

Politics, pedagogy and possibility: an analysis and review of Australian literature in the National English Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper is interested in exploring the place and possibilities of Australian literature in secondary English classrooms. To this end, this paper examines the background and politics of the current debate about teaching Australian literature in subject English, and analyses the ways in which this debate has informed the various iterations of the Australian Curriculum for English released since October 2008. I offer a close analysis of the shifting ways in which Australian literature has been presented in the drafts of the proposed English curriculum, and consider the implications of these representations of national literature for subject English. In the conclusion of this paper, I draw briefly on Ken Gelder's recent work on "proximate reading" (2009) in order to gesture towards ways in which a study of Australian literature might 'make a difference' to the ways in which secondary students negotiate the concepts of nation, identity and belonging in the 21st century.

Teaching Australian literature in subject English: background and context

The role of Australian literature in Australian school and university English curricula has perennially been the subject for debate. In the colonised Australia of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this debate centred around the validity of locally produced writing in a subject which was intended to not only teach students to read and write in English, but to essentially 'become' English (Author, 2008a, p.45). To this end, the 1930s and 1940s were marked by some public denunciations of Antipodean writing by prominent professors of English in Australian universities. When he was asked to give the inaugural Commonwealth Literary Fund lecture in 1940, J.I.M Stewart, who was Jury Professor of English Language and Literature at Adelaide University, infamously began by saying:

I am most grateful to the C.L.F. for providing the funds to give these lectures in Australian literature, but unfortunately they have neglected to provide any literature – I will lecture therefore on D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*' (Dutton qtd. in Mead, 2009)

This audacious insult was in a similar vein to remarks made just a few years earlier, by the then Professor of English Literature at The University of Melbourne, G.H. Cowling. Writing in the *The Age* newspaper, Cowling made a series of disparaging comments about the legitimacy of Australian literature, some of which were:

The rewards of literature in Australia are not good enough to attract the best minds ... Good Australian novels which are entirely Australian are bound to be few... [and] Australian life is too lacking in tradition, and too confused, to make many first class novels. (Cowling qtd. in Stephensen, p.20)¹¹

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, debate about the legitimacy of Australian literature is no longer the focus of public debate, rather, discussions about the role of Australian literature in English curricula have been superseded by

¹ A section of this manifesto is included in the Macquarie Penn Anthology.

media and governmental anxiety about what texts should be consecrated in the field, to borrow Bourdieu's terms (Bourdieu, 1993; Moi, 1999), and a related debate about the amount of Australian texts that should be studied in the years of compulsory education. This evolution of debate about Australian literature—from questions around the validity of scholarship in this field to concerns about the impact of the field on culture and citizenship—has meant that the site for the debate about curriculum, which was until the 1990s largely the tertiary institutions like those to which Cowling and Stewart belonged, now includes, and even privileges the secondary sector.

This shift in governmental, media and publishing attention from tertiary scholarship to the study of Australian literature in secondary schools has been most recently reinforced by the publication of the *Macquarie Pen Anthology of Australian Literature* (Jose, 2009), the first collection of its kind to be produced. Supported by an extensive online teaching resource for secondary teachers, it is clearly the intention of the publishers of this book—as editor of the post 1930s section Kerry Goldsworthy notes—that it be “widely used in schools” (2009). To this end, the introduction to the teaching resource (Gibbs & O'Sullivan, 2009) presents the anthology and accompanying teaching units as addressing a curriculum deficit. The writers of the introduction assert that while the presence of Australian literature on State and Territory syllabuses has increased over the years,

the classroom reality is probably rather different. Prescribed lists leave plenty of room for choice and teachers are often under no obligation to choose texts that are Australian over other texts. Research suggests many teachers tend to choose texts they have taught before, rather than new additions to a list. Further, prescribed text lists are generally only applied to senior schooling and teachers often make their own choices in the junior years. For many reasons then, it seems that Australian literature has often been under represented in Australian classrooms” (p.6).

With its tone of despondency about the state of the study of Australian literature in schools, and its anxiety about the agency of English teachers in their classrooms, the teaching guide resonates with many of the media articles and governmentally inspired documents produced since 2006 that have explicitly directed attention to the supposed absence of Australian literature in secondary schools.² In fact, the teaching guide uncannily echoes the first officially sanctioned document to direct attention to this issue: the Communiqué produced by the Australia Council for the Arts in response to the Australian Literature in Education Roundtable, convened in the final months of the Howard Government's final term, on August 7, 2007. Although this Roundtable was undoubtedly initially prompted by journalist Rosemary Neill's now infamous expose article on the crisis in the study of Australian literature at tertiary institutions (Neill, 2007), as I have noted elsewhere, the bulk of the recommendations made by Roundtable seemed to “apply specifically to primary and secondary, rather than tertiary teachers of subject English and literature” (Author 2008b, p.2).

As both the crisis, and the solution to the problem of Australian literature in the curriculum was presented by the Communiqué—and in the media responses which followed it—as residing with those involved in the school system (a proposition also implied by the editors of the *Macquarie Pen* teaching guide), it is unsurprising that the various versions of the Australian English Curriculum, the first of which was released just a few months after the Roundtable, gave particular attention to the ways in which Australian literature might be taught in 21st century Australian schools.

In light of the sustained and considerable interest in the teaching of Australian literature, and the ways in which the debate around this issue has informed the development of the Australian Curriculum for English, the purpose of this paper is to

² See for example, Bantick 2006; Ferrari, 2007 and Topsfield 2007.

map and analyse the changing ways in which the various iterations of the Australian Curriculum for English have represented, defined and positioned the study of Australian literature. In the conclusion of this paper, I will draw briefly on Ken Gelder's recent work on "proximate reading" (2009) in order to gesture towards ways in which a study of Australian literature might 'make a difference' to the ways in which secondary students negotiate the concepts of nation, identity and belonging in the 21st century.

Mapping Australian literature in the National English Curriculum

As I intimated in the previous section, it is without doubt that the approach to Australian literature advocated by the Communiqué informed the Initial Advice Paper for the National English Curriculum. Indeed, resonances between these two documents were perhaps inevitable, given that the Roundtable and the National Curriculum Board (the predecessor of ACARA – the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority) shared some of the same key personal from the field of Australian literary studies. Like the Communiqué, the Initial Advice Paper reinforces the cultural heritage model of Australian literary study and presents the national literature as a Bourdieuan gift to be received uncritically, a unified field which should "form part of what young Australians know about English and being Australian" (National Curriculum Board [NCB], 2008, p.8). This emphasis on both classic works and a traditional, Leavis-inspired pedagogy was revealed in the sections of the document which addressed the way literature was to be taught at the different stages of schooling. While engagement in text was presented as desirable in the early years of schooling, as I have discussed at elsewhere (Author, 2008b and 2009a), the Initial Advice Paper indicated that in the senior years, student engagement was not a consideration; rather, there should be a "strong focus on analysing the literary traditions of Australian literature and world literature" (NCB, 2008b, p.11). In articulating this position, the writers of the National Curriculum document appeared to be responding to the arguments made by Professors Stephensen and Cowling seventy years earlier, when what was understood to be the field of Australian literature was radically different.

After a series of national consultations following the release of the Initial Advice Paper, the National Curriculum Board produced the English Framing Paper in November 2008. This was a more comprehensive document than the previous one, and offered some modifications to the ways in which the original document presented the definition and purpose of Australian literature in the English curriculum. While an emphasis on Australian literature remains in this second publication, with much of the paragraph about heritage (cited above) being reproduced, the Framing Paper adds additional information to the canonical and historical depiction of Australian literature in an apparent attempt to broaden, or at least blur the boundaries of what was originally implied to be a rather rigidly defined, euro-centric field. In the second (new) paragraph under the heading 'The place of literature and Australian literature', the writers of the document acknowledge the "collective [cultural] memories that are represented in a range of literature, including the inscriptional and narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples." (NCB, 2008b, p.7).

On the one hand, this paragraph indicates a considerable shift in thinking about the role of literature in classrooms. While the initial document, to borrow Ian Hunter's formulation, was focussed on the study of literature as an aesthetic and a rhetorical pursuit, this second iteration draws attention to the 'ethical' and critical function of subject English. However, on the other hand, although this additional paragraph represents a commendable attempt to assert the ethical dimension of literary study, particularly in the context of the study of Indigenous literature, by discussing the literature of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples in combination with the texts of the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region, it is not clear what is being

understood as Australian literature in this context. Indeed, by presenting Indigenous literature as outside the traditions of Australian literature mentioned in the previous paragraph, these sentences have the strange effect of indicating that Aboriginal texts are ‘one remove’ from the legitimate (to again borrow Bourdieu’s term) field of Australian literature mentioned in the previous section. Similarly, while the Framing Paper extols the importance of Australian students becoming familiar with Asian traditions, there is no sense of the ways in which Asian writing informs and is part of Australian literature. Thus, this recommendation seems more in line with a foreign policy initiative than a vision for curriculum.

The emphasis on literary traditions in this section is also articulated in other parts of this document. In the subsequent section that addresses the range of texts to be read by senior students for the purposes of “analysing ... historical genres and literary traditions”, “contemporary” texts have been added to this list outlined in the Initial Advice document. While this was undoubtedly an attempt to acknowledge the greater range of texts that senior secondary students encounter, by distinguishing contemporary texts from Australian literature in a syntactically ambiguous manner, the Framing Paper reinforces the emphasis on distinct literary traditions, cited above, and implies that Australian literature is historical, and that contemporary, or non-canonical works are neither ‘Australian’ nor ‘literature’. Further, this suggests that the value and purpose of subject English, in terms of nation building, is to encourage young citizens to locate their cultural imaginations firmly in the past (and a particular representation of it), rather than the future.

It is interesting to note that this notion of Australian literature as primarily historical mimics the representation of English literature in the National Curriculum of England. A perusal of the British National Curriculum shows that English literature is valued in terms of “English literary heritage”, while ‘world literature’, a category which is not named but is rather implied in an eclectic list of texts, makes no direct reference to a national literature. This infers that contemporary writing is not the continuation or expansion of an English literary heritage (or any literary heritage) and that English literature, which is epitomised by the works of Shakespeare, stopped being produced at the end of the 19th century.

This imperial view of English literature in the English National Curriculum, like the vision of Australian literature articulated in the first iterations of the Australian English curriculum, does not allow for the acknowledgement of the diverse ways in which literature has developed in the 20th and 21st centuries, and thus does not allow students from different backgrounds to identify elements of their own lives and experiences in the national literature they read. By considering national literature primarily in an historical context, students and teachers are not encouraged to explore the ways in which contemporary writing unsettles and refigures the categories of nation and culture. Rather, as Richard Teese, Steve Lamb and Sue Helm’s work on the Victorian English curriculum implies, those who enact an historically oriented English curriculum are explicitly implicated in the project of “fortifying” schools and culture and maintaining existing structures of cultural and social capital (Teese, Lamb & Helm, 2009) .

Thus for many in the English teaching profession, who consider English as an ethical, global and cosmopolitan subject, this focus on an historical and canonical approach to literature was cause for significant concern. These anxieties about the representation of literature, and in particular, Australian literature, were reflected in the Framing Paper Consultation Report, which was released in May 2008 with the third iteration of the renamed *Australian* English Curriculum. The report, which drew on survey responses and more discursive submissions from teachers, teacher educators and other interested parties noted that

The description of Element 2 [which pertains to and informed appreciation of literature] was possibly the most controversial of the three descriptions, mainly because of the roles attributed to Literature here and

in the section on the place of Literature and Australian Literature, the nature of the Literature texts and the descriptions of what students might do with these texts. (NCB, 2009a, p27)

Indeed, the quantitative data cited in the report shows that over half of the submissions made to the National Curriculum Board either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the definitions and assertions made in this section of the Framing Paper. The report notes that while “Respondents provided general endorsement of the place of both Literature and Australian Literature in the English curriculum”, they “took issue with the definition of the term ‘Literature’, which they believed provided a narrow definition of the function of Literature and seemed to endorse a canonical approach” (p.8). Further, the report notes that while English teachers “agreed in principle with the study of Australian literature they also acknowledged that there is debate over what constitutes ‘Australian literature’, especially contemporary Australian literature and commented on how much of our traditional literature is in fact culturally outdated.” (p. 25). The Appendix of the report, which features more discursive comments of the respondents, notes a concern with the potentially parochial and irrelevant focus of a study of Australian literature in the proposed English curriculum:

[The Framing Paper] discusses globalisation only in the context of work and does not consider how globalisation is impacting on how students see themselves in relation to the world, the role of English as a global language and the place of Australian literature in a global context. (NCB, 2009a, p.21)

Arguably, it was in response to this feedback about the role of literature and Australian literature in the curriculum that prompted a revision of the way the national literature was presented in the third outline English curriculum document produced by the National Curriculum Board. Rebranded the ‘Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English’, this document, while shifting the focus from a more generic and colonial-sounding ‘National’ curriculum to a more specifically ‘Australian’ one, somewhat ironically dilutes the attention to Australian literature that had been a hallmark of the preceding two documents. While ‘[t]he place of literature and Australian literature’ was listed under the heading ‘Debates in English’ in the Initial Advice Paper, and under the more politically neutral heading ‘Considerations’ in the Framing Paper, the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English makes no specific mention of Australian literature in the contents page, thus pointedly indicating that Australian literature is no longer being understood as contentious, or something that requires particular attention. References to Australian literature in the body of the text are similarly reduced in this third ‘outline’ version of the curriculum. Although this may have the ostensible impact of allaying anxieties about a parochial and pedagogically regressive focus on Australian literature, a close reading of the ways in which Australian literature is referred to in this document shows that while suggestions about the ethical and social affordances of studying Australian literature in schools have been made more tenuous, and the original heritage-inspired rationale for including Australian texts in the curriculum surreptitiously remains.

Indeed, the two references to Australian literature in this document draw particular attention to history and tradition. In the introduction to the subject, the writers of the Shaping Paper assert that “[t]he national English curriculum will encourage an appreciation of Australia’s literary heritage and that of other cultures” (p.4). In section 5.3.2, under the heading ‘Literature: Understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature’, readers are similarly informed that

The presence of Australian literary texts and an increasingly informed appreciation of the place of Australian literature among other literary traditions will be part of the national English curriculum. (p.8)

In May 2010, the first complete draft of the Australian Curriculum: English was released. Ostensibly, this first, full draft appears to present more assertively the

presence of Australian literature in the English Curriculum than the preceding Shaping Paper. The English Draft Consultation Version 1.0.1 (which will hereafter be referred to as English 1.0.1), begins each year level description—from kindergarten to Year 10—with this following prefacing statement³ regarding the selection of texts:

The range of literary texts should include, Australian literature, including traditional and contemporary Indigenous literature, and world literature, including texts from Asia, drawn from classic and contemporary texts (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, p.8)

At first glance, it appears that this unwieldy sentence, with its embedded clauses, overuse of the verb “include” and awkward punctuation attempts to convey the significance of Australian literature at each year level, and acknowledge (unlike the Shaping Paper) that Indigenous writing is part of this. It is worth noting, however, that in all but the first version of this statement which is intended for those enacting the Kindergarten curriculum, the comma dividing “Indigenous literature” and “world literature” as in the example cited above, is omitted. This proof-reading error has the effect of including the category of world literature under the umbrella of Australian literature, and thus, like the Shaping Paper preceding it, English 1.0.1 creates unwitting confusion around a definition of Australian literature.

Further, while Australian literature is mentioned explicitly at the start of each year level outline, almost no reference is made in the content elaborations of the Literature strand to the particular role Australian literature, in all its richness and diversity, might play in the future Australian English curriculum. One possible exception is that in Year 2, students could describe structural elements of literary texts “from their own and other cultures” (ACARA, p.13). It appears that Australian literature may also have a role to play in Year 7 where it is intimated that students should: “Recognise the richness of other cultures, making connections and looking for commonalities between the cultural contexts in their world and the cultural contexts represented in literary texts” (ACARA, p.29).

Yet, the focus of the curriculum both here and throughout the years of secondary schooling reflects the notion (discussed earlier in the context of respondents’ feedback to the Framing Paper) of English as a cosmopolitan subject which prepares students for participation in a globalised world. While it is entirely appropriate for 21st century manifestations of subject English to reach beyond Australian shores, this does not preclude a focus on Australian texts. Moreover, it seems to me that if we fail to explicitly consider the ways in which engagement with Australian literature might enable students to understand themselves and others better, both ‘at home’ and internationally, then we are missing an opportunity for the kinds of transformative connections that I have argued elsewhere might be facilitated through the study of diverse Australian texts (Author, 2008a and 2009b).

Of course, those wishing to allay the concerns articulated above would be likely to contend that Australian literature is ‘frontloaded’ at the start of each year level, and that within the guidelines of the content descriptions and the scope and sequence of the strands, teachers are free to enact the curriculum in the ways in which they feel best suits the needs of the students in front of them. However, while I understand that the content descriptions for each of the strands deliberately do not prescribe an “approach to teaching”, and that the content elaborations which follow them are “not intended to be comprehensive content points that all students must be taught”, the fact remains that these content elaborations function to “illustrate...exemplify and develop a common understanding of the content descriptions” (ACARA, p.3), and in the absence of pedagogical suggestions, they tacitly indicate the framework for a possible approach.

Thus, my concern is that without more explicit methodological suggestions about the inclusion of Australian literature in the curriculum or reference to the role of

³ This echoes similar statements made in the introduction to the document, see pages 3 and 4.

Australian literature in the achievement standards, these 'national' texts may be approached with a sense of obligation rather than possibility. This is the case in some Victorian schools, as Australian literature is mandated in the final years of secondary school English and literature, but is often dismissed as irrelevant to the assessment outcomes. Moreover, without a sense of the pedagogical potential of Australian literature (something which members of the profession pointedly requested in their feedback on the Framing Paper; see NCB 2009a, p,13.) those charged with enacting the curriculum may see its inclusion primarily in the context of an historical or 'heritage' paradigm which is inconsistent with the globalised, cosmopolitan way in which English in Australia is conceived in a 21st century context (Homer, 2007).

As I have noted, this conflation of Australian literature with historical or traditional (colonial) texts has permeated each iteration on the curriculum from its inception and is maintained in the English 1.0.1 draft (see, for example, the references to literary history in the Rationale section, and the focus on 'heritage and 'values' in the Aims, p.1). Yet, while the notion of the study of literature as a historical enterprise is certainly evident in the draft of the curriculum, the Rationale for this iteration of the curriculum, unlike those which have preceded it, draws far greater attention to the ethical dimension of the subject than previous versions have done. It acknowledges that

The study of English helps to extend and deepen their relationships, to understand their identities and their place in a changing world, and to become citizens and workers who are ethical, thoughtful and informed. (p.1)

It seems to me that Australian literature, with the diversity that is evident in the *Macquarie Pen Anthology*, has much to offer this agenda. In order for these possibilities to be realised though, pedagogical approaches to the teaching of Australian literature, and the role of Australian literature in the Achievement Standards need to be considered in greater detail. To this end, a reading of the curriculum, such as I have undertaken here, indicates that on both conceptual and material levels there is room for this to occur. Although the content descriptors and elaboration in the Language and Literacy Strands of the curriculum are quite extensive, the Literature Strand is less developed and this results in long stretches of the column dedicated to literature being left blank. For my part, this empty canvas is symbolic of the work that can and should be done with regard to the framing of Australian literature in the Australian English curriculum. Indeed, it is only when we consider the pedagogies that will enable students to connect with literature that explores a range of ways of conceiving and being Australian, that the ethical affordances of the curriculum, outlined in the Rationale and more broadly in the General Capabilities section, might be more fully realised.

Coda: beginning to fill in the (pedagogical) blanks

There is not the space in this paper to develop a detailed argument about the pedagogical approach that might be used in conjunction with the proposed Australian Curriculum for English; this will be the focus of future work. However, by way of concluding this paper, and showing the ways in which the study of Australian literature can resonate with students' understanding of themselves and others locally, nationally and globally, I will outline the way in which a 'proximate' pedagogical approach to the teaching of Australian literature might be articulated.

At the recent annual national conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Ken Gelder introduced the notion of 'proximate reading' in his Keynote Address. Gelder defined proximate reading as a

way of conceptualizing reading and literary writing in contemporary transnational frameworks. Proximate reading opens up a number of aspects of reading and literary practice that are to do with the way readers negotiate

place, position and what can be called literary sociality (that is, relations between readers, texts and the meanings that bind these relations together): where these things are understood and evaluated in terms of degrees of closeness and/or distance, that is, proximity. (Gelder, 2009, p.1)

For Gelder, the proximate reading framework provided a way of reading contemporary Australian literature which is not constrained by national borders, but is rather transnational and cosmopolitan. In the opening section of his address, Gelder carefully differentiates his theory of proximate reading, which deals with closeness and distance as it operates in the text, from close reading “a reading practice that can either distance literature from its point of origin by privileging its destination...or that can tie closeness to a full understanding of that original site of production” (Gelder, 2009, p.1).

In the secondary English classroom, it is these forms of close reading that Gelder dismisses that are most often practiced. This observation reinforces Bill Green’s argument that secondary subjects and academic disciplines are of a fundamentally different nature (Green, 2008, p.36). As Australian students’ engagement with literary text is so central to the ‘success’ or otherwise of the teaching of literature (see Doecke, 1997 and Bellis et. al, 2009 for elaboration), teachers often attempt to draw close links between the text being studied and the students’ own interests and experiences, to “privilege the destination”, to use Gelder’s terms. The text, in this instance, becomes a way of reading themselves and the world (to appropriate the Frierien construction). However, when the students’ lives and interests are removed, historically, culturally or geographically from the text, then the second form of close reading, that which is concerned with the site of production—or the context of the production—is brought into play. In my experience, this second framework for close reading is often undertaken in secondary classrooms with the hope that the first will follow.

Part of this second aspect of close reading that Gelder identifies—that which concerned with the site of production—is an essential tool of classroom English pedagogy designed to expand students’ understanding of the world and its peoples through text, as it is through a greater understanding of the context that students gain an appreciation of both the aesthetic and political or ideological premise of the text. Thus, it is unlikely that these forms of close reading—which can lead to intense and rewarding student engagement with literature—will ever be absent from secondary pedagogy. However, it seems to me that rather than being the antithesis of ‘close reading’ as Gelder suggests, student closeness or distance could be productively incorporated into a ‘proximate pedagogy’ for reading Australian literature which appropriates and builds on the concepts he outlines. For a proximate pedagogy, as I understand it, asks readers of the text to consider the kinds of relationships the text attempts to establish, the times, places and people it draws closer, or makes more distant. This approach encourages readers to question not only how, but why, these proximate relationships are being brokered, and prompts them to consider the place the text is attempting to claim for itself in the world. This approach is useful for many contemporary texts. I am currently exploring this pedagogical approach in the context Richard Flanagan’s most recent novel, *Wanting*.⁴

Wanting is set in both England and Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, and juxtaposes and interweaves the stories of Charles Dickens in London at the height of his fame with a narrative which is located in Tasmania (Flanagan’s home, and the

⁴ The online support material provided by the publisher, Random House indicates that this text is being aggressively marketed to the secondary sector (as well as the burgeoning readership available through book clubs). In addition to copious reviews available on the website created for Flanagan’s latest novel, the site also offers links to YouTube clips in which Flanagan himself answers question such as “What would you consider the main themes of *Wanting*? which seem designed to reply to the queries of an imagined student audience.

site of several of his works of fiction). The novel centres around the brief and tragic life of an Aboriginal girl, Mathinna, who is adopted as an experiment in 'civilisation' by Lady Jane and her husband Sir John Franklin, the celebrated explorer and Governor of Tasmania. The two narratives come together when Lady Jane, having returned to London, enlists the services of Dickens to write a rebuttal to the charge that Sir John died after engaging in cannibalism on his last, fatal expedition (undertaken after his time as Governor in Hobart). These three stories, circle around and are drawn into close proximity to one another, and Flanagan's reader is prompted to observe the echoes and resonances between them. Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, fact and fiction, the past and the present, art and life, and England and Australia and brought into close proximity. Through this, Flanagan's novel asks us to draw unlikely characters into close relationship: an aboriginal girl and a British novelist, and in doing so, reveals the author's own desire for proximity, through what Gelder terms as "citation", on the one hand, to the canon and the historical literary establishment, and on the other, to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. This proximity is tenuous and romanticised and stands in stark contrast to the kinds of proximal relationships being explored by contemporary playwright Wesley Enoch in his play 'The Story of The Miracles at Cookies Table' (2007), which, in a very different way, is also concerned with Indigenous histories and island narratives.

Early investigation indicates that the affordances of a proximate pedagogy have much to offer a future Australian Curriculum for English. In light of this, a focus on issues of closeness and distance—significant concerns in a postcolonial, multicultural country—will be at the centre of my hopes and imaginings for the 'spaces' of possibility available in the current draft of the curriculum.

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¹ It is worth noting, as an aside, that a section of this manifesto is included in the *Macquarie Penn Anthology*.