English is ‘about’ many things, and has defined itself in different ways throughout its evolution as a school subject. Emphases and objectives have come and gone, texts and practices fallen in and out of favour. But even in the most ‘skills-based’ versions of the subject, like Business English or ESL or English grammar, teachers cannot escape the fact that they have to deal with the cultural features that come with the territory of studying English language and literature (or literature written in English). As we shall see, even the term ‘culture’ has been through its own evolutionary changes, picking up an extending set of references from the later eighteenth century through to today (roughly the period of its association with institutionalised education), during which it has steadfastly refused to abandon earlier meanings, as it acquires new ones. The kinds of study that constitute English have always been, inescapably, about culture, and thus ‘cultural heritage’, since the term, and the evolution of its products and practices have evolved side by side.

So when the AATE Statements of Belief landed on my desk, I was surprised to see that heading the list was ‘We respect the enduring values and traditions of Australia’s cultural heritage.’ It struck me as odd, that here was a statement very much of these Kemp/Nelson/Bishop days. It responded to the The Australian newspaper’s gobbledegook about gobbledegook and mumbo jumbo, Donnelly’s flaccid pieces about a preponderance of junk texts and ‘dumbing down’, as well as Archbishop Pell’s denunciation of English for its lack of morality (which can only be rectified by slogging your way through Hard Times). Thus cultural concern, when applied to English in Australia in 2007 is now no longer assumed, as it has been for many years. Rather it is something to again be firmly asserted.

In short, I was interested that the writers of the document hadn’t run the two ‘cultural heritage’ beliefs (1 and 2) together, because in English classrooms they are one and the same thing. I thus see the separation of Statement of Belief 1 (and its placement at the head of the list) as a politically strategic move, which is not to say that I don’t think it’s important or believed. It was just that such a statement is embedded in the territory of English, in Australia or wherever English is taught. It doesn’t need to be said, because it cannot be avoided. It appears that now in the climate created by the retro-conservatism of the Howard government’s educational policies, publicised and supported by The Australian’s simplistic reporting of how education has gone to the dogs, it does. Because according to their lights, English is especially to blame for the Australia’s prevailing deep rooted edumalaise. The use of the word ‘evidence’ in relation to ‘research,’ and the evocation of ‘fair go’ as a restate ment of ‘acceptance and understanding,’ further mark the new statements as a response to a particular political situation – in this case, a government’s federalist agendas in education, alongside those in workplace relations, health and recently, climate change.

Articles in English in Australia (e.g. Volume 41, Nos 1 and 2), and many other recent publications and individuals have energetically opposed this line of thinking, so there is no point in restating the detail of the arguments. Forthrightly stating English teachers’ concern for Australia’s traditions is a form of opposition to retrothinking: a line in the sand. In the jeremiads of Kevin Donnelly et al., English is constructed as un-Australian because it doesn’t teach enough (or any) Patrick White, because it ignores what the Prime Minister ‘might call the traditional texts,’ which are treated no differently from pop-cultural commentary, as appears to be the case in some syllabuses (The Australian, 21/4/07). What I want to do here is reflect a little on how Statement 1 might be read in this political context, while remembering that it is also to be read in the contexts of the every-
day work of English teachers, the other five statements of belief, and (dare I say it?) traditional views of culture.

First, it has to be said that the six statements interrelate: as I know from forty-five years as an English teacher, the other five statements work in these roles means doing something that looks very like doing English. The document even bears the stamp of current ways of thinking about teaching and curriculum, falling somewhere between the grand rubrics of curriculum frameworks and STELLA.

The statements can be read as a description of what is done in English, what it is, at once part of the processes of Australian culture and the study of it. In fact the vast amount that has been written about the subject as it is today and its predecessors over the past 150 years is very largely held together by a common concern for its role as an enculturating factor, working through a study of cultural products and practices (English, American, Canadian, Indian, Australian). Indeed, the cultural work of English goes back to its very beginnings in the 1820s.

When the classical curriculum still reigned supreme in England despite the strenuous efforts of some concerned critics to loosen its hold, English as the study of culture and not simply the study of language had already found a secure place in the British Indian curriculum. (Viswanathan, 1989, p. 3)

In one of the best contemporary descriptions of English Studies, significantly, as part of a guide for its students, Rob Pope calls it ‘an interdiscipline’ made up from the fields of ‘Language; Literature; Communication and Culture’ (Pope, 2002). This textual study draws on literary criticism, history, geography, politics and political theory, linguistics, the social sciences, studies of codes and modes of communication (rhetoric and sociolinguistics), psychology. Texts are products which express and enact relationships with the world, they are the result of processes of production (i.e. they are made), and they are subjected to processes of interpretation. Texts are what make a lesson on the use of prepositions, a discussion about the plot of Othello, and the structure of an Oprah episode all part of the same English. All are studies of culture, derived from what can be called cultural heritage(s), conducted in the discourses of the culture of English teaching.

In Keywords (1976, p 87), Raymond Williams writes ‘Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ In going on to unpack these complexities he points out that three major clusters of meaning, themselves interrelated, surround the term. He notes:

1. ‘A general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.’ This would particularly apply to anthropological work from the beginning of the twentieth century, and more lately to Sociolinguistics and Critical Language Study. This view emphasises evolution, dynamism, social interaction as the processes which shape cultures.

2. A term that can be applied to ‘a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group or humanity in general.’ In this sense, culture is something of which one can take a snapshot, though writers using it in this way, for example historians, are careful to allow that it is at best a convenient means of working, a summary if you like, albeit often a very detailed summary.

3. A term which ‘describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity’ Williams went on to say that this had become the main everyday use of the word, but reminds us that in applying it to isolate artistic and intellectual work and practice, we are in fact completing the picture sketched in (1), in that we are identifying part of what it is that actually represents and supports the evolution of cultural processes: things like Cubism, SMS message, feature article, home page. Novel for Young Adults (no longer Adolescents), museum, which, in Fairclough’s terms (1989, pp. 24–6), both construct and interpret culture through participation in its discourses.

In the years since Keywords appeared, what Williams had to say has stood up pretty well, though references to the word ‘culture’ have become even more widespread. While the third use of the term is still perhaps dominant, it needs to be noted that the nature of the ‘work and practices’ which constitute artistic and intellectual endeavour have expanded enormously, due to technological innovation, and globalism, which is interculturalism rather than internationalism. World Music is a good example. At the same time, and under the same impetus, what constitutes significant artistic and intellectual activities and artifacts has been hugely
democratised, as is seen, for example, in the fact that we now hear much less about ‘folk’ art and music, as terms to separate some art and music, from other. Interestingly, it is the first (and earliest) of Williams’ three meanings that comes closest to the modern view of culture as process, rather than merely product.

And then there is a further refinement of Williams’ categorisation, which derives from both the first two meanings. As academic and business practice has become increasingly diverse and specialised, ‘culture’ has become a handy portmanteau word, and it has become common to see it applied to professions, football teams, church memberships, groups from particular ethnic origins, the armed services and so on. In this sense we can and do talk about ‘the culture of English teachers,’ a group of people who apparently ‘respect the enduring values of the Australian cultural heritage’ as part of their core beliefs. Which brings us to ‘heritage,’ a term which when linked to culture (Meaning 3), in ‘cultural heritage’ clearly refers to items like novels and poems, buildings, institutions like schools and parliaments, visual art works, wilderness areas, gardens, which ‘we’ have inherited, and value because of their significance within Australia’s intellectual, and consequent material development.

It should be clear that as an English teacher I could not necessarily respect all of the values of Australia’s cultural heritage, even the ‘enduring’ ones. However, without knowing something about most of them I would not be able to be an English teacher at all. Reading Statements 1 and 2 together indicates a clear recognition that the parts of the Australian cultural heritage which mostly concern English include values, beliefs, practices, artifacts and institutions which are realised in literary, linguistic or other modes of communication. English shares this ground with subjects like Art, Drama, and Music, and combinations of all four, such as Media Studies. While these have their particular emphases, all are in various ways concerned to both practice/make and study/analyse the cultural processes and products with which they are concerned. Other Humanities areas like History, Geography, Sociology and Psychology do similar things. School Mathematics and the Physical Sciences have not, generally speaking, followed this model though there is no reason why they shouldn’t. In fact the tendency of some recent Mathematics and Science curricula to move in this direction is the source of some of the wrath called down upon it by the educational holy warriors. Teaching and learning are evolving socio-cultural practices, shaped by where they have come from, where they are perceived to be going, and what is happening now.

To make more concrete the issues canvassed above, here is a set of notes which suggest how Michael Hyde’s short story Dark Mass might be developed into a unit of work in English at anywhere between Years 6 and 10, and probably beyond. (The story can be found in the collection The girl who married a fly and other stories, edited by Michael and published in 1997 by AATE. This particular story has been chosen on the assumption that a set or copy of the book can be found in many schools, so you’ll know what I’m talking about). Briefly, it concerns an incident at a beach in which the beachgoers notice an indeterminate ‘dark mass’ floating some way off, and speculate about what it is. Jess, the protagonist, who is at the beach surfing with her father, defies his orders, and paddles out to see what it is. She experiences a shift to another plane of existence in which she meets an old fisherman in his boat, who seems to know about her, and puts her among those people ‘who want to wonder why we live and why we die’ as opposed to those who ‘want to be caught, only those who question naught.’ After another plane-shift, Jess finds herself back in the original (the ‘real’) world, paddling back to the beach, where she meets her father coming out to find her. On the beach, the people ask her what the mass is, and say that they have had her in sight all (?) the time. Reading Statements 1 and 2 together indicates a clear recognition that the parts of the Australian cultural heritage which mostly concern English include values, beliefs, practices, artifacts and institutions which are realised in literary, linguistic or other modes of communication. English shares this ground with subjects like Art, Drama, and Music, and combinations of all four, such as Media Studies. While these have their particular emphases, all are in various ways concerned to both practice/make and study/analyse the cultural processes and products with which they are concerned. Other Humanities areas like History, Geography, Sociology and Psychology do similar things. School Mathematics and the Physical Sciences have not, generally speaking, followed this model though there is no reason why they shouldn’t. In fact the tendency of some recent Mathematics and Science curricula to move in this direction is the source of some of the wrath called down upon it by the educational holy warriors. Teaching and learning are evolving socio-cultural practices, shaped by where they have come from, where they are perceived to be going, and what is happening now.

Working Towards Standard 4 Outcomes

Introduction: Read the story. Discuss aspects of intonation and body language as indicators of meaning, complementary to language. Pair students to rehearse the first conversation between Jess and her father, and Jess’s with the old man. Perform them and then discuss the interpretations made by the different pairs.
What do they show about the characters of Jess and her father? Does the conversation with the old man give clues to ‘what happened’? How do the various performances show how the actors have understood the story?

Would allow assessment towards 4.1 (Listening to text and determining Key Ideas and Diverse Opinions) and 4.5 (Evaluates specific aspects of spoken language when listening and responding to texts).

STAGE 2: At the end of the story we find that the people on the beach could see Jess all the time. ‘“Yes,” they all assured her. She was never out of sight except for maybe a second.’

Teaching/discussion about

• The role of ‘gaps’ in narratives, and how writers and film makers use them. Where are the gaps in this story, and where might they be in a film version? Identify one in the story, ‘fill’ it, and discuss the effect.

• How film and play scripts are set out in terms of dialogue, direction, setting. Why they are different.

Write a conversation that might have occurred between Jess’s father and the lady in the straw hat, up to the time that he took off after Jess (i.e. fill a gap). Write in film or play script form, and perform or film them, then compare interpretations.

Would allow assessment towards 4.8 (Controls and adjusts most aspects of language when planning and composing a … range of written and multimedia texts on different themes and issues …) and 4.4 (Composes a range of texts that … explore different perspectives about a range of issues and adjusts texts for particular audiences, purposes and contexts).

STAGE 3: A beach like the one in Dark Mass is a very normal, commonplace environment for many Australians, yet in the story it becomes something extraordinary.

Teaching/discussion about

• Establish all the people we know for sure were on the beach (i.e. those mentioned in the story) and where they actually were on the beach [map]. What other people or features might be there, and where?

• Small group work. Give out pictures of places, one to a group. Ask students to invent the outline of a story which happens in their place. Then they draw a map of the place, and develop the story, while including its significant features on the map. They have to be able to justify what they include, what they leave out, what they add and what they move.

• Discuss what is the difference (if any) between a good story, and a well told story, then,

Find pictures of, or invent a place where something weird or inexplicable might happen. Draw a large map or plan of the place, and invent an appropriate (i.e. weird or inexplicable) story to put into the setting. It might happen to ‘you’, or someone else (how you hear of it is part of the story). There is no need to write out the story in full, but you might need some notes to prompt you when telling the story to an audience. Then use the map to tell the story to a small audience.

This would allow assessment towards 4.2 (Produces a range of spoken texts about topics, events and issues of personal [and] community … interest and adjusts speaking for a [wide range] of contexts and audiences, 4.6 (Controls and adjusts most aspects of language for a variety of spoken texts for a wider range of school and community audiences, and, maybe 4.10 (Controls and adjusts a variety of strategies for planning, composing, presenting and evaluating spoken texts for wider community audiences).

There is no doubt that the notes set out above represent work in English, which would be recognised as such by teachers (not only English teachers), students and parents. I don’t necessarily mean ‘approved as such’, I mean recognised. I am not a fan of outcomes-based iterations of curriculum, and detest their language, but it is what a great many of us must use at the moment. But most of the teaching and learning activities suggested were a feature of English long before the English Statement and Profile made their appearance (1994), indeed work such as suggested in Stage 3 of the notes was being done by quite young children in the early Twentieth Century at places like The Perse School (Cook, 1917, passim) in England. Take away the objec-
tives, or rewrite them, and what we have is still English. All of these assessment pointers could be put in linguistic or literary terms. For example, 4.1 is about comprehension and understanding while 4.5 is about Register – tenor, field and mode, an understanding of which underlies what was first called ‘communicative competence’ by the American ethnographer of communication Dell Hymes, by which he meant knowing how to use [your] language appropriately in the society in which [you] live. [You] have to know when to speak and when not to, which greeting formula to use in which situation, which style to use in which situation. [Trudgill, 1992, p 17]

In both speaking and writing, we are thus dealing with aspects like style, rhetoric, grammar, genre, textual organisation. In other words your ‘communicative competence’ is about writing, reading, speaking, and hearing your culture, participating in and contributing to it. English teaching is about systematically facilitating this learning. It is a lot. And it is ideological. ‘Respecting the enduring values of Australia’s cultural heritage’, as one of six Statements of Belief is an ideological position, and if I read The Weekend Australian’s Editorial of 23–24 September 2006 as it meant it, then AATE and The Oz share the same belief. What is extraordinary about the passionate editorialising and leader writing in The Australian is that its writers believe in (and want to ‘go back’ to) a golden age of English (and education) when everyone learned the right things better/more thoroughly and, moreover, ideologically neutrally. As we have noted, English was invented, around 200 years ago, as an ideological project, first in the British Asian and African colonies, then it was reinvented in the homeland, and later the ‘English speaking’, self-governing colonies and dominions. How far back do our critics want us to go? Madras 1820? Blackburn, Lancashire 1880? Orange, NSW in the year of Federation? Melbourne 1952? Anywhere in 1993, the year before Statements and Profiles?

This cultural heritage (of which part is its literary heritage) contains thousands of components, relatively few of which are ‘purely’ Australian. Most of them have been assimilated into Australian culture, in specifically Australian ways, but derive from over two millennia of mainly European and Middle Eastern cultural traditions which have been selectively absorbed down the years, versions of some of them coming to rest in Australia. The ‘events’ and narratives of Australia’s history (geological, biological, indigenous, colonial, post-colonial) are only part of its cultural heritage. The other part consists of the ways in which these features became those in which Australians saw, accounted for, managed, talked about, the experience of living in Australia. Much of it is admirable, and given the caveats surrounding which is meant by ‘culture’, in a sense, enduring. But even the ‘enduring’ values acknowledged today have mutated with the culture as a whole. ‘Democracy’ in 2007 is not that of 1901 or the 1850s. ‘A fair go’ in 2007 is not the fair go that that applied when Clancy persuaded his fellow stockmen to allow the man from Snowy River to join in the now famous chase.

Finally, let’s look back to The Dark Mass notes, and identify some of the cultural information which needs to be processed, including directly taught through English lessons deriving from them.

- Conversation is one of the topics of the unit. Understanding of intonation and body language is part of students’ communicative competence, though here it may be the role of the teacher to draw attention to what is tacit knowledge. For example speech registers between parents and their children are different from those between children and (hitherto unfamiliar) adults, while those between newly acquainted adults differ again. The setting in the story, the beach, is a liminal zone in which rules of dress, speech, behaviour are relaxed, identity and status blurred. It is also a setting with which Australians are familiar from their own experience, and from the media generally. ‘The Beach’ is Australian in ways that are distinct from its role in, say, American or British culture. It is one of the most used motifs in the products of the Australian cultural heritage, including literature, art, and film

- Narration and the structure of story is another topic. Here the work moves into a consideration of modes of narration – spoken, written, performed, filmed – which draw together the conventions (how it is done) and how they relate to the experience being depicted. The Dark Mass work brings under consideration the different conventions of written narration and storytelling to an interacting audience. It also compares filmic and other media forms of depiction with those of writing (and drama), and draws attention to the ways of working that characterise all of these modes of telling. For example, all of them involve processes of inclusion and exclusion, an understanding that is an aim of the map-
...and story exercise, since at all stages decisions about what is included or not will determine the nature and success of the final product. Finally, this is one of thousands of narratives in Western culture which involve time travel, movement between parallel planes of being and such like. The work might provide an opportunity to examine some of them, in particular the ways in which the moves are contrived.

- The work plans that derive from the notes would make discussion central to completing it. In fact it could easily be seen as an exercise in semi-formal modes of speaking – reading aloud, group discussion, instruction based on question and answer (class discussion), listening for understanding, storytelling, talk that precedes writing, and that which accompanies and facilitates group tasks. Since we are being urged to look back in time for our English methodology, it might be noted this list derives from the 1970s, the work of James Britton and his colleagues at London University School of Education (for example, Barnes et al. 1969). All this calls for instruction, modelling, rehearsal, reading and research in order to get both the talk, and the assignments in order. And we haven’t even begun to touch on the writing side of it, development that would be similarly forthcoming, from spelling and grammar, to choice of vocabulary, to structuring whole pieces and paragraphs, to layout and formatting, the selection of which underlies the genres which are ‘recognised’ by the culture we inhabit, as appropriate to particular communicative events.

Of course there is much more to English than is represented by the three points above. (see Statements 2–6) which only goes to show how much it has to cover, though not all at once – it’s spread over up to twelve years of schooling, maybe more. And a lot of this stuff is not only learned in English classrooms, or even only in school. In fact the cutting edge of change in cultural processes, in language, style, modes of communication is something that English follows, as it picks up what is happening ‘out there’. What its recent critics have denounced about ‘Outcomes Based Education’ is that such ways of writing down the (English, History, Art) curriculum lead inevitably to a reliance on postmodern analyses of text, the setting aside of that part of the cultural heritage which they call the classics (or the canon) in favour of a range of other ‘popular’ literary texts, a neglect of rigor, a symptom of which is the abandonment of direct teaching of spelling, grammar etc. Even if these things were happening, they could hardly be the result of what is, as I have said, merely a way of setting out the curriculum, one which will eventually disappear, as inevitably it will. Australians live in a postmodern culture and some of the great deniers of this fact produce newspapers and magazines, political commercials, and polemical analyses masquerading as research which are inevitably postmodern in nature since they have to communicate with and to a culture which understands things this way.

What has happened to English is not that it is off track, in the sense that conservative critics mean. I don’t know how many times it has to be pointed out that the ‘classics’ which are identified as the shining lights of the Anglo-Australian literary cultural heritage have not disappeared from English classrooms. English teachers know that they haven’t, and their critics, uninformed or prepared to dissemble, take the other view. And it is true, whatever our critics say, that as Mark Howie notes “English teachers enact, on a day to day basis in their working lives, the humanistic impulse of the Western tradition.” (Doecke et al., 2007, p 32). So while English teachers work with the culture as it is, and the heritage that derives from (is continuous with) the Australian version of the Western cultural heritage, they are derided by the very individuals and organisations that exploit and advance the forms of communication that are those of the future. Postmodernist forms of discourse are not owned by English, but by its opponents. There is a sense in which the (global) culture is leaving English behind. I think that’s for another article, but if you were to ask me when the process started, I’d say it was in the late ‘80s, when the English curriculum was first ‘written down’, as part of what became, ‘Outcomes Based Education (OBE)’. In English, OBE does not lead inevitably to teaching of or by postmodern approaches, and it is not in itself, as our crusader critics think, a postmodern concept. If anything, it works to limit the so-called excesses of postmodernism, which others might call creativity or styles of thinking. (Note, below.)

The ‘Australian cultural heritage’ which I have been circling around is obviously not that of The Australian’s recent editorials, though ironically, the newspaper itself should be recognised as an important part any version of the heritage. It’s good to see AATE affirming its mission in terms of a cultural project, and I’d want to close by saying that even those English teachers who...
don’t respect the heritage, can’t avoid teaching at least some of it. That’s what English does, what it’s for, and perhaps some of the vagueness of English objectives might disappear if this cultural work was written forward (I almost wrote ‘back’) into them.

NOTE
‘I started using the term “writing down the curriculum” some time in the mid-1980s to describe what I saw as a growing tendency to collect pedagogical ideas and disseminate them in authoritative ways. “The exemplar pure and simple” became “the exemplar: the official view”. In other words, curricular and pedagogical ideas became the subject of selection and endorsement by employing and accrediting organisations. It hardly needs pointing out that the exemplar plays a key role in the discourse of levels in which outcomes based curriculum is couched. I liked the term “writing down the curriculum” because it describes at once what was going on, literally, and the demeaning effect of the process.’ (Homer, D, (2003), ‘Playing for the B Team: a Tale of the Eighties’ in B. Doecke et al., English Teachers at Work, AATE and Wakefield Press, Adelaide, p 225).

In a future history of English there will be an interesting coincidence to confront: the parallel growth of a discourse of levels in which outcomes based curriculum is couched. I liked the term “writing down the curriculum” because it describes at once what was going on, literally, and the demeaning effect of the process.’ (Homer, D, (2003), ‘Playing for the B Team: a Tale of the Eighties’ in B. Doecke et al., English Teachers at Work, AATE and Wakefield Press, Adelaide, p 225).

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language, and participation in dialogues which inhibit curricular change and development. This is particularly true when they are required to align themselves with the kind of A–E reporting mandated by the 2005 Schools Assistance Act and its unfortunate aftermaths.

English under OBE has been forced to abandon its culture making aspirations, a situation least likely to be remedied by adherence to golden age mythologies.

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1. We respect the enduring values and traditions of Australia’s cultural heritage;

2. We believe students come to understand themselves and their world through engagement with a range of cultures and the ways these cultures represent human experience;

As English teachers we have the opportunity to foreground experiences of finding and defining cultural identity to help our students to shape their personal identities. In the multicultural climate that is modern Australian society, our students may struggle to find their identities. Through reading, viewing or listening to, as well as analysing and evaluating the works of, others who engage with the concept of cultural identity, our students may be empowered to think about their own cultural identity. Students may then express themselves and their cultural identities freely and purposefully, through developing their abilities to compose and create which are honed in the English classroom. This is not to say that we encourage categorisation or ‘pigeonholing’ with respect to creating identity. Rather, we value knowledge of self and of culture as intrinsic to the ability to live productive and fulfilling lives in today’s Australia. We acknowledge diversity whilst celebrating unity.

The ability to empathise with the experiences of others through reading texts that explore cultural identity is an important attribute for a world citizen to possess in Australia’s increasingly globally-driven economic and social climate. The necessity of finding and debating the essence of a common humanity may be seen in rising tensions across the world. For our children to be peacemakers, they must be taught how to clearly enunciate their fears and their hopes, their dreams, wishes, values and needs.

Students’ values, attitudes and beliefs must be defined and explored and may be shaped and refined in the English classroom: values such as citizenship, social justice, equality, unity and trust. At the same time, the values, attitudes and beliefs of others must be respected. The activity called ‘Classes’ provides an example of these concepts being teased out in the English classroom. In this activity, a lesson is taught as usual but with a class system operating in the room. The student group is divided into three classes: the first class, the second class and the third class. The first class sits at the front of the room and they may be offered refreshments for the duration of the class – in this case, chocolate biscuits and cola – while the second class is offered water and the third class is given nothing. When the teacher poses a question, she usually chooses a student from the first class to answer, occasionally chooses a student from the second class and seldom asks a third-class student. When the third class student is called upon, the teacher disparages his or her answer – being careful not to ridicule the student – and asserts that this is the typical sort of nonsensical answer one could expect from the lowest class. The most important part of this activity is the debriefing session which occurs at the end of the class. What have we as a class learnt about racism, caste systems, apartheid and other forms of prejudice?

When I conducted this activity, one student, who was from the privileged class, raised his hand and asked, ‘How do you end such divisions when they exist in real life?’ A simple question which raised a myriad of complex answers from the group. Whilst the class agreed that there is of course no easy answer, we also decided that it was a question very much worth asking.

Australia’s cultural heritage is long-standing and marked by greatness. The ancient cultures of Indigenous Australians live on, with their values of environmental-