

# ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

The journal of the **Australian Association** for the **Teaching of English**



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We welcome high quality, teacher-oriented and scholarly submissions in any relevant field of English, language and literacy education.

Your submission should reflect dilemmas, debates and concerns facing current contemporary English educators in Australia and elsewhere. Your submission may report on empirical research conducted with or by English teachers and students in classrooms, it may discuss the effects of policy on English teaching or it may elaborate on changes in the practices of teachers. It should be explicitly linked to issues of English teaching, pedagogy or curriculum and should demonstrate familiarity with current and pertinent scholarly literature.

The name of the journal is in no way parochial. Articles will be considered from anywhere which professes English as mother tongue or second language. However, if your article relates closely to a specific national context please ensure that it is appropriately pitched to readers in other national contexts.

Contributors are encouraged to read previous issues of *English in Australia* to get a sense of what is required in terms of structure and style.

1. All manuscripts should be submitted to <https://english-in-australia.scholasticahq.com>
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3. The article should begin with an abstract of 100–150 words.
4. All references should conform to the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Please consult the *APA Publication Manual*, 6th edition, or any guide to APA referencing available through university library websites.
5. Please ensure that you have carefully edited and proofread your manuscript. Accepted articles that have style problems or inaccurate/missing references will be returned to the author for revision.

6. Please avoid footnotes. Usually it is possible to incorporate them into the text. Where they cannot be avoided they should be numbered with a superscript and listed at the end of the article (endnotes).
7. All manuscripts should be typed with double spacing on A4 paper with a 2.5 cm margin on all sides.
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9. All manuscripts are subject to double blind peer review by at least two reviewers. This means that the identity of the author is not divulged to the reviewers, nor are the reviewers' names revealed to the author.
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*We welcome contributions from all people with an interest in English, language and literacy education.*

*All contributions will be blind peer reviewed to determine their suitability for publication.*



# English in Australia

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# Editorial

ANITA JETNIKOFF

This special issue celebrates the work of two luminaries: the late Annette Patterson and the late Paul Brock, who between them contributed so much to English education. The last open issue 51.1 included a moving vale by Wayne Sawyer to Paul Brock. The vale to Annette Patterson by Brian Moon in this issue is republished here from the Western Australian ETA journal *Interpretations*. The call for papers went out half a year ago and so many articles were submitted, some will be published mid-year in the next issue. The rest of the issue comments on Literature and curriculum themes, both of which were key concerns for both Annette Patterson and Paul Brock. National Perspectives from around the states are included in this first issue for the year and, as always, exciting events and plans are underway to inspire and support English educators across the country.

The Garth Boomer address to the 2016 AATE national conference 'worlds of wonder' delivered in Adelaide by Paul Sommer opens this issue. Sommer reflects on Boomer's influence on the introduction of film study into English, which represented a significant curriculum change at the time. The current Australian Curriculum classifies film as literary – an interesting inclusion considering much other multimedia classified as 'everyday, deploys literary features; leaving hybrid forms such as digital stories, the photographic or video essay and literary hypertext in an emergent and perhaps floating aesthetic space. Sommer suggests we use these forms to respond to film study, rather than the standardised test. Garth Boomer, like Annette Patterson and Paul Brock, pushed the boundaries of literary categorisation and Sommer reflects on how this can be done with film by examining it as a coalescence of conceptual spaces. Sommer spoke of Boomer's concept of 'fissures' and his inclusive definition of literature 'as a form of conversation, as a complex social act'. Sommer discusses the textual elements and spaces

afforded by film study, which lift it beyond the visual and he concludes with advice on studying film in the classroom space.

Annette Patterson researched English and Literacy Curriculum and pedagogy, literacy, literature teaching, professional development of English teachers, reading in the secondary classroom in Australia, Secondary English curriculum, Sociology of reading, Teacher education, historical investigations of Reading Pedagogy, the Figure of the Teacher and Literacy Education. Annette Patterson's later work also took a historical view of the curriculum examined the various roles of the English teacher and readers. Annette Patterson's work on gender issues and reading was ground-breaking and the article by Margaret Merger, "Do males really prefer non-fiction, and why does it matter?" would have been welcomed by Annette as a researcher of gender and as a former West Australian. Like Annette's work which always pushed boundaries, Merger challenges the commonly held view that boys prefer non-fiction. Merger's paper questions the legitimacy of using an essentialist framework to generate knowledge about how to best encourage males to read and explores the risks inherent in this practice.

Annette would also have been interested in David Hastie's article, 'Teacher and institutional self-censorship of English texts in NSW Protestant schools'. Hastie's paper explores patterns of text selection and exclusion around English Teachers' self-censorship. The article argues that faith-based and ideological factors as well as institutional pressures influence text selection and exclusion across State and independent sectors.

Paul Brock's work focussed significantly on curriculum change and professional learning and the next group of papers in this issue reflect on this theme. Lisa Knezevic and James Albright's article, 'Responding to a national English curriculum: The embedded approach

to change of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne,' is the first of these. Albright and Knezevic investigate the professional learning around the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: English; as experienced by primary school teachers in two Catholic primary schools in Melbourne. Using a Bourdieusian lens the researchers found that professional learning about literacy in English is coordinated and customised by a number of external factors from the wider field of education as well as institutional influences.

Fittingly Duncan Driver's paper also casts a lens on how the role of teachers and readers has changed according to the paradigms of each of the main 'Post-Dartmouth' curricular changes. This follows the theme explored in the previous issue of this journal (51.3) and Driver argues that each approach to the study of literature had strengths and weaknesses. In preserving the concept of the aesthetic and the centrality of the text in the study of literature, Driver advocates a social, interactive and eclectic ("mix and match") approach to literature in current English classrooms.

Articles by Andrew Goodwyn and Bill Green also continue the international and national and Post-Dartmouth debates from the previous issue. Andrew Goodwyn's paper, 'From Personal Growth (1966) to Personal Growth and Social Agency (2016) – Proposing an Invigorated Model for the 21st Century' deploys contemporary Critical Realist theories of identity, to re-articulate Personal Growth from its Post-Dartmouth origins. Goodwyn proposes a broader conceptualisation of an 'omniculture', and offers a prototype model; or professional ideology of Personal Growth combined with Social/Cultural Agency. Although Goodwyn's context is England, there are ideas in this paper which offer a way to interpret the implicit references to personal growth in our national English curriculum in culturally diverse Australia.

Bill Green's paper "English as Rhetoric? – Once More, with Feeling" explores the territory of rhetoric as an organising principle for textuality and meaning in English curriculum theory and practice. Green conceptualises and relates aspects of 'new rhetoric' to the three strands of the current Australian curriculum, advocating a 'playful' open-ended version of this concept for 'doing things with texts' in English. The paper brings together a contemporary concept of rhetoric (including dimensions of ethics and aesthetics), history and pedagogy, as crucial considerations for the renewal of English teaching.

The final section of this issue is dedicated to memorial reflections on outstanding figures who have contributed so much to the field of English in Australia. Rory Harris' elegy to Jen Haines opens this section. This is followed by an illuminating tribute to Paul Brock by his wife Jackie Manuel and his daughters, Sophie and Amelia Brock, titled 'Why English Teachers Matter: Some reflections on the life of Dr Paul Brock AM'. This personal valedictory piece concludes with 'a message to the profession,' in the form of an extract from Paul's own professional writing. If there is any doubt that curriculum matters and concerns move in cycles, please read this powerful tribute. It is poignant in this time of high stakes testing of 'literacy' and the rhetoric around standards, that Paul wrote a historical account detailing the recurring, mythical discourse of declining standards forever mobilised and sensationalised by politicians and media.

This commemorative issue concludes with Bronwyn Mellor's personal and professional reflections on Annette Patterson. The title says much about Annette's character: 'The Gentle Dissenter: Revisiting Annette Patterson's Research in English'. Having worked with Annette myself and writing my PhD under her supervision, I found Bronwyn's account of Annette's life and work extremely accurate and moving. Those of us who knew and loved her would agree that Annette was both a 'scholar and a gentlewoman'. Annette would have enjoyed my switching the gender in this idiom.

Deb McPherson's valuable reading and viewing column, as always, provides inspiration for teachers considering new texts for the classroom.

Finally I hope everyone is becoming excited about the AATE conference in Hobart this year and that some of you are considering braving the cold and presenting a paper or workshop or attending to engage in stimulating professional renewal. Our erstwhile boundary-pushing friends and colleagues Paul Brock and Annette Patterson would approve of us doing so. It is a tribute to them that their scholarship is still quoted and discussed today; their legacy to English lives on in our work. Even though they have left us, their dedication and passion lives on in the work they shared which will continue to grow and develop into the ideas of the next generation of scholars and teachers of English. On behalf of all of us we applaud their brilliance and courage and thank them for their generosity of spirit.

*Anita Jetnikoff*

# NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

## Queensland

### What does it mean to turn 50?

ETAQ has turned 50.

Just another zero? A big party? Time to reflect on why we exist? Time to look to the future? In our special 50th anniversary year, we are doing all of these.

Our birthday logo has arrived, with a lovely big fifty and a macadamia tree to symbolise our continual growth in the venture that is English teaching.



Our big party is booked for this coming August at state conference time. Local author, Nick Earls, starts off the festivities on the Friday night, and there will be delicious finger food, champagne and chat about books. We will share this on a rooftop venue with wonderful city views. Our big ticket speakers, Larissa McLean-Davies and Markus Zusak, will headline a great conference. That night our special anniversary dinner will feature local Brisbane journalist, Frances Whiting, as well as luminary from the past Glynn Davies. We are gathering memorabilia left right and centre. So that is the party taken care of.

But why do we exist? Has our mission changed over time? And more importantly where are we going for the next 50 years? The best thing by far about organising the party has been gathering together special people from the past and the present to collaborate on our organising committee. It has given us time to make sense of who we are. Our committee has included people from the past and present – presidents, secretaries, life members, people whose life has centred around English teaching. Meantime, life member Lenore Taylor has been amassing tales of extraordinary work over five

decades, memories of campaigns, conferences and much more. She has taken on the Herculean task of writing ETAQ's history.

What I have discovered, through working with this august group, is that the mission has remained the same. The people are new, the ages varied – ETAQ has the blessing of a wide age range in its management committee. Our platforms for communicating are very different now. But what hasn't changed is that we still aim to support English teachers with a great network, high quality PD and continued advocacy on issues around English. Now that's something worth celebrating.

*Fiona Lang, ETAQ Delegate*

## Tasmania

Innovation in English continues in Tasmania in 2017 as TATE gears towards co-convening the National Conference in Hobart from 6 to 9 July. *Cutting Edge: Margin to Mainstream* will be four inspiring days attuned to our conference themes of student engagement, creativity, critical and divergent thinking, innovation, and collaboration and TATE warmly invites you to register and join with us in celebrating English teaching, development and networking.

The Program Committee has received over 240 presentation proposals to complement those nationally and internationally acclaimed guests who will be joining us in Hobart. Hear from Elizabeth Birr Moje, Cris Tovani, Adam Lefstein and Troy Hicks, as well as Libby Gleeson, Beryl Exley, Peter Freebody and Noella Mackenzie, amongst other notable English academics and practitioners. New and dynamic 'Cutting Edge Talks' will be introduced in Hobart in 2017! Inspired by the style of Ted-X talks, these fast-paced presentations will take the form of 8 minutes and a maximum of 20 slides. Perhaps you have registered to share something of your high-quality English and literacy teaching and learning practice?

Extend your stay in the Apple Isle and allow yourself to be tempted by our Litfest, a week-long program running from 2 July. Enjoy literature-focused workshops for students and teachers alike. Be inspired by prominent Australian authors as they weave their stories through iconic Hobart venues talking genre, narrative fiction, poetry, non-fiction writing, and everything in between. Sign up for our social events:



Red Decker's bus tour of Hobart, the ghost tour at the Hobart Penitentiary, a night at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and our literary breakfasts with Angela Meyer or Leigh Hobbs.

To continue whetting your appetite, follow us on Facebook at AATE ALEA National Conference or twitter @aatealeaconf, and visit [www.englishliteracy-conference.com.au](http://www.englishliteracy-conference.com.au) for further details of what lies in wait for you at Cutting Edge: Margin to Mainstream. We look forward to seeing you there and joining in exploring cutting edge thinking and practice.

*Emma Jenkins, TATE Delegate*

## ACT

We have a full calendar of exciting events in 2017. We begin with Eva Gold (English Teachers Association, NSW) presenting 'Teaching English through Textual Concepts' at our Term 1 Professional Learning afternoon. Toward the end of Term 1, we also have a new event, the Canberra Theatre Scriptwriting Workshop, run over Saturday and Sunday 24-25 March.

In Term 2, we will be running our annual conference, Sharing the Secrets of Success conference (including AGM), with the ever-popular wine and cheese reception. We are excited to have secured keynote speaker Clare Atkins (author of *Nona and Me*).

In Term 3, we will be offering an online course: Teaching Writing Digitally with Rita van Haren, Prue Gill and Jen Nott. Another new venture for ACTATE, this course will run over 4 sessions across Term 3. In addition to this, our traditional face-to-face workshop for Term 3 will be a film Analysis workshop delivered by Thomas Caldwell, writer, broadcaster, film critic, public speaker, film programmer and author of *Film Analysis Handbook*. This will be followed by a film event for members in September (to be announced).

We will finish the year as we usually do with boutique workshops run by local teachers sharing their classroom practice.

As we continue working on ways to build our media presence, we will be offering small scholarships to members to attend the AATE/ALEA National Conference in July, in return for submission of a blog post on our website about the conference.

*Cara Shipp, ACTATE Delegate*

## Victoria

I feel that every time I write this column I write words to the effect of 'times are interesting in education' and

I find myself reflecting on this idea yet again. We find ourselves in a strange place, a world where leaders are spectacles and policies are brownie points, and I think that as educators – and, more importantly, educators of English – our role in this new, strange world is more important than ever. How privileged we are to be in the position of empowering young people to question their world and to make their own minds up about what they believe in, and what a format we have, being English educators, to help our students find the words and develop the thoughts with which they might express their personal voices.

What a difference a holiday makes! Our Christmas break was certainly well-earned, and everyone at the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English was very pleased for the Christmas period to arrive, having wrapped up our ever-successful State Conference and put a lid on another fantastic year for VATE. And this year, it is as though we never stopped. It is true that things have started up again in full force and with even more vigour than before.

The Victorian Curriculum is live, and teachers across the state are implementing this and adapting programs so that meaningful and vibrant English education is being delivered. VATE is always ready to support teachers and schools in this, and already our committees have been working hard to develop programs and workshops that pull our best teachers in the state out of the classroom and into conference rooms to present to their peers. Curriculum is like the Melbourne weather that we Victorians know and love: it is fickle, it is rolling, and it will inevitably change, catching you sometimes unawares, and VATE thrives on leading such change.

The curriculum change that has most people talking this term is the Unit 3 and 4 English and EAL curriculum. Now in its final year of implementation, the new English and EAL Study Design is being delivered to Year 12 students across the state, and teachers are grappling already with new and exciting ways of delving into texts and getting students to dissect and question argument. This new Study Design sees a significant change from contextual writing to comparative writing, and in this Area of Study texts of similar themes and ideas are paired. Students are encouraged to consider how the reading of one text affects their reading of a second, and they compare the different ways that authors create meaning in alternate forms. After running a series of implementation briefings in partnership with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, VATE



has continued to provide advice, workshops, and publications on these new Areas of Study, and the reception from our educators has been positive indeed.

We also recently celebrated our latest induction to VATE Life Membership. The Life Memberships are an important acknowledgement of our long and faithful serving members, people who have given an incredible amount of their time, energy, and general goodwill to the teaching of English. Most recently we awarded the very deserving Mary Mason with the VATE Life Membership for her tireless service to VATE, its committees, and its members. In addition to co-convening the dynamic Professional Learning and Research Committee, Mary has been instrumental in the development and facilitation of incredible programs in the association, such as the Community of Practice on Teaching Reading. We thank Mary for her ongoing work for the English teaching profession!

So here's to another year of change, challenges, and achievement. We are excited to see what 2017 brings and we look forward to another great year of English in Australia!

*Timothy Nolan, VATE Delegate*

## South Australia

2017 has already started with a bang for SAETA with our annual Refresher Course for teachers of Senior English selling out. Considering this is the first year of our new Year 12 English courses which have now been aligned to the Australian Curriculum, this was probably to be expected. Thus, on Saturday, 11 February, 380 eager teachers gathered at our Educational Development Centre to listen to a range of speakers in three concurrent plenaries covering the newly minted courses of English Literary Studies, English and Essential English, and then attend an array of workshops. Such was the course's popularity we will shortly be hosting a Refresher Short Course after school for those unable to make it.

We are incredibly lucky at SAETA to have such an inspiring group of teachers who willingly present at these events, with their only reward a bottle of wine or chocolates and free registration. This allows us to keep our prices down to a reasonable level so that more people can attend.

Next on the list of the year's activities will be our annual Young Writers Award competition which closes on 19 May. Planning has also begun for our annual State Conference this year to be held at Immanuel College on 3 June, as well as the fabulous Meet the

Writers Festival for 2000 students on 22 June. Now that the weather is vaguely cooling down and autumn plus the Festival season approaches, we expect our fellow English teachers to be out and about enjoying all the literary, dramatic and artistic offerings of Adelaide's Mad March. Let's hope some marking gets a look in somewhere ...

*Alison Robertson, President SAETA*

## Western Australia

2017 is already looking to be a busy year for ETAWA. As we consolidate the Australian Curriculum roll-out that reached Year 12 last year, we are developing new and vibrant ways to support our members and shape the conversation about English teaching. This support will take the form of a bank of print and video resources for teachers, a new and formalised mentoring program for early career and regional teachers, our regular professional development sessions and rejuvenation of our suite of publications.

Much of our efforts will be focused on introducing a comprehensive professional development plan, a 'road show', that includes a variety of workshops, lectures and in-school development programs which will see ETAWA representatives travel throughout the state to support those in the classroom. Our aim is to be available to our metro, regional and remote teachers and offer support for teachers in their professional pursuits. More details of the roadshow, and financial assistance packages, will appear on our website ([www.etawa.org.au](http://www.etawa.org.au)) soon.

Our state conference, which will take place on 6 May, promises to be a highlight on the English teaching calendar. This year's theme, *Storytellers*, will explore the various roles that stories play in the teaching of English, and investigate who tells and controls the stories that shape the classroom experience. Leading these discussions will be writer, director and producer, Rachel Perkins, who has been a part of some of the most moving and powerful stories told in Australia over the last 25 years. From her early works such as *Blood Brothers* and *Radiance* to the more recent *Bran Nue Dae*, *Mabo* and *Redfern Now*, Perkins has brought characters to the screen that have shifted the ground beneath our feet. Her revisions of history in the remarkable documentaries *First Australians* and *First Contact* are testimony to the important role that storytellers occupy and the impact of narratives on social and individual understanding. Her latest project builds on this body of work as she brings *Jasper Jones* to the

screen this March and her company, Blackfella Films, continues to support more stories from indigenous storytellers and we are extremely excited to welcome Rachel to the ETAWA community.

Writer and musician Sam Carmody will also add to the conference's excitement. A gifted new writer, Sam grew up along the central rural coast of Western Australia and his non-fiction writing has appeared in various national publications, and his novel *The Windy Season* was shortlisted for the 2014 Vogel Award, being described as 'a pulsating narrative that's tensile and muscley in its depiction of a town and fishing culture drenched in alcohol, drugs and machismo, where violence bristles beneath the surface'. He currently lives in Darwin and teaches writing at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Higher Education, and will bring a variety of interesting ideas to our forum of ideas.

We invite teachers and researchers from across the country and beyond our borders to be involved in our events and programs, and we look forward to sharing ideas with others in Hobart in July.

Claire Jones, ETAWA Delegate

## New South Wales

### Syllabus changes

NSW is hovering on the brink of a new senior syllabus, due for release any day at the time of writing this report. The syllabus is due for implementation in Year 11 in 2018 with the first HSC examination in 2019. ETA has in place events and publications to support teachers through this significant change.

### Textual Concepts

As soon as the syllabus becomes available we will extend the mapping of the English Textual Concepts to complete these to Year 12.

Aside from this work, we are continuing support for teachers in their use in the classroom with professional learning on developing a scope and sequence, programs and concept based units of work. This broader program for Highly Accomplished teachers will be supplemented by a series of webinars for Proficient Teachers, *English Textual Concepts in Depth*, along the lines of those delivered to primary schools last year.

### State Annual Conference – 18–19 November 2016, University of New South Wales

*To unpathed waters, undreamed shores*

This conference, may well have been the last event in

a year commemorating 400 years since Shakespeare's death. The event and Shakespearean theme were a success, certainly by social media criteria as it trended second in the number of tweets on its second day.

The opening keynote, the Ken Watson address, by Professor Liam Semler, a Shakespearean scholar, was inspiring and linked our contemporary literary debates to a world of systems:

SysEd is my term for the increasingly systematised nature of the education sector and professional labour within it. This is no isolated phenomenon. It is a sector-wide symptom of the market-integrated and technology-driven transformation of all professional life in the developed world. It was once thought that schools and universities as key components of the public good that focus on knowledge acquisition might avoid the worst effects of neoliberalism whereby everything is commodified and valued primarily in terms of economic rationalism. It is generally agreed that if this ever were the case, it is not so any longer. Schools and universities seem neither inherently immune nor robustly protected by any perceived special status from the capitalist paradigm that celebrates ever-increasing productivity, marketisation, competitiveness, responsabilisation and acquisition of personal wealth.

Professor Semler's keynote address can be found on the ETA website under Ken Watson Address. It will also be published in three parts in 2017 *mETaphor* journals

### Resources

The first book in a series of books on Creative writing (*Creative Horizons*) has been popular and will be followed by a second book Idea for the Creative Writing classroom. A new HSC resource on teaching Judith Wright's poetry is now available. Once the new HSC syllabus is finalised more work on resources to support this will take place.

### Reading Australia

Four units were completed in 2016 for Reading Australia: *Vampyre*, *Don't Call me Ishmael*, *Evil Genius* and *Just Macbeth*. The birthday of Reading Australia was held at UNSW to coincide with our state conference.

### Early Career Teachers

We are extending our offerings to ECTs with a webinar program at the beginning of the year when they may need a little extra support. This will be followed up by our usual conference for ECTs in May.

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# VALE

## Rereading 'Personal Response': A reflection on the contribution of Annette Patterson

Brian Moon, Edith Cowan University

Perhaps we don't speak often enough of courage in the context of academic scholarship; and perhaps that is because we so rarely witness it. While the ideal of the academic researcher as a seeker of truth, an iconoclast working at the cutting edge of knowledge, is familiar and often invoked, the reality is that a great deal of published research reproduces prevailing paradigms of thought, or at least remains situated within them. There are few real breakouts. As a postgraduate student studying poststructural theory in the late 1980s, I imagined myself a radical – a common enough conceit of new researchers. In truth, I was a conformist working within a paradigm established by remote continental theorists. Perhaps the paradigm itself was radical (though even that seems less certain now); but my contribution to it was not. I came to realise these things during my PhD research, after meeting and learning from some genuine thinkers. They included Bronwyn Mellor, Ian Hunter and Annette Patterson. It was from them that I learned what it means to follow an idea based on reason and evidence rather than fashionable consensus – and what courage that requires. Looking back now on the contribution of Annette Patterson, to whom this issue of *English in Australia* is dedicated, I am reminded not only of her intelligence and her capacity for independent thought and inquiry, but also of her courage in questioning some powerful orthodoxies in English education.

In what follows, I hope to illustrate that combination of perceptiveness and bravery by revisiting a publication that was a turning point for me in my thinking about English and in my conception of what it means to be an academic. I feel confident it must have been a turning point for many others, too. The paper is Annette Patterson's 'Personal Response' and English Teaching,' which appeared in the anthology *Child and Citizen*, a publication from the Griffith Institute for Cultural Policy Studies (Meredyth & Tyler, 1993). The ICPS anthology was a showcase of innovative genealogical approaches to the subject of schooling; but I first encountered the paper in a draft that had circulated somewhat earlier, without the scholarly context it would later be given. I saw immediately that it was a work of real intellectual depth, and I found myself enthusiastically endorsing the arguments and recommending the paper to others. Only later did I come to realise that my first reading of it was in fact a *misreading*, or at best a partial comprehension. As I returned to the paper over and over again in the course of my own studies, it gradually dawned on me that much more was being said than I had guessed. My initial reading had not been equal to the depth and sophistication of Patterson's argument. Gradually, I felt the foundations upon which I was building my own doctoral thesis start to crumble, as I saw how audacious her argument really was.

At first glance, Annette Patterson's thesis in 'Personal Response' seemed a rebuke to what we now call the Personal Growth orientation in English education. Influential in the 1970s and early 1980s in Australia, Personal Growth was a broad movement fuelled by post-war trends



in the fields of literary analysis, language acquisition, education, and psychotherapy. It variously drew upon the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1938), Lev Vygotsky (1962), Carl Rogers (1969), and the German reception theorists led by Hans Robert Jauss (1970); and its self-consciousness as a movement was shaped by John Dixon (1967) and James Britton (1970). The common thread linking the diverse projects that influenced Personal Growth was the idea that meaning is not an objective property of language, or text, or the world, but is a product of individual human experience and interpretation. The pursuit of this idea saw high school English conceptualised as a curriculum space in which students could be granted the freedom to experience and respond to texts in authentic and individual ways. The ultimate goal was an escape from the 'artificial' and 'confining' procedures of the school system, with all its bureaucracy and formalism, and a commitment to the self-actualisation of students.

The philosophy of individual growth through 'authentic' experience was enacted concretely in classrooms through a host of – so it seemed – new and radical strategies. Unstructured journal writing, small group discussion, negotiated curricula, creative writing, the abandonment of grammar lessons and spelling tests: these and many other strategies signalled a rejection of formal transmission in favour of exploration and (self-)discovery. In literature lessons, standard comprehension and appreciation questions were replaced by apparently innovative and productive catalysts for response. Teachers stopped quizzing students about word meanings and authorial intentions and began asking instead, 'How did this make you feel?', 'Can you think of a time when you experienced something like that?', 'Would you like to have someone like Scout as a friend?', and 'What advice would you give to Holden Caulfield if he were here now?' In place of rehearsed 'appreciations' of literature, students were encouraged to rewrite the endings of stories, to insert themselves as characters, or to write from another character's point of view. Studying the names, dates and publication lists of famous authors was replaced by diary writing that recorded the student's developing personal response. What mattered in this 'new' English was the student's experience, which, shared and debated in class, became more than a privileged response to content – it *was* the content. Or so ran the official script. That many of the strategies listed above can be found in earlier decades and are still habitually used in classrooms today suggests that the picture

is rather more complicated than standard histories suggest. That is a point we shall return to below.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Personal Growth had fallen out of favour among the rising generation of intellectuals. Influenced by Marxist, feminist and poststructuralist theories in academia, and by the rise of the socially-conscious *genre* movement in language education, progressives had begun to scoff at what looked like naive self-absorption in Personal Growth ideology. That was the point at which I encountered Annette Patterson's work, through her doctoral dissertation 'Reading Response' (1989) and her subsequent 'Personal Response' paper. Her argument seemed at first an extension of a familiar Marxist line of attack: that personal response was a dead-end unless it led to greater political awareness – and, presumably, political action. 'The personal *is* political,' chanted the new radicals (Hanisch, 1970). Surely Personal Growth was indulgent and silly if all it achieved was a solicitation of feeling and an unquestioning acceptance of any subjective response. How could change be engineered through such a strategy? This seemed to be the point of Annette Patterson's analysis, too, when she examined the concept of subjective response.

The paper began by asking what personal response actually looked like in the classroom. How did we recognise it? How was it produced? In an incisive analysis, Patterson isolated three characteristics of the 'authentic' or 'genuinely felt' response (p. 61). First, personal responses became visible in the classroom in the form of the *response statement* (p. 63) – a verbal or written declaration by the student. Response statements followed clearly defined conventions: they were delivered in the first person; they reported a subjective experience; and they narrated the student's success or failure in coming to understanding. Second, such responses were apparently *untutored*. Teachers solicited responses, and devised situations in which they could be 'volunteered,' but they did not overtly instruct students in the characteristics of genuine response. Responses emerged from a kind of supervised spontaneity. Third, the responses were treated as authentic *revelations of self*. Their truthfulness was not challenged. Although students might be encouraged to develop or extend or even question their own response through reflection, the teacher did not rule responses right or wrong.

This patient analysis of the rules and the concrete manifestation of personal response was clearly informed by Patterson's reading of Foucault, whose

*Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) had contributed new concepts and strategies for the analysis of institutional discourses. But even more influential was Foucault's later work, *Technologies of the Self* (1988). What seemed significant to me, however, was the observation that responses were rule-based. This was a *genre*. That in itself was a significant challenge to the orthodoxy of Personal Growth. The movement was overtly antagonistic to rules and formalisms; yet here was evidence that the 'authentic' responses elicited by a supposedly non-directive pedagogy were themselves formulaic.

Even more contentious was the subsequent discussion of how these response statements were used in the English classroom. Patterson went on to note that far from 'freeing' students to engage personally with the content, response methodologies were tied to strategies of control and surveillance, through teaching practices and through assessment. In what seemed a devastating critique, she noted first that the 'self' expressed through response was not what it seemed:

[T]he emanating centre of response, the 'inner self', rather than representing the innate, individual state of the individual reader has been deployed as a strategy whereby the student reader is expected to perform a certain representation of the 'self'. (p. 62)

The self that was thought to be 'revealed' was less a revelation than a staged representation, and one that served certain strategic purposes. In a second line of analysis, Patterson observed that the outcome of personal response was not greater freedom but greater control. The pedagogy had become

the site of quite specific strategies for the surveillance and control of populations whose morals and values are the object of 'governmental' scrutiny and correction. (p. 62)

Third and finally, it was noted that so long as students continued to be graded and ranked in normative assessments, the promised goal of self-actualisation could not be met. The Personal Growth movement's expectation of self-revelation was

contradicted in many respects by the opposing demands of competitive school assessment procedures which eschew the personal. These procedures, while often incorporating the rhetoric of personal response ... nevertheless expect the student to demonstrate the successful application of specific reading techniques ... (p. 74)

In my first reading of the paper, these seemed like explosive observations. They exposed the flaws of

Personal Growth and of any similar pedagogy that promised authenticity and freedom within the institutional framework of the school system. The references to control and surveillance, especially, seemed to negate the claims of authenticity that were the heart of Personal Growth, suggesting a duplicitous breach of faith on the part of its proponents. The inference I drew was that the institutionalisation of personal response had robbed it of authenticity, co-opting the honesty of students for the purpose of policing more effectively their thoughts and feelings. The true purpose of schooling was revealed in the normalising procedures of assessments and examinations.

This initial interpretation followed a familiar pattern, in which the education system was viewed as an ideological apparatus whose function was to reproduce the limited forms of subjectivity required by the modern state – an idea famously elaborated in the work of the French structural-Marxist Louis Althusser (1972). Patterson's paper seemed to capture perfectly the contradictions inherent in promoting freedom within an institutional context:

On the one hand, [the teacher] must facilitate the development and expression of the genuine felt response, a facilitation which is never acknowledged to be part of an authorised (and normalised) reading strategy, while on the other hand she must monitor, correct and evaluate this response in terms of normative practices of assessment. (p. 79)

Read in this way Annette Patterson's paper seemed both bolshie and brave, tearing away the foundation for what had become a mainstream obsession with the personal. But there was a problem. If her argument was to follow the standard pattern of such critiques, Patterson's paper would be expected to shift from attacking this focus on the 'personal' to then championing the 'social' – calling for new classroom practices that exposed the hidden influences of class, or gender, or race in the construction of personal responses. It didn't. Nor did it express a general scepticism about the whole project of institutional education, as iconoclasts like Illich (1971) had done.

The argument in 'Personal Response' did not develop along any of the familiar lines. Instead, it headed off in a direction that was both puzzling and shocking. Having asserted that the 'inner self' manifested in response statements was not the authentic core of subjectivity, and that response was being used to serve coercive ends, Patterson advanced two propositions that seemed at first somewhat bewildering. She

asserted, first, that the 'personalising' strategies of the English classroom were not in fact innovations of the late 1960s but had been central to the subject from the very beginning; and, second, that the strategy of soliciting 'personal' responses in order to adjust the thoughts and conduct of students (whether through class discussion or examination) was not in itself a bad thing. This unexpected turn invited a double-take from readers. Taken together, the paper's propositions seemed impossible to reconcile with standard political critiques from either the left or the right. Patterson refused to defend a notion of the 'authentic' self assailed by ideological apparatus of the school; but she also refused to assert that the proper role of education was to achieve social justice through strategies of consciousness raising or through improved emancipatory pedagogies targeting gender, race, or class.

The paper also offered a cooler discussion of these issues than was characteristic of most interventions in English curriculum and pedagogy. It was free of the rallying cries and declarations of principle that were normal for the genre. There was no 'gotcha' moment in the text: the apparent contradictions between personal response and normalising assessment were not seized upon as proof of conspiracy or ideological blindness. They were simply observed and explained. This too was puzzling. Was it some new kind of crypto-conservatism, or was it an extension of political critique into a domain beyond the familiar categories of class, gender, or race? It was some time before I realised what was so unusual about the paper: it wasn't a political critique at all. It was a work of *historical description*. Patterson had stepped outside of the paradigm; and in so doing she had taken a position against not only the mainstream of English education, but against the established radical fronts as well. This was to become the hallmark of Annette Patterson's scholarship: a preparedness to follow where the evidence led, without falling prey to the siren calls of agitators on the left or the right. She was making arguments for which there was no existing cheer squad and no obvious constituency. Such was her independence and her courage as a thinker.

It took me some time to achieve the necessary reorientation in my thinking that would allow me to follow the arguments. The two keys to eventually understanding the complex ideas in 'Personal Response' were, first, a better understanding of the *historical emergence* and institutional functioning of English, and, second, a better understanding of *government*. Drawing on the work of Foucault, and on a groundbreaking historical

analysis of English education assembled by Ian Hunter (1988), Patterson had developed an explanation of 'personal' English much more sophisticated than that of her contemporaries. That explanation hinged on two important propositions: that systems of power like the modern school worked not by oppressing or blocking human capacities but by *extending* them; and that populations are not defined by essential qualities that pre-exist their social-historical contexts, but rather have their characteristics formed within those contexts. The ideas are two faces of the one coin.

In her discussion of the history of personal response in English, Patterson noted that demographic changes in the 1960s had presented the school system with a number of practical challenges: a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse student population; and a shift in social mores that made students less inclined to accept without question the positional authority of classroom teachers. Students were not prepared or equipped to play the role of passive receivers. These problems, of large and potentially unruly student populations, were not unlike those faced by architects of the modern school system in the late-1800s – figures such as David Stow, James Kay-Shuttleworth, and Matthew Arnold (p. 66). That Matthew Arnold was not only a poet but also a state inspector of schools is a salient point. Patterson notes that early educators devised strategies for the management and education of students that hinged on building a relationship of trust and sharing between teacher and student. This relationship enabled the teacher to bring the 'real life of the child' (p. 66) into the corrective space of the school through strategies of personal engagement and response – such as discussing the characters in Biblical parables, passing judgment on their conduct and motivations, and relating the events to the students' own lives. Using techniques borrowed from the Protestant Sunday schools, teachers learned to functioned as confessors, role models and guides who shaped the conduct of students not by explicit direction and admonition but by encouraging self-revelation, self-inspection, and self-judgment. The popular school system thus became a technology for the government of the population through the inculcation of specialised techniques of self-government.

Viewed in the light of this history, Personal Growth English took on a different appearance. It was not the practices of solicitation, management and correction that now seemed out of place, but rather the inflated emancipatory claims that were made in support of those practices. From the very first, Patterson reminded



us, teachers had seen the need to connect the classroom with the world beyond, constructing for that purpose a specialised relationship between teacher and student. What was perhaps noteworthy was not that these techniques 'resurfaced' in the 1970s but that they had been neglected during the War years in favour of a narrower – and perhaps understandable – concern with skills training. And perhaps it was characteristic of the time that those advocating what seemed like new and humanistic practices flattered themselves as inventors. Far from being either radical subversions or sinister coercions, however, the strategies of Personal Growth English turned out to be unremarkable and useful techniques for addressing some of the educational and pastoral goals of schooling at that time. Indeed, Patterson's article implied that there was still a place for such strategies, just as there was a place for work on issues of race, class, and gender, provided that we reminded ourselves of the contingent nature and limited scope of such practices. Their purpose is not to change the world or to free the souls of children but to adjust the skills and attitudes of the population in small but important ways, in response to the social, economic and cultural context of the time.

This new way of thinking about schooling and English as a 'governmental technology' has slowly gained traction in the years since 'Personal Response' appeared. Much of that traction has been a direct result of Annette Patterson's detailed development and application of the idea. It was characteristic of Annette that she saw these things before most of us, that she followed where the evidence led, and that she presented her findings calmly and professionally. That is not to suggest that she ever abandoned her support for the social agenda; but she recognised that it was somewhat preposterous to propose that the injustices of the world could be resolved through the teaching of poetry or the reading of novels. That is not because those things were irrelevant to the goal of social improvement, but because the school system is just not as all-encompassing or all-powerful as either its supporters or detractors assumed. It is, rather, an ad-hoc invention, assembled and maintained on the run, tasked with achieving certain limited outcomes whose efficacy is quite narrowly circumscribed. That being the case, there are no silver bullets we can fire that will transform society at a stroke: neither personal response, nor discovery learning, nor direct instruction, nor any of the one-shot solutions beloved of gurus and commentators will serve.

The message I take from Annette Patterson's body of work is that we should not look to education for grand solutions to intractable problems. The mistake made by many education theorists seems to be that they take the utopian view. Dismissive of details, they long for a simple solution that will bring an end to history and put the world to rights. From Annette Patterson's scholarship, and from her personal example, I learned that the more pragmatic approach, and I think the nobler one, is to get up each day and go to work. There is courage in doing that, too.

I have focused here on just one of Annette's many influential publications. I could have picked many others: her work with Bronwyn Mellor on classroom texts for English (1996); her study of sixteenth-century reading pedagogy (Patterson, 1997); her analysis of Literature curricula in Australia (Patterson, 2008); her work on digital publishing and reading in the electronic age (Mallan & Patterson, 2008; Rennie & Patterson 2008). The same clarity and erudition runs through them all. I have chosen just one paper that stood out for me. It stood out because it came along at a time when I thought I knew what I was doing, and it showed me I was wrong. It would not be the last time I had the benefit of Annette's guidance and correction. Indeed, she would have noted immediately the irony that what I have written here, in recounting my journey toward understanding her challenging paper, is a *personal response to reading*. If only she were still here to tell me so, and to suggest how I might improve it.

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### Literacy workshops

Many of our English teachers have been given the responsibility of organising literacy across the curriculum and ETANSW has been responding to the increased requests for professional development in this area. The literacy workshops for this year will include: Writing for NAPLAN, Grammar in Context webinars and the popular Leading Whole School Literacy days. We appreciate the support of the Newcastle Catholic Diocese in providing a venue for the repeat of the Writing for NAPLAN day. We will be providing further support to Newcastle Catholic Diocesan schools for Literacy Across the Curriculum in term 2.

### Teachers as Writers

There's been a lot of research into the idea of teachers as writers and we are now building on the research

trip of ETA Kerri-Jane Burke, winner of the 2016 ETA Premier's Scholarship, exploring this topic. The first ever ETA Writers Retreat will be run at the evocative Q Station National Park (formerly the Quarantine Station) at Manly. It follows writing days held in different regional libraries and two PD days for teachers as writers organised by ETA members from Upper North Sydney. This new model of PD empowers our members to create learning spaces for their colleagues while ETA provides content and accreditation guidance and administration.

Eva Gold, ETA NSW

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# The Delirious Spectator: Opening spaces in film studies

Paul Sommer, Curtin University, Western Australia

**ABSTRACT:** The 2016 *Garth Boomer Address* considers the teaching of film. It challenges the orthodoxy that calls for a predominantly visual analysis, arguing that editing, sound and a fresh look at the script are equally important. This invites an understanding of characterisation and narrative in terms of the creation of 'wholes' and their ruptures and potentials. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's cinema books, editing, for example, can be reconceived as placing 'moving wholes' in relation to other moving wholes and not just connecting shots. There is a striking resemblance to Garth Boomer's early work in which he speaks directly to teachers especially in terms of fissures and their productive capacity to create new spaces for learning, just as for cinema. 'We now seek and find new questions, new spaces, and new discontinuities in need of exploration.' All this raises questions of creative spaces, how filmmakers and others open them up, and how we might work to understand (or remind ourselves) that classrooms are spaces open to creative opportunities.

[A cult movie like *Casablanca*] must be already wobbly and disjointed in itself ... a series of images, of peaks, of visionary icebergs ... It should not exhibit a coherent philosophy of composition. It must live on, in and because of its glorious incoherence. (Eco 1986, p. 463)

Umberto Eco describes the experience of watching some movies. The images, peaks and visionary icebergs create a sense of worlds in ways that are dynamic: intertextual, intercultural, 'intermedia' (Eco 1986, p. 470). He asserts that we remember a (cult) movie through bits. It is a useful insight as we make sense of complex images and our responses to them. It is no less true of memory in general, and of memories of Garth Boomer in particular.

Garth gave me my first job in teaching. Literally. We sat across a small desk in a cramped rented space; this was well before Flinders Street. He asked me why I wanted to teach. I remember bits of the conversation. Him: white shirt, leaning back in the chair as he framed the next question and lounging on the desk as I answered. Me: feeling invited to talk, engaged. It was a free-flowing chat. He wanted to know what I thought. By the questions and by his attention, I had a feeling of what he was looking for and it was a direction I wanted to go in. Long story short, I got the job.

The very first classroom I stepped into was Lyn Wilkinson's (team-teaching Drama) and so, though I did not understand it then, I was moving into a gravitational force of Boomer. Lyn worked closely with him and, in an article in *English in Australia*, she described his effect on her in terms of 'passion, politics and pedagogy' (Wilkinson, 2011). These were not three different things. A world was being woven, profoundly shaped by people who had worked with Boomer or been influenced by him, and by Boomer himself. Others were in sync with him, especially later projects of teaching unions such as the National Schools Network and Middle Schooling Movement under the banner of Ted Sizer's bold and loud assertion: 'We

cannot teach students well if we do not know them well' (Sizer, 1999). Questions like how we establish relationships with students and what we use them for, about social justice, and about passion were common threads.

With the passing of a few decades, Boomer has become code for all that, shorthand, a sign. There were many Boomers but, in this address, I am interested in the one who spoke directly to the classroom teacher. If my teaching had been shaped by educational philosophies, Boomer's or anyone else's, I was not aware of it in those terms. I was just learning to teach. There is no Boomer method. He was suspicious of gurus and what he termed the 'capitalisation of adoration' (Boomer, 1986/2013, p. 11). There is, however, an orientation, an intention, a restlessness, that was attractive, and through which Boomer still exists as a spectre. I continue to ask myself if what I am offering my students is 'low level crap', and it is his voice asking the question.

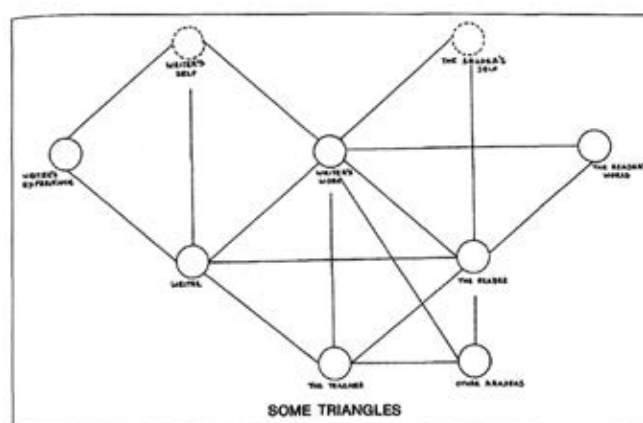
### Boomer, the writer's work and film

We will consider Boomer in relation to texts, to film in particular. In a special edition of *English in Australia*, on the 20th anniversary of Boomer's death, Wayne Sawyer (2013) observed that of English teaching's familiar categories of Language, Literacy and Literature, it is the latter about which Boomer often seemed to say the least; his own triad was Language, Literacy and *Learning*. Nevertheless, through his leadership he cemented literature's place with Language and Literacy in *A Statement on English for Australian Schools* (Curriculum Corporation, 1994; Brock, 2013, pp. 16–17). Sawyer demonstrates that Boomer engaged with emerging definitions of literature. He seemed in no rush to jump to a definition that would limit the discussion, and a discussion it was: 'I see literature as a form of conversation, as a complex social act' (Boomer, 1974, p. 41). From as early as 1974 he recognised the social and critical as essential to an understanding of literature (Sawyer, 2013, p. 31). He was eclectic in his use of others' definitions, but ultimately literature might be seen as the water the fish swims in: 'I do not see literature as a separate discipline in English. It is inseparable from the language use and language studies which should be at the core of any teaching of English' (Boomer, 1974).

What we do with a literary text, film included, when we bring it in to the classroom is to impose limits on it. Put more positively, following MacLachlan and Reid

(1994), we frame. How and why we do this is the stuff of critical literacy, but my argument here is that, with film, we limit it too much, too willingly and to the detriment of film as a field by focusing on film as a *visual text*.

Sawyer refers to an article in which Boomer did directly discuss approaches to literature. It is a good place to start, to get a sense of both the conversation and the complexity, before moving on to a focused discussion of film. In it, the literary text (in its limited or physical sense) is identified as the 'writer's work', while *literature* is to be found in the whole 'matrix of contexts' (Boomer, 1974/2010, p. 39). The article's feature is a diagram, a map of interconnected roles that Boomer referred to as 'Eternal Triangles' (p. 36)



It invites some observations: firstly, where is the Teacher's Self? (I will capitalise direct references to points on the diagram.) There is a Writer's Self and a Reader's Self. Our assigned role seems to be more functional (is this a surprise?): the teacher's job is 'to so foster the relationship that eventually reader and writer become good acquaintances' (p. 43). However, a closer reading of the roles suggests that the *selves* are not psychological but 'the poetics of the writer' and 'the aesthetics of the reader' (p. 37). Presumably the teacher self would be pedagogical and this underpins the entire exercise. This does not diminish the teacher in the diagram; rather it raises questions of how the roles are performed. It gets complicated when we consider that the Writer might in fact be the student (this was one of the challenges of Dartmouth's understanding of writing and literature) and so the teacher is cast in the role of the Reader.

Why is there no connection between (here I am going to take the licence granted through curriculum statements and adapt the terms to cinema) the Viewer's Self and the Viewer's World? Perhaps it creates

a tautology: Viewer's World, Viewer's Self and Viewer. While no such tautology exists in terms of Director, Director's Self and Director's Experience. This is the stuff of literary-cinematic biography and underpins the auteur theory in cinema giving creative responsibility to the director. But why no direct connection between Director's Experience and Director's Work? It suggests that the experience is mediated through the role of Director, so the Director's Work is a construction and not an inevitable expression of experience.

This model is created with care. One triangle (Director, Viewer, Teacher) invites a reflection on roles irrespective of particular films. Many triangles don't even involve the teacher, recognising that what we do in the classroom is part of a set in a complex whole. One line goes through another point (Viewer's Self, [Viewer], Other Viewers, Director's Work) which suggests that the viewer is engaged in a social experience of film in a number of ways: as one of a number of viewers; as an individual viewer whose role brings into play multiple connections; and as a personal-private viewer with aesthetic preferences.

What is this? It is a way of mapping relationships in terms of *both* the classroom and texts. If we make each of these points problematic, as we would want to as good post-structuralists, it would still remain an interesting map because it is about productive relationships and it intensifies our understanding of how literature works. Clearly the text is central as the conceptual space of the classroom, but it is profoundly contextualised.

Without wanting to invoke Derrida in great detail (a dangerous proviso), there is something he makes clear and Niall Lucy makes even clearer in his *Derrida Dictionary*:

In the broadest sense a text is something that has been made or constructed (a novel, a movie, a legal document, a book of philosophy, etc.)

The text is constructed. So far so good: this is the curriculum understanding. But then it is set in opposition to what it is not.

Implying that there are other things in the world (being, justice, truth and so on) which haven't been made but just are. According to this standard (metaphysical) view, we might say that everything in the world belongs either to the side of representation (text) or presence (the real). (Lucy, 2004, p.142)

What is being challenged here is not the text, as we routinely do, but the presence (the real, reality

against which we judge a text) as just existing: unconstructed, obvious and unproblematic. While philosophical consequences have been widespread, it frees us, modestly, to consider a text as inseparable from a world that only seems to exist outside it, precisely because both are constructions. Lucy goes on to quote Derrida to cement the point:

What I call the 'text' ... implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', 'socio-institutional', in short: all possible referents. (Lucy, 2004, p. 142)

Following Derrida, the text ceases to be an object brought into the language workshop. The text *is* the language workshop inviting a critique of how texts come to be understood and used, as much as their content and form.

The simplistic idea is that, when we move from a written work to a film, from writer to director, from reader to spectator-viewer, a renaming of the nodes will work. And it does, well enough, as I have demonstrated. The problem is that the director is not a creative unity in the same sense as a writer, but a marker for collaboration. Once we consider the contribution of others as essential to filmmaking, we see the need for a vertical dimension to Boomer's Triangles. Each collaboration – direction, editing, sound, scriptwriting, and so on – invites its own map of triangles and so, with film, we might propose a layering of Boomer's diagrams.

The suggestion is not that every film needs to be approached in terms of all the roles. Sometimes costume design is unremarkable, but when it is Edith Head designing for Hitchcock, that is worth a look in terms of her ideas of costume as text. When Walter Murch is editing sound for Frances Ford Coppola, he is shaping the text in a very particular way and exerting a creative force every bit as important as Coppola's. It is a genuine collaboration.

It opens a film up. The choices might make us dizzy as spectators. And I am initially using the term *spectator* as an alternative term for viewer, though it resonates with James Britton's spectator role of literature (Britton 1982):

A major aspect of a spectator's response to the event he witnesses will be a concern for the people involved and an interest in the way they react, but there is likely to be present also an interest in and evaluation of the patterns events take ... (p. 156)

While Britton allows film as literature, quoting



Harding (p. 155), it is a literary approach or disposition that he is developing. *Our Spectator* is delirious because film gives immediacy and multidimensionality to the 'patterns events take'. The recount – an essential aspect of Britton's spectator role – is more implied, or accessible only fully in subsequent viewings, as we are caught up in a film's immediacy and dreamlike fluidity.

Finally, with the triangles, each of the nodes is complete in specific instances (*The Catcher in the Rye* is a Writer's Work) but ultimately very porous in general terms. What is a writer's work? Post-Barthes, what is a writer? What are we willing to allow? As we have just seen, the question of who is 'the writer' in cinema is a complex one. They are closed and open wholes; they are historically, socially and biographically determined and always available to change and challenge. What we can't see, in the diagram of the triangles is the degree to which the nodes are in movement and transformational, even though it is implied in their realisation in Boomer's classroom.

### Movement and transformation

Ronald Bogue reminds us that, for Deleuze, this movement is fundamental to cinema: 'Movement may be seen simultaneously as bodies changing positions and as an ongoing transformation of relations between bodies' (Bogue, 2003, p. 26). For him an image is not a fragment, a piece of a bigger picture, but it is a whole (in loose agreement with Derrida's understanding of text/the real, as I have noted it). There are closed wholes and open wholes and sets that we could consider. However, it is an important understanding in relation to cinema that these wholes are in movement, and so Deleuze saw film not as a series of shots or photographs, but as a series of movements. Characters don't move through space, spaces move. More on character will be discussed later. Except to say now that each image, shot or character conveys a sense of a whole: when two characters interact, at its best, two constructed wholes are moving, developing, shifting.

In Tony Scott's *Spy Game* (2001), Brad Pitt's character, Tom, has just attempted to move an agent from East Berlin. The agent is killed. Tom feels responsible. Redford's character, Nathan, is the senior spy and his mentor. There is an exchange between this Seasoned Spy and the Rookie soon after, on the top of a building. There are two wholes here, two universes brought into proximity, resulting in a 'transformation of relations'. There is a negotiation taking place between fundamentally different forces. Everything about the structure of

the shots reinforces this: the close-ups, the dizzying sweeps around the building (presumably helicopter shots), and especially the cuts between the two characters. It is the purpose of editing to both build up and define the wholes or to put them into opposition, or at least juxtaposition, in order to effect a transformation.

What we can't see in this single extract is the complex development of the mentorship, trust and friendship. For Tom, and for Nathan in a different way, all this is on the line. The dramatic setting supports a sense of vertigo and precariousness for Tom. In contrast, Nathan is seated and secure. The camera is part of the conversation and editing positions us as spectators, since we are not in, or of, one world or another. Where are we? We are between the two of them, and then we are out in space some where looking at this in a much broader context. Finally, as the camera pulls back, we can read the wide shot of the city as Tom's deliberation having consequences for others, with him heroically standing on the edge of an abyss, at the same time as we see it as a small conversation, one of many in the city.

By comparison, in an extract from *Skyfall*, in which Bond seeks information from Severine, we notice a different dynamic. In *Skyfall*, we can use Deleuze to observe that here we are watching a single whole that *contains* the characters. The characters have pasts, but the negotiation, although it is similarly high stakes and about killing, is theatrical dialogue. We are like a privileged theatre audience, watching up-close. We see the relationships between characters *in* a physical space (and Bond movies are so good with physical spaces). It is rightly considered a set. In comparison, the space from *Spy Game* has a psychological element to it: a negotiation is taking place. In *Skyfall* we are watching a tense conversation between characters that never moves beyond cliché (not a criticism), somewhat intensified by a strong sense of irony. Still, characters are not being defined by their conversations. They are already defined, more or less. They are adjusting those definitions in terms of each other, but not in terms of their own psychologies; it is not transformational.

I could get 'cheesy' here and suggest that *Spy Game* – my world, your world, tense negotiation – is in some way a Boomer metaphor for real conversations in the classroom with all their risk and uncertainty. And the scripted conversation of *Skyfall* is how what happens in the classroom is often presented or even aspired to: scripted, clearly defined relationships.

I could get cheesy, but I won't. The interest is more in what these two movies show about editing and

putting spaces in opposition – worlds created, worlds in collision, worlds in negotiation – and how we might approach films in ways that open them to fresh constructivist understandings of the worlds we weave.

This puts it well:

[The characters] have attitudes, beliefs and dispositions which both reflect the culture from which each character comes and which enter into the conversation.

They are bringing their cultures with them, inevitably, and it is the cultures that are talking to each other. In a sense, the character becomes a marker for his or her culture. But this hardly captures it because the ‘externals’ are not fixed. The character is both created by and creating what we observe as ‘culture’: ‘What results is a space which has changed each of them in the process of being constructed.’ This is an important aspect of *Spy Game* and might be a defining characteristic of all literature. Engagement is never neutral. Discussions and negotiations are set up on all kinds of levels. We need to be sensitive to this as a fundamental part of film analysis. Then, we can start from film-as-negotiation, and negotiations as embodied in the characters who cannot help but drag with them their whole worlds even as they create or redefine these worlds.

Instead, we are more likely to want to start with film as image, so when we come to talk about editing, we are locked into a discussion of how images are juxtaposed, instead of how wholes are created, and that is a much richer question because the negotiations are endless and beg articulation.

Even when they don’t negotiate, they are still negotiating ... looking for moments, *fissures in the façade of common-sense*, for uncommon-sense intervention and these provide opportunities for acknowledging the world and orientation of characters.

‘Fissures in the façade of common-sense’ positions common-sense as a pragmatic construction and the breaks in it, the insecurities, and the frailties are the things to notice and to cultivate because they will expose and articulate the ‘world and orientation’. A film of interest, then, is one that works at the level of fissures.

But I have been duplicitous. Film is not the original context of the quotes. If you thought that this discussion is worthy of Garth Boomer, you’d be right. These quotes are not about the film, or any film, but from *Negotiating the Curriculum* (Boomer et al., 1992). It is actually ‘fissures in the façade of common-sense teaching’ (p. 88). (I was sorely tempted to change the

title of my presentation to *Garth Boomer: loaves and fissures*.)

As statements of productive, creative, problematic relationships they work as well for the classroom as the film. This is as it should be. They are constructivist statements and serve as a reminder that constructivism is not that things are constructed from their component elements, but rather the extent to which opportunities for learning-understanding-knowledge are, or can be, opened up.

This is what the undoctored quotes look like:

Even when you don’t negotiate, you will, at a more subtle level, be negotiating. You will look for moments, fissures in the facade of common-sense teaching, for uncommon-sense intervention; opportunities for acknowledging the world and orientation of students; *ways of connecting your abstractions with the lived reality of those compelled to be in your class*. (Boomer 1992, p. 88)

The italicised line demonstrates an understanding of the classroom as a negotiation between the teacher’s abstractions, the students’ (plural) realities, and the system’s power to compel – most exposed and potent at the moment any of them falter (fissures).

The other quotes are from Cynthia Onore and Bob Lubetsky:

All members of the classroom community have attitudes, beliefs and dispositions which both reflect the culture from which each person comes and which enter into the conversation. (Onore, in Boomer, 1992, p. 255)

And, unchanged,

What results is a space which has changed each of them in the process of being constructed. (Lubetsky, in Boomer, p. 257)

### **Fissures, fabric and film**

So Boomer brings into play the awareness of fissures, breaks, small inconsistencies as important. They suggest creative potential for the classroom. For the teacher who is alert to them, they are not things to be ignored. Chaos theory in mathematics began by researchers paying attention to their own fissures: what were dismissed as margins of error in experiments and measurements.

In cinema these might be small breaches in the realism (or the conventions of realism) of the movie. They led Deleuze to discuss the construction of *time* in film and to his radical *Time Image*. For him, the fissures might be a shot held a little too long, Godard’s jump cuts, reflected images within images, especially mirrors. These interrupt the realism of the movie and

expose its formal elements, and therefore make us aware of the construction of the character, the motivation, the context and ultimately of a subjective time. In doing so, we appreciate change as fundamental: it is not that things and ideas change, but that things and ideas arise from change. When these glitches, inconsistencies, anomalies, flaws, artistic flourishes and indulgences are understood as deliberate, new understandings are invited.

Fissures suggest a way into a transformative space. My covert use of the quotes aims to see spaces in film, along side spaces in the classroom, as transformative. Fashion designer, Issey Miyake, has a fine sense of just such a space in his description of design as a space between a fabric and a body: 'not only the relationship between the body and clothing, but also the space that is born between them' (Miyake, 2016). This might seem like a quip, but in his hands it is profoundly historical, critical and deeply contextualised. His fabric is very often regional, made by artisans with traditional techniques. He will have spoken to them, worked with them, understood the particulars of paper forms and weaving. He will have worked closely with the manufacturers of his pleating machine. And then, the bodies are specific bodies, women of different ages and ethnicities, sports men and women, individuals existing at particular times and places. Steve Jobs' black turtleneck is a Miyake.

This is not a *dialectic* between fabric and body heading towards some kind of resolution as if it is an argument. It is a space. It is a conversation. Like any decent conversation, it is a space where creativity is valued: a space where things can be discovered, a workshop, a language workshop. The elements of the medium are not used to build something that seems inevitable; they serve to ensure that the medium is endlessly open to critique, creation and re-creation.

### Filmic spaces

How do we keep all this open and complex enough to allow us and our students to engage without falling back into our clichés? This is a direct question for film studies and I want to suggest that (at least) three productive spaces can open up the field. Before we consider them, it is worth remembering that a space is often defined as 'something' between: between walls, between words in a sentence, between people and so on. In seeking creative spaces we are concerned with resonances between the walls so, with Miyake, the body and the fabric serve to bounce ideas around:

An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonance is not on the walls. It is the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its complex patterning. ... It is a complex dynamic unity. The interference pattern arises where the sound wave interacts with itself. The bouncing back and forth multiplies the sound's movement without cutting it. (Massumi 2002, p. 14)

What we are looking for is this complex patterning. Our role, as students of cinema, is to identify and to play a part in the amplification of intensities. Where do we look in film that allows us conceptual walls from which to bounce and intensify cinematic concepts, perceptions and observations?

Following Miyake, we can make some statements that will focus our discussion: 'A film is a space between sound and visual images'; 'an edit is a space between one moving image and the next'; 'a narrative film is in the spaces between characters'. In the case of visuals and sound, it is a matter of subverting the hegemony of the visuals: not of bringing it down, but of raising sound up as a comparable force in film as an audio-visual medium. In the case of the second, editing, we can turn to a micro level and see that an edit between one shot and the next is not a lack (something cut out) but a positive creation of potentials out of which a choice is made, resulting in the following shot: a *creation* (rather than assumption) of sequentiality. And finally, as characters are constructed from the script and what they are given to say, so spaces are constructed between characters.

### The space between the visuals and sound

Even a cursory look at support material will show that a visual approach to film based on analysis of the frame/shot has become the standard. A survey of terms in a few respected cinema resource books shows a heavy emphasis on the visual. What follows is a ratio of specific visual to sound references in glossaries and lists – understanding that this may be subjective at times and leaving aside other terms related to genre, criticism and historical categories which may include general visual and/or sound references: *Cinema Studies, The key concepts* (Hayward, 2013) 35:5; *Viewing Terms* (Moon, 2004) 66:12; *Film Analysis Handbook* (Caldwell, 2005) 106:12. I want to emphasise that I am not critical of these texts: I use them often and recommend them. Instead I want to use them to show the dominant practice in cinema criticism that led Rick Altman to his comment:

With few exceptions film terminology is camera-oriented. The distance of a camera from its object, its vertical attitude, horizontal movement, lens, and focus all depend quite specifically on the camera's characteristics and provide the field of cinema studies with its basic language. Another set of terms concentrates on the noncamera aspect of the film's visual component: film stock, punctuation, aspect ratio, lighting, special effects, and so forth. While these terms and many others constitute part of the vocabulary of any introductory film course, the corresponding audio terms remain virtually unknown. The type and placement of microphones, methods of recording sound, mixing practices, loudspeaker varieties, and many other fundamental considerations are the province of a few specialists. (Altman, 1980, p. 3)

At the time Altman was writing, sound recording was undergoing massive changes that fed directly into film: multi-track sound mixing, radio microphones, and more sophisticated and experienced audiences who had grown up with the concept albums of *Pink Floyd* and others (both in terms of narrative continuity throughout the album and in terms of stylistic or qualitative similarities between songs). In addition, digital technology gave sound new dimensions. Mixing channels went from four to eight to 32; to now when producers are able to talk sensibly of infinite tracks (*Sound breaking*, 2016). Developments in music recording have always led to innovations in film sound.

In order to redress the imbalance, Altman considered sound as an image alongside the visual. This was part of a broader strategy to raise awareness of sound that included editorship of significant publications and documentation of sound's rich history and technical arsenal (Altman, 1992, 1995). If sound could be considered in its own right, then it became, in a sense, plastic in that it could work as an object and be layered and manipulated. Altman borrowed the terms *indexical* and *iconic* from C.S. Peirce ('Icon, Index and Symbol: Types of Signs', 2016) and applied them to sound images in film. For example, a siren that we hear as we see the visual image of an ambulance is indexical, being directly related to its source. A siren that we might hear in a nightscape through a hotel window is iconic (standing for an emergency vehicle or an environment that might need emergency vehicles). It begs the question of Peirce's third category: the *symbolic*. Costanzo (1992) shows that through repetition, as in written texts, an image can accumulate symbolic significance: 'The sirens that begin and end *Rebel without a Cause* are part of the storyline – the

police are on the way – and also part of the film's symbolic structure, a metaphor for an anguished cry for help' (p. 8).

The other side is the argument that sound is fundamentally different and cannot be seen as an object in any way. Its strength is in its ambiance, which we limit by attempting to see it as an image. It is crucial in developing a sense of space. David Byrne presents the notion of an acoustic culture as fundamentally in opposition to a visual culture:

In acoustic culture, the world, like sound, is all around you and comes at you from all directions at once ... In visual culture an image is in one very specific fixed spot: it's in front of you. It isn't everywhere at once ... In an acoustic universe one senses essence, whereas in a visual universe one sees categories and hierarchies. (Byrne, 2012, p. 324)

Both of these arguments work for regarding sound as independent of visuals in cinema. If we want to argue over which is better, that is surely a development from not talking about sound at all. In any case, it is not the ontology of sound that we are immediately interested in, but the ways in which sound and visuals work to intensify each other.

The opening scene of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) demonstrates the potential of sound to work in complex ways alongside the visual. This was the debut of surround sound (as a commercial and technical product) and Coppola and Walter Murch had considered releasing *Apocalypse Now* only in purpose built cinemas so they could have control over the sound. What we hear is layered, it is edited, it is emerging, slipping between Altman's (Peirce's) categories. And so are the visuals (overlapping, slipping between helicopter blades and fan blades, fire superimposed over Willard's head suggesting some kind of anguish). Murch devised a collaboration in which the visuals are working in a very similar way to the sound, and to the same end. Each visual and aural element is profoundly and fluidly contextualised by the others.

It is exciting because once you are aware of sound, really aware of it, it challenges visual hegemony. It's a radical opening of the field. It's as if

two films were being constructed, one visual, another aural. But Deleuze stresses that modern films are not really double, that the problem of modern cinema is to maintain the autonomy of sound and sight and yet to establish a necessary relationship between them based on their difference ... to produce new relationships through their conjunction (Bogue, 2003, 374).



### The space between images through editing

Walter Murch is extraordinary as much for visual editing as for sound. Fortunately, he loves to talk about his work. A good starting point is his editing bible, *In the Blink of an Eye* (Murch, 2001) and a search of *YouTube* will reveal a number of lectures and interviews.

Editing is fundamental, but, like sound, does not get the attention it should. There are reasons for this. It is hard to put your finger on editing. It seems to be simply ways of connecting shots, but it is essential in weaving the world of the character and positioning the viewer. Editing is the production of new relationships and the intensification of existing relationships. It does the latter partly by selecting from, and realising, potentials in a shot.

We can see this clearly in Alfred Hitchcock because his handling of spaces is formal. Spaces are economically set up and defined through editing, through the juxtaposition of shots. In *The Birds* (1963) great attention is paid to spaces as intensifiers: Tippi Hedren and the other women in the safe space of the diner; the dangerous space of outside where a series of events at the gas station is leading to explosion, fire and death; and there is a third space, a bird's-eye view (literally). This space redefines the other spaces forcing us to read the birds as maliciously connected to the violence and confusion. Editing is the principal way of setting up and transforming the relations between spaces, and through it, tensions between men and women, causality and accident, nature and psychology are brought into play.

Editing is the mechanism by which ideas, impressions, emotions bounce off each other, echo and intensify. For the diner to be recognised as a safe place, we need to see what it is safe from. We see a man catch alight because of a series of incidents. Of all the potentials in that sequence (his agony, other men's awareness of what is happening, his back story, the intensity of the flames, etc.) we are taken back to the diner and to Tippi Hedren's reactions. In this way, and through particular choices, the one space intensifies the other.

When Deleuze looked to the roots of cinema, it was not the frame or shot that he saw as essential, but movement. Cinema is an art based on movement. What made it unique (as opposed to dance for example) was editing: the editing of movement. Objects did not just move through space, as common sense would have it. Whole spaces (wholes) move, or are redefined, or are attracted to and attached to other movements/wholes. It does not have to be through cutting. It is useful to

see editing as a transformation of a space, so that the seagulls entering the aerial shot are not objects moving into space, they redefine that space and the other wholes. In this way Deleuze understood editing as part of the movement of images.

### *The spaces between characters through the script*

And so I come to our conference theme, 'weaving worlds with words'. If we only think of a script as a blueprint, we can safely ignore it in analysis as the starting point of something that requires realisation to become the object of our study. Why look at a blueprint when the building is in front of you? The answer, of course, is that the blueprint shows relationships in a way that a sensory experience of a building cannot. So it is with a script.

In terms of characters the script has two things to offer: a suggestion of what we see (what they might do, look like and act like) and what they say to each other. The first can only ever be a suggestion. If a script had written: 'A woman looks out a window'. We have no trouble understanding it. But it is a statement that cannot be made visually. While she might be unnamed or unidentified, she has to be a specific woman. And language can never achieve the specificity of the image. Even if we try to be as comprehensive as possible 'the woman in her mid thirties, with dark hair, wearing a blue dress ... etc.' It sounds like a police report, and all we are doing is drawing attention to various aspects of her that do not amount to her presence because we have inevitably ordered and prioritise the description. That's what words do so well. And that is the role of dialogue: to direct attention, to prioritise, to draw attention.

A character is the intersection of the visual and the spoken. What they have to say is so important that we hear it as if in close-up at all times: major characters can be some distance from the camera, but we usually hear what they say as if they were in close-up. Altman calls this the intelligibility principle and it represented a shift away from early cinema's attempt to maintain sound perspective corresponding to visual perspective (Altman, 1992, pp. 55–60). So, it is a mistake to consign dialogue to sound as it often is. It has another function. It is sound, certainly, but because it relies on words it invites us to consider the drawing of attention and the nature of that attention. To return to Massumi (2002, p. 14), characters might be considered 'surfaces' that bounce and intensify interference patterns between them. This exchange is the first

between Carol and Therese in *Carol* (Nagy, 2016). It is quoted at length, because the power is not in a few lines here and there that can be easily lifted, rather it is in subtle shifts and rhythms.

Their eyes meet for a moment, before CAROL rummages inside her purse again. She produces a billfold, opens it, shows it to THERESE. It's a photo of RINDY, CAROL'S 4-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER.

**THERESE**

She looks like you. Around the mouth. The eyes.

**CAROL** (*glancing at THERESE*)

You think so?

THERESE looks up, clocks CAROL watching her, looks down. A bit of an awkward moment that CAROL rescues:

**CAROL (CONT'D)**

So what did you want? When you were that age?

**THERESE** (*no hesitation*)

A train set.

**CAROL**

Really. That's a surprise. (*beat*) Do you know much about train sets?

**THERESE**

I do actually. And there's a new model, just in last week. Hand-built with hand-painted cars – it's a limited edition of five thousand, with the most sophisticated electric switching system – it's quite ...

THERESE checks her own enthusiasm, noticing CAROL'S eyes on her.

**THERESE (CONT'D)**

You may have seen it. Over by the elevators? Just there –

THERESE points towards the train set and CAROL turns to look, mulling it over. THERESE watches her every move.

**CAROL** (*turns back to THERESE*)

Do you ship?

**THERESE**

Special delivery. Or courier. (*beat*) You'll have it in two, three days. Two days. We'll even assemble it.

**CAROL**

Well. That's ... that. Sold.

They stand there, nodding at each other for a moment.

**CAROL (CONT'D)**

Shall I pay now?

**THERESE**

Oh – yes, of course.

THERESE begins writing out a sales slip, then slides it over to CAROL with a pen, glancing up at her. CAROL snaps out of a brief moment of thought, a distance.

**THERESE (CONT'D)**

We'll need your account details, your shipping address.

**CAROL**

Of course. (*she begins writing*) I love Christmas. At least I love the preparation. Wrapping gifts, all that. And then ... you somehow wind up overcooking the turkey anyway.

She finishes, flashing a bright smile. THERESE doesn't quite follow her, but she doesn't want CAROL to stop talking.

**CAROL (CONT'D)**

Done.

CAROL hands the pen and sales slip back to THERESE.

**CAROL (CONT'D)**

Where'd you learn so much about train sets, anyway?

There is nothing here that gives us essential information. Personal, factual information is snatched from the photo and from the need to give an address, but it is largely irrelevant except as a tension between the private and public. It is not the dialogue that brings the characters together or defines the characters. Rather, dialogue is the process of intensification, which can only truly work if a difference between characters is maintained: an engaged difference. Harking back to *Spy Game*, it is two worlds in negotiation. Carol asks the questions, but their real purpose seems to be to keep the conversation going. Therese keeps it going by frankness and (checked) verbosity. The want, on both sides, to keep it going is transformational for both. The space between the characters is not being resolved (for example as strangers getting to know each other), but it is becoming more charged. The nature of that space and the 'charge' is, indeed, the whole movie.

As English teachers, we routinely discuss theatre scripts, but shy away from film scripts. I think we have lost a sense of what to do with them, and when we were learning to teach film, scripts were often unavailable, or hard to get and expensive. True, they are different text forms and one should not be confused with the other. You cannot do film study by reading the script. However, the script lends itself to analysis if we look at it in terms of spaces between characters. We can have a rich discussion about what is intensified and valued through their words – paying attention to syntax, interruptions and continuities, questions, sentence length, motifs, rhythms. Then later, it becomes possible to explore dynamics in visual terms and how what we observe in the exchanges is further elaborated and nuanced, or even contradicted or set in counterpoint, through the visuals.

We have been considering sound, editing, and the script along with the visual as equal partners. Animation, from Disney through to CGI and green screen movies like *Sin City*, might be there as well, inviting a tension between the virtual and the 'real',

and the list could go on. The purpose is not to be exhaustive but to provide conditions that might intensify our perceptions and our understandings of what is going on. These, to return to our metaphor of literal spaces, are the hard surfaces that facilitate the bouncing, echoing, intensification of elements of a film and our experience of it.

### The classroom space

How do we do this, in the classroom, without killing the experience by telling students what to look for and, indeed, what to find? We need to negotiate the text in ways that recognise student voice. The first thing is to maintain the conversations that Boomer saw as essential to a definition of literature.

Joelie Hancock and Deirdre Travers (1996), in their wonderful *Teaching Viewing* workshops and publication, observed that students were more comfortable *talking* about film. They suggested the tyranny of the written word had been broken with visual texts, and so students felt more comfortable in verbal analysis. Also, they often felt a sense of expertise that they did not have with the written word. There was, and is, potential to acknowledge this in assessment tasks and class activities.

In my own classes, in a Grade 9 film study of *Run Lola Run* (1997), we begin with a brainstorm and discussion of terms that I organise as I record them on the whiteboard. Then groups are assigned the task of thinking about the terms, fleshing them out and recording concepts etc on a poster that they present to the class. The first two are straightforward: Visual and Sound. The other two require a little more thought. Editing is one of them and the fourth is something whose title I vary, but basically it is narrative-story-structure in cinematic terms.

*Run Lola Run* is useful because it is in three distinct sections. They view the first section of the film in terms of their poster. Then we swap posters, so a group picks up an area that they did not compile, to watch the next section. There is a lot of talking, formally to the class and informally in groups.

A final summative task is rarely in the form of a written essay. There is great potential in audio-visual essays or video essays as analysis. They use the essentials of film – sound, visuals, editing – and subtle comment is possible. Adrian Martin and Cristina Alvarez Lopez have developed this as their preferred form of critical discussion of cinema and there are many video and audio-visual essays in Catherine

Grant's indispensable blog *film studies for free*, including her own (Grant, 2016).

Martin and Alvarez Lopez identify two models: a video essay where the images are cut to provide a commentary through juxtaposition, parallel projection, etc; and an audio-visual essay, with a voice-over developing narratives and critical responses. Martin's *Where I Come From, Where I'm Going* (2014) combines personal engagement, critical understanding, intertextuality and citation of films, and an economical movement from watching a movie as a kid to the complexity of discussing it in terms of Godard.

### The delirious spectator

The delirious spectator in my title suggests a viewer who is open to the 'world of wonder', to borrow the conference theme. The spectator is open to the flow of information: aural, verbal, digital, literary as well as visual in an unmediated way. But it is not that the delirious spectator is adrift in a flood of information. That is not what delirium is. I am placing heavy emphasis on the word *apparently* in the (*Australian Concise Oxford*) dictionary definition of delirium as 'temporarily and apparently mad, raving'. Delirium has its own narrative. A dream that seems random is, in retrospect, recountable. The path it takes and the importance it gives one thing over another are sometimes unusual, bizarre, frightening, unhinged, creative, but they are not random in any account (or recount) of them.

Deleuze and Felix Guattari created their concept of *schizoanalysis* in which delirium is a free, unmediated and uninhibited experience of images and phenomena, partly in an attempt to theorise creativity. To them, it is fundamentally in opposition to authoritarian forces that present themselves as beyond criticism and as natural. Their use of schizophrenia as a model and analogy (though it is often used more literally) was provocative and overtly political. Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (2008) take it directly into cinema with Buchanan's framing question: what would a schizoanalysis of cinema look like?

Deleuze's books on film, *Cinema 1* (1986) and *Cinema 2* (1989), are different from his other works. His research with Guattari seems wilder and based on provocation rather than argument, as the cinema books are. Buchanan suggests that we can, and should, read the cinema books from a schizoanalytical perspective. (But that's another presentation on its own.) Schizoanalysis and delirium finally suggest uncertainty: the celebration of a purposeful uncertainty

and restlessness. Our job is to find ways of limiting (if only in order to discuss) without paralysing. Guattari defines schizoanalysis as 'the activation of another world of possibilities'. That is what the great movies demonstrate and they provide a standard by which we should judge them. It is the same for our classes.

**'The school should be a rich language workshop.'**

Boomer (1983: quoting the report of a team he worked with) neatly summarised conditions that might allow this: 'the school should be a rich language workshop' – he did not say the English class, he said the school – 'where children are actively engaged in talking about how it works' – engaged with us and we with them, keeping the conversation going – 'and in evaluating the quality of what they have done so that they can do it better next time.'

'Doing better next time' is not the goal. To do film analysis so that students can get better at doing film analysis is a move towards standardised testing territory where a correspondence between the test and the thing being tested is easily lost. The on-going appeal of Boomer is that he helped to build, in collaboration with many others, a model of approaching the classroom that is in opposition to exams, standardised testing, prescriptive curriculum frameworks, accountability based on externals. As these are promoted, the other side will always be Boomer's sense of negotiation which includes its debts to Vygotsky, Britton, and the voices of many teachers still working in education today.

The full title of *Negotiating the Curriculum* is *Negotiating the Curriculum: Educating for the 21st Century*. Which begs the question (and this is where the conference started by asking a similar question of the Dartmouth Seminar 50 years ago): how are we doing? To others, that has meant engaging with globalisation, technology and innovation. For Boomer and his collaborators, it was and is about productive relationships, language and change.

In Boomer, and in Deleuze, what is prominent and attractive is an intellectual restlessness. It drove them to consider essential understandings, conceptual spaces, wholes and relationships between things in a spirit of radical change and it permits us, here, to use them to reconsider film.

Our job in the classroom seems to be to find ways of setting up conceptual spaces in which ideas, perspectives, responses can resonate and intensify (bounce off each other). At the same time, we recognise that this

is a dynamic process and we are on the look out for opportunities to subvert the process – fissures – so that we can rid ourselves of the illusion that we have arrived or that we are bound by certain orthodoxies, and also, positively, so that we can be alert for opportunities not anticipated in the frameworks we necessarily adopt in order to function as a system. The 21st Century understanding, here, is that everything is constantly in motion in every sense. (See Massumi (2002) for a discussion of far reaching implications of this for cultural studies). One of the ideas from Issey Miyake's visual manifesto, part of his recent exhibition in Tokyo (2016), is 'continue, keep going, don't stop.' Cinema and cinema studies are still comparatively young and not locked into orthodoxies (or not entirely). How well we handle that creative restlessness, without ossifying it, might be an appropriate measure of how we are doing.

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# Do males really prefer non-fiction, and why does it matter?

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**Abstract:** International findings indicate that there is a gap in the literacy performance of school-aged males and females, which has led to a focus on how to address this issue. Research suggests that an individual's literacy outcomes can be improved by regular recreational book reading, and therefore increasing frequency of engagement in this practice is seen as beneficial. However, the strategies and solutions employed to foster greater engagement in reading tend to subscribe to a problematic theoretical root. Essentialist conceptions of gender often frame educational and policy responses to this gender gap. Amongst other notions, males have been constructed as uniformly preferring non-fiction. This paper draws on previously unpublished data from the 2015 *International Study of Avid Book Readers* and the 2016 *Western Australian Study in Children's Book Reading* to examine the reading preferences of males. Male respondents in both studies displayed no marked preference for non-fiction, and males were more likely to prefer to exclusively read fiction than non-fiction. As essentialism requires homogeneity due to its biological basis, this paper ultimately challenges the legitimacy of using an essentialist framework to generate knowledge about how to best encourage males to read, exploring the risks inherent in this practice.

## Introduction

Time spent reading for enjoyment is associated with improved literacy outcomes for young people (Clark, 2013; Neff, 2015; OECD, 2010), with regular reading acknowledged as an effective intervention for improving the literacy performance of individuals who have acquired the ability to read independently (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; OECD, 2010). Internationally, boys' literacy scores trail behind the results of girls (ACARA, 2015; Chiu & McBride-Change, 2006; NAEP, 2015; OECD, 2015), leading to widespread discussion of a gender-based literacy gap. As such, improving boys' attitudes toward reading has become a central concern for addressing the disparity in literacy performance between males and females. This literacy gender gap has received considerable attention, despite research suggesting that differences within genders are far greater than those between the genders (OECD, 2010). Weaver-Hightower (2003) notes that in recent times, 'in many industrialised countries, particularly England and Australia, media furor, parental pressure, practitioner efforts, policy attention, and a great deal of research all have come to focus on the state of boys in schools', which Weaver-Hightower characterises as the 'boy turn' (p. 472). The notion of comparatively struggling boys, and an increasingly prevalent 'gender achievement gap discourse', may direct education policy away from areas of greater inequity in relation to race and class inequity (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

The underperformance of boys on international standardised tests has been used to generate 'moral panic' around boys' literacy skills and reading engagement (Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2010, p. 356). The assumption that 'all boys underachieve in literacy irrespective of race or social class' is reliant on 'essentialist understandings of gender as physiologically and cognitively based' (Skelton & Francis, 2011, p. 457); in contrast is the view that ideals of masculinity are socially and historically constructed (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Holding

an essentialist perspective has been found to be associated with endorsement of social stereotypes, with certain characteristics prescribed as having an immutable biological basis (Bastian & Haslam, 2006), and research consistently indicates that 'essentialism contributes to negative intergroup attitudes and negative intergroup behaviours' (Morton et al., 2009). However, an essentialist perspective is thriving in the discourse around this issue.

The essentialist perspective predominates in educational and policy responses to the gender gap, with Mills, Martino and Lingard (2007) arguing that political response to this issue in the Australian context is reliant upon 'populist literature and submissions from the boys' lobby, as well as practice-oriented submission to the neglect of theoretically oriented and (pro-) feminist work' (p. 5), a contention equally applicable across a range of other nations grappling to be responsive to the moral panic around the gender gap (e.g. Martino & Kehler, 2007; Martino, 2008). This political response ignores the strong 'research-based evidence (that) confirms that hegemonic masculinity is at the heart of many of the problems that boys are experiencing in schools' (Martino & Kehler, 2007, p. 411). By situating the issue as a problem of biology or gender-determined cognitive factors, the social influences that perpetuate it are all but ignored. If the gap is not incontrovertible due to an immutable biological nature, and is, in contrast, a multi-factorial construct influenced by a range of factors including the social and historical, there is a need to challenge this construct of boys' literacy, as these pervasive essentialist beliefs being currently widely expressed can 'reciprocally affect the social structure' (Morton et al., 2009, p. 653).

The notion that 'girls read fiction and boys read non-fiction' is a 'common belief' about boys' reading (Simpson, 1996, p. 268) that has been widely accepted, an adhered to 'adage that boys are often more interested in fact than fiction' (Haupt, 2003, p. 19), with a perceived preference for non-fiction a 'common stereotype' (Sims, 2012, p. 1), despite the fact that it is not yet consistently supported by a robust body of empirical research. Participants in book selection studies that are primarily conducted in the US are almost uniformly found to select fiction with greater frequency than non-fiction regardless of gender (e.g. Sims, 2012; Williams, 2008). For example, Harkrader and Moore (1997) found that both boys and girls in a study of fourth graders in Ohio preferred non-fiction. A more recent study of Black 8–12 year olds in Florida found that

while both boys and girls preferred fiction, girls were more likely to choose non-fiction than boys (Williams, 2008). Australian research with teenagers in New South Wales found that fiction was 'the overwhelming favourite genre for both boys and girls' (Manuel & Robinson, 2003, p. 69). A large sample study in the UK also challenged the idea that boys prefer non-fiction:

There is a common misconception that boys at these ages read non-fiction almost exclusively. This is not borne out by the survey findings, although the overwhelming majority (78%) of those few children who do choose to read exclusively non-fiction are boys. But only 2% of children in our survey chose non-fiction as their exclusive book-reading diet (Coles & Hall, 2002, p. 105)

While there is a strong impetus to provide appealing and relevant reading materials that are responsive to young people's preferences, pigeonholing boys as a uniform group of non-fiction lovers can feminise fiction and re-enforce gender stereotypes. Even where boys have been found to read more fiction, emphasis is often placed on their non-fiction 'reading diet' and the 'positive connections between masculinity and non-fiction reading' (e.g. Smith, 2004, p. 15; Doiron, 2007).

Despite the lack of compelling evidence to support the contention that boys have a uniform preference for non-fiction, this notion has been widely expounded, and had gained considerable traction in popular culture. Anxious articles in the media, such as Lipsyte's (2011) piece in *The New York Times*, unquestioning support this adage with statements such as 'boys gravitate toward nonfiction', with similar stereotypes predominant in websites and blog posts aiming to 'empower boys to read' (Sim, 2012, p. 1). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) endorses the USA 'Guys Read' website in its recent *Trends Shaping Education 2015 Spotlight 7* paper (2015). This website contends that boys 'often don't feel comfortable exploring the emotions and feelings found in fiction' and expounds the importance of 'boy-friendly non-fiction' (Scieszka, n.d.), evoking a troubling and outdated stereotype of masculinity, which is situated as natural rather than a product of socialisation. The OECD is not troubled by Scieszka's conflict of interest as an 'American children's book author' (OECD, 2015, p. 3), or by the fact this his qualifications, as stated on the website, appear to be as follows:

Jon Scieszka is a guy. He grew up with five other guys – his brothers. This certainly influenced his worldview, and helped inspire him to start Guys Read' (Scieszka, n.d.).

As such, Scieszka derives his expertise from his status as a 'guy'. The OECD's endorsement of this website highlights the prevalence of an essentialist belief in a notion of boys' biological composition dictating their reading preferences and abilities. However, the most unusual aspect of this endorsement is that it contradicts the OECD's most recently published findings in this area, where fiction was slightly preferred over non-fiction by boys, as per Table 1 below.

	Fiction (novels, narratives, stories)	Non-fiction books
Boys	21.4	18.4
Girls	39.9	19.0

**Table 1. Percentage of boys and girls who reported that they read the following materials because they want to 'several times a month' or 'several times a week'**

Adapted from Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators – © OECD 2011

Indicator A6: Engagement in reading and performance  
Chart A6.5. What boys and girls read for enjoyment, OECD average  
Version 1 – Last updated: 26-Aug-2011

It is also a highly ironic endorsement, considering that one of the key points of the piece is the harmful influence of gender stereotypes (OECD, 2015). These essentialist ideas are also unquestioningly reproduced in professional journals, such as library and educational publications (Haupt, 2003; Sim, 2012).

Recent research suggests that by reinforcing what is likely to be a socially constructed preference, researchers may do even greater harm than re-enforcing existing stereotypes. They may also ultimately inadvertently contribute to inequity in gender literacy performance, the very issue that they desire to counter, as reading fiction is more strongly associated with benefit across a range of literacy indicators such as verbal abilities (Mar & Rain, 2015; OECD, 2010) than non-fiction. While 'students who read newspapers, magazines and non-fiction books are better readers in many countries,' 'the effect of these materials on reading performance is not as much pronounced as the effect of fiction books' (OECD, 2011a, p. 101). Research also suggests that reading fiction may be more likely to foster empathy and social ability than non-fiction (Mar et al., 2006). As such, steering boys toward non-fiction due to an assumed uniform preference may constitute steering them toward a choice that does not offer equal benefit, and rather than being responsive to their actual individual preferences, may socialise them toward

viewing non-fiction as the only appropriate masculine preference.

It is also important to note that constructs of hegemonic masculinity, which may discourage boys from embracing book reading, are not finite and immutable if we accept that they are not biologically based, and they are subject to potentially rapid change over time. While all boys may not necessarily read books with frequency, and their attitudes may be generally more negative overall than those of their female counterparts at this stage, recent findings suggest that reading may not be a socially unacceptable pastime for boys, and that, comparisons aside, a neutral or positive attitude toward reading may be more likely than a negative attitude toward reading (Merga, 2014a; Merga, 2014b). Skelton & Francis (2011) describe how boys' 'high-status constructions of masculinity' may be 'maintained alongside 'successfully literate' identities' in contemporary times (p. 457), suggesting that possibilities for young males to enact a diverse range of masculine identities and still retain social acceptance may be growing. Sokal et al. (2007) also raise the importance of examining how boys' perceptions of reading 'change over time and context' (p. 656) in the light of their very low (9%) findings of boys' viewing reading as a feminine activity.

To determine the legitimacy of the ongoing contention that boys prefer non-fiction, further current quantitative research with samples not limited to the US context is required. This paper provides previously unpublished insights from two recent studies, the 2015 International Study of Avid Book Readers (ISABR) and the 2016 Western Australian Study in Children's Book Reading (WASCBR). While the ISABR provides an international sample of avid reading respondents, the WASCBR data is derived from a group of Western Australian school children. When split for gender, these data sets provide sub-groups of male participants. Through analysis of these data, this paper seeks to support or challenge the popular contentions that males prefer non-fiction, with findings from two recent but diverse studies drawn upon to enhance the generalisability of the findings reported herein.

## Method

### *Participants and sampling*

The 2015 ISABR collected data from an international sample (N=1136) of self-perceived avid book readers (Merga, 2016). Of the N=1136 consenting respondents



in the ISABR, n=179 identified as male. Very slightly more respondents spoke English as an Additional Language (50.8%) than as a first language.

**Table 2. Country of birth of male respondents: ISABR**

What is your country of birth?		
Answer options	Response per cent	Response count
Afghanistan	0.6%	1
Algeria	0.6%	1
Angola	0.6%	1
Argentina	1.1%	2
Australia	6.1%	11
Bangladesh	0.6%	1
Botswana	0.6%	1
Brazil	0.6%	1
Canada	2.8%	5
China	0.6%	1
Comoros	0.6%	1
Croatia	1.1%	2
Egypt	1.1%	2
Estonia	0.6%	1
Ethiopia	0.6%	1
Gambia	0.6%	1
Germany	1.7%	3
Ghana	0.6%	1
Greece	1.1%	2
Hungary	0.6%	1
Iceland	0.6%	1
India	10.1%	18
Indonesia	0.6%	1
Iran	0.6%	1
Italy	0.6%	1
Kenya	3.4%	6
Kuwait	0.6%	1
Lebanon	1.7%	3
Malaysia	4.5%	8
Mexico	0.6%	1
Micronesia	0.6%	1
Netherlands	1.1%	2
New Zealand	2.2%	4
Nigeria	1.1%	2
Pakistan	3.4%	6
Philippines	1.7%	3
Poland	0.6%	1
Romania	0.6%	1
Serbia	0.6%	1
Singapore	0.6%	1
Sudan	0.6%	1
Sweden	7.3%	13
Tunisia	0.6%	1
Uganda	0.6%	1
UK (United Kingdom)	6.1%	11
USA (United States of America)	26.8%	48
Venezuela	0.6%	1
answered question	179	
skipped question	0	

As per Table 2 above, while male respondents were born in 46 countries, small concentrations of more than 5% of respondents were noted from the USA (26.8%), India (10.1%), Sweden (7.3%), Australia (6.1%) and the UK (6.1%).

As per Table 3 below, most of the male respondents fell within the 19 to 57 age range.

**Table 3. Age of male respondents: ISABR**

What is your age group?		
Answer options	Response per cent	Response count
0–11	1.1%	2
12–18	4.5%	8
19–24	15.6%	28
25–35	29.6%	53
36–46	24.6%	44
47–57	13.4%	24
58–68	7.8%	14
69 or older	3.4%	6
answered question	179	
skipped question	0	

Most male participants in the ISABR read with high frequency, with results skewed toward reading frequency, with 67% of respondents daily readers, suggesting that more individuals identifying as avid male readers read daily than their female counterparts (64.9%).

Recruitment for the ISABR was primarily conducted through online social networking, with potential respondents exposed to a brief informational item about the study, which contained a hyperlink to Survey Monkey, the site where the survey was hosted. Further information and request for consent were available at the link location; consenting at item 1 led to survey access. As a representative sample size for worldwide avid book readers could not be calculated, a minimum sample size of 1000 respondents was arrived at primarily due to the resourcing constraints on the study. After ethics approvals were granted, the study was piloted online, with minor changes indicated. Data were then collected from 21st of September to the 2nd of November 2015. Participants were primarily recruited through Facebook groups that mentioned reading or books, through a pay-per-click advertisement on Goodreads.com, a small number of forum posts on other sites related to books and book reading, and open comment sections on webpages with book reading articles.

The 2016 WASCBR recruited Western Australian students (N= 997) in Years 4 and 6 (aged 8–12, with

an average age of 9.8 years). Of the N=997 WASCBR respondents, n=429 identified as male. All were currently living in Western Australia at the time of the study. The ages of respondents are detailed in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Age of male respondents: WASCBR**

How old are you right now?		
Answer options	Response per cent	Response count
8	4.0%	17
9	45.5%	195
10	10.0%	43
11	39.2%	168
12	1.4%	6
answered question	429	
skipped question	0	

More respondents were in Year 4 (52.3%) than Year 6 (47.7%). While 35% of these male respondents were daily readers, slightly more females (39.4%) read books for recreation daily. The different age distributions and range of geographical locations across both samples allows for broader generalisability of the findings; they are not specific to a single geographic context or limited age range.

Recruitment for the WASCBR was controlled to ensure as representative as possible a sample be generated, which precluded the use of random sampling. A sample size of 23 schools was needed in order to obtain results sufficiently robust to be reflective of the target population. The final data set included 24 schools from diverse backgrounds. This included rural and metropolitan schools, government and non-government schools, public and private schools, and schools in varying socio-economic environments. The average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage rating for the schools who participated in the main sample (1040.9) was close to the overall average in Australia (1000). Once ethics approvals were granted and the study was rigorously piloted at a local school, schools participating in the final data set were recruited via email. Unlike the ISABR, the respondents in the WASCBR study were not uniformly avid readers, with only 37.5% of all respondents reading books on a daily basis, whereas 65.1% of all ISABR respondents read every day.

**Research design**

Both studies used a within-stage mixed-model approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Although

the ISABR accomplished this within a single survey tool, the WASCBR utilised a purpose-designed survey tool hosted on Survey Monkey and a semi-structured interview tool; both of which were delivered within a single-stage school visitation by the primary researcher, the author. The relevant data reported on in this paper is purely quantitative, as in this instance, it is desirable to obtain the required data without exposure to the subjective lens inherent in qualitative methods.

At item 18 on the ISABR survey, respondents were asked, 'Do you mostly read fiction or non-fiction books?' They were then given the option of selecting 'fiction', 'non-fiction', or 'around equal of both'.

At item 21 on the survey, WASCBR respondents were asked, 'If you have to choose a book to read, what type of books do you prefer?' They were then given the option of selecting 'Story books', 'Books about information and facts', or 'either story books or books about information and facts – you don't mind'. This item was carefully tested during the piloting phase of the study, to ensure that the young participants fully understood what was meant by each option. This item gave insight into preference for reading fiction/non-fiction.

**Results: Do male avid readers prefer non-fiction?**

**ISABR**

As per Figure 1 below, only 17.2% of male ISABR respondents mostly read non-fiction, with 49.4% reading mostly fiction, and a third of respondents reading 'around equal of both'.

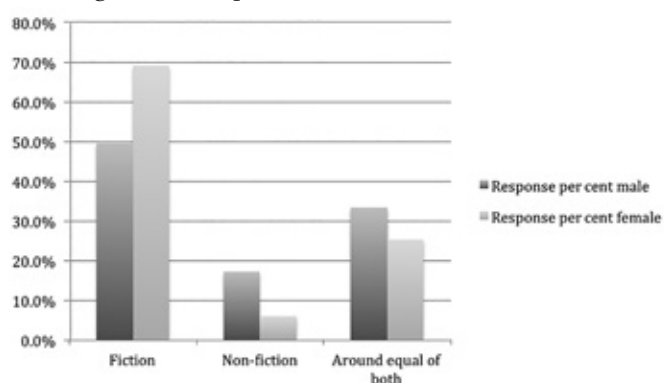


Figure 1. Response to the question 'Do you mostly read fiction or non-fiction books?'

Figure 1 above indicates that while more men than woman read mostly non-fiction, this is still less than a fifth of all men in the sample, and thus far from a uniform preference for non-fiction. In addition, with just over two-thirds of women reading mostly fiction, nearly one-third of women are not displaying a marked

preference for fiction, suggesting that many women do not have a marked preference for fiction.

### WASCBR

As per Figure 2 below, only 8.6% of boys preferred to read books about information and facts. Nearly half (48%) preferred fiction, and the remaining 43.4% were happy to read either.

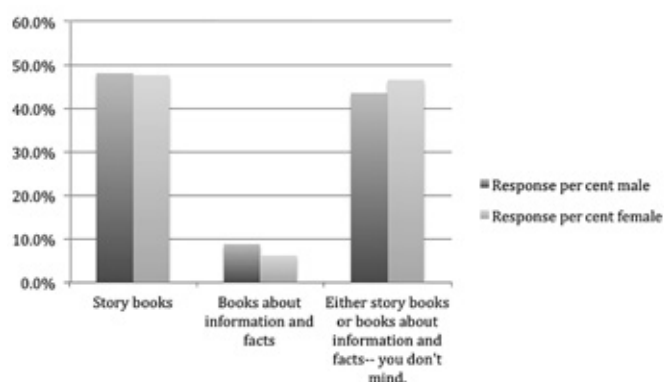


Figure 2 Response to the question 'If you have to choose a book to read, what type of book do you prefer?'

It is interesting to note how similar the male and female respondents' preferences are in the WASCBR sample, when compared with the older, international ISABR sample.

### Discussion

This research suggests that most of the self-perceived male avid readers in the ISABR study may not select non-fiction to read with greater frequency than fiction, and that boys in Western Australia may not prefer non-fiction to fiction. As such, this research joins the burgeoning body of research that challenges the myth of male preferences for non-fiction texts. It is also interesting to note the similarity in preferences between boys and girls in the WASCBR sample; while this could be due to differences in the nature of the questions (the ISABR question asks about frequency of selection, whereas the WASCBR question deals with preference), differences in available resources, preferences associated with age, or a number of other factors, it is also possible that today's boys are moving further away from a preference for non-fiction, perhaps in response to the increasing mainstream acceptability of male fiction heroes, such as Harry Potter and others. However, further research is needed before this contention can be broadly supported.

It is time for researchers in this field to actively commit to research translation, so that their findings in this area can dispel the pervasive and harmful myth

that males prefer non-fiction, which is clearly influencing both educational policy and practice. While further research interrogating this area of inquiry should be conducted, these findings need to be broadly communicated beyond academia to inform educational policy. Such findings should also be disseminated to address confusion in the general public, which has been perpetuated by the aforementioned prevalence of essentialist views in debates about how to address the gender gap in literacy. Researchers need to cease obscuring the fact that most studies find that males have equal or greater preference for fiction by foregrounding the caveat that more boys like non-fiction than girls, and downplaying the findings that at this stage, most males prefer to read fiction. If there is a tendency for boys to not (or no longer) view reading fiction as a feminine practice and we continue to insist that this perception exists, we may potentially (re)feminise reading fiction.

However, it is also important that these findings are not again appropriated to homogenise boys. While boys in these samples tended to prefer fiction, some preferred non-fiction or had no marked preference, and as such, it is important that an array of reading materials are made available to young people. It is also important that the determination of the composition of this array of materials not be left to self-professed experts in this field, who are knowledgeable on the basis of their gender and perhaps their conflict of interest. In such an emotive and highly-charged space, it is incredibly important that reading materials be informed by children's individual preferences, regardless of their gender. It is very important that research undertaken in this field be carefully designed to avoid children simply satisficing to meet the researchers' expectations, and that it acknowledge the limitations in factors such as design and sample size.

For example, in the case of the ISABR survey item, frequency cannot be conflated with preference without qualification. As such, this item gave insight into frequency of reading fiction/non-fiction. While it is likely that in most cases this strongly relates to preference, this cannot be assumed without qualification, as resourcing constraints and other factors could come into play. The ISABR male data set is quite small, at  $n=179$ , and though the WASCBR set is more robust ( $n=429$ ), larger scale international studies would be beneficial to further explore the generalisability of these findings.

Other limitations also apply to the findings herein. While the recruitment method was targeted and

deemed the most efficient way that an international sample could be garnered within the resourcing limits of the ISABR project, there is scope for respondents to grossly misrepresent their age or other factors such as gender if so inclined. However, it should be noted that the final data set was free of readily identifiable spam responses, and it is unlikely that many individuals would choose to spend 20 minutes filling in a survey for avid readers that offered no incentive for participation with intent to deliberately mislead. In addition, the ISABR sample had far fewer male respondents than female respondents, impacting on its generalisability. It cannot be assumed that this is indicative of a greater preference for reading in women; rather, it may be more indicative of a greater female presence in the recruitment spaces (online discussion spaces about books), greater willingness of women to identify as avid readers, or a range of other factors. Furthermore, it would be useful for future research in this area to track preferences over time using longitudinal data, in order to ascertain the impact of age on preference, with multi-site samples indicated to enable broader generalisability.

### Conclusion

This paper draws attention to the potentially detrimental impact a continued insistence on a male preference for non-fiction can have, with the reading of fiction books more closely associated with improvement across literacy indicators than the reading of other text types (Mar & Rain, 2015; OECD, 2010; OECD, 2011a), and a relationship between fiction reading and empathy development becoming increasingly apparent in the research (Mar et al., 2006). Rather than being responsive to a genuine gender-based preference, steering males uniformly toward non-fiction inculcates a view that this is a masculine norm, and as such, can become self-fulfilling, but with a potentially detrimental effect. The paper also clearly establishes that at this stage, there are little data to suggest that boys prefer non-fiction; the opposite has consistently been found to be the case.

In order to resist an essentialist perspective of males' reading preferences, key social influences such as policy-makers, teachers, and parents need to broadly recognise that they can help to shape males' attitudes toward reading, as this is not biologically determined. Unproven assertions that all boys prefer non-fiction may not ever be substantiated, and as such, these potentially harmful but widely accepted myths need

to be challenged. Continuing to promote this myth has the harmful effect of feminising fiction, which can in turn limit boys' exposure to what may be a more beneficial text type in terms of literacy outcomes and empathy. Literacy educators need to actively promote reading in all genders without falsely subscribing to constraints of potentially outdated notions of masculinity. Expectations that boys *can* enjoy reading, and *should* read with frequency in order to enjoy literacy benefits, should be communicated in schools, and supported at home.

### Acknowledgements

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# Teacher and institutional self-censorship of English texts in NSW Protestant schools

David Hastie, Anglican Schools Corporation

**Abstract:** Australian Protestant schools have often been depicted as sites that restrict knowledge. This paper presents the findings of a 2010–2013 field study of 137 teachers, exploring the nature and extent of Protestant School English teacher self-censorship when excluding and selecting texts to teach. In both survey and interview data, I find that the Protestant school English teacher sample was more active in text *selection* than *exclusion*, and found no clear evidence of institutional directives from schools or sector governance regarding English text exclusion and selection. The study also found that patterns of text *exclusion* were unlikely to be particularly different to those of state school teachers, but selection was more affected by religious concerns, despite the range of text titles appearing to be similar across both sectors. Additionally, self-censorship as a part of an *anticipated* parent complaint is also examined. The study also found that the Protestant school English teachers appeared concerned about anticipated institutional interference than there was warrant for in the data, and more than their own personal faith perspectives required. This appeared to indicate that Protestant school teachers may be hyper-engaged in questions about how their text selections and exclusions align with their own ideological beliefs and those of their employing institution. In the case of the English teachers in the sample, it would appear that the Protestant schools tended to be ideologically generative, rather restricted knowledge sites.

## Teacher and institutional self-censorship of English texts in NSW Protestant schools

To date, religious schooling in Australia and abroad has been frequently associated with restriction of knowledge, by those who advocate ‘open society’ and consider ‘closed society’ as civically damaging (Maddox, 2014a, 2014b; Byrne, 2013, 2012; Crook, 2011; Jakubowicz, 2009; Parker, 2009; Bachelard, 2008; Kaye, 2008a; Kaye, 2008b; Symes & Gulson, 2008, 2005; Law, 2007; Baxter, 2004; Wilkinson, Denniss & Macintosh 2004; Marginson, 1997, 1993; Seiferth, 1984; Knight, 1985, 1984; Smith & Knight 1978). Text censorship has always been understood in literate societies as a primary way of restricting knowledge. It is hence not surprising that it has been frequently depicted as part of the detrimental effects of religiously-affiliated education, and religious influence on educational policy more generally (Geddicks, 2010; Brinkly & Weaver, 2005; Godwin, Godwin & Martinez-Ebers, 2004; Harding, 2000; Provenzo, 1990; Wagner, 1990; Peskin, 1986).

The most rapidly growing sub-sector of Australian religiously affiliated education is Protestant schooling, a sector almost completely un-researched. Defining ‘Protestant’ school is complex (Hastie, 2012b, 2012c), however, ‘Protestant schools’ currently host around 17% of all secondary enrolments comprising Anglican, Presbyterian, Uniting, Lutheran, Adventist, Christian Schools Australia (CSA), Christian Education National (CEN), Australian Christian Colleges (ACC) and a range of high-fee to low-fee independent schools.

This article focuses on Protestant school English teacher and institutional self-censorship of English set-reading texts, exploring how teachers and institutions select and exclude

texts pre-teaching on the basis of faith, and the degree to which this might be characterised as censorship. This is a different topic to responses to actual *parent challenges*, about which I have published previously (Hastie, 2014).

The article does not seek to offer extended commentary on the ethics of text censorship, but to publish a body of evidence to contribute to the topic, about which *English in Australia* has been the premium publication since the *Top Girls* and *Fine Flour* controversies of 1997. Most previous articles in EIA and most other publications in Australia or abroad, however, are written from a radical anti-censorship, student liberation premise. I am careful not to take a stance on this one way or the other, and am more attracted by a liberal democratic consensus model of education, formed as a happy English teacher in a variety of NSW Protestant schools for 18 years. Hence I do not approach this study as an antagonist to religious schools, but seek to give voice to an un-researched and unheard sample. This is likely to have resulted in levels of sympathy perhaps higher than in many previous investigations of religious schooling, which have typically begun with a premise of the free secular state school as the social norm. With 40% of all Australian secondary school enrolments now in fee-paying non-government schools (90% religiously affiliated), it is the norm no longer.

Regardless of attested beliefs about theoretical models, however, it is my observation that most teachers in both government and non-government schools actually regularly practice judicious censorship of school set texts as a matter of course. In most cases most teachers would argue that this is merely reasonable duty of care, based on mostly unspoken consensus around education level / age-appropriateness, textual quality, social norms and reasonable parental requests.

The article finds ultimately that there is little difference between state school and Protestant school practice, but that English Teachers in Protestant schools appear to experience superfluous – perhaps irrational-levels of anxiety about the potential for text challenges, anxiety not actually corresponding to the measurable levels of likely challenge. Of greater effect, however, is the positive selection of texts based on teacher faith perspectives.

There has only been one previous empirical approach to Australian English classroom censorship, in Protestant schools or any other type of school, Hastie and Sharplin's 'Why did you choose that text' in *English in Australia* (2012). This is a small study (9 teachers in

three Christian schools), and does not deal with the topic of censorship. However it includes an excellent survey of the broader variety of elements influencing text selection, including: curriculum, student interest, limited availability, gender and canon. Additionally they found that 'the reasoning behind teachers' text choices is flawed due to decisions being made within the confines of traditional structures of whole-class novel study' (Hastie and Sharplin, 2012, p. 43). The religious effects on text selection were less explored, but they found that 'religious ethos does not consistently influence English teachers' choices of print texts' (Hastie & Sharplin, 2012, p. 42), a view that my larger study confirms, and this article expands.

I could find only one tiny equivalent study internationally (Freedman & Johnson, 2001). Text censorship research in the US, rather, focuses primarily on public libraries and public schools, and almost always reports on formal parent and subsequent school district challenges, many ending in vicious court battles. I have found only one example of library censorship in a Christian school in the US (Peskin, 1986), a librarian detailing blacking out sections of text in books: this single case is very widely repeated in the subsequent literature, probably far more than it deserves.

My own research, a mixed method field study for a PhD, measured the perceptions of English teachers around a range of religious effects in schools, of which censorship was one element amongst many. The study included 137 surveys drawn from 10 varieties of Christian faith based school movements, distributed at 4 different diversely populated teacher conferences, 4 seminars and multiple school mail-outs. Also surveyed was a control of 64 diversely populated NSW Department of Education state school English teachers, collected at the AATE 2012 conference at the Sydney Grammar School.

There was no interview sample from state school teachers, but the study additionally involved 20 double interviews from NSW Protestant school English teachers, drawn from 10 Protestant schools spread across a diverse demographic spectrum. By design, the volume of all the data nested around five schooling movements in particular: Anglican, Christian Schools Australia (CSA), Christian Education National (CEN), 'Independent/ Non- Denominational' and NSW state schools. Working from a phenomenological premise, the study proceeded via a hypothetico-deductive approach to knowledge, assuming that knowledge in theory (e.g. a school purpose or a theological system)



is not actually known until embodied in lived human experience, and that through embodiment the patterns of knowledge become enmeshed in highly complex phenomena. It is useful, then, to work with approaches that enable researchers to openly record human experience, rather than subordinating experience to hypothetico-deductive models. Phenomenological approaches are of great use in such studies (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Bolton, 1979). Guba (1978, in Patton, 2002, p. 38) asserts that 'naturalistic' inquiry is 'discovery oriented'—the aim being to minimise investigator manipulation. To examine what teachers believe and do in relation to religiously based education requires such naturalistic approaches, and 'emergent design flexibility': naturalistic inquiry design *cannot* be fully made prior to fieldwork (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, in Patton, 2002, p. 44). The qualitative interviews were also able to glean psycho-emotional responses through narrative method, often found to be useful in teacher-reflective studies of teacher behaviour and countering self-reporting bias (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Elbaz, 1991; Kagan, 1988; Leinhardt, 1990; Schon, 1987; Shulman, 1987; Yinger, 1987; also Reissman, 2008). Tracing the outline of an 'institutional narrative', and a teacher's proximity to it, is a revealing way of measuring the phenomenon of censorship in Protestant schools. Furthermore, due to the inherently politicised nature of this topic, critical discourse analysis was also used to frame and analyse the interviews (Fairclough, in Rogers, 2004; Bourdieu 1992; Jaworski & Coupland, 2002). The topic of censorship was indeed rife with emotional responses for teachers, full of contending stories about 'good society' and politicised arguments about what children should be permitted to read.

### Defining and classifying censorship in schools

In trying to understand the politics of such language regarding NSW Protestant School English classrooms, it is first necessary to explore the way censorship is defined, and by whom, and why.

There is no consensus about how to define it. Moody (2004), in what I consider the best of the few theoretical treatments of text censorship in Australian libraries and schools, defines censorship as 'encompass[ing] those actions which significantly restrict free access to information.' This belongs to what I would classify as a 'broad' of definition in the censorship literature. Likewise Hentoff asserts that 'the lust to suppress can come from any direction,' Citing Kerby that

'Censorship is the strongest drive in human nature; sex is a weak second.' (ALA, 2011).

Yet there are those who argue for 'limited' definition, including myself. Williams and Dillon (1993) assert that text *selection* cannot be classified as censorship: 'some claims are so facile as to rob the term censorship of any distinct meaning at all'. They also assert that removing texts from libraries that are 'poorly written and out-dated' in preference for those 'well written and modern in their concerns and values' is not censorship, although they offer no definition of the terms 'well written and modern'. McDonald, arguing from precedent of censorship practices during Apartheid South Africa, asserts that censorship should be defined only through a punitive judicial framework: that is to say, if a certain variety of text restriction is not legally enforced, then it is not really censorship at all (McDonald, 2012). Yet another way of delimiting the definition of censorship, is the tonal *intent* rather than textual outcome, or Asheim's assertion that 'a final distinguishing feature of censorship, then, is its negativity' (Williams & Dillon 1994, p. 3). I prefer this latter 'limited to negative intent' definition for pragmatic reasons as a researcher: the widespread practice of self-censorship amongst teachers has the same lacuna effect in all cases: books are absent, and the outcome of their absence on children can only be speculated, not measured. Rather, a teacher's *stated* intent in selecting/ removing a text is at least a measurable impact of religion on education, an impact on the behaviour of teachers. That is, as long researchers can convince them to reveal their motives under academically secure conditions, and controlling self-reporting and social respectability biases. It was this unguarded disclosure of intent that I sought from the interview sample and survey sample of Protestant school English teachers.

'Self-censorship' is strongly criticised by free-speech advocates such as Dillon and Williams, as being pernicious owing to its secretive nature:

like direct censorship, self-censorship is moral, authoritarian, conscious, deliberate and essentially negative ... self censorship is less defensible [than direct censorship] because it is motivated by cowardice' (Dillon & Williams, 1993, p. 4).

Whether this harsh assessment is warranted, teachers do appear to self-censor for self-protection. As already mentioned, Freedman and Johnson conducted a US case study of fifteen female middle school teachers, and their use / lack of use of a single print text in literature arts teaching to mid-teens. They

found teacher motivations for self-censorship were paradoxical:

There is an inherent paradox in the ways that teachers think about protecting (i.e., informing, educating, arming) their students, protecting (i.e., shielding, avoiding, disarming) themselves as teachers (2001, p. 368).

The study found that, 'despite all participants agreeing on the significance and high value of the text as an educative tool for complex social democratic issues, that the teachers would elect not to use it in entirety in the classroom'(2001, p. 364).

### The field study data

My field study did find evidence of self-censorship (intended negative exclusion) on the basis of religious belief, but also on the basis of many other factors. More often, teachers were engaged in text *selection*. Regarding their own text-to-teach choices, 137 Protestant school English teacher participants were asked to respond to two separate questions in the survey, and to indicate perspectives on a Likert scale:

I have selected texts to teach, on the basis of personal faith perspectives.

I have excluded texts to teach, on the basis of disagreement with my personal faith perspectives.

Almost identical questions were posed to a further 64 state school English teachers (the control sample), replacing the word 'faith' with the more generic 'religion'. Whilst over 70% of the Protestant school sample self-identified as Evangelical / Pentecostal, the range of religious orientations amongst the state school sample was diverse, with the largest Catholic, then a range of other Christian religions, a few non-Christian religion participants and a handful of agnostics / atheists. There were only four 'Evangelicals' in the state school sample.

Around 60% of the Protestant school sample reported that their personal faith perspectives had an influence on their text exclusions, but only 10% reported this occurring to a great extent. A third of teachers reported that they had not excluded texts from teaching on the basis of their personal faith perspectives at all.

However over 70% of the Protestant school sample reported that their personal faith perspectives had an influence on their text *selections*.

As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the state school control sample was different in two respects. Firstly religious belief had much less of an influence on text exclusion

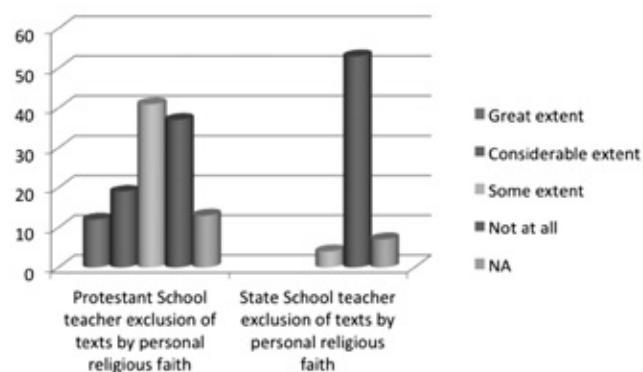


Figure 1. Teacher exclusion of texts by personal religious faith

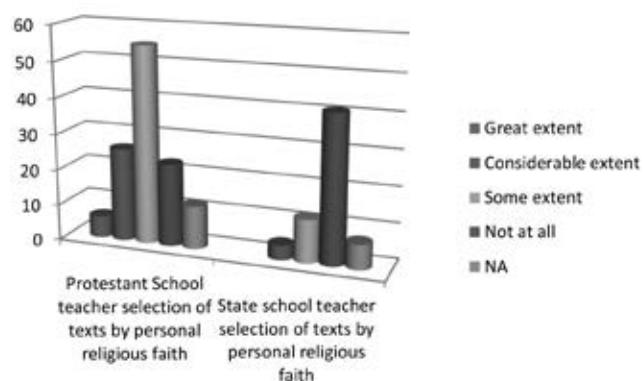


Figure 2. Teacher selection of texts by personal religious faith

and selection. Secondly, in the exclusion category, few survey participants indicated a variation from their selection response, i.e. selection and exclusion on the basis of religious faith were generally not distinguished, but both clustered together as a single phenomenon. Thinking about the nuances between *selecting* or *excluding* texts on the basis of religious faith was not a significant part of what teachers in the state school sample did day to day in their teaching, but it was a significant concern amongst the Protestant school sample. It was a live question for them.

### Personal text exclusion

This preoccupation was reflected in the interviews. Of course personal selection of texts was not always an option, owing to various course requirements (particularly at senior school level), but there was some evidence of pre-teaching text exclusions in the interviews. Very rarely, and vaguely, teachers reflected that they might exclude text on the basis of 'evil' content, but could not specify what that might mean: 'I don't know – maybe some presentations of evil, if it's like in a gratuitous kind of way.' Sexual content and age-appropriateness was a clearer criteria for exclusion, including the emotional comfort levels of students whilst studying graphic

content: 'I'm probably less inclined to teach Hamlet [to students below Year 11 /stage 6] because there's so much around about the Oedipus complex ... with stage five, I think students get uncomfortable in those sorts of situations.' Indeed teachers reflected several times about younger students feeling uncomfortable by depictions of sex in texts, and said they might exclude on the basis of empathetic nurturing. Some texts were also excluded on the basis of depicting life as hopeless:

A picture of something that they sort of don't need, but at the same time I know they're consuming text like that all the time. I would tend to try and choose text that has some kind of hope, rather than devoid of hope.

In one school that had experienced a recent student suicide, all texts with any reference to self-harm or suicide (including *Romeo and Juliet*) had been removed from all English courses. Amongst all interviewees texts were also excluded on the basis that they lacked artistic merit, and amongst some that tolerating graphic content was not merited due to poor textual artistry:

A lot of its content is, just, you know, a lot of cheap jokes and cheap laughs of a sexual nature, not that it's ever really particularly offensive stuff, I just figured that there were texts that ... whether I was a Christian or not, would be more worthy of study than say, something like that.

### Personal text selection

There was more evidence of teacher personal *selection*. Texts were chosen on the basis of pedagogy, 'I'm not afraid of teaching texts that I don't agree with – so I choose texts very much on what I think is going to inspire or grab the kids.' Course organisation was also a criterion, and making learning relevant for a particular group of students. Texts with controversial content were also willingly selected by participants to stimulate serious discussions, particularly around social morality, and by extension, Christian faith:

I'm not afraid of teaching texts that I don't agree with; 'the idea of right or wrong comes up there, so moral, ethical questions, and ... I'd program activities that would generate discussion on that ... I would often have times where my Christian faith would inform the discussion that we have.

In a revealing – yet sub-intentional- taxonomy, one teacher reflected '*I think you cover everything that's going to cause problems; homosexuality, violence and brutality*'. By 'problems' the teacher meant their perception of someone else's (parents / school officials) potential

objection. The teacher was prepared to teach these texts with 'problems', but teaching was negotiated within a schooling discourse that appeared – at least in that teacher's mind – to categorise homosexuality alongside brutality and violence.

As with exclusion, selection of controversial texts was also on the basis of perceived artistic merit: '*I would see in that text the promiscuity, if you like, is not expressed in a gratuitous way. It's actually expressed in terms of beauty and art.*' Some explicitly Christian texts – that might be characterised as Christian romantic pulp fiction (always in the school library rather than class set reading) were also condemned by some English teachers for lack of artistic merit.

There was also a relationship between teaching English texts and biblical canon for Protestant school English teachers. The first was teacher selection of Biblical – sympathetic novels, including particular Shakespearean works, Dickens' *Great Expectations* and *A tale of two cities*, *Jane Eyre*, *Silas Marner*, *The lord of the flies*, *Cloud street*, the *Narnia* series. Wide selections of biblical-sympathetic poetry were also present, including works by Donne, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hopkins, [later] Eliot, Heaney, Judith Wright, Bruce Dawe and Les Murray. Such texts are sprinkled with Christian-sympathetic themes, and Protestant School English teachers were choosing to teach them accordingly.

Teachers sometimes attested to deliberately selecting texts antithetical to Christianity to enable class exploration of Christian alternative or 'resistant' readings to English texts, such as David Mamet's plays, *Briar Rose*, 'The Waste Land', various gothic texts, and *Waiting for Godot*.

Hence the Protestant school teacher sample did appear to engage in proactive text exclusion and selection based on their personal faith, but tended to be more engaged in acts of selecting than excluding texts: proactive religious, social activist and aesthetic agents, choosing and including certain texts and stories. They are, in other words, more often *telling* certain stories, more than they are silencing stories. Whilst acts of inclusion may be types of acts of exclusion by broadest definitions, the language used to recount this process in the interviews was formative and creative, and occupied a different discourse to the language used around exclusion, unframed by Anshelm's 'negative knowledge' account. Only one participant, who taught in what might be characterised as a separatist Protestant school, reported negative intent stemming out a belief system:

There are some texts that I wouldn't teach because I would say that it is my domain to choose. I think there are so many good texts out there we don't have to deal with the texts that really do throw immorality in your face just for the sake of it ... But whether there is something that's obvious that I would choose not to take – there probably would be texts that I would certainly say I wouldn't go down there.

The other interview accounts of exclusion were minor, and mostly had to be elicited through interview questions, whereupon, after pausing to recall, the participant would recount incidences involving actual or anticipated parental challenge, usually mediated through the institutional apparatus of their employing school. If we agree that 'negative intent' constitutes the definition of self-censorship, as suggested in the opening paragraphs of this article, it would seem that the Protestant school interview sample did not significantly censor as an outworking of their own personal religious faith.

#### The anticipated parent challenge effect

I have written extensively in *English in Australia* about excluding texts on the basis of parent challenge in 'Satanic portals and sex-saturated books' (Hastie, 2014). However some in the interview sample were self-censoring without any specific external pressure, but rather an anticipation of challenge. This appeared to be on the basis of risk aversion, even though they saw merit in the text.

I taught it for one year and then I left and I don't think it's actually been used again. Because some of the parents might have complained, or one of the other teachers was worried that parents would complain. But I think from there it actually opened up some – it just opened up the students' minds to certain things in society or certain ideals, humanist ideals, so I think that suited that particular audience.

Well I think with Harry Potter there's been a lot of – I couldn't take it on as a text with the enrolment base that we have around the state. I think that we would get people pulling out somehow.

It's a hard one because censorship is at the edge of this. I remember it was one of those books ... That actually dealt with the whole aspects of paedophilia and some [staff] were very concerned about that. I don't know that I would have dealt with that as a class novel, but I would have been happy for students to read it.

Yet it cannot be said that the sample was being inundated with high levels of parent complaint about text selection. In the Protestant school survey, 52%

reported complaint, and 44% reported never having had a complaint. Of these, 10% were to a 'considerable extent', and only one teacher attested to having dealt with parental complaints 'to a great extent'.

The state school sample, in contrast, reported 34% complaints, of which only 3% were 'considerable extent'. 56% reported never having had a complaint. The figures for both these samples, however, should be understood as a minimum, and would likely be larger due to unquantified multiple incidents concentrated with specific participants and schools.

On raw figures it could be said, then, whilst parental challenge of texts in the Protestant school sample was not overwhelmingly large, text challenge is still significantly more likely to occur in a NSW Protestant school than a NSW state school. It would appear that this is having an anticipatory, self-censoring effect amongst teachers in such schools, seeking to avoid negative parental attention.

#### Institutional censorship

The unknown factor in the survey data is the extent to which both the personal and institutional exclusion figures represent pre-emptive self-censorship by teachers, double-guessing what the school institution might do if a certain text was taught, or how much is a reflection of direct intervention by the school. It is important to note, however, that even though prescriptive text lists exist widely in Australia, I have found no trace of any list of what may or may not be taught based on faith or morality. There is one directive from the NSW Department of Education and Communities restricting screening of M rated video material only to students over the age of 15; a ban that is neither required by state or federal law, nor applied in NSW non-government schools (Hastie, 2012a). I only found one public document indicating that any variety of Christian school, sector bodies, or dioceses were requiring teachers to censor, pre-exclude or pre-select texts. This was a generalised paper containing guidelines regarding text selection: in the Catholic Diocese of Armidale in NSW (Bishops commission for Catholic schools 2004), and I was unable to ascertain whether it is actually used. It does not advocate any form of restriction *per se*, but is more a guideline to follow should issues arise. This document from Armidale reflects what I found was actually occurring in teacher text selection in schools, a complexity echoed in some of the thoughtful material in the *English in Australia* special edition relating to the NSW *Top Girls* and *Fine Flour* ban (1998, p. 121).



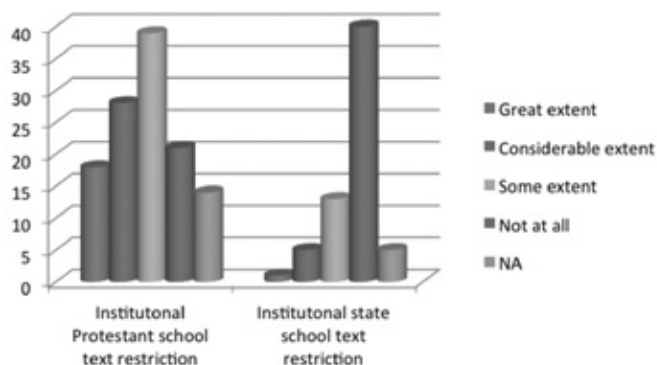


Figure 3. Institutional school text restriction survey data

However the field study survey data suggested more institutional self-censorship, a finding that was – confusingly – not supported in the interviews. Teachers in the sample were asked to answer the following question in the survey, and to indicate on a Likert scale:

I have excluded texts on the basis of my school’s faith perspectives

As before, the state school control sample had the exact question, but with the word ‘faith’ replaced by ‘religion’.

As figure 3 suggests, the Protestant school sample reported significantly more exclusion of texts on the basis of institutional faith perspectives than the state school sample. The complication with this question design, however, is that it could mean three different things: a directive from an institution to a teacher; a parent challenge that had been mediated through the school leadership; or a teacher independently interpreting the institutional faith stance of their school and personally applying it to their text exclusion practices. I found little evidence for the first, only twice (ambiguously) in in the interviews:

But yeah, I would say, here, that there’s not really a push from- from the executive level, to be making ... faith a key criterion of every lesson.

The difference which is seen – and I believe it’s the school’s opinion – although it’s not the opinion of all the staff here – would take the opinion that Harry Potter is sort of like – the world view of it is – sort of more from the dark side, rather than good versus evil.

There was also one report of a Principal issuing directions to *parents* from an assembly podium, suggesting their children not be allowed to view the film adaptation of Phillip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*.

I also found some evidence in interviews of informal advice to teachers from a HOD and once from a

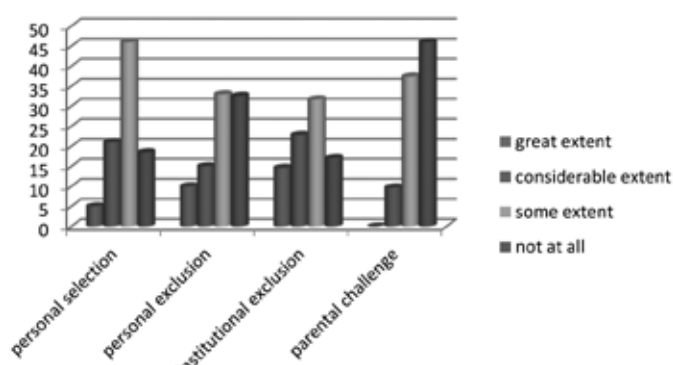


Figure 4. Combined % Protestant school survey data selection/exclusion rates

Director of Curriculum. Given the busy nature of their roles, direct intervention of principals is in fact logistically unlikely except in the event of a parent complaint.

There was evidence in the interviews for some successful parent challenges mediated through the school leadership (although far less than the school leadership actually *rejecting* the parent challenge), which was documented in the ‘Challenge process’ section of my 2014 *EIA* article (Hastie, 2014).

For the third possible reason: a teacher independently interpreting the institutional faith stance of their school; it is reasonable to assume that there is a strong overlap between the personal text exclusion data and the institutional exclusion data. The surveys and interviews found, in the main, that the teachers were in proactive ideological agreement with their schools. There was no evidence at all of subversion from the teachers.

**Relationship between the categories: self-censorship, institutional censorship, and parent challenge**

When correlating the Protestant school sample figures of self-censorship, institutional censorship, and parent censorship, we see that the rates of parental complaints are significantly lower than reports of personal or institutional self-censorship. There appears to be no correlation between teacher *selection* of texts and parental complaints.

As Figure 4 suggests, teachers are self-censoring on the basis of personal faith, and their perceptions of institutional standards, to a higher degree than parents are actually asking them to. Perhaps this is not unusual, as one complaint, from a particular kind of aggressive complainant, is likely to attract disproportionate levels of anxiety from teachers or institutions. Perhaps it is also reflective of a risk-aversion culture: a rising phenomenon that has been observed across all

types of Australian schools, and is not particular to Protestant schools. It may also reflect different levels of interest in religion, with faith-based schools and their teachers serving an (open enrolment) student family population that actually cares less than teachers do about religious and moral viewpoints.

What is more noticeable is the magnification of institutional censorship in relation to personal self-censorship. Teachers are excluding texts to a greater degree (10%) than their personal faith perspectives apparently require, owing to what they perceive as institutional constraints. In other words, they do not have personal faith reasons for some of what they are doing, but are self-censoring on behalf of the faith stance of an institution, for reasons *in addition* to their personal faith.

What do these figures reveal about the interrelationship of the dominant institutional narrative, with the narrative of the individual, particularly when the individual is to autonomously prepared to suborn some of their own faith perspectives in favour of the perceived faith perspectives of the institution? Perhaps the data simply reflects the usual kinds of disparities between the individual and institution that occur whenever the exchange of power occurs. Perhaps it demonstrates that the personal faiths of the teachers are not accurately reflected in the faith stance of their schools, although this was only apparent amongst some teachers in the Anglican school sub-sample (Hastie, 2012b). However it seems to suggest that a stronger tendency to censor texts around issues of religious faith, and to evoke religious self-censorship, lies with teacher-perceptions of the faith based school institution, rather than their personal beliefs, and not with the parent.

### Conclusion

The sample evidence does not indicate wide spread negative, restrictive intentions to censor by Protestant school English teachers and their employing institutions. Whilst faith plays a larger role than in state schools in text selection and exclusions, teachers are far more likely to be constructing and distributing formative stories through text selection than silencing stories. The interviews indicated a thoughtful, widely-read sample. There appeared to be an anticipation that their employing institution would require certain texts excluded, more than they themselves would exclude, but these figures do not appear to indicate actual institutional directives about pre-teaching selection or exclusion.

Many of the reasons for pre-teaching text *exclusions* in the interviews, I suggest furthermore, would be likely to be similar for state school teachers: sexual content and age-appropriateness; the emotional comfort levels of students whilst studying graphic content; bleakness and suicide; or artistic merit. Similarly, many text *selection* reasons would be embraced by all English teachers everywhere: good pedagogy; age and academic relevance; cogent course organisation; stimulation of serious discussions around social morality; or artistic merit. The only religious variations between state schools and Protestant schools that constituted a finding, however, was in this area of *selections*. Christian themes in certain texts (either sympathetic or antithetical) also might receive more focus, and certain texts would be selected because they expressed the Christian narrative. As we have also seen, the texts that were being selected were not particularly different between state and (even very conservative) Protestant schools, nor did I find notable difference in the personal reading preferences of teachers.

It was apparent, however, that English Teachers in Protestant schools appear to experience superfluous – perhaps irrational – levels of concern about the potential for text challenges. Such anxieties actually do not correspond to the measurable levels of likely challenge, yet teachers still may self-censor on this basis. These cases exceed censorship for reasonable duty of care, and appeared to cause professional discomfort for teachers, a shift from a consensus model of education to privileging an often phantom construct of the aggressive parent or institutional complainant. A possible way forward in managing self-censorship around this issue is for teachers to plan for, manage and educate parents/institutions around the issue of text challenge through formal processes, and filter their own Christian faith, text selection and text exclusion decisions through a formal policy rather than instinctive / reactive process. The American Library Association provides useful templates for preparing such policy and managing challenges (ALA, 2011).

Finally, if Protestant schools are involved in restriction of knowledge, contributing to ‘closed society’, this was not significantly demonstrated in the self-censorship patterns of English teachers and their employing institutions in the field study, or in any other published material. Rather, such teachers tend to be more engaged in acts of choosing than disallowing: proactive religious, social activist and aesthetic agents. It would appear that the Protestant school English

teachers tended to be ideologically generative agents, rather than enforcers of ideological enclosure. This is well reflected in many interview comments, but I will finish with one that captures it well:

As an English teacher I believe that composers – regardless of motivation and sometimes it may be manipulative – are interpreting the world to the people who read their texts. Their aim essentially – is to interpret experience and to interpret life. Quite honestly I believe that if Christian parents who have the covenant of their faith over their families, are so anxious about the notion of making the acquaintance of an alternative idea, then I think there are other weaknesses that I couldn't possibly address anyway ... I feel that as a Christian person there's nothing to be afraid of – in terms of what a composer can enshrine in a work, potentially can be extremely dangerous. I've never had to teach a text that I felt where a student acquainted with the ideas would then damage or threaten their faith ... If it is damaging or threatening their faith, then I'd be asking the question, is God too small for this concern to destroy or affect the answers that are going to come forth from any enquiry or any line of questioning that arise from this? I don't see reflected in scripture, any requirement to adopt this notion where all texts are strictly Christian. I can't find any demand there.

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# Professional learning for a new English curriculum: Catholic Education Melbourne primary school teachers and AusVELS English F–10

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**Abstract:** Teachers of subject English across Australia have been involved in a wide range of professional learning experiences to support implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: English* since its introduction in 2010. This article investigates the professional learning experienced by a small number of primary school teachers in two Catholic primary schools in Melbourne, Australia for implementation of Victoria's *AusVELS English F–10*. Institutional Ethnography and Bourdieusian field analysis are employed to analyse documentary and interview data, generating understanding of professional learning during this time of curriculum change in one large institution. The article finds that the professional learning in focus is coordinated by a number of key features, which are shaped by external factors from the wider field of education as well as institutional influences that customise professional learning.

## Introduction

In Australia, the Catholic schooling sector continues to be the second-largest provider of school education, the government sector being the largest provider and the independent sector being the smallest provider (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Operating within the third-largest Catholic diocese in the world, the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Catholic Education Melbourne is Australia's sixth largest education system and educates over 150,000 students in 331 primary and secondary schools. The implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: English F-10* (AC:E) by this large institution has been a research focus of a three-year ARC-funded research project called *Peopling Educational Policy* (LP110100062).

After ACARA's the initial release of the AC:E in 2010 and subsequent publication of a final version including achievement standards and work sample portfolios in 2011, Australia's two largest educational jurisdictions in terms of student population, NSW and Victoria, developed new English curricula, adhering to legislative requirements for state-based curricula. The *NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English K–10* was developed by the Board of Studies NSW (now called the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW) and became available in October 2012. This new English syllabus, mandated for use across years K–10 in NSW from 2015 after a planning and staged implementation period of two years, was formed by incorporating AC: E content into the existing NSW English curriculum framework organised around outcomes. *AusVELS English F–10* was developed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) and was mandated for use in Victorian public and Catholic schools from 2013. This curriculum incorporated AC: E content into the existing Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) framework that uses the language modes as the primary organising structure. The VCAA (2014) stated that the *AusVELS* curriculum 'ensures the maintenance and strengthening of particular Victorian priorities and approaches to teaching and learning ...' (p. 11), and a VCAA resource designed for teachers of

English implementing AusVELS *English F–10* states ‘the AusVELS website provides a ‘Hybrid model’ with some Australian Curriculum and the rest – VELS. Over time, the amount of Australian Curriculum will increase and the amount of VELS will decrease’ (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d., p. 4).

While the introduction in NSW and Victoria of new state-based English curricula that incorporates AC:E content demonstrates the power of jurisdictions on national educational reform, implementation of these curricula and the attendant professional learning illustrates the significant influence of institutional practices in managing and shaping systemic change. As Ball, Hoskins, Maguire, and Braun (2011) assert, policies are almost always institutionally customised, localised and translated into practice. Catholic Education Melbourne has implemented *AusVELS English F–10* using an embedded approach in which curriculum change has been thoroughly integrated into the system priority of school improvement and well-established professional learning practices. Led by the literacy team from the central office, this approach to implementation relied on professional learning that both reflects contemporary demands on educational systems and demonstrates distinction through institutional customisation.

### Professional learning and systemic change

In 2008, a comprehensive mapping of teacher professional learning activities in Australia across both the government and non-government education sectors identified a strong consensus among participants about effective professional learning (Doecke et al., 2008). Key findings of the project’s report confirm the role of professional learning as a crucial lever for system-wide and school-based reform, and also highlight the importance of grounding professional learning in local school communities and the increasing involvement of practitioner inquiry in professional learning (Doecke et al., 2008). The main difference, the report states, between the professional learning of the previous mapping project in Australia (McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland & Zbar, 2001) is the influence of standards-based educational reforms (Doecke et al., 2008). More recent analysis that articulates the right drivers of whole system reform as being capacity building, development of the entire teaching profession by building both teachers’ individual and social capital, grounding systemic change in instructional improvements, and a total commitment to systemic priorities

and strategies (Fullan, 2011) indicates the key role for professional learning in enabling successful educational reform.

A focus on school-based and teacher-driven professional learning has been realised in specific large-scale reform initiatives such as *Quality Teaching* (Ladwig, 2005; NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). This comprehensive framework for improving pedagogical practice is based on three key dimensions: the intellectual quality of learning experiences; the quality of the learning environment; and the significance of learning for students. Built on earlier research in Queensland that produced the Productive Pedagogy model, *Quality Teaching* is used by teachers to analyse classroom teaching practice, and more recently has underpinned the use of rounds by professional learning communities of teachers (Gore & Bowe, 2015). Use of this framework to improve pedagogy and the quality of assessment tasks has been shown to improve student performance and equity (Gore, 2014).

Classroom practice has also been the focus of a larger-scale change initiative in Melbourne, Victoria called *Powerful Learning* (Hopkins & Craig, 2011). Underpinned by the conceptualisation of systemic reform at the level of the school being a strategic rebalancing of top-down and bottom-up change over time (Hopkins, 2007), the *Powerful Learning* initiative takes student learning as the starting point for identifying necessary changes on the basis of which a customised organisational and pedagogical approach is planned involving the adaptation of prescribed policies to the needs of the school (Hopkins & Craig, 2011). In subsequent work Hopkins’ (2013) argument for such inside-out school reform is reasserted through his debunking of the a number of myths, including that one size fits all in system-wide school improvement and that school autonomy is a guarantee of sustained school improvement.

Systemic reform based on models of professional learning that are school-based and focus on classroom teaching practice has seen the emergence of in-school roles for teachers giving them various levels of responsibility for professional learning. The job of working with teachers primarily in order to affect change at student level taps a number of significant veins in contemporary educational research and theorising: placing teacher practice in the spotlight is underpinned by research about the relative influence teachers have on student academic outcomes (Hattie, 2002); facilitation of sustained in-house and on-the-job teacher

training addresses the many criticisms of more traditional external, one-off or short-term professional development that does not place enough value on the situated nature of teachers' professional learning (Day & Sachs, 2004); and, the foregrounding of teacher expertise and local knowledge in school-based change fosters teacher leadership and more distributed forms of leadership generally in systemic reform (Zammit et al., 2007). In the US, numerous large-scale reform initiatives have involved the appointment of school-based professional developers to take responsibility of professional learning in the area of literacy in order to improve student literacy outcomes. The largest and perhaps the most well-known of these is the *Reading First* initiative which was borne out of the 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act* and funded the hiring of reading coaches in over 5000 schools to facilitate professional learning for the implementation of scientifically validated reading instruction across the first four years of schooling (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay & Unlu, 2008). In addition to literacy coaches, school-based literacy professional developers in Australia have been labelled literacy coordinators, literacy specialist teachers, and literacy leaders.

Education authorities in Australia have formalised this role to varying degrees, mostly in relation to the development of State initiatives involving all sectors of schooling funded through the Low SES and Literacy and Numeracy partnerships, two of the three partnerships comprising the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2014). For example, Victoria's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010) specifies the work of the literacy coach as centring on six core elements: professional relationships; data and evidence; substantive conversation; purposeful instruction; school improvement; and self-improvement. Each of these elements is divided into four proficiency levels, the first of which is the expected entry level of coaching practice required for working in Victorian schools. In Western Australia, the role of literacy specialist teachers is described as working 'shoulder to shoulder' with colleagues, with further details of the role largely being informed by individual school context (Meiers, Ingvarson, Beavis, Hogan & Kleinhenz, 2008, p. 47), and in Queensland, the work of literacy coaches is explained as 'build[ing] teachers' knowledge and skills by working in a coaching paradigm based on providing feedback, modelling explicit teaching and analysing student data to drive

improvement' (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2012).

The role of literacy leader places particular emphasis on the leadership element of being responsible for improving teacher pedagogy in order to improve student literacy outcomes. Literacy leadership was identified as being central to reading and writing improvement by a 1999 Literacy Taskforce in New Zealand, which described the concept as being realised through the provision of guidance and support in the classroom, regular professional learning meetings, and expert and up-to-date knowledge of best practice and its underpinning theory by the collaborative leadership of both the school principal and a school-based literacy leader (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 1999). The notion of literacy leadership continues to guide New Zealand's focus on school-based literacy achievement (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood & Parkhill, 2012). More recently, literacy leadership has been taken up by sixty high-needs primary schools in Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland through a Commonwealth government-funded project called *Principals as Literacy Leaders* (PALL). This project is premised on the importance of school leadership in literacy improvement, and research identifying the role of the school principal as being the second most significant factor among school-related factors, after teacher quality, on student performance (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). The literacy interventions developed in the PALL project by principals involved the combination of building leadership skills and improving knowledge of literacy instruction, and have produced positive outcomes in the provision of literacy instruction, teacher practice and student teaching (Dempster et al., 2012).

### Research context and methods

The project of which this research is a component employed the combined strength of Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2005) and field analysis (Bourdieu, 1990b) to research the implementation of the AC:E across NSW and Victoria. Both these research approaches aim to develop understanding, conceptually and methodologically, that begins with everyday work and social practices, and moves to explication of how these are shaped by other social relations, including institutional relations (Gerrard & Farrell, 2013). As everyday work and social practices are organised and controlled by texts, Institutional Ethnography places additional emphasis on textual



analysis (Smith, 2006). Through a number of research initiatives the project explored the enactment of the AC:E by working collaboratively with those charged with its implementation, in order to build understanding of their localised practices as well as the challenges and the potential for opportunities to reflect upon and enhance teaching and learning practices (Gerrard et al., 2013). This paper reports a component of the project that focuses on the implementation of *AusVELS: English F–10* in two Catholic Education Melbourne primary schools.

The two primary schools concerned are located in the wider metropolitan area of Melbourne, Victoria, and both have between 550 and 600 students. One of the schools, though, is located much further away from Melbourne CBD, and is in an area that is consistently identified as having a significantly lower average weekly income according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Data were collected from a total of 16 participants – seven primary classroom teachers, four school-based literacy leaders, two school principals and three members of the literacy team from head office – directly involved in the institutional enactment of the new English curriculum at these schools. Semi-structured interviews with individual participants took place in mid-2012, and a second round of semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers and literacy leaders took place in mid-2013. Interview data was audio-taped and transcribed. Documentation relating to their curriculum enactment work was collected from literacy leaders, as was documentation from the Catholic Education Melbourne website in the form of policies and guidelines. Documentation presented as part of the Prep–Year 8 Learning Literacies Project delivered by the head office literacy team during 2012 and field notes recording observations from this professional learning project also form part of the documentary dataset of this study.

Inductive analysis of the interview data was undertaken initially to develop commonalities and differences in the reported experiences of participants in relation to their implementation of *AusVELS English F–10* and related professional learning. Iterative analysis then saw the clarification and consolidation of analytic categories. Together, these categories provided a skeleton of the institutional organisation guiding *AusVELS: English F–10* implementation, and were subsequently analysed against the documentary data for alignment purposes to produce a set of key features that inform the professional learning for *AusVELS: English F–10*

implementation. This set was then analysed deductively using the Bourdieusian concepts of field, capital and habitus. Finally, pseudonyms were assigned to all representative excerpts from the interview data.

### **Findings: professional learning for curriculum change through a Bourdieusian lens**

Institutions operate within the specific logic of a networked set of positions, or a *social field* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and Catholic Education Melbourne is one of many institutional agents that operate within what we commonly refer to as the field of education. Discussed below are three key features coordinating Catholic Education Melbourne's professional learning for implementation of *AusVELS English F–10*, and what they suggest in terms of institutional habitus and the agency exercised during this period of curriculum change. In addition, figure one is a representation of these key features, depicting *AusVELS English F–10* professional learning nested within Catholic Education Melbourne professional learning projects, professional learning practices and the system's professional learning policies, and literacy leadership operating across these relationships.

#### *Professional learning policy*

The system's *School Improvement Framework* (SIF) (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2014) details a four-year process of planning for school improvement and related improvement in student learning outcomes as well as addressing school registration. A key component in this process is the School Improvement Plan, which identifies the priorities of an individual school and informs each school's Annual Action Plan. This plan subsequently guides each school's annual decisions about professional learning, as the documented foci in a school's Annual Action Plan determines the choices available to it for systemic professional learning. This connection between systemic school planning policy and professional learning is in part based on NAPLAN results as this is one form of data Catholic Education Melbourne requires schools to include in the reflection phase of the school review process (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2014).

The policy document titled *Learning Centred Schools, A Sacred Landscape: Learning and Teaching Framework & Strategy 2009–2013* (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2009a) specifies the nature of contemporary curriculum and pedagogy in a Catholic Education Melbourne school and states, 'in a learning centred

school teachers engage in collaborative exploration and ongoing professional learning guided by relevant school-based experience and contemporary educational research. Opportunities are provided for personalised and transformative learning for all teachers in the school' (p. 7). This document presents five innovation streams that relate directly to professional learning and are activated through seven literacy professional learning projects (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2009b). Catholic Education Melbourne also articulates professional learning as an important element of literacy leadership. The Literacy Leader Framework in the *Developing Literacy Leadership* document (2007), which sets out the 'agreed literacy leadership practices' (p. 1), specifies that literacy leaders 'encourage, acknowledge and support the professional learning of their colleagues' and 'actively and collaboratively assist colleagues to improve teaching practice' (p. 3). In the *Literacy: Learning for Life (2009–2013)* document, 'sustained investment in literacy leadership and teachers' professional learning' is set out as the means of realising the system's aims in terms of literacy. The system's most recent literacy policy document, *Literacy 2015* (Catholic Education Melbourne, 2015), refers to professional learning in relation to numerous literacy projects and services that are designed to address three areas for action: supporting leadership of whole-school improvement; supporting pedagogical practice; and developing system settings.

### *Professional learning practices*

Educational policies are brought to life when they are put into practice – that is, when they are interpreted and enacted in particular social and temporal contexts. In a Bourdieusian conceptual frame, the social action of putting something into practice emerges from the interrelationship at any given point in time between the dynamics and structure of a field and an agent's habitus (Swartz, 1997), habitus being an agent's 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53). Thus, the interaction between the contemporary field of education and the institutional habitus of Catholic Education Melbourne produces the specific action it takes, including in relation to professional learning.

Integral to the approach of Catholic Education Melbourne to professional learning for implementation of *AusVELS English F–10* is the literacy Professional Learning Team (literacy PLT). These are school-based groups of teachers who take part in regular and

structured meetings led by a literacy leader that often involve professional reading and related discussion, and time spent in literacy PLT meetings is logged as official professional learning with the Victorian Institute of Teachers. The literacy PLT model has been used by Catholic Education Melbourne for a number of years (Griffin, Murray, Care, Thomas & Perri, 2010), to foster a culture of teacher learning that relates directly to school context and encourages a shared responsibility for student learning outcomes. Larger primary schools, including the two involved in this study, have two literacy PLTs, one for Years Prep – Year 2 and another for Years 3 – 6. The literacy PLT model is consistent with the identified importance of grounding professional learning in local school communities (Doecke et al., 2008) as well as the reported need for AC:E-related professional learning to provide opportunities to work with existing school-level teaching and programming to address the requirements of a new English curriculum (Albright, Knezevic & Farrell, 2013).

The other professional learning practice that is well established within Catholic Education Melbourne is the knowledge-building cycle of inquiry based on the work of Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007) that structures professional learning according to three phases of inquiry. These phases ask the following questions:

1. What knowledge and skills do our students need?
2. What knowledge and skills do we, as teachers need?
3. What has been the impact of our changed actions?

This process of inquiry connects professional learning to the particulars of each teacher's students, and was formally presented in flow-chart form at each of the five professional learning days of the Prep–Year 8 Learning Literacies project during 2012. Introducing the process, the opening slide from the presentation on the first team day of this project stated:

Since any teaching strategy works differently in different contexts for different students, effective pedagogy requires that teachers inquire into the impact of their teaching on their students. (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

### *Professional learning projects*

Specific professional learning projects, which rely on the above professional learning practices, delivered relevant professional learning to classroom teachers about the change in English curriculum. Although

the literacy team included the change in curriculum within the professional learning projects examined in this study, *AusVELS English F-10* was certainly not the primary focus of these projects. The Prep to Year 8 Learning Literacies project (P-8), which ran for the first time in 2011, has a focus on writing development and includes sessions on rich talk with students about texts, and elements of writer craftsmanship such as sensory imagery and descriptive writing. The structure of this professional learning project is as follows: an initial literacy leader day at the beginning of the school year during which the project is introduced and explained and the roles and responsibilities of all personnel involved are set out; then, three off-site team days spread out over the school year attended by literacy leaders and their teams of teachers (selected based on needs identified by the participating schools) involving shared, in-depth and hands-on analysis of a sample of student writing and related instructional planning; and finally, another literacy leader day at the end of the school year, which concentrates on reflecting on the teacher learning that has taken place throughout the year and planning for how that learning can be continued beyond the project.

Another Catholic Education Melbourne professional learning project, called the Literacy Leadership Project (LLP), aims to develop and support literacy leaders by building their leadership capacity. LLP strives to challenge and assist schools in the task of literacy improvement, supported by the view that literacy leadership is embedded in the culture and structure of Catholic Education Melbourne schools. Literacy leaders from primary schools in each of the system's regions meet four times a year off-site (as clusters) for these professional learning sessions, which have provided information about *AusVELS English F-10*.

### *Literacy leadership*

As mentioned above, Catholic Education Melbourne policy makes clear links between literacy leadership and professional learning. Further detail about the nature of the professional learning generated through this system's model of literacy leadership arises from comments by classroom teachers about the role of literacy leaders; and indicates a focus on both individual teachers and school-wide literacy.

*Nerida:* So it's supporting, when you've got students and you're not sure how you can be catering for their learning so as a person who can be, you can go and talk to about – I've got a child at risk and I've got a child

who needs extension, I'm struggling with this, that it's a person you can go and speak to who has expertise and has been given professional development so they can draw on those things. I guess it's about a coordination of the things that we are required to do, so testing, all of that sort of information, data, all of that kind of stuff. Doing some modelling, again that's best practice and I guess then also facilitating the discussions at Professional Learning Team meetings in order to have us better our practice.

*Jon:* I guess it's just keeping in the loop with what's the direction that Catholic Education Melbourne wants to take literacy, and coming up with solid practical ideas you can use, not just theories and readings, good practical lessons that achieve the standards and will help us progress.

*Letitia:* I just think it's more as a support and you kind of ... I feel it like it's a bit of a mixture of guidance and support and this is how you do things and also let go and see what happens ... Actually if I say how we're doing fables, I can do this, this and this and she's like yeah, that's fine. She comes and models, she does things like that for us. She takes the class for us if I've got to do certain things with one or two kids, she's just there to support us, and she gives us a lot of professional knowledge that we need.

The comments of literacy leaders about their work also reveal their attention on individual classroom teachers as well as the coordination of whole school literacy imperatives.

*Evelyn:* I do a lot of work with the teachers in their classrooms. I do modelling of a range of teaching instructional strategies and look how we can improve student learning so we look at student evidence ... but primarily I look at what the needs of the students are, what the teachers want support in in order to support the students in their needs, and then ensuring that we've got the resources, the professional reading, the classroom help and, whatever they need, and the other thing is I do parent education as well – so, we'll have parent education sessions and they're very well attended here.

*Cate:* So we've started doing professional reading one section at a time, so now as part of our [PLT] meeting we also share knowledge, so we're trying to build a field of knowledge around grammar because for teachers to identify if the students have those understandings, they have to know what they actually need to know and that has come up quite a bit, that lack of knowledge and teachers verbally saying 'well we were never taught grammar, we don't know what this means, so we've got some work to do there'.

The Catholic Education Melbourne model of literacy leadership involves working with individual teachers and guiding school-level literacy direction, as

opposed to focusing on one or the other. Having dual roles raises the issues of how these are balanced and managed in context and how this aspect of the role is addressed in professional learning, adding to the complexity of understanding and supporting the position of school-based literacy professional developer (Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

The authority and responsibility assigned to literacy leaders in primary schools by Catholic Education Melbourne is a form of symbolic power, which is 'the power to make things with words' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 23). Over time, this symbolic power increases as literacy leaders accrue the resources that are valuable for literacy leaders to have within an institutional context. This mix of resources can be thought of as *literacy leader capital*, and are made up professional experience, professional relationships and formal qualifications, with primary school literacy leaders in Catholic Education Melbourne being able to earn credit towards a Specialist Certificate in Literacy Leadership, a Postgraduate Certificate in Literacy Leadership or a Masters in Literacy Education.

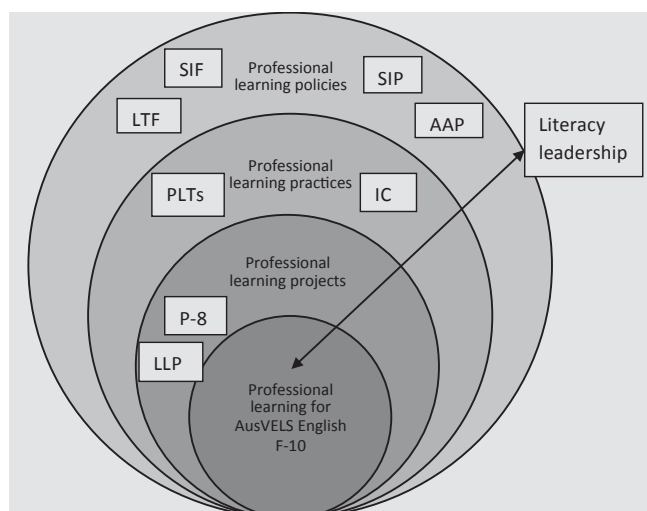


Figure 1: The relationship of AusVELS English F-10 professional learning and other key features of Catholic Education Melbourne professional learning.

**Legend:**

SIF: School Improvement Framework

SIP: School Improvement Plan

LTF: Learning and Teaching Framework & Strategy 2009–2013

AAP: Annual Action Plan

PLTs: Literacy Professional Learning Teams

IC: (Knowledge-building) inquiry cycle

P-8: Prep–Year 8 Learning Literacies Project

LLP: Literacy Leadership Project

**Exploring institutional habitus and agency**

The professional learning for the implementation of AusVELS English F-10 examined in this study demonstrates both types of agency said to be juxtaposed in

Bourdieu's concept of habitus. These are *adaptation*, where practices emerge in a field as a function of necessity and have a tendency towards social reproduction, and *distinction*, where practices emerge that differentiate agents from one another and which produce social reproduction based on perpetuating situated autonomy of differentiated identity (Swartz, 1997, p. 114).

Firstly, this professional learning can be seen as an adaptation to the logic of the field of education through its relationship with official planning for school improvement as part of the system's *School Improvement Framework*, in which NAPLAN data is one form of data required to be used. Any relationship between professional learning and NAPLAN data can be seen as a function of necessity within the contemporary field of education in Australia, given the regulating forces of what Lingard (2010) describes as the emergence of a national system of schooling involving new school accountabilities and public management through mechanisms such as NAPLAN and the *MySchool* website. For primary schools, this is a new form of adaptation that arguably makes them more like secondary schools, with professional learning in the secondary context having been significantly influenced by (end-of-school) high stakes testing in many jurisdictions for a long time. Secondly, this professional learning can be seen as an adaptation to changes in the accepted forms of professional learning in the field of education in Australia. School-based, practitioner-driven professional learning is realised in this professional learning through the practices of literacy PLTs and the cycle of inquiry, and the model of literacy leadership developed by Catholic Education Melbourne. Finally, this professional learning can be seen as an adaptation to the logic of the field of education through use of word 'literacy' in professional learning for the implementation of a new English curriculum. The fact that literacy-based projects were responsible for the delivery of information about AusVELS English F-10 to primary teachers, and literacy PLTs and literacy leadership were the professional learning mechanisms for enabling implementation of a new English curriculum in schools is an indication of the strength of the word 'literacy' in the primary school context. This may also suggest a tendency in professional learning to not clearly separate English and literacy or to conflate subject English with literacy in some jurisdictions and systems. Although the new curriculum divides subject English into the separate but related strands of language, literature and literacy,



the relative influence of literacy in primary schooling has most likely increased in the field of education through the entrenchment of standardised literacy testing in primary schooling. As Judy, a literacy leader, explained, 'The word literacy being a component of English whereas prior to that English has been called literacy, so that one word, yes definitely I think is an issue'. The prevalence of literacy in this professional learning highlights the challenge for primary teachers of subject English and those that coordinate their professional learning of paying adequate attention to language and literature as well as literacy.

This professional learning can also be viewed as a form of distinction within the contemporary field of education, with Catholic Education Melbourne customising its professional learning to reflect a specific institutional ethos and set of values. For example, *Learning Centred Schools, A Sacred Landscape: Learning and Teaching Framework & Strategy 2009–2013* (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2009a) refers explicitly to the role of professional learning in the realisation of contemporary learning and teaching as part of the institution's vision of bringing together the Catholic faith and education through living within the Christian Tradition and building accessible, strong and high-achieving school communities. Creating distinction through customisation is how institutional agents exercise agency that maintains their differentiated identity within the field. Maintaining system-based differentiation is possibly more important in highly populated areas where schools from all schooling sectors co-exist. The particular model of literacy leadership used in this professional learning, having received much institutional investment over many years and being firmly established as a driver of change within Catholic Education Melbourne, and the professional learning projects through which professional learning for *AusVELS English F-10* took place are also highly customised and are, therefore, distinctive elements of this professional learning. The *AusVELS English F-10* professional learning examined in this study can also be thought of as producing distinction through its adaptation to the logic or regularities of the field – that is, through links to school planning that involves NAPLAN data allowing for comparison between schools, and use of school-based, practitioner-driven models of professional learning, this professional learning generates practices that are locally contextualised, or tailored to each school. In adapting to the field, this professional learning

thus leads to practices that differentiate professional learning by school.

It may not be surprising that the professional learning examined in this study demonstrates agency that produces adaptation to the field and distinction within the field: as Bourdieu states, 'the *habitus* is a product of the conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 87, emphasis in original), meaning that an agent's action within a field is restrained by the conditioning forces of that field and therefore tends to reproduce that set of conditionings but as it does this it also constitutes or shapes the field through its distinctive action. What may be of more interest here, though, is the way in which adaptation to the field appears to support the emergence of practices that induce differentiation *between schools*. Professional learning that relates to NAPLAN data and that is school-focused and practitioner-driven implies that the nature and substance of each school's professional learning is distinctive as it is determined in direct response to each school's students and their specific characteristics. Such professional learning is most likely to concentrate on the 'identified' weaknesses of a school's student population and culture in order that improvement in the achievement of students can be realised over time. This professional learning therefore contributes to the logic of schools being distinct from one another in how they address students' 'needs', rather than them being the same or similar. As literacy leader, Judy, shared her thoughts about her leadership role, she expressed her desire for one meeting a month to focus on this type of thinking.

We [would] not talk about managerial issues but rather we talk about who do we want to be as a Catholic school in five to ten years' time, what do we want to be seen and known as, so that what's going to make our school different from the Catholic school that's five minutes north of us, ten kilometres south of us and around the corner east of us.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to explore the professional learning experiences of a small group of Catholic Education Melbourne primary teachers of subject English during a period of curriculum change. The key features coordinating the professional learning for implementation of *AusVELS English F-10* examined in this study are the system's professional learning policies, practices, and projects and model of literacy

leadership. This professional learning demonstrates both adaptation to contemporary demands of the field of education as well as distinction within the field through institutional customisation, and appears to support the logic of differentiation between schools through the influences of NAPLAN data and school-based, practitioner-driven models of professional learning.

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AusVELS English F-10 is being replaced by the *Victorian Curriculum F-10 English* in 2017.

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# Writer, reader, student, teacher:

## A critical analysis of developments in the discipline of English

*Duncan Driver, Gungahlin Colleger, Canberra*

**Abstract:** This essay seeks to recognise the value in a literature-focused model of the discipline of English, using I.A. Richards, C.K. Ogden and the American New Critics as models of critics who placed the text, and the reader's relationship with the text, at the centre of any study of literature, arguing that this relationship is analogous to that which should exist between text, teacher and student. It surveys developments in structuralist and post-structuralist literary theory and the way they have shaped the teaching of English over the second-half of the twentieth century, exposing flaws in the approach of the 'Growth', 'Cultural Studies', 'Textuality' and 'Critical Literacy' models of the discipline. It builds towards an analysis of David Campbell's poem, 'Night Sowing' that aims to show how a 'traditional' close reading of the text's aesthetic components reveals more than the politically-motivated application of the Critical Literacy model, concluding that the human connection of the reader/author relationship should be the foundation of any student's encounter with a text.

**Hector:** The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.

*He puts out his hand, and it seems for a moment as if Posner will take it, or even that Hector may put it on Posner's knee. But the moment passes. (Bennett, 2004, p. 56).*

### I

Hector, the gloriously flawed dynamo of literature, licentiousness and *jouissance* in Alan Bennett's play, *The History Boys* (2004), is the kind of teacher who exists rarely any more, if at all. He is Falstaff to the Prince Hal of late twentieth-century developments in the discipline of English. Once a teacher such as Hector could thrive in an atmosphere of idiosyncrasy and misrule, where the shared enjoyment of literature was like bread eaten in secret. Classrooms such as Hector's were sprawling, playful environments well-suited to what Ray Misson and Wendy Morgan call 'the excessive, unruly quality in texts' (Misson & Morgan, 2006, p. 154), a quality that requires a commensurately freewheeling pedagogy if it is to stimulate an intense, personal relationship with authors and their works.

Today, however, a range of theoretical frameworks and popular pedagogies in the discipline of English would check Hector's Dionysian impulses each time they threatened to steer a lesson towards the unplanned or apparently irrelevant. Works of Parisian post-structuralism such as Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) ushered in a whole new conception of the author-reader relationship that refused to acknowledge the communion between souls Hector found in the best moments of reading. 'Writing' came to be regarded as the play of signifiers within the closed system of language, while reading involved an individual and critical interrogation of the text. A wedge was driven between the author and the text and it was theorised that if language is simply a product of and for itself, an act of writing cannot be



said to have any meaningful origin in an 'author' who is only ever an effect of the text. There was nothing outside of the text (*'il n'y a pas de hors-texte'* (Derrida, 1976, pp. 162–3)), no hand to reach out and clasp yours. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Derrida in this semiotic *avant-garde* were Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, who wrote not of literature (or even writing) but of different kinds of 'discourse' that do not mirror or relate to an individual reader, but circulate through sites of power: institutions such as hospitals, clinics or prisons in which souls weren't communed with but created, known and subjected to the power that creates them and is created in them.

Educational theorists took their cue from these self-consciously radical post-structuralists and set about developing 'cultural studies', 'textuality' and 'critical literacy' pedagogies that could incorporate these heady new ideas into classrooms. By the early nineteen-nineties, theorists such as Robert Scholes (1985), Hilary Janks (1993) and John Guillory (1996) were arguing that students of English needed to be made aware of the ways in which language is used to maintain or challenge power, the extent to which novels, plays and poems should be considered as cultural artefacts carrying the same essential weight as their contemporary graffiti or advertisements. Texts, they argued, had no penetrable depth or inherent meaning, but were instead spatialised plains over which students should range, constructing meaning from what Roland Barthes called 'degree zero' (Barthes, 1968, *passim*), the point of encounter with any new text at which it is an authorless *tabula rasa*. More work for the student, and less play.

In the mid nineteen-eighties, when Bennett's play is set, a classroom regard for reading as a *tete-a-tete* encounter was fading fast. The author, if not dead, was dying, and the most *au courant* teachers considered reading to be a solitary – if radical – activity. To be fair, the death of the author in a classroom context was also influenced by the discourses, programmes and effects of political bureaucracy in this period. Indeed, this could be said of any paradigm shift in education, and it has been well argued that any reading lesson is 'resonantly symbolic ... signifying at once power and desire, and always the dreams and designs of a government' (Green, Cormack & Patterson, 2013, p. 340), but this essay must needs confine its analysis to the impact of literary theory on popular pedagogies; the shifting political agendas that influence educational practice are a separate consideration for a more expansive study.

Whatever the diverse means by which the author was dismissed from the classroom, it is fair to say that his absence had a series of complex and troubling effects, one of which was a deep ambivalence in new educational stances towards the unruly playfulness of the 'Hector' approach. 'These days,' argue Misson and Morgan, 'the aim of English education is often seen as the promotion of critical rationality ... in such cases play will need to be rationalised as a form of problem-solving, if it's not to be dismissed as frivolous indolence and self-indulgence' (Misson & Morgan, 2005, p. 25). Such an attitude was foreign to Hector, who considered the impulse to write and read a fundamentally pleasurable one. Perhaps this is why Bennett's stage directions call for Hector's hand to hesitate by his student's own before withdrawing. The action acknowledges that, as the author-reader communion dies, the teacher-student intimacy becomes necessarily circumscribed. As another character in Bennett's play states, by way of epitaph for Hector, 'I do not think there is time for his kind of teaching any more' (Bennett, 2004, p. 109). When Irwin says this on behalf of his colleague, he recognises a brave new English classroom in which literature is sublimated to language, power and culture, a classroom from which Hector must beat a rather hasty and regrettable retreat.

## II

The discipline of English developed swiftly from the old 'liberal arts' or 'cultural heritage' origin that many would find lurking in the background of Hector's teaching. Unlike the study of Classics, Mathematics or the sciences – which remained relatively static over the twentieth century – it was not until the nineteen thirties that English ceased to be a minor pursuit and began to assume the status of a supremely civilising, increasingly necessary one, and the rapid pace of its development reflected this increase in regard. Newly bold coteries of academics in various places set themselves to re-drawing the map of literature through an unprecedented focus on novels, poems and plays as things-in-themselves, aesthetic objects to be scrupulously dissected and rigorously discriminated. It would be a mistake to conflate the work of theorists such as F.R. Leavis, I.A. Richards, C.S. Lewis and the American New Critics into one coherent group, but for the purposes of this essay they are all giants of the English discipline who share attitudes that attempt to focus attention on the text – its unique features – and the reader's relationship with the text. Just as Hector

did, these critics all considered the reader, the author and text the only essential ingredients in the recipe of literature appreciation.

In *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1947) and *The Meaning of Meaning* (1949), I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden developed an account of the experience of a work of literature as aesthetic in its essence, combining this with a theory of language that differentiated literature and the study of literature from other pursuits. Richards made a simple distinction between 'two totally distinct uses of language: the referential and the emotive' (1947, p. 261). Literature, it was argued, uses, or rather *is* emotive language. He considered it impossible to talk about literature as though it contained, passed on or referred to knowledge outside of itself: 'It tells, or should tell us, nothing' (1949, p. 158) and no contextual knowledge should need to be brought to bear in order to make sense of it.

The American New Critics who lived and thought from the nineteen thirties to the nineteen sixties were of a similar mind. They were sympathetic to Richards and Ogden inasmuch as they also called for attention to literature as literature, insisting upon the difference between literature and other kinds of writing and attempting to define that difference in theoretical terms. Where a work such as *Principles of Literary Criticism* set out to develop a theoretical framework within which discriminating criticism could be conducted, the American New Critics aimed, in John Crowe Ransom's words, to examine how 'Figures of speech twist accident away from the straight course, as if to intimate astonishing lapses of rationality beneath the smooth surfaces of discourse, inviting perceptual attention, and weakening the tyranny of science over the arts' (1937, p. 784). The New Critics sought to emphasise the distinctive properties of literature as much as Richards and Ogden did: they wanted to deal with literature in a way that was theoretically rigorous and to use this theory to bridge a widening gap between art and an alienated modern world. They argued that a work of literature was a self-enclosed object, a universe unto itself, one which could not be regarded on anything other than its own terms. Its various parts were interrelated to such an extent that it formed an impenetrable organic unity that could be studied by an individual person as an individual object, but never solely as the product or expression of its environment. A poem, play or novel was not an oddly-shaped container for philosophy, politics or culture; it was an independent entity with

features of its own. Writing more recently, Misson and Morgan agree inasmuch as they place a comparable emphasis on the aesthetic and emotive dimensions of literature, dimensions they recognise as having been obscured by the looming giants of post-structuralism and critical literacy. As they write, 'aesthetic texts aim to make us apprehend significance rather than comprehend facts and arguments; the shaping of the text is vital; and feeling is as important as thinking in the response they elicit ... the pleasure this brings, can derive from the formal elements in texts: the clinching rhyme of a couplet in a poem, the structural balance of a sonnet, the unexpectedly right resolution of a storyline' (Misson & Morgan, 2005, pp. 19–21).

It was not until the late nineteen sixties that educators saw fit to question these notions of how a reader should relate to a text or which of its components should be isolated and examined in the classroom. One of the many knotty reasons for the change was, as argued, the advent of Parisian post-structuralist theory, but, at least as far as secondary education went, the door was open to the winds of change from the first words spoken at a 1966 conference held at Dartmouth College in the United States. As John Dixon reports in *Growth Through English* (1967, xviii), the conference opened with the question, 'What is English, which now seems to us a singularly unrewarding attempt to focus attention on the subject matter of the discipline?' The conference responded by stating that 'English is whatever English teachers do' and that the real question was not, 'What constitutes the discipline?' but rather, 'what are the processes in place that constitute the teaching of English?' An increasingly radical shift of perspective was leading English teachers to define themselves according to the language activities they engaged in with their students rather than the literary content of their lessons.

Works such as Jon Dixon's *Growth Through English* and James Britton's *Language and Learning* (1970) amplified the radical new ideas born at the conference and developed a highly influential and popular 'growth' model of English that placed the student and the development of the student's use of language at the centre of the curriculum. Although Ian Reid has argued that personal growth 'has never been a pure dogma or fully theorised position' but instead denotes 'a cluster of attitudes with a hoary lineage' (Reid, 2003, p. 101) he does acknowledge that it 'continues to appeal to a large number of teachers and students for that very reason: it can mean different things to different people'. (p. 104)

For Jon Dixon, growth meant the maxim, 'To know the individual and work from there' (Dixon, 1970, p. 75). To be fair to Dixon and other exponents of the growth model, self-discovery is a legitimate focus for the cultivation of the literate self, and one not unsympathetic to earlier representations of English and the reading of literature as an individual's encounter with another individual through the medium of the text. Problems with the growth model emerge, however, when one realises that its emphasis on literacy, on the informal, expressive and functional aspects of language, tends to marginalise literature (Whitehead, 1976, pp. 11–17; Hansen, 1979 pp. 3–16; Allen, 1980, *passim*). Although he argues in favour of the growth model and its continual relevance to current practices, Wayne Sawyer admits as much when arguing that the growth model 'stressed the active use of language and replaced an 'English-as-content' model with an 'English-as-activity' model' (Sawyer, 2008, p. 325). For earlier literary critics, it was axiomatic that the literary content of a lesson was *communicative*, a word that emphasises the dialogical relationship between author and reader much more than the growth model's preferred terms 'expression' and 'emancipation', focusing as they do on the development of the individual student.

Because the growth model concerns itself with language as students speak it, moreover, the whole of lived experience can be considered appropriate content for any given English lesson, a rather daunting prospect for a teacher. Literature itself becomes much more widely defined under the auspices of 'growth' as anything that translates lived experience into expressive signs and symbols. Britton, for instance, argues that 'once we recognise the value of books as a source of experience, we must admit as similar sources the visual-verbal media of film, television and stage play' (1970, p. 264). Not only films and television shows, but also advertisements and students' own written efforts, even their day-to-day verbal interactions. While there is nothing at all wrong with the study of film and television as part of an English curriculum – to suggest otherwise would betray a medium prejudice – and nothing wrong with the analysis of students' own creative efforts or their conversations in certain contexts, the growth model of English runs dangerously close to valuing all instances of language in the same homogeneous way, as instances of Richard's referential language in ignorance or denial of the more challenging and ambiguous aesthetic effects that great literature can possess. This is the flaw implicit in the growth model

as guiding pedagogy: it encourages the regard for all instances of language as equally weighted modes of discourse and it resists the evaluative and aesthetic components of literacy and comprehension that earlier theory considered to be self-evident. Any student can tell you there's a difference between an overheard conversation on the bus and a play by William Shakespeare; a good teacher could use the former to make the latter accessible and relevant, but they should always recognise which of the two is more edifying and warrants closer attention in terms of literary value.

### III

The growth model's loosening definition of what constituted 'literature' and its incorporative regard for what was worthy of analysis in classes were tendencies that thrived under theories and pedagogies following it. The 'cultural studies', 'textuality' and 'critical literacy' models of English regard all works of literature as cultural artefacts to be read for the codes and sign systems they are seen to exemplify and they accord literature the same status as other archaeological remnants: items of clothing, paintings, household tools and extant architectural structures. This approach is advocated by Robin Peel in her account of 'The 'Cultural Studies' model of English' (Gannon et al., 2009, pp. 31–43). Old tropes like 'symbolism', 'allegory' and 'metaphor' are rejected for carrying the suggestion of hierarchies, of textual foregrounds and backgrounds, and so new terms are applied for this new regard towards the culturally loaded: 'circulation', 'negotiation' and 'exchange' among others. Students under these models are encouraged to scrutinise the lyrics of pop songs, the poetry of John Donne and a McDonald's advertisement in very similar ways, finding in them the representations and constructions of gender, ethnicity and class that were thought to have authored them. Such classroom activities can, admittedly be very stimulating and beneficial to students. Jack Thomson argues this well in his essay, 'Post-Dartmouth developments in English teaching in Australia' (2009), adding that resistance towards the notion that all texts are of equal value constitutes a failure to recognise that the 'literary canon is itself a cultural formation serving the specific aims and interests of the groups who constructed it in the first place' (p. 9).

There is some truth in the notion that certain texts – or parts of texts – have been manipulated throughout history by those in positions of authority

in order to justify, condone, placate or deny. To glance over the western canon with twenty-first-century hindsight is all too frequently to blush at the embarrassment of dead white males on display. As much as this is manifestly true, however, it is also fair to say that certain theorists would have us throw out the literary baby with the canonical bathwater in their eagerness to expose the socially divisive machinations of canon formation. John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (1993), for instance, takes the rather extreme view that the western canon was actually formed by schools themselves and for the conscious and 'systematic regulation of reading and writing' (p. 23) on very Foucault-like terms. In Guillory's view, a school is a site of power channelling invisible structures of control beneath its facade of timetables and curricula. If he is right about the coercive imperatives that regulate the school as 'institution', one feels that it is not just old 'cultural heritage' or 'liberal arts' models of English that become redundant, but also the cultural studies and critical literacy that Guillory himself champions: would the substitution of a marginalised poem for a canonical one really liberate students from the hegemony of manipulation and control that Guillory finds dominating their lives?

We can extend our criticism of Guillory's views further. To suggest that John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, has been granted canonical status only because of the efforts it makes to support certain ideologies and deny others is to misrepresent both Milton's poem and the literary canon. *Paradise Lost* can be read as a radical condemnation of the groups that first extolled its virtues as much as it can be seen as their supporter. Similarly, that most canonical of writers, William Shakespeare, has long been celebrated not for the didactic or persuasive lure of his politics but for precisely the opposite reason: for his contrariness, for his ambiguity and ambivalence, for the ways in which certain of his characters inhabit diametrically opposed value systems to others and for the ways in which certain of his lines appear both sincere and insincere simultaneously.

If the canon performs an oppressive or declamatory function, it is one that we could say affects only the living writer who feels awed by Shakespeare and other literary giants, a feeling that Harold Bloom calls 'the anxiety of influence' (Bloom 1994, *passim*; Bloom 1997, *passim*). Writing less well than Shakespeare is something that all writers since Shakespeare have had to come to terms with, and his affect upon their style,

even on the very language with which they construct their texts, must be admitted. This needn't be as anxiety-inducing as Bloom states, however. One can take Hector's view that authors provide guiding hands to help as much as to hinder, and if we can admit that we today know more than the dead it is precisely because they – the canonical dead – constitute what we know. To put this another way, the literary canon is a loose, discrete collection of those poems, plays and novels generally thought to have passed the only sure test of greatness: time. It is a record of the texts considered worth reading because they are still influential and relevant; still read hundreds, in some cases thousands, of years after they were written. This should suggest to students and teachers that such works have essential human values that translate into the early twenty-first-century idiom and that transcend the cultural contexts in which they were created. To paraphrase Ben Jonson's elegy for Shakespeare, the canon is not of an age, but for all time.

It should be remembered, too, that post-structuralist, cultural studies and critical literacy models of English cannot claim to be free of their own agendas: they are self-consciously political – and radically political – movements developed by theorists and curriculum writers who cut their intellectual teeth in the heady nineteen sixties and seventies against the background of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war and in an academic climate that venerated Michael Foucault's philosophies. Texts or 'discourses', Foucault considered, didn't allow one individual to connect to a dead or absent other, they circulated through sites of power and served to separate, isolate and enclose the individual who was forced to perform individual tasks and was individually observed and ranked. Power was, to Foucault, self-perpetuating and economic and discourses were its central tools for gaining knowledge of and enslaving the individual (Foucault, 1995, *passim*). This view appealed to new models of English that were hyper-sensitive to the distribution and uses of power and that made a social conscience their defining characteristic. In his introduction to Dixon's *Growth Through English*, James Britton acknowledges that even the atmosphere of the 1970 Dartmouth conference was permeated by 'the desegregation controversies in American cities and the struggle for community control of education ("black teachers for black schools") the crisis in values in the United States accelerated by the growing reaction to the Viet Nam [*sic*] conflict and the revolt of students on campuses and in schools' (p. xi).



Teachers who are persuaded by the arguments of post-structuralist theory are, of course, free to follow their own political persuasions, but to accuse more traditionally-minded colleagues of promoting naïve readings of texts, of failing to engage with their political agendas or of capitulating to the ideologies they offer, is to ignore the fact that they also accede to ideology, only ideology of a different kind.

Such theorists and teachers considered that the way to avoid being enslaved by or subjected to texts was to interpret them in radical ways, to teach students to recognise the ideologies that texts served and to resist them by finding in those texts traces of what was silenced, suppressed or conspicuously absent. In an essay entitled 'Ideology and the Children's Book' (1988, pp. 3–22), Peter Hollindale advocates this technique even in primary schools, suggesting that all students need to be aware of the levels at which ideology operates:

- Explicit ideology; being the values and beliefs with which an author consciously imbues their work. For example a story that tackles green issues will overtly concern itself with beliefs about caring for the environment
- Implicit ideology: being the unexamined values – those that the author is unaware of conveying
- Dominant culture: being the widely accepted values of the dominant culture in a given time and place

He goes on to recommend a series of questions with which the English teacher can prompt their students to become more aware of ideological power structures and less in thrall to them: What happens if the components of a text are transposed or reversed? Does a happy ending reaffirm values that appear to have been challenged earlier in the text? Are the values of a novel presented as a package – i.e. aggregated into virtue or vice? Who are the people who do not exist? For instance, characters who are invisible but should be present, or those who are not named and only identified by a role?

In *Textual Power* (1985, pp. 17–83), Robert Scholes devised a similar pedagogy for English at roughly the same time as Hollindale. He regarded a student's reading and literacy development in terms of three stages: 'reading', where the student submits to the power of the text; 'interpretation', where the student shares power with the text; and 'criticism', where the student has developed power over the text. At the 'criticism' stage, the student exerts their own power over the

text by resisting the ideologies, worldviews and moral codes that it represents and developing their antagonistic opposites as they read. In an essay on post-structuralism within the English discipline (Misson, 2009, p. 73), Ray Misson provides a practical demonstration as to how this is done, detailing what he considers to be the main points in a conventional reading of David Campbell's poem, 'Night Sowing,' before revealing the radical voices that he regards the poem as having silenced. The short lyric reads:

*O gentle, gentle land  
Where the green ear shall grown,  
Now you are edged with light  
The moon has crisped the fallow,  
The furrows run with night.  
This is the season's hour:  
While couples are in bed,  
I saw the paddocks late,  
Scatter like sparks the seed  
And see the dark ignite.  
O gentle land, I saw  
The heart's living grain,  
Stars draw their harrows over,  
Dews send their melting rain:  
I meet you as a lover. (p. 73)*

Misson's 'conventional' reading of the poem sketches neo-Romantic themes of the individual's relationship to the natural, nocturnal world (Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' would appear to be its lyrical touchstone, though Misson does not mention it) and 'a discourse about heterosexual love and procreation ... a patriarchal view of male/female relationships with the woman as the passive 'gentle' partner in whose 'furrows' the male plants the seed' (p. 73). It is a conventional reading indeed, conventional to the point of being obvious, even tersely insensitive to the *bijou* charms of the poem. Misson goes on to argue that the coherence and completeness of his conventional reading works to deny the presence of harsher, more complex realities, such as 'alternative, more equal visions of male/female love' (p. 73).

His attempt to read the poem against the grain, to locate and amplify suppressed or silent voices outside of it, provides a neat object lesson as to what his and similar methods of criticism ignore and what they could learn from earlier methods such as those of Richards, Ogden and the American New Critics. The great benefit of these critical methods was that they all placed literature first when engaging with it; if

they covertly sought to manipulate it to serve a political agenda or to channel the currents of power; these impulses were secondary to their consideration of the text's aesthetic elements. I.A. Richards would have recognised that Campbell's poem does indeed lead the reader to consider the relationship between farmer and land in terms similar to those of parochial male/female love, but that the poem sows the seeds – pun intended – of its own alternative readings.

Considering the poem as an aesthetic object with imposed aesthetic rules and employed aesthetic techniques, it is easy enough to notice that where Campbell has made most of his lines of iambic trimeter formally masculine (lines that end stop on a stressed syllable) he has introduced the occasional feminine line into the poem (a line that ends on an additional, unstressed syllable), the last of which carries significant thematic weight: 'I meet you as a lover.' The last word of Campbell's poem softens the metre and formally feminises the role of 'lover' that the masculine farmer-speaker assumes at the poem's end. Thus any conventional male/female relationship the poem introduces earlier is complicated by the poem itself. Shakespeare does much the same thing when he blurs the lines between masculine and feminine gender in his controversial twentieth sonnet ('A woman's face with nature's own hand painted'). Though discussing a male subject, each of the sonnet's lines is feminine, defeating the speaker's continued attempts to identify the ways in which 'male' distinguishes itself from 'female'.

It is surprising that Misson does not recognise some of the more subtle ambiguities of 'Night Sowing' in his analysis, as he and Wendy Morgan raise very similar points when discussing John Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' in their excellent essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2005). They argue that the questions and answers raised by post-structuralist theory and the critical literacy method are not wrong, misguided or irrelevant, but 'that they often seem simply inadequate to the experience that the text is offering, if that's as far as you go ... It would be a great pity if students felt able to write the poem off as unworthy of their attention, on the basis of some sexist elements in some of the comparisons' (p. 20). What they say of Donne's poem is true of Campbell's too. As Misson and Morgan argue elsewhere, 'In the ideal of work of art ... there is a perfect match of content and form. The form has become expressively unified with the content; the content has found its natural (however strenuously worked-for) form' (Misson and Morgan

2006). It is the job of literary analysis to examine the ways in which form and content work together to create the aesthetic object and stimulate a range of complex, even ambivalent, reactions; it is by close readings such as these, readings that recognise the artfulness and profundity of aestheticised language, that we can mark the limitations of an approach to English that obscures aesthetic complexity and requires a socio-cultural polarity to be projected onto literature.

#### IV

If they are to appreciate how works of literature achieve their complex and subtle effects, then students need to learn about assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia and what the differences are between a metaphor and a metonym, between parataxis and hypotaxis, between a haiku, a sonnet, a ballad and blank verse. These may seem like examples of irrelevant and arcane jargon, but, as the brief analysis of Campbell's 'Night Sowing' shows, terms such as these allow us to recognise the brilliant complexity and technical mastery of a good poem. The recognition and appreciation of aesthetic forms that are unique to literature are key to making analysis less confronting to students and more profitable. Post-structuralism might excite revolutionary impulses, engaging a certain kind of creativity that thrills to the solipsism Barthes encouraged when he pronounced the author dead (1977, pp. 142–148), but it also denies the poem or the novel as a work of art, an appreciation of which is a more lasting and multifarious pleasure. As Misson and Morgan put it, 'When we give ourselves over to aesthetic pleasures, our submission can paradoxically be liberating ... we're active ... we collaborate with the text ... we become selves with expanded capacities for enjoyment: selves as various as texts and the pleasures they offer' (2005, p. 23). I would argue that this is preferable to the wary, resistant stance that post-structuralism and its coterie of educational pedagogies would have us assume when confronted by the text. One could argue that post-structuralism and this 'aesthetic pleasure' approach are not as mutually exclusive as this suggests: why not apply a range of theoretical lenses in the classroom, depending on the text under consideration or the outcomes desired? Some of the best teachers do indeed take this pick-and-mix approach to theory. For many, however, the breadth and depth of knowledge required to do this effectively is a tall order. One suspects, too, that because the frisson of post-structuralism still lingers in critical literacy and cultural studies, the popularity of

these approaches is 'close to becoming an orthodoxy, and risks hardening into dogma' (Misson and Morgan 2005, p. 18).

While different theoretical approaches and different interpretations of texts should be encouraged as a means to stimulate debate and to explore the various selves we find when connecting to authors through their texts, it should not be forgotten that the point of any debate or journey of discovery is to gain in knowledge of a given subject or self. There can be arguably better, more authentic readings of any work of literature, just as the aim of education is to lead any student to be more knowledgeable, empathetic and discriminating in thought. Alan Bennett's Hector would tell us that literature is there to allow us to recognise and pay tribute to the sympathetic minds and hearts that have gone before us on the road to wisdom, to learn from them and to recognise our shared humanity with them. The novelist and critic Zadie Smith agrees in an essay explaining why she no longer holds faith with post-structuralism:

I'm glad I'm not the reader I was in college any more, and I'll tell you why: it made me feel so lonely. Back then I wanted to tear down the icon of the author and abolish, too, the idea of a privileged reader – the text was to be a free, wild thing, open to everyone, belonging to no one, refusing an ultimate meaning. Which was a powerful feeling, but also rather isolating, because it jettisons the very idea of communication, of any possible genuine link between the person who writes and the person who reads. Nowadays I know the true reason I read is to feel less alone, to make a connection with a consciousness other than my own (2009, p. 56).

Smith's statement is an effective vindication of Hector's approach to literature and to teaching, which are both more social activities than post-structuralism would have them be. For Barthes, at least, 'play' meant the language games in which meaning could be endlessly deferred or delayed as words break down into infinite possibilities (Barthes, 1980, *passim*). The post-structuralists regarded this kind of game as a form of freedom, but it is only ever an individual freedom and only ever a game one plays by oneself. Hector's approach to literature may have been instinctive, even shambolic, but he understood that the games one plays with others as so much more enjoyable and rewarding simply because they are played with others: their value is rooted in interaction, in discussion, in discovery of the other as much as the self. Their very essence is human connection.

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# From Personal Growth (1966) to Personal Growth and Social Agency (2016) – Proposing an invigorated model for the 21st century

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**Abstract:** The Personal Growth (PG) model, as outlined by John Dixon in 1967, is unquestionably still recognisable to English teachers, remaining aligned to their philosophy of teaching English. This article traces a key aspect of the history of Personal Growth and explores present continuities traceable to Dartmouth in 1966, in suggesting an invigorated Personal Growth model to embrace 21st century life. Dixon himself never offered a concise definition; however, one historically significant attempt to do this was produced in the *Cox Report*, the document that defined the first National Curriculum in English (NCE) in England in 1989. In focusing on a key historical moment, the UK's *Cox Report* in 1989, almost half way between 1966 and the present day, this article addresses the continuities and developments stemming from Dixon and indicative of how subject English has expanded and changed over 50 years. A final move is to provide a new perspective on Personal Growth, more appropriate for the 21st century. Using contemporary Critical Realist theories of identity, Personal Growth is re-articulated to include a broader conceptualisation of an omniculture, and a prototype successor model is offered as *Personal Growth and Social/Cultural Agency*.

## Introduction

The Personal Growth (PG) model as articulated by John Dixon in 1966 is 50 years old at the time of writing, and his book is famously a report of the Dartmouth Seminar. His more considered text, the 2nd edition in 1975 (Dixon, 1975), clearly revises some of his thinking between 1967 and 1975 (Goodwyn, 2016); however, the opening chapter, providing his rationale for PG, was not revised; and he never offered a short definition of the phrase 'Personal Growth' itself. Indicating however his belief that Personal Growth would itself need revising, he remarked:

Is a new model for education struggling to emerge, just at the point when we have spelt out for ourselves the fuller implications of a model based on personal growth? Very well. The limits of the present model will be reached, that is certain, and thus a new model will be needed to transcend its descriptive power – and in so doing to redirect our attention to life as it really is. (Quoted [but not attributed] in Allen, 1980, p. 4)

There is no question that if we are to 'look at life as it really is' now, then we must acknowledge that the societal environment in which the subject English is taught has changed remarkably since 1966, perhaps most extraordinarily in terms of how culture exists and is mediated to audiences and individuals, with the role of the internet being the all-encompassing example. Equally, since Dixon's time, the double helix of globalisation and ethnic diversity has had huge impacts on nation-states.

I argue that we may now need to conceptualise that in 'developed' (and developing) societies, there is a pervasive 'omniculture' available to (almost) all young people (whether they

choose from it or not, it is there) and this both challenges and strengthens individual agency to an extent unthinkable in 1966. I use *omniculture* as a term with two complementary emphases. Firstly, as an umbrella term for all types of culture, dissolving the spectrum concept of *popular to serious* or *high to low*: and secondly, as it is more often used, as an alternative to multiculturalism, as in the following:

Omniculturalism is not just a combination of assimilation and multiculturalism policies. First, unlike assimilation and multiculturalism as practiced so far, omniculturalism is founded upon human universals established through empirical research. Second, in omniculturalism policy there is a strong bias to socialise citizens to give priority to human universals, and to only secondarily attend to intergroup differences. (Moghaddam, 2012, p. 317)

Therefore these changes to an omnicultural society for young people do not reduce the value of the fundamental elements of Personal Growth. Indeed, in essence they highlight how important PG's continuities from figures like Dewey remain (Goodwyn, 2016), with their clear definition of humanity as a reflective and emancipatory species with individual agency and responsibility in the real world, emphasising human commonalities.

In his opening pages, Dixon famously described English (Dixon, 1975, p. 1) as a 'quicksilver amongst metals – mobile, living and elusive. Its conflicting emphases challenge us today to look for a new, coherent definition'. One might feel that the 'coherence' of subject English remains elusive. This article will attempt to offer a form of ideological coherence, whilst accepting that definitions of the subject, and what it encompasses, will always be ideologically contested. Dixon was very clear that two of the models that he, and the Seminar participants, identified as powerful in 1966 needed to be reinterpreted; these were 'skills' and 'cultural heritage', and he argued that a model of *language in operation* will align those models with Personal Growth. The focus of this article is to consider how at least one curriculum context, England, reveals continuities and evolutions in these three models, and especially the primary place of Personal Growth.

The term 'models' remains problematic, and PG may be better conceptualised as a professional ideology and part of a complex identity matrix of which being a professional English teacher forms a core centre. In a previous article I suggested:

The term 'model', although useful given its long association with Dixon's conceptualisation and later 'The Five Models of English' (DES, 1989, section 2:20), is perhaps too simplifying a term. Within the debate about subject English there have also been attempts to categorise English teachers as different kinds of pedagogical agents. It will be argued that 'model' is useful as part of a kind of common parlance and is, in that sense, a practical way to communicate about English to 'outsiders' be they politicians, journalists or the public. (Goodwyn, 2016, p. 9)

As I noted:

Perhaps Dixon is drawing on the term 'model' as something that can be a three-dimensional version of a real thing, perhaps an exemplar of something with a hint of virtue about it, and also as something built as a kind of prototype. These variants seem to be what he had in mind in that so much of his argument focuses on the real classroom and lives of students and teachers and is very much about the future of the subject. He proposed (in 1966) a new and better way to teach English and offered a prototype that will need much development to become completed. This interpretation makes the term 'model' a kind of shorthand for these different elements and also for what is fundamentally more an ideology than anything else [...]. The term 'model' and especially 'Growth model' has endured for 50 years as a short and pithy rendition of what is a profoundly complex and dynamic conceptual framework. (Goodwyn, 2016, p. 11)

'Model' can also be considered a term for 'a very good concrete example' of the proposed method or theory and Dixon's book is very much driven by exemplars from classrooms, with these examples still resonating today.

However, clearly a great deal happened to subject English in the UK between 1966 and 1989. However, those twenty three years will be summarily refracted through the analysis of the 1989 NCE, where the first concise definition of PG occurs in the *Cox Report* [DES, 1989], the document written to justify and introduce the first National Curriculum for English – while at this time it was reasonable to speak of *the UK*, in 2013, it becomes specifically *England*. The authorship of this definition is never stated and by implication can be considered to be the Cox Committee (see Cox, 1991). As this issue of *English in Australia* follows on from the Special Issue that considered the history of English post-Dartmouth, this historic moment in 1989 deserves some attention, occurring as it does almost half way between the Dartmouth Seminar and its 50th anniversary. In terms of the formative ideologies of English teaching, *The Cox Report* does not compare

to Dartmouth in relation to generative thinking. However, it is a document with real intellectual importance – something obscured now, perhaps because it had such political resonance as the first NCE to be prescribed in the ‘English speaking’ world. Since then, most such countries (notably the USA) have moved – or are moving – in a similar, more nationally prescriptive direction (e.g. Zancanella & Moore, 2014).

### **The Cox models: the prominence of Personal Growth, the rise of Cultural Analysis**

There is no space here for a fulsome account of the genesis of the National Curriculum in England. Various accounts are available (e.g. Goodwyn 2005, 2010, 2011), including that of the key author of the Report, Brian Cox (Cox, 1991 – N.B. no page numbers in the original, just paragraph numerals). The focus in this section will be on the five models put forward, connecting three of them to Dixon’s ideas and examining the two others as examples of new, important thinking.

A close reading of Cox’s two books (Cox, 1991, 1992) referring directly to the genesis and political machinations surrounding the creation of the first NCE indicates that they never mention Dixon or *Growth Through English*. It is all the more remarkable, then, that Cox and his committee through their meetings and consultations, perhaps through some kind of intellectual osmosis, absorbed the thinking of the best English teachers and also became imbued with the spirit of Dartmouth. One telling comment from Cox which does show his genuine alignment to the concept of Personal Growth appears when he remarks on how important it was that the Report quoted the key sentences from the 1963 Plowden Report:

In our first report ... we included ... ‘At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child’. The inclusion of this quotation attracted much good will. (Cox, 1991, pp. 22–23)

Personal Growth appears as one model amongst five, and they are introduced as follows under the heading ‘The role of English in the curriculum’:-

2.20 It is possible to identify within the English teaching profession a number of different views of the subject. We list them here, though we stress that they are not the only possible views, they are not sharply distinguishable, and they are certainly not mutually exclusive. (DES, 1989)

No attempt is made to explain where these models came from, and there is no evidence that at any point the committee conducted any research to determine if English teachers recognised and aligned with these views of the subject. After presenting the models, the committee added two paragraphs of comment, and it is worth quoting these in full because they clearly reveal continuities in the ‘quicksilver’ subject but also its expanding remit, the ‘omniculture’ that is emerging:

2.26 Some of these views look inwards: either in the sense of developing the individual child or in the sense of developing English as a separate school subject. Other views look outwards: they are concerned with helping the child with the needs of language elsewhere in the curriculum, or in the outside world of work. Alternatively, they are concerned with passing on the culture from one generation to the next, and with critically understanding what that culture consists of. Another distinction is that some of the approaches concern essentially the child’s developing use of language, whereas others concern the knowledge about language and literature required of an informed and educated citizen in a democratic society.

2.27 Teachers of English will differ in the weight they give to each of these views of the subject. Indeed, some differentiation will derive directly from the stage children have reached at school: for example, the ‘adult needs’ view is more relevant to the later years of compulsory schooling than to the primary years. Some aspects of ‘cultural analysis’ are also more relevant to older children. However, aspects of media education are also important for children in the primary phase, because they can be influenced by the conventions and assumptions of mass media, and should learn to recognise this. (Ibid)

These comments make clear some continuities with Dixon, especially the emphasis on the individual child’s developing use of language, and equally they reveal a new emphasis in ‘cultural analysis’, focusing on mass media and critical understandings, including developing these understandings in primary-aged pupils. These paragraphs also posit a more agentive individual who is engaging with culture but critically, and is a nascent ‘informed and educated citizen in a democratic society’.

The document then presents the five models, with the first provided as follows:

2:21 A ‘personal growth’ view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children’s imaginative and aesthetic lives. (ibid)

The placing of Personal Growth as first was, perhaps accidentally, exactly right – see below – as it is certainly the ‘number 1’ model for English teachers (Goodwyn, 1992a, 2010, 2016, Goodwyn & Findlay, 1999). There is therefore, in England in the 1989, National Curriculum, English (NCE), a foregrounded, strong continuity with *Growth Through English*. This is not to say that the depth and the complexity of Dixon’s argument is fully represented in the Cox documents, and Dixon’s 1975 additional chapter decidedly broadened his argument with much more emphasis on communication and audience and rather less emphasis on the individual child (Dixon, 1975).

However, the continuity with Dixon is further strengthened with the appearance of Adult Needs, an updated version of his skills model, which he saw as a form of basic literacy (Dixon, p. 2). While he saw this model as having been achieved through provision of universal literacy, by 1966, it had become a problem to him as a form of practice leading to drilling and mechanistic exercises.

2:22 An ‘adult needs’ view focuses on communication outside the school: it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and of print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively. [DES, 1989]

This Cox definition is clearly much broader and more emancipatory than a simplistic ‘skills’ model and touches, presciently, on a ‘fast changing world’.

The third continuity – even in name – is Cultural Heritage:

2:23 A ‘cultural heritage’ view emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language. (ibid)

Dixon might well have argued (as I would) that this statement was not an updated version, still treating culture as a ‘given’ (Dixon, p. 3) and ignoring the living culture that the individual child brings actively into the classroom.

Dixon’s main argument was that these two ‘old’ models in ‘skills’ and ‘heritage’ were outmoded and needed superseding by Personal Growth, and his report was partly a manifesto to dislodge them. However, it is not clear whether Dixon expected them to continue in some form or to disappear entirely. The Cox committee

simply places them beside the other two, implying, though never stating, equal status between all the models, but qualifying slightly their age-relatedness in the prefacing comments above, 2:26 and 2:27.

Their fourth model was Cross-Curricular:

2:24 A ‘cross-curricular’ view focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum: otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects. (Ibid)

This model derives from the Bullock Report of 1975, which argued for a ‘Language for Life’ (DES, 1975). However, this has never been a model of *subject English* and research has proved conclusively (Goodwyn, 1992b) that English teachers saw this as emphatically the responsibility of other subject-area teachers. There is material here for another article about whether this rejection is a somewhat complacent elision of the issue in English of literary knowledge and its terminology. Importantly, this ‘rejection’ was repeated later in England when, for similar reasons, English teachers rejected being called ‘Literacy’ teachers in the early twentieth century (for an account, see Goodwyn & Fuller, 2011).

What was widely accepted by English teachers was the fourth and ‘new’ model, Cultural Analysis (CA):

2:25 A ‘cultural analysis’ view emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values. [Ibid]

There are some passing mentions of popular culture in *Growth Through English*, but there is very little attention to popular culture in the numerous Dartmouth papers, and it was simply not a priority at that time. This is partly surprising, because the Dartmouth conference was attended by many students of F.R. Leavis, including Denys Thompson. Thompson’s book, *Culture and Environment* (1933), jointly authored with Leavis, is generally seen as a seminal text in the development of cultural, and later media, studies. Thompson was subsequently the editor of *Discrimination and Popular Culture* (1964), a key text that came out of the national conference sponsored by the National Union of Teachers in 1960. 1964 also saw the establishment by Richard



Hoggart of the landmark *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at Birmingham University (see Hilliard, 2012). These developments help explain the emergence of Cultural Analysis in 1989.

By 1988 the world had changed dramatically from 1966. Just before the Cox Report was produced, a very different report, *The Kingman Report* (DES, 1988), was published – another story in itself. One of its statements, approvingly quoted by the Cox committee, was:

Round the city of Caxton, the electronic suburbs are rising. To the language of books is added the language of television and radio, ... the processed codes of the computer. As the shapes of literacy multiply, so our dependence on language increases. (Kingman 2:7)

This statement heads Chapter 9, entitled *Media Education and Information Technology*, which intelligently argues that these areas of knowledge should be a part of English teaching, and this is the acknowledgement of a truly fundamental change, towards what I am calling the ‘omniculture’.

There is a very interesting curriculum history, signalled by Chapter 9 of the Cox Report and the new model of Cultural Analysis, about the place of Media Education in the curriculum (Goodwyn, 1992a) and its struggle to secure a ‘home’. In England there was a vigorous debate about whether Media Education should be embedded within English (Goodwyn, 1992a, 2004] or seen as ‘cross-curricular’ (BFI, 1989), or a separate subject altogether called either Media Studies or Cultural Studies. However, research at the time (Goodwyn, 1992b) made it clear that Personal Growth, not Cultural Analysis, was the key model for English teachers, and they saw Personal Growth strongly infused in the first NCE.

I felt strongly in 1989 both that, while the five models were all important, they were not equally important to English teachers, and that the ideology of this first NCE was broadly in line with good practice in teaching English. An investigation to check this conviction was born out through an initial survey of serving teachers in 1990, which demonstrated that the first NCE was broadly welcomed; that PG was the key model; that ‘cross-curricular’ was seen as a necessary model but for other subject teachers; and that the other three models were, in effect, ‘equal second’. What might be seen as most striking about this latter finding was that Cultural Analysis was already as important as Cultural Heritage and Adult Needs. This innovative research was the beginning of numerous

projects, spanning twenty-five years now, investigating the relationship between new NCE versions and the ideology of English teachers. In retrospect, these varied projects may now be presented as one ongoing enterprise aimed at building up a body of evidence through successive surveys, observations in classrooms and interviews with English teachers, to understand the beliefs and values of those teachers as national and local circumstances, and society itself, were changing. This work has been extensively published elsewhere, and explains the frequent references to this author’s own work to substantiate that body of evidence. Here follows an attempt to summarise some broad movements, revealed by that research:-

The NCE, with each revision, becomes increasingly unaligned to the ideology of English teachers – the most distant point is 2013;

- Personal Growth has retained its pre-eminence;
- Cultural Heritage decreases in importance, increasingly reverting, in its official prescription, to that ‘given’ and élite form that Dixon rejected in 1966
- However, teaching literature remains central to English teachers, as a mixture of canonical and contemporary texts;
- Textual choice remains concerned with reflecting a diverse society with a number of heritages and including ‘popular’ 20th century texts from the English-speaking world, such as the USA and Australia;
- Cultural Analysis has become the second most important model for English teachers, with the gradual inclusion of media education in the NCE, between 1989 to 2012, generally welcomed.

Since 1989, there have been two broad periods of curriculum change in the UK. The first (1989–2013), although marked by several versions of the NCE, saw a steady broadening of subject English to include Media Education – itself increasingly broadening to encompass digital literacy as multi-modality became pervasive (Goodwyn, 2004). The research showed teachers maintaining Personal Growth as their priority, but with Cultural Analysis steadily becoming the second most important model, and Cultural Heritage (at least as defined officially) steadily declining in importance.

There was a kind of sub-period (1997–2007) within this broader movement, with the National Literacy Strategy, a massive policy intervention (Goodwyn & Fuller, 2011), fundamentally aimed at primary teaching but developing a secondary strand (“The

Framework for English') from 2000 to 2007. During this period, English teachers rejected being called English AND Literacy teachers, and profoundly rejecting the conceptualisation of the Framework (ibid), not least because it was not seen as student-centred, as with Personal Growth, but instead very teacher- and content-oriented, with much scripted teaching and prescriptive in-service training. The continuity with Dixon and Personal Growth remains clear throughout the period, with Cultural Analysis steadily growing in importance.

The new curriculum period begins in 2013 (and continues), with the latest version of the NCE (2013) simply evicting all references to the kinds of focus put forward in Cultural Analysis. Moreover, it is also heavily marked by being content-driven and by prescribing a very narrow version of the cultural heritage, essentially the English literary canon. The specifications for the GCSE examinations (for 16 year olds in England) also define Literature as deriving solely from the English literature 'tradition'. This shift to the fossilised traditional view of cultural heritage is exactly what Dixon was aiming to dislodge in 1966, and it is made more dramatic by the diminution of emphasis on Speaking and Listening and the reintroduction of terminal examinations, with no course-work of any kind.

The steady distancing of the ideology of the NCE, including the period of the Framework, from the ideology of teachers leads finally to a proposal for a new model of English that 'updates' but does not reject or abandon Personal Growth. Indeed, contemporary research evidence (Goodwyn, 2016) remains strong that Personal Growth stays central.

### A new perspective? Critical realism and nascent social agency

What Personal Growth needs in 2017 is strengthening and broadening, especially when curricular changes are so antipathetical, certainly in England, to the ideology of English teaching. I propose therefore a 21st-century model of Personal Growth. This must be, here, a necessarily brief introduction to an argument needing far more depth and development, but is offered here as a starting point for some further debate. Dixon's model was conceived during late modernism, and it has survived the inroads of post-modernism. During the last quarter of the 20th century, Critical Realism has become a force in social science theory (see Collier, 1994; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998;

Cruickshank, 2003) and has, I would argue, attempted to supersede – rather as Dixon argued that Personal Growth should – these two older movements. In any historical perspective they cannot be replaced, but that perspective may also reveal their waning influence; Raymond Williams notion of *dominant, residual*, and the *emergent* forms of cultural change come to mind (Williams, 1977). Both these movements had definitions of the self, identity, and humanity. Here I draw on Archer's model of the emerging mature social agent (Archer, 2003a) to argue for a new version of Personal Growth. Archer's Critical Realist model rejects 'modernist man' as 'homo economicus' and a 'completely impoverished model of man'. Equally, post-modernist humans are just a 'grammatical fiction', as she writes; 'a person is not a natural object, but a cultural artefact'. Archer argues for a far more robust and resilient model of humanity, and of the individual. In what follows, I summarise key strands of Archer's thinking and relate these to Personal Growth and its origins, particularly in the work of Dewey. There is an absolutely direct line from Dewey, through Dixon and on to Archer, focusing on the individual as an active and reflexive agent. I am, of course, not by any means the first in the field to deal with issues of Growth theory and agency (cf. Green, 1990). For the purposes of brevity, I return to Archer and Critical Realism.

Archer and many other Critical Realists frequently reference Dewey and the other influential pragmatists. For a fully developed insight into Archer's thinking, readers are referred to her trilogy of books (Archer, 2003a, 2007, 2012). Key elements from Archer (2003b) about the reflective agent can be summarised (my words) as follows:-

- We have 'selfhood – a continuous sense of self – a reflexive self-consciousness'
- There is a 'universal "sense of self" and an "evolving sense of self" for the individual'
- '[P]ersonal identity is a matter of what we care about in the world' (p. 19)
- 'our social identities are made under conditions that are not of our making
- There are three orders of reality – the natural, the practical and the social – and we need a *modus vivendi* to survive and thrive
- The process of reflection is conducted as an inner conversation as we decide how and what to be in the external world, it is an 'unseen moral life ---' monitoring our fundamental concerns

- Social identity can only be a sub-set (large or small) of personal identity because we have a continuous sense of self that interacts with a changing social environment
- Personal identity and social identity exist in a dialectical relationship
- The mature agent is active and reflexive – and enacts both social reproduction (the status quo) but can be part of transformation, that is, being emancipated and emancipatory. (Archer, 2003b, p. 20)

Archer also discusses the importance of the nascent personal identity of the young as they determine where to act (or be acted upon) by social reality. In this chapter ('The private life of the social agent' – Archer, 2003b) and her trilogy, she analyses developed societies as in a state of morphogenesis, partly caused by the affordances of the new modes of culture enabled by the internet and individualised computer access.

In the spirit of Dixon's model, then, I offer an attempt, perhaps best considered a prototype, of an expanded concept of Personal Growth, attempting to retain its Deweyan qualities (Dewey, 1997, 1980, 2011) but invigorated in accordance with a 21st century environment and 'omniculture', and emphasising the nascent agency of the emergent individual, following from Archer's outline. I must emphasise that this model still only focuses specifically on the role of subject English, most clearly signalled in the reference to literature:

A 'personal growth and social agency' view focuses on nascent and maturing individual agents and their emerging critical powers: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the reflexive individual, and the role of culture, especially literature, in developing the imaginative and aesthetic lives of children and young people.

There is, no doubt, plenty to quarrel with here, and I look forward to some robust reactions. This prototype provides continuity with Dixon, with its emphasis on Personal Growth in the Deweyan sense, and on the fundamental relationship between language and learning, of which literature is a key element. It then stresses the importance of agency and criticality in the maturing individual. The culture here is the *omniculture*, which is the environment for all young people in a developed society. This 'prototype' subsumes any 'Romantic' notions of the artist, something that critics often cite as an indulgent weakness in Personal

Growth (e.g. Hunter, 1988) by following the arguments of Critical Realism, and clarifying accordingly that the 'personal' is that which is at the heart of reflexive and critical agency in all humans. As such, this perspective offers emancipatory potential in the social world. Just as importantly, it connects us back to the project that Dixon first articulated, based on his participation in the Dartmouth Seminar, fifty years ago.

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# English as Rhetoric? – Once More, with Feeling ...<sup>1</sup>

Bill Green, Charles Sturt University

**Abstract:** The installation of the new Australian Curriculum offers rich possibilities for rethinking English in Australia, and beyond. This paper proposes that rhetoric is usefully drawn into this work of reconceptualisation, as strategically an organising principle for English curriculum theory and practice. It reviews existing work on rhetoric and proposes ways of connecting it with new understandings of textuality and meaning. It thus seeks to bring together rhetoric, history and pedagogy, as crucial considerations for the renewal of English teaching.

## Introduction: Rethinking English in the Australian Curriculum

I begin here with an operational definition from the new National Curriculum for English in Australia:

The Australian Curriculum: English Foundation to Year 10 is organised into three interrelated strands that support students' growing understanding and use of Standard Australian English (English). Together the three strands focus on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking and writing. Each strand interacts with and enriches the other strands in creative and flexible ways, the fabric of the (English) curriculum being strengthened by the threads within each sub-strand. The three strands are:

- *Language*: knowing about the English language
- *Literature*: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature
- *Literacy*: expanding the repertoire of English usage.

(EAC, June 28, 2016)

The representation of the English curriculum in terms of three interrelated strands – 'language', 'literature' and 'literacy' has proved to be a contentious formulation, and it is this that I want to focus on here. This view of English is now enshrined in policy, as a marker of professional identity and a resource for teacher programming, although it is still far from established in practice. That said, the Australian Curriculum in this instance frames and informs what is to be done in English classrooms, and that means working in some fashion with the designated strand-structure, with regard to the territory of English, or what to teach in English lessons. Among the formal professional responses along the consultative path to the final document, AATE (2009) proposed that '[a]t the very least, a diagram is required to represent how the three elements work in an integrated fashion'. I agree entirely. As it is, the conceptual space for the English curriculum remains essentially and effectively unmotivated.

As a long-time worker and commentator in this field, as it happens I do have a diagram to offer in this regard (Figure 1). It is one that I have been working with since the latter part of the 1980s:<sup>2</sup>

The focus here is on *language* – language is the superordinate category.<sup>3</sup> In this view Subject English is concerned above all with language, and it is a distinctive form of language education, with regard specifically to English as 'mother-tongue', or in official terms,

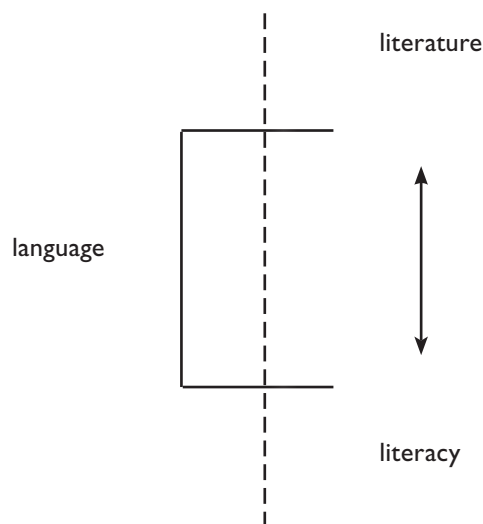


Figure 1. (Green, 1988, p. 48; 1991, p. 502)

Standard Australian English. This model gestures, in part, to what has been called 'English-as-Language', the paradigm emerging from Dartmouth and otherwise associated historically with the London Institute of Education. The diagram also encapsulates a two-fold argument: firstly, that what I have called *the print-publishing complex* is historically crucially important to subject English, and indeed to public schooling as a modernist project; and secondly, that both 'literacy' and 'literature' are to be understood as conditions of *written* language, first and foremost – again an historical matter. Language itself is a larger, more inclusive category, therefore, which is why it has priority here.

Together, these three categories, as *concepts*, form a field, and it is this conceptual field that constitutes the 'content', the territory of subject English. In this account, 'language' and 'literacy' are concepts, just as is 'literature', in Raymond Williams' sense (Williams, 1977; Green, 1990). Each requires and invites systematic and substantive scholarly inquiry, as does the conceptual field itself. Part of the work required here, now, is to take due account of a profound and historic media-shift, from 'print' to 'digital-electronics', and the emergence and consolidation of a new communication order. This is to draw in appropriate consideration of past(s), present(s) and future(s), or of residual, dominant *and* emergent forms of cultural practice and change.

The focus here is on language understood in a particular way – *language-in-use*. This is what is important about a living language, as the English language undoubtedly is: English is what it is by virtue of its active and ongoing usage, across the manifold spheres of social existence. (I leave aside for the moment due

consideration of the range and complexity of English as an international language.) One way of referring to language-in-use is to conceive of it as *discourse*. But following Foucault and others associated with poststructuralist theory and philosophy, discourse has come to have another meaning, referring more specifically to social practice and the conditions and constraints of thinking and meaning. And rather than obscuring the issue at hand, I see depth of meaning very much as a fortunate overlap of fields of reference. Language in use comes together with conditions of possibility.

With this in mind, then, I want to introduce the notion of *rhetoric*. Richard Andrews has described rhetoric in terms of 'the arts of discourse' (Andrews, 1994, p. 85; 2014, p. 20). That is, rhetoric so understood is about the artful use of discourses – or, as I prefer, *doing things with texts*, skilfully, appropriately, effectively. This is to combine knowledge and practice: knowing how to do things with texts, and doing it. The picture looks like this:

RHETORIC → DISCOURSE → LANGUAGE

That is, rhetoric is the superordinate term for the field of study addressed to discourse, its practice and its effects. It therefore embraces, or rather frames, literacy and literature as well – both of which are to be understood rhetorically.

I firmly believe that working with this formulation would be of great value, in seeking to realise the project of English teaching, post-Dartmouth, and in the new era of the Australian Curriculum. Of course there is much to be done to understand just what this means and what it involves, philosophically and historically, conceptually as well as pragmatically – but this is surely work worth doing? I will return to this matter at a later moment; though first I want to take up in somewhat more detail the question of rhetoric itself. So what *is* rhetoric, anyway? How best to understand it? Why rhetoric?

### (Re)turning to rhetoric

I have been fascinated by rhetoric for many years now. My first attempt at introducing it into the scene of debate was in a paper published in 1988, where I argued that 'a reconceptualised and invigorated English, *at every level*, will need to place great emphasis, in accordance with its espousal of the New Rhetoric, on notions of production and praxis, and hence on *writing*', referencing among others Kenneth Burke

(Green, 1988, p. 65).<sup>4</sup> For Burke, as one commentator put it, 'literature' (and 'writing' more generally) was 'a discourse of power, a work of will', a communicative practice with 'designs on the reader' (Lentricchia, 1983, p. 55; cited Green, 1988, p. 64). In this sense rhetoric is *the study of discourse and its effects* – effects of power and persuasion, yes, but also effects of pleasure and effects of learning, and more.

In this regard, it is worth noting Andrews' recent argument for moving beyond 'classical rhetoric' as the reference-point and on to what he calls 'contemporary rhetoric' (Andrews, 2014).<sup>5</sup> Dating back some 2500 years, classical rhetoric builds upon an Aristotelian foundation, and thus represents 'continuity through history' (Andrews, 2011, p. xi); however it needs to be adapted (and adaptable) for contemporary times and conditions. This means, among other things, widening the scope of rhetoric, and the range of its effects. Hence: while '*persuasion and influence* may be Aristotelian formulations of the function of rhetoric ... these intentions are only part of a wider, more generous conception of the art, which includes other functions of communication, such as informing, clarifying, and delighting (and a range of others)' (Andrews, 2014, p. 16). It also now means taking into account, in particular, the emergence of the digital-electronic apparatus as the primary shaping and framing principle for contemporary existence and communication. This involves accounting for digital culture and media, and the shift to multimodality as a field of interest and engagement, which links Andrews' concerns with rhetoric directly to Kress's work on design (e.g. Kress, 2000). In this respect, a focus on rhetoric is not simply congruent with contemporary developments in the field more generally but is organically related to them, and active in their fullest realisation and elaboration (cf. Lanham, 1993; Lunsford, 2007).

Another feature to consider here is the emphasis on *production*. This is a vital aspect of rhetoric, as I see it. It is also a key feature of the so-called 'New English', or rather that version of English teaching associated with Dartmouth and the curriculum revolution of the 1960s and subsequently. This is, again, something I have been arguing consistently, for many years – the value of a 'writing' focus for English. We can see this very clearly in Peter Medway's work, from his early focus on writing in *Finding a Language* (1980) to his later account of 'student production in English' (Medway, 1996), which he designates as 'making [semiotic] things'. A focus on writing emerges in Dartmouth and elsewhere

as a central activity in English, although the more radical, programmatic view of writing as production is perhaps more fully articulated by Robert Scholes (1985), in his account of 'textual power'. Framed in this fashion, writing is linked with speaking, as similarly a productive activity *par excellence*. Thinking thus would have the added value of opening up the English classroom to speech, to spoken textuality, and in ways distinctive from, but complementary to, the all-important advocacy of 'talk' as a resource for learning. This is arguably something lost in the post-60s period. Also crucial in this regard is what might be called *designing* (as the counterpart of 'viewing'), which is to say, making meaning productively in the audio-visual mode, and increasingly in digital-electronic form. Again this is to register a significant media-shift, this time from the verbal-linguistic to other communicative modalities and practices. Rhetoric is equally appropriate, then, with regard to writing, speaking, and '(re) presenting', or producing audio-visual texts.

Why this emphasis on production is important is, firstly, because socially and politically it places productive resources in the hands of the general populace, rather than with economic and cultural élites. Secondly, for young people to be shaped right from the outset as 'producers' of meaning and value, rather than simply 'consumers', opens up new opportunity for the educational formation of active citizenship. It is appropriate, too, to be reminded that this is one of the legacies of the rhetorical tradition. As one commentator has observed: 'The role of rhetoric was pedagogical, or rather persuasive: to teach, but also always to move – and if need be, to please or delight' (Sharpe, 2016). But it was also *political*, in the sense of equipping its students with the means to exercise power and influence in their society: 5th century Athens, or ancient Rome and its sprawling Empire. The aim was to produce people (men, actually ...) who could speak effectively and who were active participants in public life and the polity – indeed, leaders. Clearly circumstances have changed now, and here it becomes important to link a renewed emphasis on rhetoric to the project and promise of public education, and to what it means to regenerate an active, educated public, comprising the full range of citizens and subjects in a multicultural society. A renewed vision of educational and social possibility involves, further, working with and through a renovated, reinvigorated public schooling and with a reconceptualised English teaching at its heart.

It is at this point that it becomes appropriate and indeed imperative to link this emphasis on production to notions of praxis and, more particularly, *agency*. This is again a longstanding feature of 'progressive', post-Dartmouth English teaching (Green, 1988, 1995). Goodwyn (2016, p. 19) has recently identified what he calls 'personal and social agency' as a key aspect of what English teaching does and is for. This is more than simply a matter of 'personal growth', in its individualist ('personalist') vein. Rather, that perspective comes together in a new curriculum synthesis with cultural studies and critical literacy, in a distinctive post-critical pedagogy. Hence it takes due account of social and economic conditions, as well as new forms of cultural and technological change. Andrews (2011, p. 200) emphasises that rhetoric as he sees it is 'politically and socially grounded', although his own position in this regard appears to be liberal in orientation. Hence we should recall that the (re)turn to rhetoric in English studies has been significantly associated with Marxist literary scholars, notably Terry Eagleton and John Frow, a line up to which we can add the American James Berlin, working within rhetoric and composition studies, and from an avowedly socially-critical perspective (Green, 2006, 2008). Berlin links rhetoric explicitly with notions of ideology and power, but also with *agency* – with the capacity and willingness to think and act against the grain, and in the interests of social justice and postmodern democracy. As he writes: 'English studies has a special role to play in the democratic educational mission' (Berlin, 2003, p. 57). These links with agency and democracy make an important, compelling reason why rhetoric is, potentially, a rich resource for re-thinking English teaching in a socially responsible way.

Understanding and appreciating what Scholes called 'textual power', and recalling his dictum that '[t]extual power is ultimately power to change the world' (Scholes, 1985, p. 165) is important, and even crucial to Classroom life, like life itself – 'out there', in the world – comprises a multitude of more or less mundane acts, not all of which are likely to be significant in the larger context, nor of serious consequence. We also do well, then, to bear in mind Scholes's equally resonant notion of 'textual pleasure' – an appropriate segue, in fact, to point to the importance and relevance of 'art-work' with regard to rhetoric. Moving beyond persuasion opens up other possibilities for textual and communicative practice, including that traditionally associated with 'literature'. Here Andrews (2014)

makes a striking, contribution in proposing a new concern with what he calls the 'communication arts', and linking subject English with design and the arts more generally, within a broad and burgeoning digital-semiotic environment. Rhetoric provides a context and a resource for rethinking art and experience, communication and learning, from the fleeting and the ephemeral to the more durable and monumental, locally and globally.

A further consideration is the extension of rhetoric's purview not just beyond language, in the traditional verbal-linguistic sense, but also beyond any one actual, existing language, *including* English. 'Rhetoric is not attached to any one language' (Andrews, 2014, p. 192). The point is that a rhetorical perspective has implications for languages more generally, which means it has relevance for mother-tongue education (L1) more generally, and not simply the teaching of English. This is appropriate and indeed generative when it comes to taking account of globalisation and the like, and the fact that English education, in Australia and elsewhere in the Anglophone world, now necessarily looks both inward, to the nation, and outward, to the world. What's more, it might open the way to allowing heightened curriculum engagement with linguistic diversity.

It is important to emphasise that, as well as being inclusive and accommodating the digital-electronic environment, rhetoric as (re)conceptualised here is *expansive*. That is to say, it operates with an expansive, opened-ended view with regard to pedagogy and practice, as well as to textuality. This is a particularly important point, I believe, although a counter-view exists. This is the position associated with Ian Hunter and his followers, working in a neo-Foucaultian mode. One of Hunter's most enduring contributions, for me, is his formulation of English in terms of three distinct elements: *rhetoric*, *ethics*, and *aesthetics*, each with its history and philosophical trajectory (Hunter, 1997). However, where he would argue that these are better disaggregated and consequently realised differently in and across the school curriculum, I see them as re-articulated and thoroughly integrated, in the best forms of English teaching. Hence, in proposing here a reinvented view of English as rhetoric, this means drawing in both the ethical and the aesthetic as necessary albeit supplementary dimensions of rhetorical practice. Rhetoric is enriched accordingly.

Further to this, however, I want to move away from a tendency in work influenced by Hunter and others to take a more austere, even stringent approach



to pedagogy. This is exemplified in Brian Moon's recent account of rhetoric, writing, and English teaching (Moon, 2012). A good resource for the case I am presenting here, it is problematical, all the same, or so I want to argue. This is because it espouses what I see as a restricted pedagogy, of a kind that is nonetheless congruent with recent developments in literacy pedagogy – predicated, that is, on the principle of scarcity, or rarity: a restricted economy.<sup>6</sup> I certainly don't want to rehearse that debate, or dismiss it. What interests me, rather, is the manner in which Moon identifies the (classical) rhetorical tradition not simply with 'explicit instruction', which is his focus, but with *pedagogy* more generally.<sup>7</sup> As he writes: 'Rhetorical training gave students a set of 'tried-and-true' techniques for getting things done, so that they would have no need to re-invent the wheel every time they sat down to write. It was a toolkit for writers and orators' (Moon, 2012, p. 48). This was very much 'a practical tradition', as he indicates (p. 45). That is, it emphasised social utility, 'worldliness', and involved among other things engaging in regular practice(-ing), or 'training'. There was also a systematic and highly codified pedagogy readily available – in a sense, a 'how to' guide to practice. All this is consistent with what has been called 'classical' and also 'current-traditional rhetoric' (Moran & Bailiff, 2000, p. xviii). There is much in this tradition that remains relevant, as recent popular-journalistic accounts indicate (Sharpe, 2016; Leach, 2016). Even so, the emphasis is better placed on 'new' or 'contemporary' rhetoric, as I have outlined it here.

One reason is that this perspective is open to a more 'playful' approach, without at all denying the value of rigour and focus in textual study. As well as being expansive, then, it can be described as *excessive*, in the sense that it is open to a surplus of signification, an overflowing of possibilities. This makes for rich, dynamic classrooms, potentially at least – in the spirit of the classroom re-imagined as 'workshop' (Reid, 1984; Boomer, 1988) or indeed what I have called the classroom as 'textshop' (Green, 2006), drawing on Gregory Ulmer (drawing on Derrida ...) (Ulmer, 1985). This is more challenging, even 'difficult' to manage, but rewarding all the same, although the conditions need to be conducive, as always. The curriculum is one that, ideally, encourages and supports a rich diversity of textual practices, and repeated opportunity to work out how to do things with texts, and moreover how to do it well. Work such as this asks much of the teacher, but also it clearly values teachers and teaching, and

acknowledges their importance, their crucial role in the educational scheme of things. This is a familiar scenario, isn't it? For me, it is where the rhetoric of the New English, post-Dartmouth, comes together with the project of the New Rhetoric.

A further point needs to be highlighted. Reference has already been made, at least implicitly, to rhetoric being best conceived as a *practice*. What does this mean? What does it entail? Recall Moon's point about rhetoric being within 'the practical tradition'. This is to be taken literally, and seriously – as referring to a long tradition of foregrounding the role and significance of 'practice' in human affairs, which I have elsewhere described in terms of *practice theory and philosophy*. There are various strands in this line of thinking, one identified as neo-Aristotelian and another as post-Cartesian, drawing more directly on poststructuralism (Green, 2009). Rhetoric can be clearly be understood within such a frame, with specific regard to matters of language and the body, but also in being fundamentally concerned with 'doing' and 'making', as meaningful action in and on the world, as *doing things with texts*. Rhetoric is a form of practice, then, first and foremost.

But it is also a comprehensive, long-established body of knowledge<sup>8</sup> – consider, for example, the extensive literature available in the historical record on practising and teaching rhetoric (Vickers, 1988), which constitutes an invaluable if now little utilised resource. (It's worth noting here that the classical rhetorical curriculum was organised around the following themes: *invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery* (Thomas, 2007, p. 1) – all of which might be adapted for contemporary English teaching.) One such work is Moffett's 'Active Voice' writing program (Moffett, 1981). But there is much else to consider in this regard – for instance, work on 'invention' and 'memory', as techniques, and on 'composition' more generally. This older work has fallen out of favour, something dating back to the 19th century and the shift from 'Classics' to 'English'. But it still has much to offer, albeit re-articulated. We may now be able to contemplate a re-balancing of the curriculum, with the return of rhetoric. It is worth noting too that this can be seen as one of the lost opportunities of Dartmouth, where rhetoric briefly emerged as a possible resource for rethinking English teaching but was overwhelmed. Muller (1967, p. 106) reports that Wayne Booth 'proposed rhetoric as the intellectual centre the English curriculum needed if it were to have the 'philosophy' the seminar was seeking', noting also that Moffett was

offering a rhetorical perspective, in conceiving rhetoric as “refer[ring] to the ways one person attempts to act on another, to make him laugh or think, squirm or thrill, hate or mate” (Muller, 1967, p. 13).<sup>9</sup> This was a road *not* taken at that time, however – largely because of the profound suspicion that many participants had regarding the question of ‘knowledge’ and its role and significance vis-a-vis the priority of activity and experience as guiding principles for English teaching.<sup>10</sup> This is one of the great ironies of English curriculum history, it seems to me, but something that can and should be addressed now, in (re)turning to rhetoric as a resource for rethinking and regenerating English teaching in the 21st century.

### Rethinking (subject) English?

How are we placed, then, with regard to better understanding and appreciating what all this means for subject English, and more specifically for English in Australia? I began with the new representation of English in the Australian curriculum, and I want to come back to that now, in drawing to a close.

My proposal has been that English teaching would be particularly enriched and re-energised by working more explicitly and systematically with a rhetorical perspective – with rhetoric as its organising principle. (I must add I don’t see this as ‘a way of returning to a theoretical Eden’, as recently suggested (Ellis & Horner, 2011, p. 245), somewhat caustically, rather, as a pragmatic-intellectual move.) There is now a considerable body of supporting literature in the field, most recently Richard Andrews’s important account of what he calls ‘contemporary rhetoric’, building on his extensive work in this area, which he offers as a contribution to renewing English studies in education and beyond (Andrews, 2014). At the same time I see this also as an opportunity to connect more systematically and organically with North American work in rhetoric and composition, and perhaps more specifically with what is called the ‘social-epistemic’ tradition (Berlin, 2003), which I think provides a particularly useful resource for socially-critical versions of English teaching. That connection is something lost or maybe simply obscured in post-Dartmouth debates, especially for us here in Australia. Much English teaching is still implicated in literary ideology, it seems to me; it remains too ‘literary’. That is not to say that I am advocating simply discarding ‘literature’, however that is understood – far from it (Green, 2002). Rather, I want to embrace a generous and generative notion of textuality, one that is inclusive

of literary texts but not restricted to them, or even to print. The category (‘literature’) remains important, however, *historically* – and that includes the present and the future. Notwithstanding the emphasis here on production and writing, a challenge remains in how to understand reading<sup>11</sup> (and viewing) in rhetorical terms, and that is certainly do-able, and worth doing.

Coming back to the diagram I offered earlier, and the (in)famous three-strand structure of English in the Australian Curriculum: I reiterate that this is best understood both rhetorically and historically – that is, as bringing together categories which have particular historical resonance for English teaching, with all now identified with rhetoric, as distinctive but related forms of rhetorical practice. It would be strategic to do so, I suggest, and productive, not just in talking among ourselves but also with others, outside the English teaching community. There is a long tradition to draw on here, and it is still active (Thomas, 2007). For some of us, this means working against the grain, intimately – against our sense of ourselves, as subjects. Our own construction has been overwhelmingly literary, and yet literature itself, as a distinctive social category, only emerged with the eclipse (and active suppression) of rhetoric, as Raymond William (1977) among others has demonstrated (Frow, 2001).

Something worth thinking about, finally, takes us back to the nature and significance of subject English itself. How are we to understand and appreciate what it is that English does, and is for, in today’s school curriculum? What is English? This is a question I think far too seldom asked, often dismissed, or glossed over, or just underestimated – something which also, in a sense, stems back to Dartmouth. Andrews’ account is symptomatic in this regard, in fact. Although he is pragmatic in seeing English as a mainstay of the Anglophone curriculum, it turns out he ultimately wants to argue that, as ‘English’ is now clearly a ‘misnomer’ (Andrews, 2014, p. 29), the area is better (re)named as ‘communication arts’ or something similar. As I see it, he has no theorised sense of English as a *school-subject* – as a distinctive, essentially inter- and trans-disciplinary form of school knowledge, with its own specificity. His concern, rather, is with English as a now international language, as well as being one language among a larger set of languages, with rhetoric being relevant to all of these. Moreover, as he writes, rhetoric as he sees it is potentially ‘a unifying theory for ‘English’ and other subjects concerned with communication’ (Andrews, 2014, p. 2; my added italics).

I think we must do better than that, however, in seeking coherence and clarity with regard to English teaching as a curriculum practice. However imperfect it might be, the representation of English in the new Australian Curriculum can be worked with, productively. However it needs to be better understood, and re-framed, *historically* and *rhetorically*, as representing a way of bringing together language and education, culture and power, technology and textuality, in a conceptual field that is clearly specific to Australia although with relevance and resonance more generally. In such a view, rhetoric takes its place, strategically, as a new organising principle for English teaching.

I wrote this some years ago:

It seems to me that if we do hold onto the three linked concepts of 'language', 'literacy' and 'literature' as they have figured in the relatively brief curriculum history of English teaching, however reworked, we want to know how a rhetorical perspective – or perhaps better, a rhetorical *attitude* – enriches and reinvigorates them. What is it that rhetoric, appropriately reconceptualised and even postmodernised, has to offer a renewed English curriculum? (Green, 2008, p. 41)

I hope I have indicated, once more (with feeling ...), something of what this might involve, in seeking to make yet another case for how to think about rhetoric and English teaching, and in working towards the future of English in Australia, now. Our focus needs once again to be on language education, broadly defined, and appropriately reconceptualised, re-imagined as teaching and learning the arts of discourse, and re-inventing both literacy and literature accordingly, within an expanded field of textuality, and in and for a richly complex, avowedly multimodal world.

## Notes

- 1 A version of this paper was presented at the Joint Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), Adelaide, July 8–10, 2016.
- 2 Wayne Sawyer picks up on this earlier work in his paper on writing pedagogy and the National Curriculum (Sawyer, 2010), in making a similar argument to mine here, with specific reference to notions of 'rhetoric' and 'style'. It is worth noting that he was referring to what was then the draft version of the National Curriculum – clearly not much has changed in the interim.
- 3 It is important to understand that 'language' is intended here as a category which ranges from the verbal-linguistic to the digital-multimodal, and embraces communication and semiosis more generally. That is, it

is a *historical* category, encompassing past, present and future.

- 4 In his editorial introduction, Kevin Hart (1988, p. 4) observed that my focus in the paper was on 'rhetoric as persuasion rather than tropes', or figuration, suggesting indeed that it might well be possible and desirable to do both. I thoroughly agree with him, although at the time I was still working my way towards understanding why. This is one of the most important legacies of engaging with poststructuralist theory and philosophy, with its heightened sensitivity to 'language'.
- 5 It is worth noting here that Andrews has been working on rhetoric and English for many years now (e.g. Andrews, 1992, 1994), including a keynote address at AATE's national conference in the early 1990s (Andrews, 1993).
- 6 Analogous, for instance, with those associated with systemic-functional linguistics, or so-called 'genre' thinking (which Moon is clearly sympathetic to, incidentally, although critical of here).
- 7 This emphasis on pedagogy is also evident in Annette Patterson's work (e.g. Patterson, 1999, p. 4, 2001, p. 298) – although I would still want to debate how pedagogy is being conceptualised in this line of thinking, the call to refocus on pedagogy in English curriculum debate is indeed timely, and important.
- 8 As well, of course, as being a practical form of knowledge, in its own right, precisely as practice.
- 9 Andrews (2014) provides an extensive account of Moffett in this regard (Chapter 3). See also Green (2010).
- 10 A theme addressed in various places in the previous *English in Australia* Special Issue on Dartmouth (Vol. 51, No. 3).
- 11 A starting point is Scholes's (1985, p. 8) view of reading as 'a productive activity, the making of meaning, in which one is guided by the text one reads ... but not simply manipulated by it', and relatedly, to learn to read like a 'writer', a *rhetor* – what effects are being produced here, how, etc. See also Reid (1984, p. 24f) with regard to the 'integration of reading with writing'.

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**for Jennifer Haynes**

& somehow  
I never picked up  
on your notice  
maybe our blood had  
thinned a little  
but even before your death  
silence echoed an absence  
as I think you would have  
turned inside & gathered  
all that had to be done  
in the wrap of family  
& a literature of lists  
& delegation  
of how you wanted it to be

Rory Harris August 2016

# Why English Teachers MATTER

## Some reflections on the life of Dr Paul Brock AM

*Jacqueline Manuel,  
Sophia Brock and Amelia Brock*

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*'Whát I dó is me: for that I came.'*  
(*'As Kingfishers Catch Fire'*  
Gerard Manley Hopkins)

Since March 25, 2016, Sophie, Amelia and I have been heartened and comforted by the many public and private tributes and memorials to Paul. These have come in many forms – from friends, colleagues, and comrades, spanning generations; and from people we have never met who took the time to share with us their stories of how Paul made a difference to their world. These stories, together with his vast corpus of publications and achievements, attest to the impact of his lifework. Paul was a polymath. His influence as a leader in education, a writer, a teacher, a scholar, a mentor, and an advocate for medical research and disability services, stand as an enduring testament to the force of his intellect and vision, the ethical depth of his professional and personal life, his compassion and humour, and his indefatigable commitment to social justice, inclusion, and the betterment of our individual and collective lives through education. He lived who he was – with optimism, sincerity, good humour, conviction and courage. His spirit was never dulled. His will was never broken. This was all the more astonishing because the last twenty years of his life were forged in the crucible of Motor Neurone Disease (MND).

Although MND eventually took him from us, for two decades he refused it permission to define him. What continued to define him, amongst many other qualities and values, was gratitude, service, and his sustaining love for literature and language. When Anita Jetnikoff generously encouraged me to write a reflective piece for this Special Issue of *English in Australia*, I wondered how I could begin to do justice to the magnitude of Paul's fifty years as an educator. Of course, I can't. What I can do is share some reflections on Paul's life as it epitomised why English teachers matter: as the curators and custodians of the most 'essential and fundamental aspects of culture' (Murdoch, 1970); as the 'ironic points of light' in a 'beleaguered' world (Auden, in Mendelson, 1979, p. 86); and as an enabling wise presence in the lives of those they teach.

The reflections here represent a very personal act of remembrance and celebration, albeit laid bare in a public forum. In sharing our memories of Paul, as a husband and a father, Sophie, Amelia and I recall experiences that are emblematic of the ways in which literature and language were the embodied coordinates of Paul's life: to chart a course through 'restless waters', 'the river ... within us, the sea ... all about us'; and to guide him back to the 'still points' (Eliot, 1985) where meaning and wisdom dwell. To conclude this piece, we have selected two excerpts from Paul's writing. It is here that his voice, his vision, and his

aspirations for education, educators and English is most resonant. The first excerpt, from a book chapter, distils the centrality of literature as a reservoir of moral, ethical, and spiritual wisdom in his life. The second excerpt is from 'Show an Affirming Flame: A Message to the Profession', the final paper he wrote which was published in late 2015.

### Literature and language as embodied wisdom

When Paul was first diagnosed with MND, he did what he always did in times of joy and times of struggle, alike. He turned to the beauty and wisdom of poetry and music and to writing to help him to make sense of life. In our earliest days, he would quote me lines from Marvell's poem, determined that despite always hearing 'time's winged chariot hurrying near', we would

*... roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Through the iron gates of life:  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

(Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress', 1681)

After he was diagnosed, he would so often return to the words of that poem, interweaving them in what he wrote and spoke to me. The day before he finally rested, he spoke the lines from this poem, once again. But this time, he knew the chariot was near. During those last, precious days, hours, and minutes, he was quoting to me familiar lines from his and our favourite poetry – lines from Donne, Hopkins, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge.

As a student of English in the 1960s and 1970s, Paul was the fortunate recipient of a pedagogy that valued 'learning by heart' the lines, stanzas or entirety of poems. I say 'fortunate' because those early exercises in 'rote learning' proved to be profoundly significant over the course of a lifetime. The lines of poetry, Shakespearean drama or prose memorised during school English classes became for Paul tropes to live by – there at the ready to call forth in conversation, reverie, ethical and moral debates, and in his own scholarship and writing. Not in a pretentious or self-conscious way, but as touchpoints drawn from an enlarged, enduring reservoir of insights into the human condition that served the individual consciousness in its ordinary course of making meaning. In one of his recent blog posts, Ian Reid encapsulated the

critical affordances of 'learning by heart' in order to live *by and with* heart:

Knowing ourselves is inseparable from the habit of conscious, intensive remembering, a valuable habit that featured strongly in my own childhood because it was reinforced by the practice (normal in those days) of requiring or encouraging children to learn poems and many other things verbatim ...

... although 'rote learning' is out of favour in schools it would be a mistake to neglect this way of fostering memory ... And with maturity there may then come an internalised individual practice of memorisation, as we recognise the value in becoming so familiar with certain passages of verse or prose that we know them by heart. Knowing by heart is a mode of cognition to be cherished, not disparaged – especially in relation to the reading and writing of literature. Committing to memory what we read, far from being in conflict with creativity, can contribute substantially to it. (Reid, 2016)

Paul did indeed live by and with heart, and it was the internalised companionship of literature – part of the unique gift of the English teacher – that shaped the contours of his personal and professional narrative as a human being.

Like Coleridge in 'This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison' – which Paul also quoted from in his last hours – through sheer will, imagination and the power of the mind, he transfigured and transcended the ever-narrowing pincer-grip of his physical decline. Almost in inverse proportion to his physical deterioration over the course of twenty years, his spirit and resolve grew stronger. He never saw himself as a victim. He never retreated from his work for so many others in the public realm. He refused to settle for what he would often refer to as the 'lowest common denominator' – especially in the context of education. He lamented the ultra-rationalist-utilitarian turn in educational policy and what he saw as the consequent narrowing of the curriculum and the intensification of regulation. He sought constantly to remind educators, bureaucrats and others that the purpose of education must always be as much about respecting and nourishing the human spirit, heart and soul as it is about equipping students with functional skills. At every opportunity, he reinforced the power of language in generating (or obfuscating) meaning. In this way, Paul enlivened Ursula Le Guin's belief that 'words are events, they do things, change things. They transform both speaker and hearer; they feed energy back and forth and amplify it. They feed understanding or emotion back and forth and amplify it' (2004).

It was Paul's abiding hope that the power of literature and language, the passion and vision of English teachers, and our individual and collective striving for equality, justice, and inclusion should coalesce to 'transform' each life for the better.

I know Paul would want me to acknowledge and sincerely thank the many friends and colleagues who enriched his world with such *joie de vivre*. I also know he would agree with my choice of Hopkins' line from 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire' to stand as an epigraph for his time here with us – as a man who 'practised what he preached', who led by example, and who never gave up: 'What I do is me: for that I came.'

### Sophia

#### Excerpts from a Dedication (5 April 2016)

Language was so central to Dad's life – and it ended up being his only tool to exercise independence. Throughout high school, and my undergraduate and honours degree, I'd sit with him for hours – laptop propped up on his lap, his hands resting over the top of it. I'd pull up a chair beside him and sit with him as he read through each line of my work, scrolling down the page for him and making adjustments – comma here, semi-colon there. When I was younger, we'd often have debates about my use of one word or another, or the way I'd structured a sentence. But regardless of the quality of my work, he'd always finish by telling me how proud he was of me.

This exercise of intricately traversing through hundreds of thousands of words together means that now when I write, I hear his voice. So choosing the language to somehow write these words here is both comforting and heart-breaking. Dad is infused in my use of language, yet this infusion is a constant reminder of our loss. And how can we find the right language to convey the incredible impact this human being has had on so many lives? We've tried and are trying to ...

Many can reflect on Dad as an educator, friend, colleague, sportsperson, mentor, advisor, writer, and story-teller. Each of these facets of Dad's life were interconnected, forming a rich tapestry that constituted his life, and that so many appreciated and benefitted from.

For anyone who knew him, you will know that each aspect of his life was filled with passion – and what fuelled this passion was his love for his family. If I peel back the layers of his momentous achievements

as an educator for over 50 years, and I close my eyes to momentarily overlook the disease and its consequences, I am left with the same man – my Dad.

He was the first person I wanted to tell whenever I had something I was proud of. He was my moral compass and the one I would turn to when faced with an ethical dilemma. We would all regularly laugh together, so hard that our stomachs would hurt and he'd roar so intensely with laughter that his wheelchair would shake. This was often because I would – as he'd say – take the 'mickey' out of him, so much so, that he'd declare – 'I have no mickey left!' 'You cheeky bugger, Sophia Ashleigh!' he'd say.

He taught me about integrity, confidence, resilience, persistence, determination, patience, gratitude, humility, and most of all: *what it is to love, and to be loved*. My greatest privilege is to not only have witnessed, but also be the product of the love between Mum and Dad. In his own words: 'Jackie is at the heart and soul of my story.'

We all often joked about Dad's status as an 'inspiration'. Of course, he was. But the day-to-day life of our family did not feel like the material intended to inspire. For me, there was a normality embedded within our everyday lives. Mum and Dad were determined that MND would not rob us individually, or collectively as a family, our chance to thrive and flourish. Our life with Dad was simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary.

Something I discussed with Dad quite often, and which I'd like others to reflect on, is that *we should not need a reminder or a tragedy to be in awe of our lives and express our love*. Dad's love and pride in Mum and his children was just as fierce and deep before his diagnosis as after it. 'Do not let it take a catastrophe to start feasting on your life, and demonstrating your love for those you cherish.'

In the eulogy Dad wrote for his own father, my GrandKen, in 1999, he called for those present to focus on: '*the unique and immense power of the individual human spirit to flourish – despite the vastness of the universe.*'

Dad was the embodiment of the power of the individual human spirit to prevail, against the odds, to invest his life and the lives of those around him with meaning. Dad's love and legacy will help us carry the weight of his loss, and will give us comfort when the pain seems too much to bear. Look at what he faced, what he triumphantly achieved, and how he 'made content with his fortunes fit'. If he could do it, surely we will be okay. I'll live the rest of my life continuing to strive to make you proud Dad.



**Amelia**

**Excerpts from a Dedication (5 April 2016)**

‘To see a World in a grain of sand  
And Heaven in a wild flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour ...’

(Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, 1789).

Dad loved poetry. He used poetry as a source of guidance, reflection, and pleasure in many times of happiness, struggles, falling in love, or just in capturing a moment of pure bliss. He always raved about the poem I wrote for Sophie and Matt’s Wedding. So I thought for today, I would write one for him.

This is to the most incredible man who ever lived, who I am lucky enough to call my father.

In 1996, just a year after I was born,  
You got a diagnosis that had your heart torn,  
You had 3 to 5 years to live, so you were told,  
But you were so determined to see my sister and me grow old.

So you and mum decided to fight,  
You used all your love, and your might.  
All you and mum showed was courage, strength and determination,  
Despite the many times of struggle, heartache and physical affliction.

I’ll always remember the many times we would share a great roar,  
Cheering with excitement as we watched our favourite footy teams score.

We had many great memories of travel, sport and pleasure,  
All our family stories and jokes, I will eternally treasure.

You always told me how important it was to tell people you love them,  
You’d focus on the positives and praise us all, and never condemn.

‘Millie, I’m so PROUD of you’ you exclaimed everyday,  
‘Yes Dad, you’ve told me a million times’ I would say.

I’m so grateful that you are, and will always be, my Dad,

You’re the best that anyone’s ever had.  
Your passion for life, love, work and your continuous desire,  
Has created a legacy to which we can all only aspire.

I couldn’t find a way to truly finish this poem, but it’s only because there will never truly be an end. Dad, we will never stop thinking about you, talking about you, and loving you. Thank you for everything you did and for never, ever giving up. You always said you would work until the day you died, and you literally did. You were even calling your boss from hospital, telling her you’d be back in the office in just a few days. The way that we always coped was through this positivity, and always being able to laugh. Despite all the grief of tackling the devastating realities of MND, Mum and Dad always shared a great laugh, and somehow found the humour in every situation. We were lucky enough to go on a number of trips as a family, exploring Europe, New Zealand, Canada and America from 2002–2006. There are countless funny stories that came out of our trips as a result of travelling with a disability, and while some may not have found them funny at the time – it’s our sense of humour which has seen us through! We’ve faced so many challenges as a family, and our sense of humour has always helped us thrive ...

Dad, now that your soul has left your body, life without you will never be the same. But I know that you will always be looking over our shoulders, gently calming us and telling us everything is going to be okay. Dad you are incredible, your soul is eternal, and you will be loved forever.

**Paul**

**Excerpt from ‘The value of literature and language in contemporary education: A personal perspective’ in *Imagination, Innovation, Creativity* (Phoenix Education, 2009)**

What I myself have learned is that the meanings of texts – or, to put it in Rosenblatt’s terms, the ‘poems’ – that I have cherished ever since my days as an undergraduate university student have changed over time as my experience of life has developed and changed. I have waged no violence upon the texts. Nor have I rejected as immature those meanings which I arrived at when reading those texts at an earlier age. It is, rather, that I the ‘reader’ have changed. The changed ‘who’ whom I have become – or grown into – has meant that the meaning of the ‘poem’ for my older, changed self has acquired a richness and complexity shaped by my life experience.

Let me give an example. The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins was the subject of my BA Honours thesis at the University of Sydney in 1965. I had first

read Hopkins' 'Terrible Sonnets' in 1964 as a 20 year old University of Sydney third year student and a member of a Catholic Religious Order. As a Marist Brother the dominant meaning I took from the poems was that Hopkins was grappling with the range of spiritual, theological and intellectual stresses associated with what the mystic St John of the Cross described as 'the dark night of the soul'.

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of  
grief,  
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder  
wring.  
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?  
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?  
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a  
chief  
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince  
and sing –  
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No  
ling-  
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.  
O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them  
cheap  
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our  
small  
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here!  
Creep,  
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind:  
all  
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.  
(Hopkins, in Gardner, 1953, p. 61)

In late 1996 I was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND), an incurable terminal disease which progressively paralyses one's arms, legs, swallowing and speaking muscles. Eventually, if you live that long, you end up with a fully alert mind and consciousness inside a vegetative body capable only of eye-blinking – before the breathing muscles give way, and you die. The neurologist told me that I could expect to live for only three to five years. Later that day Hopkins' poem absolutely roared into my consciousness. All of a sudden the mountains of my mind and the cliffs over which I was frightfully hanging assumed an awful reality.

Instantly I acquired a far deeper and more terrifying understanding of how impossible it would be for another human being, other than my wife Jackie, to have an exact idea of what it was like for me 'hanging' there. But, unlike Hopkins at the end of the poem, that

night I found no comfort whatever in the assertion that death ends life and that each day dies with sleep.

Hopkins' poem has reverberated within me ever since. But now with a different flavour. Although now almost completely paralysed, I am still alive. I still have a powerful sense of purpose in my life. I am still loving and being loved. With the fantastic support of others and equipment, I am in a curious way more calm now than I was then back in 1996 when I still retained virtually all of my physical capacities. But I'm not just still 'hanging' there – I'm actually still 'hanging in' there.

Back on that dreadful day in 1996 I left the neurologist's rooms and mind-numbingly walked alone down the stairs into the car park and thought how the hell was I going to break this cruelly premature death sentence news to my young wife and our two very young daughters – Sophia (then 5), and Amelia, (then 1). As I wrestled with my thoughts and feelings, two sets of lines written by Shakespeare fought against each other for supremacy in my brain as I tried to make meaning of what I had just been hit with.

On the one hand there were some lines from *Macbeth* the first of the Shakespearian tragedies that I ever lectured on during my 11 years at the University of New England, where I was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English. Knowing now that his fate had now been unalterably determined, *Macbeth* roars out that 'Life is a tale told by an idiot/Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'.

After all, here I was – a perfectly healthy, happy, fulfilled human being, in the prime of life, with hardly a care in the world before I walked into that neurologist's office, after nearly three wonderful decades within the education profession. I had played just about every kind of sport imaginable. I had been heavily involved in playing grade and representative cricket for over 30 years – and for many of these years I had also coached young cricketers. I had played the piano since I was 7 years of age ...

On the other hand, reverberating through my brain was a competing set of lines – also written by Shakespeare – upon which I based much of the very last lecture I gave on the Shakespearian tragedies towards the end of my academic career at UNE in mid 1990: *King Lear*. Feeling absolutely abandoned by his daughters, with his power entirely smashed through his own actions and those of his enemies, a near delirious King Lear roars around the stage buffeted by a raging tempest, demanding to know how he can

possibly cope with the devastation into which his life has now fallen. He gets this answer from his constant companion, his court jester known as 'Fool'.

The Fool says to his master, King Lear:

He that has and a little tiny wit,  
With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain,  
Must make content with his fortunes fit,  
Though the rain it raineth every day.

(*King Lear*, Act III, Scene ii)

That is to say, you just have to do your best to cope with catastrophe as best you can – endurance is all. So, in the words of a much later poet, Robert Frost in his memorable poem 'The road not taken', once I had been diagnosed with MND and told I would not survive beyond the end of 2001 at best or 1999 at worst – there were for me two paths diverging in the woods. One, taken from Macbeth, leading towards despair and giving up; the other, taken from *King Lear*, towards striving to make content somehow fit with this disaster. I had to choose one. Which I did. Consistent with the advice of King Lear's Fool. And, in Frost's words, 'that has made all the difference' ...

Thus, these literary texts had acquired, and have continued to maintain, a far deeper, more personal, and more immediately relevant meaning and significance for me than they had ever had in all of the years leading up to this seminal and terrifying experience.

A striking example of the intersection between a cherished piece of literature that has always had significance for me from my youthful days as a university student and my more contemporary experience of life blighted by MND – and the consequential reframing of the 'meaning' of the text – occurred during a trip to England. Having spent over fifteen years living the monastic life, it was quite an extraordinary experience many years later for me to be inside the beautiful ruins of Tintern Abbey in eastern Wales. The great 19th-century poet Wordsworth had also been inspired by this place. In my autobiography *A Passion for Life* I drew upon that experience and Wordsworth's famous poem 'Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour. July 13, 1798'. to explore my own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and doubts in the religious and the spiritual spheres. So, once again, I had found myself returning to poetry I had first read over forty years before as an utterly devout, full of certitude, publicly vowed member of the Catholic Church.

And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with  
the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of  
something far more  
Deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of  
setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things

(Wordsworth, in Gill, 2004, p. 42).

Over forty years ago I looked upon these lines as demonstrating some kind of almost pagan pantheism. Now, my sense of spirituality is not uncomfortable with what Wordsworth's lines mean for me today ...

In the context of my continuing to live with a still incurable and inevitably fatal disease that has already paralysed me almost completely, a most appropriate way to conclude this chapter is to quote from a contemporary Australian poet – our daughter Millie, who is now 13. Nearly six years ago Millie saw me having a quiet weep as I was trying to come to terms with my having to live the rest of my life in a wheelchair. She told me that she had put together a little poem cycle that she had written for quite a different purpose altogether, but which she thought might cheer me up. She called her work 'Never Give Up: A Poem Cycle'.

I think that Millie's poem will resonate with many teachers, scholars, and lovers of English language and literature. In many ways what she has written, how she has written it, her purpose in choosing me as an audience, and the impact of her imagination, creativity, and power of language, are collectively emblematic of what it is we value as teachers and learners of English.

*NEVER GIVE UP: A POEM CYCLE*

'Never give up'  
If you give up on something  
You might not get it  
But if you try you might get it  
Before you die.

'I'll always love you'  
But if I don't I'll be above you  
I am in heaven  
And you are now below  
When you come up  
You and I will follow.

'My dream is to fly'  
My dream is to catch a butterfly  
My dream is to live happily ever after  
But sometimes things come up  
And they might stay.

**Paul**

**Extract from 'Show an Affirming Flame:  
A Message to the Profession',  
*Journal of Professional Learning*, 2015**

'Any weakening of universal public education can only be a weakening of the long-standing essential role universal public education plays in making us a civilised democracy.'

(John Ralston Saul, 'In defence of public education', 2001)

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

(G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 1962)

What follows is a fairly personal, eclectic collation of ideas/passions/pleas that I would include in any such message in my reflection over my past five decades as a member of what the OECD has accurately described as the 'knowing and caring' profession.

***Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose***

If there is any one constantly recurring theme in those five decades, it is that we educators have so often been under attack by those who see us as perpetrators of inadequate or declining standards. Let me give one NSW example from the first decade of the last century.

The wholesale substitution of 'modern methods' has been found to be unwise. The defects apparent in school children at the present day are summarised thus:

- (a) The children are not thoroughly grounded in essentials;
- (b) They are not accurate in their work. Business people in Sydney ... find these and similar defects in the children they are at present taking into their employment and they attribute them largely to the new methods of education'.

(*The Catholic Press*, 1909, cited in McDonnell, 1987).

Seventeen years ago I wrote a monograph on some of the myths of declining standards in literacy within an historical context, *Breaking some of the myths* – again (DET, Sydney, 1998). What follows is an extended quotation from that monograph – the substantial 'message' of which, I believe, retains its salience in 2015.

But it does not matter where you dip into the history of education, you will find thunderous roars of utter conviction that standards are 'now' palpably worse than they were a generation ago. The 1990s Jeremiahs harken back to the 1950s. It is necessary, however, to apply an informed historical perspective to untrammelled cries of gloom and doom. For example, if you go back to the newspapers of the so-called 'good old days' of the 1950s you will find identical lamentations for contemporary disasters, and calls for a return to the presumed halcyon days of the 1930s.

So, let us go back nearly 50 years to those 'good old days' and listen to the comments of the Chief Examiner in English for the 1948 Leaving Certificate examination, Professor Waldock, thundering about the students sitting for the Leaving Certificate in 1946: 'It is disappointing to find that students imagine they can pass a Leaving Certificate Examination without being able to write a sentence'. (*The Education Gazette*, 1947, p. 129).

This process of lamentation for the present and exhortation for a return to some mythical halcyon past era can be traced continuously back into the 19th century and beyond. George Elliott, President of prestigious Harvard College, bitterly complained in 1871 that 'bad spelling, incorrectness as well as inelegance of expression in writing, ignorance of the simplest rules of punctuation and almost entire want of familiarity with English literature, are far from rare among young men of eighteen otherwise well prepared for college' (in Daniels, 1983, p. 51).

One of the many modern scholars who have discussed the 'declining standards' myth, the American Andrew Sledd, has observed that:

The discussion of this [declining standards myth] is not timely – it is timeless; for although *Newsweek* certified our crisis a mere decade ago ... no fewer than five consecutive generations have been condemned for writing worse than their predecessors. By now our students should hardly put processor to paper; it's a wonder they can write at all. (Sledd, 1988, p. 496)

If I were revising this today, I would do some 'tweaking' to take account of the significant developments in the intervening seventeen years – especially recent years. However, to reiterate what I wrote prior to the commencement of the previous extended quotation, I believe it retains its fundamental salience in 2015. While there is a continuous need to ensure the quality of contemporary education, too often contemporary critics look back to the past through rose-tinted glasses, and at the present through black-tinted glasses.

When planning for the future we should retain what has been demonstrated to have been successful in the past and the present, and to transform or reject the rest!



I believe that there should be at least four interdependent and interrelated basic principles that should underpin all quality policy developments in school education – now and into the future. They are: authentic research; genuine scholarship; acquired wisdom based on the collective expertise and experience of outstanding practitioners; and what is often called ‘nous’ ....

#### **What is necessary is not always sufficient**

Of course the skills of literacy and numeracy are absolutely basic goals of school education. But while absolutely necessary, they are not sufficient. Fulfilling only basic needs is rarely enough. Shakespeare’s magnificent play *King Lear* provides us with an insight into the insufficiency of addressing only needs. After haggling with two of his daughters [Goneril and Regan] over how many retainers he really needs – involving a Dutch auction commencing at fifty, then twenty-five, then ten, then five and finally one – a distraught Lear cries out:

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars are  
in the poorest thing superfluous.  
Allow not nature more than nature needs,  
Man’s life’s as cheap as beast’s. Thou art a lady. If  
only to go warm were gorgeous,  
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous  
wear’st,  
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.  
(*King Lear*, Act 2, Scene iv)

Human life becomes cheapened when human aspiration and achievement do not exceed the basic animal needs. Education becomes cheapened if we stop at fulfilling only basic needs. We must seek to develop in our students not only skills, but also their knowledge, understanding, values, talents, creativity, imagination, and so on – all the richness articulated in our splendid national educational manifesto, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People ...

#### **Practising what we preach**

We public educators must practice what we preach. We have to live out our explicitly defined core values as public educators which, in NSW, are: integrity; excellence; respect; responsibility; cooperation; participation; care; fairness; democracy ...

Above all, we have to be fair dinkum in striving to close the gaps between rhetoric and reality. For example, there is an admirable aspirational goal to have an excellent teacher in every classroom in every

public school. We know that in this case our deeds have not yet met our rhetorical aims.

#### **The crucial importance of the precise use of the English language**

It is absolutely essential that educators be as precise as they can in the use of the English language, most especially – but not exclusively – in its written form, for communication with others.

In 1990, during my time as an advisor on the personal staff of the then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, I drafted the Preface to the Hawke Government’s Australia’s Language and Literacy Policy Green Paper – *The Language of Australia: Discussion Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy for the 1990s*. Dawkins agreed to affix his signature to the Preface I had written for him.

In the opening two sentences – which I consider to be among the best two sequential short sentences I have ever written – I attempted to articulate the power and significance of language in the following words, which I still hold to be true today.

It is through language that we develop our thoughts, shape our experience, explore our customs, structure our community, construct our laws, articulate our values and give expression to our hopes and ideals.

We aspire to an Australia in which its citizens will be literate and articulate, a nation of active, intelligent readers, writers, listeners and speakers. Such a nation will be well educated and clever, cultured and humane, and rich and purposeful, because of the knowledge, skills and values of its people. (Dawkins, 1990, p. ix)

As educators and as educated citizens we have a responsibility to be lucid in the ways we express our thoughts, ideas and values. Sludgy, clichéd, jargonistic, careless, imprecise language is evidence of sludgy, clichéd, jargonistic, careless, imprecise thinking ...

#### **Is Education the answer?**

Quite a few years ago the ABC TV news included what turned out to be a very short interview with an African lady in a war-torn, drought-ridden, poverty-stricken African country – holding her very young, ailing child in her arms. When asked what she needed, the woman replied – simply yet so complexly – ‘food and education’. With this aspiration for education as a fundamental driver for societal reform, I concluded my Keynote Address at the 2012 Annual Conference of the NSW Secondary Principals Council as follows.

In quite a few of my speeches in recent years I have pointed to education as perhaps the most powerful 21st century force to combat and eventually defeat the injustices, evils, poverty, hunger, abuse of women, triumphs of religious intolerance and bigotry, sexual slavery, wars and famines, and so on. However, today, looking at the relentless persistence of so much of these obscenities in the world, that optimism and hope is somewhat diminished.

But I am also reminded of that superb poem '1st September, 1939', written by the great Anglo-American poet WH Auden, in which he expressed his profound fear, on the edge of despair, as he reflected on the almost certain consequence of Hitler's invasion of Poland on that day – the outbreak of what would become the Second World War. Yet in that very powerful and moving poem, he found something to cling to in his final stanza.

Defenceless under the night  
Our world in stupor lies;  
Yet, dotted everywhere,  
Ironic points of light  
Flash out wherever the  
Just Exchange their messages:  
May I, composed like them  
Of Eros and of dust,  
Beleaguered by the same  
Negation and despair,  
Show an affirming flame.

(Auden, in Mendelson, 1979, p. 86).

Colleagues and friends, I put it to you that although we educators cannot defeat the macro forces that inflict such misery on so many people on this planet, surely we can continue to be 'ironic points of light' – 'ironic' in the sense that we retain the capacity to critique 'our world'. That we are 'just' men and women who exchange our 'messages' of human dignity, aspiration, hope, respect and all of those other values championed by public education. Who, 'beleaguered by the same / Negation and despair', nevertheless continue to show to our students, to one another, and – as educated citizens – to our local, national and international communities, 'an affirming flame', cherishing our belonging to the 'knowing and caring' profession.

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# The Gentle Dissenter: Revisiting Annette Patterson's Research in English

Bronwyn Mellor, *Chalkface Press*

Annette Patterson published articles, book chapters, and school textbooks in Australia, the USA and UK. She also taught in those countries and was a popular speaker at local, national international conferences. This was not, however, because she always gave audiences what they wanted to hear. Her incisive intellect and commitment to education probably meant that she was not ever going to allow a position or an orthodoxy remain unexamined even though (or, perhaps *especially* though) it was one she had initially occupied or embraced.

In the eighties, when we first met and Annette was completing a PhD at UWA, this was not immediately apparent however. A passionate believer in social justice, she had been politically engaged for many years having come of age at the beginning of Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen's long premiership of her home state Queensland, where she described political activism as 'unavoidable'. It perhaps was not surprising that in Perth, Annette was one of a small discussion group of English teachers and academics, who were all enthusiastic to varying degrees about what seemed the politicised possibilities of 'Theory' – specifically Poststructuralism – for practice in English classrooms.

In the decades following, however, Annette's thinking took a path that her friends and colleagues didn't always understand initially, coming only belatedly to appreciate the erudition and nuanced cleverness of her arguments. But in the eighties, disapproving of earlier models of English – in the case of 'Heritage English' for its 'arid elitism', and for the overly personal and individualist focus of 'Personal Growth' English – Annette embraced the social mission argued to be inherent in English in most accounts of its emergence (for example, Ball et. al., 1990) and the arguments for a politicised English, which promised to restore the connections between language and power that had been severed in earlier 'pre-theoretical' models of English.

The task of English, it seemed, was to emancipate individuals from varying social evils and thus allow them to see 'things as they really are', which is the last line in John Dixon's book *Growth through English* (1967), and we discovered later, a phrase repeated by writers as far apart as Matthew Arnold and Terry Eagleton. What differs according to these writers is *what* it is that stops us from 'seeing clearly' or 'seeing things as they really are'. For Arnold (1869/1950) it was sin; for Leavis (1930), 'mass culture'; for Dixon (1967) the division between feeling and thought; and for Eagleton (Eagleton, 1991), it was ruling class ideology, which was seen as blocking no less than the lost origin and goal of English:

English emerged, then, as a result of a certain class struggle; and it emerged equally because of a conflict of interests between the sexes. .... English began, in short, as the inscription of a certain kind of difference and otherness, in terms of both class and gender, at the very heart of the academic institution – and to say that is to claim that it operated as a kind of deconstruction all in itself. (p. 7)

Repression of this moment of birth resulted, Eagleton argued, in the erasure of 'un-nameable difference' and a reconstitution of subject English as 'the cultural arm of colonialism',

a proposition that appears to draw on descriptions of education as one of many Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1969, p. 155) designed to control students in ways that serve the needs of the status quo. The radical project, Eagleton exhorted, was 'to return to the subject's authentic, originating roots and remain true to their difference and otherness, albeit in fresh ways' (1991, p. 7).

It was a position with a social mission (Baldick, 1983) that was initially attractive to Annette, and to all of us working with her. Perhaps the most succinct statement of what we wanted to do in the English classroom came in an early paper, 'Changing Practices' (1991), co-authored by Annette:

Our aims in general terms would be to teach that 'the text is a text'; that it is a construction and not a slice or reflection of life (Belsey, 1980) and to make possible a greater consciousness of the processes involved in reading and writing and the ideological nature of texts and readings. We would argue that students should be enabled to analyse the construction of readings; 'read' other readings or interpretations; consider what is at stake in the disagreement between readings; make visible the gaps and silences of texts and readings; analyse what readings support in terms of the values they affirm; challenge other, especially dominant, readings; and construct new readings (p. 12).

Our focus was on producing *multiple* readings of the text in the interests of making available for analysis not only the construction of readings but also the values they affirmed. This, we argued, would allow and enable students to become conscious of readings that naturalised sexism, racism and other undesirable readings.

As one of the writers at this time for Chalkface Press, Annette's contributions were characteristically sophisticated and clever. Aiming, for example, to make the sexism of a particular short story 'visible and available for analysis', she devised an activity in which lines of dialogue, such as 'Do you really love me?', 'You'd let me if you really loved me' and 'Will you still love me?' minus identifying 'tags', were presented to students. The task was to 'sex the lines' by saying whether the speaker was male or female. As well as proving hugely enjoyable, it provided in Goodman's (1967) term a 'window' on the reading process, as well as revealing, it seemed, elements of sexism naturalised by the text and its dominant readings. In short, the blockages 'to seeing things as they really are' were removed, producing newly conscious readers.

It was assumed, of course, that having the evils of dominant readings revealed through the instrument of multiple readings, readers would see and *freely* accept the truths of the 'revealed' reading. This was important because our criticism of Personal Growth English had included the charge that 'questions which appear to invite a personal response are often all the more tyrannical; candidates are invited to interrogate their experience to discover a response which has in actuality been learnt' (Sinfield, 1985, p. 132). English practice informed by 'Theory' was not meant to do that; it was *enabling* analysis and critical consciousness – not teaching a particular reading.

Characteristically it was Annette, who began to articulate worries; firstly, about English's claims to be emancipatory, and secondly (and bravely) about her own work. Having criticised the description of Personal Growth English as an emancipatory discipline and its claim to offer freedom as disingenuous, she now began to question its relationship to the practices of Critical Literacy, which were endorsed in the text books for schools on which she had worked, *Reading Stories* (1987), *Reading Fictions* (1991) and later, *Investigating Texts* (1996). She began asking whether concepts such as 'multiple readings' and 'versions of reality', rather than being instruments of the critical reading that freed the reader to recognise the conditions of their formerly misrecognised reading, were actually part of the armoury of the English ethical project, and just as directive as the practices we previously had disparaged.

This precipitated a series of articles (Patterson & Mellor, 1994a; 1994b; 2001; 2004) addressing the perceived problem of normativity. It was one that also exercised others: 'But [the] focus on 'power', on 'transformation' and change does not, and cannot in itself, resolve central issues of moral and political normativity around the question of *whose* values, texts, ideologies and discourses should take centre stage, and about the desired shapes and directions of social transformation' (Muspratt et al., 1998, p. 7). Annette, however, asked a different question: *why* is there such an emphasis on freedom and transformation in English (and, also, such nervousness about instruction, expressed in articles, school documents and so on – see below). The importance of students producing their 'own readings' for example, which we had accepted without question, she pointed out, was paradoxical. The first readings of a text produced by students *are* their own readings, but they are rarely (or never) given the status of *either* a true personal response or a critical reading without



work being done to encourage modifications in certain pre-ordained directions depending on the 'model' of English. Whilst we had been willing to accept this as a criticism of Personal Growth, we struggled with it as a criticism of Critical Literacy.

In what seemed like a disengagement from many of the grander, emancipatory promises that theory seemed to offer, Annette's research led her to take a more analytical and questioning stance in relation to English 'itself' – scrutinising the 'cherished claims' of the subject with her considerable intellect. We had not ever wondered why we encouraged students to adopt 'a critical, reflective relation to self and society' (Moon, 2001, vii). We simply accepted that English was an inherently morally formative subject that encompassed the inculcation of a range of aesthetic and ethical abilities via a nondirective pedagogy. Annette encouraged us to ask (not always very willingly) how and why these particular characteristics of English had emerged.

She assembled descriptions of the emergence of English that are remarkably consistent in their attention to the production of a particular kind of person: one who can see clearly; is self-governing and, in the Critical Literacy classroom, not deceived by ideology. Further articles she wrote around this time (1997a; 1997b; 2000; 2002) explained how English has always had a morally formative and transformative goal although it had been presented in different ways. She amassed evidence, reading official documents and the works of English academics, from Arnold onwards, of how English was described in remarkably similar ways as offering the promise of an expansion of consciousness to be achieved freely through either aesthetic fulfilment *or* theoretical clarification.

Her research also elaborated on how the view of English as a morally formative subject was sustained by a pedagogy that relied on nondirective methods to bring students to self-understanding, and in Critical Literacy classrooms, to a point where they could also see through the ideological deceptions of the text (Patterson & Mellor, 1994b; Patterson, 1995). Encouraging students to problematise their initial responses to texts and inviting them to take up multiple reading positions through activities that encouraged social critique while, at the same time, claiming to allow free choice was just as disingenuous, she argued, as calling for a sincere personal response.

She gathered reminders of the non-coercive role ascribed to teachers from a range of perhaps surprisingly

diverse writers and policy makers (Patterson & Mellor, 1994a; Patterson, 1995):

If one's concern is essentially with literature one doesn't think of oneself as 'teaching'. One thinks of oneself as engaged with one's students in the business of criticism – which, of its nature, is collaborative. (Leavis, 1972, p. 109)

The teacher's skill lies in developing the subtlety and complexity of this [the student's] response without catechism or a one-way traffic in apodictic judgments. (Bullock, 1975, p. 134)

So we may bluntly point out to pupils or delicately elicit from them parts of the pattern, we may talk over relationships of the story reality, but we cannot do the work for our pupils. (Dixon, 1967)

The task is to assist the student to become himself: to make important choices about himself and his work and his relationships. (Britton, 1982, 272)

The peculiar responsibility of the English teacher is to bring students to a recognition of their human potential for feeling and speculating. (Hansen, 1984, p. 54)

Our job is not to produce 'readings' for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own. (Scholes, 1985, 24)

Annette asked us to question *our* status as non-directive 'guides'. This was not an especially popular idea with us initially. We had prided ourselves on our making clear the bases of our practice, unlike the deceptive reading regimes of previous models of English. Annette's research, however, pointed to a long-established pedagogy that operated in Critical Literacy as it did in earlier models of English, although with different 'targets'. And in the face of more *laissez faire* arguments, she pointed out that Critical Literacy does *not* accept complete multiplicity or plurality of readings. There *are* readings in the critical literacy classroom that are not acceptable: racist or sexist readings for example (Patterson & Mellor, 1994 a & b).

While we were still struggling with Annette's research at this point – worrying indeed about our teaching being 'gutted of its moral, social and political conscientiousness', as Ball (1988) had written when discussing government objectives to 'manage' outcomes in the English classroom. He had countered with a much grander vision: 'strong management and technical efficiency are poor alternatives to *freedom and democracy*' (p. 10, emphasis added). (Lest this be seen as coming from 'headier' times, *Teaching towards Democracy with Postmodern and Popular Culture Texts*, a collection of essays, was published in 2014.) Annette

pointed to such grandiose claims of English not to ridicule them, but rather, in order to ask *where* they came from, and *why* they informed both views of the subject English and so many of its practices.

What had changed in Annette's work during these years was her growing interest in history. Increasingly suspicious of ideology critique, she pursued lines of investigation that led to the publication of a series of truly illuminating articles. Influenced by the work of Ian Hunter, beginning with her reading his extraordinary work of scholarship, *Culture and Government* (1988), she became a regular at the British Library when in London, so that meetings with her had to be negotiated around that institution's opening times. Its collections of manuscripts and early texts proved invaluable to her research.

The beginnings of popular education in the nineteenth century in Annette's articles at this time are proposed as having a very different 'birth' from traditional accounts, which tend to ascribe an emancipatory genesis. Annette pointed firstly, to a pedagogy that combined 'spontaneity and restraint, autonomy and supervision, the free response of the student with the correcting limits set by the teacher' by which 'the architects and engineers of popular education sought to encourage students to 'freely' assume the task of self-regulation' (1995, p. 110). She concluded that to continue to see schooling 'within the sphere of ideology is to miss the point that [modern] schooling is the descendant of a formidable array of programs for the social administration of diverse populations' (1995, p. 110).

A series of articles building on this early historical research followed, looking at beginning reading pedagogy in sixteenth century England (Patterson, 1997b); a proposal to 'set limits' to English (1997a); the teacher-pupil relationship (Patterson, 2011; 2012); the historical conduct of the reading lesson (Green et al., 2013); and the legacy of Ian Hunter's work on literature practices, and the history of reading practices (2014). After extensive research in the British Library, which she loved, she declared she could end dinner parties by beginning to talk about early reading primers, but it wasn't true. Her research was stimulating and always presented in a witty and self-deprecatory way. Indeed, her essay titles were often preceded by the assertion that they were merely 'some' or 'preliminary' thoughts or remarks, understating the immense amount of research and intellectual endeavour involved in their writing.

Her contributions to discussions of English from the nineties onwards were not only erudite; they were also brave. Annette's questioning of largely taken-for-granted views of English and its claims had led to her asking quite different – and potentially unpopular – questions. Her article, 'Supervising freedom: the English profile: English curriculum; English pedagogy', (1995), for example, was an unusual 'take' on the arguments over the introduction around that time of Profiles in English. It is of interest, she writes, that both those *supporting* and those *opposing* the introduction of Profiles share a common ideological rhetoric around terms such as 'social justice', 'empowerment' and 'autonomy' and are informed by similar principles such as 'democracy' and 'culture'. But she notes that these terms are used very differently by each side. Those *opposing* the introduction of Profiles as an oppressive bureaucratic instrument use the rhetoric of empowerment and democracy to dismiss the ability of the merely pragmatic and instrumental to achieve personal and social ends. Those *supporting* the introduction of Profiles, however – also using the rhetoric of empowerment and democracy – do so in the interests of 'accountability and fiscal efficiency and managerial efficiencies'.

This opposition would usually lead, in discussions of English, to an argument condemning the impoverishment of instrumental interventions in English education. Not here; Annette suggests that ideology critique, while provoking discussion, has limitations, most obviously perhaps in continuing to locate opposing sides of an argument in a permanent 'face-off' that doesn't allow for analysis, since 'positions' are characterised as benign or malign principles rather than complex social and economic developments.

If it seemed to some that Annette had climbed down from the barricades and abandoned her political activism, this wasn't true. She continued her research and practical work in a wide variety of educational fields that included vocational education, IT, young adult literature, and much more. She also worked in a wide range of roles, both academic and bureaucratic, to improve the educational opportunities of all students. If her temperate historical descriptions of the emergence of English questioned a now-powerful (although not without opponents) and apparently radical orthodoxy in English classrooms and appeared to point to a more conservative form of English and a less inspiring role for teachers to play, this too was, and is, a misconception. She was no less concerned about

social justice than she had always been. Indeed, she questioned whether the over-reliance on ethics and the shying away from direct teaching was affecting those students, who would most benefit from more explicit instruction. (Such direct instruction was, of course, also criticised in the Personal Growth model, and was presumably employed with some despair by Leavisite teachers, who knew that only a small elite could take on such knowledge on anyway.)

Of course, it is possible to argue that Annette's work was simply 'reading critically' the premises and practices of Critical Literacy. Problematisation, after all, is one of its techniques – and criticisms of English and English teachers are not unknown! The subject from its inception appears to have been described as in a permanent state of crisis (Freebody, 2007; Widdowson, 1982) with critiques frequently taking one of two major forms. Firstly, there are arguments for a return to a 'golden age' when everyone could spell, read and knew their Shakespeare; and secondly, arguments for a more radical English that produces critically conscious readers able to see through 'apparatuses' of oppression. Annette's work after the eighties is different though. Her research set out not to make some triumphant ideological point or to arrive at some higher plane, but to describe how the particular characteristics of English had come about.

By 'assembling reminders' (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 127) of how English emerged and how its practices were installed, she hoped to lower the temperature of the debates around English education. The possibilities in English for moral formation, developed since the subject's beginnings, she suggested, could be seen as undoubtedly positive – but limited (1997a). And, they were also normative, responding to the needs of the time. (Scholes's 'tools' for producing 'own readings', she argued, were actually *rules* for producing particular readings.) Furthermore, she suggested, the skewing of the syllabus toward higher aims – democracy and freedom – could lead to false oppositions between administration and autonomy, and could discourage cool and informed consideration of the implications for pedagogy.

Annette did not come to see Critical Literacy as 'bad' in itself, only disingenuous in the claims it made. In schools with markedly different populations than before – both more culturally diverse and less amenable to passive regimes of reception – governmental interventions such as teaching to read for race, sex and class are performing an ethical role similar to *all* English

models in that they are responding to the perceived needs of the times. While perhaps less romantic than a call to the barricades to defeat oppressive forces blocking the realisation of the complete individual and the achievement of freedom and democracy, a *historical* account of English and its practices may enable more *openly* directive and helpful teaching strategies for *all* students (see, for example, Moon, 2012).

It should be added that Annette was always deeply admiring of the way in which teachers coped with the constant, and often contradictory, demands made of them, frequently in the face of uncivil, unfair and false accusations of 'dumbing down' and contributing to a decline in educational standards. She was the first to acknowledge that in English classrooms, good teachers have in the past provided, and in the present still *do* provide, instruction, but perhaps with some sense of unease given the exhortations to allow and enable, rather than teach.

During her lifetime, Annette produced an impressive body of work. The breadth and depth of her work and research, in fact, makes one quail at the prospect of trying to provide a survey of just one aspect of her more-than-thirty-years' intellectual enquiry in the field – and doing even partial justice to it. If only she were here to tell us where we have got it wrong! Ironically, she probably wouldn't though; she'd certainly scoff at our admiration for her work but she would be just as kind and encouraging of our efforts as she was to her students, her colleagues and her friends. Annette's work, her research and her example, however, will continue to inform – and challenge us.

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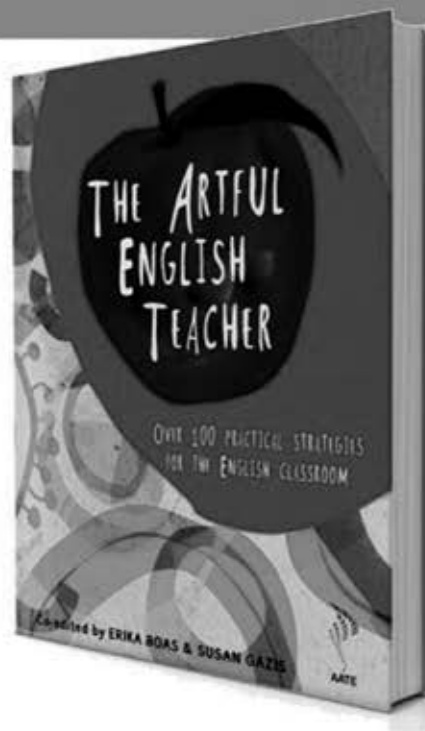
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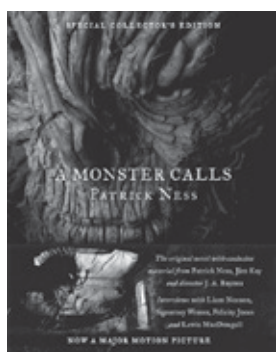
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# & READING VIEWING

with Deb McPherson

*A Monster Calls* is a very special book and it was a delight to be sent recently the Special Collector's Edition by Walker Books. I spent a few enchanting hours re-reading the original text and exploring the new second section, 'The Story of the Book.' But more of that below. This beautiful hardback reminded me of all the books publishers regularly send me so that reviews can be written to assist you in selecting texts for your classrooms. I could never review all the books I'm sent so I just try to mention those texts that stand out for one reason or another or seem to offer something special to students everywhere. I'm very grateful to all the publishers for their book parcels (the postie wonders where I put them all!) for without them I would have very little to review. I do make sure that books are redistributed to local school libraries and English departments. I've also had some help with this column. I'm very grateful to Helen Sykes, for once again, contributing a review. On this occasion it is of Glenda Millard's wonderful novel, *The Stars at Oktober Bend*.

## Fiction for Years 7 and 8



***A Monster Calls* Special Collector's edition  
Patrick Ness 2016 (2011)  
hardback 356 pp.**

I reviewed *A Monster Calls* in *English in Australia* in 2011 (Vol 46:3) and I thought then it would find its way into most school bookrooms. This new edition made me revisit the

novel. To recap: thirteen-year-old Conor's mother is dying but Conor will not admit this terrible truth and suffers headaches and nightmares because of the conflict in his heart and life. One night Conor hears his name being called. Gripping his bedroom window is the yew tree from the graveyard on the hill that has transformed into a massive and menacing monster. But

is Conor frightened and overcome? 'Shout all you want' he says, 'I've seen worse.' And of course he has – as he watches his mother decline into the grip of her disease. But the monster is not finished with Conor, and over several combative nights he tells Conor stories – stories that lead him and the reader to the final, exquisite line in the book.

Irish writer Siobhan Dowd had the idea for this book but sadly died of cancer before she could write it. The publisher asked Patrick Ness if he could write it and his author's note and dedication to Siobhan add another aspect to explore in this remarkable book. Myth and life and death have rarely been so powerfully combined.

Jim Kay's black-and-white drawings and washes, sometimes extending across three pages, other times a smudged fingerprint or a tangle of lines, are just extraordinary. Unsurprisingly, *A Monster Calls* won both the Carnegie and Greenaway Medals, the only book to have ever done so. *A Monster Calls* has been made into a film that is due to be released in Australia in January 2017.

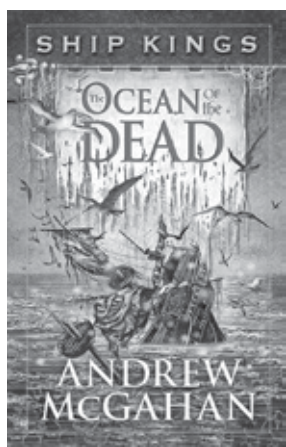
In the second part of this collector's edition we hear from Patrick Ness about writing the book. Denise Johnstone-Burt, the publisher and editor, discusses the genesis of the book from the original idea by Siobhan Dowd to the offer to Ness – 'to the best writer I know,' – to take the idea and run with it. Ness's decision to write something that Siobhan would have liked rather than in her style was pivotal in allowing him the freedom to expand on the original idea. Jim Kay provides insight into the process he went through to imagine and develop the illustrations. The film director J.A. Bayona provides insight on the transition from novel to film while interviews with actors, production and costume designers offer more fascinating detail on that process of adaptation.

At \$34.99 a copy few schools could afford to be buying class sets but a few copies in the library or English book room will provide students with great insights into the creative process of the author, the

illustrator, the editor and the director. I hope most librarians will have a few copies available for students and English faculties could augment their class sets with some additional copies of this exceptional edition.

*Ship Kings: The Ocean of the Dead* Andrew McGahan  
Allen & Unwin (2016) 419 pp.  
Series, hardcover

*The Ocean of the Dead* concludes a wonderful series by Andrew McGahan. We find Dow Amber and Nella



sailing south in an endeavour to find a new land far away from the wars and ravages of the five islands. They have two ships, the *Chloe* and the *Snout*, supplies for some months and over a thousand crew and passengers. They also have small attack boats on board that can be fuelled by whale oil to pull the ships through the areas around the equator where no winds blow. But what they face is truly extraordinary.

As Dow and Nell sail south they encounter the ships of their nemesis, Crown Price Diego, who, instead of offering them battle, allows them to leave. As Dow's ships move south into the treacherous doldrums on fretful winds they throw their cannons overboard to reduce the ships' weight. They encounter white slime and acid seas that eat into the ship's timbers, seaweed that releases the Miasma, a green mist that brings terror, madness and death and the prospect of mutiny. But before a decision to turn back can be made the ship of Diego, renamed the *New World*, is seen. Diego has been secretly tracking Dow; he has power on his side and is intent on taking command and going south to new lands that he can rule. He has his own scapegoat and some prophecies that predict his success. As all winds die, the small boats are readied to pull the ships in the intense heat but soon the fuel is consumed and rowing is required. As the Sunken arise to attack the ships and Nell and Dow are separated, it seems that all hope is lost. But McGahan conjures a remarkable conclusion, both satisfying and mystifying from these perilous situations.

Year 7 and 8 students will find *The Ocean of the Dead* a complex and enthralling book, with superb world building, nuanced characters and daunting prospects. It's the voyage of a lifetime and the echoes of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' found in the first book of the series resonate in this last one as well.

## Fiction for Years 9 and 10

Helen Sykes knows what works in classrooms. I'm very grateful for her review below of a novel that will undoubtedly find its way into many of them.

*The Stars at Oktober Bend* Glenda Millard  
Allen & Unwin (2016) 266 pp.

For me, this is the perfect class-set novel. It is not necessarily the book your students would choose for themselves, and they may need some coaxing and support when they begin reading. Like most quality literature, it is challenging. A large part of the story is told in the voice of fifteen-year-old Alice, and Alice's voice is unique. Three years earlier she suffered a severe brain injury and now her 'electrics' go haywire and she has to re-learn language. While speech is still very difficult, she has slowly taught herself to write, with much dictionary-work and reading of her grandmother's old Bible. Her unconventional style can be disconcerting at first – no capital letters, little punctuation, eccentric use of words and a format on the page that often looks more like poetry than prose:



i remembered words, struggled to speak them.  
forgot how to arrange them. how to join them on  
a page. to begin with i wrote short things. lists  
and notes to self. some lines finished with a word  
that reminded me of what i wanted to say next

*school is loud too  
many people  
joey brings me  
books teaches  
me things looks  
after me.*

Reassure less confident readers that it is worth the effort coming to terms with Alice's voice. It becomes beautifully expressive, mastering a range of emotion that a more mundane prose style could never attempt. Gradually, piece by piece, we learn about Alice. She lives with an elderly grandmother – Gram (Grandma Glorious) – who is in frail health. Her two great supports are her devoted younger brother Joey and Bear, the Maremma dog that watches over her. The



family is socially quite isolated and their lives in a condemned house on the flood plain are precarious. We discover that her father died a long time ago, that her mother left the children with their grandparents to pursue a musical career in Canada and that her much-loved grandfather is in gaol: 'there was always forsaking in our family'. Eventually we learn the searing truth about what happened to her when she was twelve.

Into Alice's life comes Manny, another damaged soul. Manny runs at night to get away from his nightmares – nightmares about the slaughter of his family in Sierra Leone where, for a time, he was forced to be a child soldier. He first sees Alice sitting on the roof of her house in the middle of the night. Manny is the first person to read the poems that Alice writes and leaves for people to find. When they finally meet, there is an immediate rapport between them. The novel is, among other things, a tender love story.

But *The Stars at Oktober Bend* is also an adventure story. The old house on the flood plain becomes a potential death trap when the river floods suddenly and violently. Gram stubbornly resists evacuation; Alice becomes trapped on a precarious balcony, unwilling to climb on to the roof of the house because she won't leave Bear behind. And there is a human menace as well – a dangerous bully who has previously threatened to harm Alice.

This is often a disturbing read. There has been a lot of pain, and the revelations about how Alice acquired her brain injury are as confronting as Manny's nightmares about the deaths of his family. In the end, though, it is a wonderfully life-affirming story, a celebration of human resilience and courage and the ability to forgive. I shed as many tears on a second reading as I did on the first.

This is for mature readers. I strongly recommend it for whole-class reading in Year 9, although some Year 8 classes might be ready for it. Yes, it's confronting and sometimes difficult – and you may need to help students to go back and pick up clues that they have missed, but the rewards are huge. Like the best class novels, this strongly engages our emotions. There is a range of characters to empathise with – Alice and Manny, of course, but also Joey and his girlfriend, Tilda. There is a constant reminder of the ugliness of life – the bullying thugs in the town, the war in Sierra Leone – but there are good, wise, generous people too: the policeman, Tilda's dad; Manny's kind foster parents; a real sense of community envelops the novel.

I have said in the past that many great class-set novels

become classics. I believe that *The Stars at Oktober Bend* will find its place in the canon of Australian young adult literature.

Helen Sykes

***Gemina: The Illuminae Files\_02* Amie Kaufman & Jay Kristoff. (2016)  
Allen & Unwin 659 pp.**

Bold, bloodthirsty and brutal with drug references – not the ingredients I would normally recommend for schools but *Gemina* is so much more than this. It's easily the most exciting YA novel I've read this year. The return train trip to Sydney usually lasts about five hours but I don't remember any of it. I didn't lift my head from the pages in front of me and saw a necessary eye appointment as a major interruption to the rush of the narrative.



*Gemina* is a worthy companion to *Illuminae* and I use that world deliberately as it is not so much a sequel as a parallel novel, a description that has greater resonance as you move through this amazing space opera. You will remember that *Illuminae* was structured around a United Terran Authority investigation into the alleged brutal BeiTech attack on the planet Kerenza and its illegal hermium mines. Two bright teenagers, Kady Grant and Ezra Mason, who fled that invasion, find themselves on different space ships working to save themselves and other escaping survivors. Finally reunited on *Hypatia* they are travelling towards the space station *Heimdall*, situated at the lip of a space wormhole.

*Gemina* opens with the Kerenza Trials and a review of the transcripts collected. Hanna Donnelly, the daughter of the station commander, is preparing for Terra Day celebrations and wants some recreational drugs for her amusement and that of her boyfriend. She approaches Nik Malikov, a member of the Dom Najov (the House of Knives cartel operating illegally on the station) to get a deal. He's up to his knees in manure as his uncle is using cows as hosts for the Lanima, vicious parasites that produce the psychoactive hallucinogen Hanna is after. As he meets her to hand it over the BeiTech assault team arrive. BeiTech are determined to keep their invasion of Kerenza a secret and their attack on the space station aims to keep that secret even safer. They have help from an unidentified mole, codenamed Rapiere, on the station.



Hanna (nicknamed 'Highness' by Nik) is more than a pretty princess. She's spent a childhood playing war games with her father and is a martial arts graduate and her father's murder spurs her to action. She joins the resistance team of Nik and Ella (Nik's wheelchair-bound cousin) with impressive results. I particularly liked the repetition of the two-page gallery portraits of the twenty-four members of the attack team and the way they are progressively whittled away by Hanna and co. In the midst of death and destruction the gallows humour of the trio and the burgeoning attraction between Hanna and Nik hits just the right pitch.

This is a big book (they both are) but the size vanishes as the myriad voices of reports, interviews, 'Unipedia' entries, captured audio and visual analysis, emails, graphics, journal illustrations, fonts and perspectives propel the reader through the pages. It's salutary that only adults ingest the recreational drugs and they play a key role in a deadly resolution.

Students in Year 9 should find this novel an addictive experience as they chase Hanna and Nic all over the space station. The pace is relentless, the revelations surprising, the science cutting edge and there is also this to look forward to: Amie Kaufman's blog says 'Coming in 2017, the third book in *The Illuminae Files* will conclude the story.'

**Bro Helen Chebatte**  
Hardie Grant (2016) 234 pp.

*Bro* takes the reader for a walk through a schoolyard at recess and reveals the ethnic groups you may find there. Romeo Makhoulouf is a Leb at a Christian Brothers' School. Rezs are the Asians (from the Arabic for rice), Fobs, or 'fresh off the boats', are the Pacific Islanders, while Ozzies (Skips, Convicts, Bogans) make up the white contingent. Indigenous students are not mentioned and don't feature in this story.

The novel revolves around Romeo, his romance with Stefanie, his friendship with best mate Diaz, and the consequences of the fight club started at the school by one of the Fobs. When Romeo is manoeuvred into a showdown with Ozzie Palmer, there is a fatal outcome. But from grief comes a Facebook page calling for unity and a realisation that fighting solves nothing and makes things worse. The dialogue is short and sharp, with slang but few expletives. In this context that doesn't actually seem realistic. The blacked out swear word might have worked well here. They worked well in the *Illuminae Files* and they leave the reader

to insert whatever expletive they like. The texting cartouches between characters add variety and interest to the page and reinforce the strong connection that social media has to adolescents. Issues of mateship, first love, peer pressure, family ties and identity are all explored in this deceptively simple novel.

Helen Chabette is an actor and an author and she grew up in the multicultural western Sydney suburb of Granville, a place she said was a buzzing mix of cultures and people that offered her endless story ideas.

*Bro* is a novel that disengaged students, particularly Year 9 boys, will respond to.

*Between the Flags*, a seven-minute Tropfest finalist in 2007 by Jayce White is a perfect companion to this novel. Two young males head to the place where the Cronulla riots are meant to take place. They are on opposing sides, but, would you believe it, they get there early and it's hard to have a riot with just two. Conversation ensues and they find lots in common from cars to speakers to technology. One brought a bat and to pass the time they have a two-man cricket game. When they get a call and find out they are at the wrong beach neither feels like going to the riot and they head off together. It's funny and frank and really endearing. You can find it at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWLB8d\\_cxPU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWLB8d_cxPU)

## Books for Years 11 and 12

**Station Eleven** Emily St John Mandel  
Picador (2014) 333 pp.

My apologies that this review took so long to appear. I promised it in 2015 but only realised recently I hadn't included it. It is a remarkable novel, certainly the most impressive dystopia I have read in a long time: inventive, realistic and haunting.

Mandel takes the post apocalyptic genre and re-directs it with calm prose towards individual lives rather than world catastrophe. She helps the reader find elements of beauty despite the event that begins the novel in which nearly everyone and everything is lost.

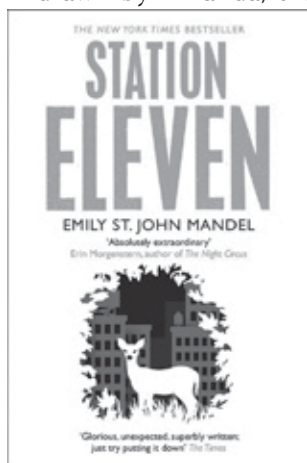
The Georgia flu is a pandemic that wipes out much of the world's population. We see it manifest itself in



Toronto after a famous actor, Arthur Leander, dies of a heart attack during his performance of *King Lear*. Jeevan, a journalist who wanted to be a paramedic, is there as is Kristin, a child actor. They both survive: not many do.

Of all of them at the bar that night, the bartender was the one who survived the longest. He died three weeks later on the road out of the city. (p. 15)

Several characters' lives weave through the story, and provide unexpected connections and insights. Leander himself, Miranda who was his first wife, Clark, his closest friend and the man who let her know of his death, Jeevan who becomes a doctor, and Kristin. The title comes from the comic of the same name, hand-drawn by Miranda, that makes connections from the



old world to the new.

In Chapter Six the author supplies two pages of an incomplete list of 'no mores' – countries or fire departments or pharmaceuticals or trains are just a few of the familiar entities and services that have vanished.

The narrative moves back and forth between the pandemic and Year 20. There are isolated settlements in

Year 20, some good, some malign. The Travelling Symphony, a group of actors and musicians in caravans pulled by horses, makes a journey between communities, bringing plays and concerts. They stick to places they know but are cautious; they have weapons and scout out territory ahead. Their motto, 'survival is insufficient' (taken from *Star Trek*), guides them as they perform Shakespeare to audiences who seem to prefer his work to any other; they want 'what was best about the world' that has gone.

When they reach a small settlement where they had previously left two members of their troupe they discover that unsettling changes have occurred. Their flight, dispersal and pursuit by Tyler, Leander's son and self-styled prophet, dominates the rest of the novel. The troupe is finally reunited in Severn where, among the remains of the airport, the community has created a primitive museum. Clark is the curator and the Museum of Civilisation represents life before the pandemic; totems from the past include mobiles, a credit card and red stiletto shoes.

While much has been lost there is confidence to be found in the concluding pages. One of the final images is of Clark showing Kristin, from the airport tower, lights glowing in the darkness to the south. Perhaps this novel gives us hope, that even when humanity is reduced and life is fragile, decency and kindness can prevail.

## Poetry

### 'What They Took With Them – a List'

Jenifer Toksvig (2016)

[www.withrefugees.org](http://www.withrefugees.org) and <http://www.acompletelossforwords.com> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xS-Q2sgNjl8> duration: 5 minutes 24 seconds.

Jenifer Toksvig's poem 'What They Took With Them – a List' is a powerful plea for understanding and empathy, a compelling invitation to really walk in someone else's shoes. It asks the question, 'If you had to flee your home what would you take?' It was inspired by the stories of refugees and their first-hand accounts of what they took with them when they were forced from their homes because of war. Prominent actors including Cate Blanchett, Keira Knightley, Juliet Stevenson, Peter Capaldi, Stanley Tucci, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Kit Harington, Douglas Booth, Jesse Eisenberg and Neil Gaiman perform the poem, using the Readers' Theatre convention. Cut into the performance are photographs and video from Brian Sokol's photography project, 'The Most Important Thing,' made in collaboration with UNHCR.

As each actor speaks a word or line or two a rhythm and urgency is established. Repetition comes into play as they announce the things people said they took with them. Money, documents, clothes, bags, torches, photos are all mentioned. The phrase 'house keys' lingers in the air and in the mind as images of bombed and ruined buildings are juxtaposed. The hope expressed in that item, the desire to come back and find home again against all the odds is almost unbearable.

This short video shows the horror that occurs when war and civilians intersect. It also shows the humanity and the dignity of people when they have lost everything. It's powerful, punchy and poetic, and students in Years 7–10 would have much to learn and much to discuss after hearing it and seeing it.

The following notice was posted on Jenifer Toksvig's webpage in mid September 2016 at <http://www.acompletelossforwords.com>

Many thanks to all who have been in touch with regard to engaging their students with 'What They Took With Them – a List'. The poem is currently only available through its connection with the film and this UNHCR campaign; the text is not available separately anywhere. Once the petition has been delivered, we'll be looking into an education pack that can be sent out: more info here when available.

**Undying A Love Story Michel Faber  
Canongate (2016) 122 pp.**

These 67 poems by a well-known novelist have that 'intensity of language' that Clive James said marks the difference between poetry and prose. This is poetry that meets James's criteria for 'real poetry' – poems you feel the force of at first glance. Poems you want to read aloud. Poems full of phrases that reverberate in your head and haunt you; phrases you want to commit to memory.

Faber says in his foreword that his wife of 26 years was suffering from 'multiple myeloma, an incurable cancer of the bone marrow, and was struggling not only with the illness but with the cumulative effects of six years of toxic treatment'. The poems chart Eva's illness and its aftermath. They are unsentimental and caring, angry and etched in black humour, full of grief and overwhelmingly full of love.

'Old People in Hospital' is one of the few poems in the collection that Faber wrote earlier, when he was as he says, 'an observer rather than an insider'.

In their appointed cots they lie  
Waiting to be cured at last, and die.

As an insider he comes to know all too well the medical insanity, the roulette nature of the illness, the feelings of inadequacy and helplessness and the terrible pressure of time:

We made love  
the second last time,  
always the second last time,  
as many times  
as time allowed.

'The Time You Chose' records Eva's death as Faber dozed beside his wife. It's beautiful and almost unbearable.

For twenty minutes, thirty maybe  
My eyes were closed  
That was the time you chose.

These poems may be harrowing and confronting in their details but they are not despairing and they have a place in the senior classroom. They are full of intelligence and truth. They offer consolation and empathy to many a wounded heart and deserve a wide audience.

All I can do, in what remains of my brief time.  
Is mention, to whoever cares to listen,  
That a woman once existed who was kind  
And beautiful and brave, and I will not forget  
How the world was altered, beyond recognition,  
When we met.

That's a eulogy to remember. How wonderful to be remembered like that.

Finally, the vital importance of critical literacy has been highlighted by troubled times across the world. More than ever students need to leave our schools knowing the difference between fact and fiction and the distinguishing features and techniques of persuasive texts.



As if to match the times in which we live a new edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been issued by Text publishing with an introduction by Charlotte Wood, whose ferocious novel, *The Natural Way of Things*, was joint winner of the 2016 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction. It also won the Stella Prize and the Indie Book of the Year.

Wood writes of the 'creeping, dreadful déjà vu' of re-reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. She notes its predictive qualities, (the Two Minute Hate), its revelations on the subversion and degradation of our language and she asks can it 'speak to our lives, here, now?' Her answer is a resolute 'yes'.

From Orwell I think the answer may be this: freedom exists only in the moments we exercise it. We must mark the paper, we must refuse. We must bear witness to the facts before our eyes, listen and give clear voice to the bones' mute protest, for as soon as we fall silent – from distractions, obedience, exhaustion or fear – our freedom evaporates, and we are left worshipping only its empty image. (pp. xiii-xiv)

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been set for study in several states, it is certainly required reading in 2017. Happy reading and viewing until next time.

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