Another way to ask this is, 'Whose love matters? Whose love deserves institutional recognition? Who gets to make this decision?' These questions certainly bled into my classrooms, where debates amongst my students from Year 7 to Year 12 were common in the lead-up to Australians casting their vote. Often, I was asked how I would be voting. I remained aloof to my students, turning the conversation to the lesson at hand. However, what was clear to me and to many of my students was that when we love, when we cry 'Here I am' to the world, there is the opportunity for others to admonish us for it. Love, when expressed, is a wonderful thing, yet it enters the social and cultural realm of communication that is policed through our various beliefs and the beliefs of others, in particular those beliefs and investments we have with regards to notions of gender.

In the wake of the 2017 same-sex marriage survey, love has been inexorably and politically linked to sexuality and gender debates throughout the education space, at times in an attempt to inflame concern. Schools are an important site for these debates, as 'Schools are active in ... constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations between them' (Connell, 2000, p. 131). One only needs to read former Prime Minister John Howard's call for public school funding to be revoked if schools do not respect parents' wishes to remove students from 'sex education in the curriculum that acknowledges the existence of homosexual sex or transgender people' (Philp, 2018) to truly understand what is at stake within this debate. What is significant about these types of arguments is that they reveal an overly conservative normative ontology at work in society in the name of 'protection', a veritable moral smokescreen aimed at obscuring and silencing the truth that some forms of love are invested with cultural capital and others are not. Howard here produces a heterosexist discourse where 'silences and ignorance are not seen simply as absences or repressions, but rather as forces that themselves actively work to construct the field' (Misson, 1999, p. 76). Whilst the absurdity of questioning the existence of people and their lived experience can be easily dismissed as ridiculous, these commentaries from public figures that exist within education spaces now more than ever reveal the need for both students and teachers to 'speak' themselves and their visions of 'love' into existence – to say, as The Scorpions did, 'Here I am'. The need for this kind of self-affirmation can be understood in terms of Judith Butler's (1993) work around subject formation and identity:

The normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as 'being' – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well. And in the case of bodies, those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unloveable, the nonnarrativisable, the traumatic. (Butler, 1993, p. 188)

'Love' in the breadth and depth of what it is, is no small thing to write about. Both a noun and a verb, 'love' exists within individuals and as something they 'do'. When considering 'love' in the current climate that surrounds educational and social discourse in Australia, teachers, English teachers more specifically, must now, more than ever, strive to 'celebrate and protect diversity and understanding of others' (Victorian Government Education Department, 2018).

They also must respond to the social and political tensions that are presented in front of them each day inside the classroom. English teachers and English classrooms are particularly suited to this task, as Misson (2014, p. 29) suggests:

English is the domain where students most certainly get the tools for engaging with the world (i.e. language), learn how to use those tools (literacy) and where there is space for considering what the world and human beings are and what they might become (literature).

In other words, English teachers must be prepared to consider what love could *be*, and how love is *seen* through the kaleidoscopic and multifaceted eyes of their students, and their students' parents. They must do this, all the while considering the love they bear for their craft, their professional obligations, the politics of the time and the implications that this holds because they work with young people. They must keep their own love aflame whilst they teach a busy curriculum amidst a profession that is continually 'evaluated' and 'reviewed' for being systemically flawed. They must fall in love all over again with what they do, as the great powers of influence reach into *their* classrooms and dictate the *right* way to 'love' or the *right* of people to love.

English and Literary studies have long been the site where notions of 'other' and 'otherness' have dwelled; one only needs to read author Amanda Michalopoulou's energised outline of literature's relationship with the 'other' from her address at the International Literature Festival Odessa in 2016 to gain a clear sense of this connection. More importantly, her comments in this address on the *function* of literature and its embrace of marginalised figures (others) throughout history further emphasise the crucial capacity for the study of English and Literature to open up spaces of visibility: 'What literature does is incorporate the other in all its quirks and peculiarities into the social body. It allows for difference ... It considers difference as a sign of courage' (Michalopoulou, 2016). In the pages of texts studied by students, and between the covers of great literary works, the love of diverse people can be, and has been, made concrete and visible. In literature from Antiquity to now, the figures that find popularity, scandal and wide public readership are bound to ideas of love. From Medea, Antigone and Paris, to Othello, Hermia and Macbeth, to Victor Frankenstein, Elizabeth Bennet and Dorian Grey, to Clarissa Dalloway, Emma Bovary and Nora Helmer, to Harry Potter, Frodo

Baggins and Katniss Everdeen, the richest characters are bound up with notions of love, or employ love as a justification for action. The history of fiction is one of *love*. As an English scholar, I love these characters for the energy their fictional lives offer, infused with insight granted through the power and unique application of their love. As an English teacher I understand and have witnessed the liberation of thought, development of empathy and powerful meaning-making achieved by students when Misson's (2014) trinity of 'language, literacy and literature' are brought alongside ideas of love. The issue for English teachers is in the affirmation and in the making visible of marginalised 'love' within the classroom, within texts, and within debate. To echo the words of Monika Wagner,

What [English teachers] can't respect is not having the opportunity to be exposed to ideas and opinions we don't agree with. I can't advocate to others ... that it is OK to censor text choices simply because they may not correspond to my way of seeing the world. (Wagner, 2016)

My hope is that one day, understanding that reading, writing and speaking about ideas of love are perhaps the most vital actions taken in this post-truth, fake news era, especially when you consider that the 'acknowledgement' of one's identity and love is at stake.

As a teacher, I face situations daily where I am called upon to be the facilitator of discussions around love and what it means for the young people in front of me. Teachers necessarily draw on their own experiences to inform their practice; their positionality often determines the way they frame conceptual thinking in their teaching space, the way they approach the analysis of a text, and the ideas they highlight to students. When I teach, I am at times aware that as a young man I loved to read and write – and yet, this was also a sense of torment for me. I was informed by my peers from a very early age that 'my handwriting was too neat for a boy'; I was pestered without end to 'go out and kick the footy' with my twin brother rather than read; at recess and lunch time, I was told I should be 'playing with the rest of the boys, because no one likes a nerd'. I saw my reputation and popularity amongst my peers plummet the more I engaged in these sorts of behaviours. As a young boy this was a deep source of shame for me. I didn't realise I wasn't being a boy properly; I didn't realise what the stakes were. My mother and grandmother had simply told me that if I read, my spelling would get better, and I didn't want

to be the worst at spelling in my class (which I was at a very real risk of becoming). I was stuck. The choice before me demanded I ask many questions: Do I feel shame for my literacy? Do I abandon my interests to appease others? Which one do I love more? Why can't it be both? This is a question that I am now attempting to answer through research. This is a question I still ask of myself at times: in an arena of possibility, such as a school, at an age of possibility, such as adolescence, why was there a gendered social narrative that told me what I could and couldn't love? And why did I listen? My secondary schooling is now a distant memory; it whizzed by fifteen years ago. However, it is interesting to think about what still occurs at the coalface of teaching and in school playgrounds, to consider how the duality of pleasure and pain plays out, and to consider how love manifests in the minds and hearts of students alongside the formative experiences they have in their classrooms. One might also consider the invisible powers at work here – who are these unseen gatekeepers of gender, these secret authorities that grant permission on who and what we love as young people? How do teachers of English, as arbiters of expression, contribute to these notions within young people? Where are these sites of negotiation or infiltration located? When do they lead to affirmations of love, and when do they lead to pain and rejection? The wider cultural narratives of both love and gender I experienced as a student are still visible within my classrooms. I see a gendered narrative that is intrinsically bound with notions of the self, play out in the interactions and performance of literacy. It appears in everyday interactions; moments that are transformed into high-stakes identity transactions take place when students performing their literacy are at times ashamed to own and share what they love.

Within the classrooms of today, there lies a unique and transformative site where both teachers and students come together both to learn, but also to navigate social tensions, identity paradigms and social processes. If English teachers consider that 'within classrooms settings, social representations such as gender are actively reconstructed through the activities of teachers and students; they are not given' (Ivinson & Murphy, 2006, p. 92), then teachers do bear some responsibility to ease this process for those whose love, identity, or lived experience is not privileged. The complexities of a modern classroom are then layered with uses of technology. The students of today are 'digital natives'; daily interactions and experiences

are increasingly enhanced through or experienced on a digital device that extend the sites of these negotiations into virtual reality. As such, tensions that arise in the moment of the classroom are now captured across a network of small glowing echo chambers that reverberate in the pockets of students long after the teaching session has come to an end. This then holds some complex implications for 21st century students whose love is marginalised, as it does for their teachers. There exists now for students an everlasting permanent digital record of their gender performance, a virtual record of their formative years, one that remains open and exposed to the scrutiny of those who see themselves as the enforcers of these unwritten expectations. For teachers, the issues of equity and equality intertwine, with the stakes for students and our own facilitation reaching beyond our classrooms and lingering well into the future.

When I sat down to write this piece, I found I was filled to the brim with things to say, yet simultaneously struck dumb with how to express it. What could I, as a married, cisgendered (a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their sex described at birth), middle-class, white, educated, straight, male possibly have to say on this topic? Could I contribute without appropriating the deep and personal struggle of those who do not experience the privilege I enjoy when I express my love? I was stuck, fixed in a position between affirmation and negotiation of what seemed the 'best' way to contribute. What platform should I speak from? As an ally of LGBTQI+ people? Do I establish my credibility and open-mindedness through political and personal exposition? Do I state emphatically how much I enjoy *Will and Grace* and *Ru Paul's Drag Race*? No. I resolved my concerns by considering love as a verb. It is an action, something we do. Something that *I* do. Something I do each day when I see my wife, when I call my parents, when I meet my friends, when I get a new book in the post, when I walk into my English or Literature classroom, I do the same thing: I love.

My hope for the future is to foster a culture within my classrooms where, when students hear the cry 'Here I am', they are met, not with a high-stakes politicised angst, but with a unified chorus of 'Here you are'.

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# Queer Pedagogies and the University English Classroom: Reflections on Teaching E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*

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**Abstract:** In this reflection I discuss my experiences teaching E.M. Forster's canonical novel *The Longest Journey* (1907) to third-year university students. I argue that there are a multitude of benefits in employing queer pedagogies for teaching English. I consider how queer pedagogies might go beyond questions of representations and visibility and promote 'queer' methodologies for reading that are diverse, student-centred, focus on questions rather than answers.

In this brief reflection, I draw on my experiences teaching E.M. Forster's canonical novel *The Longest Journey* (1907) in a higher education context. The text provides a case study for exploring the potential critical benefits of queer pedagogies for teaching English across the university curriculum. What is my role in exploring representations of queer identities and what is the value of queer pedagogies in the classroom? As David Rhodes (2009) notes, educational institutions have too often been sites of exclusions and indeed discrimination for same-sex attracted youth. Rhodes reminds us:

The extent to which imaginative literature can have an impact on negative attitudes to same-sex attraction may perhaps be minimal. However, books can stimulate discussion where otherwise there may be silence; make the invisible, visible ... (2009, p. 43).

But I also want to consider how queer pedagogies might go beyond representations and visibility and promote 'queer' methodologies for reading that are diverse, student-centred, and focus on questions rather than answers.

## Queering the canon

In 2017, I taught E.M. Forster's novel *The Longest Journey* for the first time in my third-year, core literature subject, 'Canon to Contemporary'. The aim of 'Canon to Contemporary' is to introduce students to some of the most well-known and regarded authors from the foundational eras of the rise of the novel. We read Forster alongside Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1894), and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Through the study of these texts, the subject aims for students to learn about the development of the novel and long essay and consider the ways in which these texts engage with different literary genres. We considered how these texts respond to the social contexts in which they were produced and examined the representation of education, coming-of-age, reading, gender, class inequality, religious institutions, and love and marriage (and morals). In 'Canon

to Contemporary,' students engaged in formal literary analysis and with literary criticism.

I taught *The Longest Journey* over two weeks (two x two hour seminars). The theme of education runs through the subject's core, and as most of our students are education students (taking this subject as part of their disciplinary English major), there is broad appeal for reflecting on the ongoing relevance of these texts and the representations that they offer.

Forster's lesser-known novel might seem a 'queer' choice. Though not as well-known as *A Passage to India* (1924) or *Howard's End* (1910), it is an excellent and accessible text, and the significance for us in this subject is that it (like the other novels) has education as a central theme. It is the story of (Frederick) 'Rickie' Elliot: his education at Cambridge in the early 20th century, his relationship with a small circle of friends and family, and his life after Cambridge. A *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development, the text presents Rickie's 'longest journey'—as he passes through a short life, too often filled with tragedies, confusions and failures.

As a scholar of contemporary literatures (mainly non-fiction), teaching the canon does not always come naturally to me. As much as I love the challenge of taking myself and students outside of our context and reading texts for difference and difficulty, and see this as a crucial part of learning about English and its traditions, I struggle with the heterogeneity than often accompanies canonical literature. As a female educator from a working-class background, I value the ease with which I find gender, sexual, class, and cultural diversities represented in contemporary non-fictions, and the multitude of voices present. Our students are a diverse population; many are first-in-family to attend university; many are women; and our classrooms can be culturally diverse. According to The Australian Human Rights Commission (2014), 11% of Australians identify as LGBTI. So, it is likely that our student population is reflective of the broader community. Our classrooms are potentially a broad cultural mix and we need to be mindful and dynamic in approaching these fast shifting cultures.

As Kaplan (1987) observes, there is a queer subtext in *The Longest Journey*. Rickie's disability (he has a club foot) has been interpreted as (a heavy-handed, awkward) symbol of Rickie's homosexuality (and Forster himself was grappling with his own sexuality at the time of writing the novel). Many of my students suggested that Rickie seems to be in love with his close friend Stewart Ansell, and further, that Rickie's father

might also have been gay. For these reasons the novel offers an opportunity to apply queer pedagogies in the English classroom: to disrupt heteronormative readings and ask for re-readings of canonical texts. In her essay 'Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing', Luhmann (1998) explains that a queer pedagogy is about more than the inclusion of queer texts into a curriculum. In showing students the queerness in the canon, we are not normalising or defining queerness which, as Britzman (1998), Luhmann (1998) and Shlasko (2005) point out, can be highly problematic. As Luhmann (1998) notes, queerness is unknowable and shifting, so the very idea of authentic or representative queerness is negated in queer pedagogies. Simply exposing students to representations of queerness has little effect on understanding (Britzman, 1998). Queer pedagogy is about teaching methods for reading queer content, and about queer learning and teaching and the queering of pedagogy more generally. It is about curiosity, reflexivity, and a wide interpretive lens that is mindful of its own limitations.

So, queer pedagogy urges me to do more in my teaching. As an academic, who happens to be a lesbian, I am often assumed to know much more than I do about queer theory; though I am well-read across queer literatures, I am much less accomplished as a theorist. So, teaching queer texts provides an opportunity for me to 'step up'. What follows is how I tried to do this when teaching Forster.

### Queering assessment

Shlasko (2005) argues that 'mainstream pedagogy seems unable to do justice to queer topics' (p. 127). When including queer texts in a curriculum, queer pedagogy offers a go-to methodology that aims to be critical, curious and inclusive, and such an approach has the potential to be student-centred and focussed on student empowerment. Queer pedagogy is not interested in traditional transmission models of learning. Instead, teaching is approached as a series of questions (not answers) about knowledge (Luhmann, 1998). This approach can allow us to face and support students who do not, cannot, or will not understand a literary text.

My students encounter Forster in weeks nine and ten of an eleven-week subject. *The Longest Journey* is the third novel that the students read, and thus classroom conditions are ripe for student-centred, student-led activities. The cornerstone of each of these two weeks

is in-class group work: the first week is low-stakes group work; the second week's task is an in-class group assessment task. Group assessments can be problematic (particularly when students' commitments and contributions are unequal) but they also have great potential as pedagogical tools for students to gain valuable insights into the knowledge, perspectives and scholarly practices of their peers—and thus potentially align with queer pedagogies. These learning tasks are inspired by queer pedagogy because they are open-ended, student-centred tasks, tasks that attempt close, nuanced readings of gender and sexuality in the novel. The first task asks students to choose what knowledge to share about a particular aspect of the novel.

The results of this task are below (Figures 2 and 3). At this point in the semester I am in the fortunate position of having most students completing the primary and secondary readings (they have learnt from the way I taught the first two texts that the assessment offers no place to hide!). What's important about this task is that all students are compelled to contribute. There is an expectation that they will each approach the whiteboard when it is their group's turn, and work out where to place their pieces on the jigsaw-puzzle-style set up. The effect is the layering of observations and

### Week 8: Small group task:

The students will spend 10 minutes in small groups talking before (using different coloured whiteboard pens), coming up and contributing to brainstorming on the whiteboard:

Group 1: plots a timeline

Group 2: adds information about major characters

Group 3: adds information about the novel's major themes

Group 4: adds information about symbolism

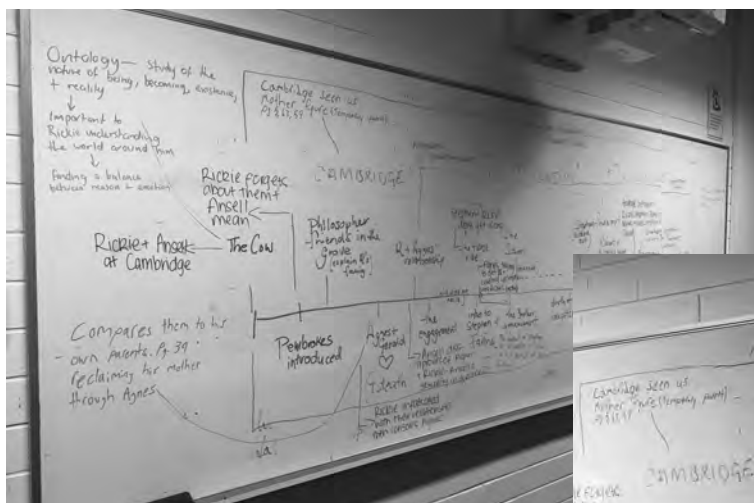
Group 5: adds three major quotes

This activity should layer and connect knowledge on the whiteboard.

Figure 1. Week 8 whiteboard task

critical interpretations upon the observations and critical observations of their classmates, making connections that they might not otherwise have done had the task not been so interactive. This active-learning approach attempts to dismantle the student/teacher binary and all evidence and interpretation is privileged by the task set up.

Representations of queerness were raised across the different groups, and several previously-quiet students came to life during this task. It occurred to me, that in



discussing Rickie's queerness, and indeed the possibility of his father's, this might have been the first time some of our students had encountered and been able to discuss non-heteronormative representations in literary texts during their studies. The pedagogical approach fostered a safe space for the discussion of these issues.

At the end of this task, every student in the class took a photograph of the whiteboard with their mobile phone camera: they saw their knowledge creation as valued and valuable.

The second task, completed the following week, was entirely centred on questions with the students choosing questions to pose to the large class group. As Shlasko (2005) argues:

One way in which queer pedagogy might work ... is to focus on questions, rather than on answers ... a queer educator (that is, an educator engaging in a queer pedagogy) could ask instead, 'What questions shall we ask of each other? After we explore those questions, what will have been left out? And then, what other questions shall we ask of each other?' (p. 128)

Though such approaches might not be characteristic of queer pedagogies alone, many of the theorists of queerness and queer pedagogy suggest questions as a central methodology (Shlasko, 2005; Luhmann, 1998; Warner, 1993). Queering a text is about opening-up new interpretive possibilities, identifying potential gaps in knowledge, as well as challenging heteronormative readings. So, as the students' research within the text, as they find evidence of Rickie's and Rickie's father's sexuality they are queering the text. But further, returning to Luhmann's idea that meaning is unknowable and shifting, in encouraging students to ask questions, sometimes at the expense of receiving knowledge, we are also queering interpretation.

For queer pedagogy to gain traction, we need to 'queer' assumptions about learning (Britzman, 1998). Again, the week 9 task (like the one the week before) dismantled the teacher/student hierarchy, giving the students the floor. Their role was questions, and while they were also asked to develop responses, the key goal was to develop questions and facilitate responses. The teacher acted as facilitator/encourager from the sidelines, inviting students to develop questions or follow them up. For instance, the students were encouraged (by me) to address representations of gender, sexuality and power in their discussion, and in turn, encouraged each other to consider potential gaps in knowledge (on gender, sexuality, and power) around the text.

### **Week 9: Group assessment:**

**Short Task 3 The Longest Journey: In-class group task (Week 9) 500 words; worth 10%**

Your small group will be given a section from the novel or one of the secondary readings and you will be asked to develop two-three robust discussion questions to pose to the large group. Your small group will lead the discussion for part of the class this week.

Groups should work on their questions for 20 minutes (an on-line time will be displayed for your information). The remaining class time will be devoted to the student-group-led discussion. Each group will have 10 minutes to present their questions and develop discussion.

The students do not need to submit notes for this assignment; you tutor will use the rubric to mark the assessment on the spot.

Tips for writing good questions:

Questions should be open-ended

Questions should be short and not complicated

You should anticipate responses to your questions to facilitate good discussion

It is your responsibility to keep the discussion going for 10 minutes

*Figure 4. Week 9 Assessment task*

The students' questions were consistently excellent and no groups struggled to make the time. Because this task had been framed as 'questioning' students felt empowered to run with ideas and observations that they might not have in regular class discussions. There was an expectation that all students speak—ask a question or part of a question, or prompt discussion and there were no weak links. I scaffolded the task by suggesting that it was okay (indeed, productive) for students to talk about aspects of the text that they did not understand or found difficult, and many of the questions reflected this. Shlasko's (2005) directive is particularly useful within the context of English studies where the purpose is to equip students with a variety of critical lenses through which to explore literary texts:

Queer pedagogy wants us to be confused. By engaging with complexity, queer pedagogy hopes to overwhelm our capacity to 'get it', to bring us to a point where we are absolutely ignorant, having neither knowledge nor resistance to knowledge ... Lacking answers, we are able to embrace questions, engage with multiple understandings, and imagine new possibilities (p. 129).



**Conclusions: risks, benefits and finding balance**

Allen (2015) argues that queer pedagogies can be risky because they ask students to embrace feelings of discomfort and confusion in their learning, which is the opposite of institutional demands for 'satisfaction' and 'happiness' in courses. This is a useful point of caution: we do not want our students' reception of complexity and confusion to result in disempowerment, or a sense that there is no point of accomplishment in reading and interpretation. Otherwise we might lose them. Finding the right balance is crucial in deploying queer pedagogies and I think that those learning activities I have cited above had a good balance of ideological open-endedness, but supported feelings of active engagement, productivity and achievement for the students.

The tasks were successful because they gave the students opportunities to engage collaboratively with the text with the goal of producing ideas and information in an active reading space. These tasks were about students seeking knowledge, not as finite answers to present back, but as part of a range of possible answers and knowledge that we might assemble on a text. The tasks allowed for and promoted diverse meaning-making around interpretations of relationships and events in *The Longest Journey*, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality.

**Note**

- 1 The topics posed were as follows:

**Topic 1:**

There are various deaths in *The Longest Journey*. Develop 2-3 questions to pose to the group that explore the significance of this theme and its representation.

**Topic 2:**

Develop 2-3 questions about the relationship between Rickie and Ansell. At least one of these questions should focus on a close reading of a passage/quote from the novel.

**Topic 3:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions on the reading by Brian May 'Modernism and Other Modes in Forster's *The Longest Journey*'.

**Topic 4:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions on the reading by Carola M. Kaplan 'Absent Father, Passive Son: The Dilemma of Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*'.

**Topic 5:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions on Frederick P.W. McDowell's 'Forster's Many-Faceted Universe: Idea and Paradox in *The Longest Journey*'.

**Topic 6:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions about the ending of *The Longest Journey*. At least one of these questions should focus on a close reading of a passage/quote from the novel.

**Topic 7:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions re what you consider the climactic event in *The Longest Journey*. At least one of these questions should focus on a close reading of a passage/quote from the novel.

**Topic 8:**

Develop 2-3 discussion questions re what you consider the core moral or message of *The Longest Journey*. At least one of these questions should focus on a close reading of a passage/quote from the novel.

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# The Job Interview

CeCe Edwards

I wait in the car, hoping no one important sees me sitting here anxiously early for my interview. A familiar closeted feeling surrounds me. The sun through the windscreen is hot and oppressive. I should wind down the windows, let some air in, but I don't want to draw attention to myself. As if the glass were enough to stop people seeing right through me.

I remember four years ago, sitting in this very same school carpark, early for the first day of my first practicum placement, wondering what my mentor would be like.

*Would I tell her? I had wondered. Would she be able to guess?*

The same indecision suffocates me now. Ultimately, I had opted to keep my secrets throughout my first prac; I was inexperienced and unsure of how I would be received. I was at a religious school and completely at the mercy of my mentor teacher: if she failed me on my prac, I might not finish my teaching degree at all.

It didn't seem to be the kind of school that would display posters like 'Closets are for clothes!', like those in the school in which I'm currently working.

The posters are meant to be encouraging but they seem to be more concerned with pushing a political agenda than the wellbeing of any individual queer young person. It makes me think of an article I read in my uni days. Rasmussen (2004) describes how 'coming out' has been held up not only as a positive but as a downright imperative action. Just like me, she questions this. Is it universally empowering? Appropriate? Necessary?

When you think about it, it's absurd to imply that such a personal choice could have generalisable effects.

Before my interview, I think, It's not always the best move to be Out. There is no formula for what will be achieved and what will be risked when someone does or does not reveal their sexual identity to others.

As I get out of the car, I brush down my ironed pants, adjust my blouse. I don't normally wear *blouses*. I wear T-shirts, or collared shirts, or singlets. But I want to look ... feminine. The blouse has a blue floral pattern, matching my dangling earrings. Feminine, respectable, 'normal'. It's probably naive to hope these details will distract the panel from my shaved head.

I had long hair for that first prac. The students had treated me like a teacher. What a buzz. I felt like I was performing. Every classroom is a stage. All the teachers merely players.

I had performed Teacher well right up until the last week, when for a moment I forgot the role I was playing.

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It had been the wind-down week, the no-man's land between final exams and holidays. The Year 11 class were watching the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

In one scene the heroine told her fiancé that a wedding was meant to be euphoric, but their wedding would not be a happy occasion for her parents if they couldn't get married in their church. The hero converted so they could get married in the traditional Big Fat Greek style, and the story moved on.

I fought back tears during this scene, thinking of my own wedding. I thought of the letter my aunt had sent me, telling me she could not attend as she did not believe in gay marriage, telling me that homosexuals have a 'mis-wiring of the brain'.

I thought of my other aunt, who doesn't understand homosexuality but who was there

anyway, because she understands family. I thought of the hours my partner and I spent writing our vows to each other, choosing a song to play, deciding what parts of a 'traditional' ceremony were important to us.

I pressed pause on the video. My mentor looked up from her clipboard. I had a story I wanted to tell.

'My grandmother got engaged just before the war', I told the class. They blinked at me in confusion, their eyes adjusting to the dark room after the brightness of the TV screen. 'Not to my grandfather, Bill, but to another man, Henry. I think she always loved my grandfather, but he was already married. Anyway, the two men went off to war: the man my grandmother loved, and the man she was engaged to.

'While away, Bill learned that his wife had been unfaithful. When he returned, he divorced her.

'My grandmother swore there had never been anything between her and Bill before that moment, but now they confessed their love for each other. My grandmother broke off her engagement to Henry, and pledged herself to Bill, my grandfather.

'Problem was, divorce was a sin, and Bill was a divorcee. When they eventually found a church that would marry them, my grandmother's mother refused to give her blessing. More than that, she refused to attend the wedding and swore she would never forgive her daughter.

'On the morning of her wedding day, my grandmother woke to find a box beside her bed. It was filled with every gift she had ever given to her mother: they had been rejected, and she had been disowned.'

The students, silent, stared at me, waiting for the climax of the story, waiting for some redeeming act from my great grandmother. That's not how the story went, though.

I had no ending that I could tell them; no ending that would not throw open the closet door and reveal my secrets.

The tightness in my chest was as much a longing to be honest as it was a terror of exposure. I longed to read them the letter my grandmother had sent me, telling her story after I invited her to my own wedding:

Even as I write, the hate shown by many comes back – it's destroying. We had a wonderful 55 years, fought of course & talked & were normal but we LOVED each other. Thank you for listening I only wish love for you & if I could stand with a shield to protect you against nastiness I would. They just don't understand. We have FAITH HOPE & LOVE and the greatest of these things is LOVE and you both cling to that.

I had kept that part of me closeted for the last three weeks, wearing a Teacher Mask over my Lesbian Self. How could I finish the story without taking off the mask?

'I have a wish for you all', I told the students. It felt inadequate compared to my grandmother's words. 'I wish that you will be able to marry whoever you want to.'

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I'm sitting in a conference room before three interviewers. Their demeanour is friendly and professional. They Look Like Teachers.

I straighten my floral blouse, adjust a dangling earring. I hope I look like a Teacher, too, and not like a dyke in drag.

I'm nervous about how I will be received, given the plebiscite.

My news feed has been glutted with opinion pieces and personal stories and photographs of angry slogans painted on mini-vans. I read an article yesterday suggesting that Anglican institutions might fire employees who had a same-sex marriage, should the laws be changed.

I feel like the debate has painted a neon sign on my forehead. My paranoia has been growing for weeks, as I imagine everyone watching me, as if my good behaviour alone will be responsible for the outcome of the vote. Strangers who see me shopping with my not-wife are assessing me, adding my every observable action to their internal 'vote yes' or 'vote no' tally.

*Calm down, I berate myself. They probably don't care about all that.*

'So, you were here for your first practicum. What makes you want to apply for a permanent position now?'

'I feel like I could fit in here', I lie.

I feel like I can be somebody else here. At my current school my identity is open like a wound that won't heal. I want to redefine who I am, at least in the eyes of my students. I want to go somewhere I can wear a mask and play a new role.

'Tell us about a time when you handled a difficult situation.'

I remember a relief lesson from a few years back. After prac I'd landed a job in the public system teaching a handful of English classes, but this day I was taking a group of Year 9s I'd never met before.

As the class began, a student passing through the corridor yelled something into the classroom.

'That teacher's a dyke!'

The students in the room started laughing.

I began handing out worksheets and some of the students started asking me questions.

'What nationality are you, miss?'

'Australian. Most of my ancestors were from England, Ireland, places like that. What nationality are you?'

'Do you have children, miss?'

'Not yet.'

'Are you pregnant, miss?'

'No.'

'Are you married, miss?'

'Yes.'

'I have a partner.'

'What's your partner's name, miss?'

'Enough about me, concentrate on Shakespeare.'

They continued to dig. Bit by bit they worked it out. I began to overhear sniggered conversations. Three students started arguing amongst themselves about alternative methods of having a baby, something about 'bull's sperm'.

The precarious order collapsed into raucous chaos. I imagined how the faculty head would berate me. I should not have allowed the students to ask me personal questions. I should have told them nothing about myself, and certainly not anything relating to my sexuality. It's just asking for trouble, it's none of their business, it's not relevant to the lesson. Shut it down; don't allow it.

I hadn't wanted to lie to these students; I hadn't wanted to lock myself into a tiny room with the brooms and buckets and the musty smell of secrets. But I hadn't wanted to come out to them, either.

There is a difference between 'coming out' and 'being out'. I relate to Khayatt (1999, p. 110) when she writes,

Whenever I use a declarative statement to proclaim my sexuality unequivocally ... it seems to end the exchange. We move onto another subject, closing this one forever. I find that by assuming instead that they are aware of my sexual orientation, it does not focus menacing attention on itself but remains a natural part of the conversation.

Being out – 'assuming they are aware' – is not an exerted effort to either hide one's identity or flaunt it, but to talk freely about one's life as if it were not exotic, perverted, or any more interesting than a heterosexual's life.

In my normal classes, I assumed they were aware. I was Out without Coming Out.

It hadn't been a problem. But here in this space that wasn't my space, the students who were not my students could not see that I was Out, and certainly could not see that I was Proud. They could smell the closet on me. They could see the string holding my Teacher Mask on. They couldn't see what was behind it, only that it was hiding something.

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'How do you ensure that every student feels accepted?'

What does that even mean, to make everyone feel accepted?

Do we mean that We allow Others to sit in Our spaces? That we open the closet at the back of the classroom and take out the uniforms, the masks, that will help Them blend in and feel safe?

I wonder if this is really acceptance: to allow someone to exist without acknowledging that they do. It reminds me of something Rich (1984, p. 198) wrote:

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game of mirrors. It takes some strength of soul – and not just individual strength, but collective understanding – to resist this void, this non-being into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

When I had first read these words, I had thought of myself. But since the plebiscite, the quote makes me think of Anne.

We had coaxed a cautious friendship over two years, embracing each other's love of music and art and writing, but neither of us had yet dared to acknowledge how Other we each were.

Ironically, it was the plebiscite that brought it out, although neither one of us mentioned it by name, as if naming it would give it power.

It sat huge and ugly, pressing its grey wrinkled skin up against us in the confined space of my lounge-room.

I sensed Anne could feel it too. But unlike me she refused to look away from it; she gently traced the shape of it, inviting me to fill in the gaps.

'Everyone was always asking me what it was like to be Asian', Anne had said. 'Like that was the thing that set me apart. Everyone knows I'm Asian because that's the difference you can see. But even if I was with other Chinese kids, I looked like everyone else but I still



didn't *feel* completely accepted, because I was the only Christian.'

I'd never thought about how religion could make you the odd one out. I'd grown up believing Christian was the default.

*You're not meant to be the freak*, I felt like saying. *I'm the freak.*

'If I ever talked about it, you know, mentioned praying or church, everyone acted embarrassed. Like it was something I was meant to keep secret. The conversation would change. They'd make all these underhanded comments about what they assumed I believed. It made me want to hide it. Not because I was ashamed of who I was, but I was ashamed of who they *thought* I was. I wish I could have shown them some role model and said, hey! That awesome person: she's just like me. But I never really saw anyone else who was like me at all.'

I let out an embarrassed laugh. I thought of all the conversations I had been avoiding, scared she would subject me to sanctimonious judgement. Both of us had been hiding ourselves from the other, scared of causing offence, scared of suffering offence. Now Anne was inviting me out, taking off her mask, inviting me to do the same. *You're safe with me*, she seemed to be saying.

I felt like there was suddenly more air in the room, as if an unwelcome presence had realised it was not needed here and left without ceremony.

I suppose until then Anne and I had been friendly. Quietly, politely, tolerant of each other. Had we been accepting? How could we have been? Acceptance requires acknowledgement; openness.

What do I teach my students about acceptance if I wear a mask when I teach? What message am I sending them about how safe they are to be themselves?

'I always felt out of place in gay groups, too', I admitted to Anne. 'I only felt like I belonged when I was with other nerds.'

Anne wrinkled her nose in mock disgust. 'You're one of those?! Now you tell me! I'm sorry, but I don't know what my religion says about being friends with nerds.'

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'What draws you to English teaching?'

*English is who I am*, I want to say. But I don't have a pithy way to explain what that means. The question makes me think of Moje (2008), who talks about how teachers 'enact the identities' of their discipline. Science teachers are Scientists. History teachers are Historians.

What are English teachers? Authors? Poets? Readers? Readers, perhaps, but not just of writing.

I think of who I am in my English classes; my real English classes, where I have allowed myself to be no more than and no less than an English teacher.

In last year's Year 10 class we talked about Hamlet, and one girl shared her father's struggle with cancer, and I shared my father's loss to it, and we cried together as we talked about ghosts and things left unsaid. We talked about Claudius and I said how my uncle had remarked that he was sure my father would be appalled that I was marrying a woman, and my mother had retorted that my father had been overjoyed that I was finally bringing someone home with whom he could have a beer and watch the football. We talked about Ophelia and we wondered if Hamlet had really loved her and we wondered about love.

In that classroom we told stories and laughed and cried and the curriculum was a friend we played hide and seek with, giggling in the bushes while Themes and Essay Structure and Apostrophes stumbled about the room looking under chairs and behind tables.

The closet door was open and costumes and masks spilled out onto the floor and we played dress-up and truth or dare but most of all we told stories and we were ourselves.

In this moment, with the question 'why English?' hanging in the air, I think, *because I cannot be a mirror to all my students – their story is not my story – but in English I can make a space where, instead of helping people to blend in, we can play with twenty or thirty or a thousand mirrors.*

'Look!' I imagine myself exclaiming to my students. 'There you are! You exist. I know you do.'

And I exist as well.

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'Can you talk about how you relate to students?'

At the end of prac, the students had given me a book. The inside cover was filled with messages. One stood out in particular:

'I'll never forget the story about your grandmother. Thank you for telling it.'

Those students would be old enough now to vote in the plebiscite. How would they vote? Would they vote at all?

Would it have made a difference, if I had been fully open with them? Some academics imply the only reason to come out is for political purposes. I remember the phrase Rasmussen (2004) used: 'destabilising heterosexuality' (p. 149).

The thought makes me feel ill: that I would be covertly manipulating my students for some selfish political agenda.

I don't want to destabilise anything. I don't have an agenda. Or at least, not a Gay Agenda. My agenda is mostly concerned with getting the kids in bed early enough to watch an episode of *Doctor Who* with my not-wife before we both fall asleep.

But I can't help but wonder ... do those students know what that story was really about? For just a moment, in the dim light of their English classroom, did they see something of the real me?

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I didn't get the job. I had worn an Experienced Teacher Mask but the panellists were unconvinced by my performance.

I'll return to my old school, where the students are less well-behaved, but at least I can be myself. In all my inept, authentic, mask-less glory.

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# PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

## Introduction

### *Dangerous Lessons: Sexuality Issues in the English Classroom*

It is one of the truisms about being an LGBTI person that one doesn't come out just once and for all, but one comes out many times and in many different ways, reflecting the different contexts in which one lives one's life. This article was important for me at the time as one of my many comings-out. It was based on a workshop I did at the AATE conference in Sydney in January 1995, and that was a quite significant coming-out too, since it was the first time I had openly acknowledged being gay in the national English-teaching context, in which I was a moderately well-known figure. I had found doing the workshop quite liberating and the positive response I got quite exhilarating. Publishing the article was the natural follow-on from this.

The article's aim was to clear the ground for classroom work on sexuality, largely by clarifying terminology and positioning the work within a critical literacy framework, suggesting the kind of outcomes being aimed at. Clarifying the terminology might seem rather too basic to bother with in an article for English teachers, but so much of the discussion around sexuality was (and still is) bedevilled by the slipperiness with which concepts merge into and are substituted for each other that it seemed important. I still think it is.

There are aspects of the article that, more than twenty years later, will strike some people as strange. We have moved on in many ways. AIDS, for example, was still very dominant in people's minds at the time, so I addressed it in the article, whereas I doubt I would mention it if I were writing such an article today, not because it is not still a problem, but because, with the advances in medication, it is no longer a life-and-death matter and has receded in the public consciousness.

The exclusive focus in the article on homosexuality (with a nod to bisexuality) will also strike some as very old-fashioned in these days when the LGBTI acronym rolls so easily off the tongue or has the fingers dancing so nimbly across the keyboard. If I were writing the article today, I would certainly use the acronym (or initialism, if one wants to be pedantic). However I would have a section on it when discussing terminology since I am not entirely comfortable with the way in which it is often used. The acronym became more or

less standard in Queer Studies because of the entirely justified wish to be inclusive of transgender and intersex people. However, I fear that, in general use, it has become little more than the polite and acceptable way to refer to homosexuality. In other words, transgender and intersex people, rather than being acknowledged and affirmed, must often feel themselves occluded by how the term is used.

It is also important to note that the term tends to erase highly significant structural differences. Whereas lesbian, gay and bisexual people are all defined by being attracted to people of the same sex, there is a strong biological/anatomical element involved in defining transgender and intersex people (differently in each case). This can make it difficult to say much about *all* LGBTI people without producing distortion about one or more of the groups, or without engaging in endless qualifications.

The article, not surprisingly, takes an anti-discriminatory stance, and sees classroom work as predominantly focused on undercutting discrimination. If I were writing the article today, I would probably be a little dismissive of anti-discriminatory work, seeing it as useful but insufficient and too inclined to see homosexuality as the problem. (There is already a hint of this in the article.) I would be much more concerned to explore ways of affirming LGBTI experience as in every way as rich and diverse as heterosexual experience. The same-sex marriage debate has been generally positive in its affirmation of the right of LGBTI people to have their relationships publicly recognised and valued in the same way as those of heterosexual people. However, it must be noted that there are still a lot of people out there who do not recognise the equal strength and validity of LGBTI relationships, who see them as lesser, or as a kind of playing at being heterosexual. (This may be so even among people who voted in favour of marriage equality.) English classrooms need to play a central part in developing an understanding of the equal seriousness, excitement, satisfaction and life-defining power of LGBTI love.

Ray Misson, August 2018

# PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

## Dangerous Lessons: Sexuality Issues in the English Classroom

Ray Misson

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**Abstract:** Homosexuality has a special relationship with literacy, albeit a negative one. When Lord Alfred Douglas wrote his poem concerning 'the Love that dare not speak its name', and Oscar Wilde memorably took up the phrase at his trial, the idea was not new (see Sedgwick 1990, pp. 202–3). Homosexuality had long been seen as something that could not be let into language, and certainly as something that could not be named as love. To counter discrimination, the word needs to be spoken, in the English classroom as elsewhere, and the condition of its common silencing investigated.

English teachers tend to be the ones who take on board social issues – feminist issues, issues of ethnicity and other kinds of social inequity and they are increasingly taking on questions revolving around discrimination on grounds of sexuality. Why the English classroom is such an important site for engaging with such issues is, of course, because of the centrality of language in constructing ways of thinking, ways of feeling, ways of being. Work on texts can lead us to see how our thinking and feelings are constructed, and, to a degree, can give us control over them.

### Setting the terms

Because sexuality is both such an important area in the construction of human identity and an area which has been kept out of mainstream language to a large extent, it's important to clarify the terms in which to discuss it, so I want to spend time on some basic distinctions.

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between heterosexism and homophobia. Heterosexism is the assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexuality, and that homosexuality is deviant from it and therefore lesser. Homophobia is the hatred of homosexuality and homosexuals. (The distinction parallels that between sexism and misogyny in terms

of gender.) 'Homophobia' is often used to cover both phenomena, but the distinction is worth making, because people can be heterosexist without being homophobic, and the difference is not simply one of degree.

Then there are three crucial terms: gender, sex and sexuality. They are inevitably closely linked (and confused), but it is worthwhile separating them out and insisting on the differences, at least initially.

### Gender

Gender is the socially constructed sense of what it is to be a man or woman. It is what we are referring to when we talk about masculine or feminine behaviour.

### Sex

Sex is the general clearing-house term in this area and can mean many things, which is why there is a lot of confusion around it. I want to separate out four meanings:

- (i) the biological distinction between male and female;
- (ii) 'the instinct or attraction drawing one sex towards another, or its manifestations in life and conduct' (Macquarie, 1991);  
(It is worth noting the heterosexism in this definition: homosexual people apparently don't experience sexual attraction as heterosexual people do.)
- (iii) 'sexually stimulating or suggestive behaviour there is too much sex on TV' (Macquarie, 1991);
- (iv) sexual activity (as in 'have sex').

### Sexuality

There is a broad meaning of 'sexuality' referring to 'sexual character; possession of sex' (Macquarie, 1991), but the meaning in which I want to use the term refers to the inclination to be attracted sexually either to



people of the opposite sex or of one's own sex or both. This is the distinction between heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality. The terms 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual preference' are sometimes used, but both can be objected to, the former because it suggests a genetic programming, the second because it suggests a shallow and changeable taste. This configuration of terms is subject to much confusion, and if we are to consider the area properly, there are important distinctions to be made:

#### **Gender/Sex (i)**

The distinction between socially-determined gender and biological sex has been a vital and powerful one in the development of feminism. It brings up the whole essentialist/constructivist debate, that debate as to whether particular characteristics are of the 'essence' of a person (in this case, biologically determined), or whether they are socially and culturally constructed. That debate has been influential in Gay and Lesbian Theory too, although Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has brilliantly and convincingly argued that it has probably outlived its usefulness, and in many ways avoids the important issues (Sedgwick 1990, pp. 40–44).

#### **Sex (iv)/ Sexuality**

The debate here is an important one for such things as Equal Opportunity legislation. It hinges on whether sexuality is a matter of particular genital acts, or whether it is to do with the whole identity of the person. Michel Foucault famously argued that homosexuality was a nineteenth-century invention, meaning that before the nineteenth century there was no conception of someone who indulged in same-sex sexual acts as a particular kind of person (Foucault 1981, p. 43). Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that, in the last years of the twentieth century, sexuality is perceived as a matter of identity.

#### **Gender/Sexuality**

It is thought that there is a congruence between sexuality and gender characteristics. The heterosexual male is thought to have the 'right' masculine gender qualities, the gay man is 'feminine'. Needless to say this is not necessarily true. As pleasing as it may be to think that all gay men are sensitive, nurturing and artistic. Sexuality is undoubtedly used to police gender. If a boy is not seen as masculinely tough, he will be denounced as gay. We need to break this nexus, every bit as much for the heterosexual boys and girls who do not meet

traditional gender expectations, as for the homosexual children who are being daily discriminated against.

Gender seems to be a safe topic these days. Virtually everyone will openly discuss gender issues. I even think that the feminist movement has made tremendous advances in people's awareness of gender inequality, although there is, of course, still a long way to go to an equitable society in gender terms, and the lessons have to be learnt over and over again. There remains a lot of uneasiness, however, when it comes to sex in those second two meanings and to sexuality.

One can perhaps see why, particularly in the context of education, when one considers some of the other concepts that are bound up with them: Love, Romance, Family, Morality, Childhood, Adolescence, AIDS. Let us examine this network.

#### **Love/Romance/Family**

The great master narrative of relationships in modern Western society is that a person falls in love, which leads to romance, which leads to sex, which leads to family. Often when this story is told, the sex bit tends to be passed over quickly as something which paradoxically is the pay-off for the ideal and ethereal love and romance (it's what it's all been leading to, it is the climax, so to speak) but which is really rather physiological and sweaty and unethereal in itself. Adults tend to think young people are better off wafting in the ethereal rather than thinking of the physiological. Confrontation with the paradox is avoided by taking the emphasis off sex as much as possible. (It's actually far more complicated than I have just suggested in that socially that telling of the narrative is basically seen as the girl's narrative: the boy's narrative focuses far more on the sex, and the aim is to get the sex without the trappings (the traps) of love, romance and family. The attempt to avoid the narrative, however, still takes it for granted as the standard.)

Now, this narrative of love, romance and family is, in the end, very much a heterosexual narrative, if only because a homosexual couple cannot procreate (even though they can create a family). The story thus cannot have its usual ending. I did a session at a conference on Young Adult Literature on books dealing with homosexuality (Misson 1994), and in the six books that I looked at with a significant homosexual couple in them, by the end, in three of them one of the partners was dead (Scopetone 1974; Chambers 1982; Gleitzman 1989), in two the couple were separated (Walker 1991; Taylor 1994), and only in one, *What Are*

*Ya?* (Pausacker 1987) is the relationship continuing, although there, the girl had two sexual partners whom she couldn't decide between. You might see this as very brave and realistic on Pausacker's part, or you might see, it is again an avoidance of suggesting that the standard narrative of settling into faithful monogamy can be fulfilled in homosexual terms.

You might also consider in this context *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. With that moving scene of the reading of the Auden poem, 'Stop all the clocks', it gives a strong image of a gay relationship such as we all too rarely get in a mainstream movie that isn't treating homosexuality as a major issue. However, I would suggest it's no accident that the gay relationship is celebrated in the funeral of the title, not one of the weddings. Homosexual relationships can much more comfortably be contemplated with sympathy when they are no longer existing: successful ongoing gay or lesbian relationships are much harder to bring into conventional narrative.

### **Morality**

Morality has of course always been very concerned with the regulation of sex, ever since Adam and Eve ate of the fruit and knew that they were naked. Sin is these days conceived primarily as sexual sin. The stress on sexual morality is probably so dominant because the sexual drives are very strong in human beings, and so they need the most solid policing, especially since protected consensual sex is not obviously disagreeable nor is it particularly likely to have disagreeable consequences. Again, homosexuality is inevitably treated badly, because morality is there to sustain that grand heterosexual narrative. There is no outcome for homosexuals that can be seen as moral, apart from lifelong repentance and celibacy, an option not many gay and lesbian people feel inclined to take up.

### **Childhood/Adolescence**

There is always a desire to protect the young from knowledge of difficult matters, and nowhere is this more apparent than when it comes to sex and sexuality. The transition from childhood to adolescence is, of course, seen largely in terms of a development of interest in sex. Childhood is perceived as a time of innocence that you would not want to sully with knowledge about sex. Adolescence is a time when you fear that sex is all they think about. Because it is a time of transition, too, a time when adult patterns are seen as being set, it is considered tremendously important that the

'right attitudes' are established. Thus any questions of sexuality will always be highly contentious when related to the adolescent years, apart from the concern that is often lurking just below the surface, that if you talk about it to them, they might go out and try it

The refusal to contemplate the coexistence of homosexuality and childhood results in the discriminatory provisions in some Equal Opportunity legislation, including that recently introduced in Victoria, which gives no protection to gay and lesbian teachers, indeed explicitly excludes them from protection.

### **AIDS**

Then there is AIDS, which is often seen as synonymous with homosexuality, at least in Westernised countries. It is only for the male homosexual community that it is a major problem, of course: lesbians are one of the least at-risk groups in the community. (I think it was k.d. lang who I first heard make the now-common point that if AIDS is God's vengeance on gays, it proves that She loves lesbians an awful lot.) Of course, AIDS is not only a gay concern, and it is dangerous to think of it as such. AIDS has been a terrible disaster, with the personal devastation it has brought and in its public use as a deterrent to sex, and an excuse for gay-bashing. It has, however, had one small positive effect, albeit negligible in the face of the devastation, of bringing a lot of issues about sexuality into the public domain and creating a sense of urgency about the need for young people to have responsible information about sex.

AIDS is an excuse, a lever to get sexuality onto the classroom agenda, but the work one can do on AIDS itself is severely limited, and an emphasis on it can be distorting in two ways. The first is that, although there is no doubt that AIDS grips the imagination and makes some talk about sexuality permissible, breaking the nexus between AIDS and male homosexuality as soon as possible is an important move, both for homosexuals, since it disadvantages them, and for the whole community, since it is worth noting that, considered globally, AIDS is not particularly a gay phenomenon.

The second point is the one already foreshadowed about lesbianism. Sexuality studies in the popular mind tend to be related to AIDS. They are also often seen as a strand of masculine studies. Certainly male homosexuality seems to be a bigger issue in masculine studies than lesbianism is in feminist studies, which suggests that the gender/sexuality nexus is particularly significant in policing male identity. There is an

inherent (indeed rampant) sexism in this. Lesbians work under the double disadvantage of homosexuality and being female: the invisibility of the female is compounded with the invisibility of the homosexual into a deeper, double invisibility. The legacy of Queen Victoria not being able even to contemplate that such a thing as lesbianism might exist is not so distant from current attitudes.

### **Why engage with homosexual issues?**

If one asks why we should bother looking at homosexuality in the classroom, there will be different answers for students and teachers, and different answers for homosexuals and heterosexuals in each group. Generally, however, the aim is to work against discrimination by making homosexuality visible. It is very easy for the heterosexual community to ignore homosexuality, and act as if it didn't exist. Homosexuality is not often detectable externally. The ease with which it can be erased from consciousness, and the ease with which the issues of discrimination surrounding it can be avoided make it important that awareness of its existence and significance should be affirmed.

For the heterosexual young, the importance of raising consciousness about homosexuality has to do with attitude formation. It is to be hoped that it will assist in developing understanding of this significant minority group, and so work against discrimination.

For homosexual teenagers, there is, of course, a particular significance in making it visible. For them, it will be an acknowledgment and, hopefully, an affirmation of their existence. It will provide an opportunity to work through, however silently, some of the overwhelming burden of emotional issues involved in minority sexual identity. One does not want them to 'come out': one just wants them to be reassured that they are very far from alone. One of the major problems young homosexuals face is isolation: there may be (are fairly likely to be) other homosexuals in their class at school, but the code of silence around the subject inevitably isolates the individual student and makes them feel abnormal. It must be remembered that they are very often isolated from their family too. By definition, most parents are heterosexual, and so not seen by the child as naturally predisposed to tolerate, let alone value, homosexuality. It's unlike the situation, for example, of a teenager who wants to maintain and assert an ethnic identity, who can at least usually feel that identity to be supported in the home. Home can be as difficult and as lonely a place as school for

the homosexual child, perhaps even more so. Little wonder then, that young homosexuals are more likely to attempt suicide than young heterosexuals, are more susceptible to substance abuse, and, of course, are peculiarly vulnerable to AIDS and other STDs because of the often clandestine circumstances in which they have to explore their sexuality (see, e.g., Uribe and Harbeck 1992).

Not that they will necessarily thank a teacher for raising the matter of homosexuality. Imagine you are a young person beginning to identify as gay or lesbian, but who is desperately trying to hide the fact because you know that if it came out there would be no end to the persecution you would suffer. Every minute during such classes is going to be torture until the dangerous subject is past, for fear that you will do or say something that exposes the terrible fact, or for fear that one of your classmates will turn around and accuse you. Still, I would argue, explicit teaching about homosexuality is, in the end, in the interests of such students. Nothing is going to change until homosexuality becomes more visible, until it is accepted as an everyday fact of existence, indeed as something contributing to the richness and well-being of a diverse society.

When it comes to teachers, heterosexual teachers need to be made aware of matters concerning homosexuality, so that they can resist heterosexism and homophobia in themselves as well as their students. This is, of course, not just a matter for English teachers or teachers in the Human Development area. The whole school is involved. The school is a site for attitude development in all its classes and all its activities. There is an urgent need for an anti-discrimination policy that is properly put into action and properly supported by professional development.

Gay and lesbian teachers are in a special position. There can be great limitations on them but they also have great opportunities. They can be subject to discrimination, and so the work they are able to do may be severely limited. Often they simply can't afford to affirm their homosexuality publicly, for fear that they may lose their jobs. However, if they can and wish to be open about being gay or lesbian, they have a particular part to play, not as 'role models', but simply in asserting the presence of gay and lesbian people in the world, and hopefully showing that one can be comfortable in a homosexual identity. There is particular force in being able to say 'we' instead of 'them' when talking about homosexuals. It gives statements about homosexuality both an emotional immediacy, and, in

the context of community discrimination, the power of a political act.

### **Engaging with homosexuality in the classroom**

Sexuality is not only an important, but an interesting area for study, particularly within a critical literacy framework, since it is a field in which one still gets publicly quite outspoken prejudice. Whereas lip-service is usually paid to 'politically correct' attitudes on class, race and gender, it is not nearly as evident when dealing with sexuality, as can be heard in any talkback radio session on homosexual issues or seen on the letters pages in newspapers when something like the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras or the Victorian Equal Opportunity legislation is being debated.

A range of texts is available to work on. There is some useful fiction, both in the Young Adult category, and in mainstream fiction, including film. One can examine how homosexuality is lodged in the narrative, and the kind of view developed of it? It can be asked, for example, whether it's seen as a problem and how the problem is framed. One would prefer often that it were not seen as a problem, but the truth of the matter is that, because of the way society thinks, their homosexuality usually is a problem for the gay or lesbian person, particularly if they are young and just coming to terms with their sexuality. Certainly, others see it as a problem: the number of heterosexual people who celebrate when someone announces they are lesbian or gay is not great. Much fiction is concerned with self-realisation and with the outsider defining him/herself with/against the group. Given the attitudes to homosexuality prevalent in the culture, it is not surprising that most novels dealing with homosexuality fit this pattern of the 'problem' novel.

Fiction texts are sometimes valued for giving positive role models, but this is a limited view of their value. It is much more useful to use them as material for analysing the practices and processes of discrimination, to examine how the inequality is reproduced in the society. There is a wealth of media texts that can be used for these purposes too: newspaper articles, radio talkback programs, letters to newspapers, etc, in which one can analyse the common constructions of homosexuality that work to disadvantage gay and lesbian people. One needs to do something beyond the kind of 'social issues' work sometimes found, which works in a humanist framework. Its model is a kind of charity for those less fortunate than oneself, and the aim seems to be to make everyone feel sorry

for the disadvantaged. It is the 'Gays are human, too' syndrome, which undoubtedly may be of some value, but which can often be unpalatably condescending, because, of course, it suggests that the power to accept or reject, the power to confer or deny humanity lies with the person saying it.

If people say that homosexuals are equal, it is, in a very important sense, not true. Homosexuals are not equal (and that's particularly so if you are a gay or lesbian teacher in the state of Victoria at the moment: the Government says you're not equal). One doesn't want hopeful statements of a belief in equality: one wants to see how the inequality is structured and perpetuated so that something can be done about dismantling it.

The aim ought not to be to dissolve the difference between heterosexual and homosexual people, saying that we are all human beings in the essential part of ourselves. We should want to achieve an equality in which the difference is not just tolerated, but recognised and valued as enriching. This is almost certainly an impossible dream, but we are more likely to approach it by examining social processes than by getting sympathetically emotional (although that can be a useful adjunct as well). Discrimination against homosexuals of course does not stem from any problem within gays or lesbians themselves; the problem is in the dominant culture and its ideological processes. That's what one wants students to see. Therefore, it's much more valuable if one is working with Kate Walker's *Peter* say, rather than just getting students to feel for what Peter is going through, to analyse what the book shows us of social processes, to look at the ways in which Peter is made to feel unnatural because of the perceived rift between gender and sexuality.

### **Dangerous lessons, and the rewards**

I don't want to underplay the difficulty of handling sexuality issues: this is not acceptably neutral, everyday material (although an everyday reality for a sizeable number in the population); it raises sensitive, difficult questions that may need to be dealt with. These indeed can be dangerous lessons. If particular teachers feel that they cannot handle the issues comfortably, then it is probably better that they leave it to others (making sure, however, that they themselves are doing no damage through heterosexist or homophobic statements). Mishandling of matters of sexuality may well be worse than not confronting them at all.

I want to end by giving two quotations.



A number of education researchers pay tribute to the extraordinary strength and togetherness of the gay and lesbian students they have worked with, and one can see why in this transcript from Mairtin Mac an Ghaill's *The Making of Men*:

*Rajinder*: Teachers, especially male teachers, assume your being gay is a problem but there are a lot of pluses. In fact, I think that one of the main reasons that male straights hate us is because they really know that emotionally we are more worked out than them. We can talk about and express our feelings, our emotions in a positive way. They can only express negative feelings like hatred, anger and dominance. Who would like to be like them?

*Peter*: If you are an outsider in this society you see things more clearly. You see those who are prejudiced against you but they don't see you. We can't take things for granted, We can stand back, become more observant, more critical Not all gays do, of course, but there is more of a possibility that you will than straights ...

*Joseph*: I think that as a group gay people can feel very proud. (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 167)

Put that up against this:

In the recent (US) Department of Health and Human Services report, it was estimated that gay and lesbian youth are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. (Uribe and Harbeck 1992, p. 16)

This second quotation suggests why it is so urgent that something be done in the classroom to support gay and lesbian students. The possibility that you'll get the quality of insights that you see in that first quotation is the reward.

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# &READING VIEWing

with Deb McPherson

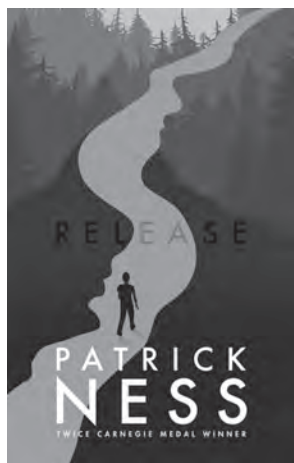
## Gender and Diversity in the Love Edition

Most novels read and studied in the classroom focus on the heterosexual experience. It must be difficult to be a teenager in the room whose sexuality has a different focus. Such students' orientation and experience are often not represented; they can be marginalised or even derided. All students would benefit from a wide reading unit on gender and sexuality that contained a broader range of texts representing different viewpoints and experiences. Patrick Ness's *Release*, published last year, was written because Ness said it was the sort of book he would have liked to have read as a teenager. Reviews of *Release*, J.C. Burke's *The Things We Promise* and Andrew Howell's play, *Things I Know to Be True*, open my column for this special edition. They are accompanied by some other reviews of texts from the past eight years that are concerned with gender, sexuality and diversity and would be useful additions to a wide reading selection around these issues.

### *Release* Patrick Ness (2017) Walker Books 287 pp.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Judy Blume's *Forever* are an unlikely pair of influences, but in this powerful novel Patrick Ness manages to use both of them to wonderful effect. We are living a day in the life of Adam Thorn, a young gay man, whose conservative religious family abhors his undeclared sexual identity. On this day we see his friendship with Angela,

best friend and confidant; we share his memories of his first love affair with Enzo (whose farewell party he will attend that night); we share his discomfort with the crude sexual harassment dished out by his boss; we see the rose he is taking to Linus, his new lover; and his attempts to find love, something only conditionally given to him by his family.



This story is close to Ness's heart and it is in safe and expert hands. There is warmth and support in the banter of friends, wonder and humour in the sexual expression of love, justice in the workplace and reality about life. As Adam says, 'Everything was so clear in books and movies. Everyone always knew their reasons. But real life was such a mess'. How good it is to have an author affirm and acknowledge that.

Adam's story is paralleled by a supernatural one. The soul of a murdered girl somehow entangles the powerful queen of another place and she enters our world to seek answers to the girl's death and to seek revenge for her fate. Her servant faun follows her in an attempt to draw her back before destruction ensues. Some readers will be puzzled by the supernatural story, yet the precise conclusion Ness delivers binds both stories together. His novel reinforces the importance of sharing the pain and passion of love and entering adulthood and underlines the message of inclusion and joy that the Australian marriage equality legislation finally delivered. This novel would be a powerful selection for discussion in Year 11, particularly with other texts that explore diversity and relationships.

Patrick Ness continues to challenge and elevate the Young Adult (YA) novel and remains for me the best and most exciting writer of this kind of fiction.

Ernie Tucker's column, 'Ernie Tucker on Books', ran in *English in Australia* for ten years. I saw Ernie recently; naturally enough, we talked books. He recommended *The Things We Promise* by J.C. Burke and kindly sent me his review which I am delighted to share with you.

### *The Things We Promise* J.C. Burke (2017) Allen & Unwin 370 pp.

Please don't be misled by the cover, which I dislike, and the serious topic of the 1980s-90s HIV/AIDS crisis. When I consider how many YA readers see those tragic events as ancient history, I applaud the courage of J.C. Burke and her publisher for reminding young readers that the current issue in Australia of marriage equality



owes so much to those who fought and won and suffered terrible losses in the recent past.

Gemma, the first-person narrator, is fifteen and in year eleven. She is looking forward to wearing her mother's designed dress and having her hair and make-up styled by her brother Billy for her end-of-year formal. Billy is returning home after working in New York. Billy is gay and

is in a long-term relationship with his partner there. When Billy last left Australia, he gave Gemma his INXS T-shirt featuring the words 'Silence = Death'. Most of this engaging story illustrates this slogan.

Gemma's mother is increasingly distant from her and both their mood swings become more extreme as Billy's return comes closer. Similar emotional strain soon extends to Andrea, her best friend, who was also going to have Billy do her hair.

On Billy's return, the secrets and grief emanating from the AIDS/HIV crisis challenge Gemma and her personal and family relationships. Burke has created a strong female protagonist who suffers at the hands of bigots but is able to grow stronger through this experience and the support of her mother and new friends. Lest you think that this produces a superficial, romantic glow, I assure you that Burke never relents from the harsh truths of those times.

### A play about love and diversity

Jane Sherlock is the co-coordinator of student days for ETA NSW and a passionate lover of theatre. We often work together and enjoy presenting at the NSW ETA Annual Conference on *Choices for English: Texts that Work in the Classroom*, continuing the work and vision of Helen Sykes who, together with Ernie Tucker, delivered textual support for teachers for so many years. Jane was particularly impressed with Andrew Bovell's play and I'm very grateful she has put pen to paper and reviewed it for you. Her other review of *Single Asian Female* can be found in the Drama section of this column.

*Things I Know to Be True* Andrew Bovell (2017)  
Currency Press 68 pp.

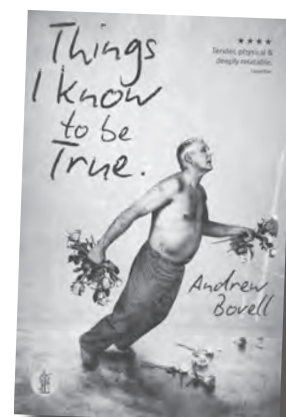
Families: what would we do without them? What would we talk and write about? Indeed, they are the making and breaking of us. Andrew Bovell's wonderful

2016 play *Things I Know to Be True* is full of people who could be our own siblings or parents. It is poignant, painful and powerful, and always real. Bovell is a compelling writer and after seeing his beautifully scripted stage adaptation of Kate Grenville's classic novel, *The Secret River*, I have come to love and admire his craft.

*Things I know to be True* is focused entirely on the Price family. We never meet anyone other than the two parents, Bob and Fran, and their four adult children, Rosie, Pip, Mark and Ben. We hear of their partners and workmates but never meet them. The intensity of the drama is like a Greek or Shakespearian tragedy; it is focused entirely on the immediate family. There is unity of place, the family home and garden, and a compression of time into one year, with each child taking the spotlight over one season. This makes for a hothouse of human emotions and family tension.

The dialogue drives the action and is very real. There is nothing poetic about these six family members but there is a poetic depth to their inability to effectively communicate with one another. They each have memories of their childhood and what they thought was the ideal Australian family but over time the realities of life have intervened. Rosie is the youngest and has returned from her gap year in Europe after being heartbroken and robbed (by the same man), and her gap year is becoming gap years. Pip is leaving her children with her husband and moving to Canada, and Fran, her mother, will have to step up and help look after the children. Ben has been seduced by the gloss and glamour of the business world and is in fear of not only losing his job but going to gaol.

Parents Bob and Fran are there for each of their children even if they do not agree with what their adult children are doing. Bob and Fran can cope with all of this until their son Mark reveals he is going to become Mia. The heart-wrenching exchange between Mark and his parents when Mark explains his need to change his gender is Bovell at his best. You can hear so many parents speaking these same words when Bob begs his son not to consider this gender operation. Bob says, 'you have beauty and strength. You've got both and now you want to mess with that, with what nature has given you'. But Fran is beyond arguing; her repudiation of her son is eviscerating. For Mark, this



is devastating – his whole life is in the balance, caught as he is in the wrong body and the wrong gender. In many of the exchanges with Bob and Fran and their children, words are spoken that should not have been said, but this is part of Bovell's clever and insightful craft in creating credible characters. When Fran reveals she has been saving extra money, her words ring true: 'my get-out money ... I had to know I could go if I ever needed to'. Her husband is confounded that she has kept this from her and yet her practical explanation seems to make such sense.

This play would work very well with Year 11. It's short (68 pages) and a compelling read which leaves you feeling that you know the Price family and they know you. There is a little of Arthur Miller's Willy Loman there, in the lost dreams of Bob. There are poignant lines from every character and there is something very Australian, very Winton, in the pathos and pain. The youngest member of the Price family, Rosie, says it all: 'People aren't perfect. Even the people you love. Especially the people you love.'

### Other reviews from past columns about gender, diversity and sexuality

#### *The Flywheel* Erin Gough (2016) Hardie Grant 306 pp.

Delilah has a crush on Rosie, the flamenco dancer across the road from her father's café. Rosie is beautiful and graceful, and Delilah is desperate to meet her. It's wonderful to read this richly entertaining novel with a strong and passionate gay protagonist. Delilah is an engaging character, opinionated and hardworking, who is forced to make some tough decisions about her life and her schooling. She is helping at her father's café on the weekends while he is on holidays. When the

full-time manager gets deported back to Ireland, she has to shoulder the burden of the business. The waiter is stealing from the till and a girl she valued and liked romantically at school turns against her. The campaign of bullying and bigotry that ensues is horrible. Despite the protest of her best friend Lauren, Delilah decides to leave school as she tries to save the café and herself. Another friend, Charlie, has problems too, and in the jumble of life some things get sorted and some don't. The friendships are strong and tested,

misunderstandings occur and the dialogue crackles as the narrative gathers speed.

This novel is a promising one for generating discussion about bullying and homophobia in the Year 9 or 10 classroom. These issues cannot be ignored in schools and in the workplace as well. The latest Beyond Blue report (Magee et al., 2014) found 'half of all Australian employees will experience workplace bullying during their careers'.

#### *The Sidekicks* Will Kostakis (2016) Penguin 256 pp.

*The Sidekicks* is the perfect novel to explore point of view with Year 10 or 11 students. Isaac is dead and his three friends tell us about him. Ryan the swimmer, Halley the rebel and Miles the brain are all devastated by Isaac's death, but they are not friends. Each young man describes his version of Isaac and the events before his death and the effects of his death on their lives. The reader discovers a great deal about each of them and about their mutual friend. What is especially enjoyable about this novel is not just the revelations about Isaac (a charismatic character) but the way the three disparate young men grow slowly together in the vacuum left by his death.

All the boys attend a fictional private school, Barton House, in Sydney's eastern suburbs. Amid the aftermath of Isaac's death is the fate of the fraudulent essay writing business he and Miles were engaged in. Kostakis shows us a range of masculine behaviours as the boys grieve for their lost mate: Halley absconds and flees back to his dad in Gerringong; Miles obsessively views the hours of film he made with Isaac as his star; Ryan throws himself into more training. Ryan is gay and struggles to find the courage to come out to his mother and the school community. In an interview with Tony Britton in *Metaphor* (2016), Kostakis said, 'We need coming out stories'. He gave Ryan 'as supportive a network as possible to show that there are still barriers to coming out: fears that are founded and some that are not'.

While a private boys' boarding school is not particularly representative of schooling across the country, friendship and grief are universal and Kostakis gives us the light and shade of both. His characterisation of the three boys is admirable. The women in the novel are positive as well as powerful, from Ryan's English Head Teacher mother to Halley's girlfriend Jac and Isaac's





mum. There is humour to lighten the story and the final collaboration of the boys in the attempted theft of their lunch table is symbolic and brilliant.

*The Sidekicks* deals with a tragic issue with a sure and skilful hand. Kostakis has given us a memorable novel to explore in the classroom.

**Will Grayson, Will Grayson** John Green and David Levithan (2010)

**Text Publishing 310 pp.**

Two main characters with the same name and two authors could make for confusion, but this novel delivers a powerful emotional punch through alternative perspectives from two different boys. The first chapter and then alternative chapters are written by John Green, while the second chapter and the fourth are written by David Levithan, and so on.

John Green's Will Grayson lives by two rules – don't care too much and shut up. His best friend is Tiny Cooper, who is larger than life and really, really gay.

Tiny is big and loud (Tiny is one of the those opposite nicknames like Bluey for a redhead) and full of ideas and music and falls in and out of love all the time. David Levithan's Will Grayson is gay and depressed. He is keeping his sexuality a secret. He does form an online friendship with a guy who rather devastatingly turns out to be his female friend, Maura.

What friendship means, the difficulty of trust in relationships, and the way gay students deal with the prejudiced attitudes of their peers are all canvassed in this novel. While the subject matter is serious, there is a great deal of humour and heart in this book, much of it from the character of Tiny Cooper. Students in Years 10 and 11 could find much to explore in this novel. There is widespread use of strong language in this book that could offend some readers. While such language is mainstream in our society and in our playgrounds, parents and students should know about it before this powerful, confronting and deeply moving novel is studied in the classroom.

**F2M** Hazel Edwards and Ryan Kennedy (2010)

**Ford Street Publishing 330 pp.**

*F2M* takes the reader into the world of transgender teenagers and the punk music experience. When Skye, a punk rock guitarist in an all-female band, turns 18, the idea of transitioning from female to male (F2M) is

dominating her life. A Life Skills counsellor told her class at school, 'sex is between your legs and gender between your ears'. Skye knows her breasts don't match her own perception of herself. She has Gender Identity Disorder and the book details the obstacles and frustrations as well as the support and understanding she encounters in her efforts to get her outside female body to match his inner male. The name change from Skye to Finn and the pronoun shift from she to he is an important acknowledgement of that transformation. Family and friends find the change difficult, as would be expected, but the journey is a compelling one for Finn and the reader.

This is a valuable book for expanding student understanding of the range and type of gender roles. While its language and content may offend some readers, it has a place in a Year 9 or 10 wide reading program.

**Sprout** Dale Peck (2009)

**Bloomsbury 276 pp.**

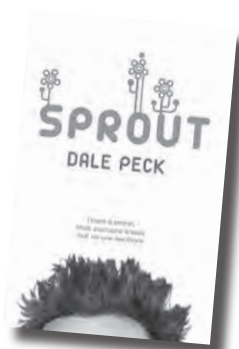
*Sprout* is a deftly written story about grief and love. Sprout's mother has died, his father is an alcoholic and he has moved from New York to rural Kansas. Sprout is also gay and Dale Peck gives him a wonderfully wry voice in this moving account of love won and lost. Sprout will have a difficult time at the new high school, not least because he dyes his hair green. The humour and the pace of the novel together with its engaging tone make it an appropriate addition to a wide reading program based on relationships. Sprout's deepening friendship and loving sexual relationship with Ty is frankly depicted, as is their break up. There are descriptions and language use that may offend some readers but this teenage love story about a homosexual relationship should win some friends in Years 9–10.

**New Fiction for Years 7 and 8**

**The Explorer** Katherine Rundell (2017)

**Bloomsbury 394pp.**

Fred is flying to Manaus over the Amazon jungle in Brazil when his pilot has a heart attack and the plane crashes. Shades of *Hatchet*! But the differences



soon start to emerge. Survival is still the number one problem, but in this story the main character has company on the plane. There's Con, a pale and angry girl, and Lila and her five-year-old brother, Max. Lila's parents are scientists and know about plants and so does Lila. Con has a photographic memory and Fred has always been fascinated by explorers and has a high degree of curiosity. All these talents prove invaluable. Relationships in the group are strained at first, especially as life at home for Fred and Con is difficult, but working together helps them find some food and the remains of an old shelter as they try to work out what to do. The feeling that someone has been here before is strengthened when a map is found during a hunt for honey. Building a raft and following the map leads them to a lost city and an explorer who prefers to remain hidden. He is not the welcoming adult they hoped for and their honesty and courage are sorely tested.



There are so many wonderful things about this novel. The detailed and practical accounts of the children's response to their predicament and the natural outbursts, anxiety and terror that they experience, in a jungle far from home, are a welcome relief from the usual magical ways out. The animals and plants of the area are brought to life by an author who travelled to Brazil, went swimming in the Amazon and

learned about some of the ways to survive in the jungle. The small sloth they rescue is a particular treasure. The children's experiences with grubs and spiders for food are sometimes disgusting but always feel authentic. The caustic explorer who finally aids the children to return home had a very good reason to leave the company of the world and keep the lost city secret. He saw the decimation of the Indigenous people through European contact and lost his wife and child to the introduced diseases. But the children open his heart again and he wins their pledge to keep his city hidden.

*The Explorer* is a fascinating and thrilling read and Year 6 and 7 students will really enjoy the adventures of Fred and company as they make their way from the plane wreck through the jungle and down the river to a lost city and finally home. Highly recommended for a great deal of excitement in the classroom.

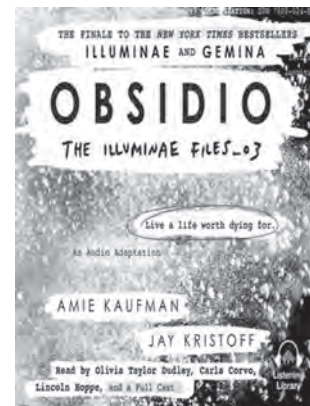
## New Fiction for Years 9–10

### *Obsidio: The Illuminae Files 03*

Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff (2018)

Allen & Unwin 615pp.

When *Obsidio* arrived, it cleared my desk of other contenders, as I have been looking forward to it for so long. At last the *Illuminae Files* are complete (albeit with a final hint that AIDAN the computer consciousness could come back again) and Books 1 and 2 (*Illuminae* and *Gemina*) combine with *Obsidio* to come to a very explosive and satisfying conclusion. What a wonderful series this has been, always pushing the boundaries of what these Australian authors can do in the printed form and involving the reader so richly in the lives of the characters they have created, and the world-building universe they have imagined.



We begin back on the planet Kerenza, with Asha Grant (cousin to systems expert Kady Grant of Book 1 fame). Asha, a pharmacy intern, is one of the survivors of the BeiTech invasion and a member of the resistance. Unfortunately, they are seriously outnumbered and outmatched by the ruthless mining corporation. Asha encounters an ex-boyfriend, Rhys Lindstrom, a techie sent to join the BeiTech team responsible for keeping the colony functioning while BeiTech replenishes its hermium, the illegal mineral being mined on Kerenza. Their plan is to leave the planet after eliminating all survivors. Can Asha trick Rhys into helping them? Or does their relationship still mean something to both of them and could he have an important role to play in helping the remaining civilians on Kerenza survive?

Meanwhile Hanna and Nik, the main characters from *Gemina*, and Ezra and Kady from *Illuminae*, are facing diminishing food and air resources and impossible choices aboard the container ship *Mao*, which contains the consolidated *Hypatia* and *Heimdall* crews. AIDAN, the artificial intelligence reactivated by Kady, is experiencing an identity/existential crisis that could imperil them all. The crew respond to a plea for help from the rebels on Kerenza and approach the planet and attempt to prevent the catastrophe BeiTech has engineered.

The gold, glittering metallic cover and the huge variety of textual forms and illustrations – emails, journal entries, instant messaging chats, blueprints, computer files, dossiers, scrunched up handwritten notes – are just the accompaniment to a tightly plotted and absorbing cavalcade of young characters. Kady, Asha, Nik, Hana and Ezra and the others face war and death and pestilence and are deeply changed by what they experience. Their resilience is tested; emotional exhaustion sets in towards the exacting finale but they all answer the call. Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff have really delivered a multimodal text that pushes the graphic novel in a new and scintillating direction. Take these novels into the Year 9–11 classrooms and challenge your students to find out just what is going on in this future universe.

## New drama

*Single Asian Female* Michelle Law (2018)  
Currency Press 64pp.



*Single Asian Female* is a new and refreshing perspective on living as a contemporary Asian Australian. It involves three feisty, outspoken and colourful females from the Wong family and a range of friends and 'frenemies' who are all part of the story. It is Michelle Law's debut play; previously she has written across print, film and television.

The matriarch, Pearl Wong, is the mother of two girls, Zoe and Mei. Pearl has a Chinese restaurant (of course) and is very aware of this stereotype. Her husband has left her for one of his many mistresses and Pearl only knows hard work and sacrifice. Her Chinglish is the vehicle for some delightful self-deprecating humour and enables the audience to see the cultural paradox of wanting to be Australian but needing to be Chinese. The older daughter, Zoe, is a star violinist and is hoping to get a role in an orchestra. But she falls pregnant on a one-night-stand and her dilemmas are exacerbated by her personal conflicts over her own identity.

The youngest daughter, Mei, wants to discard all that is Chinese. She begins throwing away all her Chinese possessions and clothes including her 'Hello Kitty' decorations and jelly shoes. This is a delightful scene, especially as her Aussie friend, Lana, adores all

the Chinese kitsch. Mei is in her HSC year and preparing for the graduation formal. Pearl wants Mei to wear Pearl's own, and favourite, cheongsam, but Mei is desperate to wear a dress like everyone else. Mei wants to have the post formal after-party in the restaurant. Pearl is delighted: 'we can serve mummy's yummy dumplings' and have 'karaoke ... and lanterns on the ceiling'. Mei is not happy: 'Why can't it just be a normal party? Just music and dancing and finger food?' This role of food in the cultural divide is something that Nam Le talks about in his short stories and it seems to be a recurring symbol in this new wave of diasporic literature.

Peal, Zoe and Mei are real people living the challenges of so many of Australia's new citizens. It is refreshing to hear the Chinese-Australian voice on stage and while there are stereotypes in the set and in the dialogue, there is also genuine human pathos and tension within the Wong family.

Arwa El Masri, in her book, *Tea with Arwa*, said she read books about the lives of other migrants when she was growing up in Australia, but 'none about my [Palestinian] culture'. Her own memoir seeks to redress that imbalance. Texts that reflect intergenerational migrant perspectives from the diverse countries of the Asian region are also in short supply. *Single Asian Female* provides many opportunities to contest stereotypes and explore identity with humour and wit. It is only 64 pages long and is an entertaining and engaging read. It works wonderfully on stage and if you get the chance to see it, please do. The play would work well with Year 11. Study of this text also supports the cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia.

Happy reading, viewing and writing – until the next column.

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# AATE matters

AATE Matters e-bulletins have become a regular way of sharing news from the national English teaching umbrella Association with educators from across Australia. Four editions have been published thus far in 2018. Here we highlight some of the key messages shared in the June and August editions of AATE Matters.

## New members of AATE Council

We welcome Rachael Radvanyi to AATE Council as the new delegate from the ACT. Rachael Radvanyi has been an English teacher in ACT schools for 25 years. For the past 18 years she has been an Executive teacher for English, initially at Lanyon High School, and now at Canberra College, a large Year 11 and 12 school in South Canberra. Rachael is passionate about using technology to innovate learning and teaching practice as well as developing collaborative approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy. Rachael completed her Masters of Education through the University of Illinois in 2010 and she is the President of ACTATE.

In an earlier bulletin, we shared that Alex Bacalja joined AATE as the new delegate to Council for Victoria. Dr Alex Bacalja is a lecturer in English education and literacy at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. He has completed a PhD titled 'Videogames, Distinction and Subject-English: New Paradigms for Pedagogy', investigating the place of digital texts in the English classroom and has presented at conferences within Australia and overseas. Having taught English in a range of schools across Victoria, Alex continues to work closely with the profession, supporting pre-service teachers in their entry into teaching, and on the Victorian Senior English Text-Selection Advisory Panel.

## It's a Wrap!

The 2018 AATE/ALEA *Art of English* Conference was a huge success! The Conference saw leading academics, consultants, authors and educators present on a range of topics providing opportunities and challenges for educators at this time.

Presentations included plenary and keynote addresses, workshops, cutting edge talks as well as research paper and symposium formats. International speakers included Dominic Wise (UK), Debra Myhill (UK), Terry Locke (NZ), Nell Duke (USA) and Allison Skerrett (USA).

## Conference in a snapshot

- Over 700 conference delegates
- 220 sessions
- 27 exhibitors
- 573 delegates logged into the app
- 1,342 likes of the AATE/ ALEA National Conference Facebook page

Congratulations to Claire Jones (ETAWA President) and Grace Oakley (ALEA WA State Director) together with Wendy Cody (AATE and ETAWA Past President) for their work in organising and convening the highly successful National conference.

The Conference Program and a range of presentation materials can be accessed via the conference app.

The *Short Talks* filmed at the conference will be available via the Official Conference YouTube channel soon. Subscribe today to receive alerts of when new content is uploaded: 'AATE/ ALEA National Conference Channel'.

Thank you to all of the presenters and attendees for making the event so successful.

We next head to Victoria in 2019 for an AATE Conference. Stay tuned for more information about Melbourne 2019.

## AATE Matters session in Perth

Over 60 participants attended the AATE Matters workshop in Perth, WA. Attendees looked closely at three key areas: research, publications and projects and digital resources. A summary of group thinking can be found on the AATE website/ AATE Matters portal. The ideas contributed by attendees will help to inform the future direction of AATE initiatives. If you have ideas for AATE Council to pursue or if you can connect us with project ideas and initiatives, please contact English House.

## English in Australia available online

The assessment-themed issue of *English in Australia* and this 'Love in English' issue are now available online.

If you are a member of ACTATE, ETANT, SAETA or TATE you can access digital copies via the AATE website.

Members of ETANSW, ETAQ, ETAWA and VATE should consult their Association website for details, or contact their own association to request online access.

For the upcoming **First Nation English** themed issue



of *English in Australia*, Associate Editors Philip Mead (University of Melbourne), Jeanine Leane (University of Melbourne), and Catherine Beavis (Deakin University), together with the *English in Australia* editorial team, are calling for papers that explore contemporary issues of the teaching of English as a First Nation language, of the decolonising of English teaching, and of Indigenous literatures. Areas of focus might include:

- English teaching, Aboriginal languages and curriculum
- Who is the English teacher in schools in Indigenous communities?
- Language and identity: implications for Subject English and English in Australia
- Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, writers and experience in texts available for study
- Aboriginal languages and pedagogy
- The politics of language
- Language policy and assessment
- Aboriginal English and Australian culture
- How is the teaching of English to be informed by Aboriginal languages?
- Literary complexity
- Digital literacies, digital culture and digital technologies – opportunities, creativity and access for young people in Indigenous communities
- English teaching and schooling in remote and/or poorly resourced communities
- Bilingual and multilingual programs including Aboriginal languages
- Aboriginal English in the curriculum
- Decolonising the English curriculum through language (Aboriginal English)

All manuscripts are subject to double blind peer review.

**Submissions are due by 9 November 2018.**

Questions about this special issue can be directed to the Special Edition Editors:

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### **Poems to Share II successfully launched at the Perth Conference**

The 'Poems to Share II' poetry teaching resource was launched at the AATE National Conference in Perth (July 2018).

Poems to Share II has been created by Red Room Poetry in partnership with the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE). It follows Poems to Share (2010) and features new poems and activities.

Poems to Share II features 40 poetic activity cards to spark imagination and creative writing. Inspired by original commissioned, student and educator poems from the *Red Room Poetry Object*, this interactive resource is designed to enliven poetic learning through language, literature and literacy.

The linked digital resource (available to all who purchased the boxed set resource) supports educators to deepen poetic engagement, language exploration and imaginative thinking, with alignment to curriculum outcomes from Years 5–10. The digital resource becomes available with the purchase of Poems to Share II.

### **Research Opportunities for AATE**

AATE Research Officer, Professor Philip Mead, is keen to develop the Association's research activities but he wants to make sure that this is in response to the specific and real concerns of members and practising teachers.

At the moment the Association publishes *English in Australia*, which is a forum for research and articles about teaching practice and other topics of relevance to the profession. These often involve research by individual educators or groups of educators.

If we think of research as the discovery of new knowledge, or as driven by questions about how to solve problems:

- What kinds of things do you think English teachers need to know that they don't currently know?
- What kind of issues are facing English teachers that research might address?
- What do you feel are the gaps in our current knowledge about English teaching?
- What kinds of research processes or methods would you like to see?
- Are there possible collaborators for research that you would like to see AATE work with?
- How do you see the relationship between AATE's research program and its publication series?
- What other initiatives would you like to see? How else could AATE explore or support research?
- How would you like to be involved in any research projects that AATE might initiate?

Please email Philip any ideas of responses you might have (philip.mead@unimelb.edu.au).

AATE Council

# Marion Meiers ... Consummate Professional ... 'Boundary Rider' ... Archivist

*Terry Hayes, on behalf of AATE*



This eulogy for Marion, who died in June this year, was delivered at the Garth Boomer Address at the 2018 AATE-ALEA Conference in Perth. Terry, a former AATE President, met Marion in the late 1980s when working on the development and implementation of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Literature Study Design. They became friends as well as professional colleagues and, for the past 30 years, worked closely on several of the projects cited in the eulogy. It's very appropriate that we honoured Marion, and her immense contribution to English and literacy education over the past forty years, at an AATE/ALEA conference. As an educator she, more than most, moved easily between both communities and was often a conduit between them.

It's also fitting that we did so as a prelude to the Garth Boomer Address. She was, along with Bill Green, co-editor of the 2013 commemorative edition of *English in Australia* which celebrated Garth's legacy twenty years on. And, as readers of that edition are aware, she was present at the 1989 AATE/ALEA conference in Darwin when Garth delivered his now legendary keynote address, 'Literacy: The Epic Challenge to Progressivism', in which he exhorted his audience of committed practitioners

- to teach at the edge of their understandings rather than operate from safe and stable ground;
- to become involved in the battle for better literacy;
- and to take on the political challenges involved in that battle.

Not that Marion would have needed much exhortation. In her own measured and unostentatious way, she was already one of Garth's 'boundary riders' – not

one of those 'Boomerish' crazy brave, cock-a-hoop, Akubra-waving roustabouts, out in front, leading the way, but more an outrider, rounding up and prodding the mob in the right direction. She continued to do so in many roles throughout her career as

- classroom teacher;
- university tutor;
- consultant;
- resource developer, especially through *The English Club* (the consultancy she founded with Robert McGregor);
- project officer and executive liaison officer, a role she undertook for the Australian Literacy Federation (ALF) which brought together AATE and ALEA, along with PETA and the adult literacy and TESOL organisations, as they sought 'common ground' (the title of the ALF newsletter she edited) in their response to the National

English Curriculum State and Profile;

- member, and often convenor of committees, working parties, advisory and reference groups;
- author, editor, publisher;
- researcher, as Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research where she worked for twenty years, retiring only two years ago at the age of 75;
- and, always, a trusted and supportive colleague.

Her school base for much of her career was Leongatha Technical School in rural Victoria, but distance was no hindrance to either serving at the centre of things or spreading the word beyond Victoria. An 8pm meeting in Melbourne, after a two-hour drive from home, to attend an exam setting panel; a workshop/seminar on the National Statement and Profile, delivered with Helen Campagna-Walsh, at the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE) conference in New York in 1995 – such was the staple of her ‘after hours’ professional life.

Her imprint on every major curriculum reform and event, especially in Victoria, was telling:

- the National English Statement and Profile, especially in developing a suite of exemplary work samples;
- the development and implementation of the Victorian Certificate of Education, and her work as a State Verification chairperson;
- the IFTE 2003 conference in Melbourne, where she was both a member of the coordinating committee and the convenor of the 21st Literacies strand;
- the Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA) project;
- the special joint editions of ALEA/AATE journals celebrating and promoting the work of the IFTE 2003 and STELLA, which she co-edited with Brenton Doecke;
- the latest iteration of a National English Curriculum.

Marion’s own educational instincts were progressive, informed by principles of social justice and equity. She believed in the important nexus between quality professional learning and student success, and the primacy of teachers’ professional judgement in developing curriculum and assessment.

But she was also politically pragmatic. She understood the nature of educational bureaucracies: when teachers worked with government policies and mandated curriculum and assessment processes, they

had to settle for a principled compromise between the ideal and the possible. The business, then, of educators and researchers such as herself, was to work collegially with teachers to deliver the best possible learning within those constraints. To achieve that objective, she promoted the importance of collaborative networking and the power of publications to sustain and extend those networks. In those contexts, she encouraged teachers to affirm their professional identities through writing and research.

In her own work she was an exemplar of the kind of volunteerism that makes associations such as ALEA and AATE viable and vibrant. She believed that there was more to one’s professional life than the ‘day job’. In her long second career at the Australian Council for Educational Research, she also edited ALEA’S *Literacy Learning* journal, and served, for eleven years, as ALEA’s Publications Director.

Most of all, Marion affirmed the presence of the personal in professional collegiality. She was an inveterate conference attendee and presenter, be it VATE, AATE, ALEA or IFTE, as well as other state, national and international ones. Such gatherings were opportunities to catch up with friends and colleagues as much as they were professional commitments.

Marion was distressed at the thought of not being able to attend the Perth Conference. Her increasing physical frailty had not prevented her attending the previous two national conferences in Adelaide and Hobart.

I spoke to Marion a month before the debilitating dementia that eventually killed her had taken deep hold. I was hoping to interview her for a VATE project exploring the development of the VCE English Study Design as a powerful example of curriculum reform, and the challenges such reform faced. She was keen for me to return and to interview her.

I had also asked her husband, Alan, to have access to Marion’s books and papers which might be relevant to the project. He was more than pleased to ‘bequeath’ them to me. ‘Marion, he said, ‘was such a hoarder’.

‘No’, I thought to myself, ‘she was not a hoarder, she was an archivist’. She not only actively participated in, and helped shape, the last forty plus years of English and literacy education in Australia, but she recorded and documented them with such punctilious and meticulous thoroughness.

I think she would be pleased that we are ‘recording’ her contribution to that history here. She will be missed.

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