At this watershed moment in Australian history, it seems impossible for English teachers to avoid the professional responsibility of asking anew how they should handle issues of gender and sexuality in their classrooms. 61.6% of those who participated in the plebiscite voted yes, 38.4% no. English teachers surely need to respond to this endorsement of same-sex marriage on the part of an overwhelming majority of the Australian population. Such a response is part and parcel of teachers' responsibility to address the ‘diversity of students and the effects of social inequalities in students’ lives and learning’ (Connell, 2013, p. 73).

At the very least, political policy debates impinge on the work that happens in English classrooms – they provide the content for students to develop the skills to critically engage with media representations of Australian society. The very visible political discussions on the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program are fleshed out in an article by Stephanie Wescott, who explores the ways in which language use of our parliamentarians shape the ways in which topics of equity and equality for LGBTIQ+ Australians are debated within education and society at large. Chris Walsh and Louise Townsin present a model to address the ‘how’ aspect of teachers’ work, asking how English teachers can engage in practices that provide equitable educational experiences for LGBTIQ+ young people that are free from discrimination. The border crossing pedagogy model presented in their article titled ‘A border crossing pedagogy to disrupt LGBTIQ+ bullying and violence in schools’ illustrates how and why English teachers can teach about diverse genders and sexualities on the basis of anti-discrimination and marriage equality laws. This is a matter of facilitating the kinds of conversations that occur within classroom settings, where the challenge of acceptance of difference and diversity is always present.

Eleanor McRae and Jen Scott Curwood raise the important issues of teacher education programs encouraging visibility of queer inclusive texts to preservice teachers. They describe this as ‘one mechanism’ to promoting equity and equality for LGBTIQ+ young people and challenging heterosexism; a challenge in and of itself. Kate Douglas also explores a
higher education context, reflecting on experiences in the university English classroom with teaching E.M. Forster’s *The Longest Journey*, and emphasising the central role of questioning in queer pedagogy. Douglas also acknowledges the ‘risky’ position taken up by educators who choose to teach in ways that ‘ask students to embrace feelings of discomfort and confusion in their learning’.

The fact that not everyone voted in favour of same-sex marriage contributes to the potential difficulties or ‘riskiness’ associated with such acts of inclusion. It has already become apparent in the months since the legislation has been passed that some community groups and institutions continue to feel that same-sex unions are fundamentally at odds with their views and values. This suggests that there is good reason to make visible positive representations of diverse genders and sexualities. The inclusion of such characters in queer literature for young people makes it possible for such identities to be visible inside the school gates, in school libraries and in classrooms. Emily Booth and Bhuva Narayan reveal some of the barriers for authors who include LGBTQIAP+ identities and themes in their fiction work, not only in the world of fiction, but in the reality of the everyday lives of Australians. The changes in legalisation of same-sex marriage recognise and make visible the love that exists between same-sex couples to the broader community in Australia. How, then, do we discuss love when we are facilitating conversations with young people in our classrooms?

For all the contributors to this special issue of *English in Australia*, marriage equality is something of immense personal significance. The deeply felt personal character of this historical moment can be felt in the stories and other writing that people have contributed to this issue. We have framed the whole issue with two very powerful narratives, beginning with ‘Drawing on Love’, by Amy Azano and Eve Azano, in which they share their experiences of Eve coming out and reflect on the need for young people to be able to see themselves in the texts chosen for study. Then towards the end of this special issue can be found another narrative by CeCe Edwards, ‘The Job Interview’, in which powerful questions are raised about her identity as an English teacher and how open she can be about her sexual identity when students inevitably try to tease out details of her personal life.

The word ‘story’ perhaps does not do justice to the quality of this writing, which has a hybrid character, combining moving accounts of personal experiences with more general reflections in which the authors endeavour to understand the significance of those experiences within the context of this historical moment. The same can be said about Timothy Mannix’s ‘Here I am’ and Aubrey Jean Hansen’s ‘On Queering Indigenous Literatures’, both of which in their different ways provide personal testimonies in response to the call that we originally distributed for contributions to this special issue to affirm the role that love ought to play in our lives. Rory Harris has also responded to this call with a poem entitled ‘Tears’.

Over the years English in Australia has featured many articles on gender and sexuality. The archives reveal at least two special issues, one entitled ‘Gender’ (No. 107, March, 1994) and another entitled ‘Gender and Sexuality’ (No. 112, July, 1995). In this edition’s ‘Perspectives from the Past’ section, we reproduce Ray Misson’s 1995 paper which focused on ways in which questions relating to homosexuality and discrimination might be addressed, not only in the English classroom but also at a school-wide level. Misson offers short ‘reintroduction’ to this paper for this edition, which considers ways that the field and related issues have changed since the paper was first published.

Issues relating to equity and equality intertwine as we are challenged as educators and scholars to give voice to a wider range of perspectives on love. Thank you to the impassioned academics and educators who have contributed their words and their creativity to this special issue.

Note
1 ‘Their, they, them’ are used as alternatives to gendered pronouns (Washington Post, 2017)

References
