Textual Constraints: Queering the Senior English Text List in the Australian Curriculum

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Abstract: In this paper we report the results of an analysis underpinned by a critical orientation seeking non-heteronormative representations of sexualities in an official English curriculum text list. Content and thematic analyses were conducted to establish the extent to which diverse sexualities are represented in the ‘sample text list’ for the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary English. Only two of the fiction texts on the list were found to substantially contain non-heterosexual protagonists, named characters, experiences, or relationships. We contend that creators of authorised text lists should seek to more overtly address the persistence of heteronormativity in Australian schools by listing texts that represent diverse sexual identities and issues of sexual difference and diversity, and texts that are equitably accessible to a wider range of students in English.

Introduction
The question of which texts ought to be studied by school students in English subjects is a source of perennial debate. Nowhere in the school curriculum are decisions about text choice so contested as in senior secondary English subjects. Conversations about appropriate content, perceptions of literary quality, and concerns about balancing print, live, and digital-electronic media are typical topics to come across in this field (McGraw, 2005). In Australia, decisions about whether teachers must choose texts from a prescribed list for study are made by curriculum agencies at the state and territory level, and New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania are currently the only states requiring Year 12 teachers to choose from mandated lists. With Queensland adopting this practice from 2019, half of the Australian states and territories will require Year 12 students to focus their study in English on written, spoken and multimodal texts that are chosen from a state-authored prescribed text list. Texts for study are typically selected from the official list by the teacher or at the English Department level, with varying approaches to consultation with students or parents/caregivers, and within the limits of other curriculum constraints such as number of texts to be studied in total, required balance of genres, and assessment advice.

In 2012 the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) released the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary school, for subjects in the learning areas of English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. The English learning area includes four subjects: ‘English’, ‘Literature’, ‘English as an Additional Language or Dialect’ (EALD), and ‘Essential English’. For each of these four subjects there is a sample text list that proposes texts as examples of what is suitable for study in the categories of fiction, poetry, or non-fiction (Appendix A). In this paper, we analyse the extent to which texts featuring non-heterosexual sexualities are included in the senior secondary Australian Curriculum for English and report on the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, and plus1 (LGBTIQ+) identities, experiences, and relationships in these listed sample texts. We argue that lists of texts that are endorsed, promoted, or prescribed by curriculum authorities must represent a diversity of sexualities.

1. plus1 refers to the acronym LGBTIQ+ which collectively means lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, and plus.
We will first describe the context in which text selection for school-related reading in Australia takes place, establishing contemporary issues in the contexts of language use, social context, policy and curriculum. We then outline relevant findings from the existing literature to show the positive impact of inclusive curriculum design on LGBTIQ+ students’ academic achievement and wellbeing, and detail how texts representing LGBTIQ+ have been used in other teenage reading projects. Our finding that the sample text list for senior secondary English in the Australian Curriculum contains very little representation of diverse sexualities leads us to conclude that non-heterosexual representations are still considered significantly taboo in the English curriculum. Given the progress in the Australian Curriculum in recognising other significant ‘cross-curriculum priority’ areas of Indigenous experience and Australia’s relationship to Asia (Appendix B) for the benefit of social improvement and social justice, we suggest that recognition and representation of diverse sexualities in senior English continues as a neglected area in student experiences of the world through texts.

**Background and context**

Conversations in school settings about sexuality and sexual identity cover complex territory. As issues of sexuality can be framed in physical as well as cultural discourses, conversations about sexual identity can potentially occur across the curriculum areas. However, upon review of the curriculum, explicit reference to ‘sexuality’ is typically confined to the Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum. In other curriculum areas such as English, ‘sexuality’ is silenced in the official curriculum, despite the subject’s vital study of human relationships in literary texts. In English, ‘heterosexuality’ is normalised, made invisible. Understandings of sexuality are influenced by cultural values, drawn from multiple discourses, including the conversations occurring in family, friend and community groups. Institutional discourses also impact the approach to sexuality taken in educational settings, as political bodies and religious organisations in particular take public stances on the acceptable limits of these conversations, especially in relation to young people. The debates are framed by an ongoing tension between wanting to promote student safety and wellbeing by giving access to knowledge and wanting to protect students from threats to their safety and wellbeing by limiting access to knowledge. Ultimately, judgements about whether accessing material and discussion relating to sexual identity is helpful or harmful to young people are grounded in personal values and belief systems, making this an emotive topic.

**Terminology**

The language used to talk about sexuality is itself continuously evolving, and we wish to recognise at this point in the paper the overlapping concepts of sexuality and gender, as well as the increasing recognition of both sexualities and genders. Representations of sexuality include, for the purposes of this paper, not only sexual acts, but sexual identities (Renold, 2005) and orientations (Janssen, 2008), or sexual behaviour, sexual desire/attraction (Riley, 2010). Whilst we acknowledge the interplay between a plurality of genders and sexualities, the focus of analysis in this study is on sexualities.

In the field of sexualities, collective identifiers such as GLB (gay, lesbian, bisexual) have developed over time and the contemporary orthodoxy for referring to the various identities outside of heterosexual experience is LGBTIQ+. The expansion of this collective acronym reflects a tension in the field of gender and sexuality studies, namely the extent to which sexualities ought to be constructed along traditional binaries that support the privileging of heterosexual and cisgender identities as the norms against which to define the ‘other’. In this paper we seek to explore the representations of any non-heterosexual sexual identities (extending beyond same-sex attracted identities) in the Australian senior English curriculum.

**Social context**

The topic of sexualities has been heightened in Australia by two recent socio-political controversies. The surrounding contexts include the 2017 postal survey that was conducted by the Australian Federal Government to find whether the marriage of same-sex couples had majority public support, and the extensive public debate of the Safe Schools Program.

The same-sex marriage survey was pitched to the public by the government as an opportunity for ‘respectful debate’. However, what ensued was an onslaught of harmful and damaging propaganda that entered the letterboxes and television screens of Australians. Although the outcome was positive for all Australians with a successful ‘yes’ to marriage equality, the debate prior to and following the postal
survey continues to position non-heterosexuality as debatable and problematic. For example, following the decision, the government has conducted a religious freedoms review, implying that the legalisation of same-sex marriage may lead to religious freedoms being impinged upon.

The Safe Schools Program was initially introduced as a federally funded program in 2014 and was subsequently rolled out to states and territories. The program had been successfully developed and implemented in Victoria for years upon which the national program was developed. The national program of funding was completed in 2017. In February 2016, the Australian Government announced that there would be an independent review of the current resources provided to schools under the Safe Schools Coalition Australia Program (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2018). The findings revealed that the materials suited the aims of the program to address homophobic, transphobic and interphobic bullying and to support teachers regarding same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming themes and issues. Also, it was suggested that some of the material was more suited to secondary schooling contexts. A national evaluation of the program was conducted, but the results were never released to the public. Concerns about legitimising ‘identity politics’ and promoting concepts such as ‘gender fluidity’ through the use of education materials echo social debates about whether it is acceptable to legalise same-sex marriage. What these two areas of concern have in common is a fear of moral disorder and a desire to reassert heteronormative values.

By describing issues such as marriage equality and gender fluidity as controversial, we are aware that we become complicit in a discourse that positions queer identity work as marginal and even optional. Educators like to avoid controversy, and with good reason. Gayby Baby, a film about the lives of young people living in same-sex families, received significant media and political attention when a school attempted to have some students view it (see Jeffries, 2018). The results of this study show that ‘conservative, liberal, and critical discourses were regularly employed in this digital debate, with very few postmodern comments evident’ (Jeffries, 2018, pp. 10–11). A study undertaken in the United Kingdom reveals how one principal’s attempt to include a trans-inclusive initiative was unsupported by education authorities, despite the application of policy. The principal received significant negative press and the initiative was described as ‘risky business’ (Taylor, 2017). Teachers are making pedagogical choices about responding to diverse sexualities based on the question, ‘Will this end up on the front page of the newspaper?’ (van Leent, 2014).

Policy

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians specifically details the provision of equitable education outcomes regardless of ‘sexuality’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Yet, education inclusive of diverse sexualities continues to be a controversial and ‘risky’ endeavour some ten years following this publication. Each state and territory in Australia develops localised education policy on ‘LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusions’, and there is great variation. For example, the Queensland policy is a two-page document titled ‘definitions and reference’ (Queensland Government, 2016), and yet, South Australia has a comprehensive policy built on the World Health Organisation’s International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (2009). The policy has recommendations for all departmental and school staff and includes comprehensive legislation links, definitions, roles and responsibilities, references and resources (Government of SA: Department for Education, 2016).

Curriculum

The move in the last decade to a national curriculum also saw progressive state curriculum elements disappear as local frameworks fed into a larger ‘Australian Curriculum’ that needed to be feasibly rolled out to all states and territories. For example, the New South Wales (NSW) syllabuses for Years 7–10 contained seven areas of ‘cross-curriculum content’ that were intended to be embedded in all Key Learning Areas:

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Work, Employment and Enterprise
- Key Competencies
- Literacy
- Aboriginal and Indigenous
- Civics and Citizenship
- Difference and Diversity
- Gender
- Multicultural. (Board of Studies NSW, 2003)

The focus of the gender cross-curriculum content was described in the NSW Years 7–10 English syllabus in this way:
Gender is a term that refers to the social construction of identity that follows historically from the biological differences between females and males. In English students explore the impact of different gender perspectives, stereotyping, and the social construction of gender in texts including the media. (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 11)

As we have already noted, the concepts of gender and sexuality are interrelated, but are not interchangeable. However, as can be seen in the quoted description of the content above, the cross-curriculum content for gender frames the concept as a ‘social construction’ and recognises a plurality of ‘different gender perspectives’, which is in keeping with the theoretical perspectives we have put forward in this paper 15 years later. It is not a stretch to imagine that the same theoretical framing would apply in the NSW syllabus context of 2003 to the concept of sexuality, particularly given that explicit reference to sexuality does appear in the cross-curriculum content for gender in the English syllabus in the area of difference and diversity:

Difference and Diversity content acknowledges that students experience difference and diversity in their everyday life. This experience occurs in their personal life, in the local community and in the wider society. English provides opportunities to assist students to deal with personal, social and cultural difference and diversity in a positive and informed manner, showing awareness, understanding and acceptance. It assists them to develop and express their sense of self, to connect with other people and communities and to understand the features of a fair and just society that values diversity. In particular, the representation of disability and sexuality in texts is a point of focus in the English content. (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 11, emphasis added)

The Australian Curriculum, in contrast, fails to mention either gender or sexuality explicitly in any of the seven General Capabilities, or in any of the three Cross-Curriculum Priorities (listed in Appendix A). The General Capability ‘intercultural understanding’ does include ‘interacting and empathising with others’ as one of three key ideas, though this is related more strongly to ‘cultural identity’ (implying issues of nationality or ethnicity) rather than other kinds of identities (e.g. sexual identities). Gender identity and sexual orientation do appear in Australian Curriculum content at the subject level – overwhelmingly, these instances occur in the HPE learning area, and notably, no content of this nature is apparent in the English learning area. The imperative to engage specifically with diverse representations of sexuality, once the status quo across all subjects in NSW junior schooling, was erased during the writing of the Australian Curriculum and therefore erased from subject English nationally.

Scholarly perspectives
There has been a long-standing argument for queering the curriculum and reading the curriculum in non-heteronormative ways (Letts & Sears, 1999; Sumara & Davis, 1999). Mayo puts forward the agenda of queering education:

Queer theory works the verb ‘to queer’ to centralise the constant need for critical attention to the processes of subjectification, whereby particular meanings of identity come to form potentially limiting understandings of identities, practices, and communities. But queer theory, similar to LGBT studies, is concerned with examining places in dominant discourses that are particularly open to the play of meanings that make change, however momentary, possible. Queer theory, then, is as concerned with the press of normative power in dominant culture as it is in queer subcultures themselves, concerned not only with the limits of discourse around queerness but the limits of discourse in general. (2007, p. 80)

To clarify our theoretical position and to summarise the words of Mayo, a queer undertaking signals that we are interested in broader understandings about how normative power is represented, and in this paper specifically, how normative power manifests through the limits of representation of LGBTIQ+ identities. Sumara (2001) hones in on the ‘literacy education’ space to theorise about how the work of teachers can engage in critical literacy practices that examine not only heteronormativity, but how any label or categorisation of human experience creates and/or limits possibilities for understanding identities.

Blackburn, Clark and Martino (2016) identify the groundbreaking work of English language arts scholars such as Athanses, Epstein, Hamilton, Reese, Schall and Dauffmann, who have advocated for queer-inclusive curriculum. Blackburn and colleagues (2003, 2005, 2011) significantly contribute to the development of the concept of queer-inclusive literature. Queer-inclusive literature provides an opportunity for LGBTIQ+ students to see representations of themselves in stories (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). More recently, Page (2016), and Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) have continued to advocate for queer literature which is inclusive of the themes and experiences of gender and sexually diverse young people. A
more recent development extends the advocacy to the digital text arena in which van Leent and Mills (2017) have developed a Queer Digital Literacies Framework, that suggests ways of working with young people to both consider queer-inclusive texts and to read digital texts queerly. A clear trajectory of advocacy for queer-inclusive literature and the benefits toward inclusive curricula and positive school climate form the argument for our analysis of the inclusiveness of the secondary English recommended text lists regarding diverse sexualities in particular.

Queer lives are increasingly visible in contemporary literature and popular culture. However, certain queer representations are more visible and acceptable than others (Greteman, 2018). Acknowledging that queer lives are more visible in texts pays homage to those that have endured years of developing and advocating queer theories to the point that these theories have permeated popular culture; for example, notions of Butler’s ‘gender performance’ have influenced cultural shifts in representations and understandings about gender (Greteman, 2018). Literature which includes queer representations provides an avenue for students to see themselves reflected in the literature (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). However, queer representations, queer lives, LGBTIQ+ lives, are still ‘missing’ from mainstream concepts of inclusive literature; the sample text list grossly represents the underrepresented queer life.

There are myriad barriers to inclusive curriculum and pedagogy in terms of gender and sexual diversity. These barriers include concepts such as heteronormativity (Britzman, 1995; Warner, 1991), which is a belief that heterosexuality is natural and normal, and ideologies such as childhood innocence (Robinson, 2013), which is the notion that young people are too innocent to know about diverse sexualities. Robinson (2013) describes the discourse of childhood as being invested in concepts such as innocence, ‘purity, naivety, selflessness, irrationality, and a state of unknowingness … vulnerability’ (p. 42). As a result of such concepts, the visibility of gender and sexual diversity continues to be narrow and pedagogical practices such as critical literacies possibly rendered heteronormative.

Schools with an inclusive curriculum have students who report a more supportive environment. Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, Gabrion and Russell (2015) report that school climate is perceived as safer, and bullying is reduced when inclusive curricula is broad across multiple learning areas. Furthermore, Helmer (2015) suggests that a ‘Gay and Lesbian literature class’ (p. 418) contributed to a queer-inclusive curriculum which proved to be meaningful for all students, and that the queer English curriculum would contribute to a whole school-inclusive curricula agenda and in turn increase student wellbeing and overall school climate.

Research design
In seeking to establish the extent to which LGBTIQ+ perspectives and representations are evident in the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English, this paper reports findings of an analysis of the fiction and non-fiction texts appearing in the ‘sample text list’ of the Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English (ACARA, 2012). The text list was selected as key content for analysis to establish the presence of LGBTIQ+ themes and perspectives in the English curriculum, as it indicates the type and nature of texts that are intended for students to experience.

The analysis of the text list used an initial content analysis to quantify the number of texts in which representations of LGBTIQ+ identities, experiences or relationships were foregrounded. The second stage of the research design used a thematic analysis to investigate the nature of the representations in the texts identified as containing LGBTIQ+ themes and perspectives to establish the extent to which they could be used to engage students in non-heteronormative discourses.

Content analysis
The Australian Curriculum for senior secondary English contains four ‘courses’ for English:

- English
- English as an Additional Language or Dialect
- Essential English
- Literature.

Data for analysis in this research was limited to the sample text list for the English course, as it is the course that would typically be undertaken by the majority of students in senior school. All of the courses feature a ‘sample text list’, which is not mandated for study, but which provides insight into the types of text that are institutionally recommended and endorsed by ACARA as a national curriculum authority.

The lists organise texts under three subheadings: fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. This research analysed texts appearing in the English course list for fiction and non-fiction only, as these longer pieces of prose work contain relatively discernible characters and
relationships, whereas the meanings expressed in poetry are further open to interpretation. The inclusion of poetry analysis was also ruled out from this study due to the tendency of the sample list to identify poets rather than specific poems for study (see Appendix B), making the corpus of poetry texts too large and ill-defined for inclusion in this data set.

The total number of texts yielded by this sampling process was 21: thirteen fiction texts and eight non-fiction texts (see Appendix B). The content of these texts was analysed to quantify the number of representations of LGBTIQ+

- protagonists (identity)
- named characters (identity)
- experiences (acts and desires)
- relationships (overtly non-heterosexual).

Protagonists and other ‘named’ characters were counted separately, in order to distinguish between stories that are about an LGBTIQ+ character and stories that include them.

**Thematic analysis**

After applying our categories for the content analysis of the list, any texts identified as containing representations of LGBTIQ+ identities, experiences or relationships were considered in light of three themes informed by scholarship in this field. As described in our review of research literature, a queer-inclusive curriculum should include access to and study of queer-inclusive literature, and this is characterised by

- inclusivity of the experiences of gender and sexually diverse young people;
- inclusivity of relatable themes for gender and sexually diverse young people;
- overt representation of gender and sexually diverse characters.

A deductive analysis was undertaken to establish how closely the identified texts could be described as ‘queer-inclusive’, followed by an inductive analysis to ascertain text-based themes arising from the identified fiction and non-fiction works.

**Findings**

A content analysis of the sample text list for English revealed that only two out of the 21 texts listed in the fiction and non-fiction categories contained any representations of gender or sexual identity that can be categorised as non-gender normative or non-heteronormative. The two texts identified as containing queer-inclusive representations – *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare – are both in the ‘fiction’ category.

**The Great Gatsby**

In order to count *The Great Gatsby* (Gatsby) as a queer-inclusive text in this analysis, we accepted suggested queer readings of the text, which provide multiple instances of textual evidence to support the ‘homo-sexual leanings’ of Nick, who can be read as in love with Gatsby (Wasiolek, 1992). An analysis of the text in this light reveals two relevant themes: that gender can be constructed beyond a simple binary of masculine/feminine; and that Nick can be read as a gay character.

Fitzgerald’s novel, published in 1925, is recognised for the theme of questioning and challenging constructions of gender, in particular of masculinity. Nick Carraway narrates the story of characters living on Long Island during the prohibition era in the fictional towns of West and East Egg; he is a key example of a male character who is constructed with feminine qualities. Nick’s views of Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and George Wilson provide multiple angles on what masculinity looks like, and on what kinds of masculinity are desirable and ultimately lead to gains in social status and power. Earlier critics conflate gender with sexuality, for example, arguing that guest lists for Gatsby’s parties contain ‘sexual hybrids’: ‘“The women are ‘defeminised’ – Mrs. Ulysses Swett, Francis Bull, Faustina O’Brien – and men are emasculated – Newton Orchid, Earnes Lilly, and Russell Betty”’ (Pacey Thornton, 1979, as cited in Wasiolek, 1992, p. 16). This speaks to the overlap between constructions of gender and sexuality; however, when ‘gender and sexuality’ is constructed as a topic pair rather than discrete issues in their own right, it provides scope for English teachers to engage with gender norms in texts such as *Gatsby*, without ever tackling notions of sexuality.

A notable theme for engaging frankly with representations of sexuality in *Gatsby* would be to examine arguments that Nick can be read as a gay character, attracted to Jay Gatsby, just as ‘strange gender transgressions [e.g. in chapter 2] suggest Fitzgerald’s discomfort with strict divisions between masculine and feminine behavior and personality’ (Kerr, 1996, p. 416), the representation of Nick’s affections does not present a ‘strict division’ between heterosexual and homosexual love, and readers (perhaps frustratingly) are not given explicit confirmation of Nick’s sexual identity. Rather, the novel contains instances of personal desire that are
not explicitly or singularly about sexuality, sometimes intertwined with desire relating to wealth, class and masculine power.

In contrast to the subtle and covert representation of homosexual desire in *Gatsby*, the novel contains high levels of sexual reference, demonstrating that books containing heterosexual sex are not taboo in senior English:

Tom sleeps with a chambermaid shortly after his marriage; the Buchanans leave Chicago because of one of his flings; he fornicates with Myrtle while Nick goes out to buy a pack of cigarettes; Nick has an affair with a girl from Jersey City; and the parties Gatsby gives are whatever else, sexual orgies. (Wasiolek, 1992, p. 15)

We acknowledge that the appearance of this content in *Gatsby* does not mean that sex is no longer a taboo subject in all schools. However, the inclination of some schools to censor all literature that contains sexual references – even in senior school – suggests a specific need for authorised text lists to contain 'PG-rated options', in which LGBTIQ+ characters and themes are explored without also representing sexual acts. In some schools, the adult nature of the subject matter in *Gatsby*, irrespective of any queer reading, would rule this text out for study.

**Twelfth Night**

Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (*Twelfth Night*), written around 1601/1602, offers opportunities to investigate themes relating to both gender and sexual diversity. In the play, the twins Viola and Sebastian are separated in a shipwreck that turns Viola up on the coast of Illyria. Viola disguises herself as a male, takes the name Cesario, then enters into a love triangle that challenges notions of both gender construction and sexual attraction.

The play can be categorised as a ‘transvestite comedy’ (Wright, 2011) due to Viola’s cross-dressing; in the context of Elizabethan theatre, this has further significance as roles in Shakespeare’s plays would have been performed by male actors. Gender as a socio-cultural construct is directly challenged:

In the doubly androgynous role of male actor playing a woman playing a man, Viola/Cesario must literally perform the role of the male; her success before the aristocratic Orsino and Olivia consequently points to the constructedness and performative character of gender itself. (Charles, 1997, p. 123).

Although the play yields in this way an avenue for discussion of gendered performances, the term ‘transvestite comedy’ points to the limitations of this theme in this text. Rather than being a text that offers contemporary students in English a story reflecting ‘serious’ issues relating to transgender or transsexual experiences, Viola’s situation is treated as temporary and comedic.

The ‘constructedness of gender’ is a standout theme of the play, as Thomas argues: ‘[T]hat is the whole point of Cesario’s transformation: *Twelfth Night* depicts one’s gender as essentially a performed role, a simple change of costume marking a change in identity’ (2016, para 6). Other scholars note the androgynous nature of Sebastian’s characterisation (cf. Lindheim, 2007). However, the comedy is resolved in Shakespearean style by a series of heterosexual weddings at the end of the play after Olivia is reunited with her twin Sebastian and reveals her identity: Olivia marries Viola’s twin brother Sebastian (believing him to be Viola/Cesario); Viola marries Duke Orsino, who she has been in love with since first sight.

As with *Gatsby*, in our analysis of *Twelfth Night* we accepted readings of the text that posit a homoerotic friendship between Sebastian and his rescuer, Captain Antonio, and the possibility of Antonio’s homosexual-ity (Pequigney, 1992). Taken alongside Sebastian’s later marriage to Olivia, the play furthermore presents possibilities for reading Sebastian as bisexual. Pequigney argues that Duke Orsino can also be read as bisexual, given his marriage to Viola/Cesario, who he came to love as a male servant.

One of the things that makes *Twelfth Night* problematic as being one of only two texts on the sample text list offering non-heteronormative characters and themes, is the historical context in which the study is situated. Although there is room in a study of the play to contrast the text with more recent adaptations and transformations (such as the 2006 film *She's the Man*), a study of gender and/or sexuality in *Twelfth Night* can be conducted from a ‘safe’ distance, possibly without relation to contemporary conversations about diverse genders and/or sexualities. Given the difficulty of reading Shakespearean works, we are also concerned that this text would not be seriously considered by teachers of students with low engagement in English, effectively rendering this a text that is only accessible to more motivated or talented students. We will argue in our discussion that authorised text lists ought to include more accessible and/or contemporary texts that provide students with representations of LGBTIQ+ themes and characters that they can more readily and directly relate to their personal socio-cultural contexts.
Discussion

The pressure and persistence of heteronormativity

Queer theory is interested in challenging normalised constructions of gender and sexuality identities (Meyer, 2010), challenging heteronormativity. Through analysis of the sample text list for senior English, we argue that heterosexuality is normalised through a lack of queer identities or themes. Heteronormativity is an example of institutional reproduction of cultural norms: heterosexual stereotypes, heterosexual privilege; the normalising of heterosexuality. The sample text list does the job of perpetuating heteronormativity.

If we are to challenge the construction of the list, we might propose sj Miller’s (2015) work, which introduces a literacy education philosophy of equality: a Queer Critical Literacy Framework. Miller draws on queer theory to develop a set of ten guiding principles for educators, for example, ‘advocates for equality’ (Miller, 2015, p. 42). Two of Miller’s guiding principles are relevant to the analysis and discussion of the identified texts for the purposes of this investigation:

5. Opens up spaces for students to self-define with chosen (a)genders, (a)sexuality, (a)pronouns, or names.
6. Engages in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, etc. (Miller, 2015, p. 42).

If the construction of the list was underpinned by these philosophies, we might see creators who open spaces so that students have the opportunity to ‘self-define’, and we argue this is relevant in terms of ‘reading’ representations of themselves in texts introduced into the curriculum and classroom (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). The ways in which young people identify with a range of genders and sexualities includes, Miller (2015) suggests, ‘(a)genders, (a)sexuality, (a) pronouns’. Point 6 reinforces the critical literacies work to be done in the sample text list for senior English in the Australian Curriculum. Whilst gender and sexuality norms are inextricably intertwined and the focus of the analysis was the representations of sexualities within the texts, we argue that Miller’s principles would most likely still be relevant in the event of an analysis of representations of gender diversity. For example, hegemonic masculine representations (Connell, 1996) might consistently represent the protagonist in the literature. To be able to critique sexuality representations, one must have a language to discuss what it is and what it is not. A heteronormative lens provides an opportunity to label genders, sexualities and their norms. The queer lens critiques these representations; revealing the norms, questioning the norms, critiquing the norms. The sample text list should be underpinned by philosophies of equality and inclusion, and the intersections of identity (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

Diversity as a productive resource

In 2005, Janks draws on hooks and Kostogriz to make a case for diversity being a productive resource:

Awareness is not enough; critical education needs also to produce transformative action … We need to provide our students with a lived experience of difference, where they experience difference as a resource for ideas, for creativity, for new ways of being in the world. Deconstruction is also not enough. If we use deconstruction to reveal the power of discursive representations and the interests they serve, then we have a responsibility to imagine with our students ethical possibilities for change and reconstruction. (Janks, 2005, pp. 41–42)

Our analysis of the text list does show how curriculum choices can marginalise/silence diverse experiences. In discussing these results, we take on board Janks’s (2013) call for critical analysis of texts to attend to the interdependence of power, diversity, access, and design/redesign as ‘dimensions’ of critical literacy. In this research we have focused closely on providing an account of representational diversity in relation to the texts put forward in official curriculum documentation, but in light of Janks’s interdependent model for critical literacy, we suggest that future transformation will be limited if seeking greater queer representation in the English curriculum is viewed as an isolated aim. We have shown that there is queer representation in both Gatsby and Twelfth Night, but is this ‘enough’, given the limitations of the texts we have also described? Considering how dimensions of power, access, and design/redesign are operating in the learners’ contexts will allow conversations about text diversity in the curriculum to move beyond critique and toward transformation. We argue that access remains a neglected consideration in the list, as both texts identified can optionally have their queer readings denied and silenced by a teacher who chooses to do so, and both texts are potentially inaccessible to students due to their adult themes (Gatsby) or textual difficulty (Twelfth Night). Further research might address the question of how to negotiate a queer-inclusive design/redesign of text use in senior English.

To be clear, we do not suggest that the result of this
research should be a ‘tick-a-box approach’ to representing marginalised identities in English. We also acknowledge that identities are intersectional, and that the authors of any official list will be hard pressed to choose a range of texts in which every possible student can see their unique intersection of identities represented by a protagonist or key relationship. However, the Rationale for the Australian Curriculum for senior English might be considered here:

[English] encourages students to engage with texts from their contemporary world, with texts from the past and with texts from Australian and other cultures [as] such engagement helps students develop a sense of themselves, their world and their place in it. (ACARA, 2015a)

By only selecting texts including LGBTQI+ characters and themes from ‘the past’ and from ‘other cultures’, the sample text list sends the message that diverse genders and sexualities have no place in ‘our’ world and are best studied at a safe distance. It is an example of how education ‘dismisses or cannot bear to know’ (Britzman, 1995, p. 154) how particular forms of knowledge, in this case heteronormativity, are structured and enforced in our contemporary world.

**Filling the curriculum gap**

We resist the notion that students studying English in secondary school are not mature enough to discuss sexuality, as well as the notion that conversations about diverse sexual identities are inappropriate for English teachers to engage, particularly once students are in Years 11 and 12 and preparing to enter the adult world. The Australian Curriculum for HPE contains content as early as Years 5–6 in the sub-strand ‘Communicating and Interacting for Health and Wellbeing’ relating to ‘how media and important people in the community influence personal attitudes, beliefs, decisions and behaviours (ACPPS057)’ (ACARA, 2015b). The elaboration for this content descriptor explicitly offers sexual identity as a topic (although it doesn’t mandate its inclusion): students could explore ‘media representations of people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from diverse cultural backgrounds, same-sex attracted or gender diverse’, and discuss ‘how representations impact on community values’ (ACARA, 2015b, emphasis added).

This particular elaboration could just as easily sit within the English curriculum, which is also concerned with media communication and representations. In the context of primary schooling, a cross-curriculum study with HPE and English content would be easy to construct here. However, in secondary schools, which in Australia largely continue to run class timetables where students study different subjects as content ‘silos’, in different rooms with different teachers at different times, such cross-curriculum studies become more difficult to organise and design. In senior secondary English, especially in states where prescribed text lists are in place, the content is constrained even further.

Of interest to the audience for this journal is the range of high quality community resources being produced in this space by readers, writers and researchers, including several curated websites and online lists. The *Get YA Words Out* website is ‘a platform supporting the writing, reading and publishing of AusQueerYA’ (https://getyawordsout.com/) containing book lists and resources relating to ‘Australian kids’ books with LGBQ characters’. *The Rainbow Owl* is a website curated by academics from Flinders University, Clare Bartholomaeus and Damien Riggs, which aims to document ‘the growing international body of literature and resources that focus on trans and gender diverse young people, their families, and those who support them’ (http://www.the-rainbow-owl.com/).

Jenny Pausacker’s outstanding and comprehensive guide titled ‘So Gay: A List of Australian Children’s and Young Adult Contemporary Realist Novels with LGBQ Characters 1985–2015 (plus three remixes)’ provides not only an alphabetic list of titles from the time reviewed with LGBQ characters, but also a chronological list, a breakdown of the kinds of LGBQ characters represented in Australian children’s literature, and annotations on individual titles. Although this paper has found the sample list in the Australian Curriculum for senior English to lack diversity in LGBTQI+ representation, for English teachers and students, there are these other avenues for gaining information about non-heteronormative texts. Future research in this area might focus on further analysis of other senior English texts lists (e.g. in NSW, Queensland or Victoria), or seek to explore the extent to which Australian English teachers are using alternative, community-generated resources.

**Conclusion**

Professor Peter Freebody’s video introduction to the Australian Curriculum English indicates the intent of the curriculum and suggests some key guiding principles to help teachers to ‘clarify and be confident and
sure-footed about how it is that English plays a key part in equity; he suggests that the curriculum should be adapted to the ‘real conditions in which teachers work’ (ACARA, 2015a). For example, real conditions equal 10% of the population identifying as LGBTIQ+ (The Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). Whilst Freebody may not have had gender and sexual diversity in mind, he did have ‘equity’ in mind. Given the statistics and experiences of LGBTIQ+ students in our schools, it would seem the word ‘equity’ applies to them. In turn, the English curriculum, including text recommendations, should play a key part in equitable learning experiences, at least, of students.

Through our analysis of the current text list, we would like to contribute to the debate about which texts end up on the text list by suggesting that features such as appropriate content, literary quality, and variety of language modes and text production mediums can all be achieved with the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ identities. By queering the senior English sample text list in the Australian Curriculum and exploring the work that literature, identity and sexualities can do, at the very least, LGBTIQ+ youth will see aspects of their lives reflected at school. Young peoples’ lives are too often silenced through heteronormative practices both within schools and in the institution of schooling itself. The senior English text list production is one such example. Whilst we acknowledge that myriad factors influence the text list production, such as a narrow (although increasing) scope of queer-inclusive literature to draw on, we would like to highlight the normative assumptions that underpin the processes and decisions made along the way.

The text list ultimately impacts the decisions made to use particular texts at the school level. Whilst the text list is not a mandated list and teachers have autonomy at the classroom level, it is difficult to step outside of the espoused norms reflected in the text list. Without systemic support, selecting a queer-inclusive text might be or feel risky for some teachers. If texts are explicitly recommended, teachers may ‘see’ professional permission to teach with LGBTIQ+ inclusive texts and engage in queer pedagogies with a range of literature. If no authoritative voice is visible to challenge norms and provide permission for the representation and interrogation of diversity, then heteronormativity endures. English curriculum in Australia has an imperative to include texts representative of LGBTIQ+ identities and themes.

Notes
1 The term ‘plus’ signifies that these bounded labels are fluid and not exhaustive; they do not capture the complexities of time and place. It also works to include other/future non-conforming identities.
3 Retrieved from: http://jennypausacker.com/so-gay-a-list-of-australian-childrens-and-young-adult-contemporary-realist-novels-with-lgbq-characters-1985–2015-plus-three-remixes/. Pausacker gives this rationale for compiling the list: ‘In 2015 I accidentally discovered that it was possible for LGBTQ and LGBTQ-friendly writers and reviewers to be completely unaware of a 30 year tradition in Australian children’s literature of writing about characters who identify or are identified as gay male, lesbian, bisexual or questioning and I decided I wanted to know exactly how many books had been forgotten.’

References
Board of Studies NSW. (2003). English Years 7–10. Sydney: Board of Studies NSW.


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Appendix A

Australian Curriculum (Senior Secondary)

‘Sample Text List’ for English (ACARA, 2012)


The sample text list for senior English is introduced with the following statement:

‘The following texts are examples of literary texts suitable for the study of English and are intended to stimulate thinking about teaching resources in relation to the content of the curriculum. The following examples are not meant to be prescriptive.’

Fiction

- *Swallow the Air* by Tara June Winch (novel)
- *The Broken Shore* by Peter Temple (novel)
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (novel)
- *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri (short stories)
- *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* by John Misto (play)
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (play; film directed by Elia Kazan)
- *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare (play)
- *Gattaca* directed by Andrew Niccol (film)
- *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* by Zdenko Basic and Manuel Sumberac (illustrated version)
- *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (graphic novel)
- *Cloudstreet* by Tim Winton (novel)
- *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville (novel)
- *Citizen Kane* directed by Orson Welles (film)

Poetry

- Christina Rossetti
- Wilfred Owen
- Judith Wright
- Romaine Moreton
- *Windchimes: Asia in Australian poetry* edited by Rowe and Smith

Appendix B

Australian Curriculum (Foundation–Year 10)

General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities


General Capabilities

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- ICT Capability
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Country/Place
- Culture
- People
- Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia
- Sustainability
- Systems
- World views
- Futures.

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