



Supporting gender and sexual diversity in high schools:

Building conversations for LGBTQI human
rights in the English classroom

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Introduction

Although the status of human rights with respect to diversity in gender and sexuality has improved over the past two decades, discrimination against LGBTQI individuals in Australia remains unacceptable in terms of social attitudes, policies and practices (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015). Young LGBTQI people, in particular, face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives. Educational experiences can be especially negative, with schools identified as sites where students are often at risk of bullying, harassment and other forms of violence in relation to their diverse or perceived diverse genders or sexualities (Greytak, Kosciw & Diaz, 2009; Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman & Mitchell, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Boesen, Bartkiewicz & Palmer, 2011; Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovendon & Davies; Taylor et al., 2014).

When LGBTQI identifying young people or those from LGBTQI families feel unsafe in schools or unrepresented by the curriculum, the Australian education system's capacity to promote mental health, well-being and academic outcomes for all students is compromised. Given legislative requirements, human rights are the business of all educational stakeholders, with teachers playing a key role in making a positive difference to young people's lives. *Supporting gender and sexual diversity in high schools: Building conversations for LGBTQI human rights in the English classroom* is based on a Young and Well CRC research project that examines the perceptions and practices of a group of high school English teachers who were exploring ways to work in this area. The discussion that follows is informed by the words and experiences of the teachers interviewed for this project.

Accounts of teachers' struggles to create safe classrooms and inclusive practices provide valuable insights for other educators, for whom this resource has been written. The resource builds on the productive work of many community and government organisations, such as the Safe Schools Coalition, Freedom Centre, Curtin University's Centre for Human Rights Education and the Equal Opportunity Commission, to raise awareness of and support sexual and gender diversity in schools. It is hoped that this resource will be of interest to every educator who wants to engage in conversations to counter discrimination and bullying specific to gender and sexuality and protect the human rights of all young people, including those who self-identify as LGBTQI.

Note: In this document, **the term LGBTQI** is used to describe the community of individuals identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and/or Intersex. It also refers to those people who may be questioning their gender or sexuality as well as friends and/or allies of individuals identifying with the LGBTQI community. Inspired by the Australian Human Rights Commission, (<https://bullying.humanrights.gov.au/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-equality-1> retrieved 29/06/16), the research team embraces diversity, and acknowledges that terminology in this field is contested and that the LGBTQI community is, of itself, diverse.

About the research

Conducted in Western Australia, this research was supported financially by the Young and Well Collaborative Research Centre between 2012 and 2016. Aiming to promote the mental health and well-being of young people across Australia, the Young and Well CRC is affiliated with more than 75 organizations in academic, government, not-for-profit and corporate sectors (e.g. Beyond Blue, Freedom Centre, Twenty10, National LGBTI Health Alliance, The Commission for Children and Young People, Murdoch University, The Australian National University, Edith Cowan University, The University of Melbourne, RMIT University, The University of Sydney, etc.).

The study *Developing Inclusive School Communities: Literacy Learning, Teaching and Technology* aims to build conversations to support human rights of all educational stakeholders, particularly students who self-identify as LGBTQI. Phase 1 of the study explored secondary English teachers' classroom practices in literacy and technology, with reflections on media resources inclusive of diverse representations in gender and sexuality. Phase 2 explored university students' perceptions about campus life, literacy and technology, with reflections on the same set of media resources.

In Phase One, survey and interview data were collected about high school English teachers' pedagogical practices, including use of technology, with particular reference to working with students of diverse genders and sexualities. Sixty eight teachers completed an online survey, which was disseminated through teacher organisations. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine teachers (seven female and two male), most of whom had completed the survey and indicated an interest in further participation. Some interview participants were also recruited through the technique of snowballing, via informal professional networks. The data in this publication is based on analysis of the teacher interviews.

Four core themes emerged in analysis of teacher responses to the open-ended questions presented in the interviews. Each theme is posed as a question to help build conversations about gender and sexual diversity in high schools. The teachers' own experiences and comments are used to frame a brief commentary on each question and to generate some starting points for discussion. The final section in the publication offers a list of resources that present LGBTQI themes and can be used in the English classroom. Resources have been 'mapped' to the Australian Curriculum, and some ideas about ways to use resources have been included.

An overview of the nine interview participants' ages, years of experience and types of school is shown below. At the time of their interviews, all participants were teaching English in high schools. In view of ethical considerations and the limited number of participants, only general background teacher information is provided.

- Participants ranged in age: from mid-twenties to over fifty-five years.
- Participants ranged in years of teaching experience: from less than five years to more than 20 years.
- School sectors covered were: Government and Independent
- School locations were: Metropolitan, suburban and regional.

Notes:

1. All participants had experience of teaching in Government schools.
2. In commentary, individual teachers are simply identified as T (for teacher) followed by a number from 1 through to 9 (so T1, T2, T3, and so on) to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

1. How does school climate enable or constrain attempts to create inclusive communities for students and teachers of diverse genders and sexualities, and their allies?

‘School climate’ can be defined as ‘the general ethos and feel of schooling environments’ (Ullman, 2015, p. 20). Research has shown a clear connection between an individual’s subjective experience of school – how they experience the climate of a school – and their sense of wellbeing in the school (Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen & Meyer, 2014; Ullman, 2015). The experience of the teachers in our research suggests that a school’s climate, as it relates to the experiences of students of diverse genders and sexualities, is by no means homogeneous, but rather localised and highly contextual (Payne & Smith, 2014; Richard, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Winans, 2006).

Several different types of high schools were represented in the research: government specialist colleges, public and independent schools, and single sex and Catholic settings. While each school had its own distinctive ethos and culture, teachers’ experiences across all schools were of trying to work (often alone) against a prevailing climate that marginalised or actively discriminated against students of diverse genders and sexualities. ‘Climate’ is not consistent across all areas of a school. One teacher described a wide spectrum of practices in their school, from colleagues being ‘very supportive’ of students of diverse genders and sexualities to others who would ‘snigger’ when discussing two members of the leadership team thought to be members of the LGBTQI community (T8). One school leader who was supportive of initiatives, such as ‘Wear it Purple’ day, drew the line when asked if their school could be featured in a press release about the event. Evidence from the teachers’ interviews suggests a lack of consistency of approach to establishing a school climate in which students (and teachers) of diverse genders and sexualities can feel safe to be themselves.

It must be acknowledged that the data reported here does not reflect the experiences of students, but of teachers. With respect to the climate of their school, or what it feels like to be an LGBTQI student in the school, we only have the teachers’ word. Nor are these teachers’ experiences representative of all English teachers. Nevertheless, the teacher interviews contain provocative insights into and snapshots of how different school climates can be characterised with respect to openness towards and acceptance of LGBTQI students. Two key areas are explored below: the role of school leaders, and examples of the marginalising practices identified by the teachers.

The role of school leaders

The role of the school principal and other school leaders appears pivotal in shaping the school climate. Only one school principal was described as making ‘inclusiveness a deliberate goal of the school’ (T5). In this case, the teacher’s perception was that valuing and understanding diversity as a general principle supports all types of diversity (T5), though it must also be noted that this was a general observation and not supported by evidence of acceptance of or support for students or teachers of diverse genders and sexualities. However, it is possible that a school leader with an explicit commitment to valuing diversity is more likely to be prepared to take positive steps to ensure that the school climate is supportive of students of diverse genders and sexualities than one who does not have such a commitment.

Some teachers perceived that their schools were more or less accepting of sexual or gender minorities (T1; T8), but no school was actively supportive of students and teachers of diverse genders and sexualities. Indeed there are significant blind spots in school communities’ understanding of the existence of students and teachers of diverse genders and sexualities. A recurring story indicative of a lack of forethought about the needs of gender diverse students was captured by the comment that ‘adjusting to trans students has been a challenge’ (T1). Schools seem to be ‘taken by surprise’ (T6) by the need to make basic provisions such as toilets for trans students. Several teachers cited examples of the policing of students with same-sex partners by refusing to allow such students to bring their partner to the school ball) (T3). Concern for a school’s public image often led to a perception by teachers that school leaders are ‘fence sitting’ (T1) in their reluctance to take a positive stance in public. Even those school leaders who are sympathetic and privately supportive of LGBTQI individuals are constrained by the need to manage the public’s impression of the school, and struggle to balance ways to make their school distinct or unique while maintaining enrolments (T1). One teacher, working with a sympathetic principal who allowed students to take their same-sex partners to the Year 12 school ball, noted that lines were drawn by the principal, who ‘would not like the school to be seen as a, you know, school that’s openly gay’ (T1). When school leaders are unable (or unwilling) to provide direction, teachers are left to work against the marginalising practices they see around them to create their own safe spaces for students of diverse genders and sexualities.

Teachers on their own cannot make a huge dent in a school culture. (T7)

Examples of marginalising practices in schools

There is clear evidence from teachers' interviews that not only are LGBTQI students by and large invisible in schools, but also that their experiences of school are often negative, painful and marginalised. Many teachers situated antagonism towards students of diverse genders and sexualities under the umbrella of bullying. While it is too easy to dismiss discrimination against LGBTQI students as simply a type of bullying (which hides the particularly damaging nature of this kind of harassment and violence – see Meyer, 2009; Swearer, Turner, Givens & Pollack, 2008; Taylor et al, 2011; Ullman, 2015; Wyss, 2004), some teachers saw such discrimination as one aspect of the bullying behaviour that had become 'normalised' in some schools (T1; T8). The climate of such a school is unlikely to be conducive to the well being of all students, and particularly of students of diverse genders and sexualities. Teachers suggested that action to address the marginalisation of LGBTQI students could not happen without an associated commitment to tackle bullying.

All-boys' schools and co-educational sports colleges appear to be particularly 'unsafe for students who are gay' (T7). The hyper-masculine, competitive or 'blokey' culture in such schools constrains possibilities for exploring issues of gender and sexuality, and the presence of masculine 'alpha male' students 'skews' the culture of the school (T4). Two teachers indicated that such school environments tend also to be misogynistic (T7; T9), where girls who challenge the norms find that 'if you're not the right sort of [overtly feminine] girl then you don't get treated correctly' (T9). Indeed, in some school environments there is 'no way' that students can come out' (T2) (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2016).

Schools may have a commitment to being open and accepting of difference, yet there is evidence in every teacher's interview of an undercurrent of systemic, unexamined heteronormativity in schools (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Ferfolja, 2007; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). One teacher pointed out the contradiction of a school whose culture is 'to be open' yet where two gay teachers are not able to be 'out' (T5). Several participants commented that when teachers remain silent about homophobia and fail to 'call it out' they signal by default their acceptance of it. In their turn, students are ever watchful, working out what is and is not acceptable, based on teachers' practices: students will either infer that such behaviour is acceptable or, if themselves the subject of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, are likely to feel unsafe, at risk, disregarded (T1). There was no evidence in any of the interviews of whole-school affirmative action to create an LGBTQI-friendly climate. School climates ranged from indifferent to openly hostile; for students who are different, school 'is a place where you hide who you really are, and try to quietly fit in' (T9). Such statements support the findings of school climate research in schools that continue to document the impact of homophobia, transphobia and biphobia on all students and the lack of intervention and support for educators to address these forms of discrimination and violence (Taylor et al, 2011; Ullman, 2015; Wernick et al, 2014).

How do students' experiences and attitudes contribute to the school climate?

All participants reported experience of having taught same-sex attracted students, and some of teaching trans students. Two teachers talked about how, in their experience, such students feel 'unsafe' in school (T2; T8). One teacher mentioned their belief that there 'must be more' students in school who are gender or sexuality diverse than identify as such, given that the number of students who do identify is so much lower than in the population as a whole (T9). Based on the interview data there is strong evidence that gender or sexuality diverse students continue to practise self-surveillance as they 'fly under the radar and tread carefully' (T4) (Gattis & McKinnon, 2015; Youth Gender Action Project, 2009).

Gender and sexuality diverse students' lives are made difficult by the persistence of entrenched and traditional ideas about gender roles in schools, and students routinely stereotype others on this basis. Many students appear unhappy or unable to embrace difference, and several teachers spoke of the 'deep conservatism' of young people, and of their lack of engagement with issues and events that are outside their local experience (T1; T3; T9). This conservatism appears to be a particular feature of all boys' schools, where one teacher spoke of the need to routinely 'dismantle' students' practices of using pejorative terms relating to gender (T7).

*Very conservative views are still very powerful amongst our youth.
(T9)*

There is also evidence of the positive impact that students can have on the climate of a school with respect to acceptance of and support for LGBTQI students. While what goes on in terms of peer reactions may be 'hard to label and [hard to] understand' (T3), in several schools, there was evidence of increasing acceptance by peers of students who are openly exploring sexuality, which suggests increased 'tolerance' and acceptance' of students with different sexualities (T1; T2; T3; T6) (Taylor et al., 2011). One teacher identified a growing concern on the part of students to not cause offence to LGBTQI peers, and shared the perception that 'same-sex families are becoming cool' (T4). Contrary to the perception of young people's deep conservatism, one teacher suggested that in their experience, students were 'really cool' with dealing with risky topics (T8).

Thoughts on creating a positive school climate

Some schools actively valued and embraced the diversity of the students, and there is a perception on the part of some teachers that valuing diversity as a general principle supports all types of diversity (T5). Several teachers shared the perception that the greater the social and cultural diversity and the higher the level of acceptance of diversity in a school, the more accepting the students are of all forms of difference. While we only have a limited number of teachers' perspectives, there is some logic behind the idea that where schools celebrate and embrace diversity in general, it is more likely that practices are in place to ensure that the specific needs of members of all marginalised groups are met. Indeed, teachers with experience of working in two or more different schools shared the view that those schools that are 'full of minorities' are 'very open' (T5; T8).

A final positive perception is that students can and do have a significant impact on the culture of a school (T3). Reports that students are becoming more comfortable in the presence of LGBTQI peers, appearing to be more concerned not to cause offence to others, and are caring for, advocating and standing up for each other, give hope. Indeed, two teachers suggested that the incidence of students who are 'out' in schools encourages progressive changes in the school's culture (T1; T2). A key question for educators and schools is to consider how to make the best use of this shift in attitudes to confront persistent and entrenched heteronormative school practices and cultures. In fact, the research shows that LGBTQI-inclusive and supportive curricula matter and that in schools where such commitments exist, there are higher reports of safety and awareness of bullying (Snapp et al., 2015; Taylor et al, 2011).

2. How do teachers' identities impact on their capacity to reflect on and support sexual diversity and gender justice in classroom practices?

Participants were not asked directly about their identities as teachers, but all spoke unbidden about how they saw their roles as teachers and how their sense of self influenced their capacity to reflect on and support sexual diversity and gender justice. Individual participants' identities as teachers were very significant in shaping their practices with respect to commitment to providing support for individual students of diverse genders and sexualities, and in shaping their readiness to address LGBTQI issues through teaching in general (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2015, 2014, 2011; Thein, 2013; Wiltse & Boyko, 2015).

Since teacher identities are shaped by the values and norms of the professional context in which they work (Bullough, 2005), the capacity of teachers to be who they want to be in the classroom is closely connected to the climate of the school in which they are teaching (De Palma & Atkinson, 2006). Participants spoke of making a conscious decision to work in a particular school because the practices were congruent with their own (T1), or of 'having to leave' a school because it was 'so homophobic' (T5). Each participant had been able to find at least some space in the school where they were currently teaching to enact the teaching roles that were congruent with their deep-seated values and sense of self, despite being members of what is predominantly seen as a 'highly conservative' workforce (T9).

What is teacher identity?

According to Giddens, a coherent sense of identity is characterised by an individual's ability to integrate experiences in the outside world into an 'ongoing story of the self' (1991, p. 52). Although participants were not asked to explore their identity as teachers, each participant's 'story of the self' gradually emerged as the interview unfolded and teachers spoke of their attitudes and practices with respect to support for gender and sexuality diverse students. Examining the ways participants spoke about their practices, aims and ideas about their roles as teachers, it became possible to characterise key aspects of their identities that led participants to adopt particular positions as teachers. Two broad elements emerged.

Personal Identity

For some participants, their personal identity as an openly gay individual or as a parent, sibling or relative of an LGBTQI young person provided a powerful motivation for adopting a particular identity as an ally or advocate for students of diverse genders and sexualities (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2014). One participant spoke movingly of the experience of watching their child come out as gay, and of the distress of knowing that this young person would have a difficult future because ‘being gay is hard in this society’ (T8). This participant is now a staunch advocate for teaching against stereotypes: ‘we have to start the movement’ since ‘how else are we going to change society unless it starts within education?’ Another participant is gay and ‘out’ at work, and in that capacity has been asked by the school’s student services manager to talk to students who are struggling with their own sexuality.

One outcome has been to establish a Gay-Straight Alliance club in the school (Lapointe, 2015; Walls et al, 2010) which ‘just started off very, very small, little humble beginnings basically’ but which the participant hopes has the potential to grow and contribute to a school climate where ‘a parent has that opportunity to put their kid into a school where they’re going to fit ... and they’re going to feel comfortable ... and they’re going to feel accepted’ (T2). As advocates on behalf of LGBTQI students, for both teachers, teacher identities may be traced back to personal identities. However, this does raise the important question of the need for allies and a broader commitment to addressing gender and sexual diversity in schools, so that such anti-oppressive education does not just fall on the shoulders of teachers and students who identify as LGBTQI (Kumashiro, 2000).

Identity as English teacher

Insights into participants’ professional identities as teachers emerged throughout the interviews. All participants were English teachers, and all identified with the potential of English to enable the exploration of complex or challenging subject matter. English teachers were seen as people who ‘step outside the box’ and encourage students to ‘broaden their views’ (T5). English is a discipline that invites interrogation of humanity, relationships and complex lived experiences. By introducing students to new perspectives and different lives, the study of English opens up new ways to understand oneself and other human beings.

We, as an English department, need to increase the cultural capital of our students, and it’s probably one of the few subject areas, where we get to talk about world issues ... philosophies. Peoples’ values and attitudes are very much a part of English. (T8)

Drawing on this idea, many participants identified themselves as having relational or empathetic orientations to teaching (T1; T6; T7), endorsing the idea that ‘education is a process of building relationships’ (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 88). One participant commented that English teachers are ‘uniquely positioned to hear when students share personal information’ (T7). There was consensus that the subject matter of English invites students to explore issues that are ‘real and relevant’ (T9) and, where the classroom climate allows, this encourages students to communicate their own perspectives about aspects of human experience (T7). The extent to which the teachers value the relational and human elements of English teaching is emphasised by one participant’s concern that teaching risks becoming ‘de-humanised and soulless’ when teaching programs become increasingly prescribed. In this teacher’s view, ‘telling’ teachers ‘exactly how many assessments there are, what type of assessment they are ... and that they’ll be done in this week’ makes it difficult for teachers to be responsive to students’ needs as human beings (T4). Participants agreed that English potentially provides a unique context in which to explore risky or difficult ideas, such as gender and sexuality. However, not all participants had actually taken the step of exploring LGBTQI issues in their English classrooms, which raises questions about the barriers and lack of support provided for teachers to facilitate addressing anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic education in schools (Taylor et al., 2015).

Identity as advocate

Participants agreed that because of the subject matter they teach, English teachers are well-placed to engage relationally with students. This close engagement with students’ lives seems to lead to increased empathy for students such as ‘that girl in the corner who’s struggling with the fact that she’s got something she wants to say, but is hiding it every day’ (T9). From there, it seems a natural step for teacher participants to take on another element in their identity, that of advocate. Many teachers saw themselves as being involved in advocacy work, such as being allies to LGBTQI students or being role models to both LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI students and colleagues (T2) (Blackburn, 2015). Other aspects of teacher advocacy roles involved ‘not being bystanders’ and ‘calling out’ pejorative language (T7), ‘being vigilant’ (T8), and helping students ‘feel normal’ by choosing texts that reflect a spectrum of genders and sexualities (T2) (Clark, 2010). Being an advocate for LGBTQI students involves ‘speaking out’ against the normalised culture of schools if this culture is to be changed, and this requires courage (T8). One teacher claimed that it is important for teacher-advocates to find ways to take a stance so that others do not ‘get angry back in your face’ (T2), which raises questions about the need to create productive spaces and professional development for educators to think through the use of specific resources for addressing gender and sexual diversity in schools and in their classrooms.

Everything we do it's got to be peaceful, it's got to be positive, it's got to be ... something that ... people can feel that they can get involved with, or that they can be supportive of, without feeling like they are giving up their own little patch of ground. (T2)

Advocacy requires a degree of courage, but the consequences of not engaging with students to explore some of the realities of young people's lives can be much worse (Martino, 2000; Taylor et al., 2011; Ullman, 2015; Wyss, 2004).

... I'd much rather present some confronting issues, than be hearing about um ... tragic lives lost, because we didn't sort of possess the, you know, the strength to engage them [students]. (T7)

Thoughts on teachers' identities and the capacity to reflect on and support sexual diversity and gender justice in classroom practices

The English teachers in this research appear to position themselves as being particularly well placed to address questions of sexual diversity and gender justice in their classrooms. However, it is important to keep in mind that these teachers are not representative of the English teaching profession. They provide a window into how teachers might reflect on social justice and anti-oppressive oriented pedagogies that are committed to examining heterosexim, heternormativity, homophobia, transphobia and cisgender privilege (see Bryan, 2012; wallace skelton, 2015 for a more detailed explication of these pedagogies).

There was very little evidence that the teachers saw that the kind of advocacy work done in English could be transferable to work in other disciplines, which leads to the question of whose job it is in a school to do this work. However a clear message from the interviews was that all teachers can adopt, as a starting point, a relational approach to their work, by acknowledging the diverse identities of their students, by being responsive to each student ‘as a whole person’, and by being non-judgemental when engaging with students who don’t fit the mould (T1; T2; T7). There was consensus that the work should not be left to those teachers of diverse genders or sexualities, but that it is the responsibility of all teachers to be embracing such productive and critical pedagogies in their classrooms (Education Queensland, 2002). ‘Straight’ teachers need to be allies, not bystanders (T7). ‘Some of this stuff, if we could actually get the ... straight teachers teaching it, that would be a really powerful message!’ (T2) (Blackburn, 2015). What is also clear from the interviews is the significance of the school climate (there are some schools where such work could not be contemplated) and the need to take account of the context of the wider community, which is the focus of the next section. This is undoubtedly risky work, and needs courage.

3. What role does the curriculum ('official', 'hidden' or 'null') play in limiting or making possible more LGBTQI inclusive school communities?

The concept of 'curriculum' is complex and highly contested. Our view is that a school's curriculum encompasses every learning experience, both planned and unplanned, that a student has in school. Students learn not only from the 'official' curriculum, but also from the 'hidden' curriculum (the unintended learning that happens as a result of participating in school routines and practices) and from the 'null' curriculum (those things that are not taught and which students therefore come to understand as being irrelevant or unimportant to learning) (Apple, 1971; Eisner, 1994). Eisner, writing about the 'null' curriculum, suggests that 'what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach' (1994, p. 97).

During the semi-structured interviews, teachers in this study were asked to comment on how they planned, taught and assessed Secondary English. Teachers spoke at length about the most highly visible components of their school's 'official' curriculum – the Australian Curriculum for English. While the Australian Curriculum for English gives scope for learning about difference and exploring the experiences of others (T8), some teachers identified a tacit assumption of student homogeneity in this curriculum that made them question its inclusivity with respect to young people of diverse sexuality and gender (T3; T7).

Another dimension of a school's official curriculum is associated with the active promotion of values such as social justice and inclusion, and with the endorsement of events such as the 'Wear it Purple Day' (www.wearitpurple.org/: individuals are encouraged to wear purple in support of sexuality and gender diverse young people). Teachers in one school, for example, saw such events not just as a 'one off' flash in the pan opportunity for engaging with gender and sexual diversity in their school community but as basis for developing an ongoing, integrated curricular focus for examining homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism through employing a range of texts (see Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2014, for further examples of such an approach). Further discussion of teachers' insights into these aspects of a school's official curriculum are found elsewhere in this booklet, particularly in the sections on School Climate and Teachers' Identities.

Teachers' interviews also provided insights into the workings of the 'hidden' curriculum, particularly the impact of standardisation through testing (T1; T2; T4; T9), and the 'null' curriculum, which renders invisible the lives and experiences of LGBTQI students (T2). These three different aspects of curriculum intersect in interesting and complex ways for teachers whose approaches to teaching are not only responsive to the changing needs of students in their care, but are also inclusive and socially just.

The official curriculum

Many teacher participants acknowledged that while the official curriculum (in particular the Australia Curriculum for English) need not appear constraining, in practice it often is. Many factors make it easy for teachers to follow the standard curriculum, but difficult for them to adapt or resist what is prescribed. Interview participants agreed that while there is space in the Australian Curriculum in English for teachers to exercise autonomy and plan learning that is responsive to students' needs and experiences, the push towards standardisation makes it more and more risky to challenge the norms and boundaries of established practice (T1; T2; T4) (Brass, 2015). Numerous constraints work against teachers' capacity to shape the official curriculum and 'cut through [its] rigidity' (T1).

*There are risks for teachers who appear to break taboos.
(T3)*

The official curriculum allows some limited opportunities for creating more LGBTQI inclusive school communities. Many participants look for ways of working opportunistically, introducing difficult ideas 'by stealth' (T9) or 'slipping these things in whenever I can' (T2). Further discussion of such strategies is found in the following section on Multiliteracies. However, opportunities for individual teachers to choose content that acknowledges the experiences of LGBTQI students, or that requires the exploration of new and confronting subject matter for cis-gendered or heterosexual students, is restricted when expectations on the part of students, other teachers and parents are that every class should study the same texts. Individual teachers who may be willing to explore non-standard texts and introduce new ideas to their classes are therefore pushed back by the orthodoxy of others (T1; T2; T3; T4). Lack of time is also a factor. Extreme pressure of work leaves little time for innovation (T2) and teachers lack the time needed to develop the classroom space for the collaboration and reflection that is necessary to support students as they engage with new and challenging material (T1). Teachers recognise the potential for texts and reading practices to 'interrupt' and 'work on our assumptions' (T1), but instances of censorship (T3) can mean that teachers may shy away from stepping into such difficult territory and quickly learn to practise self-censorship (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014). A degree of experience and confidence is important for a teacher to be able to work 'against the grain' of the curriculum (T1; T7) (Martino & Mellor, 2000; Mellor & Patterson, 2000).

The hidden curriculum

The most significant aspect of the hidden curriculum (the unintended learning that happens as a result of participating in school routines and practices) is the standardisation of learning and teaching that has come about as the result of an increasingly constraining testing regime. It is ironic that despite the National Curriculum Board's (2009) expectation that English should be developed with 'a futures orientation' that 'includes an appreciation that our society is growing in its complexity', the actual effect of standardisation in the hidden curriculum has been a loss of complexity. Concern about how standardisation of learning and teaching affects teachers' work is a common theme throughout the interview data. Teachers reported feeling 'locked down' (T4) or having their attention diverted from 'real teaching' (T9) when the focus of their intellectual and creative energies is to prepare students to do well in tests or public exams.

A teacher's job is to help students love learning, not teach them to pass tests. (T9)

A common thread in teachers' interviews was how the testing regime in Australian schools has led to an 'obsession' with standardisation and consensus (T1; T2; T4). Students who become 'programmed to pay attention' only when being tested (T2) are reluctant to engage in learning that is not directly associated with the test. By its nature, a standardised curriculum is an impoverished curriculum as it 'reflects very limited social realities' (T3). The diversity of students' cultures and experiences and the future needs of the young people as they prepare to participate in an increasingly complex and increasingly diverse society are not addressed (see Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti & Sellar, 2016).

They are very Anglicised expressions of ethnicity that we offer the students [in this school's community]. (T3)

Another hidden aspect of the ‘imposed’ curriculum is its failure to acknowledge that it will not meet every student’s needs and that some students are ‘not going to get there’. There is no allowance for ‘that organic modification, adjustment that all teachers need to do if they are to be responsive to their students’ needs (T7).

There’s something really stupid about having a prescriptive ... course outline locked in and printed, and ready for distribution, before ... you’ve actually met the client base. (T7)

This hidden curriculum, valorising standardised content and pedagogy, is damaging for all students not just because it fails to take account of individual students’ needs. In a much broader sense, the hidden curriculum limits students’ thinking, leads to the ‘erosion of [students’] rights’, and risks creating a ‘compliant, non-questioning, homogeneous society’ (T3). It is particularly damaging for students who do not conform to the norms assumed through standardised curriculum, and who are at risk when the curriculum singles them out as different because their experiences are not represented (T3). Several teachers pointed out that any standardised culture discriminates against students who are different.

The key to ... supporting the mental health of LGBTIQ people in general but particularly younger people is just inclusivity. Is just [having] a range of texts which includes them ... as a regular, normal, significant part that no big deal is made about. (T1)

The null curriculum

Participants shared the view that the official curriculum is silent about the experiences of LGBTQI students. One teacher mentioned the Curriculum's 'missed opportunity' to include LGBTQI issues (T2). From the tacit acceptance of heteronormativity, cisnormativity and misogyny, through the unchallenged use of non-inclusive language, to the existence of taboos around discussions of gender diversity and sexuality, the null curriculum effectively silences and makes invisible the experiences of the LGBTQI community (even though individual students who struggle in this marginal space are often themselves painfully visible). However, learning about LGBTQI people takes place in schools whether or not this is intentional. Each participant was able to cite examples of the null curriculum in operation in their school. Participants reported that gender-normative discourses go largely unchallenged in the schools where they teach, and this makes it very hard for those students whose gender embodiment and expression defies binary systems for thinking about and understanding gender identity/identification or is non-normative (see Ullman, 2014). When gender diversity and gender justice are not addressed as part of the official curriculum, the null curriculum ensures that default learning about gender takes place. This seems to create particularly difficult settings for students who are questioning their gender identity or who simply do not fit within binary frameworks for making sense of gender. Male students who are 'in a space where [their] masculinity is not clear' often feel threatened by the hyper-masculine culture of their male peers (T1) (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Pascoe, 2007). Girls who are not overtly feminine are made to feel they are not the 'right sort' of girl (T9). The misogynistic environment of many schools, particularly (but not exclusively) of all boys' schools, further entrenches stereotypical ideas about sexuality, such as women with short hair must be lesbians and men who are gentle must be gay (T7; T8), and constrains possibilities for exploring issues of gender and sexuality (T9) (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005).

I feel like I'm in a 1950s locker room [in this school].
(T9)

There is a silence on homophobia and transphobia, with many participants reporting that colleagues are ‘accepting or silent on homophobia’ and students are ‘watchful, working out what is and is not acceptable based on teachers’ practices’ (T1) (Greytak et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2011). One common aspect of the null curriculum is the tacit acceptance of homophobic language, which the teachers agree must be ‘called out’ (T2). There is some evidence that using the word ‘gay’ pejoratively is dying out in schools (T8), but also evidence of teachers making derogatory comments about other staff members who are ‘so gay’ (T9). However, such diminishment of pejorative terms does not necessarily mean that heteronormativity and cisgender normativity are not pervasive in their institutionalised manifestations, as supported by the school climate research cited in this report. Teachers in the study recognise the need to be vigilant and counter the negative consequences of such unexamined silences. As one teacher put it, ‘I put it back on them ... ask why do I feel like this, why am I thinking like this?’ (T8).

There are also curricular silences about ways in which the world outside is changing with respect to the lives of people of diverse genders and sexualities. Several teachers felt subject to parental resistance and control (T1; T8) and described the ‘fear factor’ and ‘risks’ for teachers who are apprehensive of negative reactions from parents when they appear to break taboos by discussing issues such as sexuality (T9) (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). On the other hand, as the mass and social media are generating new understandings and providing new provocations that shape students’ understandings (T3), it is possible that such exposure to events outside school may ‘expand’ students’ views (T4) (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Drier, 2007; Sandercock, 2015). The extent to which the new openness in the wider community will transfer to school contexts remains to be seen (T9).

Curricular possibilities and limits in creating LGBTQI inclusive classrooms and school communities.

Our research strongly endorses the view that schooling, through the curriculum (whether ‘official’, ‘hidden’ or ‘null’), ‘constitutes and perpetuates homophobic, cisnormative and heteronormative discourses’ (Robinson, et al. 2014, p. 25). Our research shows that teachers struggle to confront such discourses despite the ‘lack of institutional direction’ that Ullman identifies (2015, p. 41). Teachers’ experiences are of working in contexts where deeply conservative school cultures shape students’ and teachers’ experiences and rarely reflect contemporary social realities. Faced with the complex intersection of the official, hidden and null curricula that in their different forms work to exclude and marginalise LGBTQI students, and which are themselves the result of insitutionalised heteronormativity and cisnormativity, some teachers work hard to find moments when they can introduce oppositional or transgressive content into the classroom (Helmer, 2015; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2014).

Standardisation has killed curriculum as a creative pursuit. (T3)

Despite this continuing struggle, by and large, the teachers in this study maintain a commitment to work against the ways that the curricular practices marginalise LGBTQI young people in classrooms.

The least that a teacher can do is normalise those ideas of marginalisation ... and create an environment where at least for that one hour of the six hour day ... the potentially marginalised individuals feel respected. (T7)

4. What are the possibilities for using a multiliteracies approach to build conversations about LGBTQI human rights?

A multiliteracies approach to teaching English acknowledges the rapidly changing nature of information, communication and cultural migratory patterns in contemporary life. Today's communication is increasingly based on multimodal forms of expression, such as the Internet, new digital media and multimedia texts, and reflects constantly changing national and global environments. In this context, learners who develop new ways of engaging with, understanding and responding to new types of texts (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015) are better prepared to become informed citizens able to participate fully in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse and complex (Anstey, 2002).

A multiliteracies approach to English teaching is endorsed by the National Curriculum Board in its document *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* (NCB, 2009). In particular, this document highlights the culturally and linguistically diverse character of present-day Australia, the need for a curriculum that prepares students for the future, and advocates for the inclusion of new communication technologies and multimodal texts as well as more traditional print media (NCB, 2009).

From *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English*

Introduction

2.2

In developing the national English curriculum those features of present-day Australia that matter to all Australians need to be considered – a view of our nation as culturally and linguistically diverse, democratic, evolving, with a history of accomplishments, and struggles, and a commitment to equity and openness.

2.3

Equally, the curriculum needs to be developed with a futures orientation. A futures orientation includes an appreciation that our society is growing in its complexity and that Australians will need to interact in a global environment, know how to learn, adapt, create and communicate effectively, and interpret and use information more fluently and critically.

Approaching English teaching from a multiliteracies perspective helps students learn to successfully negotiate multiple types of texts and contexts for meaning making. With its ‘situated practice’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4) and emphasis on working with the kinds of texts the students use themselves, a multiliteracies approach also has the potential to help every student feel they belong in the learning community and are connected to the content being learned. This aspect is particularly relevant to young people, such as members of the LGBTQI community, who are not represented in more traditional texts. The classroom is also an important environment for young people to prepare, as future citizens of a complex, challenging and constantly evolving community. Rennie (2009) suggests that for ‘cultural transformation’ to take place, learners must be given opportunities to ‘truly engag[e] with difference’ in the classroom (p. 13). Based on this principle, a multiliteracies approach provides the basis for introducing different ways to make sense of gender creativity and diverse sexualities, encourage shifts in perspectives and prepare students to better understand how and why ideas in this field are changing.

For these reasons, the research team sought to explore with participants the possibilities for using a multiliteracies approach to build conversations about LGBTQI human rights in their English classrooms. All teacher participants were invited to note the extent to which they thought that LGBTQI issues are included or addressed in the English curriculum, and to describe any specific resources or texts that address LGBTQI themes and that are being used in the English classroom. Interviewees were asked to comment on how they plan, teach and assess, and how they integrate technology in the English secondary curriculum. Participants were prompted to consider the role of critical literacy(ies), consideration of human rights that are inclusive of gender and sexual diversity, and the use of media, multimodal texts or multiliteracies. The following includes comments from the teachers’ interviews only.

The potential of English to ‘open minds’

Many participants spoke of the potential for English to encourage critical thinking (T2, T4, T5) and to ‘open minds’ (T5). The English classroom is a place where world issues, philosophies, values and attitudes can and should be spoken of. This is ‘ingrained’ in the practices of English teachers (T8), who must continue to ‘ask big questions and deal with confronting topics’ by encouraging students to engage with challenging texts (T7). In this respect, participants appear to agree with a core principle of a multiliteracies approach, that for learning to be successful, learners need to be taken out of their comfort zones and introduced to new ways of seeing and understanding their world (Kalantzis, Cope and the Learning by Design Group, 2005). Teacher participants also agree that the texts chosen should be meaningful, vital and responsive to students’ lives.

The texts and the resources we use ... control thought patterns and shape the future. (T3); Texts have the potential to 'interrupt' and 'work on our assumptions'. (T1)

However, many teachers proceeded cautiously when introducing challenging texts such as those dealing with diverse genders and sexualities. Teachers are often highly strategic. One participant spoke of working opportunistically, introducing difficult ideas 'by stealth' (T9); another of 'slipping these things in whenever I can' (T2), and another noting the need to consider the 'receptivity' of students when introducing texts that might take them 'out of their comfort zone' (T7).

This work is 'emotionally taxing' as it is 'deeply connected' to students' experiences and to human experiences. (T7)

However, there was a consensus that the Australian Curriculum for English provides a context for teachers to invite students to engage in questioning the world through texts. The Curriculum encourages questions such as 'What would you do? What do you think?' (T8). The use of texts to explore literary concepts gives scope to choose texts that also happen to focus on gender and sexuality (T4); exploring the construction of gender, social class, power relations has been 'traditionally ... a big part' of senior English (T4).

The potential of new technologies

Most participants recognised the potential of new technologies to enhance their teaching and students' learning, but appeared cautious about using these approaches and made very little mention of using them to teach about LGBTQI topics. While using technology is 'an imperative' since it 'reflects contemporary literacy practices' (T1), and it has real possibilities for engaging students (T7), there are also significant risks. Managing social media and student safety appeared to be a challenge for all teacher interviewees, with no clear way forward.

When I first started teaching we would be battling with students to do written work or to do reading, because they'd go home and want to watch television. Now you talk to students about television and it's like, "What?" If they watch anything they watch it online. They're on Facebook, they're on YouTube, on Instagram ... so unless you can bring some of that into your teaching ... you're in the dark ages. (T4)

The pedagogies made possible by the use of new technologies did, however, provide rich potential for teachers to create space for students to discuss risky subjects and express their ideas in a forum that is less public than that provided by whole class discussion. The teachers spoke of the utility of the Internet as an important source for their teaching. It enabled them to search out texts and sources dealing with LGBTQI content and representation that they could then integrate into their lessons and units of work that addressed questions of identity and societal expectations, for example. In addition, teachers remarked that ready access to texts online makes it possible for students to work together in small groups to view and discuss ideas that individuals might feel unsafe discussing in front of a whole class (T4). One participant suggested that a teacher-directed discussion makes it difficult for students who 'feel a little bit unsafe or ... who have a question or ... who disagree'. This teacher implied that in such a setting students are easily silenced. 'They may just sort of go, "Oh, ok. You know we'll just sit and listen"' (T4). Another participant, who does a lot of 'technology rich teaching', uses an iPad app to designate seating for the class each day. In that way, 'every day, that student is sitting in a new seat, with new people, in collaboration' (T7). This process may create an evolving space for students to explore complex issues and for teachers to initiate discussion about gender and sexual diversity.

A safe space in the classroom needs to be established and maintained. (T5)

Two teachers also saw the value of using new communication technologies to enable students to produce their own multimedia texts (T4; T8). One teacher talks about ‘the human experience, main ideas, studies and attitudes, across a range of genres’. The teacher then encourages students to respond with multimodal texts of their own. ‘What the students now do back for me will be a reinterpretation or a creation multimodally’ (T8). In this regard, several teachers explicitly mentioned the opportunity for LGBTQI students themselves to use such avenues for exploring their own identities and to address issues relevant to their lives as gender and sexual minorities.

However, there was broad consensus that teachers feel out of their depth with such learning, some questioning whether it is ‘real’ learning? (T3). While there may be an increasing focus on ‘visual texts and semiotics ... how those things shape students’ understandings of their world’, some teachers still believe that students should instead be ‘learning phonics and ... compound sentences and ... doing more multiple choice tests’ (T3).

Participants in this study clearly see the potential of a multiliteracies approach to introduce texts that are relevant in form and content to students’ lives, particularly those texts produced using new communication technologies. They also identify the potential in accessing such texts with a specific LGBTQI content to initiate discussions with their students about the politics of recognition, representation, visibility and erasure of gender and sexual minorities in the broader society. Participants also have a clear view of the pedagogies that can enable students to engage safely with the challenges and new experiences that can ‘open minds’ to new possibilities for the future that are not delimited by heteronormativity, heterosexism and cisnormativity. However since many teachers do not have the confidence or skills to make the best use of new technologies in the English classroom, there remains much work to be done to make this an established practice. Even more work is needed to encourage the introduction of multimodal texts that focus on LGBTQI topics, given the pervasive homophobia, transphobia and institutionalisation of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in the broader Australian society.

In the following section, we suggest some multimodal texts, as starting points, for educators who would like to ‘start some really beautiful discussions’ (T9).

5. Resources

This section presents a variety of resources to support teaching and learning in senior years English classrooms. Resources were chosen for their diverse representations of gender and sexuality. The resources are presented below in categories.

As part of Phase 1 of the study, the participating English teachers were asked to talk about their classroom practices in literacy and technology and to reflect on multimedia resources provided by the research team. Teachers endorsed the resources for their relevance to students' lives and to current issues in the wider community, suggesting that English resources used in schools are often not particularly relevant to students. Most teachers had not used any of the resources provided, but all stated that they would use them, especially if given ideas and suggestions for ways to incorporate them into teaching and learning.

Teachers may not have opportunities to choose resources when texts are prescribed by a school's curriculum (T1), and may lack time to develop activities to support learning using new or challenging resources. With this in mind, activities have been suggested for each resource, and mapped onto descriptors (shown with descriptor acronyms) of the Senior English Secondary Curriculum – the Australian Curriculum v.8.1 (ACARA, 2015). (See attribution note below).

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Resource categories

Video clips

- *My Princess Boy*
- *Bronies: The extremely unexpected adult fans of My Little Pony*
- *Profile of Jason Ball*
- *Gay NFL player says "I'm going back to work"*

News items and images

- *Bert and Ernie's moment of joy*
- *High Court rules 'non-specific sex' permitted*
- *WA divided over same-sex partners at formals*
- *"Now I've got something to play for": Tennis star Dellacqua*

Music clip

- *Same Love*

Teachers must continue to ask big questions and deal with confronting topics, through encouraging students' engagement with challenging texts. (T7)

Video clips

My Princess Boy

Interview by New Day, with Cheryl Kilodavis (2011) [10 min.]

Interviewer Margaret Larson speaks to author Cheryl Kilodavis and her son Dyson about the text *My Princess Boy*. Cheryl wrote this book to support conversations about gender diversity. The story is about a boy who enjoys dressing up, questioning assumptions of what it means to be a boy or a girl. A psychologist, and Dyson's primary school principal join the discussion. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGdx8yPybGI>

Possible focuses

Who speaks with authority during the interview?

How are messages/themes represented multimodally?

Indicative prompts

Where do speakers source their knowledge and how does this give them a certain type of authority?

Print: Why is Dyson holding a book? Oral: Which types of questions does the interviewer use? Who uses particular terms and why (e.g. terms such as bullying, acceptance, beautiful, pink, sparkly, dress up, pretty)?

Visual: What is the significance of photos of Dyson, images of the *My Princess Boy* picture book, and video of Dyson dancing? Gestural: What do you notice about body postures, expository hand movements, protective touching, eye contact and gaze?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 10

Language for interaction:

Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people (ACELA 1564);

Understand that people's evaluations of texts are influenced by their value systems, the context and the purpose and mode of communication (ACELA 1565).

You've got to allow them [students] to air how they feel first, and then think about their thinking, so their metacognition starts. (T8)

Bronies: The extremely unexpected adult fans of My Little Pony (2012)

Documentary film [90 min.]

Bronies are the young adult fan base of the (2010) animated television series, *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*. See <https://vimeo.com/87502723>

Possible focuses

In what ways can this text be considered a persuasive piece?

How would you evaluate your own responses to the text, and what do your responses lead you to conclude?

Indicative prompts

Which genres are present in the text? What is the relationship between genre and gender?

Which similarities and differences are present in actor perspectives in the film? How might these views reflect or contest your own perspectives? To what extent are certain stereotypes being challenged or not?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 11

Unit 1

Students explore how meaning is communicated through the relationships between language, text, purpose, context and audience. Through responding to and creating texts, students consider how language, structure and conventions operate in a variety of imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts, evaluating the impact of description and imagery, including figurative language, and still and moving images in digital and multimodal texts (ACEEN007); Analyse and evaluate how responses to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by purpose, taking into account that a text's purpose is often open to debate (ACEEN008).

*I love texts that work on our assumptions.
(T1)*

Profile of Jason Ball, Australian Rules Football Player

Beyond Blue (2014). Website and video [2 min. 27 sec.]

Beyond Blue ambassador Jason Ball is a 25 year-old Aussie football player, who recently 'came out'. Since this time, he has worked in the public eye to oppose the screening of anti-homophobic advertisements during media coverage of Australian football events.

See <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/connect-with-others/ambassadors/ambassador-profile/jason-ball>

Possible focuses

How are narrative structures and conventions layered in the text?

Indicative prompts

Which aspects of narrative are apparent in the text? How does the author's use of the narrative genre contribute to the purpose of the text? How are issues of sexuality, gender and visibility in sport being addressed by this text? What are some of the challenges that are being addressed for gay men in Aussie Rules football?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 11

Unit 1

Students explore how meaning is created through the relationships between language, text, purpose, context and audience. This includes how language and texts are shaped by their purpose, the audiences for whom they are intended and the contexts in which they are created and received.

Students examine similarities and differences between imaginative, persuasive and interpretive texts including: explaining the ways language features, text structures and conventions communicate ideas and points of view (ACEEN004); evaluating the impact of description and imagery, including figurative language, and still and moving images in digital and multimodal text (ACEEN007). Students analyse and evaluate how response to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by purpose, taking into account that a text's purpose is often open to debate (ACEEN008); personal, social and cultural context (ACEEN009).

So they [students] could view the text, there could be discussion around the issues involved in the text . . . you're meeting the literacy outcomes. (T6)

Gay NFL player says "I'm going back to work"

Interview with Michael Sam, American Broadcasting Corporation News, Good Morning America (2014). You Tube video clip [2 min. 53 sec.].

Michael Sam is an award winning National Football League player, and the first to openly 'come out' as gay in the public eye. In this media interview, Michael discusses his perceptions of 'coming out', consequent impacts on his career, and his experience of winning the Arthur Ashe Award for courage.

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QfTL_Hk65U

Possible focuses

How does this text represent and challenge different attitudes and voices?

Indicative prompts

Which perspectives are represented? Which actors voice these perspectives? How is Sam represented as a gay man? How do issues of gender and sexuality impact on his experiences and shape his perspectives?

Consider why this text is presented as a media interview. What stylistic choices throughout are significant to presentation of the main message of the text? In what ways do these choices impact voicing of particular views?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 11

Unit 2

Students analyse the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts to consider how texts represent the world and human experience. [Students] Compare texts in a variety of contexts, mediums and modes by analysing the style and structure of texts including digital texts (ACEEN022); investigating the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts including analysing the ways language features, text structures and stylistic choices shape points of view and influence audiences (ACEEN024).

[This resource] is enormously important, because sport is very mono-gender. (T5)

News items and images

Bert and Ernie's moment of joy

The New Yorker (July, 2013). Image.

Recently, the New Yorker published a cover depicting 'Sesame Street' characters Bert and Ernie. Appearing after the US supreme court's overturning of the Defence of Marriage Act, the cover energized discussion about same-sex couples and relationships.

See <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/cover-story-bert-and-ernies-moment-of-joy>

Possible focuses

How are elements of the foreground and mid-ground of the visual text used to create layers of meaning?

What multimodal elements contribute to this representation?

Indicative prompts

Who is represented in the foreground? How are they represented? Who is represented in the mid-ground? How are they represented? How are different aspects of the text framed? Why would the author create contrast between the foreground and the mid-ground of the text? How is the issue of same-sex marriage being represented in this text? To what extent is context important in thinking about this particular issue?

Which colours are used for different aspects of the text? Why? How do textures vary in parts of the text? How do these design elements contribute to meanings of the text?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 10

Expressing and developing ideas: Evaluate the impact on audiences of different choices in the representation of still and moving images (ACELA 1572);

Texts in context: Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELY 1749).

You would be able to combine an actual analysis of the cover story and looking at the techniques used, and looking at the actual issues presented. (T9)

High Court rules 'non-specific sex' permitted

News report, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 7.30, hosted by Sarah Ferguson, with Monique Schafer, 2/4/2014. Video [5 min.] and print transcript.

Norrie lives in Sydney. Norrie has won a four year High Court battle to have a non-specific sex category identified on birth certificates in New South Wales.

See <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s3977156.htm>

Possible focuses

How are language choices used to construct a particular perspective in this media text?

Point of view

Possible question prompts

How are viewers being invited to respond to this High Court ruling? Consider the significance of particular terms used throughout, such as: battle, identity, human rights, private, public.

Which points of view are presented? Which points of view might be missing? How does the author craft the text to create viewer empathy?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 12

Unit 4

Students understand how content, structure, voice and perspective in texts shape responses and interpretations; examine different interpretations of texts and how these resonate with, or challenge their own responses. They evaluate different perspectives, attitudes and values represented in texts by analysing content, purpose and choice of language (ACEEN063); analysing the use of voice and point of view such as in feature articles, reporting of current events or narration (ACEEN064); exploring other interpretations and aspects of context to develop a considered response; evaluating the way points of view and values are represented (ACEEN067); evaluating the selection of language features that generate empathy or controversy (ACEEN068).

It's about being aware of and exploring our humanity . . . identity . . . it's one of the key focuses for ATAR. (T1)

WA divided over same-sex partners at formals

Perth Now, Sunday Times (2011), by K. Symonds. Print news article with image.

Media comment on an online campaign orchestrated by students at St. Mary's Anglican Girl's School (Western Australia).

See <http://www.perthnow.com.au/wa-divided-over-same-sex-partners-at-formals/story-fn6mh6b5-1226105536392>

Possible focuses

Who is the intended audience for this news article?

What contextual information is given to support the perspective of the news article?

Indicative prompts

How do language choices in the text provide information about the intended audience?

How are broader values and attitudes regarding sexuality being reflected and challenged in this text? What is the significance of information such as that provided through the use of statistics? Is this information relevant to audiences in various social and geographical contexts? Why/not?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 11

Unit 1

Students explore how meaning is communicated through the relationships between language, text, purpose, context and audience. This includes how language and texts are shaped by their purpose, the audiences for whom they are intended and the contexts in which they are created and received. Students examine similarities and difference between texts including: explaining the ways language features, text structures and conventions communicate ideas and points of view (ACEEN004); explaining the ways text structures, language features and stylistic choices are used in different types of texts (ACEEN005); and analysing how vocabulary, idiom and rhetoric are used for different purposes and contexts (ACEEN006). They analyse and evaluate how responses to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by purposes, taking into account that a text's purposes is often open to debate (ACEEN008), and influenced by personal, social and cultural context (ACEEN009).

*There was a furore about that. . . You could [use the resource] to generate discussion.
(T3)*

"Now I've got something to play for": Tennis star Dellacqua

Essential Baby, Celebrity Parent News (n.d.), by Linda Pearce. Online news article with images. Australian tennis star Casey Dellacqua talks about her career and motherhood. See <http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/news/celebrity-parents/now-ive-got-something-to-play-for-tennis-star-dellacqua-20130828-2spx1>

Possible focuses

Representations of gender in Australian news items.

Possible question prompts

How might gender representations in this news item compare with representations in news items you have read in the past, including news items listed in this resource list? Which language conventions and conventions of the news genre have been used in this piece? How are issues of sexuality, gender and visibility in sport being addressed by this text? What are some of the challenges that are being addressed for lesbians in sport?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 12

Unit 3

Students explore representations of themes, ideas and concepts through a comparison of texts. They analyse and compare the relationships between language, genre and context, comparing texts within and/or across different genres and modes. Students recognise and analyse the conventions of genre in literary and non-literary texts and consider how those conventions may assist interpretation and how they may be challenged. Students compare texts from similar or different genres and contexts, examining how responses to texts and genres may change over time and in different cultural contexts. (ACEEN049)

*The WA articles are particularly good because they're contextual . . . very topical.
(T9)*

Music clip

Same Love

By Macklemore (rapper) & Ryan Lewis (with Mary Lambert). Song with video [7 min.]

This song was recorded at the pivotal time of the Washington Referendum (2012) aimed to legalize same-sex marriage. The song gained popularity in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. It tells the story of a young man from birth to adolescence, and celebrates his lifetime of marriage to his same-sex partner.

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlVBg7_08n0

Possible focuses

Song writing (genre) as a vehicle for self-expression and freedom of identity.

Indicative prompts

Throughout, the text juxtaposes the desire to adhere to cultural tradition, with alternate notions of self-expression, freedom of identity and love. True or False? OR How does the use of juxtaposition lead the author to take up a particular view? Is the viewer's response likely to be logical or emotive/empathetic? How is this important? How is the theme of same-sex love being taken up and represented in this text? What specific views are being challenged and promoted?

Links to Australian Curriculum

Year 12

Unit 3

Students explore representations of themes, ideas and concepts through a comparison of texts. They analyse and compare the relationships between language, genre and context, comparing texts within and/or across different genres and modes. Students compare and contrast distinctive features of genres by analysing the techniques and conventions used in different genres, mediums and modes (ACEEN044); considering how the conventions of genres can be challenged, manipulated or parodied (ACEEN045).

The key . . . is just inclusivity . . . is just a range of texts which includes them [LGBTQI students] . . . that they have representation and that they see themselves in a way that is not a stereotype. (T2)

Additional resources

Beyond Blue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Equal Opportunity Commission Western Australia (2013). *Guidelines for supporting gender and sexual diversity in Schools: Sexuality Discrimination and Homophobic Bullying*. Perth, WA: Equal Opportunity Commission of Western Australia.

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) (2016). '*Being LGBT in school*' A resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBT students. Retrieved from <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Being-LGBT-in-School.pdf>

Johnson, B., Harrison, L. Ollis, D., Flentje, J., Arnold, P., & Bartholomaeus, C. (2016). '*It is not all about sex*': Young people's views about sexuality and relationships education. Report of Stage 1 of the Engaging Young People in Sexuality Education Research Project. Adelaide: University of South Australia. Retrieved from http://www.youthsexuality.com.au/files/9814/5801/5069/It_is_not_all_about_sex_Research_Report_16.3.16.pdf

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