Australian literature: culture, identity and English teaching[i]

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The development of the Australian Curriculum has reignited a debate about the role of Australian literature in the contexts of curricula and classrooms. A review of the mechanisms for promoting Australian literature including literary prizes, databases, surveys and texts included for study in senior English classrooms in New South Wales and Victoria provides a background for considering the purpose of Australian texts and the role of literature teachers in shaping students' engagement with literature.

In taking the pulse of Australian literature generally it is worth pausing to think about some of Australia's literary prizes and their accompanying guidelines and criteria. Many texts set for study in classrooms first appear on our radar through these prize lists. One of the most prestigious and oldest awards is the Miles Franklin Award which commenced in 1957. The winner of that year was Patrick White for his novel *Voss*. In the 54 years since the prize was established it has been won by female writers on 12 occasions, including four-time winner Thea Astley. Given Thea Astley's repeat performances, the prize has been awarded to nine individual female authors. Male authors have won the award on 39 occasions including repeat wins by Patrick White (2) Kim Scott (2) Alex Miller (2) Tim Winton (4) Thomas Keneally (2) and Peter Carey (3). Overall, the award went to 30 individual male authors. But perhaps of greater interest is the fact that many Miles Franklin winners and shortlisted authors were secondary school teachers of English including the 2011 winner, Kim Scott, who is descended from the Noongar peoples of southern Western Australia. Kim Scott along with Alexis Wright, descended from the Waanyi peoples of the Gulf of Carpentaria and winner of the 2007 Miles Franklin, are the only Aboriginal Australian writers to receive the award. Imbued with cultural gravitas, the Award embodies a preoccupation with cultural identity and literary quality. The judges claim each year that their decision is based on the quality of the writing of the submitted novels and the purpose of the award is clearly articulated: 'The Miles Franklin Literary Award celebrates Australian character and creativity and nurtures the continuing life of literature about Australia' (see http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/).

Australia is littered with literary awards, which at last count included 26 for literature, 19 for poetry, eight for children's books and three for crime writing. The lucrative Prime Minister's Literary Award was introduced by the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 and now includes four categories: non-fiction, fiction, young adult fiction and children's fiction. In 2011 the winning book attracted a tax-free prize of $80,000 with $5000 going to a maximum of four shortlisted titles in each of the Award categories. As with the Miles Franklin Award, the Prime Minister's Literary Awards make an explicit link with Australian culture while not stipulating that the texts should be about Australian life. The Guidelines for Entry state that the Awards 'celebrate the contribution of Australian literature to the nation's cultural and intellectual life' (see http://www.arts.gov.au/pmla). The awards recognise the importance of literature 'to our national identity, community and economy'. (An intriguing reference there to 'economy'—a reminder that literature does pay its way.) What each of the literary prize websites are at pains to point out is that these awards are about something broader than 'literary merit'. In each case they pursue a strong agenda centred on culture and identity.

Another indicator of the health of Australian literature is the extent and growth in recent years of resources to support the teaching of Australian literature. The most well-known of these is the AustLit database (sometimes referred to as 'the gateway'). My involvement with this long-running project commenced in 2009 when I joined a team led by Kerry Mallan at the Queensland University of Technology to develop a digital repository of Australian Children's Literature, funded by the Australian Research Council's Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities grant[1]. The Children's Literature Digital Repository is now a major subset of the AustLit database and includes a number of Learning Trails developed by a member of the project team, Cherie Allan, to support teachers in using the early texts that form the digital repository in combination with more contemporary texts. Currently developed Learning Trails include Australia's Engagement with War, The Anzac Tradition, The Roles of Women in War, The Conscription Debate and many more. The Australian Research Council (ARC) traditionally funds at a high level the infrastructure and equipment needs of engineering and science faculties including laboratory buildings and super computers but the AustLit contributing universities, led by Kerry Kilner at The University of Queensland, won an argument with the ARC on the grounds that data comprise the infrastructure of the Arts and the Humanities and as such are as important to these fields as are super computers or laboratory equipment to engineering and the sciences. The outcome has been funding from the ARC and from contributing universities for the development over several years of the AustLit database which is accessible from most Australian libraries, including school libraries, and provides a wealth of information for teachers and researchers. As an example, *The AustLit Anthology of Criticism,* which is part of the service accessible from the AustLit site, provides access to a wide range of resources for teaching Australian literature in secondary schools including criticism, author biographies, bibliographic details (AustLit home page).

The database team extended its interest in teaching Australian literature via a survey of teachers which was published by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council in 2010 (Mead, 2010). Although the number of senior secondary teachers who responded was low (n = 25) the survey provided a rare insight into the views of some teachers. Secondary teachers were asked what they considered important in the provision of resources when selecting Australian literature texts for teaching. Responses indicate that digital access was considered the least important influence. The most important influences were (1) the availability of the text in the school store room, (2) the availability of the text in print and (3) the existence of the text as an enduring feature of the curriculum over time (15).

Secondary teachers who took part in this survey also rated the following attributes as 'very important' or 'important' when selecting texts for study (15):

Aesthetic value 88%
Quality of language use 88%
Exploring questions of identity 75%
Representing cultural diversity 75%

These views about the importance of literary quality, culture and identity also echo the concerns of literary prize panels.

Senior secondary teachers were generally supportive of a national curriculum although they stressed the importance of teacher autonomy in selecting texts for study and in the design of units, emphasising the need for units to be designed to suit local contexts. General consensus on the compulsory study of Australian literature in separate units was that it limits students' engagement with a diverse range of literacy contexts (13), for instance, sixty-five percent of secondary teacher respondents to the survey stated a preference for including Australian texts 'within units that relate key concepts and themes to texts from around the world' (26). Teachers were quick to avoid the impression that the study of Australian literature be linked to nationalism, rather they approached the question of the importance of Australian literature from the perspective of students' enthusiasm for engaging with texts that represent recognizable experiences from their own lives.

A third indicator of the strength of Australian literature is its presence and long history in Australian classrooms. It is salutary at this point to recall an enduring social and pedagogical anxiety around the need to include Australian stories as part of the curriculum. This anxiety dates back to the early years of school education in the fledgling colonies. Through the mid- to late-nineteenth century the Australian colonies used two sets of school readers as textbooks for teaching reading and for English studies in schools: First, the Irish National Reader, which was in use from the 1840s to the 1870s, followed by Nelson's Royal Readers, which were used into the early part of the twentieth century in Victoria and Queensland. These were followed by the Australian School series, which was in use in NSW until the introduction in 1916 of *The School Magazine of Literature for our Boys and Girls*. The Royal Readers and the Australian School Readers were almost identical in content and layout and were modelled on their predecessor, the Irish National Readers. Together these books formed the foundation for teaching reading and for extending the reading interests of children throughout their schooling years—generally up to around Grade 6. These books and magazines were used in every classroom in the country and distributed free of charge through schools. They formed the centrepiece of the reading curriculum and gained a wide audience as they were read not only by school children but by members of their families.

By the 1880s teachers and parents began to question the content of the readers and to make demands for books with relevance to the Australian landscape and to what was viewed as an Australian way of life. Although the Royal Readers and the Australian School series did include some references to some Australian flora, fauna and history they remained firmly located in the northern hemisphere. The colonial education department was under increasing pressure during the 1890s to change the reading books in order to include more local content. As H. Shelton, an inspector of schools commented in 1891 in relation to the Royal Reader:

> I have often wondered how the Wimmera farmers relish the statement in the Second Book [of the Royal Readers] that 'it is a pleasant sight to see wild rabbits running over the fields.' This lesson should either be struck out, or the other side of the picture given for the benefit of young Australians (Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 189165).

By the turn of the century a great deal of Australian content had been added to the readers and school papers, including stories about Australian explorers, about Aboriginal peoples and their way of life (as interpreted by Europeans) and stories from the gold fields. The 'new

education' of the early twentieth century articulated a need for reading materials to be relevant to the child's experience of the world and this remains a familiar argument today.

A modern example of an enduring interest in the inclusion of Australian texts in English curricula is the relatively high level of Australian content in the 2009 Year 9 NAPLAN reading test. The Year 9 NAPLAN (2009) Reading Magazine, which forms the basis of the NAPLAN Year 9 Reading test, included several texts about Australian experiences, created by Australian writers or artists:

- An extract from David Metzenthen's novel, *Finn and the Big Guy*
- An extract from Deidre Stokes' book about Aboriginal art, *Desert Dreaming*
- A reproduction of a painting by Michael Nelson Tjakmarra, *Dreaming Sites in the Western Desert* (in Deidre Stokes' book)
- An extract from Andrew McGahan's novel, *The White Earth*
- An extract from Fiona Capps's novel, *Night Surfing*

These extracts formed more than half of the material included in the 2009 NAPLAN Reading Magazine and, as previously noted, the use of prose extracts, rather than full-length works and the inclusion of Australian content dates from the early years of the colony's first schools. The argument for the use of extracts is the same now as it was in the nineteenth century. The brevity and functionality of extracts and adaptations afford teachers a way of introducing students to a wide range of language use and to ideas that might not be accessible through a full-length work.

When we begin to look further up the secondary school the evidence of inclusion of Australian texts or Australian authors or creators is somewhat mixed. The prescribed text list for the New South Wales, Higher School Certificate English (Standard) and English (Advanced) paper in 2010 included five Australian authors in addition to the Dutch/Australian film director, Rolf De Heer. The prose fiction section included five novels with only one novel by an Australian writer (Tara June Winch) and the only Australian non-fiction text set for prescribed study was *Romulus, My Father* (Raimond Gaita). One of the two drama texts was by an Australian playwright, June Harrison, and both films (*Strictly Ballroom* and *Ten Canoes*) were by Australian directors. Australians also scored well on poetry with two of the three prescribed poets (Peter Skryznecki and Steven Herrick). Overall then, apart from the prose fiction section, Australian writers and directors of work that could be considered to enhance students' understanding of Australian experiences were fairly well represented on the 2010 New South Wales (NSW) Higher School Certificate (HSC).

NSW is clear too about the purpose of the HSC English program of study in relation to developing what are viewed as Australian values. Its stated purpose is (among other things) to:

> foster the intellectual, social and moral development of students, in particular developing their:
> respect for the cultural diversity of Australian society (5).
>
> Course requirements for each of the English courses that make up English Stage 6 include the statement:
>
> 'students are required to:
>
> • study Australian and other texts' (23, 39, 57).

> [Through this set of courses,] the development of English language skills, knowledge and understanding, and engagement with literature, will increase students' understanding of the diversity and values of Australian and other cultures (54).
>
> **Meaning** is central to the study of English. The study of English makes explicit the language forms and processes of meaning. English Stage 6 develops this by encouraging students to explore, critically evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of the texts of Australian and other societies…
>
> These [HSC English] courses provide diverse approaches to texts so that students may become flexible and critical thinkers, capable of appreciating the variety of cultural heritages and differences that make up Australian society (20).
>
> Students also have opportunities to:
> enhance their understanding of Australian and other cultures (23).

Australian culture and texts are liberally referred to throughout the HSC English studies curriculum, but without a great deal of guidance regarding the reason for their inclusion or the purposes to which they should be put, apart from developing an appreciation of social and cultural diversity.

A similar situation occurs in Victoria with the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) English. Although the study design for VCE English changed after 2007, it is possible to track Australian texts listed for study for the text response section of the written paper over the past ten years. Each year the VCE English written paper listed between 20 and 31 texts from which students could select when addressing examination questions and each year the list included a number of Australian texts. For instance, over the past decade the text list has included 33 individual texts by Australian writers or directors, although not all of these texts explored Australian themes, settings or characters. The following table shows the most frequent occurrence and the years in which the texts appeared on the list.

Table 1a

Occurrence of Australian authors and directors on the VCE Written Examination text list for the text response section of the paper 2001-2010, showing texts that have appeared in three or more years.

Text	Number of times occurring on VCE English Section A text list 2001-2010
Romulus, My Father Raimond Gaita	2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
Stolen Jane Harrison	2002, 2003, 2004, 2005
Short Stories Henry Lawson	2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
Minimum of Two Tim Winton (also by Tim Winton, *The Riders*)	2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 2001

Don't Start Me Talking: Lyrics 1984—2004 Paul Kelly	2006, 2007, 2008, 2009
Inheritance Hannie Rayson	2006, 2007, 2008, 2009
Home Larissa Behrendt	2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
Look Both Ways Sarah Watt	2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
Dream Stuff David Malouf (also by David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter*)	2002, 2003, 2004 2001
The Year of Living Dangerously Christopher Koch	2002, 2003, 2004
The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith Thomas Keneally	2003, 2004, 2005
Lantana Ray Lawrence	2005, 2006, 2007
Maestro Peter Goldsworthy	2008, 2009, 2010
Selected Poems Kenneth Slessor	2008, 2009, 2010

Table 1b

Occurrence of Australian authors and directors on the VCE Written Examination text list for the text response section of the paper 2001-2010, showing texts that have appeared once or twice.

Texts	Frequency of appearance 2001-2010
Going Home Archie Weller *Sometimes Gladness* Bruce Dawe *The Divine Wind* Garry Disher *Breaker Morant* Bruce Beresford *I for Isobel* Amy Witting *The Hunter* Julia Leigh *Blueprint for a Barbed Wire Canoe* Wayne Macauley *Collected Stories* Beverley Farmer	Appeared twice 2001-2010

	Appeared once 2001-2010
Bearbrass Robyn Annear	2001
Diving for Pearls Katherine Thomson	2001
The Brush-Off Shane Maloney	2001
Jackson's Track Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon	2003

Dispossessed Philip Hodgins	2004
A Human Pattern: Selected Poems Judith Wright	2010
Bypass: The story of a Road Michael McGirr	2010
Cosi Louis Nowra	2010
Year of Wonders Geraldine Brooks	2010

Overall then, in taking the pulse of Australian literature in secondary classrooms, there is clear evidence of its importance and inclusion on text lists, in statements of curriculum purpose and aims, and in teachers' claims for the necessity to include texts that connect with students' lives and experience. However, it is also useful to look at evidence of the actual take up of Australian texts in secondary classrooms. Many texts are recommended for study but how often do students have an opportunity to study these texts?

Each year the VCE English examiners identify the texts that have been selected most often by students in addressing the examination questions in the text response part of the paper. It seems reasonable to assume that the list of most popular selections by students could also be a guide to the types of texts most commonly selected for study by teachers. Most popular texts are the five texts that have been selected for response by more than 50% of students. Least popular texts are those where fewer than 100 scripts were submitted.

Overall, four texts by Australians, *Stolen, Lantana, Look Both Ways, Cosi, and Maestro,* have appeared on the most popular list over the past decade, while ten texts by Australians have appeared on the least popular list, including *Bearbrass, The Brush-Off, I for Isobel, Jackson's Track, Short Stories* (Henry Lawson), *The Hunter, The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Home, Collected Stories* (Farmer) and *Selected Poems* (Slessor). Given the wide range of Australian texts recommended for study it seems reasonable to expect to see some of these texts appearing on the most popular list and, as can be seen, this is in fact the case but only in more recent years. During the early part of the decade, there were no Australian texts appearing on the most popular list and several Australian texts appearing on the least popular list.

Table 2a

Most popular and least popular texts selected by students undertaking the VCE English written paper, Part A or Part 1 (responding to texts) with Australian texts asterisked 2001-2006

Year	Most popular texts are the five texts that have been selected for response by more than 50% of students.	Least popular texts are those where fewer than 100 scripts were submitted.
2001	*Montana* (18%) *Medea* *Cabaret* *Dead Letter Office* *The Longest Memory*	*Rock Springs* *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* *Frontier* ***Bearbrass***
2002	*Cabaret* (14%) *Medea* *Dead Letter Office* *Night* *Only the Heart*	*Frontier* *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* ***The Brush-Off*** *No Great Mischief*

2003	*Gattaca* (27%) *Night* *The Divine Wind* *Oedipus Rex* *Othello*	*A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* ***I for Isobel*** ***Jackson's Track*** *A Lesson Before Dying* *Things Fall Apart* ***Short Stories* (Henry Lawson)** *No Great Mischief*
2004	*Gattaca* (30%) *Triage* *The Wife of Martin Guerre* *Girl With a Pearl Earring*	*The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* *Things Fall Apart* ***The Hunter***
2005	*Gattaca* (21%) *The Wife of Martin Guerre* *King Oedipus* *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (6%)	*The Stories of Tobias Wolff* *The Age of Innocence* *The Plague* ***The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith***
2006	*Gattaca* (14%) *I'm Not Scared* *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (9%) ***Lantana* (8%)** *The Quiet American*)	*Voices and Visions from India* *Fine Line* *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems*

Between the years 2001-2006 only one Australian text (*Lantana*) appeared on the most popular list while the remaining seven Australian texts recommended for study appeared on the least popular list (fewer than 100 scripts in each case included a response to those texts).

Table 2b

Most popular and least popular texts selected by students undertaking the VCE English written paper, Part A or Part 1 (responding to texts) with Australian texts asterisked 2007-2010.

Year	Most popular texts are the five texts that have been selected for response by more than 50% of students.	Least popular texts are those where fewer than 100 scripts were submitted.
2007	**Look Both Ways* (15%) *I'm Not Scared* **Lantana* (8%) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (7%) *The Kite Runner*	*Voices and Visions from India* *The Baghdad Blog* *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* **Home*
2008	**Look Both Ways* (26%) *The Kite Runner* *Nineteen Eighty-Four* *A Man for all Seasons* *In the Lake of the Woods*	*Great Short Works* (Poe) *Of Love and Shadows* ***Collected Stories* (Farmer)** ***Selected Poems* (Slessor)** *Into Thin Air*
2009	**Look Both Ways* (24%) *The Kite Runner*	*Great Short Works* (Poe) *Of Love and Shadows*

	Nineteen Eighty-Four *A Man for all Seasons* *Generals Die in Bed*	**Collected Stories* (Farmer) ****Selected Poems* (Slessor)** *Into Thin Air*
2010	**Look Both Ways* (24%) **Cosi* (12%) *Nineteen Eighty Four* *A Man for All Seasons* **Maestro* (9%)	*Into Thin Air* *A Human Pattern* **Home* *Of Love and Shadows* ****Selected Poems* (Slessor)**

Bold = Highest mean scores achieved by students who selected these texts in these years.
Asterisk = Australian texts.

In more recent years there appears to be a good representation of Australian texts on the most popular list although some texts appear a number of times. *Look Both Ways* appears at the top of the most popular list on four occasions (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). *Lantana* is the next most popular Australian text, appearing twice (2006, 2007). What is more encouraging, however, is a pattern of occurrence and recurrence of Australian texts on the most popular text selection lists in recent years. After a slow start, Australian texts appear to be making more regular appearances among the top five, with 2010 being an exceptional year where three of the top five were texts by Australian writers or directors. In addition, the top scoring students appear to be working with Australian texts, most notably, Beverley Farmer's *Collected Stories* and Kenneth Slessor's *Selected Poems.*

Curricula statements of purpose in relation to the inclusion of Australian texts and the take-up of Australian texts by teachers and students provide a context of sorts, albeit somewhat limited, for teachers of literature to reflect on the wider project of literary education and the continuing debate about the role of Australian texts in our classrooms. In 1985 Terry Eagleton made an observation about literature teaching that encapsulated the first wave of ideology critique or what was to become known more broadly as cultural studies (and its close relative in school contexts, critical literacy). Speaking at a conference for English teachers in the UK Eagleton claimed that:

> What literature teaches is not so much this or that moral value ...It teaches us rather to be—let me rehearse some of the cherished terms—sensitive, imaginative, responsive, sympathetic, creative, perceptive, reflective. Notice the resounding intransitivity of all of these familiar shibboleths. The task of the moral technology of literature is to produce an historically peculiar form of human subject who is sensitive, receptive, imaginative and so on ... *about nothing in particular* (original emphasis) (98).

As a Marxist literary critic, Eagleton's target at the time was liberal humanism, which he linked directly with a literary education. Even now, more than twenty-five years later, we can recognise the urgency of his call to battle, particularly his insistence that literature and culture are inextricably linked through politics and ideology. His work was an inspiration to a generation of English teachers, myself included. At the time of his talk to teachers in London I was teaching English at a Perth high school and setting out on my studies toward an honours degree. Along the way I met an Australian teacher, Bronwyn Mellor, who had just returned from almost two decades teaching in London. She brought news of the work of cultural theorists I was yet to encounter in my honours studies: theorists such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Catherine Belsey. Together these theorists

opened a path to what appeared to be new ways of thinking about literature and its role in the classroom.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism began to appear as terms to describe a strange new phenomenon, a way of thinking and talking about texts that was fresh and exciting in its engagement of history and culture, of politics and ideology. Social positioning took centre stage. It seemed at the time a great leap away from the assumptions of liberal humanism, which had dominated the study of literature through the first seven decades of the twentieth century and considered good literature to be a timeless repository of self-contained meaning, untroubled by history, society or politics. It was difficult to argue for the inclusion of Australian texts in an environment where questions of culture, history and identity were not considered important. Poststructuralism, cultural studies and critical literacy reorientated teachers' and students' views of literature and its social, cultural and historical roles.

English teachers responded strongly to Terry Eagleton's challenge to make literature teaching mean something in political, ideological, historical and cultural terms. A new metalanguage entered the classroom and teachers discussed reading practices as often as they discussed reader response. Contexts sections began appearing on exam papers and students were asked to address issues of gender, ethnicity, identity and culture. Interestingly, when Terry Eagleton's talk was published by a US journal, he felt the need to provide a context by way of a foreword in which he stated:

> In this ideological climate, the struggle for progressive political methods of English teaching is clearly vital. The [UK based] National Association for Teachers of English contains many young radicals, but also a number of older-style liberal humanists in opposition to their aims. The political point of the paper, then, is to lend polemical support to the former grouping against the latter ... (96)

While the baldness of this statement appears somewhat naive from the perspective of the early twenty first century it serves as a useful reminder of the nearness of a time when the meaning and use of critical reading practices were contested both within the classroom and the curriculum. Literature was once read in terms of aesthetics and teachers had to fight for the inclusion of Australian literature on aesthetic grounds. The argument became less fraught when literature's links with culture and identity formation were recognized. The following brief summary indicates the extent of the gap in thinking.

Humanism—assumptions	Post-humanism—assumptions
Good literature is timeless.	Literature is neither 'good' not 'bad' but is socially, culturally and historically located and is read in relation to these variables.
Literature contains meaning within itself.	Meaning is created by readers and by social and cultural processes and by institutions and organisations such as schools, universities and publishing companies.
Should be studied as it stands and without reference to extraneous factors.	Should be studied in context/s.

Continuity in literature is of prime importance since human nature is unchanging.	Literature is riven by disjunctions, separations, eruptions and it is within these spaces that something different can be created.
Individuality transcends all other forces.	Subjectivity is developed in relation to a wide range of social practices, which are linked to cultural contexts.
The purpose of literature is to enhance human existence and promote human values particularly freedom and rationality.	The purpose of literature is to enhance human existence and promote human values particularly freedom and rationality.

These dichotomies appear to be fairly straightforward and, even in our current post-theory phase, are the taken-for-granted differences that we recognize under a number of different binary headings (structuralism/post-structuralism; modernism/post-modernism and so on). But if we turn from these apparent differences to think about my original question—the purpose of studying (Australian) literature—the picture is not quite so clearly differentiated.

On the one hand, we have taken up Terry Eagleton's mid-1980s challenge and made sure that we now teach students to be sensitive, receptive and imaginative about *something* (culture, society, gender, diversity, identity and so on). But the purpose of studying literature, I suggest, remains relatively unchanged from the early mission of liberal humanism. Traditionally, humanism took as its mantra the need to promote the values of freedom and rationality (instead of, for instance, the earlier values of community and faith). Enhancing the human condition remains a goal of literature education. Although we are at times uneasy with the suggestion that we are teaching specific forms of response in our classroom explorations of texts (rather than allowing students the freedom to explore their own inner beings), nevertheless, I believe that the important work of English literature study lies in the direction of shaping behaviour and beliefs through textual study. The increasing inclusion of modern Australian texts for study will lend a particular weight to that work. Earlier attempts to recreate the values of 'home' (viewed as England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales) is gradually being replaced by a move toward a newly emerging cultural identity that takes account of Australia's geographic location and culturally differentiated population.

The purpose of the moral technology of which Terry Eagleton spoke is to produce a particular form of the human subject, one who is sensitive, receptive and imaginative but also self-regulating, self-reflective and committed to particular sets of values. But while we as literature teachers have taken up Terry Eagleton's challenge to teach students to be sensitive about some things and in doing so, have shifted the focus of our activities away from traditional humanist or modernist concerns with continuity and timelessness, we have nevertheless retained a humanist focus on the core values of our subject. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Australian literature provided a means for teachers and students to reflect on the advances of the British empire, to value the flora and fauna of a unique landscape and to admire the courage of early explorers (but not condemn their assumed right to take the land from traditional owners). While these attributes appear to us now to be quaint at best and racist at worst they are a part of the waters in which we swim. In the twenty first century, literary study provides a mechanism by which to teach students to value diversity, promote tolerance, expand language and reflect on identity formation and its consequences. It also provides a mechanism for promoting what is often vaguely referred to

as a 'a love of literature'. English curriculum is almost unique in its insistence on pleasure and affect.

The following quote from a paper reported in the NSW Public Instruction Gazette in 1906 is a reminder of enduring practices and beliefs. The title of the paper was *The Teaching of Literature* and it was read by W. J. Liggins, of the Macquarie Street South School, at a meeting of metropolitan teachers.

> We should remember that there is not a subject that we teach in school, which will generally exert a greater influence over the future happiness of the child than the subject under consideration. We teachers have it in our power to considerably assist our pupils in their choice of reading matter. We are able to arouse their interest in the works of the best of our writers. And our task is a pleasant and a profitable one. The children may be made to become intensely interested. *A good and pleasant understanding arises between teacher and scholar*. The scholar enjoys the happiness of the moment. The teacher is looking farther ahead. He is hopeful that his efforts will be crowned with success; that the seed, which he is now sowing, will take root, and grow, and thrive. He himself knows the keenness of the pleasure that he has derived from literature, and he is happy in the knowledge that he is putting his pupils in the way of deriving similar enjoyment (emphasis added, 255).

This article was followed in the 1906 Gazette by a scientific one written by S. A. Long. The title of Long's paper was *The Clinometer: How to make it, and how to use it*. Pleasure wasn't mentioned. Neither was that 'good and pleasant understanding ... between teacher and scholar'.

In teaching Australian literature, teachers do a great deal more than teach about the quality of the language or the characteristics of a genre. English teachers teach techniques for living, ways of behaving and responding, building empathy, promoting tolerance and developing responses to texts that are considered appropriate within current social and cultural contexts. It is a complex process involving the text, the student and the teacher in a relationship that is unlike that of any other subject area.

Selecting texts for study is a process influenced by the interests of educators and of governments. Syllabus documents and examination papers provide a solid historical record of these influences over time. However, a text list is not something from which we can simply read off the ideology of an era, although it does provide a guide to the inclusion or exclusion of particular types of texts and of particular authors. Over time a text list can provide valuable historical information about identity formation, social values and ideological alignments. It is important, however, to look closely at the experience of students through the type of analysis provided here in order to better understand which students are reading and responding to particular texts. It is clear from Tables 2a and 2b that very few students studying English Literature for the VCE in the six years (2001-2006) chose to write about Australian texts, while in more recent times (2007-2010) there has been a considerable increase in the level of engagement by VCE students with Australian texts (albeit a narrow range comprising *Look both Ways*, *Lantana*, *Cosi and Maestro*). The positive shift in students' engagement with Australian texts reflects a shift in the interests and pedagogical attention of English teachers. Text lists are an important first step in helping to shape and change the teaching and reading practices of students and teachers.

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