

# ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

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# English in Australia

# 2018

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# English in Australia

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# Editorial

LARISSA MCLEAN DAVIES, LUCY BUZACOTT AND WAYNE SAWYER

In a 1966 edition of *English in Australia* Tony Delves considered the purposes and goals of teaching English in his article 'English as She is Not Taught'. Delves identified a number of key debates and ideas around the teaching of English that feel, even to the teacher or academic revisiting them in 2018, surprisingly contemporary: the role of grammar, language versus literature, student experience, creative writing, personal response, and teacher and student knowledge (Delves, 1966). Delves' piece speaks to ongoing debates around the nature and content of subject English, where English is at once imbued with huge breadth and scope, responsible for not only literacy but also the moral and ethical education of students (Patterson, 2000), but at the same time, seen as having 'no content' (Dixon, 1975) and lacking a tangible body of knowledge (Doecke et al., 2018). We might then ask, as many before have – what is subject English? Peter Medway calls the need to define the subject as 'an itch some of us can't stop scratching' (2005, p. 19).

This edition of *English in Australia* does not seek to rehash debates about the purpose and content of Subject English – to scratch the itch – but it does consider English as complex and multi-faceted, not content-less, but imbued with a wide variety of knowledges, priorities, challenges, and goals. Specifically, this edition explores some key influences shaping contemporary renderings of subject English, and the ways in which forces both outside and within the profession influence teachers and schools' priorities with regard to curriculum, policy and practice. To this end, this edition commences with articles that are concerned with the impacts of policy on teachers' practice and curriculum work. The breadth of the work that teachers do is the focus of Jackie Manuel, Don Carter and Janet Dutton's article 'As much as I love being in the classroom ...' which reports on the findings of a research study of 211 secondary teachers in New South Wales. This article reveals the pressures impacting on English teachers' day-to-day lives, including increased assessment and data gathering tasks, policy changes, and challenges regarding resourcing, and considers the

ways in which these are impacting on teacher performance and work-life balance.

Notions of how external forces impact on schools and classrooms are also central to David Hastie's account of text censorship in Australian schools. Hastie considers the 'liberal consensus model' as a way of thinking about how text censorship might be understood in secondary English classrooms, continuing debates raised in the most recent special edition of *English in Australia* 'Love in English' (53.2, 2018). Investigation of the ways in which external drivers impact on school policies and agreements continues with Margaret Merga and Veronica Gardiner's article, which examines the role of whole school literacy policies in supporting reading engagement in Australian schools. Through an analysis of publicly available documents, Merga and Gardiner consider the ways in which these policies and plans articulate with English curriculum priorities, and the extent to which they connect students' home and school literate practices.

While the first three articles of this edition illuminate the ways in which external policies are impacting on the work that teachers do within the English classroom and the school system, the second suite of three articles take up questions of classroom practices and resources, and more broadly, on the formation of teachers' understandings of what constitutes subject English in the 21st century. Alexander Bacalja's article 'What videogames have to teach us (still) about subject English' reports on a participatory action research project which used games as texts for study and play in the middle years. Drawing on and engaging with dominant paradigms of subject English, Bacalja argues for a closer engagement with students' textual worlds via videogames, and presents a new framework for video games literacies. Emily Frawley draws on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu in 'Are you the writer? Literary and cultural influences on writer identity uptake within subject English'. Frawley's article considers the ways in which teachers position themselves as writers within their classrooms. Frawley's research, framed by a case study methodology, reveals the complexity of English

teachers' identities as writers and as readers in ways that can assist practitioners with thinking about their own teaching identities. This is a timely piece given the current state of interest in the teachers-as-writers movement.

The subsequent articles in this edition draw on Keynotes presented at the 2018 AATE National Conference and, like Frawley's piece, are also interested in issues of English teachers as writers, and of the teaching and promotion of writing in English classrooms. Terry's Locke's review essay, derived from his AATE Keynote presentation begins with the premise that 'we are all writers'. Locke is concerned by trends in writing pedagogy that have limited student and teacher agency and calls for the development and celebration of a 'culture of writing' in the English classroom. Like Frawley and Locke, Dominic Wyse explores the ways in which we can understand the role of writing in subject English in 'Choice, voice, and process'. Drawing on material from his *Donald Graves Tribute Address* at the 2018 AATE National Conference, Wyse considers the process approach to writing and examines theory and empirical research which contribute to knowledge about the effective teaching of writing in contemporary English classrooms. This focus on writing, on ways in which it might be meaningfully experienced in English, takes on particular urgency in the context of neo-liberal reforms, where 'creative' writing, creativity and student voice are often compromised in high-stakes assessment environments (McLean Davies & Sawyer, 2018).

The first special issue of *English in Australia* for 2018 (53.1) took as its focus the role of assessment in the English classroom. This issue was designed to confront the challenges and opportunities presented by current debates about how English is and should be assessed. We are delighted to include in the current edition a response by Dr Bethan Marshall, Senior Lecturer in English Education at Kings College, London, to our special edition on assessment. Bethan has made a considerable contribution to debates about assessment in English (Marshall, 2011) and her short response takes up some of the key ideas raised in the first edition for the year and reflects on these from her context in the United Kingdom. Also responding to the ideas about curriculum and assessment raised in the special issue is this edition's *Perspectives from the Past* section in which Brenton Doecke reflects on Graeme Withers and Margaret Gill's *Assessing Text Response: The 1990 pilot CAT: A Review for Teachers*.

The variety of articles included in this edition of *English in Australia* reflects the diversity and multiplicity of classroom English in the contemporary moment, and the range of forces, external and internal, which shape our subject. We hope that this edition provides you with the opportunity to reflect on your own context and the ways in which the work you do, in secondary or tertiary classrooms, and through the formation of or engagement with curriculum, policy and theory, contributes to the ways in which students make meaning through texts and negotiate their identities in the world.

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

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# 'As much as I love being in the classroom ...': Understanding Secondary English Teachers' Workload

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**Abstract:** This paper reports on the findings of a study of 211 secondary school English teachers in New South Wales, Australia. The study aimed to gather data on English teachers' work and lives, including their perspectives on workload, motivation, work satisfaction, wellbeing, and career intentions. In an educational environment dominated by a culture of 'performativity' (Ball, 2003, p. 216) manifested through the institutionalising of standards-based systems designed to codify, measure and judge teacher quality, the views and voices of teachers themselves are too often marginalised or absent from research and policy debates. In this paper, we represent English teachers' perspectives on their work and lives and draw attention to the impact of an intensified workload on their capacity for quality teaching and continued investment in teaching as a career. The findings highlight a range of professional and situated factors (Day et al., 2006) experienced by teachers as a consequence of: administrative and accountability compliance demands associated with monitoring and reporting of teacher and student performance; high-stakes test preparation, associated data gathering, administration, and heightened expectations from the school executive, students, parents and the wider community; the speed of centralised curriculum change and policy reform; and diminished resources and support, including inadequate support for implementing new curriculum. The phenomenon of an intensified and excessive workload was perceived to be the single most determinant factor in impeding English teachers' desire to focus on the 'core business' of teaching to their best. The paper calls for urgent attention to teacher workload and its far-reaching implications for quality teaching, student learning and the retention and support of high-calibre teachers in the profession.

It is evident that vastly increased administrative tasks are having a 'blanketing' effect across all types of schools, locations, levels of socio-economic advantage and staff teaching roles within schools, and severely threaten to overwhelm teachers' professional focus on teaching and student learning. The extent and magnitude of the reported effects indicate underlying system-wide causes, and teachers widely attribute these to government policies and ongoing change initiatives. (McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey & Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 2)

## Introduction

The current political discourses around the quality of teaching often rely on the narrative that effective teachers must live up to the heroic archetype of the selfless, dedicated, resourceful, and ever-resilient professional, regardless of the constraining professional and situated conditions of their work (Day, 2017). This narrative of the 'good' teacher tends to attribute the problems of workload stress, disillusionment, burnout and struggle to the personal shortcomings

of the individual teacher (Schaefer, 2013, p. 265). It is a narrative that also inscribes the expectation that if the teacher, like Boxer in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, were to simply 'work harder' (1945/2000, p. 25), the systemic challenges of teaching and learning would evaporate.

The working lives of Australian teachers, however, like those of teachers in many countries around the world, have undergone a marked transformation over the last two decades (Day, 2012, 2017; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey, & Fitzgerald, 2018; Sachs & Mockler, 2012). In large part, this transformation has occurred as a result of what Ball describes as the culture of 'performativity' (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Manifested through the institutionalising of standards-based systems designed to codify, measure and judge teacher quality, the culture of performativity has steadily redefined notions of teacher professionalism and narrowed the scope for teachers' everyday enactments of agency and autonomy in the core business of teaching and learning (Ball, 2012; Day, 2017; Goodwyn, 2018; Gu & Day, 2007; Ryan et al., 2017; Sachs & Mockler, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011, 2017).

Elaborating on the impact of ubiquitous standards-based policy reform, Day (2017) identifies five inter-related consequences for contemporary teachers' work and lives (pp. 6–7). He points to the benefits of some of these changes, such as greater opportunities for collaboration between teachers and schools, and the actual and potential affordances of digital technologies (p. 6). He also draws attention to the detrimental effects of other consequences on teachers' professional identity, motivation, and ability to 'teach to their best' (p. xiii). One of these consequences has been the intensification of teacher workload, fuelled by the proliferation of administrative and bureaucratic tasks associated with system imperatives such as, for instance: the need for compliance in the standardised reporting and documenting of performance, including student performance (Brass, 2015; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011; Lingard, 2010; Loyden, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2016; Ryan et al., 2017); and 'increased pressures to meet the external demands of results-driven policies' (Day, 2017, p. 2).

A focus on teacher workload in recent research has emerged as part of the broader concern relating to the recruitment, retention, wellbeing and support of 'quality' teachers (AITSL, 2016; Cross, 2015; Day, 2012, 2017; Day & Gu, 2014; Gallant & Riley, 2017; Mockler, 2011; NSW DEC, 2011b; OECD, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017) and in response to the rise of negative

political and public discourses about teachers and their work (Farley, 2018). Internationally, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has conducted the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) – 'the first and only international survey that focuses on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in lower secondary schools' (OECD, 2018, p. 3). In Australia, a number of similarly designed large-scale studies of the teaching workforce have incorporated data collection on teacher workload, perceptions of self-efficacy, and career intentions (McKenzie et al., 2014).

With two notable exceptions (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), there have been fewer recent studies designed to explore the context-specific working lives of teachers in individual Australian states and territories. Considering the variations between and within state and territory education jurisdictions in terms of school structure, staffing needs, student populations, socio-economic indices, teacher recruitment policies and student assessment and examination programs, a deeper understanding of the contours of teachers' working lives may be gained from more finely-focused, 'self-in-context' (Mansfield, Wosnitza & Beltman, 2012, p. 32) studies. Such studies, including the study we report on in this paper, are predicated on the assumption that teachers are 'active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thought and beliefs' (Borg, 2003, p. 81). They are also geared towards learning more from teachers themselves about 'the central role of workplace conditions' (Day et al., 2007) in enabling or eroding teachers' capacity and commitment.

When it comes to particular sub-groups of teachers within the profession, such as secondary English teachers, there exists little current research that provides up-to-date information from teachers themselves about the nature, distribution and perceived value of the tasks that constitute their workload. In NSW, secondary English teachers make up the largest cohort of subject specialists in the profession (NSW DoE, 2016). Potentially, they may experience an amplified version of performativity culture due to:

- their unique role in preparing *all* students for external, high-stakes tests and examinations in literacy and English;

- implementing substantial curricular reforms at both junior and senior secondary levels; and
- carrying responsibility for the performance of all students in the only compulsory subject in the NSW curriculum from Kindergarten (Foundation) to Year 12 (the final year of schooling).

It is well understood that for teachers of 'English and humanities (i.e. essay-based) subjects, the volume of work produced by learners is very high, so therefore this creates a large workload in terms of the time required to read and comment on the scripts submitted' (DfE, 2018, p. 16). In addition, secondary English teachers in NSW (and all teachers in Australia) must now conform to standards-based policies and performance frameworks established and regulated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership (AITSL, 2011). In NSW, teachers' work has also been influenced by state policies such as *Local Schools, Local Decisions* (NSW DEC, 2011a) and *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: A Blueprint for Action* (NSW DEC, 2011b).

In the light of these national and state policy reforms, there has been no published study reporting specifically on current NSW secondary English teachers' workloads. According to McGrath-Champ et al. (2018) 'the intensification of teachers' work is not being sufficiently acknowledged ... [and] the research base in general is lacking a comprehensive understanding of what it is that teachers are already doing – not to mention their lived experience, and what they think of it' (p. 8).

Their observation speaks directly to the purpose of this paper. Our intention is to report on selected findings from the first phase of a larger two-phase research study of 211 NSW secondary English teachers designed to elicit their views on a range of dimensions of their working lives. We concentrate here on exploring teachers' responses to questions pertaining to their workload and its self-reported impact on their personal and professional lives, including any impact on their levels of motivation, health and wellbeing, job satisfaction, and career intentions.

Initially, the paper situates the study through a discussion of the relevant international and Australian research literature on teacher workload. It then addresses the researchers' context, and the aim, purpose, research design, methodology and theoretical and conceptual framework informing the study. The methods of data collection and analysis are explained, with a descriptive overview of the sample

and participants. The remainder of the paper sets out the results, foregrounding teachers' comments about their workload and the perceived value, relevance and impact of the range of work tasks they undertake. We conclude with a synthesis of teachers' perspectives and recommendations for addressing a number of key matters and implications arising from the findings.

An explicit goal of this study has been to represent the views and voices of teachers whose storied presence (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) in published research, scholarship and policy reform is either too often obscured beneath the presumed authoritative weight of statistical data, or simply absent. Almost 30 years ago, Goodson (1991) advocated for the need to 'know more about teachers' lives' and to 'assure that the teacher's "voice" is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately' (p. 36). For this reason, there is an emphasis in this paper on reporting the qualitative responses of secondary English teachers to a range of questions about their lived experiences of workload. In so doing, we seek to redress in some measure the 'neglect of the teacher as a person [that occurs by] abstracting the teacher's skills from the teacher's self, the technical aspects of the teacher's work from the commitments embedded in the teacher's life' (Hargreaves, 1994, p. viii). If the most salient influence on the learning and achievement of students is the teacher (OECD, 2018), then it is necessary to more fully understand the factors that determine their capacity for 'teaching to their best and well' (Day, 2017, p. xiii).

### **Background: Research and current understandings of teacher workload**

It is not surprising that against the backdrop of prevailing policy discourses of 'quality teaching' and 'teacher quality' – coupled with the predominant 'big data driven' nature of educational reforms – there is a growing research interest in understanding the multi-faceted nature of teachers' workload and how this key aspect of their working lives influences their capacity for quality teaching and student learning. This interest is reflected internationally in the OECD's TALIS initiative.

Including Australia, the number of countries participating in TALIS has grown from 24 in the inaugural study in 2008, to 34 in 2013, to over 45 in the current 2018 cycle (OECD, 2018). Based on the belief that '[e]ffective teaching and teachers, as well as strong school leadership, are key to producing high performing students' (OECD, 2018, p. 5), the survey seeks to

gather internationally comparable information about teacher demographics, school systems, leadership, professional development and teacher practices and beliefs (McKenzie et al., 2014).

The snapshot of Australian (lower secondary) teachers' workload showed that teachers 'report working on average 43 hours per week, 5 more than the average for TALIS countries'; they spend 'similar numbers of hours per week on a variety of work-related tasks compared with the TALIS average. For example, teachers in Australia and other TALIS countries report spending 19 hours teaching per week, 7 hours planning and 5 hours marking' (Freeman, O'Malley & Eveleigh, 2014, p. 3).

The TALIS data have been utilised by a number of countries in the development of their own national studies. In England, for example, the government has implemented a 'programme of action to address unnecessary workload' (Higton et al., 2017, p. 5) by undertaking biannual large-scale surveys and other research studies of teacher workload (Higton et al., 2017). The findings of these studies – both qualitative and quantitative – provide a source of longitudinal evidence based on teachers' voices to inform policy and reform agendas in that country. Of note in the *Teacher Workload Survey 2016* report (Higton et al., 2017) was that:

- The majority (93%) of respondents stated that workload in their school was at least a fairly serious problem; just over half of those surveyed (52%) cited workload as a very serious problem. This group worked an average of 57 hours in the reference week with 19 hours out-of-school time compared to 53 hours and 13 hours respectively for others.
- Over three-quarters of staff were dissatisfied with the number of hours they usually worked. Most staff disagreed that they could complete their workload in their contracted hours, had an acceptable workload and could achieve a good balance between their work and private life. Those who strongly disagreed with these statements again reported longer total hours, more hours working out of the regular school day and more additional hours beyond their contract (p. 9).

The qualitative strand of the *Teacher Workload* project (DfE, 2018) 'gathered evidence of the factors that were reported to be associated with longer working hours, how teachers perceive their workload and how schools are seeking to address these issues' (p. 3). From

interviews with primary and secondary school teachers, the study found that the key drivers for increased workload were: administration (including the high volume of email workload); curriculum reform; data tracking; and marking and assessment (p. 3).

Such is the concern with teacher workload in England, and its consequences for the strength of the profession, student learning, and the retention of teachers, that the cumulative findings of the biannual *Teacher Workload Survey* and the subsequent collection of qualitative data have served to direct and maintain a high-profile focus on this issue and inform national policy agendas.

### Research on Australian teachers' workload

Although there is no Australian equivalent of the English *Teacher Workload Survey*, a number of national surveys provide useful insights into the general characteristics of the Australian teaching workforce and patterns of workload distribution. The most substantial of these is the Australian Government Department of Education's *Staff in Australia's Schools* (SiAS) survey (McKenzie et al., 2008; McKenzie et al., 2011; McKenzie et al., 2014). While TALIS gathers data only from lower secondary school teachers, the SiAS surveys capture information from primary and secondary school teachers, executives and principals across the country's education sectors.

The SiAS survey in 2013 (McKenzie et al., 2014) included the responses of 10,349 secondary school teachers. Secondary school teachers reported an average workload of 47.6 hours per week, made up of:

- 20 hours of face-to-face teaching;
- 11–12 hours of marking, planning and preparing; and
- 7 hours of administration (p. 50).

The report notes that a weekly workload of 49.4 hours for secondary teachers in NSW is higher than the national average (p. 50).

When compared with the Australian TALIS findings, the SiAS findings reveal a number of correspondences and discrepancies. In terms of workload, the SiAS 2013 data indicate an average weekly workload of 47.6 hours (49.4 for secondary teachers in NSW), whereas in the TALIS data gathered in the same year (2013) the average is 43 hours. In both studies, the average age, gender balance, length of teaching experience and face-to-face teaching hours are consistent. These figures do not, however, provide a breakdown

of the time teachers typically spent outside of the required weekday working hours on teaching-related or other tasks associated with their role.

The recent Victorian *School Staff Workload Survey* (SSWS) (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) offers a more fine-grained analysis of teacher workload and workload distribution through data collected from more than 13,000 Victorian primary and secondary school teachers and principals. For secondary school teachers in Victoria, the average reported workload was 52.9 hours per week, almost 10 hours more than that reported in the TALIS 2013 report. Time spent on teaching and teaching-related activities accounted for 76 per cent of the workload for the whole sample, with the remaining 21 per cent spent on other work activities. Secondary teachers reported spending an average of six hours during their weekend on work-related tasks (pp. 8–9). When asked about their perception of workload, only ‘about one fifth of teachers’ thought that their workload was ‘often or nearly always manageable’ (p. 38). Almost one quarter of secondary teachers reported that their workload was ‘never/seldom’ manageable (p. 39). An additional significant finding was that

[a]round 90 per cent of teachers indicated that their workload at some stage has had a negative effect on the quality of their teaching. Just over one third of teachers in all schools indicated that their workload often or nearly always adversely affected their health ... About one third of teachers regularly think about leaving the teaching profession (p. 10).

The context-specific nature of this Victorian-based study provides more precisely calibrated findings, illustrating in greater depth the complexity, context-specific nature and impact of workload on teachers in this one Australian state.

Similarly, the recently-published *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning* (UWSFTL) (McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey & Fitzgerald, 2018), commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation, reports on a large-scale study of more than 18,000 NSW public school teachers. This significant project set out to gather data on: the teaching and learning and other activities currently undertaken in schools; teachers’ perspectives on their workload and whether or not it has increased in volume and complexity over the past five years; their judgements about the value and relevance of the tasks they undertake; the impact of changes to their workload; and their suggestions for redressing declining systemic support for teaching and learning (p. 10).

The authors of the report note that:

This almost unanimous reporting in relation to increases in workload indicates a common experience at levels rarely encountered in social science research, where variance usually abounds ... The particularly resounding changes in administrative workload were felt across all school locations – metropolitan, provincial and remote or very remote (p. 53).

In the face of ‘resounding changes in administrative workload’, the report also highlights teachers’ efforts to ‘preserve their work that is most focused on students’ (p. 43), yet ‘many teachers are suffering from the additional demands and feel frustrated that these distract them from their work with students’ (p. 43). The key findings of the report resonate with those of the Victorian *School Staff Workload Survey* (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) in terms of teachers’ working hours, the growing time-demands and complexity of their workload, the extent to which compliance and other ‘time consuming, cumbersome’ (p. 43) administrative tasks are encroaching on teaching and learning, and the personal and professional consequences of these for teachers and students.

This most recent, comprehensive portrait of NSW public school teachers’ working lives contributes further evidence to support the calls for urgent policy reform. The authors argue that rather than enabling quality teaching and learning, NSW Department of Education policies such as *Local Schools, Local Decisions* (NSW DEC, 2011a) have in fact undermined the scope and potential for quality teaching and learning: systemic support has dwindled as responsibility for educational outcomes has been shifted to individual teachers and schools, ‘leaving the state to remotely monitor and control’ (Stacey, 2017, p. 790).

## The present study

### *Researchers’ context*

In undertaking this research with secondary English teachers, we understand that such a process is inevitably shaped by our own histories, values and worldviews. As university teacher educators with a background as secondary English teachers, Heads of English, Chief Examiners of NSW Higher School Certificate English examinations<sup>1</sup> and NSW Board Inspector of English,<sup>2</sup> we are biographically situated and invested in a distinct interpretive community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 48). We bring to this research a set of beliefs about English as a subject, and about teaching and learning

that rests on a relativist ontology and interpretive epistemologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, pp. 58–59). Our work with teachers is also driven by a belief in the primacy of language in shaping, making sense of and conveying experience. This background thereby positions us not only as co-participants as we seek to mediate, interpret and represent the perspectives of teachers in this study (Creswell, 2013, p. 32), but also as advocates for English teachers' perspectives, English teaching and student learning.

### *Aim and purpose*

The aim of the study was to gather data on secondary English teachers' perspectives on their working lives, including their:

- perceptions of, and attitudes towards, teaching;
- beliefs, values and aspirations;
- workload;
- levels of wellbeing;
- work satisfaction;
- views on current curricula, testing regimes and policy reforms;
- perceived self-efficacy; and
- career intentions.

The purpose was to further understand the factors that may enable or impede teachers' capacity to effectively enact their professional role and then to represent their perspectives on their working lives in their own words. Although the findings presented here are not generalisable, an additional purpose of the research has been to contribute evidence to current debates and calls for reform pertaining to teachers' work.

### *Research design*

The research design for this study was based on a range of questions about secondary English teachers' perspectives on their working lives. Questions were generated and then refined from a critical review of the relevant literature on: teacher workload; teacher motivation, recruitment, retention, and attrition; teacher wellbeing, stress, burnout, and resilience; and teacher professional identity. The synthesis of suitable methodologies and findings from validated prior research studies informed the initial development of the protocols for the study. Consistent with our ontological and epistemological preferences, we sought to collect data 'with strong potential for revealing complexity ... [with] "thick descriptions" ... that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong

impact on the reader' (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 11). The intention to 'understand rather than reduce complexity' (Day et al., 2006, p. 11) led to the development of a theorised conceptual framework and methods that allowed for an inductive, iterative and recursive process of making meaning from the data gathered from teachers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### *Methodology*

Guiding the research design was an interpretivist paradigm based on constructivist-subjectivist presuppositions (Creswell, 2013). This paradigm embraces the concept of multiple realities that are made and remade through subjective, language-based, context-bound and temporal constructions of meaning. Since the study is located in the tradition of phenomenological research, we were therefore concerned with representing the multiple realities of participants through the inclusion of the voices of the teachers themselves, communicated through written responses (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### *Theoretical and conceptual framework*

In designing the study, we have drawn on the theoretical and conceptual framework developed by Day et al. (2006) in their study of the work and lives of 300 primary and secondary school teachers in England reported in *Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness* (VITAE). The study has been subsequently elaborated by Gu and Day (2007, 2013) and Day (2017). In the VITAE study, the influences on teachers' work and lives are theorised in terms of the interactions of three dimensions of their professional identity as it is shaped by 'combinations of factors embedded in the individual, relational and organisational conditions in which they work and live' (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 29).

The first of these is the *professional* dimension, which encompasses:

- the influence of external systems;
- social and policy expectations of the 'quality teacher';
- a teacher's ideals and values; and
- professional life phases.

The professional dimension 'is open to the influence of long term policy and social trends as to what constitutes a good teacher ... It could have a number of competing and conflicting elements such as local or national policy, CPD, workload, roles and responsibilities' (Day et al., 2006, p. 147).

The second – *situated* – dimension includes the myriad of context-specific and inter-relational factors affecting a teacher's work such as, for example:

- the students, including student behaviour;
- school socio-economic factors;
- workload and working conditions;
- levels of support, including systemic support manifested locally; and
- the nature and quality of leadership and collegial relationships.

The third dimension is the *personal* that comprises life outside of school, family and social roles, life events and circumstances, and individual personality (Day et al., 2006; Day, 2017). A visual representation of this model is given in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Dimensions of identity shaping teachers' work and lives. (Adapted from Day et al., 2006; Day, 2017)

According to this model, 'teachers' capacities to manage their professional lives and identities are mediated positively or negatively' (Day et al., 2006, p. 20) by the dynamic and often fluid interplay of these three dimensions. A teacher's capacity and commitment are influenced by the extent to which the professional, situated and personal dimensions are in balance or, alternatively, out of balance at a particular time due to the predominance of, or tensions between, one or more of the dimensions. In their research with teachers, Day et al. (2006), constructed four 'Scenarios' (p. xiii) amongst their participants that were 'identified by the degree of dominance that each of these dimensions had on aspects of a teacher's life at a given time' (p. 150):

1. dimensions in relative balance (for over a third of teachers in the study);
2. one dominant dimension (for more than 44 per cent of teachers in the study);
3. two dominant dimensions, impacting on the third dimension (for more 15 per cent of teachers in the study); and

4. three conflicting dimensions (for 6 per cent of teachers in the study) (p. 153).

Teachers experiencing Scenarios 2, 3 and 4 were found to be most at risk in terms of their motivation, commitment, resilience and wellbeing (p. xiii). For the purposes of the study of NSW English teachers' workload, the VITAE (2006) model thus afforded an established and validated theoretical and conceptual framework to inform the research design and interpretation of data.

## Methods

### Data collection

The initial phase of the study involved the development of a 28-item questionnaire. During 2017, secondary English teachers in NSW were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary, anonymous basis by completing the online, structured questionnaire, accessed through the state English Teachers' Association closed social media group. Since participants in the study represent a non-random, convenience sample and there are recognised limitations of the questionnaire as an instrument, the findings cannot be generalised (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

The questionnaire drew on and adapted the validated survey instruments utilised in the Australian SiAS research studies (McKenzie et al., 2014), the Victorian *School Staff Workload Survey* (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), the VITAE project (Day et al., 2006), and the *Teacher Workload Survey 2016* (Higton et al., 2017). The first nine items of the questionnaire sought demographic and profiling information about the participant's gender, age, length of service, current role, school postcode/setting, employment status, subjects taught and highest qualification. The remainder of the questionnaire contained items organised according to the broad themes derived from the model of teachers' work theorised by Day et al. (2006):

1. Self-efficacy, agency, professional beliefs and values.
2. Workload and working conditions.
3. English curriculum reforms, policy changes and regulatory requirements.
4. Wellbeing, satisfaction with teaching, and career intentions.

Items formatted as multiple choice questions allowed for internal multiple responses. Most of these question types were based on a Likert rating scale, with the option of 'other' responses and an open field

for comments. Items inviting written comments were open field and not word-limited. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data was considered to be productive for the exploratory, inductive nature of the research, since 'numbers and words are *both* needed if we are to understand the world' (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 42) of teachers' work and the ways in which they make sense of their lived experiences. Phase Two of the study has been designed to build on Phase One by gathering further qualitative data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The findings of this second phase will be reported on separately, at a later date.

### *Sample and participants*

In the research sample of 211 secondary school English teachers from 191 schools across NSW, 181 participants were female, 29 were male and one identified as non-binary (female/male). Twenty-six per cent of the participants can be categorised as early-career teachers with teaching experience of up to five years. Teachers with more than 5 years' teaching experience made up 70 per cent of the sample. The average age of the group was 47 years, with an average length of time teaching of 18 years. Of the 211 participants:

- 64 per cent were classroom English teachers (85 per cent full-time and 11 per cent part-time) in a secondary school;
- 30 per cent were Heads of Department of English;
- 2.8 per cent were casual teachers; and
- the remaining participants were either retired, or in school-based leadership, co-ordination or other executive roles.

Notably, 60 per cent of the sample held an Honours, Masters or PhD degree.

### *Data analysis*

In keeping with the research design, theoretical and conceptual framework, and methodology, qualitative data in the form of participants' written comments were analysed inductively, iteratively and recursively. An average of more than two-thirds of participants provided written comments in questions containing an open field, and some of these comments were extensive. The volume of written responses can be taken as an indicator of teachers' engagement with the issues raised in the questionnaire and their interest in voicing their perspectives. Due to the complexity of the data, the research questions focusing on a typical

workload for a full-time teacher, and limitations of space, only the responses from full-time classroom teachers (including Heads of Department with a teaching load) are explored here.

The initial coding of responses from teachers evinced a number of themes, which were then utilised to collate sub-categories allowing for closer semi-otic analysis and interpretation (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 10). Hermeneutic textual analysis of individual's written responses enabled a multiplicity of 'readings' and the subsequent identification of themes, sub-themes, and patterns of meaning emerging from teachers' situated perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). When the coding, analysis and interpretation were conducted on each question with an open field, a range of written comments in each thematic category was selected as representative of the set of responses in each question. Responses to quantitative items in the questionnaire were analysed for general trends and descriptive participant profile information. Where appropriate, quantitative results are provided in order to indicate the proportion of teachers who chose to provide written comments.

### **Results**

The following sections focus on the responses of participants to questionnaire items related to their workload.

#### *Workload and workload distribution*

In order to determine the nature and time-demands of NSW secondary school English teachers' work, Item 10 of the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate the time spent on a range of activities in a typical working week. A number of these broad categories of activities – such as, for example, those related to meetings, administration and professional collaboration and learning – included sub-categories intended to draw out more nuanced information about the nature of those activities. Participants were also asked to indicate the time spent on work-related tasks on an average weekend.

#### *Average workload*

The findings showed that the average workload for teachers in this sample with a regular teaching load was 58 hours per week, with a portion of this total work time occurring on weekends for a large majority of full-time classroom teachers and Heads of Department. The activities in these teachers' workloads and the average amount of time per week spent on each activity are summarised below.

### *Face-to-face teaching*

As expected, the most significant reported time commitment was for face-to-face teaching, with 81 per cent of classroom teachers spending between 15 and 27 hours per week engaged in this work. The average face-to-face teaching time for classroom teachers in the sample was 20.5 hours. A number of participants commented on the intensification of aspects of their workload that were not directly related to teaching and learning, and the impact of this on their capacity for high quality teaching and commitment. Representative of the concerns expressed by other classroom teachers were comments made by an experienced teacher about the changing nature of her working life:

I have been a teacher for 15 years. In the last 4 or 5 years, I have worked harder, and longer hours, than I did in my first year. The job has changed. I love my kids, and I love the basic premise of this job – guiding kids into the world through literature – but time, funding, expectations, constant changes are all affecting my ability to teach with the energy and positive attitude needed (F, 10+).<sup>3</sup>

### *Planning and preparation directly related to teaching and learning*

Almost half of classroom teachers reported spending three to nine hours per week on planning and preparation directly associated with teaching and learning. For 32 per cent of teachers, a typical week consisted of between 9 and 15 hours of planning and preparation. Almost 10 per cent reported undertaking 19 or more hours of preparation per week to support their face-to-face teaching. Within this 10 per cent, there was a large representation of early-career teachers. One teacher's comments reflected the content of other teachers by highlighting the pressures associated with juggling the demands of teaching-related activities: 'My preparation and marking take up most of my time. Every week, I have to prioritise what it is I am going to focus on, which is stressful. The workload is relentless and endless' (F, 10+).

### *Meetings*

The average amount of time spent on staff meetings and other meetings with colleagues was three hours. Around one fifth of classroom teachers reported spending between three and five hours per week in these kinds of meetings. Staff meetings were typically devoted to operational and school/department policies and administration matters. The meetings were generally not occasions for curriculum development

activities, professional learning or other teaching-related collaborations directly connected to teaching and learning.

### *Marking*

After face-to-face teaching, the marking of student work figured as the second most significant component of English teachers' workload directly related to teaching, with 53 per cent of classroom teachers allocating 5 to 9 hours per week to this task. Almost one fifth of teachers spent more than nine hours per week marking student work. A number of teachers highlighted the cyclical nature of their marking workload, confirming that the hours spent on marking increased at certain peak points during the school year such as assessment, examination and reporting periods. As one teacher remarked, 'These times change throughout the year. During musical time, reporting periods, senior marking, these hours double if not triple' (F, EC).

### *Extra-curricular commitments*

The average amount of time spent on extra-curricular activities (such as, for example, school sport, debating, and drama) was two hours per week. In addition to their classroom teaching, 73 per cent of teachers reported that they spend up to 5 hours per week engaged in extra-curricular activities with their students.

### *Professional collaboration, learning and engagement*

A snapshot based on the highest frequency ranges showed that English teachers spent an average of one to three hours per week engaged in professional collaboration and professional reading. Of note is the finding that 53 per cent of classroom teachers in the sample engaged in curriculum development for between 1 and 5 hours per week. More than a quarter reported spending more than three hours per week on this endeavour. This finding may reflect the fact that at the time of the survey, the new senior secondary syllabus had recently been released, thus requiring teachers to devote additional time to redesigning existing, or developing fresh, teaching programs. Many teachers drew attention to the impact of constant reform and ever-increasing situated expectations on their motivation, resilience and ability to 'teach to their best and well' (Day, 2017, p. xiii):

I love teaching but it is overwhelming and it has affected my mental health ... Every year the workload increases, the behaviour worsens and the support diminishes. I

am giving myself another two years and then I think I'll be out. I love it; I am a generally very well-liked teacher and I am getting good results, but I didn't sign up to be a slave ... who works for free out of school hours, every single day. I'm a smart professional who is successful at my job, and I deserve to be taken seriously and I deserve to be adequately compensated for my time (F, MC).

### **Administration**

Administrative tasks directly related to teaching (emails, data collection, reports, individualised student monitoring and programming, performance auditing, and paperwork associated with activities such as excursions) accounted for a substantial proportion of teachers' workload. More than half of the sample reported spending up to five hours in a typical week on these tasks. Nineteen per cent reported spending between five and nine hours per week on teaching-related administration, with sixteen per cent of the sample spending more than nine hours in a typical week on this work.

Administration directly related to meeting external regulatory requirements such as teacher performance and accreditation contributed to the weekly workload of 72 per cent of English teachers with 21 per cent indicating that these tasks absorbed an additional one to nine hours per week. One experienced teacher's perspective on this aspect of her workload was representative of the views expressed by many others in the study: 'Too much administration detracts from teaching and the love of the job. The number of hours required to merely sustain the role is destroying my family life and my stress levels are usually quite high' (F, 10+).

Combining the average time spent on administration directly related to the teaching role in a school with the average time spent on administration related to compliance with external regulatory policies, classroom teachers spent an average of between eight and twelve hours on administration during a typical school week and weekend.

### **Engagement with students and parents**

Pastoral care of students, individual student consultations and engagement with parents added between one and five hours to the workload of 66 per cent of teachers. For 12 per cent of teachers, the pastoral care of students consistently required more than 5 hours per week. For 97 per cent of the sample, the average time spent on communication and other forms of

engagement with parents was 1 hour per week. Some teachers addressed this dimension of their work, and the underlying pressures and adverse consequences associated with some parental and broader societal attitudes:

We are time-poor, overwhelmed by the external pressures attached to our roles, and are frustrated by the lack of resources, lack of support from parents in general, many of whom do not value education at all, as well as the erosion of our status in society. The money doesn't matter. Most teachers just want to feel respected for their efforts in trying to make differences in their students' lives (F, 10+).

### **Weekend work**

Item 11 of the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate the amount of time they spend during a typical weekend on work-related tasks. For a majority of teachers (96 per cent), the workload activities that could not be completed during the school week were undertaken on weekends. More than 54 per cent reported spending 5 hours or more on a typical weekend with around 20 per cent of these teachers frequently spending more than nine hours each weekend on work-related tasks. As one teacher remarked, 'I cannot think of a single weekend I have not done school work, in almost ten years of teaching' (F, MC). Another commented that 'sometimes I'll spend 15 hours in a weekend giving feedback to students, sometimes 1-3 hours doing admin and lessons for the next week' (M, EC). Teachers also acknowledged the spikes in marking that occur during assessment, examination and reporting periods, noting that the amount of weekend work time depends on these fluctuations throughout the school year: 'If marking or during report season it could be 16+ hours (of weekend work). If not, far less' (F, MC).

### **Professional and situated factors contributing to the intensification of teacher workload**

Teachers identified a suite of professional and situated factors associated with systemic policy, funding and reform agendas that they believe have contributed to their escalating workload. The most frequently cited factors were those over which teachers felt they had little or no control and agency and included:

- administrative and accountability compliance demands associated with monitoring and reporting of teacher and student performance (both internally within the school and department, and

externally through regulatory and other bureaucratic policies);

- high-stakes test preparation, associated data gathering, administration, and heightened expectations from the school executive, students, parents and the wider community;
- the speed of centralised curriculum change and policy reform; and
- a lack of resources and support (both material and human), including inadequate support for implementing new curricula.

These themes and the tensions evident between the rhetoric of policy and the realities of day-to-day teaching were well-articulated by an experienced teacher:

As much as I love being in the classroom, the amount of time it takes to teach well and cope with all the extra jobs that exist in the school is getting to me and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. We're also becoming hugely data driven, and although I know data is important, the tests we are running just don't seem to fit the ideals of '21st Century learners', which every educational body espouses. Creativity doesn't seem to be high on the agenda anymore. I do still love teaching English when I'm in the room with the kids though. It's just getting to the room that's tough (F, MC).

More than 83 per cent of teachers named the aspects of their work that they believed were adversely affected by these externally-driven professional and situated factors, including:

- planning and preparation for teaching;
- providing quality feedback to students;
- scope for reflexive practice;
- creative/innovative teaching and risk-taking; and
- formal and informal professional learning, professional dialogue and school-based collaboration.

### Consequences of intensification of teacher workload

#### *Sustained commitment to teaching*

Of the 110 teachers who commented on their working lives in terms of their levels of motivation and commitment, 30 affirmed their continued passion and altruism with comments such as: 'My passion for teaching has grown throughout my career' (F, 10+). 'I still want to make a difference' (F, 10+); and 'I am still passionate about literature and learning and thinking and hope to pass that on to students' (F, 10+). A number of teachers pointed to the enabling influence of supportive

colleagues and leadership (situated factors) as a crucial factor in sustaining their commitment to teaching:

I have been fortunate to work in an intellectually stimulating environment with a diverse range of students – because this environment has been supportive, I feel that I have been able to live up to my goals (F, 10+).

I have worked with supportive and caring staff who have a strong vision. The schools also had strong vision and leadership that supported teachers. I have weathered the highs and lows of teaching because of these and the feeling that I am making a difference in the lives of some of my students (F, 10+).

#### *In tension: commitment to teaching, workload pressures and work-life balance*

A further 90 teachers, however, identified tensions in the professional and situated factors that impact their work as English teachers. They expressed frustration that the work they regarded as their core business was increasingly compromised as they struggled to cope with the burgeoning nature of their workload beyond face-to-face teaching. They volunteered extensive written elaborations related to the toll workload pressures have taken on their personal and professional lives, motivation and aspirations. Many teachers echoed the perspective conveyed by one teacher in terms of the disjunction between the desire to teach to their best and the exigencies of a workload that has incrementally prevented some from sustaining this goal:

The dream and aspirations of teaching versus the reality differ greatly. Between juggling the ever-daunting administration duties in conjunction with the polymathic demands of the profession and the act of delivering and planning content, there is no time to breathe. We're drowning (M, EC).

From an analysis of written comments, a cluster of prominent themes emerged around the impact of workload on the teacher's personal and professional lives, including:

- the emotional labour of being a teacher (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 838; Lo & Liew, 2016);
- work-life balance issues, including impacts on health and wellbeing;
- fatigue, burnout or concerns about burnout;
- lack of respect for and support of classroom teachers' work;
- reduced time, systemic support and funding for professional development;
- flagging levels of motivation;

- diminished levels of resilience; and
- ambivalence about their continued role in the profession.

One teacher's response encapsulated the interdependent nature of these themes, expressing the flow-through effect of intensified workload on her personal and professional life:

Maintaining motivation about teaching has been difficult. I still love teaching teenagers and enjoy my subject; however, I do feel overwhelmed. My work-life balance is terrible. I let my own children down all the time and often prioritise my students. I have become cynical about examinations and structures, believing that it is impossible to teach well in our current policy-driven environment (F, 10+).

Similarly, an experienced teacher voiced a common theme that 'the lack of time means we are frazzled, running from class to class, never doing anything as successfully as we'd like' (F, 10+). Another observed that the 'changing nature of the job makes me constantly reconsider why I'm still doing it. The opportunity to bring a love of literature and the world to kids still exists, but I feel that external factors are making it harder and harder' (F, 10+). The impact of an intensified workload on a teacher's professional identity and perceived self-worth is further illustrated by an experienced teacher's reflection on the state of her working life:

Currently I am in constant flux regarding my feelings of worth in being a teacher. There are some good days, but others that are extremely overwhelming and depressing. The thought of facing a new syllabus next year, requiring a whole new direction/resources/texts etc is, quite frankly, really daunting. I am worried about the timeframe to prepare adequately and feel confident ... Every text I currently teach and have numerous resources for is no longer on the list so I must start from scratch AGAIN! (F, 10+).

When asked to indicate the extent to which their health and wellbeing were affected by their workload as teachers, more than 80 per cent of classroom teachers believed that their health and wellbeing were to varying degrees deleteriously impacted by their increasing workload. Of this group, 48 teachers expanded on their responses through written comments, often sharing candid reflections that revealed a troubling pattern of physical and psychological struggle:

I know I have no work-life balance. My personal and family life has suffered because of the demands of this

job. In order to survive in a classroom in which we have to cater for students with quite diverse needs, feeling that we have to exceed the expectations of a society which does not value teaching or education, and just simply keep up-to-date with the constantly changing nature of curriculum and teaching methodologies, means that we are generally overworked. I never thought I would say this, but I will be very pleased to see my retirement days be realised (F, 10+).

In this vein, the themes of frustration, exhaustion, and depleted levels of morale were pronounced in 52 teachers' comments in relation to the issue of burnout. These teachers described either a state of burnout or serious concerns about the potential for burnout for themselves and/or colleagues: 'I am very concerned and worried [about burnout] having watched several people leave the profession for this reason' (F, EC).

#### **Work satisfaction and career intentions**

This was the focus of Item 24 of the questionnaire, with just over 46 per cent of classroom teachers reporting that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their work as teachers. Of this group, 31 teachers volunteered written remarks expressing that they 'love teaching', while qualifying this with a 'but': 'I love teaching, but am overwhelmed by the constant demands of the job and how much work I need to do in order to even attempt to meet the varying needs of my students' (F, EC); 'I love what I do, but I am so tired' (F, 10+); 'I still love it, but the admin and expectations make me sad. It's hard to even eat lunch in peace and that is not healthy' (F, 10+); and 'I still love kids and literature and the teaching aspect of my job, but the excessive paperwork and extra required work is exhausting' (F, 10+).

We draw attention to the very high written response rate to matters of health, wellbeing and burnout in order to underline that for almost a quarter of teachers, the constraining professional and situated dimensions of their work have dominated that work to the extent that they have, or continue to, negatively impact(ed) on the teachers' personal lives and motivation to teach.

Around 10 per cent of teachers were 'unsure' about whether they were satisfied with their work, and a further 25 per cent were 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied'. The percentage of negatively rated responses to this question were consonant with the proportion of teachers who expressed concerns about their motivation, health, wellbeing, and burnout in an earlier question. Repeatedly, however, these teachers spoke of their unswerving dedication to their students as the

overriding 'pull' factor in their ongoing commitment to teaching: 'I love the job, but I'm dissatisfied with the external issues. I have considered leaving, but the kids keep me coming back' (F, 10+); 'I stay because of the students, not the shifting climate' (F, MC); 'This is not a black-white answer. I know I am a great teacher, and I know I make a difference in students' lives but it is an incredibly stressful job with little financial reward and is taking a toll on my mental health and my family's wellbeing' (F, EC).

Teachers who reported greater levels of dissatisfaction with and ambivalence about their work also expressed the intention to exit teaching prematurely, or had considered this option. As one teacher observed, 'I'm unsure that I will continue teaching. I do not believe that teachers can maintain their current workload. My passion for creating units and programming, and delivering them, has been eroded by administrative overload' (F, 10+). For some teachers, financial obligations operated to restrict their choices for alternative employment: '[I stay] for financial reasons predominantly. I would love to go back to just teaching with paperwork in the background' (F, 10+); '[I'll stay] until I can find other work' (F, 10+). The limited employment options for older teachers and uncertainty about employability in other fields emerged as a strong theme, represented by one teacher's statement that 'I can't see what else I'll do' (F, 10+).

### Synthesis of key findings

#### *NSW secondary English teachers' workload in comparison to international, national and state averages*

Given the responses of teachers in this study, it is timely to compare their self-reported workload with the terms of contractual employment requirements. In NSW, the industrial agreement for permanent, full-time teachers stipulates a workload of 38 hours per week (NSW DoE, 2016, p. 2). This workload accords with that set out in similar employment agreements in other Australian jurisdictions and corresponds with the OECD average for lower secondary school teachers (Freeman, O'Malley & Eveleigh, 2014). Full-time secondary school teachers in NSW are required to undertake the equivalent of 20 hours and 40 minutes per week of face-to-face teaching (NSW DoE, 2016, p. 2), which closely aligns with the findings in the present study. When it comes to other activities in teachers' workload, NSW secondary English teachers

reported spending an average of six and a half hours on work activities on a weekend – a finding that chimes with the results reported in the recent Victorian SSWS (2016) and the NSW UWSFTL study (2018). The distribution of workload for teachers in the present study revealed substantially heavier demands on teachers' time in the combined areas of administration, planning, preparation and marking, than that reported in the TALIS 2013 Australian results.

The TALIS 2013 Australian findings noted that the average workload of Australian teachers in that study was '43 hours per week, 5 more than the average for TALIS countries [emphasis added]' (Freeman et al., 2014, p. 3). From the SiAS 2013 survey results, the average workload for Australian teachers was 47.6 hours and for NSW secondary teachers 49.4 hours (McKenzie et al., 2014, p. 50). The Victorian SSWS (2016) found the average workload for secondary teachers in that state was 52.9 hours, almost 15 hours per week more than the OECD average in 2013. Similarly, the NSW UWSFTL (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018) showed that teachers in NSW public schools worked, on average, 55 hours each week. With a reported average workload of 58 hours per week, NSW secondary English teachers in the present study have a 50 per cent greater workload than the TALIS 2013 OECD average of 38 hours, a more than 20 per cent greater workload than the SiAS 2013 survey average, an almost 10 per cent greater workload than Victorian secondary teachers (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), and a 3 per cent greater workload than the average for all NSW public school teachers in the NSW UWSFTL study (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

Considering the time lag of four years between the TALIS 2013, the SiAS 2013 survey and the present study, along with the differences in the methodology and the sample size of these studies, it is problematic to make anything more than simple comparisons between the findings. However, the themes evident in NSW English teachers' perspectives on their workload resonate strongly with the findings reported in both the Victorian SSWS (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) and the NSW UWSFTL (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

#### *The professional and situated dimensions: Navigating a culture of performativity*

Like teachers in the English Teacher Workload Survey (Higton et al., 2017), the Victorian School Staff Workload Survey (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), and the NSW Understanding Work in Schools study (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018), teachers' responses in the present study

consistently drew attention to the ballooning nature of their non-face-to-face teaching workload and its consequences. They attributed workload pressures to substantial increases in administrative tasks (professional and situated dimensions) associated with burgeoning compliance demands around the monitoring, measurement and reporting of teacher and student performance. On this point, Day has argued that 'there can be little doubt that teachers in this century face unprecedented national pressures to comply with policy agendas through increasingly interventionist systems of surveillance of the quality of their work and its measurable impact on pupil progress and attainment' (Day, 2017, pp. 2–3).

For NSW secondary English teachers, the 'national pressures to comply with policy agendas' have been exacerbated by a number of local, situated factors. Predominant amongst these has been the intense period of curriculum reform and implementation in NSW over the past four years. Since 2014, secondary English teachers (and other subject teachers) have been required to implement a renewed junior secondary syllabus and senior secondary syllabus. Despite robust representations by the profession and other stakeholders to the statutory body responsible for curriculum in NSW – the NSW Education and Standards Authority (NESA) – arguing for the need to provide teachers with a realistic lead-in time for the implementation of a new senior secondary syllabus, teachers' voices and professional judgement were overridden (Manuel et al., 2017).

Since English is the only compulsory subject in the NSW curriculum, the pressure on English teachers to demonstrate and account for improved achievement for all students in high-stakes national literacy tests and equally high-stakes state-based external examinations is particularly acute. These professional and situated (Day et al., 2006) dimensions of English teachers' working lives were powerful themes in participants' written comments, with one teacher capturing the sentiments of others by concluding that 'it is impossible to teach well in our current policy-driven environment' (F, 10+).

Teachers recognised that the ever-increasing demands on their time meant that they were forced to compromise the time spent on tasks they regarded as essential for improving teaching and learning, that is: planning and preparation for lessons; providing feedback to students; and engaging in reflexive practice, creative and innovative teaching, professional

learning, dialogue and collaboration. For many, these compromises translated into a constellation of professional and personal (Day et al., 2006) consequences, with more than one quarter feeling 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied'. Navigating a culture of performativity posed direct challenges to their values, beliefs, motivation, and levels of commitment, prompting more than one quarter of classroom teachers to report that they have considered, or are considering, leaving the profession.

The teachers' comments in this study underline what is now well understood from a growing body of research (Kyriacou, 2001; Ryan et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) – that is, that workload pressures and the ensuing stress experienced by teachers as a result of external accountability and performance demands are linked to 'adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition' (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 2). Studies of teacher workload and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) have shown that 'measures of teacher burnout predict both subjective and objective health as well as teachers' motivation and job satisfaction' (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, p. 519).

Many teachers in this study alluded to a narrowing and impaired sense of agency wrought by pressures to comply with regulatory policies, fast-paced curriculum change (without what they believed to be necessary support and professional learning), and performance surveillance. Added to this, teachers highlighted the impact of political and public discourses of declining standards and deficit narratives of the teaching profession. These findings resonate with national and international research (Ball, 2012; Connell, 2009; Glazer, 2018; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011, 2017; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) that similarly reports the deleterious impact of large-scale educational reforms on teachers' levels of professional agency, autonomy, work satisfaction, motivation, enthusiasm and disposition to 'teach to their best and well' (Day, 2017, p. 21).

#### **Towards re-balancing the professional, situated and personal dimensions: Teachers' solutions**

In their written comments, teachers in the study offered a range of solutions, mostly reflecting the situated dimension (Day et al., 2006; Day, 2017), to address the impact of an intensified workload on their capacity to direct their time, energy and expertise to the core business of teaching and student learning. In order of frequency, these solutions were:

- to reduce face-to-face teaching to enable more time for planning, preparation, collaboration and genuine creativity;
- to slow down the pace of change;
- to increase support through school-based and systemic opportunities for collaborative learning and innovation;
- to remove or reduce administrative tasks associated with external regulatory and compliance requirements;
- to increase time and funding to support the implementation of new curricula; and
- to add inclusive consultation and decision-making processes around curricula and policy reform that are respectful of, and driven by, teachers' professional judgement.

Again, these suggestions resonate strongly with those set out in the two most recent Australian studies reporting on teacher workload (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). Representative of the common perspective of teachers in the present study was the recommendation that:

We must have funds or reduced face to face time to cope with the changes constantly thrown at us and so we can adjust our teaching/build resources/reflect, etc. to deliver the best outcome possible. I am teaching too much 'on the hop' and it is neither as fulfilling or as fruitful as it could be, but I have to do so otherwise I'd work 70+ hours every week as opposed to 70+ hours during report and marking periods (F, MC).

### Concluding reflections

For teachers in this study, the lived experience of an intensified and excessive workload was perceived to be the single most determinant factor in impeding their capacity to attend to the tasks necessary for high quality teaching and learning. Workload tasks associated with policy and curricula reform and compliance constituted the most dominant situated and professional factor undermining their levels of commitment to the profession (personal dimension). Their workload distribution can be understood in terms of two categories. The first entails the visible, 'contained' time allocated to face-to-face teaching, regular staff/departmental meetings, and extra-curricular activities that has remained relatively stable and in line with national and international averages.

The second category encompasses the time spent on a range of tasks beyond those necessary for effective teaching that is not formally stipulated in terms of

required workload hours. This category of workload is therefore 'uncontained', often 'invisible' and ostensibly prone to the kind of unchecked escalation reported by teachers in this study. According to participants, this unchecked 'invisible' component is directly attributable to a raft of professional and situated factors. This finding aligns with the responses of teachers in the Victorian *School Staff Workload Survey* (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) and the NSW *Understanding Work in Schools* report (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

Up to one-third of English teachers in this study reported experiencing what Day et al. (2006) theorised as 'Scenario 3' (pp. 150–154). In this scenario, two dimensions of a teacher's work dominate and impact on a third. For example, difficult situated conditions due to workplace demands, coupled with community expectations of quality teaching (professional dimension), impact on the teacher's health and personal motivation leading them to be 'more negative about their well-being and work-life balance' (p. xiii) and their ongoing commitment to the profession. This finding emphasises that the problems of workload stress, disillusionment, burnout and struggle have a more nuanced and complex cause than the personal shortcomings of an individual teacher (Schaefer, 2013, p. 265).

Many of the English teachers in this study, like Boxer in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, reported that they continue to 'work harder' (1945/2000, p. 25), but they are becoming increasingly aware that the systemic challenges of teaching and learning that they face cannot simply be overcome by their individual efforts alone. The flawed narrative of the individual teacher prevailing at any cost ultimately absolves institutions and systems of their responsibility for ensuring that the professional and situated conditions shaping teachers' work are inherently enabling of quality teaching and learning – a principle laid out by the OECD (2005):

The quality of teaching is determined not just by the 'quality' of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also the environment in which they work. Able teachers are not necessarily going to reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge or reward (p. 9).

The findings of this study with NSW secondary English teachers expose the implications of an individualist-focused narrative of teachers' work: the 'problems' teachers identified were overwhelmingly those stemming from interventionist policies and a lack of

‘appropriate support’. Unless and until government policy, attention and funding is directed to addressing these crucial professional and situated dimensions, the work of many invested teachers will continue to be at risk as their intrinsic and altruistic ambitions as educators are jeopardised – ambitions that one teacher, representative of many more, voiced so lucidly: ‘I have a strong and clear moral purpose – that I can make a difference in the life of a child and that all children deserve a quality education’ (F, 10+).

## Notes

- 1 The Higher School Certificate is the exit credential for final year secondary school students in NSW and includes an external examination.
- 2 The Board Inspector of English is responsible for the development and maintenance of the English curriculum K-12 in NSW.
- 3 Throughout the paper, direct quotations from participants will be referenced with identifiers of gender (F/M/O) and three categories of length of teaching experience (Early-career: 1–5 years = EC; Mid-career: 6–10 years = MC; More than 10 years’ experience =10+)

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# Should We Ban Books in Schools?

## Arguments from the Public History of Australian School Text Censorship

David Hastie, Education & Humanities, Alphacrucis College

**Abstract:** The sensitive question of whether censorship is permissible in the classroom has not been effectively explored, nor has there been an exhaustive survey of all occurrences of public censorship in schools. Through tracking all public occurrences, this article seeks to understand whether censorship is ever justified in both the English classroom and the school beyond. The language surrounding occurrences revealed three different social discourses about the agency of the child: *purity and danger*, *the pedagogy of the oppressed*, and *liberal consensus*. Whether text censorship is justified is ultimately a nuanced ethical issue concerning what constitutes the good society and the free agency of its children. From a social utilitarian position, I conclude that the *liberal consensus* model is most constructive for the Australian social contract, and argue for a rare case for censorship when a consensus model is undermined.

### Introduction

Since the impulsive 1997 banning of two NSW HSC texts, *Fine Flour* and *Top Girls*, the English teachers' journal *English in Australia (EinA)* has been the premier site for the discussion of Australian school text censorship: a whole special edition was dedicated that year in response to the scandal. Since then, two further articles have been published in *EinA* based on field studies of teacher attitudes and parent challenges (Hastie, 2014a; Hastie, 2017). The sensitive question of whether censorship is permissible in the classroom has not been effectively explored, however, nor has there been an exhaustive survey of all occurrences of public censorship in schools.

Through tracking all public occurrences, this article seeks to understand whether censorship is ever justified in both the English classroom and beyond. The language surrounding occurrences revealed three different social discourses about the agency of the child: *purity and danger*, *the pedagogy of the oppressed*, and *liberal consensus*. Depending on which of these discourses was privileged in the case at the time, public censorship was given sanction in Australian schools, but in very different ways, and relating to different kinds of texts.

To ban, or not to ban, is a nuanced ethical issue, and it is ultimately ethical categories that help us to sort through the frequently absurd political language around incidents of censorship. *Purity and danger*, *the pedagogy of the oppressed*, and *liberal consensus* are contending views about what constitutes the good society and the free agency of its children. Whether to censor, therefore, is about deciding which of these discourses of society and children's agency is most valid, and the ethical categories most defensible within its discourse.

From a social utilitarian position, I conclude that the *liberal consensus* model is most constructive for the Australian social contract, and argue a rare case for censorship when a consensus model is undermined.

### Intelligent Heroes vs Purity Defenders

Internationally, most theoretical writing on censorship per se does not explore school textbook censorship, but focuses on politics, customs seizures, pornography, the First Amendment (in the United States), and notable legal cases (e.g., Moore, 2012). Amongst the study of children's texts, issues of sex education and human origins are just as likely to attract attention from researchers as does mainstream English literature, and the research context almost always includes the school library as well as the classroom (American Library Association [ALA], 2011; Doyle, 2010). Globally, there are few known empirical fieldwork studies of English teachers and text selection, and these are all small samples (Freedman & Johnson, 2001, p. 368).

Similarly, most of the academic literature on censorship in Australia has to do with political censorship or the legal vice cases of counter-culture undergraduate-style magazines, such as the *Angry Penguins* and *Oz* (Moore, 2012). However, the written record around school text censorship in Australia has almost always been the artefact of a particular controversy at a particular time, with public demands by a religious organisation, politician or media figure, to ban a certain text from schools (Hastie, 2014a).

The empirical study of schools and censorship in the Australian context is minimal. Williams and Dillon's (1993) study of Australian libraries is the most comprehensive but is a broad survey of librarians in schools and community libraries, with no targeted sub-research of classrooms. It is also frequently unscholarly: for example, it employs gratuitous satire against parents who challenge books in libraries and is unreflectively aligned with a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' discourse. Moody's (2004) article is more measured but includes no empirical data. Apart from this, material is too localised, personalised and slight to provide adequate research taxonomies for an article such as this. Indeed, I have only found one Australian publication advocating restriction of texts that might be categorised as academic: a brief response by a school principal to *EinA's* anti-censorship articles of the *Top Girls* scandal considered later in this article (Mullins, 1998). The research taxonomies, therefore, will need to be created as this article unfolds.

The majority of public *language* about censorship, in both Australia and the United States, tends to be characterised by two distinctly different narrative shapes.<sup>1</sup> Those who might be described as 'libertarian' in approaches to censorship tend to privilege the free

autonomous agency of children to be allowed to access texts as a matter of individual empowerment, and the resistance of power claims over their lives. Such a stance belongs to what might be characterised as the 'emancipatory' (Symes & Macintyre, 2000) theoretical family, such as critical discourse, Neo-Marxist and Foucaultian approaches. In educational terms, Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* might act as a trope for these, and hence I will appropriate the title as a category title. These advocates speak in terms of an intelligent 'hero/stupid villain' narrative (with themselves as hero). On the other hand, social conservatives seek to employ a 'purity/danger' narrative shape, a taxonomy I appropriate from Mary Douglas's anthropological trope in her classic analysis of religion and society, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2001).

On the one hand, 'intelligent heroes' defend open society ('anti-censorship'), and 'stupid villains' create closed society ('censors'). On the other hand, the defenders of 'purity' restrain moral pollution/disease/violation (anti-censorship) in society and children. As will be seen, all cases of public text censorship in Australia have been characterised by a bitter argument between these two irreconcilable approaches to the social good. Both use 'fundamentalistic' language (Ochs & Capps, 1996) to characterise the other. Neither use evidence to justify their characterisations.

In the only published empirical survey of school text censorship, apart from my own two articles in *EinA* (Hastie 2014a, 2017), Williams and Dillon (1993) employ the same 'fundamentalistic' narrative, where 'censors' are described as a 'type' of 'gauche, philistine reactionary', or, ominously, 'certain organised groups' with a 'narrow political agenda', who 'descend on the school or the local media with a story about the school'. Such language simultaneously invokes tropes of stupidity, poor taste, barbaric violence ('philistine', 'descend'), and social stasis ('reactionary', 'narrow'). Williams and Dillon also describe censors as 'minority', 'undemocratic', exerting 'inordinate pressure', and who are 'a problem' (1993, pp. 8–9).

All other examples cluster around particular public instances, and it will be useful to analyse the language of all of these in historical sequence. Happily, this can be an exhaustive review, because publicised instances of English set text censorship are rare, the 1997 banning of *Fine Flour* and *Top Girls* in NSW being the most prominent. Hence, it will be necessary to observe some school text-banning beyond the English classroom.

### *Women's Liberation Masturbation Manual* 1971

Whilst anti-censorship debates were prominent throughout Australian politics and law from the 1940s (Moore, 2012), until the 1970s the public debate relating to school education appears to have been somewhat low-key and coincides with the rise of Neo-Marxism and Critical Theory in Australian universities. In 1971, a sex education pamphlet including an instruction guide on masturbation written by members of the Women's Liberation Movement was distributed to school girls outside their campuses across Brisbane (Moore, 2012, p. 294). It was described in Brisbane's parliament in various ways: 'despicable', 'impudent', 'peddling salacious material to children in a public place' (812), 'moral anarchy', links with communism,<sup>2</sup> 'the disruptive efforts of the small university group to smash all that sustains Christian society' (Queensland Parliament, 1971, October 6, 820–823, various speakers).

In a now forgotten flourish of florid right-wing Australian oratory, Charles Porter, Member for Toowong, condemned the Women's Liberation Movement for

assum[ing] the right to prepare material and distribute it to young girls, material in the form of a pamphlet that is so obscene, so lewd, and such an outrage of unmodesty [*sic*] as to make a hardened whore blush. ... I believe that a perusal of this pamphlet by unprepared young girls – and I mean 'unprepared' in the sense of having this sort of material thrust in their hands – could leave lasting scars on them. The majority of these girls are not the avid, sexually precocious nymphets that the intelligentsia would have us believe they are, but are girls as they always have been in every generation – decent, innocent and unsuspecting. In my view they should not be left defenceless against this type of attack. ... Society is entitled to protect itself against these forlorn and perverted creatures, who want to rationalise their own maladjustments by wreaking havoc on young girls and steering them into the barren world of permissiveness, eroticism and unbridled sexuality – and it is a barren world ... I believe that those who peddle these putrescent pamphlets to immature girls are as much molesters of children as are the debased men who take them aside and maul them. They are making a premeditated, malevolent attack on children and on the family unit, and society should be protected against this attack. (Queensland Parliament, 1971, October 6, 821–823).

Porter's utterance needs to be taken within a broader context of challenge to English class texts in Queensland in 1971. In this debate, Porter reiterated his earlier criticism:

A few weeks ago, I raised in this debate the matter of books that were being used in the study of Senior

English, books which I believed had very little literary merit, were of a somewhat unsavoury and salacious character and had a tendency to introduce a very pernicious form of sex education into schools under the guise of the teaching of English. (Queensland Parliament, 1971, October 6, 821–823)

In this debate, Porter made a seamless link between the Women's Liberation Pamphlet and this earlier issue with English teachers who

displayed an alarming attitude of academic arrogance, a suggestion that there is an intellectual elite that is so superior to all the rest of us that those who belong to it cannot be questioned in their self-appointed role as leaders and innovators in the field of permissiveness. (Queensland Parliament, 1971, October 6, 821–823)

Here the 'intelligentsia' are being derided for polluting society, proposing a resistant reading to the 'intelligent hero/stupid villain' discourse matrix.

In this earlier speech, Porter indicated he had received a number of complaints from parents, whom he did not identify, about Senior English texts. The list of titles he provides (several of which are misattributed in his speech)<sup>3</sup> indicates that the 'parents' almost certainly included Rona Joyner (Maddox, 2014c, pp. xiii–xiv) and Angel Rendle-Short. Rendle-Short's comprehensive campaign against a range of English set texts – including very similar lists – is recorded in her daughter's semi-biographical book *Bite Your Tongue* (2011), which I have dealt with more extensively in another publication (Hastie, 2014a).

Similar to his October speech, Porter's language is mapped across a 'purity/danger' matrix:

What is happening under the guise of the teaching of English in our secondary schools? ... certain people have decided that children should be given the opportunity to experience vicariously these various forms of debased indulgence ... Children are receiving a most unbalanced kind of sex education in the guise of the teaching of contemporary English expression ... Do not confuse this with the cry of the sacred freedom of the individual to read what he wants to ... I consider it to be the worst form of modern madness to expose youngsters unnecessarily to what is termed the modern novel. And it becomes raving insanity when they are not only exposed to it but are also required, under the authority of a curriculum, to put their noses into the trough. ... raw, crude and shocking ... this insidious brain-washing, which is aimed at crippling the human spirit, should not be undertaken in the guise of teaching English expression ... a most unhealthy and potentially dangerous situation for our young people. (Queensland Parliament, 1971, September 1, 334–335)

Porter's poetic turn of phrase captures the 'purity/danger' discourse matrix around censorship with flair, although his malapropistic list suggests he has not actually read any of the novels which so incensed him.

### *The Little Red School Book* 1972

In 1972 an English translation of *The Little Red School Book* appeared in Australia. Originally written by two school teachers in Denmark, the book was never a set text in Australia but a subversive tract handed from student to student, providing graphic advice about sexuality, drug use and counter-culture behaviour. The Queensland Literature Board of Review banned the book, and bookshops were raided by NSW Vice Squad police (Moore, 2012, pp. 283–285). When it was seized by the Victorian Police on April 19, 1972, the *Catholic Weekly* attacked the book as 'a nasty, shoddy publication which should never have been allowed into Australia ... positively dangerous in its advice on sex', and the State Secretary of the Catholic-based Democratic Labor Party sent a warning letter to all Victorian secondary school headmasters, describing those who promoted it as 'an arrogant minority, attempting to usurp parents' rights and teachers' responsibilities' (Day & Dunn, 1972, p. 1). The Australian Union of Students said the ban would make Victoria 'join Queensland in becoming the laughing stock of the rest of Australia' (Day & Dunn, 1972, p. 1). Radical anti-censorship activist and sometime anarchist Wendy Bacon led a national university student campaign to distribute *The Little Red School Book* at school gates, and published large slabs of the book in the University of NSW (UNSW) student newspaper *Tharunka*. Bacon and the UNSW response was part of a much larger provocative counter-cultural social agenda – indeed, she had been jailed for obscenity in 1971, for wearing a blasphemous sign pinned to a nun's habit costume she was wearing, which she also wore to her court hearings (Moore, 2012, pp. 283–285).

Here, the familiar language polarities of intelligent hero vs. stupid villain occurs ('laughing stock'), including contempt and satire by university students. Yet the 'purity/danger' discourse matrix ('nasty, shoddy ... positively dangerous') dominates across the language of the many opponents of *The Little Red School Book*, including many in the Federal Cabinet. The *Catholic Weekly*, as reported in *The Age*, also linked the book's potential presence in schools to '[o]bscene and perverted devices on sale in the sex shops now proliferating in our capital cities' (Day and Dunn, *The Age*, 20 April, 1972, p. 4), depicting the book's presence

as part of a broader pollution of Australian society. The University of Melbourne's 2010 exhibition 'Banned Books in Australia' showed Federal Customs Minister Don Chipp's 'file on the subject contain[ing] more than 400 items, most – though not all – from vehement opponents of *The Little Red School Book*'. A representative letter reads, 'Ban the "Red Book" and make it clear you are not a moral coward bent on making our young folk a bunch of moral savages.' (University of Melbourne Library, 2010). Here we have the anthropological frame of Mary Douglas writ large: the idea of savagery versus civilisation, of tribal taboo.

### MACOS and SEMP 1978

Also prominent was the drive by self-proclaimed Christian groups to remove the social studies programs, 'Man: A Course of Study' (MACOS) and Social Education Materials Project (SEMP), from Queensland schools in 1978. Smith and Knight characterised the campaign as a

continuing, organised drive by members of Fundamentalist groups to purge education of all 'progressive' and liberal elements, and return it to a more 'essentialist' posture ... to create a totalitarian Fundamentalist Christian society in Australia. (Smith & Knight, 1978, as cited in Maddox, 2014c, p. xviii)

In *Taking God to School*, a broad 2014 polemic against government support of religion in Australian education, Marion Maddox begins by relating in satirical, naïve narrative her personal experience of the MACOS controversy whilst a schoolgirl: 'we were mainly transfixed by the [baboons'] hot-pink, leathery, hairless buttocks – another triumph of classroom film' (Maddox, 2014c, p. xii). The airy innocence of her experience of the usefully educational MACOS is then contrasted to the intemperate extremity (stupidity) of its opponents – 'local boycotts and town meetings whose flavour can be sensed from the resolution from Lake City, Florida, in 1970 denouncing MACOS for promoting "sex education, evolution, hippie-yippy philosophy, pornography, gun control and communism"' (xii, emphasis added).

The anti-MACOS/SEMP primary commentary quoted in *Taking God to School* depicts a 'purity/danger' discourse matrix, which is then rhetorically contrasted with Maddox's own 'intelligent/stupid' matrix. Maddox positions herself as intelligent and fundamentalist Christians as stupid, and this tone characterises her entire monograph. Norma Gabler, one of the

key anti-MACOS/SEMP activists in the United States (Gabler & Gabler, 2011), visited Australia in 1977, meeting up with Rona Joyner (already mentioned above). They agitated successfully to have the Bjelke-Peterson government remove the MACOS and SEMP material from schools for its implications of “adultery, cannibalism, divorce, trial marriage, female infanticide, murder, senilicide, bestiality, incest and sexual promiscuity” (Gabler, as cited in Maddox, 2014c, p. xiv; Matheison, 1986, p. 6).

The ‘purity/danger’ matrix, with its reference back to notions of primitive taboo, is here writ large, alongside the ‘intelligent/stupid’ matrix of Maddox, and of writers such as Matheison in her *Queensland Teachers’ Journal* account:

The bans were not in response to concerns held by teachers, parents, students, educational experts ... but by born-again (from atheism) fundamental Christian Rona Joyner ... her lobby groups, including STOP (Society to Outlaw Pornography); CARE (Campaign Against Regressive Education) and the amusingly titled COME (Committee on Morals and Education). (Matheison, 1986:6)

In fact, Australian public commentary from conservative ‘censors’ is much rarer than the ‘anti-censor’ commentary. I sighted one example some years ago in a 1981 Christian Schools Australia (CSA) school promotional tract by Christian Community Schools founder Bob Friskin, which he now distances himself from (Friskin, 2011).<sup>4</sup> It was lying in a pile of tracts in the front office of a rural CSA school. The controversy around the MACOS study programme in schools in the late 1970s was probably a catalyst for this pamphlet, although it is not named as such. But Robert Long and Neville Buch verify the rise of Christian education in the years following the controversy:

Of all the Themelic [Fundamentalist/Calvinist] schools which currently exist in Queensland more than 68% were started in the seven years following the MACOS controversy (CSAQ Directory, 1995). In these seven years following the MACOS controversy Themelic schools grew at more than 30% annually which was more than fifteen times the national average enrolment change in government and other non-government schools (Connell 1993: 101). (Long & Buch, 1996, p. 18)

In fact, the growth trajectory of ‘Themelic schools’ continued unabated long after this (and continues to this day), so the link is perhaps less certain. To be sure, there was much ferment at the time, mostly coming out of Queensland, and the founding of the Christian

Community Schools Sydney (later CSA) also coincided with this climate.

### *Young, Gay and Proud* 1979

Another prominent 1970s public text complaint arose around the tract *Young, Gay and Proud*. It emerged in NSW as part of a broader context in the Wran government’s de-criminalisation of homosexuality. Using what appears to be a generic set of paragraphs, 35 separate petitions to the NSW Parliament throughout 1982–83 condemned the Anti-Discrimination Board’s ‘irrational proposal that copies of *Young, Gay and Proud*, an obscene children’s school textbook, should be included in all school libraries ... [it] is a threat to morals of children.’ (NSW Parliament *Petitions*, Legislative Assembly 1982,1983). According to the then premier Neville Wran, The Reverend Fred Nile, representing the Call to Australia Party in the NSW Legislative Council, published a newspaper advertisement claiming that ‘[t]he Board even recommends in its report ... that a controversial restricted pornographic publication *Young, Gay and Proud*, which contains explicit details of sodomy and other perversions be used in schools’. The claim it was to be used in schools was then [accurately] refuted as false by the then Premier of NSW in the Hansard transcript (NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly, 1982: 2164–2165).

The six-page manual *Young, Gay and Proud* was first produced in 1978 by ‘[a]n anonymous collective of the Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group’, intended for use by school students. In the teachers’ support material accompanying the pamphlet, the stated aims were to

- clearly affirm the validity of a homosexual preference;
- provide accurate and relevant information to the gay student; and
- convey its message in simple and direct language. (Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students Group, 1978b, p. 2)

*Young, Gay and Proud* does indeed contain graphic sex advice (e.g. the sections, ‘Doing it – Lesbians’ and ‘Doing it – Gay men’, pp. 36–42), and controversial advice such as ‘don’t trust the police’ and ‘many police are bullies’ (p. 44). Much of its content, however, relates as much to being a student safety document as a provocative political tract. *Young, Gay and Proud* is depicted as being in the direct lineage of *The Little Red School Book* in the *Dictionary of Educational History*

in *Australia and New Zealand (DEHANZ)* (Campbell, 2014). Whilst it was clearly political and part of the counter-cultural activism explored above, *Young, Gay and Proud* was the first time that the notion of 'safety', which belongs in the 'purity/danger' discourse matrix, was used in public language to describe morality in schools other than conservative Christian morality, albeit for individual students, rather than society at large. The heated politics surrounding the distribution (and subsequent restriction) of the manual is described well in Daniel Marshall's 2005 essay, 'Young, Gay and Proud in Retrospect: Sexual Politics, Community Activism and Pedagogical and Intervention' (Marshall, 2005). The 'purity/danger' language characterised the public debate, with homosexual teachers being depicted in some instances as predatory. It is interesting to note that university students were, as with the other cases described above, instrumental in its production and often subversive distribution to schools.

Other less prominent public bans/attempts between the 1970s and the mid-1990s occurred from time to time, but these had less specific application in schools, were more localised, and seem to now only appear in secondary references: Patrick White's *The Twyburn Affair* in 1989 (Moore, 2012, p. 227); Hal Porter's *Watcher on the Cast Iron Balcony*, Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*, Louis Nowra's *Summer of the Aliens* (Hayes, 1998, pp. 21–23). Throughout the secondary source language around these instances, the 'intelligent/stupid' discourse pervades.

### *Top Girls and Fine Flour* 1997

Probably the most public censorship incident relating to English texts in Australia was the 1997 banning of Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* and Gillian Mears's novel *Fine Flour* from the HSC reading list. *EinA* was the premier publication that analysed this issue after its first roar in the Sydney press. David Marr wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the time that the reaction was a result of 'a blundering Minister for Education, John Aquilina' (1997, p. 33). The books, which had been taught for years, were brought to the public's attention by the ultraconservative Christian lobby group 'Festival of Light' and picked up by radio host Alan Jones – and dumped, more or less on air, one crowded March morning in 1997, by an ambushed Minister for Education. The NSW Teachers Federation passed a motion describing the ban as a 'hysterical campaign ... designed to sanitise the HSC curriculum in accordance with the wishes of religious Fundamentalists

and certain populist journalists' (Larriera, 1997, p. 3).

Elaine Nile, wife of Fred Nile and fellow NSW politician, addressed three questions relating to the texts to the NSW Legislative Council. *Top Girls* was described in the 'purity/danger' matrix: '[It] [e]xpresses contempt for religion, portrays life as meaningless ... unsuitable ... introduces gratuitous violence in banal and crude language ... obscene ... [about which the education minister was] horrified' (NSW Parliament, Questions without Notice, 1997 (April 23), NSW Parliament, Deferred Answers, 1997 May 13).

In his satirical account of the controversy, David Marr quoted 'Daily Telegraph' sports writer and columnist Ray Chesterton's description of *Top Girls* as a "'Putrid Play ... a collection of the back doors of toilet cubicles'" (Marr, 1997, p. 33). Marr's account in the *Sydney Morning Herald* makes for entertaining reading, presenting the complainants and the minister as a bumbling, badly-read bunch of fools.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'The decision was branded "a victory for Philistines and talk-back radio cowboys" by the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations' (Phelan, 1997, p. 5); 'the chairman [*sic*] of the Australian Society of Authors, Ms Anne Deveson, said it was an act of political censorship and a demonstration of ignorance and narrow-mindedness' (Larriera, 1997, p. 3). Bill Simon, teaching *Top Girls* to a class in an inner-city Sydney school, said, 'I can't cry because it's too silly for words' (Marr, 1997, p. 33).

The professional defence of the books was not slow in coming but was largely ineffective. Its audience was narrow: mostly writers, academics and English teachers in outraged mutual agreement. *EinA* published a special 1997 edition on the banning; writers Ernie Tucker and Nick Enright delivered a special lecture hosted by the English Teachers Association of NSW in July. I will not quote extensively from these forums – I recommend reading the *EinA* copy – but the 'intelligent/stupid' discourse matrix runs throughout, albeit there is considerable complexity around reader-response, culture and literacy. Indeed, I published my own article titled 'Satanic Portals and Sex-Saturated Books: Parent Complaints About English Texts' in *EinA* (2014a) as something of a tribute to this earlier debate. Needless to say, the 'purity/danger' discourse was nowhere in any of the professional response, with one notable exception. Andrew Mullins, a Sydney school principal who, alone in any of the academic material ever published on school text censorship in Australia, argued for a 'purity/danger' approach:

[A]n indiscriminate opposition to all forms of censorship would put the AATE in conflict with mainstream parenting and teaching practice ... sensible parental censorship, far from being a violation of a child's freedom, actually augments it by protecting the child from manipulation by others ... The *English in Australia* 121 contributions by Nick Enright, Terry Hayes and Ernie Tucker virtually ignored the rights of parents in this whole matter. Nick Enright found meritorious the deception of parents by an English teacher. Worryingly, the comments of all three smacked of a distaste for the mention of morality ... Moral principles themselves, for these writers, seemed a sticking point. Such attitudes are out of touch with the heartfelt concerns and practices of many parents and English teachers. Children have a right to grow unstunted, unharmed by the complacent meddling of 'casual persons' ... Strange that in these years when our minds have been seared by stories of physical abuse of children, we can be slow to admit the intellectual and moral abuse that words can visit on the innocent and vulnerable. (Mullins, 1998, pp. 8–9)

Since 1997 the issue of school text censorship was fairly quiet in Australia, until 2015, as we shall see below. There were a few moments. Moody cites another cry from the Call to Australia Party in 2003, calling to "[r]emove all immoral, anti-family, anti-Christian books and courses from school libraries and curriculum" (Christian Democratic Party [CDP], as cited in Moody, 2005, p. 142), but I have not been able to trace this quotation to its source. CDP head The Reverend Fred Nile raised concerns in the NSW Parliament about the impact of the *Harry Potter* series on children:

[There is a] report<sup>5</sup> of the impact of these books and films on some children, and even the increased interest in the occult by some teenagers and adults. This published phenomenon warrants further study. It is also important for child psychologists to assess the impact of the *Harry Potter* books on the developing minds of children. (Nile, 2006)

This followed on from a 2001 statement concerning the 'possible harmful impact by the obsession with *Harry Potter* books, film and video games on the mental health of NSW children because of its emphasis on witchcraft and the occult' (Nile, 2001).

#### A shift in threat-source

When Marion Maddox and I published four counter-claiming articles about religion in Australian schools on *ABC Religion and Ethics Online*, they attracted over 46,000 words of unsolicited reader comments, many different voices arguing against one or both of us, but most notably voices of readers attacking each other

(Hastie, 2014b, 2014c; Maddox, 2014a, 2014b). As in the text censorship cases, a discourse matrix of 'intelligent/stupid' operated with little middle ground, and readers often expressed terms of utter contempt towards each other.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, a discourse matrix of 'purity/danger' to society and children operated throughout, often side by side. Unlike the 1997 censorship case, however, the danger posed to children and society was more often from the perceived social threat of religious thought, rather than 'secularist/permissive' thought.

This is an interesting reversal of the threat-source. The idea that religion endangers the 'purity' or safety of the child's mental health commandeers the position previously taken by religious advocates who depicted 'permissive' content of classroom texts as deeply dangerous for the child's moral formation. In many of these 2014 comments, *religion* was being depicted as a social toxin.

#### *You: An Introduction, A Sneaking Suspicion* and *Teen Sex by the Book* 2015

This shift was also seen in the May 2015 government banning of three texts used in NSW Christian Special Religious Education (SRE) Classes. In a 2014 article on school text censorship, I suggested, 'Let us hope, however, that when the next school text censorship controversy bursts into the Australian public square, full of sound and fury, that the calmer voice of research might also be heard' (Hastie, 2014a: 70). I was far too naïve. This punitive 2015 banning by the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) was the first politically directed act of school text censorship in Australia since the *Top Girls* ban in 1997. According to a DEC directive sent to state schools, The Reverend Dr John Dickson's *A Sneaking Suspicion* (1992/2015), The Reverend Dr Michael Jensen's *You: An Introduction* (2008), and Dr Patricia Weerakoon's *Teen Sex by the Book* (2013) did 'not comply with departmental policies' because they 'potentially breached the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998' (Wood, 2015a).

The sudden reaction was in response to a *Sydney Morning Herald* article on Wednesday May 6, prompted by the anti-SRE group Fairness of Religion in Schools (FIRIS). FIRIS commissioned sex educator Deanne Carson to critique Weerakoon's book, who found that it 'promote[d] "purity culture", where the only acceptable expression of sexuality is within a Christian marriage' (Carson, 2015, p. 3). Carson, a school sex educator, who also co-owned and edited the now discontinued

same-sex erotica journal *banQuet* (Carson, 2017), accurately observed that Weerakoon ‘teaches as fact that extramarital sex is bad and sex within marriage is sublime’ (Browne, 2015). The banning story went viral. Hannah Ongly, columnist on the popular women’s issues site *xoJane*, called for Weerakoon’s ‘horrific book’ to be burnt (Ongley, 2015). However, NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli rescinded the book ban on Tuesday May 19, after significant lobbying from Christian organisations, parliamentarians and many other individuals (Wood, 2015b).

My research of school text censorship finds no previous Australian calls for school text burning, but there are several celebrated ones from the United States, including the Bakersfield California burning of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the burning of *Harry Potter* by Christ Community Church in Alamogordo, New Mexico. As we have seen, loud groups, mostly religious, call for books to be banned from school libraries and classrooms. In this case, the reason for burning was that the book was religious, a reversal in threat-source (ALA, 2011).

In the 1997 case examined above, *Fine Flour* and *Top Girls* include prolific swearing, and a graphic scene involving menstrual blood. However, these were *elective* texts for study by small groups of high-level 17- to 18-year-old HSC English students. In contrast, Weerakoon’s banned *Teen Sex by the Book* advocates monogamy, sexual abstinence and heterosexuality as Christian lifestyle ideals (Weerakoon, 2013). Jensen’s and Dickson’s books, which are popularised applied youth versions of mainstream conservative evangelical Anglican doctrines, had been used in Protestant NSW SRE for years (Jensen, 2008; Dickson, 1992/2015). Their banning remains something of a mystery but seemed to relate to the books’ use of support materials which promoted Christian approaches to sexuality and marriage. Furthermore, SRE, according to NSW law, consists of an hour a week of religious instruction by a nominated representative of a parent’s church, and is attended with parental consent. Law Professor Neil Foster of the University of Newcastle reflected on May 11 that ‘this sudden censorship was, frankly, astonishing’ (Foster, 2015).

Both the language of Carson, and the formal NSW Department of Education and Training linking of these authors with possible breaches of the NSW Child Protection Act, reveals the phenomenon of Christian religion as a new threat-source in the ‘purity/danger’ discourse matrix around texts and religion in schools.

Lara Wood, campaign coordinator for *FIRIS*, called ‘on the [Department of Education and Communities] to remove all of these materials from schools immediately and conduct a parliamentary review into how this damaging curriculum was able to become available to SRE teachers’ (Browne, 2015).

Deanne Carson maintained that religious privileging of heterosexuality and ‘purity’ culture endangers the mental health of juveniles. This argument had been regularly advanced by a variety of recent activists opposing religious non-government schools, most prominently around the issue of homosexuality in schools.

Former High Court Justice Michael Kirby, in an address to the National Press Club, was reported as citing (unattributed) ‘research in Queensland ... public schools that showed lower rates of bullying towards minority students compared with non-government and religious schools’. Kirby remarked, ‘If you live in a school which has a belief and an instruction that you have a tendency to evil, that is going to percolate down – it is going to be part of the reality’ (as cited in McIlroy, 2013).<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Independent Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly for Sydney, Alex Greenwich, launched a NSW Legislative Assembly non-government members bill to remove the exemption for faith-based schools from anti-discrimination on the basis of gender, claiming that schools could expel students on the basis of sexual orientation: ‘Often these exemptions are not used by the school, but the fact that such a law exists I find that quite appalling and I know many others do as well’. He alleged numerous anonymous examples of students approaching him with discrimination claims (Greenwich, 2013a, 2013b; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013).<sup>8</sup> I could find no actual case in any state where discrimination against a student by a Christian school on the basis of a student’s same-sex orientation had been taken to trial, or had the evidence confirmed from more than one source (i.e. the complainant), and so the anonymous claims that Greenwich cite unfortunately remain untested. There was a well-publicised 2015 case of a parent’s sexuality being the basis of his withdrawing his daughter from Foundation College, Mandurah,<sup>9</sup> Western Australia (Holgate, 2015; Hondros, 2015). Similarly, however, this was a report to the media from an aggrieved parent, with no account of the alleged exchange forthcoming from the school or other verifiable sources.

### *Gayby Baby* 2015

Another text-banning incident related to 'purity/danger' and student gender in schools occurred in August 2015, when the compulsory attendance of all students at Burwood Girls High in NSW to an in-school screening of the film *Gayby Baby* was halted by the NSW Education Minister, after complaints from parents, led by local Presbyterian Minister Mark Powell. The incident was polarised in the two main Sydney newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* supporting the screening (Jeong, 2015; Bagshaw, 2015) and the *Daily Telegraph* opposing it (McDougall, 2015; Ackerman, 2015; Devine, 2015). Support for the screening and calls for its banning were both based on the idea of student safety, and both sides cried censorship:

In a school newsletter Burwood Girls High deputy principal Karyn O'Brien said the Wear It Purple campaign, started by ex-student Katherine Hudson, was supported by a growing number of schools to 'raise awareness of issues faced by LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) students and ways that schools can provide a safe, supportive and empowering environment for rainbow youth'. (McDougall, 2015)

The 'Wear it Purple' campaign was part of a broader campaign federally funded by the 'Safe Schools Coalition' (Safe Schools Coalition Aus., 2016), an organisation which had at the time 493 Australian member schools, a 'national coalition of organisations and schools working together to create safe and inclusive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families' (Safe Schools Coalition Aus., 2016). The member schools consist mainly of government schools but include a variety of 57 independent schools, and two Catholic schools.<sup>10</sup>

The *Guardian Australia* published a now widely quoted article that Burwood Girls High had received no complaints from parents about the film (Saffi, 2015). This was then refuted in the *Daily Telegraph* by conservative columnist Miranda Devine, who claimed the complaints received were not in the technical format to be deemed a formal complaint, and so were not recognised as complaints and dismissed by the school (Devine, 2015).

The Reverend Dr Michael Jensen, one of the banned authors in the earlier May incident, asserted a freedom of speech stance in his ABC article, 'Whatever Your Thoughts on *Gayby Baby*, This Wasn't About Education' (Jensen, 2015). Censorship, in this case, was applied

to those views that were suppressed by the screening of the film.

The 'intelligent/stupid' matrix was certainly present throughout debate, with a familiar depiction of religious censors as sub-intelligent. In an article entitled 'Persecution Complex: The Passion of Mark Powell', regular *FIRIS* writer Scott Hedges posited,

What Reverend Powell doesn't seem to fully understand [is] that after he exercises his freedom to oppose something, that other people can exercise their freedoms to point out that his views are absurd and uncharitable, and ridicule him for his views. Not listening to him, and laughing at him, is not a form of 'persecution'. Mocking what he says is not limiting his freedoms. (Hedges, 2015)

Yet, much more at the heart of both sides of the debate in this incident was a 'purity/danger' discourse: on the one hand, the perceived safety (purity) of potential LGBTIQ+ students; on the other, the perceived purity (safety) of Burwood Girls High students who may not have felt they were able to be supportive of the 'Wear it Purple Campaign' (in this case, students who were perceived to be from Christian and other religious families).

This is a seismic shift since the 1997 NSW school censorship cases and the earlier cases explored in this paper. Secularist and/or anti-Christian advocates in education, some with a form of federal government financial backing, were now appropriating the 'purity' (student safety) side of the 'purity/danger' discourse, implying, and often explicitly expressing, that conservative Christianity is socially dangerous.

Similarly, Jensen's article is an unfamiliar move for an Australian Christian public voice. His appeal to freedom of speech, citing John Locke, is a classical liberal anti-censorship argument, previously used *against* Christians seeking to ban books: 'You can't force people to agree with you, whatever the cause – not the least because you can never know whether a coerced assent is genuine. This principle holds in society in general, and in schools in particular' (Jensen, 2015). This rationalist liberty stance is familiar throughout many arguments against school text censorship published by *The American Library Association*, and more broadly across the Anglo-liberal democratic response to censorship (Hastie, 2014a).

### Conclusion

Lying at the core of the academic and public language around Australian (and U.S.) school text censorship is a contest for essentiality. It is a deeply polarised

discourse, frequently characterised by the 'fundamentalistic' demonisation of opponents as either moral polluters or idiots. Two notions of sacredness, complete with sacred language, jostle for precedence for what is 'normal': a 'sacred' ideal of free speech, and a 'sacred' ideal of a 'Christian' foundation to civil society. In a recent development, both sides of this debate now also seek to appropriate the role of protector of purity in the face of social threat.

The high modality language throughout the Australian 'purity/danger' language politics of school text censorship connotes transgressive excess: 'obscene', 'perversion', 'sodomy', 'obsession'. The language also evokes ideas of deviation from a civically essential core: 'anti-family', 'anti-Christian'. The recent shift with religion being depicted as the 'threat-source' appeals to a third, and new essentialism: individual (LGBTIQ+) child mental wellbeing as a first principle, privileged over all other social requirements. Despite first appearances, this is not a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' stance seeking the individual empowerment of children. It is not about the freedom or agency of the child, but rather about the mental health of the child being constantly under threat. In this discourse, as in the conservative religious approaches of earlier censorship incidents, the child is actually deprived of agency and choice, with schools assuming a primary role of seeking to keep the child 'safe' from danger.

All the cases cited in this article, I would suggest, are loud departures from a liberal consensus model of education. I would describe the liberal consensus tradition as upholding a tacit yet ubiquitous consensus between four key parties: students, parents, the governing institution and society at large. Most Australian education systems have operated on this consensus model since the public instruction acts of the late 19th century (Austin, 1961; Barcan, 1980), holding that this four-way social contract is a civic good, rendering conditions stable, safe and prosperous for the vast majority of citizens and an open economy. Such a paradigm differs from more recent Critical Theory models in English and the Humanities, the 'pedagogy of the oppressed', where any power except individual power is seen as intrinsically problematic, and education is seen as a means of opposing such power constructions. In the *Women's Liberation Manual*, *The Little Red School Book*, *Young, Gay and Proud*, the NSW SRE bans and *Gayby Baby*, this 'critical education' model, or what Symes and Macintyre (2000) term an 'emancipatory' model, was operative and continues

into the Safe Schools Coalition controversy to this day. That these foundational ideologies remain in conflict is being played out in the public sphere at the time of writing this article, with the NSW and SA governments banning all Safe Schools Coalition materials in state schools from June 30, 2017 (Safe Schools Coalition 2017), just under two years after the *Gayby Baby* screening brought the government-funded program to public prominence. The key arguments against the program largely revolve around lack of informed consent from parents and society at large. The *MACOS*, *SEMP*, *Fine Flour* and *Top Girls* controversies were similarly breakdowns of the consensus model, only this time from small but organised groups of social conservatives.

Whether from social conservatives, or Critical Theory education, social consensus and collaboration was replaced by anger and recrimination, with accusations that people were deliberately trying to pollute children, or, conversely, that idiots were being allowed to wreak havoc in public policy.

So is it ever right to censor school texts? I would cautiously suggest *there exists a case for censorship* when the consent of two or more of the four key education stakeholders – parents, school institution, the student and society at large – is significantly ignored on a large scale. This is essentially a social utilitarian position, defending a *liberal consensus* model as most constructive for the Australian social contract.

The 1971 Women's Liberation manual, *The Little Red School Book* and the 1978 distribution of *Young Gay and Proud* were intentional acts of social disturbance. The distributors of these books were utterly aware that many parents, governing authorities and large amounts of society would not consent to students of all ages having unsupervised access to these texts. That was the point, or perhaps even something of the undergraduate thrill. The major distribution role of undergraduate university students in all three cases is interesting – students who were perhaps only a year or two older than the oldest school students. In these cases, the only stakeholder whose (theoretical) consent was privileged was that of the student. With such a breakdown in the social contract, attempts to censor were inevitable, and – in a liberal consensus model – understandable.

Though much less revolutionary, the requirement of compulsory attendance to the Burwood Girls High *Gayby Baby* screening could be (and has been) seen as a political act, provoking issues in gender politics that were at the time socially unresolved. Within the

broader context of a national plebiscite on the legalisation of same-sex marriage, if the school's intent was not political, its effect certainly was; it failed to account for a broad range of beliefs in society in general, and the school's families in particular. Unlike texts such as *The Little Red School Book* and *Young, Gay and Proud*, the content of the film *Gayby Baby* was itself not the issue: when I was teaching English in religious schools, I screened far more controversial films to selected classes, and my research of Protestant school English teachers indicates a similar curated liberality (Hastie, 2014a). However, the manner in which *Gayby Baby* was planned to be screened expressed disregard to a significant volume of parents and society at large, and drew inevitable and, I would argue, understandable censorship.

Similarly, the 1978 banning of *MACOS* and *SEMP*, the 1997 banning of *Top Girls* and *Fine Flour*, and the 2015 banning of the NSW Christian SRE texts, can all be seen as showing significant disregard for the consent of school institutions, students, large volumes of parents, and society at large. These bans emerged from deliberate politically driven campaigns by small but organised lobby groups, skilfully applying pressure on inexpert politicians through expertly timed public embarrassment, with the ominous charge of polluting the purity of children. I would argue these texts were appropriate for their target audiences and appeared to be mostly handled sensitively by education professionals. Lobbyists such as Rona Joyner, Angel Rendle-Short, Fred Nile, Elaine Nile, Alan Jones, and *FIRIS*, whilst free to represent their own perfectly legitimate views about religion and Australian culture, did not seek to create and contribute to social consensus, but sought to force contested views upon students, parents, school institutions and society at large.

Ultimately, to ban or not to ban is about deciding which social discourse concerning children's agency is most valid, and the ethical categories most defensible within that chosen discourse. I choose liberal consensus and social utilitarianism, but the other social discourses in the censorship debates are also defensible, with long and rich histories. It follows, surely, that deciding which to believe can be a rational exchange, but my research into the history of the public language around school text censorship found little that was reasonable. It remains both inaccurate and unhelpful in our polity to demonise anyone simply as a moral polluter or an idiot. Let us hope that educational complexity, and reasoned mutual regard, might

characterise the way we select and teach texts, and that such careless abandonment of respect and reciprocity in public debate might be cast far into the footnotes of our social story.

## Notes

- 1 For the United States, cf. ALA 2011; Gabler & Gabler, 2011; Doyle, 2010; Geddicks, 2010; Brinkly & Weaver, 2005; Baxter, 2004; Donelson, 1997; Edwards, 1997; Robotham & Shields, 1982; Blanshard, 1955.
- 2 These were probably accurate: the Women's Liberation Movement held a seminar on October 3, 1971, at 291 St. Paul's Terrace, Fortitude Valley, the headquarters of the Communist Party of Australia.
- 3 "Another Country", by James Baldwin, who is also the author of "Couples" [*sic* – Updike]; "Mash" [*sic* – Hooker] and "Catch 22" [*sic* – Heller], both [*sic*] of which are in the modern, deliberately crude manner and appeared recently as sensational films; "Lolita", by Nabokov, which is a careful study of the erotic relationship of a child and a middle-aged man; Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" and "Wayward Bus", both of which are in the early genre voyeuristic descriptions of sex; and Mary McCarthy's "The Group", which I can only describe as a pulp-magazine description of orgasmic free-for-all ... Griffin's "Black Like Me", D.H. Lawrence's "Kangaroo", Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye", "Bring Larks and Heroes" [*sic* – Keneally] ... Gunter Grass, "Cat and Mouse" and "The Drum" [*sic* – "The Tin Drum"].
- 4 I have not been able to locate an extant copy of the tract.
- 5 I have been unable to find a copy of this report, nor has Reverend Nile nor the CDP responded to three separate requests to clarify the matter.
- 6 Unfortunately, the comment streams have now been removed from the site. I made a copy at the time and can provide it to anyone interested. Please contact me through the editor of *EinA*.
- 7 I have been unable to locate this research. The latest Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) survey has found the opposite in the perception of bullying by sector (HILDA, 2015, p. 20). Similarly, the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS) by The Child Health Promotion Research Centre (2009, p. 22) at Edith Cowan University, commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), found that in all states except Tasmania, the prevalence of 'being bullied' was higher in state schools (27.7%) compared to non-government schools (24.6%). However, students in non-government schools were more likely to confess in the ACBPS survey to having bullied someone else (10.5% compared to 8%).
- 8 There are recent media reports of Christian schools discriminating against homosexual students (Hondros, 2015; Holgate, 2015; Cox, 2013; Greenwich, 2013b). However, these are invariably sourced from individual

aggrieved parents or students, denied by the school involved, and remain formally un-investigated. Only once (in 2002) has the issue received threats of court action (Milligan, 2002), but I have been unable to find any record of the Hillcrest Christian College actually proceeding to trial or any other outcome. I have been unable to find any cases of such an exemption being applied to the removal of students from non-government schools.

9 Note: this was Foundation Christian College, Mandurah, not Mandurah Baptist College.

10 The majority of these were non-religious humanist schools but also included 10 broad Protestant Anglican, Presbyterian and Baptist schools (one in NSW) and 2 Catholic schools.

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# The Role of Whole-school Literacy Policies Supporting Reading Engagement in Australian Schools

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**Abstract:** The Australian Curriculum positions literacy as a general capability to be taught across all subject areas. While schools may design agreements and policies to formalise the position of literacy as a whole-school priority, there is relatively limited research guiding the structure and content of these planning documents. We contend that reading engagement should have an important place in such planning documentation, despite the Australian Curriculum's relative silence on this aspect of literacy learning, as it is a valuable facet of literacy promotion, with research strongly supportive of the relationship between reading skills and will. We conducted a content analysis to determine if available whole-school literacy policy plans, agreements and policies were supportive of fostering reading engagement at school, and the extent to which they fostered home and school partnerships around reading engagement. Mirroring absences in the curriculum, we found that few schools promoted reading engagement strategies as a whole-school priority, and where strategies did feature, these varied widely.

## Introduction

Since 2014, all Australian states and territories have used the new Australian Curriculum (AC) as set by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). While this has led to numerous changes in teaching and learning in Australia, which have differed between states and territories, the positioning of General Capabilities was perhaps one of the most significant shifts, with literacy positioned as one of seven General Capabilities to be taught in every subject area. While the notion that literacy should be a priority outside of subject English is not new (Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a), national recognition of its importance across all areas, mandated in a cohesive curriculum, was a significant development. As such, all teachers across all disciplines and years of schooling must take responsibility for building their students' capacities in both literacy as conceived more generally, and the specific literacy needs of their learning area(s).

The establishment of literacy as a general capability (ACARA, 2017a) was a culmination of various forces and educational trends. The whole-school approach to literacy in part originates from the 1980s Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) movement, which 'spread from the United Kingdom to New Zealand, Australia and other countries and promoted a student-centred, language learning focus in all discipline areas' (Alford & Windeyer, 2014, p. 75). Parker (1985) contends that for practical purposes the LAC movement originated 'in London in 1966 when a group of secondary English teachers met to consider the role of talk in English lessons' (p. 173), with that conversation broadening to consider the role of language across the whole curriculum. The LAC movement in both Canada and Australia grew during the 1970s, fuelled by theory development and classroom-focused research. In the 1980s the LAC movement was additionally bolstered due to intellectual innovations, 'with knowledge

increasingly constructed as the result of a complex interaction between individuals and their environments and textual exposure' (p. 173). For around two decades, educational policies have valued the explicit teaching of literacy across the disciplines (Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a). The positioning of literacy as a general capability to be expressed as an underpinning facet of all disciplinary learning in the AC can be seen as part of this broader shift in understandings around language, disciplinary literacy and the value of literacy as a gateway skill for learning in other areas.

Schools may design and enact plans, agreements and policies to formalise the position of literacy as a whole school priority and guide how this priority is to be enacted in daily practice. However, there is limited research literature exploring or detailing best practice in designing or enacting a whole school approach to literacy in peer-reviewed research sources, and no available comprehensive meta-analysis, though the extant literature contains hints about what it can constitute and encompass, and how it can best be achieved. For instance, research suggests that non-native speakers can be key beneficiaries, as a whole school approach to literacy can raise expectations of a cross-curricular approach to supporting the needs of second language learners, as ACARA has 'made it explicit that all teachers will be required to provide pedagogy that responds to the language learning needs of students whose first language is not English, regardless of whether these teachers have had formal language teacher training' (Alford & Windeyer, 2014, p. 76). In addition, the extant research literature tends to suggest that whole school literacy policies need to be responsive to their social, socio-economic and geographic contexts (e.g. Baxter & Sawyer, 2006); knowledgeable of and responsive to the literacy requirements across learning areas as well as the literacy requirements of high stakes testing (e.g. Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a); supported by stable staffing and a collaborative school culture; and spearheaded by strong leadership (e.g. Baxter & Sawyer, 2006). Where specific educational programs are employed as part of the policy, adequate professional development must be provided to staff (e.g. Clary, Feez, Garvey & Partridge, 2015). When formulating such a policy, commencing with a school-wide literacy audit to investigate how literacy is addressed in the curriculum areas and identify teacher preparedness to meet the literacy requirements in their learning area(s) can identify dimensions of practice to be developed (e.g. Clary & Daintith, 2017). Others have

focused on the creation of multi-purpose tools rather than policies, plans or agreements, with Humphrey and Robinson (2012b) describing a metalinguistic 'toolkit' for both teacher and student use across disciplines. Hovelroud (2016) explored a 'whole-school 'common language' approach' (p. iii) in one Australian school.

While these works explore a range of dimensions and issues, the literature is not typically concerned with the role of a whole school approach in fostering positive attitudes toward literacy. For example, Hill and Crévola (1999) found 'substantial, measurable improvements in early literacy outcomes can be achieved when schools adopt a whole-school, design approach' (p. 9). Such a design did not tap into engagement, focusing instead on elements such as a literacy block which included explicit instruction, 'the setting of rigorous performance standards', and 'a focus on data-driven instruction with assessment of all students at the beginning and end of each year on a full range of measures' (p. 10). However, Baxter and Sawyer (2006) are an exception, describing a theory-informed approach at the disadvantaged Greenleaf Girls High School, for which the 'first step' involved 'building up a positive attitude to books and reading' (p. 8), amongst an array of other initiatives. This program was highly successful, leading to an 'outstanding performance in literacy' (p. 9).

Reading engagement has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, for instance as a 'multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, cognitive, and affective attributes associated with being deeply involved in an activity such as reading' (Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012, p. 602). More recently, Afflerbach and Harrison (2017) juxtapose reading engagement with reading motivation in their argument that the two concepts are not interchangeable.

Motivation is somewhat like a reader's potential energy: It is what you have when you are ready to read, when your reading bike is paused, as it were, at the top of a hill. Engagement is more like a reader with kinetic energy: It is manifest when the reader is zooming down the mountain bike trail of a challenging text, fully absorbed, fully engrossed, totally immersed in the activity of reading (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017, p. 217).

We operationalise reading engagement by drawing on this previous work to develop a simple construct (Figure 1).

Our engaged readers both enjoy reading for pleasure and undertake the practice with frequency.

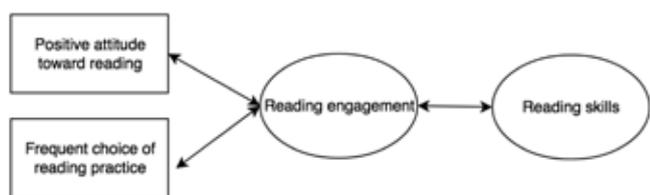


Figure 1. Reading engagement

The paucity of research literature exploring reading engagement as part of a whole-school literacy policy or plan is reflective of curricular silence on this matter. While the AC aims to build literacy skills, it does not recognise the importance of fostering enjoyment of reading, and reading engagement, in order to promote literacy achievement, despite the robust body of evidence supporting the link between the two. Though the AC gives some very brief cursory attention to the role of enjoyment in reading, it is at best positioned as a minor consideration. If a whole school literacy policy, plan or agreement seeks to improve whole school literacy performance, this link needs to be understood. Research suggests that one of the most influential factors impacting literacy development is reading engagement (Guthrie et al., 2012; OECD, 2011b), with a recent Australian investigation of children's reading finding that reading attitude is a strong predictor of reading frequency (Merga & Mat Roni, in press). International research indicates that reading engagement can counter disadvantage:

levels of interest in and attitudes toward reading, the amount of time students spend on reading in their free time and the diversity of materials they read are closely associated with performance in reading literacy. Furthermore, while the degree of engagement in reading varies considerably from country to county, 15-year-olds whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who are highly engaged in reading obtain higher average reading scores in PISA than students whose parents have high or medium occupational status but who report to be poorly engaged in reading. This suggests that finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change. (Kirsch et al., 2002, p. 3)

Avid, engaged readers “punch above their weight” across the whole curriculum’ and ‘high reading engagement mitigates 30% of the effect of social class on attainment generally and 70% of the effect of gender’ (Wrigley, 2017, p. 105). To become an effective reader, a child must have both the skill and the will to read (Gambrell, 1996), with enjoyment of reading being positively related with literacy achievement (e.g. Lupo, Jang & McKenna, 2017; OECD 2011a). Engaged readers

are those who are motivated to read and who typically find enjoyment in the practice, and they are also more likely to choose to read book for pleasure (De Naeghel et al., 2014), an activity consistently associated with literacy benefits (e.g. Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; OECD, 2010). These benefits are diverse, including improved syntactic knowledge and word recognition (Stanovich, 1986; Sullivan & Brown, 2013), reading comprehension, spelling and oral language skills (Berns, Blaine, Prietula & Pye, 2013; Mol & Bus, 2011), vocabulary building (Nagy, Herman & Anderson, 1985; Samuels & Wu, 2001), and oral reading fluency (Allington, 2014). As such, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005) report on teaching children to read notes as a recommendation that ‘whatever method is used in the early stages of teaching children to read, we are convinced that inspiring an enduring enjoyment of reading should be a key objective’ (p. 36).

Our understanding of the relationship between reading engagement and achievement is informed by Expectancy Value Theory (EVT), a motivational theory that posits that young people’s willingness to perform a particular activity is influenced by the importance or value they attribute to that activity (Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), with intrinsic motivation more strongly associated with reading engagement than extrinsic motivation (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). Most importantly, this perspective assumes that ‘motivational decline’ in children ‘is not innate or inevitable’; rather, it is responsive to contexts and influences that teachers and parents can shape (Guthrie & Davis, 2003, p. 65). Increasing student engagement in reading is not beyond our powers.

Reading engagement strategies should form part of a whole school literacy policy, plan or agreement, yet researchers are yet to consider the role of whole school literacy policies supporting reading engagement in Australian schools. We do not know if reading engagement is presented in this planning documentation, and which strategies are recognised as beneficial through inclusion in the documentation. When evaluating the extent to which a literacy program is supportive of reading engagement, one measure could include exploring the inclusion of current best-practice strategies that are ideally research supported, as we explore in detail in our methods outline below. There are a range of strategies and approaches associated with benefit for reading attitudes and engagement in the

research literature, and these strategies will be explored in detail in the discussion in relation to the findings of the study detailed herein.

### The project

We wanted to discover if, despite the relative curricular silence on the importance of reading engagement, Australian schools were privileging reading engagement as a core informing principle in their whole school literacy plans, policies and agreement documents (PPADs). As previously mentioned, both teachers and parents can influence young people's reading engagement, therefore schools can play an important role in working with their parent/guardian body to foster positive attitudes toward reading. Therefore, we also wished to know about the extent to which these PPADs involved parents in supporting reading engagement initiatives. And finally, where schools were supportive of fostering reading engagement at school and/or in the home, we investigated which ideas and strategies they endorsed. To this end, we performed a content analysis of 34 Australian PPADs published and currently available online. We conducted this investigation with a view to illuminating the current status of reading engagement as a priority in Australian school cultures.

### Method

We undertook a content analysis to explore the following research questions to determine if PPADs are typically supportive of reading engagement and the role of whole school literacy policies in supporting reading engagement in Australian schools:

1. Do whole school literacy policies typically support the fostering of reading engagement at school?
2. Do whole school literacy policies typically support the fostering of reading engagement at home?
3. What strategies and processes are identified to support reading engagement in school and home contexts?

### Approach to content analysis

We adopted a content analysis approach that was fit for purpose. While we were concerned with the manifest content (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), we were ultimately more interested in the deeper meanings and contextual relevance that could be ascribed to the presence or absence of the support indicators and strategies that we sought (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314), referred to as the latent content. Latent content analysis

can be defined as 'analysis of what the text talks about', and this 'involves an interpretation of the underlying meaning of the text' (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). We analysed the manifest content to find research engagement supportive strategies in order to draw conclusions about the latent content, in relation to the extent to which PPADs are supportive of reading engagement.

We contend that even though we quantise, our analysis is ultimately qualitative in nature. Krippendorff (2004) makes a strong argument for avoiding the dichotomising of content analysis into qualitative and quantitative approaches, because as he contends, 'ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers' (p. 16). We primarily use a *directed content analysis* approach, as we use previous research in reading engagement as a guide to uncover any research-supported strategies and processes endorsed within PPADs, while at the same time we retain an exploratory, *conventional* stance of flexibility, ready to identify any other strategies which appear as endorsed on the basis of improving students' attitudes toward or enjoyment of reading and their frequency of engagement in reading for pleasure (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As such, the approach was deductive, in the sense that we drew on background expertise in relation to reading engagement, but also inductive in that we treated relationships in the data as emergent.

### Sampling

We decided to source PPADs that were published online, rather than approach schools to request policies. We felt that those documents that were freely available would typically be final versions open to public consideration. We also did not want schools to retrospectively manipulate their PPADs after being approached, in an attempt to conform to our perceived research agenda. This finessing was considered a real risk, as we are known for our research in the reading engagement space. We aimed to source every Australian PPAD freely available online through Google searching within our search period.

We searched for schools with Whole-School Literacy Policies using the following keyword search terms, from 3 November to 1 December, 2017:

Whole school literacy plan; whole school literacy policy; whole school literacy agreement; whole school literacy approach Australia; whole school literacy policy Australia; whole school literacy policy Australia high

school; whole school literacy policy Australia secondary school; secondary college whole school literacy policy Australia; school literacy agreement.

We searched through to page 10 of the search results, after which the search was continued until we reached a whole page with no relevant results. The search was terminated at that point.

This sample recruitment method yielded 27 PPADs from primary schools, 5 PPADs from secondary schools and 2 PPADs from schools spanning all schooling years (K–12). When a greater volume of PPADs can be sourced, there will be considerable utility in ensuring a balanced representation of different types of schools is achieved. At this stage, so few policies were available that this representation could not be accomplished. For example, there is only one PPAD sourced from the Northern Territory. The heterogeneity in the small sample precludes reasonable generalisability.

Instead, we focus on providing foundational exploratory insights. Descriptive details about the 34 schools can be seen in Table 1. Even though these PPADs were freely available in the public domain, we have withheld details that would allow easy deductive disclosure of schools. In this context, deductive disclosure relates to where schools can be identified through traits or details that are either unique when occurring individually, or unique when collectively amassed. Kaiser (2009) notes that

Given that qualitative studies often contain rich descriptions of study participants, confidentiality breaches via deductive disclosure are of particular concern to qualitative researchers. As such, qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research. (p. 1632)

Preventing deductive disclosure was particularly important as the PPADs were publicly available materials sourced online and not from the schools themselves. We would not wish to discourage schools from making their documentation broadly available to the community by providing critical commentary of PPADs that are readily identifiable. This strategy aimed to avoid exposure or stigmatising of schools that did not incorporate reading engagement policies, or any perception that schools are being opened to judgement. Rather, the purpose of this study was to inform and potentially enrich future planning for literacy in schools.

PPADs' names varied widely, and they were only

**Table 1. Characteristics of schools within the sample as per My Schools (ACARA, 2017b)**

Anonymous number (S#)	State/territory	School sector	Year range	Location
<b>Primary schools (27)</b>				
S1	NSW	Public	K–6	Major cities
S2	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S3	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S4	NT	Public	P–6	Remote
S5	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S6	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S7	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S8	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S9	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S10	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S11	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S12	SA	Public	R–7	Inner regional
S13	ACT	Private	K–6	Major cities
S14	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S15	SA	Public	R–7	Inner regional
S16	WA	Public	K–6	Outer regional
S17	SA	Public	R–7	Outer regional
S18	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S19	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S20	SA	Public	R–7	Outer regional
S21	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S22	SA	Public	U, R–7	Major cities
S23	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S24	SA	Public	U, R–7	Major cities
S25	NSW	Private	K–6	Inner regional
S26	QLD	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S27	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
<b>Secondary schools (5)</b>				
S28	WA	Public	7–12	Major cities
S29	NSW	Public	U, 7–12	Outer regional
S30	NSW	Private	7–12	Major cities
S31	QLD	Public	7–12	Major cities
S32	VIC	Public	7–12	Major cities
<b>Combined schools (2)</b>				
S33	SA	Public	R–12	Outer regional
S34	WA	Private	PP–8	Very remote

included where a literacy plan was clearly identifiable. The following 17 names were included: Literacy Policy, Whole School Approach to Literacy, Whole School Literacy Plan, Whole School English Plan, Literacy Curriculum Guide, Literacy Plan, Site Plan Literacy, Academic Plan for Literacy and Numeracy, Literacy Agreement, Language Policy, Whole School Literacy Agreement, Business Plan, Annual Operational

Plan – Literacy, Whole Site Literacy Agreement, English/Literacy Agreement, School Literacy Agreement, and Literacy and Numeracy Policy. This information on the breadth of titling nomenclature can be used to inform the search scope for future projects in this area.

According to My Schools data for 2016 (ACARA, 2017b), enrolment numbers ranged from a high of 1475 to a low of 22, with an average of 412.2. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranged from a high of 1162 to a low of 801 (with one unlisted value), with an average of 1010.6, which is slightly above the Australian average of 1000 (ACARA, 2017b). While schools in major cities dominated the sample, it was interesting to note that the sample included inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote schools.

### Analysis

Our aim was to analyse PPADs to find specific strategies and processes that were clearly supportive of reading engagement in young people. The first challenge arose in the lack of uniformity between the planning documents, as the content of and approach to these documents varied widely. The level of detail for implementation varied from the broadly aspirational to the specific; document length also varied, from a one-page *Literacy Agreement*, or a two-page *Whole School Literacy Plan* (S4), to a 119-page *Whole School Literacy Plan* (S34), or a 73-page *Language Policy* (S13). Some of the PPADs were incorporated into larger planning schemas, while most were presented independently. Analysis was therefore challenging due to the diverse nature of the documents' purpose, presentation, scope and depth.

Our approach involved the following process, as 'in the absence of similar research studies to inform the criteria' we needed to devise a rigorous approach with robust inclusion criteria (Merga & Hu, 2016, p. 78). The first author read through all sourced materials, addressing the three research questions through analysis of manifest content. Analysis for research questions one and two was initially coded as *yes* where supporting data were clear, coded as *no* in instances where no supporting data could be found, and coded as *to be decided* in the instances where the first author was genuinely unsure. In order to satisfy the research question and obtain a *yes*, three essential inclusion criteria had to be satisfied.

1. We needed to find at least one instance of an endorsed strategy or approach to support reading

engagement in the school. We needed to see an instance of reading being fostered with pleasure and attitudes given some degree of consideration. Where enjoyment or pleasure was briefly referenced as a goal, but completely absent in the strategies and approaches, a *yes* was not marked. Simply referencing enjoyment briefly and obliquely in the aims, but not mentioning them in any of the subsequent strategies or approaches, would not lead to the PPAD being considered as advocating reading engagement. For example, where 'encouragement' was mentioned aspirationally, but not elaborated in relation to concrete strategies, it was not included.

We discuss some of the nuances that we grappled with further in our results and discussion below, though we reached a point of strong confidence in our shared analysis of the PPADs, as we explain herein.

2. To warrant inclusion, instances could not be ambiguous. Independent reading could not be conflated with silent reading for pleasure; for example, the S32 PPAD states:

Opportunities for independent reading will be created within class time. The English program at Years 7 to 9 will devote at least one period a week of class time for independent reading practice during which reading skills are explicitly taught. (p. 3)

This statement highlights a focus on skill rather than enjoyment in this activity. This is not to suggest that no children enjoyed the practice, rather that engagement was clearly not central to its purpose. Similarly, shared reading such as reading aloud did not have to be an activity related to enjoyment – it could constitute the reading aloud of passages as part of reading comprehension testing.

3. Instances needed to have the potential to be part of recurring practice in order to support the frequency as well as the enjoyment component of our operationalised construct of reading engagement. Thus, we excluded one-off event participation such as Reading Challenges and Book Weeks or Days; these often appeared as cursory mentions in plans that were otherwise devoid of any consideration of reading engagement.

To address research question three, all instances of strategies and processes that were supportive of reading engagement were identified and coded. As few instances were found, the coding opportunities were limited.

Once this iterative process was completed to the satisfaction of the first author, the PPADs were forwarded to the second author to be independently coded without seeing the initial coding. The same coding process was used, completing Stage One of our analysis. We undertook this stage to establish intercoder reliability and to endeavour to minimise error and bias resultant ‘when processing the voluminous amount of text-based data generated by qualitative inquiry’ (Hruschka et al., 2004, p. 309). While we have used this method in the past (e.g. Merga, 2016), in this instance it seemed particularly important to have two coders independently code the responses, as there was room for subjective interpretation even within the applied frame of the inclusion criteria. As such, we were careful to avoid specific discussion of any school cases before the independent coding was performed, after which time we met to discuss discrepancies, negotiating a final dataset that adhered closely with our objectives.

After both authors coded the data in relation to the two inclusion criteria in Stage One, in Stage Two Margaret analysed the coding to identify instances of agreement, disagreement and indecision. Of the 34 PPADs, there were 22 instances of full agreement, 8 instances where there was at least some disagreement, and 4 instances where both authors desired to discuss further. Each author then provided an explanation of their position for the items that were in disagreement or indecision, and further consideration was given to the strength of these arguments. The authors then met for a review and were able to reach a final agreement on all of the PPADs in relation to the three research questions, concluding Stage Two. This process was not a matter of one author simply acquiescing to the perspective of the other; the process was closely and carefully negotiated.

## Results

Overall, of the 34 schools, less than a third (n=11) had a PPAD that was at least to some extent supportive of reading engagement at home or school as per the criteria that we have outlined. Only one of the 34 schools included support of both school and home reading engagement initiatives.

### *Support for reading engagement at school*

We found that n=10 schools supported reading engagement at school. As per Table 2, in relation to Research Question 3, seven supportive strategies and processes were identified.

**Table 2. Strategies for supporting reading engagement at school**

Anonymous number (S#)	Strategy
S6	Shared discussion about books
S7	Silent reading
S9	Access to books; Silent reading
S13	Teacher modelling; Silent reading
S16	Shared discussion about books; Shared reading
S20	Access to books; Responsive to student interests; Shared reading; Teacher modelling; Silent reading; Shared discussion about books; Environment
S25	Shared reading
S27	Environment; Access to books; Shared reading
S31	Teacher modelling
S32	Environment

Half of these schools only employed one strategy. S20 was by far the most comprehensive in its consideration of reading engagement at school, making reference to all seven of the research supported strategies.

### *Support for reading engagement at home*

We found that two schools’ PPADs were supportive of reading engagement in the home.

As per Table 3, in relation to research Question 3, the following strategies and processes were identified.

**Table 3. Strategies for supporting reading engagement at home**

School Name	Strategy
S1	Parental modelling; Shared reading
S32	Shared discussion about books

## Discussion

Our research suggests that in the current landscape, Australian PPADs are not typically supportive of reading engagement. It also suggests that where reading engagement is supported, it is usually only promoted within school contexts, rather than through optimising home/school partnerships. We found this school-home disconnect interesting, particularly in one school where the school expected parents to ‘model and encourage positive and enjoyable reading and shared reading experiences in literature at home’ (S1, p. 3). As such, the school positioned reading for enjoyment as a home rather than a school responsibility.

We explore these codes, briefly discussing some of the varied supporting research base for each of the identified strategies, before exploring its occurrence in the data set.

**Shared reading**

Shared reading experiences are associated with both literacy and attitudinal benefits. When teachers or parents read aloud to their students and children in the context of pleasure, and not just for work-related purposes, this is associated with fostering positive attitudes toward reading (e.g. Beers, 1998; Herrold, Stanchfield & Serabian, 1989; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007; Ledger & Merga, 2018; Merga, 2015a; Merga, 2016; Merga, 2017b). Additionally, longitudinal Australian research has found that children aged 10–11 years were more likely to enjoy reading and to read if they were read to when aged 4–5 years (ABS, 2012).

In the data set, there were five schools that made reference to shared reading for pleasure, inclusive of reading aloud for pleasure, and being read to for pleasure, and these were related to both school and home contexts. For example, S16 specifically references reading to students for pleasure in the 'Plan for Reading' under their 'teaching strategies' (p. 16).

**Silent reading**

Silent reading is reading for pleasure that involves the independent reading of self-selected reading materials at school or at home. It is important that we continue to provide opportunities for reading for pleasure in both contexts. While the value of Silent reading as a beneficial practice has been questioned in the past (e.g. Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008), such challenges have been addressed (e.g. Garan & DeVogd, 2008; Krashen, 2001), with Silent reading valued for its capacity to promote reading frequency and positive attitudes toward reading (e.g. Clark & De Zoysa, 2011; Merga, 2013; Merga, 2018).

In the data set, four schools described use of Silent reading in the context of pleasure. For instance, at S7, reading for pleasure is scheduled into morning and afternoon learning in junior school, though silent reading becomes more optional beyond this point.

**Modelling**

Both teachers and parents can positively influence children's attitudes toward reading through modelling personal enjoyment of the practice (e.g. Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Artley, 1975; Mancini & Pasqua, 2012; Merga, 2014b; Merga, 2017a; Merga 2016; Methe & Hintze, 2003; Mullan, 2010; Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn & McNaughton, 1984; Wollscheid, 2013). Modelling in this instance differs from explicitly skill-based

modelled reading practices, where skills are explicitly taught, as it focuses either exclusively or inclusively on an attitudinal model.

Our data set contained references to teachers or parents modelling personal enjoyment of reading at four schools. For example, S31 required that their teachers 'demonstrate pleasure in reading' (p. 5).

**Shared discussion about books**

The research suggests that enhancing the position of reading as a social practice can positively influence students' attitudes toward reading (Merga, 2014c), and that discussing books in the context of pleasure is typically well-received by young people (Lapp & Fisher, 2009; McKool 2007; Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2018), with this discussion enhancing the attitudes of reluctant readers (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009).

We found four schools made reference to shared discussion about books in the context of pleasure or enjoyment, both at school and at home. For instance, S6 uses literature circles and book clubs to 'focus on enjoyment and comprehension of quality literature' (p. 5).

**Access to books**

Books are the text type most strongly associated with literacy benefit at this stage (e.g. Baer, Baldi, Ayotte, & Green, 2007; OECD, 2010; OECD, 2011c; Pfof, Dörfler, & Artelt, 2013; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2010; Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016), and access to book-rich environments is associated with reading motivation (Clark & Poulton, 2011; Gambrell 1996; Kirsch et al. 2002; Merga, 2015b). If children do not have access to books in the home to read for pleasure, their engagement can be limited, though access to a library can have positive attitudinal effects on reading (Ramos & Krashen, 1998).

In the data set, there were three schools that mentioned provision of access to books for reading for enjoyment. For example, S9 stated 'classes (are) to have a print rich environment, including a class library of relevant topic or theme books and fiction books for pleasure' (p. 8).

**Responsiveness to student interests**

Where students are able to make choices about their reading material, they are more likely to be interested in what they are reading, and be engaged readers (e.g. Gambrell, 1996; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Schraw, Flowerday, & Reisetter, 1998), and where teachers and

parents are responsive to children's interests in their recommendations and provision of access to books, this typically fosters greater reading engagement (e.g. Merga, 2015a; Merga, 2014b).

Only one school (S20) mentioned being responsive to student interests to foster reading engagement. They described 'giving students a voice in book selection and purchasing books with the specific aim of engaging our students', indicating that they take students' individual interests into account in resourcing.

### **Conducive environment**

By conducive environment, we refer to the specific surroundings in which reading is occurring, rather than referring to broader access factors which are covered in the access code. Previous research suggests that environment can be important for reading engagement (e.g. Merga, 2017), however more research needs to be done on how use of a book promoting space influences young people's engagement with books for this to be recognised as a research-supported strategy.

There were three schools that described aims to create learning environments conducive to reading for enjoyment. S27 described this aim as follows:

We aim to provide a classroom environment which promotes a love of books and reading where students feel inspired to read. Each classroom is a language rich environment with lots of environmental print, labels, posters, information, students' work etc. Books are given their rightful place throughout the school. Each room has a class library where books are displayed in a variety of ways. Topic books are easily accessible to the students. (p. 2)

As such, this school described creation of an environment that privileged the position of books within the learning space.

### **Further considerations**

All of the above strategies are research-supported to some extent, and all of them can clearly be part of a PPAD. However, these strategies are clearly being underutilised in the current landscape of planning in Australian schools. In addition, we also feel that it is noteworthy that there was often a gap between the school mission statements and actual strategic planning. For instance, while S8 identified ensuring that students 'develop a love of language and learning' as a component of their mission statement, fostering a love of reading fell outside the scope of their plan, which instead focuses on reporting assessment, standards

and targets. Similarly, S26 mentioned promoting 'reading for enjoyment and information' (p. 17), but no supportive strategies were detailed.

Unsurprisingly, PPADS typically sought to be closely responsive to the AC, and it is used to justify a wide range of decisions, from broad planning to resourcing. For instance, S11 states that 'the Australian Curriculum is a guiding tool of yearly expectations. It allows teachers to source programmes to cater for individual and small group capabilities, as evident in Bug Club and Blue Prints which each have different levels embedded in their programmes' (p. 5). A number of policies included direct quotes from the AC. We suspect that in order for schools to include reading engagement as a priority in their PPADs, the value of reading engagement needs to be recognised in the AC. In addition, in the absence of a clear and consistent framework around what whole-school literacy policies could and should encompass, there is potential for important potential pillars to be omitted, ignored or misunderstood.

As we move toward furthering our understanding of what constitutes a strong PPAD, this need not be a drive toward uniformity, but rather toward possibility. We acknowledge that a lack of a uniform approach to whole school literacy can be reflective of schools' desires to adopt models that meet the unique needs of their communities. For instance, in the rural context, Clary et al. (2015) describe the importance of incorporating 'rural literacies' (p. 25), which can be characterised as the literacy skills needed to sustain vocational and lifestyle opportunities in rural areas, which may differ to their urban counterparts and also vary between rural locations. Similarly, when describing meeting the needs of a whole school literacy approach in a disadvantaged context, Baxter and Sawyer (2006) highlight the importance of strong systems support focused on mitigating social disadvantage. However, we believe that research supports the contention that reading engagement has universal value, and as such, has broad contextual relevance.

We note that at a discourse level, these documents tend to strongly favour a conceptualisation of literacy success or outstanding performance in relation to testing improvement and diagnostic measurement. For instance, at S5, which did not encourage reading engagement, under the outcome 'Increase the capacity of ALL staff at CPS to deliver effective literacy practice' it was requested that 'NAPLAN planners to be used in Terms 1&2 by Year 3 and 5 teachers', and 'NAPLAN

planners to be used in Term 4 by Years 2&4 teachers' (pp. 1–2), demonstrating how test preparation is a focus not just in the year of NAPLAN testing, but also prior to the year of the test. PPADs also favoured a strongly top-down notion of reading, with very little consideration given to students' interests.

As previously mentioned, only one school gave consideration to home and school strategies for supporting reading engagement. This suggests that in the area of reading engagement, much can be done to increase home and school partnerships. As contended by Sonnenschien and Schmidt (2000), parental involvement in literacy-related activities can convey an important message to children about the value of such activities. They note that 'urging parents to become involved in their children's education is not enough; teachers often must provide parents with the tools enabling them to do so'. Ideally, PPADs should contain clearly articulated strategies and tools for teachers to support parents and guardians to achieve the shared goal of increasing reading engagement.

### Limitations

A number of limitations apply to this study. Reading engagement strategies could have been fostered in other documentation that we were unable to source. While the dates on some of the PPADs suggested potential obsolescence, we assumed their continued availability online marked their ongoing currency as per November-December 2017. Though we have used a rigorous process in our analysis, the limitations of inter-subjectivity must still apply.

In addition, not all of the reading strategies we have focused on in this study were equally represented or supported in the literature. However, this does not mean that particular strategies must be considered more or less effectual. For instance, we believe that environments that make use of space and resourcing to promote book reading are likely to be conducive to greater reading engagement, though we acknowledge that further research needs to be conducted in this area.

We also note that this article can only capture reading engagement strategies that are promoted in PPADs, and that schools may employ a range of these strategies in their classroom practice without the necessity that they feature in a PPAD. However, as our previous research notes that schools may utilise reading engagement strategies such as shared reading (Ledger & Merga, 2018; Merga, 2017b), silent reading (Merga,

2013; Merga, 2018) and shared discussion about books (Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2018; Merga, 2018) far less frequently than might be expected, it also cannot be assumed that these practices are widespread.

### Conclusions

Our research suggests that most Australian schools may not have PPADs that support reading engagement. Where research-supported strategies for reading engagement were employed, shared reading and silent reading were most common, though modelling, shared discussion about books, access to books, responsiveness to student interests, and conducive environment were also featured in PPADs. The lack of focus in the AC on reading as a life-long practice, as a result of attitudinal engagement, is evident in these policy and planning documents. We hope that this paper will initiate deeper inquiry into school based policy making, how it is mediated by broader policy processes, and how global and local policy processes might foreground reading engagement. We further argue the need to understand elements of planning for reading engagement, and how these elements contribute to practices in isolation and combination. While the AC is a rich document, we would also like to see greater inclusion of ideas and strategies that reflect the value of fostering reading engagement in our students. Our research also suggests that greater consideration of home and school partnerships in the context of reading engagement is warranted, and it would also be useful to look closely at the individual literacy support roles that teachers, librarians, support staff such as education assistants, and administrators play in enacting a whole school literacy PPAD. We look forward to revisiting this area of inquiry once the pool of PPADs in primary and secondary schools increases, to further our understandings in this under-researched area.

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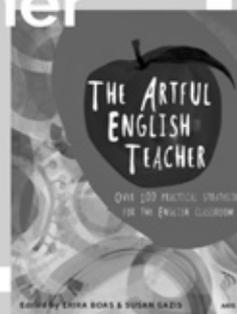
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# What Videogames have to Teach Us (Still) about Subject English

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**Abstract:** This paper reports on a participatory action research project which used videogames as the central texts for play and study in a middle-years English classroom in Australia. Ongoing questions about the nature of subject English have often focused on the discipline's ability to accommodate twenty-first century literacies. Videogames, as increasingly popular and digital forms of texts, are often praised for their ability to engage students (Gee, 2003), yet less is understood about the pedagogies necessary to enable the rigorous study of these texts in classroom contexts. This study found while that existing conceptual and pedagogic models of subject English can be adopted and adapted to suit the unique affordances of this text type, issues associated with play and interactivity complicate the use of videogames in the classroom. It offers a new contribution to the evolving field of study associated with games as texts (Beavis, Dezuanni, & O'Mara, 2017). The study has implications for those seeking to engage more closely with students' textual worlds but unsure of how to negotiate videogames' intrinsic textual features.

## Introduction

It has been over fifteen years since Bill Green tackled the challenges that the growth of literacy has presented for the theorisation and practice of subject English (Green, 2002). Through his discussion of the many tensions and reactions to changes facing the discipline, Green posed a number of provocations that, given the rapid rise in digitally-mediated communication technologies, are as relevant today as they were at the turn of the century. Green asked:

- Will English survive the transition to the twenty-first century?
- Will it maintain or renew its traditional centrality in the school curriculum?
- How is it adapting to the circumstances it now finds itself in, and evolving accordingly? Is it? (p. 25)

These questions are linked to English's 'complicated presence' (2004, p. 291), which has not untangled itself in recent years.

What we report below represents one way to answer some of these questions, by presenting the findings of a research project that bridged the nexus between twenty-first century digital texts and traditional orientations to English. It responds to those who have variously invited engagement with new perspectives (Boomer, 1988, p. 25), a reimagining and remaking of the subject (Durrant & Beavis, 2001; Green, 2001), attention to the 'substance and method of producing histories of English' (Patterson, 2002, p. 45), reassembling the field (Luke, 2004) and affirming the possibilities of English as a project for the future (Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006). Curricula always involve conflicting interests, incorporating regressions from the past and possibilities for the future (Young, 1998), and the suggestion that English should change to incorporate texts not traditionally the focus of study offers one response to those posing questions about the future of the subject.

While the received tradition of English teaching, in a post-WW2/post-Dartmouth world, was understood as being attentive to learners and to student voices and texts (Green, 2004,

p. 296), this is no longer possible. We teach now in more constrained times. It is true that the latter half of the twentieth century was a time when the subject was increasingly sensitive to students, a view that correlates closely with a 'Personal Growth' philosophy of English. However, if this were still the prevailing philosophy, we would have long ago accepted texts into the English classroom that are today at the centre of students' out-of-school literacy lives, namely videogames.

The most recent edition of the annual *Digital Australia* report (Brand, Todhunter, & Jervis, 2017), a gaming-related yearly survey of 1200 Australia households and 3400 individuals of all ages, revealed that 97 per cent of Australian households with children have a device for playing videogames, and 90 per cent of 5–14-year-olds and 82 per cent of 15–24-year-olds played games. Average daily gameplay was about the same for the youngest and oldest Australians, reaching 70 minutes per day for 5–14-year-old females and about 110 minutes for their male counterparts (p. 16). The pervasiveness of videogames in the survey respondents' lives was evident in data showing that 82 per cent of parents restricted access to videogames as a punishment but, contrarily, 76 per cent used videogames as a reward.

Despite the growing body of research establishing the centrality of videogames in the lives of young people, this has not filtered into curriculum documents. The term 'videogames' is absent from Australian national curriculum documents for English (ACARA, 2018). Furthermore, an analysis of the Senior English and Literature text lists from across Australia reveals that videogames have never been included as a text that teachers can elect to teach to their students. The gap between students' home and school literacies remains, despite a growing body of literature establishing the value of closing such a gap.

### Videogames, learning and literacy

One of the most common arguments in favour of videogames as learning tools focuses on their ability to facilitate constructivist learning environments and new ways of thinking about schooling (Carr, Schott, Burn, & Buckingham, 2004; Gee, 2003; Squire, 2003). Gee's influential work *What videogames have to teach us about learning and literacy* (2003) sought to use videogames as a means of building schooling on better principles of learning, outlining thirty-six 'Learning Principles' found in good videogames which combine to scaffold gamers through long, hard and challenging

experiences. Numerous edited collections have been compiled to bring together the findings of research investigating videogame-based learning (Hawisher & Selfe, 2007; Hayes & Duncan, 2012; Khine, 2011; Salen, 2008; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012). What this body of research reveals is that the combined effect of narrative, action, stories, immersion, agency, and transformation produces an environment which encourages active learning, and subsequent engagement and success.

Definitions of videogame literacies, or game/gaming literacies, are in their infancy. Burn (2007), in an attempt to capture what videogame literacy 'looks like', describes six characteristics of game literacy, saying that:

- it draws on cultural experiences of games
- it requires access to technological tools and the ability to use them
- it requires an operational literacy
- it requires and develops an understanding of key concepts important to game-texts
- the process is multimodal and multiliterate
- it requires a wider notion of game-literacy in order to include peripheral literacies (pp. 65–66).

For Salen (2007), gaming literacies emerge from the gaming attitude: a stance or attitude adopted and tied directly to play. Gaming literacies are not simply about how games work (their design), but also how they support 'a performative and often transgressive learning stance based in play' (p. 307). Definitions have also come to emphasise two different priorities: games as design and games as social and cultural products. Beavis (2014) brings these two foci together in a model for critical games literacy based on the belief that videogames-as-text differ from other texts and forms of popular culture. The model consists of two interlaced layers, games as action and games as text, and brings together aspects of how these texts exist as the active creation of new texts, and how narrative positions players in the real world.

However, these definitions have not been without challenge. Pelletier (2005a) points to the difficulty of positioning games within existing literacy frameworks due to the issue of semiotic systems and the extent to which games can be 'read' and 'written'. As a result of questions about what reading and writing involve, Pelletier argues that a collapsing of the differences between them has occurred. Other authors have pointed out the problem with the ludic, or play,

element of videogames, namely that the difficulty of a game literacy is that it must also account for the playable aspect of videogames, which will likely require new and distinctive pedagogic methods (Buckingham, 2006; Buckingham & Burn, 2007). Squire's (2008) focus on the social dimensions of gameplay highlights the way that different gaming communities construct gaming very differently, and how, as a result, this will impact upon the systems of 'reading' or framing of gameplay that emerge.

Additionally, a range of work has sought to understand highly realistic gameworlds in terms of how they construct a sense of place which enhances emotional connection to certain locations (Ryan, 2009), enlist narrative story lines and interactive rules that support a dynamic unity of person and transformative play (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010), and contribute to designed narrative-centred learning environments (Spires, 2015). As a result of many of these influences, research has also begun to focus on the nexus between videogames and the English classroom.

### Creating space for videogames in English

A brief look at some of the ways in which videogames as text in the English classroom have come to be conceptualised and practised is evident in *English in Australia*. This conversation began in 1998 when Catherine Beavis reported on the controversy that ensued after she delivered a lecture advocating, amongst other things, for computer games to be studied, like other popular culture texts, alongside more traditional texts in the English curriculum (Beavis, 1998). In more recent years, the journal has published a body of work seeking to understand what place these texts have in the English classroom and how teachers might work to support learning. Moon's (2008) interest in the English experiences of disengaged boys suggested that a turn toward the technical styles, systematic instruction, and contrived personas characteristic of videogames, might be one way to engage those boys who hold English in low esteem. Beavis (2008) and Russell and Beavis (2012) studied changes in curricula toward a recognition of the multimodal, to demonstrate how videogames could be used to compliment the study of more traditional texts. Beavis et al.'s (2015) report on case studies from five secondary schools found that 'turning around' to the affordances of digital games, in terms of 'action' and 'text', facilitated English classrooms becoming more relevant to students' lifeworlds. Finally,

Marcon and Faulkner's (2016) incorporation of the game *Minecraft* into the classroom bridged students' outside- and inside-school literacy practices, while Lowien's (2016) work explored the linguistic and visual semiotic depictions of value positions in the videogame *Watch Dogs*, drawing connections between SFL theory, the *Australian Curriculum: English*, and videogames as texts for study.

Outside of Australia, there have also been a few efforts to incorporate videogames into English curricula. Pelletier (2005b) describes a case study working with 12 and 13-year-olds in a media and subject English unit, which concluded that literacy was a competence which could, and indeed should, be developed and evaluated multimodally and not just in print form. Buckingham and Burn (Buckingham & Burn, 2007; Burn, 2007) used a school-based intervention aimed at developing game-authoring software to show how students could be introduced into the metalanguage of game design and narrative and then use this knowledge to construct new representational systems. Simpson and Clem (2008) used commercially available videogames to test the efficacy of game-anchored learning, and concluded that students quickly established the 'experts' in the group who helped to create a collaborative learning environment. A number of studies have reported the benefits of using simulation-based instruction to facilitate learning with English as an Additional Language students (Glover Adams, 2009; Ranalli, 2008; Suh, Kimt, & Kim, 2010). McNeice, Smith and Robison (2012) designed a games unit that allowed students to develop their critical literacy skills within a context personally relevant to them, while Ostenson's work (2013) engaged reluctant readers through a focus on archetypal heroes and narratives in videogames. Finally, Burn and Durran (2013) and Burn, Bryer and Coles's (2016) work researching how students worked multimodally to transform literature (*Macbeth* and *Beowulf*) into computer games concluded that students can be supported to creatively mediate classical literature and videogames in the English classroom.

To return to Green's provocations, this body of work confirms that English is in a state of transition. Yet despite the abundance of work exploring the impact of the digital on English teaching and learning (Beavis, 1999, 2010; Green, 2001; Love, 1998; Sefton-Green & Nixon, 2003; Snyder, 1997), many New Media texts are still largely absent from English classrooms despite their enormous popularity in popular culture.

## Research design

This paper reports the findings from a participatory action research project in the qualitative tradition. The study, a response to the lack of research which positions videogames as texts for study within paradigms of subject English, was designed to capture both the dispositions of eight students involved in a five-week intervention playing and studying videogames in a subject English classroom and the pedagogical practices of one teacher, guided by the research questions below, to analyse and understand the complex social reality in the classroom. A participatory action research design allowed me, in the role of teacher-researcher, to examine my own practices in order to develop new ideas for practice and praxis, new ways of doing things, and new kinds of relationships between those involved (Kemmis, 2010, p. 420).

The research was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the pedagogical issues associated with working with videogames in subject English classrooms?
2. What are the intrinsic practices associated with videogames which will impact on the study of these texts in subject English?
3. How does the projective identity capacity of videogames, both inside and outside of subject English, affect learning and teaching with these texts?

These questions sought to expand on existing work linking the home-literacy practices of students to curriculum demands (Apperley & Walsh, 2012; Beavis, 2014; Buckingham & Burn, 2007), thus establishing the pedagogical possibilities for playing and studying videogames, as well as the unique textual characteristics of these texts. This became an opportunity to test whether the affordances so often cited by those investigating the relationship between learning and videogames (Gee, 2003; Salen, 2008; Squire, 2003; Squire & Jenkins, 2004) remain active when the context of play shifts to a focus on the study of such texts within educational contexts.

The context of the study was a Year Ten classroom in a co-educational secondary school in the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne. A five-week intervention was delivered during the participants' scheduled English classes. The preference for a small group of middle-years' students – eight participants between 15 and 16 years of age – allowed the researcher to pursue a deep and detailed understanding of the experiences of these participants, the smaller group size allowing

for closer interaction between the researcher and the students. Given the prevalence of videogames amongst Australian youth (Brand et al., 2017), this age group was identified as ideal for participants because of the increasing independence they were likely to have experienced in terms of gaming in contexts free of adult supervision. When combined with the emphasis on selecting students who self-identified as gamers, it was assumed that this would facilitate the playing and studying of videogames without the need to spend time learning basic functional skills such as operating a controller.

The core component of the intervention involved the teacher-researcher working with the study's participants in a teaching space while they completed activities associated with videogame play and study. A range of playing and learning activities was conducted utilising the Xbox 360 videogame console produced by Microsoft. Figure 1 provides a summary of the activities that took place during each topic of the intervention. Six games were incorporated into the study,<sup>1</sup> each being used to achieve different learning and teaching goals. Selection was determined so as to meet a number of objectives. The games needed to have a combination of strong narrative and play components, and they needed to include a mix of single and multiplayer formats. Adhering to classification restrictions proved a significant obstacle, limiting selection to games rated by the Australian Classification Board as suitable for audiences age 15 and under, largely eliminating most popular and large-production games from selection.

In order to maximise the opportunity to form understandings in response to the research questions, data relating to individual interviews (conducted before and after the intervention), audio recordings of all classroom interactions and student work samples were collected. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998). All data was input into data analysis software NVivo (QSR International, 2010), and manually coded according to themes. Themes were generated for coding based on the theory and literature, and as a result of engaging with the data as it was collected.

The following presents findings from the intervention related to pedagogical approaches to teaching videogames as text. It describes teaching activities from the intervention, as well as the responses from students. While data related to critical literacy have been explored elsewhere (Bacalja, 2018), themes of multimodality, gaming capital, play and interactivity,

Topic 1	<p><b>Introduction Activity</b> Defining videogames. This was followed by a whole-class activity led by the teacher-researcher focussed on sharing prior experiences with gaming.</p> <p><b>Brainstorming Game Cover Activity</b> This involved students working in two groups of 3, brainstorming the key themes, stories, and characters they observed based on five videogame front covers.</p>
Topic 2	<p><b>Genre introduction</b> A teacher-led discussion about genre began this topic followed by two short readings from the blurbs of novels. A brief discussion followed focussed on the language used in each blurb to construct the genre.</p> <p><b>Game Trailers</b> Four videogame trailers were shown to the class. As each was presented students completed a table that required them to identify features of the trailer that related to: text, visuals, dialogue and music.</p> <p><b>Genre and Story Comprehension Questions</b> Four comprehension questions were placed on the whiteboard. These required students to refer to earlier discussion and the table they had completed.</p>
Topic 3	<p><b>Story Discussion</b> The teacher-researcher began this topic with an open discussion about any videogames that students had played over their holiday break. This was followed by a discussion about the elements necessary to create a story.</p> <p><b>Writing and Playing <i>Bully</i></b> Students were given booklets that included blank lines. The instruction was for the class to write the story they saw unfolding on the screen. At the same time, one student took control of the game's avatar and played the game. After approximately ten minutes, a second student switched places with the first. This activity was followed by a discussion about what aspects of the story were revealed by these game-playing moments.</p> <p><b>Free play <i>Bully</i></b> For the final four minutes of this topic, in response to the preceding discussion, Andrew was instructed to play <i>Bully</i> in whatever manner he wished.</p>
Topic 4	<p><b>News Article Pair and Share</b> This topic began with students being placed in pairs and asked to read one of three news articles about the banning of the game <i>Bully</i>. Prompt questions were used to facilitate discussion amongst each pair.</p> <p><b>Playing, Writing and Talking about Power in <i>Bully</i></b> One student was asked to take the controller and play the game for approximately fifteen minutes while other students observed. The class was then asked to open their booklets to a range of questions about the theme of power. Students were required to choose five questions from the list of options and write their answers in the booklets provided. While students completed their answers, a different student continued to play the game. This activity was followed by a sharing activity whereby each student was asked to choose one of their responses to read out to the class.</p> <p><b>Talking about Identity</b> The next activity shifted to questions about how readers' histories impact on reading. Students were instructed to open their <i>Bully</i> booklets to complete an activity relating to real-world, virtual, and projective identities. Student responses were the catalyst for a discussion which linked to the gameplay they had observed thus far.</p>
Topic 5	<p><b>Paired Gameplay and Note-taking</b> For this topic, all students were given a handout with a table for filling-in. Each pair of students were required to play a game for five minutes in multiplayer mode. At the same time, the remaining six students observed and took notes on their handout about they observed. At the conclusion of this activity, every student had played a game with a partner and had completed the 'Gameplay Table.' The gameplaying and note-taking were the catalyst for discussion about the differences between games, the types of games, language, power, choice and the types of gameplay that took place.</p>
Topic 6	<p><b>Playing Digital Stories</b> The topic began with discussion prompted by two questions placed on the whiteboard: What makes a digital story? How do you make a story digitally? Each student was then assigned a feature of a story, for example, dialogue or visual effects. Whilst one student played a game for up to fifteen minutes, other students were required to take notes about how their assigned element was used to create the story. This was repeated with a second game. The topic finished with a teacher-led discussion guiding students to share their responses.</p>
Topic 7	<p><b>Free Gameplay</b> An improvised gameplay activity was organised whereby students played <i>Halo 3</i> in pairs. Each time a virtual character died, the controller was passed on to another student. Gameplay was followed by discussion relating to the paired gameplay, including prompts from the teacher about: the experience, power, texts, prior learning and story.</p>
Topic 8	<p><b>Eight-Player Gaming</b> The final topic in the intervention involved multiplayer gaming. The first gaming experience placed students in one of two teams competing against each other. Each team sat together and watched their own screen as it was projected onto a white wall. The second gaming experience allowed students to choose the game they wanted to play and with whom. One group, comprised entirely of males, chose to play the first person shooter game together. The other group, comprised entirely of girls, chose to play a car racing game. The topic finished with the students returning to form one large group and each student being asked to share one emotion or impression they had during that topic. Further discussion followed regarding what studying videogames in a subject-English class might look like.</p>

Figure 1. Summary of activities during intervention.

and their implications for classroom learning and teaching, are discussed here.

### Understanding multimodal storytelling

One focus of the intervention was to support students in understanding how stories are realised multimodally. During the first lesson of the intervention, students completed a game-cover activity which

involved working in groups of three to deconstruct the front covers of six videogames. Each game-cover was printed in colour on A3 paper with space provided for students to write notes. Students were instructed by the teacher-researcher to use each game's cover to hypothesise about the characters, themes, and stories within each game. Figures 2 and 3 show the work of two groups.

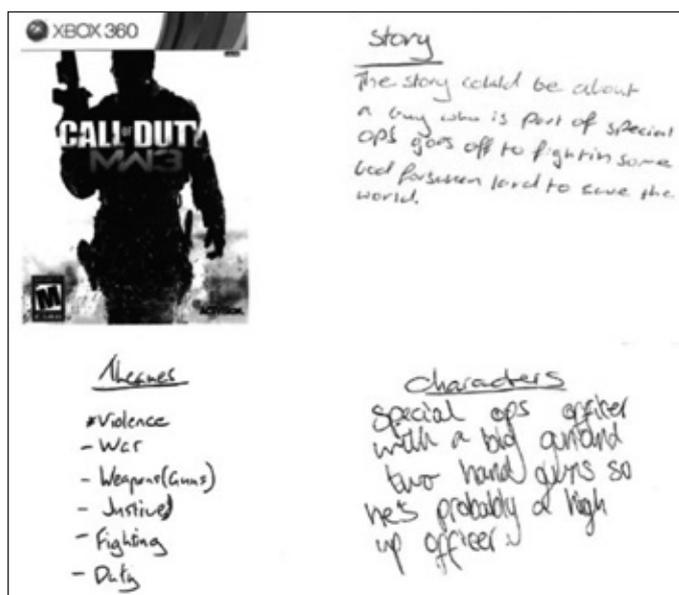


Figure 2. Brad, Cam and Harley Call of Duty poster

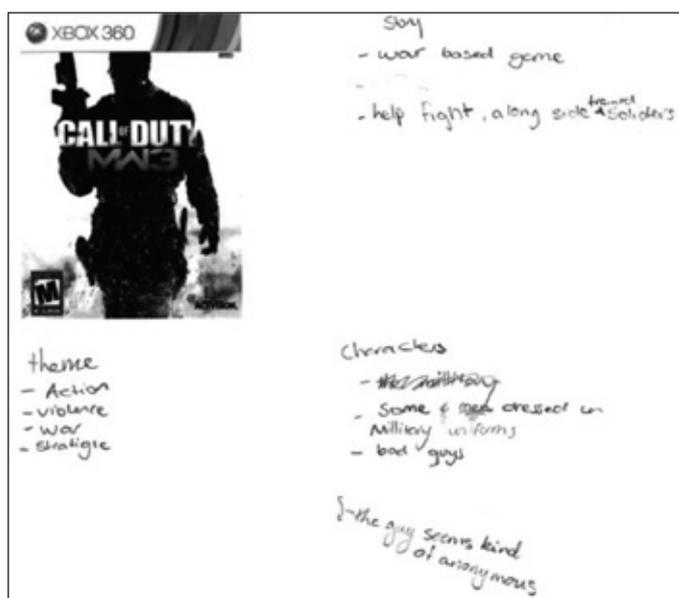


Figure 3. Kate, Rachel and Alicia Call of Duty poster

These two posters revealed that a learning scaffold, in the form of a game-cover, supported by three prompts (themes, characters, story) were sufficient to guide students' reading so that they could identify various visual elements and use these to generate ideas. This preliminary activity was just the first of numerous activities that moved towards pedagogies targeted at skills associated with new literacies (Unsworth, 2008).

One way students showed their multimodal reading capacity was by differentiating between visual elements that served different purposes. For example, both game posters refer to the highly popular game *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, which was likely to have been played by many of the participants. In their poster, Brad, Cam

and Harley made a connection between the presence of 'guns' and the themes of 'war' and 'violence'. Likewise, the presentation of the protagonist in dark shades and with no facial features led Kate, Rachel and Alicia to conclude that the character 'seems kind of anonymous'. Student notations were evidence of reading multi-modal images, with minimal teacher intervention, in a way that identified and grouped visuals before abstracting these groupings for association with story elements.

Another intervention activity required students to identify how moving images could support the realisation of narrative. This was evident in the multiple modalities which students referred to when deconstructing gameplay, including cinematic cut-scenes. A gameplay narrative activity, whereby individual students took turns using the controller to play each game's introductory scenes, was designed to reveal how stories are created multimodally. Students were required to complete a table that captured how visuals, dialogue, music and texts functioned to create the story unfolding on the screen. Figure 4 shows the collated student responses to the roles played by visuals to create the story of one of the games, *Fable II*.

All six students described the role played by light and dark imagery in creating the setting. Kate moved beyond simply identifying visual features, explaining the function of light and dark motifs by stating, it 'sets the mood of different places'. Several students also used visual representations to position observed gameplay within particular genres of narrative, including Harley's comment that the presence of a bird was 'hinting at an adventure tale' and Brad's comment that the bird's flight path allowed the gamer to 'see the area of the world', and then classifying the setting by linking it to a particular genre of videogame 'kind of like an open-world game'. These comments captured how students could identify and analyse how modes beyond the printed word contributed to the creation of stories and worlds seemingly of another place and time that appear real, and encourage exploration in order to further unravel the narrative (Mott, Callaway, Zettlemyer, Lee, & Lester, 1999).

### Connecting with students' gaming capital

Classroom activities also aimed to connect with the textual world of students. In the tradition of personal growth approaches to English (Britton, 1970; Dixon, 1975), one aim of this work was to value student experience and encourage learning about self and

Alicia	Brad	Cam
Light and dark grey clouds above town	Following the bird's path, you can see the area of the world.	Cartoon world/realist factors to it
Dark village	Kind of like an open world games from the looks of things.	Smooth edges
Girls standing around fire and snow		Lighting
Panning over landscape	Very dark area, with small sections of sunlight	
Lights on in town		
Kate	Rachel	Harley
Darkish,	Lighting	Bird travelling a long distance, hinting at an adventure tale
Sets mood of different places	Colour	
Smooth-edged looking Animation	Dark areas and light areas	Cartoony fantasy
	Scenery	
	Fire	
	Overview of the whole area	

Figure 4. The role played by visuals in creating the story of Fable II.

the world through developing relations to texts and context. An early activity in the intervention included a teacher-led discussion in which each of the students present was asked to share their prior experiences with videogames, and to describe their favourite game. The intention was for this activity to encourage reflection on prior gaming activity and to create the learning environment as a shared experience. The data showed that students possessed various degrees of gaming capital, a form of cultural capital which when activated in the right context produces social profit (Bourdieu, 1986). Described by Consalvo (2007) as knowledge about games, the gaming industry, and other players, it enables interactions with games and facilitates learning and playing.. A brief insight into each students' gaming capital can be seen in the following comments:

Cam: I've probably spent, yeah probably ten years, maybe a bit less, maybe nine years playing videogames. I've played all sorts of game over the years. I'm into a lot of fantasy [games] like those ones with main stories. [My favourite is] probably a game called *Rune Factory*. It's on the DS.

Brad: Yeah, I played a lot of videogames. I'm influenced by my step-dad who it's a rare thing for him not to visit JB Hi-Fi and bring home a game of some sort. So I, yeah, I played lots and lots of games because he is a step dad he plays lots of, I don't know. He plays lots of shooter games so I play lots of those too. I do enjoy the *Halo* series as well as the *Call of Duty* and things.

Harley: I played games just a lot. Just every night probably.

My favourite is probably *World of Warcraft*.

Kate: I used to play games more than I do. I used to play *The Sims* all the time. Like, all the time. I don't know, my brother plays a lot of games so I just borrow them. I like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Rachel: I don't really play games. [After prodding from the teacher-researcher, Rachel elaborated on her initial response]

I don't know. They are very fun. Like, some of my friends play them and they really like them. They seem really fun.

Alicia: Mine is probably just playing with my little brother on the Wii game mainly and we can play *Mario Kart* a lot but other than that, not much experience with videogames.

The data revealed a contrast between those with extensive exposure to videogames, such as Cam, and those who play rarely, such as Rachel. The references to time spent playing games showed how some students had experienced many opportunities to develop their gaming capital, which would be observed later in the study as a factor impacting the ways in which students responded during learning activities. Harley's claim of playing videogames every night, like Kate's assertion that she had been an avid gamer in the past, when combined with other contributions made by these two students throughout the intervention, were indicative of two teenagers who had accumulated ways of talking and acting with videogames that have become embodied in the form of dispositions of the mind and body

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47) and could be called upon for distinction during activities that valued this type of knowledge and experience.

Student talk during the game-cover activity described earlier showed how students could mobilise gaming capital to complete learning activities. As they deconstructed the game posters, students were recorded saying:

Cam: Yeah. I haven't played it [*Fable*] much but I've seen my brother play it quite a lot. He's into the series. He's got [game] 1, 2, and 3.

Harley: *Bully*. Oh, *Bully's* a grouse game. I used to play it all the time.

Cam: That flaming lady.

Brad: It's like the lady in *Dragon Age*.

Cam: Hey we got *Civilization*. That's a good game, that's pretty cool.

Cam: Have you played that game? It's very weird.

Brad: I played the *Age of Empires*. That's pretty close.

Cam: Yeah but this one is turn-based, I don't really like it. It is turn-based.

Brad: That's all right there will be like tactics.

Cam: It's a bit of turn-based and real-time strategy.

Brad: Did you ever play *Final Fantasy Grim Attack*?

Cam: No.

Brad: That's the same thing.

Students were making connections between the demands of the task at hand and the knowledge they possessed about other games from the same genre. This is evidence of intertextual reasoning (Kristeva, 1980, 1986), as student references to a number of games created relationships between them and informed the meanings and discourse imposed on the original text. For example, when Brad makes connections between the games *Age of Empires*, *Final Fantasy Grim Attack* and *Civilization* he is using his knowledge of the characteristics of one game genre to inform his, and his peers', initial perceptions of the games which were the focus of the activity.

The way in which students used their gaming capital was similar to findings from other practice-based research incorporating videogames in subject English. Ostenson's (2013) study of storytelling in the high school classroom involved a study of archetypal

heroes across many genres of stories in collaboration with a study of narrative in videogames. He found that this pedagogical approach empowered and supported reluctant readers by allowing them to bring more of their culture into the classroom. The intervention explored in this paper similarly empowered students to draw on their knowledge of videogames to participate in deep and engaging conversations about the unique strengths and weaknesses of storytelling in videogames, thus improving their self-efficacy. The interaction between Cam, Harley and Brad is evidence of gaming capital informing textual comprehension as a result of the application of a pedagogy that begins with students.

### Play

The games at the centre of the intervention were not prescribed for at-home play, necessitating gameplay in the classroom to realise their story elements. What this revealed was the challenge between the mobilisation of play for the purpose of navigating the goals of the game, and play in the service of learning and teaching goals associated with the intervention. This became evident when students were asked to describe the experience of play following an eight-player gaming session, when students played games of their choosing in two teams of four students.

Student feedback is presented in Figure 5 below, in terms of student talk which captured the interactions between players, and talk which focused on successful or unsuccessful play.

Students reported positive and negative effects of social and multiplayer gameplay on how they learnt to play the game, with the range captured by the support Rachel felt she received from her team mates who could 'help each other in the game,' and on the opposite end of the spectrum Harley reporting on an obstacle to learning to play as a result of some players' greater gaming ability: 'It was getting like, annoying... because they are so good'. Similarly, student comments relating to successful or unsuccessful play demonstrated that some students found learning to play challenging – 'I didn't really know what I was doing' (Kate) – while others observed a noticeable improvement in the quality of play after a period of time: 'You could see that people improved over the half an hour' (Cam).

Student comments captured by references to social gameplay and the challenges of play are examples of play when it is conceived in terms of 'learning to play', as opposed to 'playing to learn' (Arnseth, 2006).

<u>References to interactions between human players</u>	<u>References to successful or unsuccessful play</u>
It was a lot more social than before (Cam)	I didn't really know what I was doing (Kate)
Everyone was always killing everyone (Kate)	I am not very good at it... I think you have to be good at it to enjoy it (Sharon)
It was getting like, annoying... because they are so good (Harley)	It was fun though a little bit frustrating at times... I couldn't navigate properly. (Alicia)
I thought it was heaps more interactive, like way more social (Adam)	You could see that people improved over the half an hour (Cam)
I thought it was good when you like came and could help each other in the game rather than being by yourself (Rachel)	

Figure 5. Student comments about 'learning to play'

Arnseth (2006), interrogating the distinction between playing to learn and learning to play, has argued that when playing to learn, the emphasis is on learning some content or skill which should be the end result of game playing. As such, knowledge and skills are treated as effects or outcomes. Conversely, learning to play puts the emphasis on the activity of playing. The student comments in Figure 5 show that the introduction of gameplay into English contexts may produce the circumstances for students to focus their talk on play-based goals, rather than subject-English-focused goals.

Learning environments which incorporate gameplay need to be carefully planned so that play as an activity which can support text comprehension is realised, but with the recognition that time will need to be allocated so that learning to play is supported, in the same way that most English classrooms allocate time to read the set novel or view the set film. The risk here is that students who lack basic gaming skills will be more likely to focus their attention on learning to play, thus minimising the benefits which can arise from playing to learn.

### Interactivity

Complex processes of meaning-making between reader and writer are further complicated in the videogame-based English classroom when we consider that any game requires input from a user before its story can be fully realised. In the tradition of Rosenblatt's (1938) and Eagleton's (1983) work on the transaction between reader and writer, questions about a game creator's intention are further complicated by processes of interactivity. When students played videogames during the intervention, they engaged with the game designers to

co-construct the story on the screen. This activity typifies interactivity, a partnership between the reader and the text in the production of meaning.

Ryan's (2001) theory of interactivity distinguishes between interactivity which is figurative, where there is collaboration between the reader and the text in the production of meaning, and interactivity which is literal, meaning 'textual mechanisms that allow the reader to affect the 'text' of the text as a visible display of signs, and to control the dynamics of its unfolding' (p. 17). In practical terms, textual practices that involve a student reading a novel represent figurative interactivity as the student's reading of the text necessitates collaboration with the author's work. Textual practices which invite a gamer to use a controller to direct an avatar represent literal interactivity as the gamer's actions affect the actual text, as evidenced by visuals on the screen. For interactivity to be literal, the text must undergo physical changes during the reading/making process. This distinction is evident in two types of text activity from the intervention.

During a gameplay comprehension activity, one student played the game *Bully*, an open-world sandbox game where the player takes control of Jimmy Hopkins, a rebellious student at the fictional Bullworth Academy, while the rest of the class wrote down what they saw happening on the screen. This learning activity produced both literal and figurative interactivity.

The first form of interactivity related to students making sense of what they saw on the television screen, itself an image projected from the videogame console. During this activity, Brad used the controller to direct the virtual character around the gameworld, completing several introductory game activities and familiarising himself with the virtual setting. The



Figure 6. Interactivity in the *Bully* gameworld

other students were directed to watch the screen and make notes in their workbooks describing what they saw unfolding. All students were involved in 'reading' the images, sounds, colour and events depicted on the screen, a form of figurative interactivity similar to meaning-making during film-viewing, or as it occurs when a reader engages with a novel and constructs meaning from the words on the page.

The second form of textual practice analysed, intrinsic to the playing of a videogame, was more literal in nature and refers specifically to Brad's actions controlling the virtual character. Figure 6 captures typical gameplay from the game *Bully*. It shows how the game allowed Brad to perform two types of activity. The screenshot on the left shows how Brad could roam around the gameworld – a fictional boarding school called Bullworth Academy – and the town in which it was situated. The screenshot on the right depicts how Brad could approach and respond to other virtual characters, choosing to complete quests and challenges. Both of these types of textual practice involved literal interactivity, in which the text must undergo physical changes during the reading/making process. It is worth noting that this is a process distinct from the reading or viewing that take place when engaging with novels or films. The game provided, and required, Brad to take control of a textual mechanism, the virtual character, which was accessible through a handheld controller and allowed his decisions to form the 'text' of the text (Ryan, 2001, p. 17). While all students figuratively interacted with the text, only Brad literally interacted, as evidenced by the virtual world incorporating and responding to each and every command he issued. Physical changes in the text were realised through the changing visual landscape, a response to Brad's decisions about where to go, and also through dialogue

with other virtual characters, a response to Brad's decisions regarding whom to engage with.

Textual study in subject English has often been characterised by attempts to uncover and understand the work and the author's intended message through attention to the text (Thomson, 2004). This approach to textual understanding would be insufficient for dealing with videogame literacies which pose the complex challenge of unpacking game action to distinguish the meanings and intentions of the enmeshed relationship between game designer and game player.

### Conclusions

Returning to Green's three provocations about how English will service the rise of digitally-mediated communications in the twenty-first century, we can see how the inclusion of digital texts for play and study in the English classroom will impact how teachers and students negotiate teaching and learning. Findings from the study show that while videogames share many features with other texts traditionally studied in English, there are distinctive videogame practices. The interactive and immersive components of videogame practice impact their realisation. Similarly, the socially-mediated performance of these texts, in terms of gameplay collaboration, are at odds with the often-solitary way that print-based texts are enacted. When combined with the highly multimodal nature of videogames, we are left with a text that demands new ways of conceptualising textual study in subject English.

New media texts which play such an important part in young people's lives and are symbolic of broader technological shifts are redefining what matters in subject English. The integration of new technologies need not be a threat to the subject, but in fact can enhance the great work that English teachers are

already doing with text, and suggest some new ways forward.

Adult anxiety about the 'newness' of videogames, and their capacity to engage absolutely, is not sufficient justification for ignoring these texts and their associated practices. With change comes anxiety, and a disparity between teacher identities and new forms of text has the capacity to produce considerable angst. Salen's (2008) argument about change is apt. She says that despite our desire to change the way that learning and thinking occurs in classrooms, we are limited by old tensions which pit the real against the virtual, the in-school against the out-of-school, the formal and the informal. The concerns about videogame mirror these same tensions. At a time when questions of student engagement continue to be asked and attention is focused on those students disengaged from schooling (Gallup, 2015; Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013), playing with virtual characters in digital worlds and inviting students to become a part of the narrative construction and enactment is a positive outcome for students that will be impacted by each teacher's ability to reconcile their professional identity in a version of subject English that is changing.

## Notes

- 1 Bully, Dungeon Siege 3, Fable 2, Forza Motorsport 4, Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2, and Halo 3.

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# Are You the Writer?

## Literary and Cultural Influences on Writer Identity Uptake within Subject English

Emily Frawley, Melbourne Graduate School of Education

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the notion of English teachers as writers, focusing specifically on the identity of the writer as they move from literary, philosophical and broader cultural spheres, and how this is understood within the context of secondary English education. The implications of what this identity, of these identities, mean for how teachers position themselves as writers in the classroom are discussed, as well as how this then affects understandings of the nature and value of subject English. The data for this paper are drawn from a research project that utilised a case study methodology of fifteen teacher-writers and data collection comprised a series of semi-structured interviews analysed through Pierre Bourdieu's sociology. The data reveal that English teachers' views of writing indicate a complex interaction with broader popular and cultural tropes of the writer.

### Introduction

'Mr. Trout—'

'Yes?'

'Are—are you Kilgore Trout?'

'Yes.' Trout supposed that Billy had some complaint about the way his newspapers were being delivered. He did not think of himself as a writer for the simple reason that the world had never allowed him to think of himself in this way.

'The—the writer?' said Billy.

'The what?'

Billy was certain that he had made a mistake. 'There's a writer named Kilgore Trout.'

'There is?' Trout looked foolish and dazed.

'You never heard of him?'

Trout shook his head. 'Nobody—nobody ever did.'

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Kilgore Trout, a recurring character in several of Kurt Vonnegut's novels, is a prolific but underappreciated science-fiction writer. His interaction in the above quotation with the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim, is an exchange that invokes the notion of not only identity, but also identity contestation. In the absence of any validation from the outside world, or space for him to claim a writer identity, Trout does not recognise Billy's proposal that a person such as he might be known as a writer. Although the novel does not extend on this question further, one might reasonably wonder who the world *does* allow to be seen as a writer. Elsewhere (Frawley, 2015), I have mapped the range of research literature investigating the concept of the 'teacher-writer' and the various ways that this particular identity, situated within the field of subject English, has been defined and contested. This paper, however, takes as its starting point an interest in how broader cultural perceptions of the writer affect the ways this identity is experienced in the English classroom. A Google image search (Figure 1), as a modern vox pop, provides a revealing insight as to who we



Figure 1. 'Writer'

think of when we think about the 'writer':

There is much that can be read into these images. First, they are largely romanticised images and point to a somewhat privileged identity: there are typewriters, parchment and fountain pens, white men with pipes, bowties and suspenders. There are also several instances of magic or divine inspiration, and this view persists even in the modern keyboard age with the image (bottom row, third from left) of light, both literal and metaphorical, filling the screen. Then again, there are a few references to the toil of being a writer: a late night holed up in the garret, and bits of paper screwed up in frustration. One notes that in the world of *Google*, at least, the vision of the writer is very much an artistic identity. For the sake of comparison, if one searches for an image of the 'reader' (Figure 2), a very different identity is invoked:

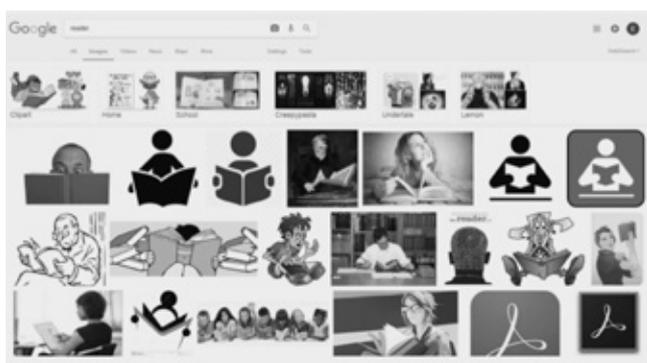


Figure 2. 'Reader'

One of the most prominent things to note in the 'reader' image search is that this is a much more inclusive identity: there are men and women, people of different ethnicities, and many young readers as well as older ones. Significantly, there are five generic outlines of readers in the top hits alone, almost inviting the viewer to take on the persona of the reader. Further, many instances of reading for enjoyment may be noted, seeming to signify that 'a reader' is simply anyone who

enjoys reading. There is also some critical and academic reading taking place: a portrait of an old man in the top middle row presumably studying some canonical texts, another academic in the library just below him, as well as the familiar image of 'Rosie the Riveter' on the far right middle row, who is reading for empowerment.

It is clear that the wider community is drawing on very different criteria when they decide what makes a writer and what makes a reader. This article considers the question of how these wider views are experienced in the field of English education. The writer, as an identity that is potentially harder to access, is the focal point of the research, particularly in terms of how it is experienced by English teachers – those who not only enact the curriculum, but also mediate literate identities for themselves and for their students.

### Methodology

This paper draws on research conducted as part of a wider three-year project that investigated what it means to be a teacher-writer. The methodological approach to this research comprised a case study investigation of fifteen Australian secondary English teachers who are also writers, and involved a series of interviews and interactions with each participant over the course of a year. The research was underpinned by a qualitative epistemology with an analytical framework informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's oeuvre (Bourdieu 1984, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1996 ; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) explicitly engages with the fields of Education and Art, making his work a highly pertinent theoretical lens through which to explore the intersection of these two fields.

Data collection was based on a number of strategies and collection phases in order to triangulate the data and allow for reflection (Atkinson & Coffey, 2001). There were three stages of data collection, all of which involved semi-structured interviews that each lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. Stage 1 of data collection involved an exchange of emails with each participant and covered the topics of biographical information, writing habits and qualifications, and beliefs about the nature of writing. Stage 2 involved three in-person or Skype interviews with each participant, and covered the participant's teaching context, writing pedagogies, and beliefs about the place of the writing identity within and beyond subject English. Stage 3 consisted of a final interview with each participant, in which the transcribed interviews and initial findings were reflected upon and verified (Kvale &

Brinkman, 2009). Analysis of the data was based on a grounded theory approach that was evaluated through a 'series of alternating inductive and deductive steps' (Punch, 2009, p. 172) and aided through the use of NVivo computer coding in identifying themes and trends.

A key concern for Bourdieu (1984), and for this research, is the concept of 'distinction' – the habitus or set of acquired tastes that allows individuals or groups to determine legitimacy within a field. In the field of art and cultural production, Bourdieu's work attempts to demystify the special aura that is often given to artists, including prevalent discourses of art such as genius, privilege and disinterestedness (the notion of the artist being above or removed from economic and social concerns). Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1984) was employed in examining the ways in which participants are predisposed to think of themselves in certain ways, whilst still retaining individual agency. Habitus can be summarised as the dispositions inscribed on individuals to act in certain ways due to their life experiences and the structures of the field in which they find themselves. Furthermore, Bourdieu's notion of capital, and cultural capital in particular (manifesting in such forms as attitudes, knowledge, skills, qualifications and behaviours), serves to highlight how teacher-writers engage with bids for distinction (or not) within the field.

The participants constituted a varied group in terms of age, gender, teaching experience, and teaching context, which allowed for a range of voices and perspectives to come through in the data. Nine out of the fifteen teachers worked in government and independent metropolitan schools (Melbourne), while the remaining six worked in rural and regional Victoria and NSW. Furthermore, there was a variety of dominant writing pursuits engaged in by the participants. Each participant led a nuanced writing life, with multiple writing activities and interests that often blurred the lines between artistic and commercial writing, professional and private writing. As a collective, the sorts of writing these teachers engaged in included novels, short stories, memoir, poetry, journal writing, journalism, scriptwriting, self-help and academic non-fiction. With some minor variations, they were all confident in their writing ability, and enjoyed writing or felt compelled to write.

### Findings and analysis

The findings discussed in this paper are selectively drawn for their ability to exemplify different

philosophies and cultural tropes of the writer identity that emerged from the literature review (Frawley, 2015). The writer philosophies and cultural tropes that participants referenced were used to group the two distinct positions that the teacher-writers occupied. In keeping with a pluralist understanding of the dynamic and contextual nature of identity, however, it is important to reassert that teacher-writers' positions are subject to change, and the positions expressed by select participants in the data that follow are best thought of as expressions of positions that any teacher (or teacher-writer) might take on in a given context:

- Positions of distinction: encompassing such concepts as the 'tortured artist', Romanticism and the writer as 'dangerous outlier';
- Contested positions: encompassing 'writing as community', institutional recognition, identity politics, and Bourdieu's concept of 'misrecognition'.

The data established that the way in which teacher-writers conceive of the writing identity is multifaceted, and influenced by the way in which they mediate understandings of the writer identity across cultural and philosophical fields, and into the field of education. The data reinforced assertions from previous research: that English teachers who write have vastly different understandings of the writer identity, which are informed by prevailing cultural tropes about writers in the popular sphere that 'reflect broader cultural beliefs about literacy and individuality' (Sloan, 2014, p. 25). When the writing habitus is placed within the field of English education, participants were more likely to assert their own (and their students') identities as writers if they subscribed more to a Personal Growth, empowering model of English (Dixon, 1967). This student-centred model of English, which has been prominent since the 1960s, inclines teachers towards a broader definition of what constitutes 'literature' (opening up space for students' work to be viewed as such), and places a heightened value on creativity and writing. Alternatively, if they saw their own writing identity as a position of distinction, they were more inclined to prioritise a Cultural Heritage model of English, with its focus on writing for appreciation and emulation of canonical literature (Locke, 2005). Teachers operating under this model were therefore more likely to problematise or dismiss the writing identities of other agents in the field, such as their students.

**Table 1. Positions of distinction**

Teacher	View of writing	Philosophy/ Trope	View of students as writers/ Student writing
Amy	<i>'For me writing is mostly a torment, a hell.'</i>	Tortured artist, art as suffering	<i>'Year 10 creative writing is not art. You know?!... and good for them, because they don't have to worry about it in the way that I do.'</i>
Rowan	<i>'I just – I listen and listen. I hear it and write it [the poem] down.'</i>	Romanticism, artist as genius, muse, expressivism	<i>'Any time anyone calls their [students'] work 'art', I have a hissy fit. Because it's not bloody art.'</i>
Henry	<i>'The reality is that a lot of people who are great don't get published ... You don't do it for that reason.'</i>	Bohemian, outlier; autonomous, dangerous, disinterested	<i>'I had a principal once ask me what I was doing to improve the ATAR<sup>1</sup> score. What an idiot!... I look for creative ways to teach.'</i>

1 ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) is the primary criterion for entry into most undergraduate-entry university programs in Australia.

### Positions of distinction

The amount of cultural capital the teacher-writers laid claim to was the largest factor in determining how readily they identified themselves and others as writers. The first group of teacher-writers was those who saw themselves as having what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as 'distinction' in the field – they were published writers, their writing received an income, or the quality of their writing had a significant amount of cultural or social capital. One example is Amy, who identified a tortured relationship with her poetry. This view speaks to a long history of art being associated with frustration or even mental illness – the trope of the 'tortured artist', seen through widespread depictions of writing as a form of suffering and the writer as an individual prone to mental instability (Sloan, 2014). Numerous writers and artists in other fields have contributed to the prevalence of this notion. Abbs (1991) cites the journaling of Virginia Woolf (1984), who confessed a link between illness and creativity – a link which Abbs contends has become widely recognised in the psychology of creativity since that time. As Amy moved into the classroom, she saw a clear distinction between this privileged, albeit difficult, art and the writing that she values for her students. In the quote included in Table 1, Amy locates her view of student writing within the Personal Growth model, viewing writing as a process of crafting creativity and expression (e.g. Graves, 1983). However, Amy draws a contrast between the process that students engage in when learning the craft of writing, and actual artists (such as herself) who produce legitimate artworks.

Another teacher-writer, Rowan, invoked the trope of the muse in his writing, viewing writing as something that pours forth when he refers to 'listening' for the poem, in a similar fashion to the 'poet and Nobel laureate' Wisława Szymborska whom Rowan quotes as 'talk[ing] about being in a field and [seeing] the poem

coming. And she starts running towards the house and catches it and writes it down.' Rowan's description (in dialogue with Szymborska) of the writer 'catching' or 'listening' for inspiration to strike is a recognisable trope of the artist as genius, and the writer as innately gifted (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002; Yagelski, 2000). The implication for students, however, is that it creates a clear divide between 'art' (what the teacher-writer produces) and their writing. This may also be a way of conceiving of a rare and special identity – not everyone is visited by the muse and able to 'catch' it. Amy and Rowan's views are similar in the ways in which they position students and school writing as 'apprentices' (a term they both invoked) whose legitimisable or arbitrary writing (to once again draw on Bourdieu's terms) is typified by enjoyment and freedom. Amy and Rowan can both be understood as engaging in a bid to endow their writing with distinction through their dialogue with consecrated gatekeepers. Both Amy's and Rowan's identities are very much centred around interactions and associations with canonical writers as a way of affirming and establishing the parameters for their own writing identity. Having said that, Rowan characterised his teaching as 'loud, fast, dramatic, challenging, [and] hilarious'. For example, when brainstorming a writing session with his class, Rowan provided students with an energetic array of musical and visual stimuli in order to stimulate students' own creativity. Consequently, while he does not accord his students writer identities, Rowan nonetheless enculturates them with his own conceptions of artistic practices and processes.

Another significant way in which the writer of distinction is conceived is via the trope of the anti-establishment, impoverished bohemian writer. Henry, who has had various literary, educational and journalistic publications throughout his writing career, invokes the cultural trope of the struggling artist when referring

**Table 2. Contested positions**

Teacher	Self as writer	Philosophy/ Trope	View of students as writers/ Student writing
Teresa	<i>'For a long time I didn't sufficiently value my writing ... I see that in the girls I teach.'</i>	Institutional theory of art, writing communities	<i>'I would hope that more of my students leave my classroom feeling empowered to call themselves writers than I was myself empowered by my own education.'</i>
Steph	<i>'I feel like it's something I could do [later in life] and I think I can write quite well. But it's – my passion is education and teaching kids to write.'</i>	Identity politics	<i>'Probably because I studied creative writing myself, I feel a lot more confident teaching that and encouraging kids to be creative.'</i>
Andrew	<i>'Teacher-writer? Small 'w' writer ... Probably some would argue that being a reader gets in the way of writing.'</i>	Misrecognition in English	<i>'[The enjoyment of teaching writing] has nothing to do with my own writing.'</i>

to his many 'unpublished manuscripts in the bottom drawer', which led him to pointedly identify himself as 'a true writer'. Henry's discourse here is aligned with the notion of the struggling artist, instantly identifiable with the ideals of Romanticism and bohemianism and a revelling in poverty as a sign of independence from the establishment (Schneider, 2015). Henry's discussion of not 'writing to be published' is in reference to the fact that he is a self-published author – however, instead of attributing less legitimacy to this standpoint, he sees this as a consecrated position in the field. And just as he is not writing for publication, his teaching is staunchly opposed to outcomes-based education. The implied reason behind Henry's rationale for making art is the 'art for art's sake' discourse. Henry's insistence that he is a 'true writer' is therefore facilitated through his ability to claim what Bourdieu refers to as 'disinterestedness' – a key characteristic of artists insofar as they are seen to be removed from economic interests.

The trope of the anti-establishment writer speaks to Bourdieu's (1996) mapping of the 'field of cultural production' and the two poles within it: heteronomous and autonomous. Any agent within the field, such as a teacher in education or a writer in the field of cultural production, moves between these poles as they negotiate various imperatives, so that a teacher who wants to value the aesthetic growth of a student and 'learning for learning's sake' may be trying to situate themselves towards the autonomous pole of the field. However, they must also equip students with the literacy skills that will allow them to gain university admission or enter the workforce, which will pull them towards the heteronomous pole. In keeping with the cultural view of the artist as disinterested, Henry's teaching context is significant for the fact that he has left classroom teaching and now teaches English as a tutor. Henry characterised his decision to leave the classroom as due to 'bureaucratic bullshit'. He later gave an example

of a past school's preoccupation with results and the ATAR. As with his writing, Henry's comments reflect that his teaching is also positioned at the autonomous end of the pole. Effectively, then, he moves from the 'art for art's sake' discourse with his writing to the 'education for education's sake' discourse with his teaching. The disconnection that Henry felt between his preferred approach to teaching and the pressure to adhere to school curriculum and outcomes was therefore the primary reason why Henry left the classroom. These views not only align with assertions about the importance of risk-taking, experimental environments for creativity (Davies, 2013; Robinson, 2001), but also link to the idea of the artist as 'dangerous' due to their perceived distance from stability and order (Burns, 1996; Eldridge, 2003).

### Contested positions

As the previous section demonstrated, teacher-writers with distinction align their identities with notions of artistry and the literary field. By contrast, many teacher-writers who participated in the research viewed themselves as having less capital than those included in the previous section. These participants were more likely to situate their writer habitus within the field of education. Teresa's views were a common example of this contested writer identity. She didn't always see herself as a writer, although her writing practices encompass 'poetry, short stories, plays, reviews, reflections and of course, that journal.' Yet despite her love of writing, and compulsion to write, Teresa claimed that 'it has taken [her] many years and much encouragement to self-identify as a writer,' echoing Du Gay and Hall's (2011) assertion that identity can be conceived of in terms of future directions and aspirations. As an adult, Teresa thinks it important to assert her identity as a writer, and this extends to her students' identities as writers. This not only aligns with notions of writing

communities, but can be related to the institutional theory of visual art that asserts that art is whatever the art world says it is (Danto, 1964; Dickie, 1971; Levinson, 1992). Teacher-writers such as Teresa function as what Bourdieu refers to as 'gatekeepers' in the English classroom, and have the power to legitimise their students' identities as writers and therefore either empower them to also achieve a writer identity, or ascribe them with that identity in order to position the classroom as a community of writers.

Steph embodies an opposing view: she came to English through a creative writing degree, although she does not necessarily view herself as a writer. Nonetheless, her background in writing means that she privileges creativity in her students. Steph connects creativity to the broader skills of effective communication and critical literacy, similar to the way in which it is conceived of in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2015): being able to engage with creative thinking, reading and writing, but also being invested in the politics of empowering students to value and obtain these skills (Graham, 2009; Morales & Samkoff, 2013; Peel, 2000; Stanhope, 2011). Steph's valuing of creativity is centred around her pedagogy and how she can foster creativity in her students. It is significant to note that Steph viewed creativity as a process, not a product (Doecke & Parr, 2005), and was invested in helping her students to also see creativity in this way. Steph expanded on this idea when discussing how disheartened many students can be when they attempt something creative but receive poor marks for it, reflecting that she really tries to 'make sure to get kids to write for themselves and try to break them out of that "I'm not creative, I'm not creative, I'm not creative [mindset]". This mindset could imply a view of the writer as anyone who creates and engages with creativity and values the process of creativity within English – although the fact that Steph rejected this view would suggest that the individual's understanding of the field of English also shapes to what extent this connection may be recognised. This raises the question of whether it matters if you identify yourself or your students as writers: that is, whether identifying as a writer might have an empowering effect on efficacy. McCabe (2005), writing within the field of feminist theory, asserts the complexity of the relationship between attitudes and identification. Individuals may hesitate to identify as feminists (or writers), even while they share the same beliefs and practices. This phenomenon raises the question of whether the naming of the 'writer' identity within the

English identity matters so long as the English teacher is showing the students (and themselves) what it is to *practise* as a writer.

In the final example, Andrew, a teacher who has published study guides, newspaper articles, poetry and film scripts, nonetheless hesitates to call himself a writer – especially when measuring himself against the consecrated literary writers that he reads. Andrew's comments in the above table therefore reference the competition for distinction that is at play in the writer identity. His hesitation to call himself a writer functions as an example of what Gee has described as an 'inferior' writer setting himself up in opposition to 'elites' (2000, p. 113). The way in which he downplays his writing identity, and the ease with which he identifies as a reader, shows that Andrew accords the identities of 'reader' and 'writer' markedly different levels of cultural capital. Andrew appears to set up a binary between his reading and writing identities, with his reading identity superseding his identity as a writer, rather than the two being able to co-exist complementarily. Andrew's rejection of a link between being a writer and enjoying teaching writing is reflective of the misrecognition of the inherent connection between the two activities, signifying the level of comfort and subscription agents feel within the doxa of the English field: they 'forget how we have actually been produced as particular kinds of people' (Webb et al., 2002, p. xiv). Such a position points to the ongoing confusion, or at best variety, in the nature of subject English (Luke, 2003), which is further complicated by the habitus of the teacher-writer and their willingness to challenge the orthodoxy and consecrated aspects of the subject. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, the most influential factors that predispose individuals' views are transmitted without passing through consciousness, 'but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life' (p. 51), and therefore, by their very lack of overt consciousness, are able to inscribe themselves more firmly into views that are misrecognised as 'natural'. It is through this naturalised misrecognition, then, that the significance of being a writer in the English classroom can be problematised or even dismissed – even by individuals who are writers themselves.

### Conclusions

This research established that there are diverse discourses used to conceive of the teacher-writer

identity, and that these understandings of identity are profoundly impacted by broader literary, cultural and academic constructions of the writer. The connections that participants made between their writing identity and their pedagogy towards, and identification of, students' writing identities, was further dependent on how they viewed the field of English. Subject English constitutes a site of struggle, whereby competing practices (such as reading and writing) struggle for distinction. It is for this reason that the reader identity enjoys distinction within the field of English, even as it is able to be claimed with less capital than that of the writing identity. Significantly, the writing identity constitutes a contested habitus not only within the broader literary and artistic fields, but also within the subject of English itself. This research has established that if the English teacher takes on the role of gatekeeper (a term used by Bourdieu [e.g. 1984], and later by Csikszentmihalyi [1990] to denote those with the power in a field to judge the 'worthy'), they are empowered to legitimise not only their own writing identities as a key component of the English teacher identity, but also the writing identities of their students.

Although the participants in this research valued writing, and were not deliberately promoting the value of reading over writing (i.e. reception over production), they could misrecognise their own position of influence and reinforce the distinction accorded to reading within this field. Just as previous research has examined the identity of the subject by way of better understanding its teachers (Alsup, 2006; Doecke, Locke, & Petrosky, 2004; Findlay, 2010; Luke, 2003), further research should consider English's ties to production and creation, especially in the face of calls for this element of English to be minimised (e.g. Spurr, 2014). Several significant research projects have argued that the notion of the teacher-writer is a creative identity (Andrews, 2017; Cremin & Baker, 2014; Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Gannon, 2008), and my research has advanced that argument by tying the English teacher's identity to the broader artistic field. The field of art has a long history of debating which works can be thought of as art, and therefore who is an artist (see Eldridge, 2003; Graham, 2000). Yet just as avant-garde art tends to be met with caution or rejection by the Academy, so too might the teacher-writer identity constitute an avant-garde assertion in the identity of English teachers and the affordances for creativity within the English teacher identity. According to Webb et al. (2000), the point of asserting such an artistic identity is

that 'unless people working at this end of the field can stake a claim to the field of cultural production, they cannot acquire any of the symbolic capital attached to art' (p. 16). In line with a Bourdieuan analysis, if the teacher cannot stake a claim to the writer identity, the role of English may well be relegated to procedural writing, rather than trying to compete for the consecration that comes with being 'a writer'.

The overarching question for this research was what it means for an English teacher to identify as a writer. Furthermore, it examined whether there is a difference between the way teachers identify and their values – whether there is a difference between being a teacher-writer and being a teacher who enjoys writing. Recent research by Cremin and Locke (2017) is predicated on the view that there is a difference between being a writing teacher (modelling writing) and being a teacher-writer (modelling 'being a writer'). They posit that research into the identity of the teacher-writer is important because of the need to recognise and develop identity in educational contexts, and because young writers' identities will be influenced by the ways in which their teachers view their writing identities. The question of what it means for a teacher to be a writer, however, has been shown to be complicated due to the different domains in which the term 'writer' is located, and the myriad of influences and contexts in which the teacher finds themselves at any given time (Brooks, 2007; Cremin & Baker, 2010, 2014; McKinney & Giorgis, 2009). The view that there is something arbitrary in trying to draw a connection between the two identities of 'teacher' and 'writer' was common for many of the participants in this study, with several participants commenting in their final interviews that this research had brought their attention to a connection between their English teacher and writer identities that they had previously not considered.

In line with previous research (Goodwyn, 2010; Yeo, 2007), the teacher-writers in this research reinforced the notion of reading as being central to the English teacher identity, thereby minimising an inclination to view their teacher identity as problematic or unstable. Lawler (2014) observes that the assertion of identity is often foregrounded in anxieties over loss or instability of who one is. Consequently, if there is no initial sense of anxiety over the English teaching identity, there will also be little need to question or assert that identity. The disposition to dismiss a connection between the teaching and writing identities can therefore be read as not only a misrecognition of the inescapable nature

of the subject (i.e. its inherent ties to writing), but also a complicity in the continued dominant view of the English teacher as a reader. Writing, as a field of cultural production, tells a story of the agents operating in its field; it also functions as a practice used to identify English teachers and students to each other. The path towards the occupation of this identity is therefore dependent on the semantic uptake of this identity within the broader English teacher identity.

The influence of various tropes of the writer identity on the uptake of this identity in the English classroom is shaped, to various extents, by popular culture images of writers and writing, and teachers' own views about writers, writing, English teaching and student learners. On first inspection, this would suggest that the teaching of writing as a practice is more likely to be influenced by a deep knowledge and understanding of the teaching of writing rather than by a particular identity claimed by, and/or ascribed to, individual English teachers. However, it was only through teachers' writing identities, formed through their practices, that this confidence with writing pedagogy was achieved. The identity and practice-based implications of teachers labelling themselves and their students as writers therefore warrant further investigation. Hall (1992) argues that the linguistic turn in philosophy has framed language as a tool that *makes* meaning, as opposed to simply carrying it. In the vein of literary developments such as Marxism, feminism, African-American and queer critical theory, identity enactment and assertion are a matter of power – of claiming the right to occupy positions that had previously been denied. Under this philosophy, the ways that English teachers label themselves and their students can signal a change in how these identities are understood for the future (Du Gay & Hall, 2011; Prior, 2008). As with broader literary and artistic challenges to the questions of what is art and who is an artist, so too should the English profession consider how it can speak back to these consecrated positions, and affirm the diverse writer identities in their classrooms.

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# The English/Literacy Teacher and the Practice of Writing: A Review Essay

*Terry Locke*

**Abstract:** This review essay begins with the premise that we are all writers. However, for a number of reasons, many teachers struggle to identify as writers and teachers of writing. In the current environment, the need for schools to adopt pedagogical practices facilitating the development of disciplinary literacies means that teachers cannot avoid the task of inducting students into the discursive practices of one or more disciplinary areas. This challenge requires a re-examination of ways in which English, 'literacy' and curriculum areas are constructed. It also demands that schools adopt ways of developing a culture of writing among its teachers and encourage and enable teachers to reflect on the identities they project to their students.

This review essay relates to a keynote address presented at the AATE/ALEA Conference on *The Art of English: Language, Literature, Literacy* in Perth (July 9–11, 2018). It is a review essay in the sense that it draws on a range of research undertaken over the course of a decade around teachers as writers, the teaching of writing, and how one might go about building a community of writing within a school. The essay is also theoretical in that it draws on this research to theorise a number of connections between the English/literacy teacher and the practice of writing.

While I'm primarily seeing myself as addressing teachers of subject English in its various global iterations here, I consider the argument I am propounding to be of relevance to elementary or primary school teachers and high-school teachers of subjects other than English also. As will become clear, there is a significant conversation that needs to occur that demands cross-disciplinary dialogue among all of us who shoulder the responsibility to teach the literacy practices relevant to a world citizenry at this time in history.

The logic of my argument can be represented by the following propositions:

1. All of us are writers.
2. Many teachers struggle to *identify* as writers.
3. In part, this struggle is discourse-based. There are specific constructions of 'English' and 'the writer' which contribute to teachers' reluctance to identify as writers.
4. Disciplinary communities construct, articulate and disseminate knowledge via the management of written language (and other semiotic) systems. To do science is to develop mastery of the discourse of science. Therefore, all teachers, regardless of their curriculum area, are required to induct students into the discursive practices of one or more disciplinary areas.
5. Creativity and the aesthetic are not the prerogative of one domain of knowledge. All cutting-edge disciplinary thinking is creative.
6. Our job is to think of our students as novice writers in Wenger's terms, peripheral participants in a disciplinary community of practice.
7. Therefore, as teachers we need to find ways of identifying ourselves as located on a novice-expert writer continuum related to the disciplinary areas we are responsible for and to model this identity with our students.

### 1. All of us are writers.

According to the website *Ethnologue* (Simons & Fennig, 2018), there are currently around 7,100 living languages of which 3,900 have developed writing systems. That leaves over 3000 languages which are unwritten. Consequently, I can't claim that all human beings on the planet are writers. However, I can claim that, despite their diffidence or reluctance, all of *my* readers – and the readers in school systems around the world – are writers.

To support this claim, we need to look no further than the humble shopping list. The shopping list is one of the genres I enjoy discussing with teachers in professional learning contexts. Perhaps surprisingly, there is quite an academic literature on it – see, for example, such titles as 'The influence of shopping lists on visual distraction' (Büttner, Kempinski, Serfas, Florack, & Vohs, 2015). The shopping list is never likely to make the grade as a high art form, though it does share with poetry a penchant for short lines. Like most genres the shopping list is multifunctional: an aid to memory, informative and, as that article title suggests, a potential brake on spending. Some people, of course, prefer to wing it when they go to the supermarket, going as they do *without* a shopping list. Others may rely on a short-term memory of a task-oriented conversation with their partner or flatmate.

Those who *do* write shopping lists have a range of options available in terms of possible structure. Like most real-world genres, the shopping list defies the Sydney Genre School's enduring view of genres as 'staged, goal-oriented, social processes' (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987, p. 59). As with all genres, the structure of the shopping list is determined not just by purpose, but by rhetorical situation. So, some people structure their list in terms of a needs analysis conducted as they move from the fridge to the pantry, or vice versa, depending on the location of their skinny pad. However, those who regularly shop in the same supermarket may opt to sequence their list with reference to the spatial layout of the supermarket: fruit and vegetables first, then the bread and specialty cheeses, and so on. These, of course, are just two structural possibilities.

Introducing the shopping list in the context of a writing workshop invariably sparks a lively discussion. Participants are prompt to share their preferred way of approaching the genre, and there is a remarkable lack of self-consciousness in admitting that, at least in the case of shopping lists, one is indeed a writer.

### 2. Many teachers struggle to *identify* as writers.

Ironically, while we don't appear to experience too much difficulty in identifying as writers of shopping lists, many of us struggle to *identify* as writers; it's as if a fearsome, capital letter has attached itself to the beginning of 'Writer'. It is unsurprising then that many who work with a Writing Workshop model (Andrews, 2008) of professional development take it as a given that 'writing apprehension' is a feature of the mental landscape of many teachers (alongside 'grammar apprehension'). It is the terrible fear of being found out or found wanting. In my own case, as a Writing Workshop leader, it is why we tackle this phenomenon head-on on the first day of a writing workshop using a test developed by Daly and Miller (1975).

The following quotations are taken from interviews with teachers involved in Professional Learning Communities set up in projects aimed at developing a culture of writing in the secondary school (see Locke, 2015a, 2017):

- There had been an identity as a writer but not really – a writer who doesn't write much. (Media Studies teacher)
- I was a poor writer ... I always struggled with the technical side of writing ... yeah, that sort of mechanical side of it and that's why I probably would have categorised myself there. (Maths teacher)
- I think I tended to feel that my role as a teacher was to actually facilitate that process in the classroom rather than ... looking at myself as a writer. (English teacher)
- I didn't really enjoy writing much at all. I found it very, very difficult, and extremely time consuming to write anything meaningful. (Maths/Technology teacher)
- I only wrote when I had to. And I never encouraged my students to do much writing, other than what they had to. And I just didn't write. (Chemistry teacher)
- I had no confidence whatsoever, had never done it [writing]. (Technology teacher)
- I was really afraid of writing, very scared, not very confident. And I think that I worried about what people thought, a lot. (English teacher)

The themes represented here are predictable: an uncertainty over writer identity, low self-efficacy, a lack of enjoyment around writing, writing avoidance, fear and self-consciousness.

In 2014, Michael Johnston and I drew on 140 teacher-of-writing self-efficacy scale questionnaires completed by New Zealand teachers from four schools to undertake a components analysis which revealed two principle dimensions of this construct, that is, ‘teacher-of-writing self-efficacy’ (TWSE). These were ‘pre-writing instructional strategies’ and ‘compositional strategy demonstration’ (Locke & Johnston, 2016). We then used the questionnaire data to compare teachers’ self-efficacy in different subjects. The following graphs represent the findings that emerged. Figure 1 compares teachers in terms of ‘pre-writing instructional strategies’ and Figure 2 compares teachers in terms of ‘compositional strategy demonstration’.

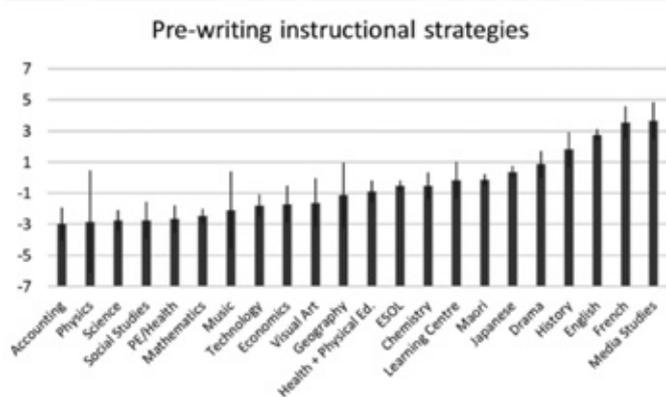


Figure 1. Comparing the self-efficacy of teachers re pre-writing instructional strategies by subject (see Locke & Johnston, 2016, pp. 9–10).

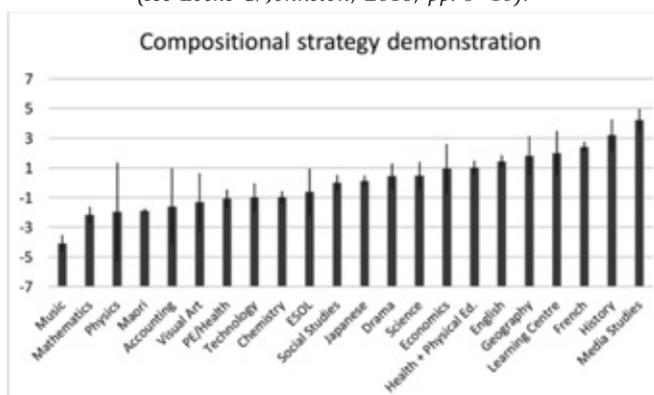


Figure 2. Comparing the self-efficacy of teachers re compositional strategy demonstration by subject (see Locke & Johnston, 2016, pp. 9–10).

There is clear variation across subjects on both variables. While we find some difference in the subject ordering on each, there is reasonable consistency, with the humanities generally having greater values than the sciences and mathematics. Again, there are no surprises here. Siebert and Draper (2008), writing in the American context, noted widespread resistance among mathematics teachers ‘to cooperate in literacy

instruction’ (p. 229). In a similar vein, Canadian researcher Rivard (2004) contended that language-based learning activities have been seriously underutilised in the science classroom (p. 421).

I define writer identity as *the subscribed-to discourse or story about what it means to be a writer that is implicit in one’s own beliefs and practices* (Locke, 2017, p. 135). As a reader of this essay, you might find it a useful exercise to reflect personally on the question, ‘What story do I tell myself about what it means to be a writer?’

These stories teachers subscribe to are likely to be complex, varied and change over time. They are likely to have their origins in a range of experiences and cultural contexts (Cremin, Lillis, Myhill, & Eyes, 2017). They are also likely to have an affective aspect, in that these stories about what it means to write and be a writer will be connected with certain emotions, some negative, some positive. As I have made clear, everyone who has learnt to read and write has a writer identity of some kind. But self-doubt, a lack of self-efficacy, and a history of painful experiences, which may have implanted a fear of being judged, will discourage many people from acknowledging the writer identity they *do* have.

As a further point, it is important to distinguish writer identity thus defined from the way one positions oneself (or not) as a writer in various contexts; the latter can be viewed as the public face of writer identity. There is a world of difference between telling myself that I am a writer and presenting myself as a writer to others (Locke, 2017).

So, here are some possible reasons why a teacher might struggle to identify as a writer:

- low self-efficacy as a writer, that is, we don’t view ourselves as particularly competent to do certain writing tasks;
- our history of learning to write, especially with teachers who engage us in meaningless writing tasks and error fetishism;
- the absence of affirmation of what we *do* write when the writing is meaningful to us, that is, the lack of an adequate and/or authentic response to the ideas we are expressing.

Before moving to a fourth reason, I want to mention something about the relationship between writer self-efficacy and identifying as a writer.

It is important to note that self-efficacy is about self-perceived, rather than actual, competence. Our sense of self-efficacy in relation to anything is produced out of the way we cognitively *process* ‘source’ data: mastery

experiences, social persuasion, vicarious experiences and emotional states (Bandura, 1997). For the five secondary teachers who participated in a two-year 'Teachers as Writers' project I led (2010–2011), the most prominent theme emerging from the data was 'the ability to frame one's writing practices within a wider view of writing as an activity, in particular writing as a "real-world" activity beyond the confines and constraints of school and classroom' (Locke, Whitehead, & Dix, 2013, p. 61). This enlarged perspective, however, worked differently for different teachers. For one teacher, this larger perspective *increased* her sense of her limitations as a writer and thereby decreased her self-efficacy as a writer.

A similar finding emerged in a 2014–2016 project entitled 'Developing Writing Identities as a Key to Writing Success', which took place in a bicultural, central North Island school, Ōtorohanga College. The project involved 12 teachers from a range of subjects who constituted a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (McLaughlin & Talbert 2006; DuFour 2004). In the context of this study, aimed at developing a culture of writing in the school, one teacher had a decreased self-efficacy score over time in 'pre-writing instructional strategies' and five teachers had a decreased score over time in 'compositional strategy demonstration'. In an August 2016 milestone report, prepared for the Ministry of Education which funded this project under its Teacher-Led Innovation Fund (TLIF) scheme, we wrote the following summary:

- The evidence suggests that a number of teachers from curriculum areas generally associated with low self-efficacy in relation to the teaching of writing, and writing itself, made substantial self-efficacy gains.
- Involvement in Writing-Workshop-based professional development can actually lead to a reduction in self-efficacy in relation to the teaching of writing, and writing, in some teachers. In part this is because they become more knowledgeable about what writing and teaching writing actually *mean* and more attuned to their actual abilities. We can think of this as a 'sobering' effect – a good thing since, in many cases, it leads to teachers becoming far more focused and realistic in terms of their professional goal-setting.

Having said that, over the same time period, teachers in the project generally identified more strongly as writers.

### 3. There are specific constructions of 'English' and 'the writer' which contribute to teachers' reluctance to identify as writers.

This is confirmed I think by Emily Frawley's excellent, recently completed, doctoral thesis: *Worthy of the Name: The Teacher-Writer in Subject English*. In her conclusion, Frawley (2018) writes that her study

[r]evealed that the writer identity is a contested and highly politicised notion within the field of English, conjuring up associations of artistry and distinction that can often impede agents in the field from viewing themselves as writers ... The place of literature within the field of English Education has ... been shown to be a complicating factor, as it creates a potential divide between the often canonical (or at the very least institutionally recognised) writers who are studied, and the teachers and students. (p. 176)

What I found sobering in Frawley's study was that her 15 Australian research participants were all accomplished, and mostly published, writers as well as English teachers, yet a significant number of these resisted identifying as writers with their students.

Some years ago now, I suggested that there was a relationship between the discursive constructions of subject English and writer orientation (Locke, 2005). A cultural heritage model encourages attitudes of 'appreciation and emulation', 'deference' and 'acculturation' (p. 79), puts writing on a non-attainable pedestal and privileges literature over non-fiction. Frawley's thesis indicates that the cultural heritage model is alive and well in Australia and is a discursively-constructed constraint on teachers positioning themselves as writers in front of their students.

I now want to move to the related topics of writing in the disciplines and subject-specific writing in the school context, which is not the same as the former. There is a case to be made for the role of the English teacher in relation to the latter, which is outside the scope of this essay (but see Locke, 2015b).

### 4. Disciplinary communities construct, articulate and disseminate knowledge via the management of written language (and other semiotic) systems.

The major implication for this proposition for those of us working in the educational sector is that, for example, learning *in* mathematics means learning to understand and use the discourse of mathematics. Similarly, learning *in* science means learning to understand and use the discourse of science – and so on for other subject areas.

My book *Developing Writing Teachers* (2015c) is underpinned by a rhetorical approach to writing which has its origins in Bakhtin (e.g., 1986), and which, in its present form, began to be theorised in the 1990s by Richard Andrews (1992) and others. It is a useful antidote to the cultural heritage model of English because of its focus on the situatedness of the writing act and its determination to move beyond so-called 'literary' writing. As I have elaborated elsewhere, this rhetorical approach can be summed up in the following statements:

1. People construct texts with a view to achieving a desired result with a particular audience.
2. Text is a product of function (form follows function).
3. Texts are generated by contexts. Social/cultural contexts call forth texts.
4. All texts assume a kind of social complicity between maker and reader.
5. The expectations of people participating in such acts of complicity become formalised in the conventions of genre.
6. These conventions can apply to such language features as: layout, structure, punctuation, syntax and diction in the case of print texts, with other configurations of features operating for other modes and modal combinations.
7. In a rhetorical approach, literature is not devalued but revalued. (Locke, 2015c, p. 62)

A disciplinary community is one instance of a socio-cultural context, or what Bakhtin called, an 'area of human activity' (1986, p. 60). Young and Muller (2010) have this to say about disciplines:

All disciplines, in order to be disciplines, have shared objects of study, and in order to be robust and stable, display objectivity – that is to say, they possess legitimate, shared and stably reliable means for generating truth ... Truth is, by this account, a stable relationship between the objects of study and an informed community of practitioners. (p. 21)

The process whereby disciplines become reconfigured as school subjects, which Basil Bernstein (2000) terms 'recontextualisation', is a complex process and subject in various ways to the influence of government policy and interest-group lobbying. The primary disciplinary discourses that have fed into subject English have changed over time and vary with context. In New Zealand, these discourses have included literary criticism, grammar, social linguistics and applied

linguistics, with the latter achieving dominance in recent years. As suggested earlier, the primary discourse of literary criticism remains strong in the construction of subject English and is in stark contrast to its attenuating presence in the New Zealand context (O'Neill, 2006).

The absence of rhetoric, and by extension, the absence in schools of a rhetorical approach to writing, can be explained by the absence of rhetoric as a discipline in Australasian universities. In the United States, in contrast, rhetoric has a strong presence as a foundational study in universities and colleges. It is perhaps not coincidental that initiatives such as the National Writing Project that took root in the US (Lieberman & Wood, 2003), are absent in the Australian educational landscape, and only intermittently present in New Zealand.

All school subjects mirror beyond-school disciplines by making meaning in discipline-specific ways using a range of representational resources. These ways of making meaning can be thought of as *disciplinary literacies* – socially constructed, cognitive, technologically mediated ways of making meaning using a range of symbolic (semiotic) systems. Recent reforms in mathematics and science education, for example, have prompted an investigation into how discipline-specific literacy is constituted, the kinds of curriculums and classroom practices that best foster disciplinary literacy and 'the pedagogical content knowledge, school culture, and instructional approaches needed by teachers in the content areas to achieve disciplinary literacy for their students' (Norton-Meier, Tippett, Hand, & Yore 2010, p. 118).

**5. Creativity and the aesthetic are not the prerogative of one domain of knowledge. All cutting-edge disciplinary thinking is creative.**

While this point may appear to be a diversion, I'm making it here because of two myths that are widely subscribed to, and have consequences for the teaching of writing and teacher self-identification *around* writing:

- *Myth 1:* Creativity is a characteristic of the genius brain. This myth, which tends to be espoused by subscribers to a cultural heritage view of English, is no longer tenable in relation to our current understanding of how the brain works. However, as long as it persists it becomes an added reason why English teachers might resist identifying as writers. We are all wired to be creative, as Ron Carter (2004)

asserted some years ago via his concept of 'ordinary creativity', and which Brandt and Eagleman (2017) celebrate in their recent book, *The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World*.

- *Myth 2*: The aesthetic is something that concerns artists, and beauty is something that inheres in art works. Keats's famous assertion that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' might well be viewed as a rejoinder to this myth – as a counter-claim that there is an aesthetic dimension to the production of knowledge in all domains of knowledge (Root-Bernstein, 2003). There are many instances of this from various scientific fields. When the physicist Heisenberg was working on his equations in the field of quantum mechanics in 1925, 'he did not depend on experimental evidence to validate his theory; that would come later. What convinced him he was on the right track were the elegance, coherence and inner beauty of his approach – in other words, its aesthetic qualities' (von Baeyer, 1990, p. 2).

So what should we take from this as English/literacy teachers? Firstly, creativity is at work whenever we and our students grapple with a problem, including problems associated with a particular writing task. Secondly, there is an aesthetic dimension to the shaping of the content and form of a piece of writing, regardless of the subject area and genre.

All of this brings me to a central imperative for all of us as teachers, that is, that all teachers, regardless of their curriculum area, are required to induct students into the discursive practices of one or more disciplinary areas. Putting this another way, we are all required to be teachers of disciplinary reading and writing. If we are high-school teachers, our disciplinary focus will be determined by our subject areas. If we are primary teachers, the situation is far more complex, and subject to debates regarding the age at which a focus on disciplinary literacies needs to commence (see Fang & Coatoam, 2013, who argue that disciplinary literacy can commence at the upper levels of primary school.)

This imperative brings us back to the issues of teacher identity and the reluctance of many teachers to identify as teachers of writing, let alone writers themselves. The late Ken Havill, who was principal of Western Springs College for the duration of a 2012–2014 'Culture of Writing' project at his school (Locke & Hawthorne, 2017), confided to me his view that only a minority of his staff would have viewed themselves as teachers of writing. On a later occasion, when I was

introducing a 'Culture of Writing' project to staff at Ōtorohanga College in 2014, I was told in no uncertain terms by a physics teacher that writing had nothing to do with her subject.

However, in two action research studies undertaken at Western Springs College by investigating the impact of the use of disciplinary talk and writing activities in developing the conceptual understanding of junior secondary maths students, the results were stunning (see Locke & Tailby, 2016; Johnston & Locke, 2016). We write to learn and we write to learn the practices of a particular discipline.

Primary teachers will know full well what a challenge it is to master the discipline-specific genres that relate to the curriculum areas they are responsible for, especially given the mismatch between these and the so-called 'genres' identified by the Sydney Genre School (SGS) and the decontextualised version of 'literacy' constructed by high-stakes testing regimes. (Many years ago, now, Wayne Sawyer (1995) raised the suggestion that the formulaic teaching of genres in accordance with SGS practice lent itself to such regimes.) Secondary English teachers are relatively advantaged for two reasons:

1. In a rhetorical approach to genre, an English teacher can choose to teach virtually any real-world genre. Here is a list of some of the genres I had my students write at various times back in the day when I was an English teacher:

- short story
- ballad
- lyrical poem
- biography
- autobiography
- memoir
- letter to the editor
- editorial
- travel story
- submission
- press release
- human interest story
- news story
- book review
- curriculum vitae
- psychological profile
- display ad
- slogan
- plays
- TV Sitcom

- opinion piece
- manifesto
- nature trail pamphlet.

2. We mix with colleagues who are required to teach their students genres appropriate to disciplines related to their subject areas. The 'nature trail pamphlet' I mention above was written by students in a junior English class but drew on genres that are generally associated with the botanical sciences (field notes) and tourism (heritage trail pamphlets) (Locke, 2015d).

One of the crucial findings to emerge from both projects on the development of a culture of writing in secondary schools was the fruitful, interdisciplinary dialogue that took place among the project teams – PLCs – about writing (Locke, 2017). One might liken it to a compare-and-contrast exercise on a large scale, which led to memorable examples of border crossings in terms of genre. In one example, Māori biology teacher Lorrin Shortland had her Year 10, Western Springs students write 'Tomato Pip Narratives' as a way of learning the human digestive system (Shortland & Locke, 2017). In another example, a woodwork technology teacher at Ōtorohanga College had his Year 10 students write poems about workshop safety and incorporate them into a woodworking project. An unanticipated outcome of this interdisciplinary dialogue was that when PLC members relieved in the classrooms of colleagues from another subject area, they actually taught writing in that subject area.

#### **6. Our job is to think of our students as novice writers, in Wenger's terms, peripheral participants in a disciplinary community of practice.**

I feel so strongly about this proposition that I dedicated one whole chapter in *Developing Writing Teachers* to 'Building a Community of Writing Practice' (Locke, 2015c). In this chapter, I discussed a number of themes:

- writing as a socialised practice;
- the fluidity of identity that occurs when the writing classroom is thought of as a community of practice, especially around the following questions:
  - Who is the expert?
  - Who is the novice?
  - Expertise in what?
- the importance of authenticity;
- the centrality of audience;
- developing response to text practices (e.g. via response groups and/or response pairings);

- the place of talk and metacognition (and, by extension, grammar/metalinguistic knowledge) in enhancing writer option-taking.

#### **7. Therefore, as teachers we need to find ways of identifying ourselves as located on a novice-expert writer continuum related to the disciplinary areas we are responsible for and to model this identity with our students.**

All of us have ways of describing our writing identities to ourselves and to others. For instance, I'm happy to describe myself as a published poet of modest ability; or, as a reasonably accomplished academic writer; or, as a novice science writer; or even as a wannabe fiction writer. None of this is about false modesty. It is about the honest recognition that, in terms of any kind of writer identity, we *all* exist on a novice-expert continuum. This is simply the way it is, so let's try to be relaxed about it. There is no summit to be reached, as can be seen in the writing biographies of any reputable author we might name.

So, if you accept this line of argument, there are a few points we might reflect on as corollaries. And with these, I'll bring this essay to a close:

- Regardless of where we are on this continuum, the point we are at is potentially a point of departure and growth.
- When schools, or departments, or informally based groups of teachers commit themselves to developing as learning communities of writing practice, there are many ways in which this growth potential can be realised.
- An important form of growth resides in our ability to find a language adequate to an authentic and productive response to another person's writing.
- This means knowing the difference between criticism and critique.
- Cross-disciplinary dialogue in the school setting is likely to enhance this metalinguistic development and to sharpen a teacher's appreciation of the genres specific to his/her own discipline or subject area.

The final point we need to keep telling ourselves is that identifying as a writer means doing writing in ways that are seriously and joyfully self-reflective. When we do this *with* our students we can safely trust that they will love us for it. I'll leave the last word to Helen Kato, a teacher who took what she felt to be a huge risk in sharing her writing with a switched-off senior English

class (see Locke & Kato, 2012). The following are two practices she learnt from this class:

Always write when students are writing. Model the practice. Model the creative process on the whiteboard: the alteration of vocabulary, the scribbles, crossings-outs, the reading aloud to 'hear' rhythm, the alteration of structure. (Locke, 2015c, p. 11)

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# Choice, Voice and Process – Teaching Writing in the 21st Century: Revisiting the Influence of Donald Graves and the Process Approach to Writing<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The narrow teaching of writing that had been common in schools for hundreds of years was challenged in the 1980s by 'one of the most seductive writers in the history of writing pedagogy'. Donald Graves's process approach to writing, as it came to be known, was popular in Australia, New Zealand, USA and the UK. At the heart of Graves's approach was learner choice, and the development of the writer's voice, enacted in a publication process in the classroom. However, one alleged weakness was the lack of a research base for Graves's approach. Since then, more than 30 years of research gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate Graves's ideas.

In its exploration of the process approach to writing, this paper examines theory and empirical research in order to contribute to knowledge about the effective teaching of writing. The paper reports findings from a four-year multidisciplinary study, in particular the findings from a secondary data analysis of the work of expert writers compared with experimental evidence of what is effective for novice writers. Overall, the research found that the metaphor of 'the ear of the writer' represented fundamental aspects of how writing is learned and could be taught. In conclusion, some implications for national curriculum policy and the teaching of writing are considered.

Appropriate levels of literacy are vital for full engagement with modern society, and necessary for progression through all phases of education. In statistics generated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2015, it was estimated that across the world, '758 million adults 15 years and older still cannot read or write a simple sentence. Roughly two-thirds of them are female' (UNESCO, 2016). The consequences of not acquiring literacy are not only an issue in low-income countries. For example, as part of the government-commissioned survey of adult skills in England, approximately 15% of the people who were interviewed and tested were assessed as attaining below level one, which meant that they 'may not [have been] able to read bus or train timetables or check the pay and deductions on a wage slip' (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2012). If this is extrapolated to the approximately 30 million working population in the whole of the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2015), this means that 4,500,000 people may not be able to read a timetable. 1,500,000 people at entry level one or below 'may not be able to describe a child's symptoms to a doctor or use a cash point to withdraw cash'. Concerns about numbers of people who are able to read and write lead inevitably to questions about how they can best be taught.

Debates about standards of language and literacy, and how they might be improved,

have a very long history. One of the first most popular examples of a text designed to improve standards of English was published in the late 16th century, soon after the technology of printing had been developed in the West. As a new technology, printing stimulated the first books that aimed to prescribe and/or describe the English language, and hence seek to establish a standard form of the English language. One of the first printed educational guides written in English, about English, was by Richard Mulcaster, a teacher who was headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School in London.<sup>2</sup> It was called *The First Part Of The Elementarie Which Entreateth Chiefly Of The Right Writing Of Our English Tung, Set Furth By Richard Mulcaster* (Mulcaster, 1582). Mulcaster explained that the purpose of the *Elementarie* was to help teachers and parents of elementary school children to guide children in their learning by providing elementary educational principles. The tenth principle was that, 'Learning about language, and therefore grammar, is the height of the *Elementarie*.' The role of Grammar was to support understanding of the broader principles that were to be taught. The fifth principle stipulated that the curriculum should 'seasoneth the young mindes with the verie best, and swetest liquor'. Consistent with school curricula (and research) for hundreds of years to follow, reading was regarded as the most important curriculum area. Writing was mainly seen to serve reading although there was also mentions of memory and handwriting (beautifying the mind). Music was also central to the *Elementarie's* purpose.

The advocacy for ways to improve standards through better teaching of writing continued from the 16th century onwards. One of the key areas of contention was the extent to which pupils in schools were given the opportunity to compose writing, as opposed to copying, imitating or reproducing texts according to the rigid prescriptions of the teacher. Shayer's history of the teaching of English in schools from 1900 to 1970 is indicative:

'Imitation' was not simply an isolated classroom exercise, but a whole way of thinking that was taken for granted by a great many teachers, if not by the vast majority, certainly until 1920 and even beyond. Briefly, the pupil (elementary or secondary) is always expected to imitate, copy, or reproduce. (Shayer, 1972, p. 10)

However, in the 1980s, narrow teaching of writing was challenged by 'one of the most seductive writers in the history of writing pedagogy' (Czerniewska, 1992,

p. 85). Donald Graves's 'process approach to writing', as it came to be known, was popular in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom. His approach to writing was published in his popular book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Graves, 1983). This book was informed by Graves's qualitative case-study research as part of his doctorate, for which he won the '1974 Promising Researcher Award' of the National Council of Teachers of English (Graves, 1975).

At the heart of Graves's approach was learner choice, and the development of the writer's voice, enacted in a publication process in the classroom. Graves's approach was built on regular writing workshops carried out in primary/elementary school classrooms. Pupils were encouraged to generate ideas for writing, then work on those ideas towards a finished product, for example a short book or other 'publication'. These publications become part of the classroom literacy resources, for example, being available alongside professional published books, to be read and critiqued by the classroom community. The teacher's role was akin to that of an editor. Guidance was given orally by the teacher to individual pupils during the writing workshop. Ground rules for peer-to-peer feedback could also be developed. Teachers would initiate 'mini-lessons' with small groups, or with the whole class usually at the beginning of a writing workshop, based on their ongoing assessments of the writing of the pupils. So, if for example the teacher noted a particular issue that needed input, this would be used as the focus for the mini-lesson or whole class input.

The use of the process approach as the sole method of teaching writing was probably not common, in spite of the apparent popularity of the method. The first, and possibly only in-depth research study (albeit modest in scale) of the use of the process approach in England was published by Wyse (the author of this paper) in 1998. The study examined the research evidence and debates about the teaching of writing at the time, in particular the place of the process approach in the context of primary education policy and practice in England. In-depth case studies of the work of three teachers over the course of a school year documented the ways that the process approach was combined with other methods of teaching writing, including more traditional writing task-setting. The evidence from the case studies, combined with evidence from wider research, scholarship and policy documents suggested that in England, the combination of the process approach with other methods was more common than

the use of the process approach as the main approach to teaching writing, although evidence to substantiate this was limited.

Some of the Donald Graves story is typical of many education researchers who begin their careers as teachers. His work was informed by experience as a teacher, head teacher, then teacher educator in initial teacher education programmes. Graves's method was based on his small-scale qualitative research, the kind of research that has remained popular with researchers from similar backgrounds, a methodology recently defined as *close-to-practice* research (Wyse, Brown, Oliver & Pobleté, 2018). What is less typical of Graves's story is the popularity he achieved through his best-selling book. But with this popularity came criticism. A particularly sharp criticism alleged that Graves's approach to teaching writing was based on 'unstructured expression of personal experiences':

[Graves] uses his case study of sixteen New Hampshire children as a research base providing proof of the efficacy of this method. However, his observations from this study qualify as reportage more than research. The work of the Graves team in New Hampshire represents a demonstration of teaching ideas that work well under favourable circumstances. Because he never considers negative evidence for the hypothesis he is testing, his work does not constitute research. (Smagorinsky, 1987, p. 331)

The idea that Graves's study does not constitute proper research is extreme. This line of criticism can be seen as related to research debates that have crudely polarised research as scientific and/or experimental versus research that is qualitative, including qualitative case-study research (see Wyse, Smith, Selwyn, & Suter, 2017, for a recent review of such debates, and see later in this paper for a systematic review and meta-analysis that includes qualitative research studies).

Since the publication of Graves's work and the ensuing criticisms, we have the benefit of more than 30 years of research on writing to recontextualise the process approach to writing (or process writing as it is sometimes called). We are able to reconsider its effectiveness on the basis of experimental evidence. This paper presents and reviews research evidence in relation to the teaching of writing. The relevance and effectiveness of the process approach to writing for contemporary primary/elementary education is a key focus. The lines of argument are informed by a four-year multidisciplinary study of writing, of which two elements are presented in this paper: 1. a qualitative

secondary data analysis of interviews with eminent expert writers; 2. an account focused on novice writers based on previously published experimental research on effective writing teaching. The paper concludes with reflections on the continuing relevance of Donald Graves's ideas, and the process approach to writing, in 21st century primary/elementary education.

### A multidisciplinary study of How Writing Works

The overall aim of the four-year study, *How Writing Works*, was to contribute to knowledge about writing, and ultimately about how writing can be learned and taught more effectively. The scope of the work was broad, addressing as it did expert writers and novice writers in the context of writing in society. The research questions were as follows:

- How should we understand writing theoretically?
- How do key moments in the history of writing enable us to reflect on writing now?
- What are the relationships between the composition of meaning and the technical elements of writing such as structure, sentences, words, letters, and sounds?
- What are the relationships between oral and written language?
- How are conventions and standards of language established and applied, and in what ways do, and should, they impinge on writing?
- What is the nature of creativity in writing?
- And consequently, how does writing work and therefore how is writing best taught?

The multidisciplinary orientation of the work was built on philosophical, historical, socio-cultural and psychological perspectives. The historical dimensions of the research located the work particularly in four ages of the history of writing: pre-human language, the birth of the alphabet, the advent of printing, and the rise of social media. In parallel with the historical framing, the philosophical dimensions of the research took account of western philosophy's origins in Ancient Greece, and ultimately the philosophy of pragmatism, in particular Dewey's philosophy of language.

An important element of the multidisciplinary framing was the comparison of the writing of words and text with the writing of music. The rationale for the selection of this comparison was that music is the only other form that, like language, has both oral/sound and written forms. The music versus text exploration included the following: comparison of the historical

origins of alphabetic writing with the development of western musical notation; philosophers' use of examples from music to theorise language and writing; eminent writers' use of music as a means of explanation of their craft of writing; and neuroscience research on creativity showing close parallels between composition of music and composition of texts.

The empirical projects that were part of the research included a qualitative secondary data analysis of *The Paris Review Interviews* carried out with writers regarded as some of the world's best (determined by the winning of awards such as the Nobel or Pulitzer prizes). A three-year longitudinal study of young people's creativity and writing was also carried out (not reported in this paper for reasons of space). The primary data that underpinned the secondary data analysis already existed in *The Paris Review Interviews*. *The Paris Review Interviews* are interviews with some of the world's great writers from the 1950s onwards. At the time, there were four printed volumes that represented a selection of the best of 64 interviews taken from all interviews available prior to each volume. As the editor, Philip Gourevitch made the selections for the four printed volumes. Subsequently, the resource was developed online. The interviewers were themselves writers who had read their interviewee's works. The interviews, which were undertaken over one or more visits to the writers' homes, sometimes over a period of years, were followed by writers being sent an edited transcript of the interview to review. Hence, the benefits of the oral interview, with its revealing 'on the spot' requirement for answers, was balanced against the opportunity for the writers to reflect carefully on the transcript to ensure their answers were accurate. A unique feature of the interviews is that they focus on the processes of writing, the writer's craft, much more than the outputs of writing.

The qualitative data analysis of the edited interview transcripts involved full readings of all interviews followed by qualitative data coding supported by NVivo software. At the start of the work, *The Paris Review Interviews* were only available in printed volumes, but ultimately a digital resource archive was established. Codes were allocated to selected quotes from the writers. The process included progressive focusing in order to reach sufficient depth of findings in each category, and across categories. Categories were derived from identification of significant patterns of ideas that recurred in the words of a majority of the writers. *A-priori*, the theoretical framing outlined

earlier in this paper guided the establishment of categories and their dimensions, but new categories also emerged consistent with an *abductive* approach to data analysis (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005). The final main category set identified in the secondary data analysis was as follows: creating original ideas for writing; influences on writing; writing and music; writing and teaching; basic processes of writing, including the writer's workplace.

### Thinking about writing

The choice of philosophy as a way to theoretically orient the study was made in recognition of the seminal contribution to knowledge, and the breadth and depth of theoretical explorations, that philosophy has made. In addition, the substantive focus of the research on the English language, an alphabetic language which has origins in the development of the concept of alphabet in Ancient Greece (and prior to that, in Egypt – see Darnell et al., 2005), was relevant to the choice of western philosophy. The attention of the philosophers of Ancient Greece was not focused directly on language – this was to develop much later, particularly as part of the *linguistic turn* in philosophy (Potter, 2012). Prior to the linguistic turn, language itself was less the object of analysis. Instead the extent to which different meanings in language expressed broader philosophical arguments, for example in relation to how concepts like 'truth' might be defined and understood, was the focus. In addition to the philosophical orientation, the How Writing Works study was historically oriented in order to identify significant trends of thinking over time. The historical focus included analysis of the debates related to the development of 'standard English' which often hinge on conceptions of the origins of the English language, for example in linguistically prescriptive accounts claiming the importance of Latin as an influence on the language and hence the need for 'rules'.

The possibilities and challenges of combining philosophical trends in thinking with a history of writing became exemplified in two key linguistic issues: (a) the neglect of writing as an object of study due to its categorisation unproblematically as an extension of oral language; (b) the context principle. For the philosophers of Ancient Greece, writing was initially seen as a threat because the traditional role of the teachers to induct learners through oral language was challenged by the new possibility that writing created for more independent learning, potentially without the need

for mediation by a teacher. The initial reception to the invention of alphabetic writing in Ancient Greece was hostile. In Plato's dialogue, *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts an ancient story. The king of Egypt was the god Thamus who was visited by the god Theuth, who wanted to show some of his new inventions, including the invention of alphabetic letters. Thamus discussed the merits of each of the inventions but was completely dismissive of the letters that make up writing:

You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise. (Fowler, 1925/2018, s274a)

The gradual increases in philosophical attention to language, over many hundreds of years, ultimately resulted in the linguistic turn, a phenomenon that originated in the thinking of Gottlob Frege and other seminal thinking by Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Potter, 2012). Frege's placement of language at the heart of philosophical thinking was encapsulated in the 'context principle', in particular that words can only be understood in the context of a sentence. But ultimately it was Wittgenstein's analysis of the way the words of language are the 'clothes' of thinking, and his construct of 'language games', that transformed not only thinking about language but the whole of western philosophy. For Wittgenstein the concept of language games explained not only the multiple meanings possible from reading words, including metacognitive thinking, but also from reading more generally, i.e. reading music, pictures and even people's faces. Finally, the relative neglect of the linguistic study of writing in its own right was to be challenged by Jacques Derrida. Language was a central focus of the warrant for Derrida's attack on *structuralism*, in his claim that the great Swiss linguist Saussure's structuralism had adopted a *phono-centric* orientation.

The philosophical and historical origins of the How Writing Works study were brought up-to-date through consideration of more recent socio-cultural perspectives, informed by Vygotskian mediation theory, and relevant psychological-neuroscientific work. This revealed some important points of convergence, for example in well-known cognitive models of the writing process (e.g. Hayes, 2006) that include the *environment* in which writing takes place. However, one of the most striking examples of the connections between

socio-cultural and neuroscientific research was seen in research on *creativity*, an important focus in relation to processes of writing. A significant neuroscientific empirical study of creativity based on the measurement of brain cells activity debunked the idea that cognitive functions such as creativity happen in discrete zones of the brain, arguing instead that the idea of networks of hubs in different regions of the brain is a more appropriate metaphor. *Stimulus-dependent thought* versus *stimulus-independent thought*, and attention-switching between salient environmental stimuli, are features of such neural networks. As a consequence, it was argued that 'task-unrelated thoughts', or perhaps something akin to day-dreaming, appear to be an important part of thinking that supports creativity (Jung, Brittany, Carrasco, & Flores, 2013). But it was not just the main findings reported in Jung et. al.'s (2013) study that were relevant. The opening of their research paper had a revealing insight into multidisciplinary. Their paper begins with the assertion that the attempt to define creativity results in 'unedifying arguments' (1). In a parallel made with genetics, the claim is made that the word 'gene' has no commonly accepted definition, and nor does the word 'creativity'. However, following some exploration of the assertion, the authors concluded that a 'broadly accepted definition of creativity'

refers to the production of something both novel and useful ... This definition is plausible, is broadly applicable, and would appear to hold true across much of evolutionary time. As such, it also refers to the workings of the brain. (Jung et al., 2013, p. 1)

The concepts of originality ('novel') and value ('useful') can be seen as broadly accepted definitional qualities of creativity from a range of disciplinary perspectives (for an overview, see Wyse and Ferrari, 2014).

Having framed writing philosophically and historically, and accommodated relevant thinking from socio-cultural and neuro-scientific perspectives, the final part of establishing the theoretical framing was to link philosophical ideas from the past with more recent philosophy. In particular, there is the idea of language as not simply a vehicle for meaning but language as more actively endowing meaning (or essence), including giving meaning to the nature of physical objects. An important aspect of this pragmatist view, inspired by John Dewey's philosophy, was the distinction between language as instrumental versus language as 'consummatory' (Dewey, 1988). Language as consummatory

is exemplified in direct participation, for example, in performing arts. As the literary forms of such arts develop, direct participation is enriched through *imaginative identification*, by readers, viewers or audience. Dewey argued that literary forms are an essential part of how human life is judged: forms such as poetry are appreciated not only by individual readers but also at the level of appreciation by society. Here, there are echoes with the Ancient Greek philosophers' understanding of the rhetoric of different forms of oral and written 'texts', for example, the differences between oral and written manifestations of the rhetoric of poetry versus the rhetoric of legal arguments.

Dewey built on the philosophical canon, including work from Ancient Greece, as would be expected from a philosopher of his stature. But less typically for mainstream philosophy, he paid significant explicit attention to education, including developing an applied educational approach based on this philosophy (in the University of Chicago Laboratory School). Of particular significance to the research reported in this paper was the way that philosophy of language was central to Dewey's philosophy more generally: Dewey regarded communication, language and discourse as a natural bridge between existence and essence (Biesta, 2013). A crux for the theoretical orientation of the How Writing Works research was recognition that Dewey's philosophy of language appeared to extend even Wittgenstein's and Vygotsky's powerful arguments related to the centrality of language to human understanding, and therefore that understanding human processes such as writing was to be found in the nature of language as inseparable from essence and existence.

## Findings

### *Interviews with expert writers*

The fundamental starting point, in the process of writing, that faced the expert writers was developing their own original ideas. This starting point is similar to children who experience Donald Graves's process approach to writing. When Louise Erdrich was asked by her interviewer about original ideas for writing, or how her books came into being and where they started, her answer was metaphorical, and also noted the sheer emptiness of not having an original idea:

I have little pieces of writing that sit around collecting dust, or whatever they're collecting. They are drawn to other bits of narrative like iron filings. I hate looking for something to write about. I try to have several things

going before I end a book. Sometimes I don't have something immediately and I suffer for it. (Erdrich, as cited in Editors of the Paris Review, 1998)

Nothing short of immortality drove Ernest Hemingway's search for originality:

From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, *you give it immortality* [emphasis added]. That is why you write and for no other reason that you know of. But what about all the reasons that no one knows? (Hemingway, as cited in Gourevitch, 2009, p. 61)

The essential referents for these eminent writers' reflections on originality included comparison with music. William Faulkner referred to the expressive possibilities of music versus words:

A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can. Obviously he must use the tools of his environment that he knows. I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express oneself, since it came first in man's experience and history. But since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better. That is, music would express better and simpler, but I prefer to use words, as I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence. That is, the thunder and the music of the prose take place in silence. (Faulkner, as cited in Gourevitch, 2007b, p. 48)

As part of the data analysis it became clear that in most cases the writers engaged in teaching. For some, this was only in the broad context of invitations to talk about their work. But many of the selected writers had paid employment teaching writing, typically creative writing in universities, although the poet Ted Hughes was an important and rare example of a writer who not only worked with school-age writers but also published a book about teaching poetry (Hughes, 1967). The reflections on teaching and learning were fascinating, and particularly whether the writers thought that creativity in writing could be taught. Paradoxically, some writers taught creative writing classes but doubted that the creative aspects of writing could be taught. Part of this paradox was their occasional reticence, faux or real, to explain their craft of writing.

Another part of the paradox was that the writers who were doubtful that creativity could be taught still

sought to provide ideal conditions for creativity in writing to flourish. For example, the actor and writer Robert Stone was dubious about whether students could learn from creative writing classes, yet he taught such classes. His philosophy was that 'You know, you throw the rock and you get the splash' (Gourevitch, 2007a, 331), by which he meant that the teacher sets up experiences, such as going to visit bars and race tracks, to listen carefully to people's dialogue in order to try and bring a sense of realism to the enactment of fictional characters in writing.

Knowledge, including knowledge from different disciplines, was also part of the account of teaching that these great writers gave. In a memorable example, the writer Richard Price linked his view that knowledge was important for all writing, including fiction writing, with a particular student he was struggling to support. The seemingly simple question 'what do you know that I don't know?' produced powerful authentic writing about a sub-culture experience of graffiti signers, their aerosol-can techniques, their 'tags', and details such as 'the smell of spray-paint mixing with that rush of tunnel air when someone jerked open the connecting door on a moving train that you were "decorating"' (Gourevitch 2007a, 403).

In summary of what these great writers said about writing, and drawing the music versus text comparison together, Al Alvarez's thoughts, from a writer who had succeeded in multiple forms of writing, were profound:

I sometimes feel about my profession much the same as Vladimir Mayakovsky felt about suicide: 'I do not recommend it to others', he wrote, and then put a gun to his head ... The art of poetry is altogether different from writing nonfiction, and literary criticism is different from them all. Fifty years of writing for a living have taught me that there is only one thing the four disciplines have in common: in order to write well you must first learn how to listen. And that, in turn, is something writers have in common with their readers. Reading well means opening your ears to the presence behind the words and knowing which notes are true and which are false. It is as much an art as writing well and almost as hard to acquire. (Alvarez, 2005, p. 12)

The experiences of some of the world's most eminent writers reflect a range of important parallels with the process approach to writing: the starting point of creating ideas for writing; the hard work required to turn those ideas into workable text; the demanding skills of editing; and finally, satisfactory publication, were all aspects of Graves's approach. The authentic accounts of these great writers seemed to provide an

important corrective to more dubious claims about how writing should be taught, for example, approaches that assume an undue emphasis on imitation, copying and reproduction.

#### *Experimental evidence in relation to novice writers*

The perspectives of expert writers provide an important insight to those who have achieved highly in their craft. However, education in early years settings and schools is concerned with the development of writing from humans' earliest stages onwards. There is now a considerable amount of robust research evidence on the most effective ways to teach young students to write, as this section will outline. Experimental trial evidence about process writing was not available when Graves's original work was published. Not only are there now examples of robust experimental work, including randomised controlled trials (RCTs), but in recent years these studies have also been combined in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. In addition to the attention to young people's writing, a smaller body of work has been carried out with novice writers who are adults, and who therefore have not learned to write sufficiently during their years in school.

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of true experiments (i.e., including random allocation to experimental and control groups such as in RCTs), quasi-experiments, and participants as own controls studies (where participants experience both intervention *and* control conditions in a sequential order), categorised sets of studies and their findings into four key areas: 1. emphasis on students' writing, including doing more writing; 2. supporting students' writing – emphases in teaching, including the process writing approach; 3. explicit writing instruction – including strategy instruction; 4. writing assessment – including self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016). Unusually the systematic review also took account of qualitative research studies and single subject design studies.

Under category 2, supporting students' writing, 33 experimental studies were found which had compared a process writing approach to a control condition ('business as usual' or a different approach to teaching writing). The meta-analysis of these studies found a statistically significant effect for the process writing approach (see Table 1), with an effect size of 0.34 overall, when carried out in primary/elementary or secondary classes. *Effect sizes* go beyond simply establishing whether an approach has worked or not. They

**Table 1. Meta-analysis of experimental studies of the process writing approach (informed by Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016, p. 211)<sup>3</sup>**

Interventions	Studies	Effect size	95% confidence interval	Grade levels
Process writing	33	0.34***	0.24 to 0.44	1–12
Elementary/primary	18	0.48***	0.34 to 0.65	1–5
Secondary	14	0.25***	0.12 to 0.39	6–12

indicate how well it worked, through their measure of the *extent of difference* between comparison groups in experimental studies. An effect size from 0.26 to 0.44, equivalent to a range of three to six months' progress, is considered moderate (Higgins, Kokotsaki, & Coe, 2012). The statistic for the 95% confidence interval for the effect on writing ranged from 0.24–0.44. Although the process writing approach was effective with both primary and secondary students, it was more effective with elementary/primary students (Grades 1–5), with an effect size of 0.48 as opposed to an effect size of 0.25 for secondary students.

There is much less research on what kind of teaching is effective for adult novice writers compared with that for school-age learners. One of very few studies to focus on writing, as opposed to literacy more generally, studied 199 learners, in 40 classrooms, in 20 organisations who were working to improve adults' writing in the UK. Small but significant improvements in writing were attributed to a range of theories and practices. Consistent with experimental trial evidence with younger learners, having plenty of opportunity to write was vital, and for the learners in this study it was estimated that 150 to 200 hours of teaching and learning was required in order to progress one level (assessment levels for adult learning determined by a national policy). The research found that if meaningful contexts for writing activities using a range of different forms of writing were provided, and if these were clearly linked with the learners' experiences in their lives, then adults' writing improved. In addition, time was needed for discussion between teachers and learners about writing and the tasks, and individual feedback and support was needed while learners were writing, through teachers who were responsive to their learners' needs and flexible about adapting the planned session according to those needs. Overall, the findings emphasised that 'teaching should approach the technical aspects of writing: spelling, grammatical correctness and punctuation, within the contexts of meaningful writing tasks rather than through decontextualised exercises' (Grief, Meyer, & Burgess, 2007. p. 11).

It appears, then, that the key elements of the process approach to writing that work for young writers may also work for adult learners.

The evidence in relation to expert writers and novice writers, the historical and philosophical analyses, the range of empirical findings, and the comparisons of music composition with text composition that were part of the How Writing Works study (a full account is published in Wyse, 2017) ultimately became focused in the metaphor of 'the ear of the writer'. The writer's ear is developed in part through inhabiting the worlds of the work of other writers that they read. In relation to the attributes, knowledge and skills that writers most need, the author Maya Angelou was perceptive in her observation that 'ears ears ears', (Gourevitch 2009, 255) and the 'courage' to take risks, are essential attributes necessary for successful writing.

### Discussion and conclusions

Donald Graves's process approach to writing was an example of an approach developed by someone whose early experience was as a teacher, then head teacher, and whose subsequent research was 'close-to-practice' research. However, Graves's PhD research, which was the basis for his approach, was criticised for being small-scale case-study research. From the 1990s onwards, Graves's approach fell out of favour. Yet more than 30 years later there is compelling experimental evidence that process approaches to teaching writing are effective. One important aspect of Graves's approach that perhaps has not been subject to robust experimental research is whether pupil choice, and hence ownership of their writing over time, is beneficial compared to process writing tasks which are planned and controlled by teachers.

Overall, there is then compelling research evidence about how to teach writing effectively. This brings into question the extent to which education policies, including national curricula, reflect research evidence, an increasingly important question for practitioners and researchers. As far as the teaching of writing is concerned, there is much variation internationally.

For example, a comparison of the national curriculum texts for subject English/language in New Zealand with, say, Queensland, Australia reveals notable differences in the extent to which either of their curricula emphasises the process approach to writing versus products of writing, and in the extent to which pupils are encouraged to make choices in their writing. Another example of a national curriculum, and what is perhaps a unique perspective worldwide, is Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* that includes in its programme of study for writing an explicit strand called 'Enjoyment and Choice'. Within this strand the requirements for the First and Second Level (Grade) programs of study include this: 'I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience' (Scottish Government, 2011).

In the country where the English language originated, it might be reasonable to expect an evidence-informed and enlightened approach to teaching the English language and writing in its national curriculum. While there are some elements of England's national curriculum that could be seen as emphasising process elements, such as aspects of the emphasis on writing 'composition', at the same time the heavy emphasis on formal grammar is not in line with research evidence on what supports the teaching of writing (Wyse & Torgerson, 2017). Research on writing, some of which has been featured in this paper, provides ample evidence that could inform future developments of national curricula, including in England, and not least the pedagogical practices to avoid.

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the practical manifestation of a more evidence-informed national curriculum for writing might be found in a different subject area. If the subject specification for music in England's national curriculum was only slightly modified, for example to replace the word 'music' with the word 'language' (as can be seen in Table 2) we may be closer to a more appropriate curriculum for writing.

A possible rationale for music's place in understanding the writing of words is that writing is a compositional process first and foremost that also requires the acquisition of skills and knowledge. The intonation for pitch in music is akin to intonation for the language of writing. The concept of musical melody can be seen in the themes or lines of argument of writing. Chords and harmonies are like the layers of textual meaning. We can make sense of the craft of writing through musical metaphors such as Jack Kerouac's notion of blowing

**Table 2. A proposed Language/English curriculum derived from the music curriculum of England's national curriculum.**

	Language/English
Purposes	one of the highest forms of creativity; increase [pupils'] self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement.
Aims	to create and compose <i>writing</i> on their own and with others; understand and explore how <i>writing</i> is created.
Key Stage 1 Programme of Study	experiment with, create, select and combine <i>words</i> using the interrelated dimensions of <i>language</i> .
Key Stage 2 Programme of Study	improvise and compose texts for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of <i>language</i> ; listen with attention to detail and recall <i>text</i> with increasing aural memory.

like the tenor man: the saxophonists' control of breathing and musical phrases akin to Kerouac's writing of sentences (see Wyse, 2017). And when the ear of the writer is well developed it enables analytic precision, compositional fluency, and the technical skills that are necessary to create and craft writing.

### Notes

- 1 This paper draws on material I presented as part of 'The Donald Graves Tribute Address' at the Australian Literacy Educators' Association and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English conference in Perth, Western Australia, on July 9, 2018.
- 2 Mulcaster also published what may be the first theory of primary education: Mulcaster, R. (1903). *The educational writings of Richard Mulcaster (1532–1611)* (J. Oliphant, Ed.). Glasgow: Glasgow University Press/James Maclehose and Sons.
- 3 'Note. All average-weighted effect sizes are for writing quality except effects for Writing about Content Material (content learning measured) and Writing about Material Read (reading comprehension measured) ... \*\*\*  $p < .001$ '. (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016, p. 211)

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# Response to *English in Australia* 53.1 special issue 'Assessing English'

Bethan Marshall, Kings College London

Dylan Wiliam said that if he was going to talk about formative 'assessment' now he would be tempted to call it responsive teaching. His reasoning was that the word assessment inevitably makes people think of summative exams, or at least some form of summative assessment. When you read the volume of *English in Australia* you can see his point. The articles are dominated by terminal tests be it NAPLAN or even creative writing summatively assessed. Some are attempts for a kind of English to be taught despite the tests, as in the one on drama but the tests remain, ever present.

The situation in Australia differs little from that in the United Kingdom. The testing regime first saw the light of day in the UK with the arrival of the national curriculum and the subsequent Standard Attainment Tasks or SATs that followed. For the last thirty or so years terminal exams have ruled the day and much of the talk around assessment has been, in differing forms, a railing against high-stakes, standardised testing. The nature of complaints about the SATs sound eerily familiar to those of the Australian teachers today. A London teacher responding to a survey about the tests for fourteen-year-olds, over twenty years ago, wrote,

The SATs have a negative influence on the curriculum because they narrow and limit what can be done. They tend to eliminate creativity and imagination in both the teachers and the student. Instead we are told what to do, what play to read, and what scenes will be examined (LATE, 1995, p. 31).

And yet it was an Australian teacher, who claims that teaching to NAPLAN, 'isn't relevant to the actual teaching of English that we do – text study, poetic forms, analytical writing, language analysis, etc. But we are forced to reduce our teaching down to the basics in order to accommodate it' (VATE, 2017, p. 9 cited in Reeves et al., 2018).

Part of the problem lies not so much in the fact that the tests are timed, and that is even more the case in England now that the English curriculum for fourteen to sixteen-year-olds has to be crammed into around eight hours of exams taken at the end of a two year course, but that it alters the subject. Both teachers

quoted above feel cramped by what the tests ask of them. They 'narrow and limit'; they 'reduce our teaching'. Leave the 'creativity and imagination' and you are left with the 'basics'.

The writers of the articles in the journal make much of the limitations of the tests and quote numerous academics, who have said the same, such as Klenowski, Wyatt-Smith, Lobascher or Lingard. They could have cited British authors too such as Stobbart or Mansell or writers from the United States like Wayne Au. Each has looked at the impact of high-stakes testing and the deleterious affects on schooling. Much of the political rationale for high stakes testing is meant to be closing the attainment gap between the high and low achievers which is often characterised by class. Certainly, it was under a Labour government in England but it would appear that that is also true in Australia and yet even this is seen to be a questionable reason for imposing NAPLAN if Paul Gardner's article is considered and Diane Reay, whose work he cites, in England. NAPLAN widens the differences.

All of this, the tests, the standardised assessments, the limitations on the subject and most of all the damage to the education of young people, makes the notion of assessment for learning, as Wiliam says, problematic. Yet the term 'responsive teaching', his potential alternative, lends emphasis to what we do as teachers. Part of what he was trying to convey in the term 'formative assessment' was the role of the learner as well. He and Paul Black defined formative assessment as:

all those activities undertaken by teachers, *and by their students in assessing themselves*, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. *Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs.* (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 2; emphasis in original)

Even this definition was problematic for some. Mary-Jane Drummond, whose work on formative assessment predates that of Black and Wiliam, wrote that Assessment for Learning (AfL) should 'describe the ways in which, in our everyday practice, we observe

children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put our understanding to good use' (2003, p. 13). She eschews a model in which 'the assessor collects the evidence, makes judgements on the basis of that evidence, and then certain events follow' (ibid, p. 14). Instead she sees the process as 'essentially provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory and, inevitably, incomplete' (ibid, p. 14). Unfortunately nowadays, all too often,

'assessment for learning' is becoming a catch-all phrase, used to refer to a range of practices. In some versions it has been turned into a series of ritualised procedures. In others it is taken to be more concerned with monitoring and recording than with using information to help learning (James, 2004, p. 2).

One of the difficulties with teaching English is that at times it can seem vague, the criteria for how to improve unspecific, how to progress a little too waffly. With AfL, the desire to make the criteria clearer coupled with the relentless pressure to improve results, has tempted all of us to become to 'concerned with monitoring and recording' and less 'provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory and, inevitably, incomplete.' Maybe it's time we remembered that what we really want is for students to become better readers, as in Margaret Mega's article, or imaginative writers, as in Jennifer Dove's piece. Dove concludes by telling

us of one of her students altering what he had written because 'he felt as though he finally understood something more about "good" writing, and his new story had just come'. She gives a number of scenarios for how this may have transpired, including her giving him the book *The Kite Runner* but she retains an ambiguity about how it occurred. Her answer, and the reasons for his improvement, remain 'provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory and, inevitably, incomplete.'

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## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

# Graeme Withers and Margaret Gill, Assessing Text Response: The 1990 Pilot CAT: A Review for Teachers, Carlton: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board (VCAB)

*Brenton Doecke, Deakin University*

**Abstract:** The Assessment Issue of *English in Australia* has prompted Brenton Doecke to ask himself about significant moments in the history of subject English in Australia when truly innovative work was done in the area of assessing English. There are many examples to choose from, including Brian Johnston's *Assessing English: Helping Students to Reflect on Their Work* (1983/1987), which provided excellent support to teachers who were implementing process writing in their classrooms in the 1980s; Robert McGregor and Marion Meiers' *Telling the Whole Story: Assessing Achievement in English* (1991), which showed what teachers can learn through careful observation of students' language from day-to-day; and Brian Johnston and Stephen Dowdy's *Work Required: Teaching & Assessing in a Negotiated Curriculum* (1988), a book with a cross-disciplinary focus that was designed, as its subtitle suggests, to support teachers in a range of subject areas to implement forms of assessment that were congruent with the ideal of negotiating the curriculum with students. All these publications are signs of an extraordinarily rich period in Australian curriculum history, when English teachers were able to exercise their professional responsibility in developing and implementing forms of assessment that accorded with their sense of the richness of their subject area. The text that Brenton eventually chose for 'Perspectives from the Past' was Graeme Withers and Margaret Gill's, *Assessing Text Response: The 1990 Pilot CAT: A Review for Teachers*. This text is anchored in attempts by educators in Victoria in the 1980s and 1990s to develop and implement a new senior school curriculum that was responsive to a diverse student cohort and which would serve as more than an instrument for tertiary selection. Its significance, however, extends beyond the Victorian scene, because of the way it conceptualises a form of assessment that was congruent with what literary scholars and educators had come to understand about how readers make meaning from literary texts.

Graeme Withers and Margaret Gill's *Assessing Text Response: The 1990 Pilot CAT: A Review for Teachers* was one of a cluster of publications produced in Victoria in the early 1990s to support the implementation of the English Study Design that was part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). VCE English was conceived as a 'common study': all students were required to do English, and the curriculum was intended to provide a space where people from a diverse range of backgrounds could come together and engage in meaningful communication with one another, whatever their differences. It embodied, in short, a social democratic vision. It is not surprising, then, that the

curriculum soon fell victim to the managerial reforms introduced by the newly elected Kennett Government, and that its demise heralded a wave of standards-based reforms in Victoria and around the whole country. The development and implementation of VCE English as a 'common study' was, however, surrounded by immense optimism, involving extensive support from the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) and the wider English teaching profession, as the pages of *Idiom*, the association's journal, shows. The immediate challenge for the implementers of the VCE English Study Design was to develop forms of assessment that might serve the purposes of the

Design and provide a means of gauging the language of students as the Design envisaged it. The bulk of assessment took the form of common assessment tasks (CATS) that were done by teachers at a school level and then subjected to moderation involving teachers from other schools (see, e.g., Kent, 2005, p. 198). The text response CAT took a different form, in that it was to be completed under examination conditions – thus, the developers of the new curriculum hoped to satisfy the demands of those stakeholders who continued to believe in the importance of examinations.

A good way to begin reading *Assessing Text Response* is to ask yourself what you understand by terms like ‘text’ and ‘text response’. When this book was first published, these words did not loom large in the professional vocabulary of English teachers. They signified a shift in thinking that was reflected in the VCE English Study Design’s emphasis on the importance of providing students with a far wider range of texts than had traditionally featured in the senior English syllabus. The anonymous authors of the Study Design felt obliged to offer the following definitions of ‘text’ and ‘reading’: ‘the term “text” is intended to encompass printed, visual and oral materials ... The term “reading” includes listening to and viewing texts, as well as reading print material’ (VCAB, 1990, p. 2). English was thus conceived as embracing a wider diversity of texts than the novels, poems and plays that had been the traditional fare of the English syllabus (McLean-Davies & Doecke et al., 2017). Teachers could now choose from an extraordinary range of texts that reflected the socio-cultural diversity of Australian society, texts in which students might recognise themselves, their interests and concerns, or at least with which they could make a connection in order to explore issues that were current and relevant to them.

Part and parcel of this expansion of the range of texts available to students for study was a critical stand-point vis-à-vis key assumptions that had traditionally underpinned English teaching: terms like ‘literature’ or the ‘literary canon’ were no longer taken as given, as signifying an esteemed body of texts that was beyond question. This is not to say that texts were treated as being of equal value, as though a play like a *Midsummer Night’s Dream* was of no more worth than a television sitcom (though some people at the time did indeed try to argue that embracing textual diversity and making space in the classroom to explore the range of semiotic resources available to people in contemporary society did mean jettisoning notions of literary value or at least

treating them with suspicion (see Misson, 1990)). The challenge was to arrive at a sense of the purpose and audience of a text and to reach a judgement about its significance for you as a reader or viewer on the basis of your engagement with it.

The diversity of texts available for study was accompanied by an equally strong emphasis on the diverse ways in which people might respond to those texts. This was as distinct from privileging the literary-critical essay as the most appropriate way to express your views about a text. Arguably, the most innovative feature of *Assessing Text Response* is its series of ‘prompts’ (see p. 26). Rather than setting questions, three sets of prompts were provided that enabled students to develop a response to their chosen text in a variety of forms:

#### SET 1

1. There was one part of the text which made a very strong impression when I encountered it. Looking back, I can see how it was a focal point for the text as a whole.
2. The ending of a film or a book is often a surprise to the viewer or reader. However, the creator of the text must have good reasons for making the text end the way it does.
3. Words and images are alive with meaning. This meaning comes from their contexts, associations and sensory qualities.

#### SET 2

1. I can sometimes understand a character better by inventing a speech for him or her. This speech shows what that character might have thought at some critical moment.
2. The reader or viewer may gain greater insight into a text by re-creating a key scene from the point of view of one of the characters.
3. Sometimes it helps to understand a text by imagining details or whole scenes which are not included.

#### SET 3

1. To some people, the important thing about a text is whether the issues explored are relevant to present-day readers.
2. A really good book or film makes you view the world a little differently, and helps you understand people and issues you wouldn’t normally encounter.
3. Characters, settings and plot are ways in which the maker of the text explores ideas. (p. 26)

The rationale for giving prompts, as opposed to asking questions, is stated as follows:

The difference between a prompt and a question is a key one. The former, being an open-ended statement or contention, allows a more comprehensive (but not limitless) knowledge and understanding of the text to be considered by a student when planning for writing. A formal question commonly confines or at least circumscribes response much more narrowly to a pre-desired pattern. (p. 25)

You might care to judge the potential of these prompts to elicit worthwhile responses to texts by using them with your own students. The prompts are designed to enable students to convey a sense of 'the nature and quality of the engagement, or "contact" the student [is] judged to have made with the text, as expressed in the writing' (p. 22). They presuppose an understanding of reading as a process through which readers make meaning of the texts they are reading, rather than assuming that that meaning somehow inheres within the text. The latter assumption underpins the notion of 'comprehension', whereby a reader's understanding of a text is established through a series of questions that gauge the adequacy of the reader's comprehension against the meaning that supposedly sits within the text. More to the point, the prompts place the interaction between readers and texts in the foreground, encouraging readers to convey a sense of the meaning-making that they have experienced through interacting with the text. This is in contradistinction to treating texts as simply 'boxes of themes' (p. 38), as one of the teachers who had been recruited to assess the students' responses put it (all markers were required to keep a journal as they responded to the writing the students produced, as well as the discussions in moderation meetings). Or, as another marker expressed it,

The problem of texts being a simple equation for an issue or issues was brought up at the final markers' meeting. This was the cause of my exclamation about 'what are we doing to books?' earlier in my journal. I began by thinking that the pleasure of the text has been replaced by the search for the issue or issues. 'The issues are such issues as grief, control, past, home, isolation, loneliness, and relationships.' The character is seen only as an expression of an issue.

The summing up of texts as moral fables expressing an issue has limited some writing and some responses ... The 'what it is' is given more importance than the 'how it means'. (p. 39)

This recognition of the active role that readers play

when reading novels or plays or poems is one of the key insights to emerge from literary theoretical debates in the 1980s. It is something we associate with names like Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Roland Barthes, not to mention a host of other literary theorists who came to prominence at that time. In Australia, this new understanding of reading as a process of *making* meaning on the part of readers on the basis of the attitudes and values they bring to their reading received its most eloquent expression in Ian Reid's (1984) *The Making of Literature* (and prior to that, in an important essay that he published in *English in Australia*, entitled 'The Crisis in English Studies'). It is noteworthy that Margaret Gill, when she was editor of *English in Australia* (1981–1983), published Reid's 'The Crisis in English Studies', which she later described as challenging 'current academic practice' and arguing for 'a radical revision of what counted as English Literature and how it might be taught' (Gill, 2014, p. 35). Another influential text at the time was *Understanding Teenagers' Reading* (1987), in which Jack Thomson took the innovative step of interviewing teenagers in the Bathurst region about their experiences when reading, thus positioning them as authorities when it came to understanding the complexities of their literary socialisation. Such ideas were in circulation in the 1980s, and they undoubtedly provided a significant rationale for the new English Study Design and associated publications like *Assessing Text Response*. As Ian Reid remarks in 'The Crisis in English Studies', theorists had begun to work towards 'a fundamental reappraisal of the very nature of literature and of its academic study' (Reid, p. 37). Part of this reappraisal was a move away from the academic essay as the privileged form of response to literary texts to promoting creative responses to texts, such as creative rewriting of a text chosen for study.

This is not to say that students were given a licence to make anything they liked of their chosen text. The excerpts from the markers' journals that are included in *Assessing Text Response* show that they recognised the value of the prompts for providing students with 'an opportunity to show what they could do', noting that the generous time given for drafting and writing a response to the prompts produced quality writing, lessening 'the extent to which the task assesses exam technique and speed writing rather than text response and considered writing' (p. 22). Throughout the markers' reflections on what they had learnt through assessing the students' writing, there is a strong emphasis on 'personal response, supported by close reading of

the text' (p. 40). To borrow again from the comments by the marker that I have quoted above, the key challenge lies in exploring *how* the text means rather than *what* it means. An easy judgement about 'what' a text means may more easily lend itself to the instrumental purposes that have traditionally been performed by examinations. To focus on the 'how' is to highlight the complexity of any reader's interpretative activity when engaging with the words of a literary text, recognising that the complexity of that interpretive process is violated when readers rush to judgement about 'what' it means. One of the delights of reading the markers' comments that are included in *Assessing Text Response* is their awareness of the way that literary texts open up the possibility of an interaction between 'inner' and 'outer', between the subjectivities of readers and the words (or images) of a text, that defies summative judgements and propositional logic (cf. Doecke, 2017; Doecke & Mead, 2018).

What you have in *Assessing Text Response* is an attempt to show how such understandings might translate into assessment practices within a school setting that 'allowed students to demonstrate at an appropriate level their intellectual, aesthetic and personal engagement with chosen text(s)' (p. 5). That this intent was shaped by an external demand that the VCE course should still culminate in a state-wide examination makes *Assessing Text Response* even more fascinating as an attempt to balance the demands by some stakeholders for standardisation with the professional obligation on the part of the English teaching profession to provide students with opportunities to engage in meaning-making activities that are congruent with their sense of the rich complexities of literary language. This aim was embedded in a recognition of the importance of developing a form of assessment that 'respected the integrity of the Study Design', as well as taking into account 'the range and diversity of the students undertaking the VCE' (see p. 5). As the people responsible for conducting the pilot study, Graeme Withers and Margaret Gill were also supremely mindful of the need to develop defensible assessment procedures that 'would yield reliable and valid assessments in line with specified assessment criteria', and that 'would allow for discriminations amongst performances across the range of grades and their descriptors' (p. 5).

This language reflects their expertise as those responsible for developing this fundamental dimension of the English Study Design. It is noteworthy, however, that it is also a language that the teachers who

were involved in the pilot could share, and that practising teachers played a crucial role in evaluating the suitability of this new way of assessing text response. (It is not the language of so-called 'measurement experts' who nowadays lend their authority to bogus exercises like NAPLAN, and whose expertise has been allowed to displace the knowledge and experience of practising teachers as they assess students' work on a day-to-day basis.) A strong feature of this report is, indeed, the way it incorporates the views of teachers who acted as assessors of the pilot CAT. As with the development and implementation of the whole of the VCE English Study Design, the profession played an active role in generating forms of assessment that might underpin its aims as a 'Common Study', that is, forms of assessment that were congruent with the nature of English as a field of study and which could do justice to the learning that students accomplished by doing VCE English. Throughout *Assessing Text Response*, you hear the voices of the teachers (and even their students) who participated in the pilot, as they weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of the prompts as a vehicle for eliciting writing from students that would enable teachers to make valid judgements about their capacity to handle the demands of this particular area of study (overall, the markers evaluated the prompts positively, and their criticisms were more pointedly directed against the residual practices of identifying the themes of chosen texts, as we have seen above, which limited students' capacity to exploit the potential of the prompts for developing a response to their chosen text). Another feature of *Assessing Text Response* is that samples of the writing that students produced in response to the prompts are provided for readers to gauge their own responses to the writing that the students completed under examination conditions. The book thus continues a powerful tradition of reflective practice that includes texts like Marjorie Hourd's (1949/1968) *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* and John Dixon's (1967/1969) *Growth Through English*, which both use samples of students' writing to prompt reflection about the complexities of language and learning and how teachers might best respond to the work their students produce.

*The full text of Assessing Text Response: The 1990 Pilot CAT: A Review for Teachers will be republished in 2019 as part of a special issue of Idiom, the journal of VATE, which will focus on the development and implementation of the VCE in the late 1980s and early 1990s.*

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# READING & VIEWING

with Deb McPherson

The wonderful thing about being a reviewer is that there is never a shortage of texts to inspire and surprise. The terrible thing about being a reviewer is also that there is never a shortage of texts to inspire and surprise. No matter how hard I try to read them all there are always more books in the pile on the desk and beside the bed to explore. Of course, this applies to visual texts as well, as they multiply on the computer, the tablet, in the cinemas or on the television. There are also new plays to see and consider. Inevitably there comes the time to compose the review and the need to face the crucial problem of getting that done while the memory of the text's impact is still vivid and fresh. But sometimes another book arrives and it looks so good that it must be read before that other review and so it goes. My only consolation, when I realize that I must re-read or re-view a text whose review was not done promptly, is that most texts reward a second reading or viewing. Happily, in many cases riches can be discovered on that second time around that escaped me on the first reading. So, as you read through the selection of texts that caught my eye in the past few months, be assured that there are many more jostling to be reviewed.

## Fiction for Years 7 and 8

*Lyla: Through My Eyes Natural Disaster Zones*  
Fleur Beale (2018) Allen & Unwin 199 pp.

*Angel: Through My Eyes Natural Disaster Zones*  
Zoe Daniels (2018) Allen & Unwin 178 pp.

*Lyla* and *Angel* conclude an excellent series that takes readers to areas where young people have lived through natural disasters and shows us their resilience and courage amid the devastation.

Lyla is a New Zealander in her second year of high school when the 2011 6.3 Christchurch earthquake changes her life irrevocably. When she and her family are separated she rises to the challenge of helping neighbours and finding her way around a devastated



city. Lyla is strong and brave in taking charge and helping others but what lifts this tale is the way it details the post-traumatic stress that Lyla has to deal with after the event, the feelings of never feeling safe, of always feeling jumpy and shaky and hiding that with jokes and laughter. Her battle, (with counselling support), to find ways to cope with an unsafe world is authentic and affecting.

*Angel* tells of a different natural disaster through the eyes of a young Filipina girl. In November 2013 a tropical storm, originally called Haiyan, is reclassified as a Super Typhoon as it intensifies in power and speed. Renamed as Yolanda it made landfall in the Philippines, devastating a large area in the Eastern Visayas. With winds over three hundred kilometres an hour Yolanda killed at least 1774 people and flattened Tacloban City.

Angel lived in that city and her family had lived through many typhoons. But nothing prepared them for Yolanda. Separated from her father as the typhoon struck, Angel is lucky to survive the terrible violence of the storm and the destruction of her home. She must find her family, including her mother and brothers who left to look after her grandparents on Samar, an island off the coast.

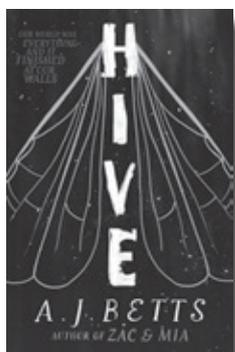
The appalling devastation and the difficulty of finding clean water and food, as well as shelter, are vividly described by the author, Zoe Daniels, who was then the ABC South East Asian correspondent. She, and her cameraman, David Leland, were both

in Tacloban City a day after the typhoon hit. Daniels writes with knowledge and skill about what she saw and her eye witness account adds considerable authenticity to Angel's story.

Timelines, glossaries, resources and author's notes in these novels really help students to understand the contexts of both stories and would enable students to conduct research into the natural disasters they describe. The other two novels in the series are *Shaozhen* by Wai Chim and *Hotaka* by John Heffernan and were reviewed in *English in Australia* Vol. 52 No. 3.

**Hive A J Betts (2018)**

Pan 262 pp.



While bookstores are currently awash in dystopian fiction I found *Hive* to be singularly different because of the structure of its society. The main character, Hayley, lives in an arcology or integrated city designed for dense populations, reminiscent of the structure of a bee colony. There is no sky or ocean in this city-world but there are gardens and forests. In the cult-like society, everyone knows their place and non are encouraged to ask questions; conformity is the natural order of things. But beekeeper Haley is troubled by migraines (a transgression that speaks of an anomaly in this enclosed world) and her own curiosity. She is especially worried by a salty drop of water that should not be falling from a ceiling. Betts supplies details of life and its rituals in this strange hexagonal city (including the controlled marriages of the population) that are plausible and disturbing. Hayley's discomfort with not fitting in, and her troubled relationship with Will, the son of the leader, leads to more discoveries and the possibility of escape.

A sequel is planned and I would like to see what befalls Haley and this insular world. Students at the end of Year 8 will find *Hive* an absorbing read with much to discuss about society's rules and conventions and the way it works in the novel and in our own lives.

**Moxie Jennifer Mathieu (2017)**

Hodder 344pp

'Moxie' is a slang term meaning courage, spirit, determination, spunk and attitude and it's the appropriate title of this fiery novel about standing up to sexism at school. Viv Carter is a 'nice' girl at East Rockport

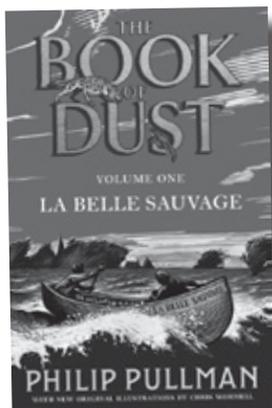
High School in Texas but she is increasingly angered by the gross comments and actions of the football guys at school and the way the administration does nothing to counter them. The fact that the principal's son is a ringleader and the football team is highly favoured in the funding area makes matters worse. In addition, the random dress code checks by the administration only target girls and demean and humiliate them. Viv may be a quiet student but her mum was a punk rock *Riot Grrrl* in the 90s. When Viv finds some zines (small, original, self-published works of text and images) in her mother's *My Misspent Youth* box, she has the idea to create a feminist zine to try and engage and connect with other girls who are fed up with the status quo at school. As her *Moxie* zine circulates through the school (after she anonymously places them in the female toilets) conversations start to happen and the divisions among the girls at school start to diminish. *Moxie* Issue 2# urges girls to oppose the targeted dress code checks by wearing their bathrobes to school (so they 'won't distract the boys!') and *Moxie* Issue 3# begins a fight back against the escalating 'bump n grab' incidents which are sexual assaults masquerading as a game. The 'You're an asshole XOXO MOXIE' stickers enclosed in the zine urge students to tag offenders:



If a boy bumps 'n' grabs you, TAG HIS LOCKER with a Moxie sticker. If a boy gropes you in the hallway – TAG HIS LOCKER with a Moxie sticker! If a boy thinks he can treat you like an object – TAG HIS LOCKER, TAG HIS CAR, TAG HIS BACKPACK – TAG!!! Moxie girls fight back!

Viv's increasing involvement with new boy, Seth, and the evolution of her feminist attitudes and those of her friends and acquaintances make for thoughtful and interesting reading. Meanwhile the administration pushes back hard against the girls' revolution and a *Moxie* mass walk-out brings all the issues to the attention of the town and the school board and, through the internet, to the wider world.

The novel is creative and engrossing, echoing the wakeup call of these #MeToo and Time's Up days. Use this clever and fierce book with Year 8 or 9 and get students investigating the issues that are important to them in their lives and creating their own zines. Amy Poehler has acquired the film rights to *Moxie*.



***The Book of Dust Volume 1 La Belle Sauvage***

**Phillip Pullman (2017)**

**David Fickling Books 546 pp.**

*The Book of Dust* is a wonder. On one level it is a deeply exciting tale of derring-do, of quest and adventure; on another level it's a dark tale of sinister forces and fascist power that has much to say about humanity's worst fears. But never

fear, there is hope and joy as well, and the richness, complexity and world building that can only come from a master storyteller.

Twenty-two years after the publication of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* the author takes us back to the beginning of the story of Lyra Belacqua, to when she was just a baby. Malcolm Postead, a curious and clever eleven-year-old and Alice, a damaged teenager, both work at Malcolm's parents' pub and become involved in saving Lyra from deadly forces. When a great flood pours through the area and Lyra is under threat from the evil forces of the Magisterium, Malcolm and Alice use Malcolm's canoe, *La Belle Sauvage* to flee with her. They are pursued by one of the most terrifying characters I have encountered in literature, the sexual predator and maniacal Gerard Bonerville, and his savage hyena daemon. As the flood waters sweep the trio down the Thames and the rain pours down, the reader can't escape the sense of panic about the forces ranged against them as they try to make their way into Oxford and sanctuary for Lyra at Jordan College. The terrors Malcolm and Alice and their daemons face from their pursuer, the constant worries of providing for the very young Lyra, the nappies changed, the milk to be warmed, the food to be found and the chaos that the flood creates, are all brilliantly captured. Malcolm is a hero who never gives up but fierce, abused and courageous Alice has my heart, as she and Malcolm struggle to protect Lyra and to understand their feelings for each other.

Pullman respects his readers while asking much of them and this wondrous book will reward anyone prepared to be swept away in *La Belle Sauvage* with Lyra and her protectors.

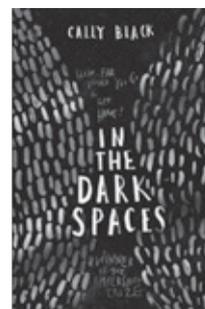
***In the Dark Spaces* Cally Black (2017)**

**Hardie Grant 219 pp.**

*In the Dark Spaces* is an original and fascinating look at an alien culture, akin to J.C. Cherryh's epic *Foreigner*

series (eighteen books and counting), with its emphasis on the perils of first contact, the importance of language and the vital responsibility of an interpreter.

Tamara is a 14-year-old orphan who is hiding on a space freighter. Her aunt is a cook on the ship but kids are not allowed so Tamara and her young cousin, Gub, must stay very quiet and hidden to escape detection. But Tamara, who is small for her age, knows her way around the secret places and tubes in the spacecraft and she uses them to explore for food. It is while she is away from the cabin that an alien race, the Garuwa, suddenly attack the ship. The Garuwa are bat-like creatures, winged Crowpeople, with advanced weaponry. Tamara's voice is raw and terrified as she describes one of them.



The stranger keeps coming, long-legged stretches of shiny black uniform kicking down the ramp. And it's not a person. Facing McVeigh is this tall half-crow, half-scarecrow thing, all dressed in black. Shiny black armoured ridges line down the centre of its chest and across its shoulders like the back of a crocodile. Its head is a massive beaked helmet. And it's not a leathery cape, cos it's moving by itself. They're wings. Wings that lift higher and quiver ... My scalp prickles. Not right. This is not right. This is a real thing! p. 20

The Garuwa violently slaughter the crew. Tamara only survives because she repeats a call or whistle they are making and identifies the captain. She is taken back to their Hive. Tamara is in shock, overwhelmed by the alien language and culture, and yet her distinctive voice takes the reader through her pain and desire to survive so she can somehow return to her ship and learn if her cousin survived. Tamara learns the language, begins to understand the Garuwa and their culture, becomes a squad member and works for them, but she also wants peace. She discovers it's a tortured path to peace.

This novel is so much more than a survival story. It becomes apparent that humans have been mining in alien space and they threatened the existence of the Garuwa.

Tootoopne talks about how more and more human ships come into their space, and how they worry for their hives if more come. He talks about how humans fire on anything in their path. How humans take the minerals the hives need to grow. He talks about how much good we do protecting all the hives of their children. p. 109

Black tackles big issues. Gender, colonisation, economic systems, the nature of home and the importance of family are all explored. Black's creation of the Garuwa race and their society and environment is deeply impressive. The Hive protects them and in return they care for it and feed it. The contrast in economic systems is also well sustained; humanity's capitalism comes up against the Garuwa's focus on co-operation. Tamara, or Weku as the Garuwa call her, is the link between two very different cultures. Her grief and guilt at what she has done, her tenacity, her wisdom (gained from the horrors she has seen), her facility with language, her toughness and her courage all have a part to play in the resolution of the conflict between humans and the Garuwa.

*In the Dark Spaces* is a compelling and deeply satisfying novel which challenges many of the reader's assumptions. It more than fulfils Black's dedication to 'To all young people searching for a kinder future in a harsh world'.

Black's novel won the Ampersand Prize and was an honour book in the CBC 2018 Older Readers awards. Teaching notes and a comprehensive summary are available from Hardie Grant at <https://www.pegiwilliams.com.au/pdfs/teachernotes/9781760128647.pdf>

## Fiction for Years 11 and 12

### Ryan O'Neill *The Drover's Wives* (2018)

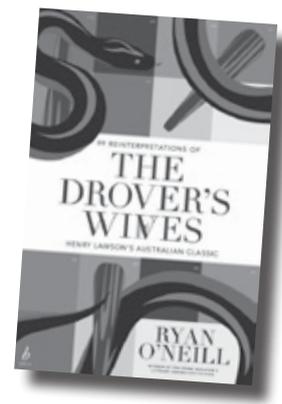
Brio 254 pp.

Ryan O'Neill's *The Drover's Wives*, will certainly set laughter ringing in the classroom. His ninety-nine re-interpretations of Lawson's classic short story, *The Drover's Wife* take many forms. He lifts the spirits and punctures pretension and the ridiculous while renewing our love of the original and showing the fun we can have with language, both inside and outside the classroom.

Here are some re-interpretations to tantalise your interest. (They are set out alphabetically and not as they appear in the text):

- Agony aunt column
- Amazon book review
- Backwards
- Biographical
- Cento
- Chronological
- Clichés
- Conditional
- Crass American Sitcom

- Crossword
- Dance
- Editorial Comments
- Elizabethan
- Emojis
- Fable
- Fine wine
- Freudian
- Gossip column
- Imagist
- Imperative
- In the style of Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Mary McCarthy, H.P. Lovecraft
- Internet comments
- Interrogative
- Lecture slides
- Letter to *The Daily Telegraph* (a personal favourite)
- Limerick
- Lipogram
- Mixtape
- Monosyllabic
- Ocker
- Pangram
- Parable
- Pop song
- Post Modern
- Punctuation
- Question Asked by an Audience Member at a Writers' Festival
- Reality TV show
- Recipe
- RSPCA Report
- Scratch and sniff
- Sensory
- Sporting commentary
- Trivia quiz
- Tweet
- Tweets
- Verb-less
- Word Cloud
- Year 8 essay.



You will have to get the book to see the rest. I only have to look at the cover of *The Drover's Wives* to smile and chuckle anew. When has satire been easier to access and teach? O'Neill places the original short story at the start of his text and then follows with his ninety-nine responses to it. He said he had about 130 re-interpretations and whittled them down. While undoubtedly referencing Raymond Queneau's *Exercices in Style* and Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story* there

is something about the sheer delight in the Australian forms O'Neill uses that adds special lustre to this text. What a gift for teachers and students.



*Boy Swallows Universe* Trent Dalton  
(2018)  
Fourth Estate 474 pp.

Trent Dalton has definitely delivered a new Australian classic. *Boy Swallows Universe* is a marvellously big novel about growing up poor and disadvantaged among criminals. It has an outrageous amount of love and humour, a touch of magic realism, depictions of parental neglect, hot and dangerous nights in Brisbane in the 1980s

and unforgettable characters. It is not for the faint-hearted. Trent Dalton has drawn heavily on his own life to shape this novel and has done it so convincingly that when I saw him on television I checked out whether he had all his fingers (as the main character does lose one along the way). It was with great relief that I saw that all his digits were in place.

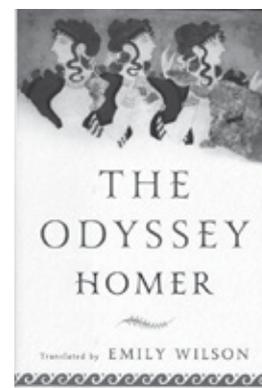
It's hard to know where to start with such a huge-hearted book, but family, its flaws and its beauty, are central. Eli Bell's father is absent for the first part of the book, his mum is a junkie, his brother August is mute, his stepfather is a drug dealer and his baby-sitter, Slim, is a convicted killer and his mentor. A start like this gets the reader's attention quickly. Eli's life is complicated but the one constant person in his life is his brother, whose love protects Eli throughout the novel. Eli dearly loves his troubled mother, Frankie, and his break in (as opposed to break out) to the Boggo Road Gaol to see her on Christmas Day is one of many outstanding vignettes of the book. There are important letters written and great books read, courtesy of an alcoholic father who struggles (and often fails) to support his sons. The villains are compelling too, with Tytus Broz, a pale and powerful drug lord, whose sinister henchman, Iwan Kroll, is prone to dismember his victims. But while chaos seems to reign Dalton plots his way skilfully to a sensational conclusion.

*Boy Swallows Universe* will be a wonderfully wild ride in the Year 11 classroom and some teachers and parents could have issues with the strong language, the drug use, the squalor, the sex and the violence. But it's all part of a greater whole and I hope they will be won over by the truth, love, hope, laughter and joy of living that light up this novel.

## Poetry

*The Odyssey* Homer, translated by Emily Wilson  
(2018) Norton, 582 pp.

Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's two-and-a-half century-old poem is just magnificent. Its contemporary idiom, clarity and vitality catch you with the first line and never let you go. What a commanding start it is – the perfect beginning to a storytelling epic. It introduces Odysseus astutely as a 'complicated' man and teases the reader/listener with what is to come:



Tell me about a complicated man.  
Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost  
when he had wrecked the holy town of Troy,  
and where he went, and who he met, the pain  
he suffered in the storms at sea, and how  
he worked to save his life and bring his men  
back home. He failed to keep them safe; poor fools,  
they ate the Sun God's cattle, and the god  
kept them from home. Now goddess, child of Zeus,  
tell the old story for our modern times.  
Find the beginning.

The reader is thrust back in time to the story of Odysseus and his long voyage home to Ithaca, and his wife, Penelope, after the end of the Trojan War. Odysseus' journey, as he 'worked to save his life, and bring his men/back home' is full of action and disaster, interwoven with the rituals of the time. These rituals are strongly around hospitality, feasting and honouring the gods. Men meet, greet each other, praise the gods and then feast, as animals are killed and their meat is pushed onto skewers to roast. Bowls of water are brought by slaves to wash the hands. Weeping is common, in both men and women, as emotions run high. There are gods and goddesses, monsters and witches, bloodthirsty encounters and the ghosts of the dead and enough excitement to delight any student.

Odysseus, that complicated man, bestrides the poem. Manipulative and cunning, as well as wise and courageous, Odysseus is a man who suffers much and also inflicts anguish on those close to him. He is a mixture of light and dark, a crafty survivor and leader of men. Telemachus, his awkward teenage son

is also there, making mistakes as adolescents do, but being kind as well as arrogant; his youth and difficult position in a houseful of older suitors is really brought home to the reader.

Women's voices are strongly represented in the text from the sharp-eyed Athena to Helen (reunited with Menelaus) and the wise Penelope. Helen is not afraid to speak out and Penelope plays a clever, cautious game with her suitors. The slave girls are represented too. Their suffering is unjust. As slaves, their inability to reject the suitors' sexual demands results in their savage execution at Odysseus' command. Margaret Atwood tells their story too, in her novel, *The Penelopiad*, a witty re-telling that would be an excellent companion text to this new and revitalized *Odyssey*.

Wilson's wonderful translation is the same length as the original 12,000 lines but in iambic pentameter which is familiar to readers and listeners because of their exposure to Shakespeare's plays. The repetition, cues and reminders of what happened seem to deepen the experience of the reader and listener and reinforce the oral tradition that gave the poem birth. The directness and ease of the language, its contemporary idiom, liveliness and readability, make this *Odyssey* the perfect version for a senior English class. While the hardback version is too expensive for the classroom, the paperback version will be available on 6 November 2018 and would make a wonderful combination with Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in the Year 10 or Year classroom.

## Multimodal

***Searching* Directed by Aneesh Chaganty due for DVD release on 19 December 2018**

***Sabrina* Nick Drnaso (2018) Granta Books 202 pp.**

*Searching* is a film about a father's search for his missing 15-year-old daughter, and it's destined for the classroom, being especially suitable for the new Year 11 Module A Standard English course in NSW or for students in Years 9, 10 or 11 in any state or territory.

When David Kim's daughter, 16-year-old Margot, does not reply to his texts and phone calls he gets worried and starts trying to track her down online. As he searches, he discovers that he doesn't really know

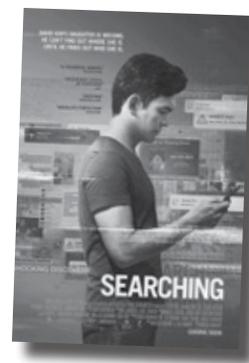
his daughter. As her friends tell him they haven't seen her his fears grow, and so do ours. David is a skilled user of the internet and the involvement of the police in the person of Detective Rosemary Vick gives us all hope. But there are many more twists in this film to come.

This engaging thriller is constructed with media and computer screens, texts, FaceTime screens, social media and the internet. It's an intelligent and compelling film which is rated M for coarse language (which I didn't even notice) and would work really well in Year 11 with Nick Drnaso's graphic novel, *Sabrina*.

In 2018 *Sabrina* became the first graphic novel to make the Man Booker Prize longlist. *Sabrina* is a 200-page exploration of another missing person but with a much grimmer conclusion than *Searching*. *Sabrina* is a remarkable read. Zadie Smith called it a masterpiece.

The novel opens with two sisters, Sabrina and Sandra sharing some time together and contemplating a bike trip later in the year. The frames move to Colorado where Calvin, a soldier, is helping out a childhood mate, Teddy, whose girlfriend has gone missing. Teddy is in shock about what may have happened to his girlfriend, Sabrina, and when the horror of what happened and the way people respond, are exposed the reader is equally terrified and repelled by both revelations.

A graphic novel is a slower text to read and I found Drnaso's pictures compelling and often deeply unsettling. Words and images deliver a textbook for our times. Both texts interrogate the role of social media and media and the way truth has gone missing in our society. Both the film and the graphic novel are highly recommended.



Happy reading and viewing until my next column.



# Join a larger conversation Write a book review for *English In Australia*

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**Australian  
Association** for the  
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English

# AATE matters

AATE Council is pleased to share highlights from the final edition of *AATE Matters* for 2018. These bulletins are a regular way of sharing news from the national English teaching umbrella Association with educators from across Australia. The AATE Council is made up of representatives from all state and territory ETAs (ACTATE, ETANSW, ETANT, ETAQ, ETAWA, SAETA, TATE and VATE).

## Appointments to AATE Council

We held our AGM on 20 October 2018 at English House in Adelaide, the home of AATE. We congratulate the following individuals on their appointments to Executive roles on AATE Council:

Continuing in their Executive positions:

AATE Treasurer 2019–2020 – Phil Page

AATE Commissioning Editor 2019–2020 – Trish Dowsett

And joining National Council in an executive role as AATE President-Elect for 2019, going on to President 2020–2021 is Fiona Laing.

*Fiona Laing is the President of ETAQ and has been Queensland delegate to AATE Council for 6 years. Fiona has taught English and Social Science at a range of Brisbane high schools, having trained at UQ (B. Arts) and QUT (Diploma of Teaching). Currently Deputy Principal at Forest Lake State High School, she continues to find it very exciting to work with passionate teaching teams.*

Congratulations to all elected Office Bearers.

Sadly, we farewelled Wendy Cody who stepped down from AATE Council at the end of 2018. Wendy completed her term as Past President after serving as AATE President. Prior to this Wendy was the WA delegate to AATE Council for 9 years. Thank you Wendy for your service to the English teaching profession and to AATE. We wish you well.

AATE Council continues to work positively and productively to support English teachers across Australia.

## Publications in the pipeline

Early next year AATE will launch our E4AC reboot project. This will see the four original units available free to teachers on line being updated and available

with the inclusion of two additional units for teachers.

AATE also has two wonderful publications in the pipeline. One will feature the writing process with practical ideas around the use of micro stories in the classroom. The other is the first in the 'Theory to Practice' series that will focus on the teaching of Dystopian Fiction. Stay tuned for more information in 2019. For more information about submitting a publication proposal please visit our website or contact our Commissioning Editor, Trish Dowsett: trish.dowsett@sthildas.wa.edu.au

## Poems to Share II digital sequences

*Poems to Share II* was successfully launched at the AATE National Conference in Perth in July and we are receiving some great feedback about the resource. With the purchase of *Poems to Share II* boxed set of poetic cards, teachers have access to 40 digital sequences written by educators for grades 7–10. For more information about the digital resource, please see the AATE website: [aate.org.au/products/poetry/poems-to-share-ii](http://aate.org.au/products/poetry/poems-to-share-ii). The sequences are linked to AC:E outcomes.

Poems to Share II is now available to order online at the same web address. The digital resource is accessible through an online login after the product is purchased.

## English in Australia available online

This issue 53.3 of *English in Australia* is 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 ETA website for details, or contact their state/territory association to request online access.

## NAPLAN writing review meeting

On 27 September 2018 ACARA convened a 'blue sky thinking' meeting to focus on reviewing the NAPLAN writing test. The aims of the meeting were to:

- collect different stakeholder views
- begin the process of reviewing the present writing test
- consider other possibilities from different national systems

- create a 'blue sky' vision
- build on discussion in further meetings.

Mel Dixon represented AATE at the meeting. As the Education and Publications Officer for ETANSW, Mel has presented workshops across Australia about NAPLAN; presentations including unpacking the literacy demands of the test and unpacking the writing criteria. A summary of key discussion points from the stakeholder meeting is presented below:

- Possibility of offering choice for students to write (choice of stimulus items; choice of genre etc)
- Changing dates – the testing comes too early in the year
- Reconsideration of the ages for testing – preference given for years 4–6 and 8–10 as year 7 was an important transition year which was not suitable for testing with students getting used to a new system
- Using information differently – not as a stick – refusing league tables to be published or to be promoted
- Reporting: Need to make the reporting easier to read- parent body raised issue of having a report that showed students not how they compared to others but to their previous performance
- General aversion to formulaic responses and the way NAPLAN was regarded as creating this mentality – comment that this is a misreading of criteria and may be limiting marks as top marks do not reflect a formulaic approach
- Question of computer marking – rejected universally as unable to access nuances of language – there was also a general feeling that marking was a professional development opportunity that was helpful to teachers and should not be replaced by computers
- Some interest in the USA Smarter balance program – the testing connected reading with writing and was therefore regarded as more valid

#### **AATE supporting research initiatives**

AATE is in the process of putting together a set of guidelines to help our members and interested partners learn more about the ways in which AATE is supporting research. Our Research Officer Philip Mead has put together a Research Portal on our AATE website. This site will continue to grow in coming months, so please visit for information about how AATE is supporting research.

#### **Publication proposals**

AATE welcomes proposal submissions from authors and editors of potential AATE print and digital publications. AATE also welcomes the possibilities offered by partnerships with other organisations including partnership projects between AATE and state and territory ETAs and other publishers, other professional teaching associations and other government, non-government and commercial bodies engaged in the publication and marketing of professional materials across a range of print and digital platforms. In all AATE publications, the Intellectual Property rests with both AATE and the author.

For more information, including a link to a proposal submission form, visit [aate.org.au/resources/propose-a-publication](http://aate.org.au/resources/propose-a-publication) or contact AATE Commissioning Editor – Trish Dowsett: [trish.dowsett@sthildas.wa.edu.au](mailto:trish.dowsett@sthildas.wa.edu.au).

#### **What's happening across the ETAs?**

ETAQ held a number of Vision2020 events in 2018. Teachers registered in record numbers to hear quality presenters provide detailed advice and guidance on texts, ideas around quality assessment and the new units for 4 of the subjects in the English suite. Many thanks to the vision of Julie Arnold and Sophie Johnson who devised and managed this huge project.

Thanks to ETAQ members for responding to the survey about Writing in the Age of NAPLAN conducted by Susanne Gannon at Western Sydney University.

TATE recently held its annual Portraits of Practice professional learning event. The full day of workshops, themed 'Brave New Worlds', saw local teachers Bree Everett, Imogen Gray, Emma Jenkins and Erika Boas present on ways to integrate ICT and digital resources into the English classroom. The day also featured a presentation by Ruth Degrassi and Vicky Nicholson on the new teaching resource, *The Orb*, developed by the Department of Education and Aboriginal Education Services in Tasmania. Visit [theorb.tas.gov.au](http://theorb.tas.gov.au) to learn more about the experience of Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples, their histories and their culture.

TATE members were also invited to participate in the Teaching Writing in the Time of NAPLAN study.

VATE recently began implementation of its Enhanced English Teaching mini-method, aimed at supporting those teachers working in English classrooms who have no prior experience with the subject. The program offers six online modules and two professional learning days. The program is overseen by a project officer with contributions by classroom

teachers and university experts and is fully funded by the Department of Education and Training.

VATE is also over-seeing the continuation of the Reading program (2018–2020). Funding supports three Critical Friends to work with schools. For 2018, 21 applications were received with 9 schools being selected. The program will cost \$120,000 over three years and is funded by the Victorian Government Strategic Partnership Program.

2018 also saw the launch of VATE's newest publication VOX. The epub expands the previous newsletter to include resources, including a range of sections that engage with all of VATE's work, including its history.

### Using podcasts in your teaching

A suite of teaching sequences for secondary English teachers connected to writer podcasts made available through *The Garret Podcast* is now available on the *Reading Australia* site: [readingaustralia.com.au/level/secondary](http://readingaustralia.com.au/level/secondary)

Interviews with Alexis Wright, Charlotte Wood, Alison Lester, Alex Miller, Ursula Dubosarsky, Hannie Rayson, Thomas Keneally, Graeme Base, Morris Gleitzman, Don Watson, Leigh Hobbs, Anita Heiss, Christos Tsiolkas, John Marsden, Isobelle Carmody, Andy and Jill Griffiths are all featured.

Sequences were written by: Emma Jenkins, Dr Anita Jetnikoff, Dr Rosie Kerin, Josie McKinnon, Ellen Rees and John Thomas and range from Years 7 to 12.

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### AATE Online Store and Gift Vouchers Now Available

A reminder that the AATE Online store contains a plethora of resources for English teachers. We now have gift vouchers available for purchase – a nice way to welcome a new English teacher to your faculty, or to recognise long serving contributors to a school or English teaching association. Or perhaps as a gift for an English teaching friend or a school volunteer.

The advertisement features a large, bold headline "Struggling for a gift idea?" in a sans-serif font. Below it, a sub-headline reads "Problem solved! AATE Gift Vouchers are now available!". Three sample gift vouchers are displayed in a row, each with a different value: \$25, \$50, and \$100. The vouchers are dark with white and gold text and graphics. At the bottom right, a dark banner contains the text "visit [aate.org.au/products](http://aate.org.au/products)". The background of the advertisement is white with a decorative pattern of grey dots and a grey arc.

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